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The “Donroe Doctrine”

After months of escalating tensions, on 3 January the United States carried out a large-scale operation in Venezuela, extracting President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores. President Donald Trump confirmed the move, stating that Washington would run the country until a transition could be put in place. Suddenly, a doctrine born two centuries ago is back on the front pages: the Monroe Doctrine.

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Introduction

The raid in Caracas that led to the capture of Nicolás Maduro and his wife was not an out-of-the-blue decision. It was the practical execution of a strategy laid out months earlier in the November 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS), the White House's document defining US foreign-policy priorities.

In remarks following the operation, President Trump described the US role in Venezuela as temporary but necessary, casting it as a modern reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, now known as the "Donroe Doctrine". In doing so, Trump invoked James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States, elected and re-elected in 1816 and 1820, whose presidency came to be remembered as the "Era of Good Feelings."

The Monroe Doctrine

James Monroe was the fifth president of the United States when he articulated what would become one of the most durable principles in American foreign policy. His presidency coincided with a time where European empires were weakened after the Napoleonic wars, and newly independent states were emerging across Latin America. The United States, though still militarily limited, moved early to define the rules of engagement in its close environment.

Monroe entered office having already consolidated diplomatic achievements. His administration settled long-standing disputes with Britain and reduced European presence on the continent through the acquisition of Florida from Spain in 1819. But his most consequential legacy came in 1823, when, in his annual message to Congress, Monroe asserted a US national right of influence against European imperialism in the Western Hemisphere.

In geopolitical terms, the concept of the Western Hemisphere vs. the Eastern Hemisphere is a framework that divides the world into two distinct spheres of influence. Historically, this served to separate the "New World" (the Americas) from the "Old World" (Europe, Asia, and Africa).

The Monroe Doctrine formalised a US position that rejected any renewed European political or military expansion in the Americas. Colonisation, imposed regimes, or external interference by European powers were no longer acceptable. The United States framed such actions as incompatible with its security interests. In parallel, Washington committed to non-involvement in European conflicts and accepted the continuation of existing European territories in Canada, Alaska and the Caribbean.

While initially declaratory, the doctrine became operational as US power expanded. In the early twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt broadened its scope. Through the Roosevelt Corollary, he argued that instability within Latin American states could invite European intervention, and that the United States therefore had a responsibility to intervene pre-emptively. This reinterpretation transformed

the doctrine from a barrier against external powers into a justification for direct US involvement, leading to military interventions in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Haiti.

This approach was later adjusted rather than abandoned. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the "Good Neighbour Policy", promoting cooperation and diplomatic engagement across the hemisphere.

During the Cold War, the Monroe Doctrine was reactivated under a new framework. US policymakers viewed Soviet influence in Latin America as a contemporary equivalent of European imperial encroachment. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan invoked this logic to justify intervention for anti-communist forces in Central America, treating ideological penetration as a direct hemispheric threat.

Another reference point cited in discussions of the Monroe Doctrine is the 1989 US intervention in Panama, where American forces removed military ruler Manuel Noriega, following allegations of involvement in drug trafficking. Today, Washington has levelled similar accusations against Nicolás Maduro, alleging that his government presided over a "narco-state" and exploited Venezuela's oil resources at the expense of both Venezuelans and American interests. Maduro has denied the charges, characterising them as pretexts for the US to exert control over his country's oil resources.

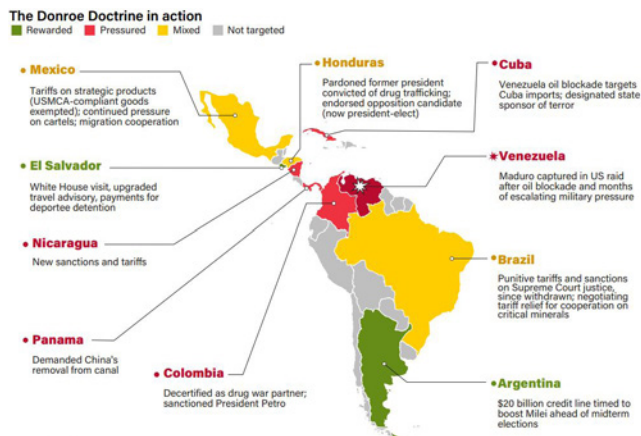
Trump's assertion of the doctrine

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National Security Strategies define which regions matter most, which competitors are considered strategic threats, and which tools, diplomatic, economic, or military, are legitimate to defend US interests. Trump's first National Security Strategy in 2017, signalled a return to great-power competition, primarily with China and a gradual move away from years of heavy engagement in the Middle East. In the 2025 NSS, the Western Hemisphere is explicitly elevated to a central position in US strategy. It also formalised a "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, framing the activities of non-hemispheric powers as a direct threat to US national security.

The document frames Latin America as both a security perimeter and an economic asset. It argues that "non-Hemispheric competitors have made major inroads into our Hemisphere" and warns that allowing such influence to persist would constitute a long-term strategic failure. China particularly is treated not simply as a commercial rival, but as a power-seeking control over ports, infrastructure, supply chains, and strategic resources. The stated objective is to ensure that the United States

remains the “partner of first choice” for governments in the region and to “discourage their collaboration with others” through a combination of incentives and pressure.



Source: Eurasia Group

The NSS highlights the Western Hemisphere’s concentration of strategic assets, energy, critical minerals, rare earths, and key transit routes, and calls for an interagency effort to protect, and jointly develop these resources with aligned regional partners. Access to supply chains is treated as a national security issue, explicitly linked to reducing dependence on China and re-anchoring industrial capacity within the Americas.

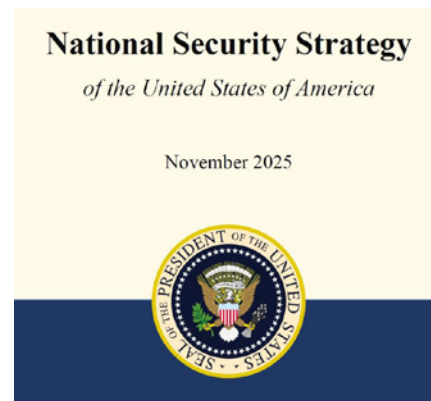
Within this framework, the Trump Administration has framed threats and military actions as serving both security and economic objectives. It also lowered the threshold for intervention. Migration, drug trafficking, and cartel activity are framed as national security threats rather than law-enforcement challenges, justifying expanded naval deployments, targeted military operations, and, where deemed necessary, the use of lethal force.

In the days preceding Maduro’s seizure, Washington combined economic pressure, naval interdictions, and regional force posture adjustments, while publicly accusing Caracas of operating a “narco-state” and undermining US security. After the operation, Trump stated that the United States would “run the country” during the transition period. He also publicly linked the intervention to Venezuela’s energy wealth, referencing the country’s oil reserves and signalling that Washington could support or subsidise US companies seeking to operate there once political conditions were reshaped.

This approach is formalised through what the document openly calls a “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. The NSS states that the United States “must be preeminent in the Western Hemisphere as a condition of our security and prosperity” and commits to denying external powers the ability to “own or control strategically vital assets” or position threatening capabilities in the region.

In a message marking the doctrine’s anniversary, Trump declared that the United States was reaffirming its commitment under a new corollary, one in which “the Ameri-

can people, not foreign nations nor globalist institutions, will always control their own destiny in our hemisphere.”



2. What Do We Want In and From the World?

Achieving these goals requires marshaling every resource of our national power. Yet this strategy’s focus is foreign policy. What are America’s core foreign policy interests? What do we want *in* and *from* the world?

- We want to ensure that the Western Hemisphere remains reasonably stable and well-governed enough to prevent and discourage mass migration to the United States; **we want a Hemisphere whose governments cooperate with us against narco-terrorists, cartels, and other transnational criminal organizations; we want a Hemisphere that remains free of hostile foreign incursion or ownership of key assets, and that supports critical supply chains; and we want to ensure our continued access to key strategic locations.** In other words, we will assert and enforce a “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine:

Source: NSS

A message to US rivals in Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran

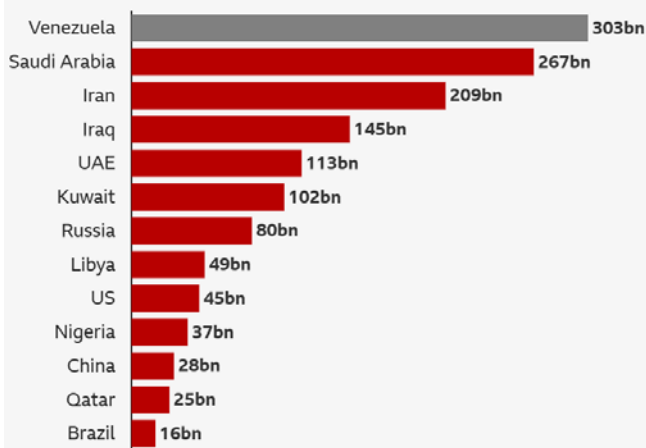
The embarrassment was hard to miss for China. Maduro was detained shortly after meeting a Chinese delegation. Maduro had publicly reaffirmed ties with Beijing, presenting China as a strategic partner in the construction of a “multipolar world.”

The operation underscored Washington’s intent to cut China’s access to cheap and reliable energy. Venezuela holds the world’s largest proven oil reserves and, according to Wood Mackenzie, has roughly 241 billion barrels of recoverable crude. China, Venezuela’s largest oil customer in recent years, condemned the move and rejected US efforts to secure exclusive control over Venezuelan oil exports.

West Africa is also part of the picture. In late December, the US carried out airstrikes in Nigeria, Africa’s largest oil producer, justified as operations targeting Islamist militants. China is also hard to ignore here. According to Statista, in the first quarter of 2024 China was Nigeria’s largest import partner, accounting for 23.2% of total imports. India and the United States trailed far behind, at roughly 8.5% and 8% respectively. Nigeria relies heavily on Chinese-supplied military equipment. In 2023, Nigeria imported \$197.16 million in arms from China, compared with \$46.7 million from India and just \$4.63 million from the United States. Last November, Beijing also signed with Nigeria to jointly launch Africa’s largest poultry project.

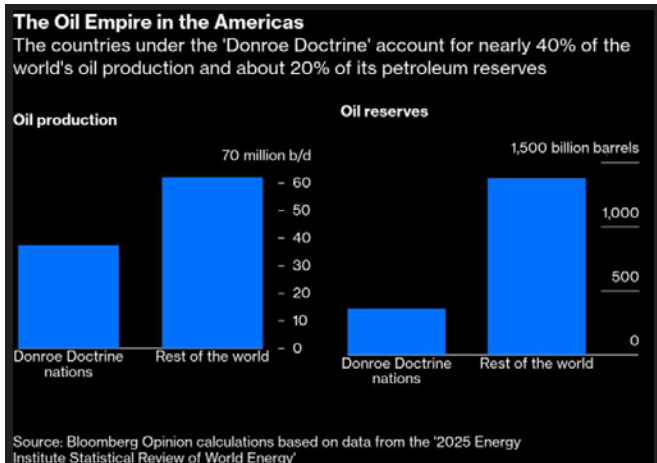
Who has the largest oil reserves?

Estimates of proven crude oil reserves (barrels)



Source: BBC

Control over supply, paired with control over transit routes, translates into power over the rival economy. From the Bab el-Mandeb to the Strait of Hormuz, Washington is positioning itself to shield its own economy while leaving China more exposed to disruption. There is also a financial dimension. Control over major energy producers helps anchor oil trade within dollar-based systems, reinforcing the petrodollar's central role in global markets.



Source: Bloomberg

If China was the immediate target, Iran was the implicit one. Tensions in Tehran are escalating. Iran's deepening economic crisis has triggered widespread protests across more than two dozen provinces. On the eve of the Maduro operation, Trump warned that the United States was "locked and loaded and ready to go" if Iran "shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters."

Securing Venezuelan heavy crude provides Washington with a strategic buffer. If a confrontation were to disrupt the Persian Gulf, alternative supply from Venezuela would limit the economic shock. Venezuela becomes the ultimate insurance policy, making military escalation in the Middle East "affordable."

With Russia, the confrontation is more direct. On Wednesday, US forces seized a Russian-flagged tanker carrying Venezuelan oil after tracking it across the Atlantic for more than two weeks. The vessel was reportedly operating under the protection of a Russian submarine. The seizure marked one of the few instances in recent memory that US forces physically detained a Russian-flagged ship. The incident was a test of credibility—if Washington can enforce sanctions at sea, those sanctions carry real weight.

Conclusion

Venezuela is the "Patient Zero" for a new era of American dominance. If this succeeds, it's a blueprint for reasserting dominance over trade routes and energy flows for the next 50 years. But there's a massive "if." If the US gets bogged down in a prolonged crisis in Caracas, it drains the very capital needed to project power in the Middle East and Asia.

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