

## **The Caribbean is burning again**

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Historians learn early that maps do not simply describe power. Maps assert it. Few regions illustrate this truth more vividly than the Caribbean, that warm blue hinge between North and South America which returns to the strategic centre of the world with the regularity of an old maritime fever.

The fever is back.

And the cause is not a tropical storm. It is the unmistakable signature of American power. F-18 Super Hornets cutting across Venezuelan skies. Strategic bombers tracing old Cold War routes. Tomahawk-equipped destroyers moving with clinical precision. The USS Gerald R. Ford, the largest and most advanced aircraft carrier ever built, now parked in Caribbean waters as if the region had suddenly turned into a second Persian Gulf.

A casual observer might believe this is about Nicolás Maduro alone. It is not. Washington's fear goes far deeper than another Latin American autocrat. What unsettles the White House is the sense that its own hemisphere, once viewed as secure, had begun to slide quietly into the orbit of rival powers.

For any imperium, finding a rival's footprints so close to home is the purest form of provocation.

### **America in the domain of losses**

Psychologists speak of a "loss-aversion domain". The term describes what happens when individuals or nations believe they are losing ground. They take risks they would otherwise avoid. They escalate in order to avoid further decline. The United States is now firmly in that psychological space.

China has purchased influence through ports, minerals and political loyalties. Russia has inserted intelligence officers and weapons. Iran has supplied drones, cyber tools and discreet access to financial networks. None of these interventions had the purpose of rescuing Maduro from his own failures. They were designed to acquire strategic leverage inside what Washington has always considered its own neighbourhood.

History teaches that great powers facing loss tend to act first and justify later.

History also teaches that embattled autocrats tend to misread every signal.

### **Maduro's strategic miscalculation**

Maduro is operating inside what game theorists describe as the "domain of gains". He believes he is advancing. He believes he can bluff. He believes his foreign patrons are prepared to confront the United States on his behalf. He is mistaken on every point.

While American aircraft patrol his coastline, Maduro organises forced public rallies and stages choreographed displays of popular support. This is not strength. It is the behaviour of a regime that confuses noise with power.

The Venezuelan paradox is an old Latin American pattern. Strongmen stop trembling at precisely the wrong moment. They realise too late that Moscow, Beijing and Tehran have no appetite for a confrontation with Washington over a struggling petro-state that can no longer offer meaningful returns.

To them, Maduro is not a partner. He is expendable ballast.

### **The opposition sees its opportunity**

By contrast, the Venezuelan democratic opposition, led publicly by María Corina Machado, has read the moment with more accuracy than many Western commentators. They understand that Washington's objective is not regime change for the sake of theatre. The objective is the restoration of hemispheric equilibrium.

In sequential conflicts, the actor who reduces uncertainty becomes indispensable. At this moment the only actor capable of offering a predictable and stable "day after" scenario is the Venezuelan opposition.

Washington understands this clearly.

### **A crisis of movements, not snapshots**

The Venezuelan confrontation cannot be understood as a single episode frozen in time. It is a chain of moves.

1. The United States escalated with an extensive military deployment combined with authorisation for covert action.
2. Maduro responded with denial and theatrical bravado, a tactic that looks stable only until it collapses.
3. The opposition aligned itself with American strategy and reduced uncertainty about the final outcome.

4. Russia, China and Iran now calculate whether Venezuela is worth a geopolitical gamble. The likely answer is no.

The regression logic is straightforward.

If the United States escalates further, Maduro cannot respond.

If Washington maintains covert pressure, the regime decays from within.

If the opposition guarantees an orderly transition, international actors close ranks.

If Russia and China hesitate, Maduro loses.

The likely outcome is not a cinematic amphibious landing. It is a hybrid collapse driven by external pressure and internal fragmentation. Empires often achieve their aims without needing to invade. Gravity does the work.

### **The Caribbean returns to the front line**

Analysts often describe the Caribbean as a laboratory of the future: democracies that tire easily, authoritarian regimes that do not fall quickly, fragile economies and a silent rivalry for influence. Yet laboratories can ignite. When they do, investigators arrive not only to extinguish the fire but to ask who lit the match.

From Washington's perspective, the culprits are clear. Russia, China and Iran pushed too far. Maduro is collateral. The Venezuelan opposition is the natural partner for reconstruction. And the region once again acts as the proving ground for the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere.

### **What comes next**

There will be no sudden, unannounced strike. The moves already unfolding are the strike.

Nor will there be negotiations that rescue Maduro's authority. That period has expired.

In the logic of sequential hegemony, the path becomes almost predetermined.

When a dominant power feels its own neighbourhood slipping, it reasserts control.

When rival powers hesitate, they withdraw.



The Caribbean is now the space where Washington marks its presence again.

Venezuela is the point where the hemispheric map begins to realign.