

GENERAL STUDIES II

US Strikes on Venezuela 2026: UPSC Notes & Analysis

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The reported US military operation in Venezuela, codenamed Operation Absolute Resolve, has intensified debates over national sovereignty, the prohibition on the use of force, interventionism and the future of the rules-based international order. This UPSC-focused analysis examines the international response, the Monroe and Donroe doctrines, geopolitical competition over Venezuelan oil, India's diplomatic position, UN Security Council reform, and the prospects for a multipolar world order. Includes prelims revision facts, mains answer writing guidance, and examination practice questions.

CIVIL SERVICE GURUKUL

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS 2026

GS PAPER II

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Why Is Venezuela in the News?

On 3 January 2026, the United States conducted a military operation in Venezuela, known as Operation Absolute Resolve, during which Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was captured and transferred to the United States.

The operation involved US military activity in Caracas and surrounding areas. It triggered major international debate over sovereignty, the use of force, international law and the future of the global order.

2026

Year of the Operation

3 Jan

Date of US Military Action

Article 2(4)

UN Charter: Prohibition on Force

UPSC Relevance: GS Paper II: International Relations, United Nations, sovereignty and foreign policy. GS Paper III: Security and energy geopolitics. Essay: Multipolarity, global governance and the rules-based international order.

2. Key International Reactions

A. United Nations

The UN Secretary-General expressed deep alarm about the military action, warning of its consequences for regional stability and international law.

The United Nations stressed the importance of respecting the UN Charter, human rights, the rule of law and inclusive dialogue.

B. UN Human Rights Concerns

The source material reports that UN human rights officials rejected the argument that allegations of human rights violations alone could justify unilateral military action.

The broader legal issue is whether human rights concerns can override the prohibition on the use of force without a recognised legal basis.

C. Countries Critical of the Operation

Russia and China criticised the operation. Several Latin American governments, including Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Panama and Cuba, expressed concerns or objections, although their individual positions differed.

D. Countries Supporting the Operation

According to the supplied material, Argentina, Paraguay and Israel welcomed aspects of the US action, particularly in connection with narcotics trafficking and security.

E. European Response

European governments sought to balance concern about Venezuela's political situation with support for international law and diplomatic solutions.

F. India's Response

India expressed deep concern and emphasised peaceful dialogue, regional stability and respect for international norms.

India's Diplomatic Approach: Peaceful settlement of disputes, sovereignty, non-intervention, strategic autonomy and balanced international engagement.

3. Why Did the United States Strike Venezuela?

The following explanations should be separated into official US criminal political arguments and geopolitical interpretations.

A. Official US Justifications

The US administration linked its actions to allegations involving:

- Drug trafficking and narco-terrorism.
- Transnational organised crime.
- Threats to US and regional security.
- Criminal charges against Maduro.

These are US allegations and justifications, not an independent legal determination that the use of military force was lawful.

B. Political Legitimacy

The US questioned Maduro's legitimacy following Venezuela's disputed 2024 presidential election.

However, disputes over democratic legitimacy do not automatically authorise foreign military intervention.

C. Venezuela's Oil Reserves

Venezuela possesses some of the world's largest proven crude oil reserves, concentrated significantly in the Orinoco Belt.

Analysts have linked US interest in Venezuela to the country's energy resources and their strategic significance.

D. Regional Dominance

Critics interpret the operation as reflecting renewed US efforts to assert influence over the Western Hemisphere.

E. China, Russia and Iran

Venezuela has maintained important relationships with China, Russia and Iran.

Geopolitical interpretations suggest that limiting rival powers' influence in Latin America may be a US strategic objective.

F. Ideological Competition

Venezuela's ruling United Socialist Party has followed a political and economic orientation often at odds with US policy preferences.

Critical Analysis: Resource control, ideological rivalry and hemispheric dominance are interpretations of possible motives. They should not be perceived as conclusively established causes.

4. Monroe Doctrine: Historical Background

The Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed in 1823 by US President James Monroe.

It was originally directed against further European colonisation and intervention in the Americas.

Three Main Principles

1. **Non-colonisation:** European powers should not establish new colonies in the Americas.
2. **Non-intervention:** European powers should not intervene in the affairs of independent American states.
3. **US non-interference:** The United States would generally avoid involvement in European wars and existing colonies.

The doctrine later became associated with broader assertions of US influence in Latin America.

5. What Is the Donroe Doctrine?

The expression "Donroe Doctrine" combines Donald Trump's name with the Monroe Doctrine.

It is a political and media label used to describe an assertive approach to US influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Features Associated with the Term

- **Resource interests:** Greater attention to strategic energy and mineral resources.
- **Regime management:** Attempts to shape political outcomes without necessarily replacing all state institutions.
- **Coercive diplomacy:** Use of sanctions, tariffs, military threats or force.

- **Regional influence:** Opposition to strategic rivals' expanding presence in the Americas.

Basis	Monroe Doctrine	Donroe Doctrine
Origin	1823	Contemporary political label
Historical Focus	European intervention in the Americas	Assertive US regional influence
Primary Concern	Colonisation and external interference	Security, resources and geopolitical rivalry
Nature	Historical US foreign-policy doctrine	Interpretive term, not a treaty

6. International Law and the Use of Force

A. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter

Article 2(4) requires states to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state, or otherwise inconsistently with UN purposes.

B. Article 51: Self-Defence

Article 51 recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs, subject to the Charter framework.

C. Security Council Authorisation

The UN Security Council may authorise measures involving force under Chapter VII when the legal conditions are met.

D. Sovereignty and Non-Intervention

State sovereignty protects territorial independence and the right of states to conduct their affairs without unlawful external coercion.

Important Legal Point: A foreign leader's alleged criminal conduct or disputed electoral legitimacy does not, by itself, create a general exception to Article 2(4).

E. The Legal Debate

The US described its operation through security and law-enforcement arguments, while critics argued that the military action violated Venezuelan sovereignty and international legal norms.

A sound UPSC answer should distinguish these competing claims from an authoritative judicial determination of legality.

7. Consequences for the Global Order

1. Pressure on International Law

Unilateral military interventions may weaken the norm against cross-border use of force.

2. Regional Destabilisation

Military intervention can intensify political uncertainty, displacement and regional insecurity.

The 2003 Iraq invasion is frequently discussed in debates about long-term instability following intervention.

3. Weakened Multilateralism

Actions undertaken outside collective UN mechanisms can raise questions about the effectiveness and authority of multilateral institutions.

4. Great-Power Rivalry

US, Chinese and Russian competition can make regional disputes part of wider geopolitical confrontation.

5. Economic Fragmentation

Sanctions, tariffs, export controls and trade restrictions can reshape supply chains and international investment.

6. Erosion of Sovereignty

Coercive actions by powerful countries may create insecurity among smaller and middle powers.

7. Pressure on Alliances

Disputes involving Greenland, trade policy and regional security can generate tensions between allies.

8. Friend-Shoring, De-Risking and Re-Globalisation

Concept	Meaning
Friend-shoring	Moving supply chains towards politically trusted partners
De-risking	Reducing excessive dependence on vulnerable economic relationships
Economic fragmentation	Splitting trade and investment networks along geopolitical lines
Re-globalisation	Renewing international integration through more inclusive and resilient cooperation

The WTO's World Trade Report 2023 discussed the importance of re-globalisation in addressing global economic and environmental challenges.

9. India's Strategic Interests

A. Strategic Autonomy

India seeks to retain independent decision-making while maintaining relationships with multiple major powers.

B. Multi-Alignment

India engages with the US, European Union, Russia, Global South and other international partners.

C. Energy Security

Developments in oil-producing regions can influence global energy markets and India's import costs.

D. Rules-Based International Order

India has an interest in predictable international norms, peaceful dispute settlement and respect for sovereignty.

E. Global South Leadership

India can advocate stronger representation of developing countries in global institutions.

India's Strategic Balance: Maintain constructive relations with major powers while supporting international law, diplomacy, energy security and independent foreign-policy choices.

10. Way Forward

1. United Nations Reform

Reform of the UN Security Council could improve representation and legitimacy.

The G4 countries are India, Japan, Germany and Brazil. Greater African representation is also an important reform demand.

2. Gujral Doctrine

The Gujral Doctrine provides a useful framework for regional diplomacy through:

- Respect for sovereignty.
- Non-interference in internal affairs.
- Respect for territorial integrity.
- Peaceful settlement of disputes.

- Mutual cooperation.

3. Multipolar and Inclusive World Order

Global governance should reflect the participation of major and emerging powers rather than excessive dependence on a single state.

4. Strategic Autonomy

India should diversify its economic, energy, defence and technology partnerships.

5. Resilient Supply Chains

Countries should promote trade diversification, regional cooperation and inclusive economic integration.

6. Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Negotiation, mediation, international legal processes and diplomatic engagement should remain central to dispute settlement.

11. UPSC Prelims Quick Revision

Topic	Important Facts
Operation	Absolute Resolve
Date	3 January 2026
Venezuela's Capital	Caracas
President Captured	Nicolás Maduro
Monroe Doctrine	1823
President Associated	James Monroe
UN Charter Article 2(4)	Prohibition on threat or use of force
UN Charter Article 51	Self-defence
Venezuela Oil Region	Orinoco Belt
G4 Countries	India, Japan, Germany, Brazil
Gujral Doctrine	Regional cooperation and non-interference

12. UPSC Mains Answer-Writing Framework

Model Question: 250 Words

"The US intervention in Venezuela has reopened the debate over state sovereignty and the rules-based international order." Critically analyse.

**Introduction ? Background ? Legal Issues ? Geopolitical Motives ? Global Consequences ?
India's Position ? Way Forward ? Conclusion**

Suggested Answer Points

- Explain the January 2026 military operation.
- Discuss Article 2(4) and Article 51.
- Distinguish legal claims from political justifications.
- Explain energy and geopolitical dimensions.
- Examine consequences for multilateralism.
- Discuss India's strategic autonomy.
- Recommend diplomacy and institutional reform.

Suggested Conclusion: A stable international order requires credible institutions, respect for sovereignty, accountability and peaceful dispute settlement.

13. Relevant UPSC Mains PYQs

Important: These are selected previous-year questions from recurring International Relations themes within the 2016–2025 period. They are paraphrased for revision. The explanations are suggested model-answer points, not official UPSC answer keys.

UPSC MAINS 2024 | GS II

PYQ 1: UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee

Evaluate the effectiveness of the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee and related bodies in addressing international terrorism.

Suggested Answer

The Committee strengthens coordination, implementation and technical assistance. However, enforcement depends on member states, while geopolitical disagreements can obstruct collective action.

Explanation: Link the question to UN institutional effectiveness, terrorism and multilateral security cooperation.

UPSC MAINS 2023 | GS II

PYQ 2: NATO and India

Assess whether NATO's expansion and stronger US–Europe strategic cooperation benefit India.

Suggested Answer

Potential benefits include technology cooperation and stronger engagement with Western partners.

Challenges include bloc polarisation, Russia–West tensions and pressure on India's strategic autonomy.

Explanation: A balanced answer should consider both opportunities and geopolitical constraints.

UPSC MAINS 2022 | GS II

PYQ 3: I2U2 and Global Politics

Explain how I2U2 could transform India's position in global politics.

Suggested Answer

I2U2 creates opportunities in investment, food security, technology and connectivity. It reflects India's flexible, issue-based partnerships.

Explanation: Relate this question to multi-alignment and strategic autonomy.

UPSC MAINS 2021 | GS II

PYQ 4: US–China Strategic Competition

Explain why China presents a major strategic challenge to the United States compared with the former Soviet Union.

Suggested Answer

China combines economic integration, manufacturing strength, technological capacity and military power.

Unlike the Cold War rivalry, US–China competition also involves deep commercial interdependence.

Explanation: Connect this with great-power rivalry and economic fragmentation.

UPSC MAINS 2020 | GS II

PYQ 5: India's Global Role

Examine India's changing position in international politics and the role of its diplomatic partnerships.

Suggested Answer

India seeks greater international influence through multilateralism, strategic partnerships, development cooperation and independent diplomacy.

Explanation: This is a broad theme-based revision prompt. Do not treat this wording as a verified verbatim UPSC question.

UPSC MAINS 2017 | GS II

PYQ 6: China's Economic Influence

Analyse how China's economic relations and trade surplus may support its strategic and military influence in Asia, including implications for India.

Suggested Answer

Economic strength can support military modernisation, infrastructure investment and strategic leverage.

India must strengthen economic competitiveness, regional partnerships and strategic preparedness.

Explanation: The question highlights the relationship between economic power and geopolitical influence.

14. Original UPSC Prelims Practice MCQs**Question 1: Monroe Doctrine**

The Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed in:

- A. 1776
- B. 1823
- C. 1919
- D. 1945

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: President James Monroe announced the doctrine in 1823.

Question 2: UN Charter

Which provision primarily prohibits the threat or use of force in international relations?

- A. Article 2(4)
- B. Article 21
- C. Article 75
- D. Article 101

Correct Answer: A

Explanation: Article 2(4) contains the Charter's central prohibition on the threat or use of force.

Question 3: Self-Defence

Which UN Charter article recognises the inherent right of self-defence?

- A. Article 5
- B. Article 19
- C. Article 51
- D. Article 99

Correct Answer: C

Explanation: Article 51 addresses individual and collective self-defence.

Question 4: Venezuela Geography

The Orinoco Belt is particularly associated with:

- A. Coal reserves
- B. Crude oil reserves
- C. Uranium reserves
- D. Diamond reserves

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: The Orinoco Belt contains major heavy crude oil deposits.

Question 5: G4 Countries

Which of the following is not a G4 country?

- A. India
- B. Brazil
- C. Germany
- D. Canada

Correct Answer: D

Explanation: The G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan.

15. UPSC Revision: Most Important Themes

Theme	Relevant Paper
State Sovereignty	GS II
UN Charter and International Law	GS II
Monroe Doctrine	Prelims and GS II
Great-Power Rivalry	GS II
Energy Geopolitics	GS III
India's Strategic Autonomy	GS II and Essay
UN Security Council Reform	GS II
Economic Fragmentation	GS III

16. Conclusion

The January 2026 US military operation in Venezuela has reignited questions about the limits of military power, the meaning of sovereignty and the credibility of international institutions.

It also illustrates how energy resources, ideological differences and strategic competition can intersect with international legal disputes.

For India, the central challenge is to preserve strategic autonomy, support peaceful diplomacy and advocate a more inclusive multilateral system.

Final UPSC Takeaway: A stable global order depends on respect for international law, peaceful dispute resolution, credible multilateral institutions and balanced relations among states.

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