Maduro's abduction exposes Western hypocrisy, mockery of international law

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro is now handcuffed and appearing in a US court. Along with him was his wife, similarly handcuffed—a shocking sight to the world—even as US President Donald Trump boasted about the strike as "brilliant", while Venezuela held a day of mourning for 38 soldiers killed and another 24 security guards in the raid.

But in essence, the Venezuela adventure is not about Maduro at all. It is about what it means for the rest of us. True, few of us know or care about international law (IL), but here's the thing. IL is what gives sanctity to your borders, ensures your right to fly out to another country, ensures your ships ply the oceans for trade, and a hundred other rights you take for granted. Most of all, it ensures that governments act within some guardrails—not much, but some.

The US kidnapping—for it is no less—of the President of Venezuela and his wife shatters that very thin glass ceiling on what countries and leaders can and cannot do. That's disturbing. What's worse is that no one, especially not the great democracies of the world, is prepared to do anything about it—at least not in hard terms. But as President Trump threatens a number of other countries, including Iran and Guatemala among others, the international system is shifting gears.

The US and Multiple Regime Changes

It is not that the US has not indulged in such acts before. It has done a lot more than most people are aware. A book, Gray Zone Warfare: The Way Ahead for India by Lt Gen Dushyant Singh, lists over 72 regime changes by the US since 1947-1989, of which only some six were overt, and of those, three were in Latin America. In fact, this part of the world dominates the list, showing the deep conviction of Latin America as part of the US "divine right" of intervention.

Most did not achieve their goals, and many were against established democracies, including France and Italy. There is another interesting statistic. The preferred strategy for regime change included electoral interference (exactly what Russia was accused of in US elections), and the top ten interference operations were in Italy (eight times), Japan (five times), Israel (four times), and Sri Lanka (four times). That list might well have included India, if allegations against USAID are to be believed.

Certainly, "regime change" was achieved using huge funds, non-governmental organisations, and a host of other institutions, all of which were subverted for US ends. In other words, both covert and overt interventions were not driven by fear of communism at all, but by solid self-interest.

The US charges against Maduro have quite literally piled up over the years—in fact, since 1999—in terms of his partnering with narco-terrorists, running guns, and, most significantly, being described as an "illegitimate" government. No doubt the elections of 2024 were seen as suspect by many. Also true is that protests and violence after the elections were far more violent than before, in a country that has seen political violence earlier.

But that last charge is the key justification in bringing him to trial under US domestic law, plus the fact of his alleged massive cocaine activities that harmed US citizens. There are also declared charges that Maduro "stole" US oil assets, apparently because the infrastructure was set up decades ago by US companies, though that is not part of the charges. None of that will hold water under international law.

Kidnapping a head of state, however corrupt, is completely unjustified, and there is not an iota of "self-defence" involved in the use of force, which was certainly employed.

US Justifications and Loopholes

What the US seems to have resorted to first is a Justice Department legal memo from 1989 during the George HW Bush administration. In 1989, the media noted the unusual secrecy with which the Justice Department gave the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) legal authority to apprehend fugitives from US law in foreign countries and return them to the United States without first obtaining the foreign state's consent. This appeared to be consistent with US attempts at the time to seize Panama's Noriega on similar charges of drug trafficking.

Called the President's "Snatch Act", it was a legal opinion that reversed earlier rulings during the Carter administration that expressly prohibited federal agents from undertaking such acts. Covert actions of all kinds—including political influence operations—are permitted under the National Security Act of 1947, where the President originally had near freedom to decide on any covert action abroad, though subsequent amendments did require greater congressional committee oversight.

But that line remains unclear, with anything short of war still giving the President considerable freedom. Notably, the administration briefing to a select bipartisan group framed the whole episode as a "law enforcement" operation, a tone that is unlikely to sit well with lawmakers. But with Republicans dominating in the Senate (53 to 47) and in Congress (220 to 213), planned legislation to bar the use of troops in Venezuela (or anywhere else) may be an uphill task, since it requires Republicans to break ranks.

International Law Doesn't Apply

There is another notable issue. In an answer to the Senate Intelligence Committee, a US official, quoting Section 503(a)(5) of the Act, stated that while presidentially authorised action may not violate the Constitution, "Congress did not prohibit the President from authorising a covert action that would violate a non-self-executing treaty or customary international law". Further, she stated, "...the United States respects international law and complies with it to the extent possible in the execution of covert action activities".

In other words, the UN and international rules have no bearing on US covert actions.

For India and the rest of the Global South, it is not just the US action that is worrying. It is also the complete helplessness of the rest of the world—not just in preventing this abduction of a sitting President, but even other such adventures.

Trump's Greenland plan has Denmark and Europe fulminating, but there is not much they can do about it. Europe could send a "common defence force", but for that they have to settle the Ukraine war, which is being fought to the last Ukrainian.

That support for a now unelected President Zelenskyy is another travesty. This is no "rules-based order", which will make it increasingly difficult for India and other Quad members, among others, to stomach co-operation with US forces. The trouble is that the world's worst countries, who have nothing to lose, will rally around Washington to pursue their own illegal aims. Pakistan is a prime example. And now Bangladesh, where the US hand in removing Sheikh Hasina—ironically for poor democratic practice—is likely to become another exercise in international disruption.

These are highly dangerous times. India must gather to itself those countries that can stand together for a true "rules-based order" based on Vasudaiva Kutumbukam—the world and all living things in it as one family—for their own interests. To become a standard-bearer of such high moral principles, however, the entire development model of the state must follow the principle that no one and nothing stands alone. Everything is related to everything else, which means going back to the Vedas for development models.

The clarity of these old texts needs to replace the old Western-inspired models of development. Let Bharat grow on its own terms and its own principles. When that path is set, the rest of the Global South will follow. Time for the best and highest of principles to be laid in stone. Meanwhile, keep your powder dry. Rule-making is a tough business.

GLOBAL ROAD INFRATECH SUMMIT & EXPO (GRIS) 2026

Ahmedabad, A two day Global Road Infratech Summit & Expo (GRIS) 2026 with more than 400 infrastructural, transport and road safety experts from India and abroad attending began here today .

GRIS-2026 being organised by the India chapter of the Geneva based International Road Federation (IRF) global road safety body working for better and safer roads world-wide in partnership with CRRI, ITS India Forum and Bitumen Forum with the theme 'Vision Zero India: integrating Safety Sustainability and technology in Infra' is being attended by global infrastructure experts and policy makers , visionaries, and technocrats from India and about 20 countries. "The summit will be inspiring innovation, showcasing cutting-edge solutions from industry providers, fostering knowledge exchange, and open valuable networking opportunities for experts and decision-makers from government bodies and private organisations. The event through the conference cum expo mode, aims to deliver a holistic experience that educates, inspires, and drives progress in the industry by seamlessly blending the formats." Said Mr K K Kapila, President Emeritus, International Road Federation (IRF). (1-7)

Ms. Nivedita Shukla Verma (IAS), DCPC, visits Plastindia2026

Ahmedabad, Ms Nivedita Shukla Verma , Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals visited the ongoing Six day PLASTINDIA 2026, one of the leading plastics exhibitions in the world, being held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, from 5–10 February 2026. The PlastIndia2026 is being organised by the PlastIndia Foundation, the apex body of plastic industry in the country . The exhibition is witnessing participation from industry leaders, global buyers, innovators, policymakers, and stakeholders from across India and the world, reinforcing India's position as a key driver in the global plastics ecosystem. "We were honoured to welcome Ms. Nivedita Shukla Verma (IAS), Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals

(DCPC), during her visit to the exhibition. Her presence reinforces the Government's strong commitment to innovation, sustainability, and global collaboration across the plastics value chain." Said Mr Ravish Kamath, President PlastIndia Foundation. PLASTINDIA 2026, the leading international plastics exhibition and India's first-ever 100% zero-waste expo, is hosting over 2,000 exhibitors and is expected to attract more than 6 lakh visitors from India and across the world, showcasing the scale, strength, and global competitiveness of the Indian plastics industry. (1-7)

AM/NS India becomes first integrated steel producer

Ahmedabad, ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) has become the country's first integrated steel producer to receive Green Steel certification under the Ministry of Steel's new Green Steel Taxonomy. AM/NS India's Hot Rolled (HR) coils and sheets have achieved a four-star rating, and Cold Rolled (CR) coils and sheets have achieved a three-star rating. These products - key inputs for the automotive, infrastructure, defence, construction equipment, and consumer durables sectors - are now officially recognised as government-certified Green Steel, enabling customers to reduce Scope 3 emissions across their value chains. Eligibility for certification is based on the emissions intensity of steel production, with a qualifying threshold of less than 2.2 tonnes of CO? equivalent per tonne of finished steel (tCO?e/tfs). Steel produced with emissions below this threshold is rated under a three-tier system: three-star, four-star, or five-star Green Steel. To achieve certification, AM/NS India underwent a rigorous audit by the National Institute of Secondary Steel Technology (NISST), which confirmed that the company's flagship flat steel portfolio meets the Green Steel criteria. (19-10)

Printed and Published by MAYUR C. BHATT on behalf of KALYANI PUBLIATION PVT. LTD. and Printed at : Dharti Printers C-3, Shankar Chember, Nr. Fadia Chamber, Asharam Road, Ahmedabad-Published From KALYANI PUBLIATION PVT. LTD. 201,202,208 Nandan complex, opp mithakhali rly crossing, mithakhali, ahmedabad.
Editior : Mayur C. Bhatt