

**Forum:** *United Nations Security Council*

**Issue:** *Addressing the situation in Syria*

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**Position:** Chair

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## Introduction to the Security Council

The United Nations Security Council (SC) met for the first time on 17 January 1946 in London. Charged with maintaining international peace and security, the SC is one of the primary bodies within the United Nations, whose mandate is laid out within Chapter V of the Charter of the United Nations. The Security Council consists of 15 representatives from UN Member States, including five permanent and 10 non-permanent members based on geographic distribution. The five permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The 10 non-permanent members are at the moment: Belgium, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland and South Africa. <sup>1</sup>All permanent members of the Security Council are empowered to veto any resolution. This means a single "no" vote from any permanent member of the Security Council will cause the resolution to fail. Therefore, all member states should work on a draft resolution, which considered the positions of the five veto powers China, France, UK, USA and Russia to avoid a veto from these member states. The powers and responsibilities of the Security Council have evolved over its years of existence. From the very beginning, it has had the distinction of being the sole organ of the United Nations with the power to adopt legally binding resolutions. The SC has the power to take action ranging from investigating any situation threatening international peace, recommending procedures for the peaceful resolution of a dispute, calling upon member nations to implement economic sanctions on other nations, and enforcing its decisions through the use of military force. Additionally, it can recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the Assembly, elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice. Subsidiary bodies and working groups are established by Security Council resolutions, and exist to focus UN resources on enacting a UN mandate in regard to peace and security. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/current-members>

<sup>2</sup> Charter of the United Nations, Chapter V: Security Council

## Addressing the situation in Syria

### Introduction

Since 2011 the Levant region is in turmoil. At the very heart of this conflict stands the Syrian Arab Republic after the first calls for the first reform during the Arab spring protest. The situation has since then evolved in an armed conflict. The main issues in this region are:

- The question of legitimacy of the ASAD government,
- The strive for Kurdish independent regions in the north as well as
- the looming terrorist threat by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The growing scale of the conflict has led to the involvement of national interest groups as well as key members of international politics to influence the situation in their favour. All of these powers have a high interest to influence the situation in their national interest. Since 2014 the attempts of political negotiations between the government and the opposition at UN-sponsored conferences have failed so far to produce a resolution of the conflict.

As of December 2018, approximately 6.2 million Syrians were internally displaced, while an estimated 42,700 refugees returned to Syria from surrounding countries. Approximately 13 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance across the country, and an additional 5.7 million Syrians were registered refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa. The conflict in Syria remains one of the largest humanitarian crises worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

### Definition of Key Terms

#### Term: Democratic federation of northern Syria

Definition: The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria is the autonomous region in the north and east of Syria. It consists out of self-governing sub-regions.<sup>4</sup> Although the region entertains some foreign relations, it is not recognized as a being autonomous by Syria or any international government or organisation.<sup>5</sup>

#### Term: free Syrian Army

Definition: The free Syrian Army is one of the loose fractions within the Syrian Civil War. Their main idea is to bring down the system of Assad while protecting the people and bringing together all opposition forces.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20171201032359/https://en.hawarnews.com/electoral-commission-publish-video-of-elections-2nd-stage/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ibtimes.com/fight-kobane-may-have-created-new-alliance-syria-kurds-assad-regime-1701363>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.joshualandis.com/blog/free-syrian-army-established-to-fight-the-syrian-army/>

**Term: Internal displaced person (IDP)**

Definition: “Internal displacement refers to the forced movement of people within the country they live in.”<sup>7</sup> “They remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement.”<sup>8</sup> “Millions of people are forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence each year, including in the context of conflict, violence, development projects, disasters and climate change, and remain displaced within their countries of residence. Millions more live in situations of protracted displacement or face chronic displacement risk.”<sup>9</sup>

**Term: Refugee**

Definition: “Refugees are people outside their country of origin because of feared persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and who, as a result, require ‘international protection’”<sup>10</sup> “They are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.”<sup>11</sup>.

**Term: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**

Definition: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is usually known as Islamic State (IS). It is a Salafi jihadist militant group and operates mostly in parts of Iraq and Syria.<sup>12</sup> The SC has already passed resolutions about it including S/RES/2170 to introduce sanctions in regards to the ISIL.<sup>13</sup>

**Key Issues****Key Issue**

The main issues in Syria include human rights violations by different governmental as well as non-governmental groups, refugees as well as internally displaced persons, the problem of the ISIL, the use of chemical weapons and last but not least the withdrawal of the US Army. The Amnesty International Report of 2017/2018 states most of the Human Rights violations. According to this report, at the end of 2018 over 400,000 people were killed including civilian and more than 11 million people were displaced within and outside Syria.<sup>14</sup> One big issue are the attacks with banned weapons including chemical weapons where not only combatants but also civilians are getting attacked and killed. The try of the SC to condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria was vetoed three times by the Russian Federation. Additionally, different groups attacked repeatedly hospitals and medical facilities. Another issue in regards to human rights violations it the forced displacement of people through the Syrian government as well as other armed groups. Lastly it has to be mentioned that security forces arrested and continued to

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.internal-displacement.org/internal-displacement>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.internal-displacement.org/internal-displacement>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/refugees.html>

<sup>12</sup> Threat Tactics Report: Islamic State and of Iraq and the Levant, November 2014.

<sup>13</sup> S/RES/2170

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International Report. The state of the world's human rights. 2017/2018

detain tens of thousands of people, including peaceful activists, humanitarian workers, lawyers and journalists, subjecting many to enforced disappearances, torture or other ill treatment and causing deaths in detention.

The consequent of the Civil War with the Human Rights violations is a refugee crisis as well as a large number of internally displaced people. The ongoing civil war has resulted in over 5.7 million registered Syrian refugees - dispersed in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey – and in over 6.2 million IDPs as of December 2018.<sup>15</sup> This has not only an impact on neighbouring states but also to European countries. According to the UNHRC the civil war has led additionally to nearly 3 million people who are hard-to-reach and besieged areas.<sup>16</sup> Different organisations as well as parts of the United Nations are trying to find solutions to this issue and to solve this difficult situation which is influencing other states as well as to take care of the refugees and IDPs in the different countries.

Another big issue in Syria is ISIL. Due to ISIL the conflict is boosted. ISIL is a strong power with many combatants, large resources as well as a lot of publicity in the social media. During the past year ISIL managed to gain more and more territories within Syria and Iraq since April 2018 they control only small parts in Syria and Iraq. ISIL claimed over the years to be responsible for killings of civilians especially through suicide and bombing attacks. These attacks were also but not limited to Aleppo and Damascus.<sup>17</sup>

Another problem which appeared recently is the announcement of the withdrawal of the US forces in Syria which has rekindled the issue of leadership in the region. This might cause more power for ISIL again as the US forces were supporting Kurdish forces in the fight against ISIL.<sup>18</sup>

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### Country

Turkey has interest in territorial gain in north Syria as well as breaking Kurdish control over regions in northern Syria due to the fear of the establishment of a Kurdish state which would in turn destabilize southern regions of Turkey with Kurdish minorities.

US government involved themselves in 2014 first of all to be in opposition to ISIL in order to prevent the establishment of terrorist foothold in the region. Furthermore the USA supports the democratic federation of northern Syria.

Russia has an interest in supporting Assad as their ally in the near east. Although Russia proclaims to be against ISIL, most of their strikes were targeting rebels trying to topple Assad.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/report-syria/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/trump-syria-us-troops-withdrawal-isis-end-islamic-state-a8690871.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/01/world/middleeast/the-syria-conflicts-overlapping-agendas-and-competing-visions.html>

## Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
March-July 2011	Protests, civil uprising	Defection of parts of the security forces after refusal of firing at civilians
July 2011-April 2012	First armed insurgency	-Formation of the free Syrian army; United Nations Commission of Human Rights classifies the situation in Syria as a civil war -no observers are allowed to enter the Syrian state
April-May 2012	Joined Ceasefire negotiation attempt by the UN and the Arab league lead by the former UN Sec-Gen Kofi Annan	On the 12 <sup>th</sup> of April the Syrian government as well as the free Syrian army entered into a ceasefire period but several infractions of the ceasefire by both sides causes several casualties Kof Annan advised the Iran to be part of a sustainable solution
June 2012	Withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission	
25 May 2012	Houla massacre committed by government troops	-108 people killed -Lead to escalation of Syrian civil war -UN Human rights council condemns the massacre
2012-2013	Escalation of Syrian civil war	-consequent contempt to cease control over the country
January to September 2014	Fighting between the different rebel, separatist and opposition groups	-Rise of ISIL in the region
September 2014 to September 2015	ISIL gaining ground in Syria	-US intervenes in the conflict with air strikes against ISIL
September 2015 to February 2016	Assad led government asks for help in the fight against ISIL and the rebel groups	-Russia intervenes on behalf of Syrian President Assad Alliance
February to July 2016	Adoption of resolution 2258 by the Security council that endorsed a stop to hostilities	-Ceasefire held until July when violence broke out again -UN-designated attacks against terrorist groups were still made

August 2016 to January 2017	Turkish military intervention in Northern Syria	-ISIL are pushed back by the Syrian Democratic Front and Turkish forces -clash of Turkish forces with Kurdish YPG -Raqqqa retaken by American forces
December 2016 to April 2017	Aleppo recaptured by Russian and Syrian forces ceasefire between government forces and rebel forces	-Ceasefire was broken
April to June 2017	Chemical attack on Khan Shaykhun American air strikes on Syrian base agreement between Russia, Iran and Turkey on four de-escalation zones	-Establishment of De-escalation zones -Syrian-American conflict ceasefire since 6 May -UN condemnation of chemical attack
July to December 2017	Government troops with Russian aide break three-year siege of Deir ez-Zor by ISIL. Kurdish and US troops seize full control over Raqqqa	-Syrian government states it still considered Raqqqa an occupied city due to the presence of Kurds. -On the 6th of December Russia declares Syria “completely liberated” from ISIL
January to March 2018	Turkish cross border operation in Kurdish-majority Afrin Canton in Northern Syria Syrian Army advances in Hama Governorate against rebels	-Turkish-American relations stretched to breaking point due to Afrin -government starts operation to recapture Ghouta
April to August 2018	Chemical attack in Douma Southern Syria offensive by the Syrian army, backed by Russia US air strikes on last ISIL strongholds	-SC failed to adopt three competing resolutions on an inquiry -Syrian forces take control of Douma
September to December 2018	Trump announces the withdrawal of US troops Iraq strikes ISIL targets Turkey and Russia agree on buffer zone in Idlib	-Idlib demilitarisation
January 2019 to present	Ongoing ISIL attacks near Deir al-Zour Security Adviser Bolton says, withdrawal of US troops depends on certain conditions	-Rejection of protection of Kurdish troops by Turkey

## Possible Solutions

### Solution

The Security Council has already passed resolutions in regards to stabilize Syria and in order to protect the rights of Syrian refugees and IDPs.

Yet there is no end to the conflict and ne problems might arise caused by the withdrawal of the US army and the possibility of ISIL gaining more strength again.

Delegates should focus on the mentioned key issues including the problem of the use of banned weapons, human rights violations and the threat by ISIL.

Possible solutions could include a peace keeping operation in Syria to ensure that ISIL is not able to gain more power and that human rights violations stop. Another possibility could be to send more observers to get a better view about the current situation in Syria to ensure that future resolutions may solve the issues.

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## The current political and humanitarian situation in Venezuela

### Introduction

Venezuela was once upon a time one of the foremost economic powerhouses of South America. It had only turned towards its own brand of socialism at the end of the 1990's when in 1999 Hugo Chavez was elected President. He championed a set of populist policies that while arguably initially successful in improving the welfare of the lowest classes, the current crisis that has spanned both the end of Chavez's tenure and has overshadowed that of Maduro has shown just how fragile the pillars of the Venezuelan economy are. The opposition says that the United Socialist Party (PSUV) - of which both Chavez and Maduro are/were members - proceeded to erode Venezuela's democratic institutions. The state has been crippled by political corruption, scarcity of basic products, closure of companies, deterioration of productivity and competitiveness, and high dependence on oil. It seemed like a potential political turning point in 2015 when opposition leaders won a majority of seats in the National Assembly, dealing a blow to Maduro. But early in 2016, Maduro flooded the Supreme Court with his supporters to block the National Assembly from impeaching him. Key was the surprise announcement by the Supreme Court that it was taking over the powers of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, leading to months of protests that have left nearly 100 dead. This situation has recently escalated when Juan Guaido, the President of the National Assembly, declared himself President. Under most circumstances this would have not rippled the pools of international relations, but the response of the United States and its allies have chosen to recognise him as the President, giving him access to Venezuelan funds that are held overseas.

In the midst of this, the Security Council finds itself in a conundrum: should Member States involve themselves as a whole in the process of revitalisation - thus possibly having to support one of the two existing powers or should they opt for a distant approach and by extension letting the country solve its own internal turmoils - even if it is done at the expense of the citizens' welfare?

### A Brief Overview of the Topic

Venezuela has been fighting a socioeconomic and political crisis since 2010, when Hugo Chávez was president, and has continued to do so even into the current presidency of Nicolás Maduro. Since then, Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, has seen almost daily demonstrations in the streets, some of which have turned deadly. The state is in the midst of a severe crisis which is constantly getting worse.

There is a number of reasons that drove Venezuela into its current situation, into the worst economic crisis in its history. For example, in January 2016, the Supreme Court suspended the election of four legislators – three that were enrolled with the opposition and one with the ruling party – for alleged voting irregularities. The opposition accused the court of trying to strip them of their super-majority, and went ahead and swore in three of the legislators in question.

The response was tough: the Supreme Court ruled that the entire National Assembly was in contempt and all decisions it made would be null. The Court also suspended a stay-or-go referendum against

Maduro and postponed regional elections until 2017. This has not deterred the National Assembly from maintaining that it is the rightful governing body of Venezuela. It has continued to try and assert some form of control, but if nothing else works, it continues to vocally oppose Maduro especially now that he was sworn in in elections that were deemed unfair by countries across the globe. But the survival of the Maduro regime is not determined directly by foreign support, or even mass appeal in the *barrios*, but on the continued support of the Venezuelan armed forces and especially its Minister of Defence - Vladimir Padrino Lopez. A support that can only be guaranteed by a continued income from oil - a task that appears harder and harder for the Maduro government to accomplish.

## The Humanitarian and Economic Situation

Due to the lack of quality economic data from Venezuela it is hard to accurately depict the bleak economic situation in Venezuela but an attempt to outline the conditions will be made nevertheless.

*HYPERINFLATION* is definitely one of the most significant problems of Venezuela. The annual inflation rate reached 830,000 percent in July due to the rapid depreciation of the local currency on the black market. By IMF figures, it has the world's worst negative growth rate (-8 percent). Despite the Maduro regime claiming that inflation is a result of an 'economic war', the reality is that this rapid deterioration is a result of mismanagement by the Chavez-Maduro governments who have blindly followed a path of socialism that does not stand up to the pressure of the real world.

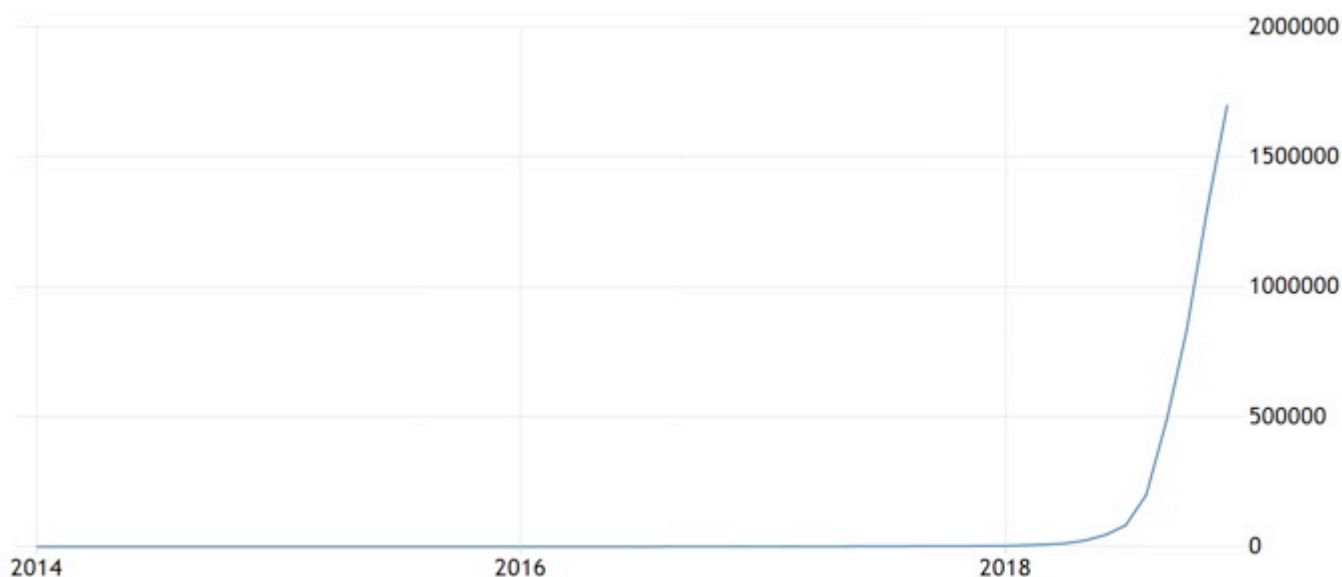
*FOOD SHORTAGES.* The government is having a hard time when it comes to fighting with the black market, which has a powerful influence on prices. Prices on basic goods can change in a matter of days, causing severe food shortages. There are also attempts to cross the border with Colombia in order to buy basic goods. Food is, anyway, being transported under armed guard and water is arriving in the capital city only once a week. Malnourishment and lack of access to basic consumer goods has forced millions of Venezuelans to flee to neighbouring countries, not in search of a better quality of living, but in search of survival.

*HEALTH ASSISTANCE.* The public health system is slowly collapsing. Medicine and equipment are increasingly not available.

*CRIME AND POVERTY* are also widespread. In 2016, 27.479 people were killed, at the same time being listed as the 9th most corrupt country in the world.

*ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT.* Even a rudimentary study of economic history shows that price controls have never been successful in keeping economic productivity at its desired level. By not allowing prices to adjust freely, artificially low prices disincentives production, increasing the shortages of food and basic consumer goods. In spite of overwhelming evidence, the Maduro government has chosen to tread down this path and push Venezuela and its population to the brink of destruction.

Venezuela was supposed to pay back \$15.2 billion in debt between 2015 and 2016, but the country has only \$15.2 billion in foreign reserves to make good on that. A severe energy shortage was provoked by water shortage because, without enough water, the hydroelectric dam (that used to provide 60 per cent of the nation's power demand) cannot run into full capacity. As a result, the government is still shutting down electricity for hours every day.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | BANCO CENTRAL DE VENEZUELA

Venezuela is so rich in oil, that it became an actual issue. The state has the largest proven reserves in the world and this wealth underpins the economic problems. Venezuela has never bothered to produce too much of anything else instead of oil. By exporting it, the state earns dollars which are used to import goods Venezuelan people want and need from abroad. So, when the oil price plummeted in 2014, Venezuela found itself in a shortfall of foreign currency.

The economic crisis comes with a constant and growing anti-government sentiment that boosts the opposition's efforts to oust the president Nicolas Maduro. Just one in four Venezuelans approves of President Nicolas Maduro's governance, 7.3 percent of Venezuelan households are classified as living in extreme poverty and 40 percent of people working make the minimum wage or less.

## Foreign Support for the Maduro Regime

Russia often finds itself alone on the international political stage, so it must ally itself with regimes that can only be described as less than savoury. Amongst this menagerie of failed and rogue nations is Venezuela. Venezuela is an unusual choice for Russia in the sense that it does not possess anything that would be of economic interest to Russia, nor is it a neighbour of Russia or a Russia ally. This deprives Russia of the ability to directly influence events by placing boots on the ground as well as the ability for Russia to use other allies as proxies to do its dirty work in Venezuela (as Iran does in Syria). But what makes Venezuela important is its close proximity to the United States making it a thorn in the United States' side. This is compounded with the fact that the Venezuelan regime has locked horns with the United States recently, thus giving Russia a chance to show off its geopolitical might on the world stage.

It must be pointed out that Russia's support for these regimes is not just simply a way for it to oppose the United States for the sake of opposing it. Russia has historically tried to simultaneously westernise while maintaining fragments of its own ways, often times when the two clashed, Russia chose a path of orthodoxy. This has led it to grow weary of perceived attempts to curb its sovereignty, and therefore it makes a point of supporting nations against intervention even when a basic sense of morality dictates

otherwise. Furthermore, Russia perceives NATO exercises, expansion and modernisation as hostile actions taken against it - a much weaker nation in comparison. This therefore makes vocal action on the international stage necessary in order to remind the West that it is still a force to be reckoned with.

It cannot be stressed hard enough. Russia does not support these nations because they are undemocratic, because they violate human rights. It supports them in spite of this.

## Recent Developments

This latest chapter in the Venezuelan crisis is a result of Maduro's decision to honour the results of an election that was declared a disgrace by the international community and have himself inaugurated as President once more. It was in response to this move that Guaido declared himself the rightful acting President. The swift response of the international community in recognising Guaido has created an interesting situation where many sovereign powers have been effectively removed from Maduro but not truly transferred to Guaido. A good example is foreign policy where the United States has chosen to ignore Maduro's demands to close down its consulate in Caracas and has instead chosen to transfer power over Venezuelan financial assets to Guaido. All this while Guaido cannot exert meaningful control due to the continued support for Maduro within the ranks of the armed forces. It must be pointed out that the support from the armed forces is not as strong as it once was. In recent weeks a small group of soldiers had tried to seize control of a small area of Caracas hoping to incite a coup against the regime and more recently the Venezuelan Military Attache to Washington has chosen to side with Guaido.

## Conclusion

The question of what to do about Venezuela is an urgent one. Now that the United States has cut off Venezuela's access to oil revenue, the country is headed for the brink of disaster. It is the duty of the UNSC to act and to try and avoid this at all cost. But it must do so without allowing the illegal Maduro regime to remain in place.

### Questions to consider

- 1) Can economic sanctions on their own bring down the Maduro regime? Or will it hang on until there is nothing left to hang on to?
- 2) How likely is an armed rebellion by the people? Is it a risk worth taking to allow such a rebellion to occur?
- 3) What are the knock-on effects on the neighbouring countries?
- 4) Is armed force (as hinted by the United States) a viable option?
- 5) What should be done once the Maduro regime falls? Who will help rebuild what was once one of South America's powerhouses?

## Background Reading

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