

# Transcript — Venezuela, Cuba, and the New Western Hemisphere Strategy

**Christian Smith:** Welcome to this podcast from Geopolitical Futures. I'm Christian Smith. It's our last podcast of 2025. But as the year wraps up, geopolitics shows no sign of slowing down. Washington has been ramping up its pressure campaign on Venezuela in recent days. Last week, President Trump announced a blockade of oil, all oil tankers under sanctions entering and leaving the country. And on Sunday, the US Was reportedly pursuing a third oil tanker off the Venezuelan coast, having already intercepted two. As we discussed last time on the podcast, the new focus on Venezuela comes as the world continues to digest America's new national security strategy with its emphasis on the Western Hemisphere. So today on the podcast, I am joined, as usual by Geopolitical Futures chairman and founder George Friedman to discuss how the pressure on Venezuela fits into this wider strategy and why Cuba has a lot to do with it. Before we start, though, just a brief word to say thank you very much for tuning into the podcast this year. We are really grateful to you out there for listening and for watching on YouTube. And remember, you can go to [channel geopoliticalfutures.com](https://channel.geopoliticalfutures.com) that's [geopoliticalfutures.com](https://channel.geopoliticalfutures.com) for all our analysis. And also just a reminder, don't forget to subscribe on YouTube or wherever you get your podcasts. Now, enough of that. On to today's subject and on to George. George, hello. Welcome. I hope you are looking forward to your cold winter break in Rochester.

**George Friedman:** Well, I'll have to do it. Love the grandchildren. Love my children. Why they live there? I don't know.

**Christian Smith:** It's a bit warmer in Texas, I assume. Well, coming to you from Dublin right now, I can tell you it's cold here, too. But look, remind us about the new national security strategy and particularly how it can fundamentally change America's approach to the Western Hemisphere. I mean, what does it say about the US Realigning its focus with the Western Hemisphere?

**George Friedman:** Well, first say that this was inevitable. For the last 80 years, we've been deeply engaged in the Eastern Hemisphere, necessary blocking Soviet developments at the same time costing us a number of wars and many lives from Korea to Vietnam to Afghanistan and so on. So there are many smaller ones. A lot of people died now that the Russians have demonstrated they are not capable of taking Ukraine and therefore all this fear of Russia is vastly overstated. The US is doing what it had been doing before the 80 years, which is focusing

on the Western Hemisphere, which is fundamentally important to the United States at a time where the Eastern Hemisphere is both not that threatening and simultaneously in chaos. So this move to focus on the Western Hemisphere goes back to basic principles of American foreign policy.

**Christian Smith:** What's the U.S. the broad U.S. imperative in the Western Hemisphere, then?

**George Friedman:** Well, it was stated by President Monroe back in the early 19th century that European powers should not be in a position of controlling the Western Hemisphere was that would directly threaten the United States. When the Soviets came into Cuba, that was violating it, but no overwhelming force was used to get rid of them. At this point, however, the. With the Russian influence in Venezuela, Maduro, this is part of an American strategy to secure the Western Hemisphere, both for the United States and for the Latin Americans.

**Christian Smith:** And in there, I suppose, I mean. I mean, what does it actually want to achieve? When you say secure, what would that look like in Latin America?

**George Friedman:** Well, there's no question that there's cartels. There's no mention that the cartels are very powerful in some Latin American countries. And there's no question that the sourcing of drugs from Latin America to the United States is causing substantial damage in the United States to drug addicts. And they're still citizens. And therefore, that's one of the dimensions. It's very real. At the same time, there's broader issues on how Latin America should be organized. And therefore the United States has intervened in the Caribbean Ocean. There's something interesting, however, that intervention, the number of ships and the size of the fleet is far too large just for containing the cartels. That could be done with. Should be done with much small force. The number of troops available are not enough for a significant invasion of Latin America. There are under 3,000 that are deployed at sea. So we take a look at the deployment. It obviously overdoes the interdiction of cartels. At the same time, it does not have enough force to invade all of Venezuela. And that would be possible for that force to take Caracas to capital. But on the other hand, there's a disbalance both in the naval force and the ground force.

**Christian Smith:** And a lot of that, I think, has to do with Cuba, which we might come onto. Well, we will come onto in a moment, but focusing on Venezuela in particular, but broadly more Latin America as well. The US Is in some ways sort of shifting its attention from. It wants the Western Hemisphere perhaps to be more, shall we say, stable, more financially secure.

**George Friedman:** Well, I would put it this way. The United States fundamentally created China by allowing them to export massive amounts of goods to the United States without limit and simultaneously investing heavily in China. So in a certain way, in the same way that we did the same thing for Europe, we did this For China, that had the benefit because China and Russia are not particularly friendly with each other at that time. At the same time, it was a great benefit to the United States. The United States has a massive productive capability, but the costs of that productivity are fairly high. To bring down the average cost of consumption, imports from nations with lower wage rates and therefore cheaper products is a necessary dimension to organize it. And we did that with China. We also did that with Europe. After World War II, there's been always a major low cost exporting country emerging. The first one was the United States, which emerged in the 1890s as a massive exporter to Europe. It was the China of the day. At the same time, after World War I, it failed. Forty years later, the next massive exporter was Japan. As the elderly will remember, made in Japan was a joke. It was a joke of shoddy, cheap products. At the same time, it evolved into threatening the US Auto industry by having cheaper, better cars, and that was that. The third major exporter that balanced the American economy was China. And that Chinese evolution has reached its end about 40 years later. That seems to be the cycle in the sense that the Chinese products were destabilizing the United States too much. At the same time, their price is rising. Therefore tariffs are placed on China. And so now, in a way that I'm not sure is understood even by the policymakers, we turn to what is the next China? What is the next low cost exporting power that will reduce the cost of living in the United States but maintain the major American economy? In my mind, when you look around the world, it's always a country. You never expected to do it. No one thought the United States would emerge as a major economic power. Back in the 19th century. No one thought Japan would recover from World War II. No one thought China, which was a wreck after Mao Zedong, could possibly have emerged at this economic power. Thus, we look for a country or a region that is incredibly unlikely to emerge. When you look at the world, if you look at what's happening in Latin America, particularly in countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and so on, there's massive economic growth now emerging. And so when we look at the question one, how do we deploy, define the national strategy? It is that the Western Hemisphere be secure. Secondly, the development of a significant economy in the Western Hemisphere next generation China, Japan and United States is very possible. Now, I don't think that the policymakers take this in mind. I think they're looking at it strictly from a national security point of view, but from my point of view, when I look at the world's economy, there's always an emerging massive exporting region. The Europeans, the Americans and the Japanese. Now China has reached the end of that process.

It's going to have a normalized economic economy. There needs to be this. And I look at Latin America, particularly the Southern Cone, Argentina, Britain, Brazil, Chile, these countries and the rate of investment that's going on in there and the rate of growth in the economy, I would say this is most likely the next emerging country. Now this sounds power. Now this sounds preposterous, but you would have been laughing hilariously in 1980 if you said that China was going to become a world economic power.

**Christian Smith:** That is fascinating.

**George Friedman:** That is a side effect, but I don't think is the major driving concept behind his strategy. It simply is something else that emerges.

**Christian Smith:** From it that is fascinating as well. I mean, let me just ask you just a bit of a side question there. Many would say that India sort of might be that emerging economy, export economy that might replace China. Do you think that South America, Latin America play a more significant role there?

**George Friedman:** Well, the usual evolution is not a major power already getting a little better. The usual evolution in the past more than a century has been the emergence of a power that has a fairly capable population, natural resources available to them, and markets in the world that are hungry for low cost goods pretty manufactured. So when you take a look at where and elsewhere you could do it, well, India is already far past that point. It is a major economic power, but not the fundamental exporting power that Japan, the United States were, or China. This has to start from the beginning. And what Latin America has is a fairly reasonable workforce, a lot of natural resources, and is now in the process, already started, of developing more powerful economies in the south and also more investment going on, much more investment going on from outside, including the United States and Europe and the Chinese as well are down there putting money in. So when you look at this, it is from my mind, not the President's mind, a possibility of a new area merging because one will emerge. And this is the best plan for the United States. The national security at this point by the security documents we've published is them a fundamental thing. We do not want to be engaged in Europe, we do not want to be engaged in Asia. We don't want to have these ongoing wars that have been going on, so reducing our presence because the Russians have demonstrated they are incapable of even taking Ukraine, let alone all the other things that people worry about. And so we now look at the Western Hemisphere as someplace we should secure.

**Christian Smith:** Take a moment to follow and rate us on your preferred podcast platform. For video versions of the show and More, subscribe on YouTube [eopoliticalfuturesgpf](#). Click the

link in the description for access to our free newsletter. And for a limited time, you'll receive an instant download of our special report on NATO's eastern line by senior analyst Antonia Colibasanou. Well, let's bring back Venezuela here. I mean, speaking as well of ongoing wars and potential issues coming out of that. I mean, to an extent, some people see this as just a political joust between Trump and President Maduro, as you mentioned there, George, that some policy makers may actually see this more as a national security issue. Is this a national security issue for the U.S. do you think that's what's going on here? Or is there a matter of ironing out Venezuela for the hope of a broader grand strategy ambition?

**George Friedman:** As I said at the beginning, the amount of naval force being deployed is far greater than what's necessary to block the cartels. You've got aircraft carriers, all sorts of vessels all over the place. But you also have to understand that something else happened. We started by interdicting cartel traffic, but then something changed. We started going after oil tankers. The first oil tanker we seized was going to Cuba. Now, this is a really important thing. Having shifted away from the cartels, we're still interdicting them, but at the same time shifting to oil tankers. We're doing something very different. We have to understand that a great deal of the oil going to Cuba comes from Venezuela. We also have to understand that Cuba at this point is in a devastatingly bad position economically. There is hardly an economy functioning. A great part of the electrical system does not work for many hours, sometimes for days. And the standard of living in Latin America is pathetic compared even to the lesser Latin America. They must have oil. They don't have any oil themselves, so they have to have the oil. One country exporting it to them is Mexico. But I think they're about to stop that exportation, as the President said they would be thinking about it. And the other is the big one is Venezuela. So when you take a look at the force that's out in the field, it's way bigger than needed to block exports. On the other hand, the military force landing force is much, much too few to do anything in Venezuela. The question of Maduro is of course important. He is linked to the Russians. He is in the hold of or in charge of the drug rollers. So it's good in its own right, from the American point of view. But I think given the deployment of forces, the size and the shape, we have another issue on the table. And that's an issue that is fundamental to dominating the Western Hemisphere. That's a very old issue. Cuba, it's been an issue since the 1960s, the Cuban missile Crisis, and it's still a danger to the United States, not simply because it's so close, but because they've recently signed a treaty with the Russians to renew their defense relationships. That was when the Tomahawk missiles were being threatened to be sent to Ukraine. At the same time, both the eastern and western parts of the Gulf of Mexico can be blocked easily from Cuba, which has always been a nightmare for the United States because most of our imports and exports come from the Gulf Coast. So when you look at this whole

thing and you say, I want to dominate the Western Hemisphere, you've got to start dealing with the Cubans. The Cubans are weak now, and Venezuelan oil is sustaining them in part. So there are two things here. Maduro is one, Cuba is the other.

**Christian Smith:** And what's the end game there with regards to Cuba? I mean, Cuba is really on its knees already economically. It's sort of, as you say, there is massively dependent. I think about 40% of its oil comes from the Venezuela. Could we see societal collapse even in Cuba if. If this oil is cut off?

**George Friedman:** To a great extent, there is societal impact in Cuba already. If you cut off the flow of oil, the energy problem emerges massively. And from the American point of view, if there was any, if ever, a time for regime change, not in Venezuela so much as in Cuba. This is the time and when we remember the importance of Cuba historically. The United States. The United States drove the Spaniards out of Cuba and then the Russians came back. Then used to kind of see a pattern developing out of the deployment of forces.

**Christian Smith:** And I suppose, I think I read yesterday that about a quarter of Cubans have left the island or are planning to leave the island because of the crisis there. I mean, is it really as part of a sort of wider grand strategy? Grand strategy, national security strategy. Is this an aspect of. Look, let's just from the US Perspective, of course, iron out the issue that could be Cuba.

**George Friedman:** Well, there were many, many, many Cubans that left and came to the United States and are now doing quite well and actually are secretaries of state and such. So this is a tradition. On the other hand, I doubt that the United States wants another wave of Cubans coming in. On the other hand, we want to stabilize Cuba as it is currently. It's an unstable country. It has a relationship, treaty, relationship with the Russians. And we have every reason to want the Russians to stay out of this hemisphere. Therefore, enriching Cuba, creating a situation where the Cubans are not so desperate is in the American interest, immigration aside, at the same time, doing that while the Venezuelans are shipping them oil or the Mexicans or anyone is going to be not going in the direction we want to go. So what we're hoping for, I think, is some sort of crisis inside of Cuba, not just economic, but political, and having the force available necessary to support the coup against the current regime, if there is one.

**Christian Smith:** And bringing it back to Venezuela. Now, what's the end goal there then for the US Blocking oil to Cuba, putting economic pressure on Venezuela? But what, what then?

**George Friedman:** Well, we certainly want the cartels not to have access to the United States. That's reasonable. Maduro has close ties not just with the cartels but with the Russians. That presents a problem. So certainly we want to get rid of Maduro, but that is not fundamental to the United States. The cartels may be. What is fundamental to the United States, as it turns to the Western Hemisphere, is the situation of Cuba. Cuba was once a very significant Russian asset, Soviet asset, to threaten the United States. During that time, there were several crises involved. At this point, Cuba is sort of ruined and has potential relations with Russia. The Cuban question is more important, but you can't really deal with that question until you control the Caribbean Ocean, blocking the oil, but as well threatening Cuba from the south and from the north, because from north you've got Texas not too far away from Cuba and a lot of troops there. So when you take a look at the situation, we put Cuba in a pincer position and at the same time, did it justify it realistically by the need to block the cartels?

**Christian Smith:** Do you think we'll see military action at all against either Cuba or Venezuela in this situation? Or is it really just a threat, a reminder of the power that the US Has?

**George Friedman:** This administration has been very cautious about committing US Troops into combat. It's avoided most of these things. Therefore, I think the hope is that if you intensify the crisis inside of Cuba and inside of Venezuela, internal forces will arise to force regime change at the same time. Whereas in Venezuela, there is time to be had in the Cuban situation, the situation is so bad that it may get out of control very quickly and some US Troops will be needed. But the primary desire in putting the pressure on Venezuela and on Cuba is to have an evolution in the internal process. Maduro has been pretty much a failure as president. He has many enemies. He has very powerful friends. But weakening those friends by putting his blockade on is a way not to send troops in, but to try to evolve the situation inside. The number of ground forces that are deployed at this point are not available, are not sufficient, I should say, to operate either in Venezuela, a little more possible in Cuba. But that's not the way this administration plays it. It brings pressure to bear, but it does not use troops usually.

**Christian Smith:** I mean, if it gets to the point where it either has to or it won't get what it wants. I mean, if taking into the picture this idea of a more stable Latin America where it might be able to be used as a new exporting power or some of the countries, and it might be if Venezuela and Cuba remain how they are, and by that I mean generally opposed to the United States. Can. Can the US Live with that?

**George Friedman:** It could live with that. But can Latin America. Remember, much of the drugs coming to the United States are not grown in Venezuela, they're grown in Colombia. And even Brazil has its cartels and so on. So it's very difficult to develop a massive economy at the same time that the capital is held in the hands of drug dealers. In other words, rationalizing Latin American economic policy in a way requires the marginalization of the drug dealers. They won't be limited altogether. So when you look at it, and again, I can't say that this is what the Americans are considering right now, but the outflow of this, of what they're doing now is going to be to clear the decks, to some extent, of the cartels that are functioning all over the place and open the door for more investment in viable industries.

**Christian Smith:** Well, George, as I said at the top, it's the last episode of the year. Now at Geopolitical Futures, every year the company produces a forecast looking ahead at what they think, what the analysts think will happen in geopolitics in the coming year. Just talk us through, George, what that looks like, what the process is.

**George Friedman:** Well, firstly, we're in the business of forecasting geopolitics. We look at policies that nations make, not in terms of what they choose to do or would like to do, but the things they're forced to do. So if you look at the imperatives that they have, the forces they're facing, you can start predicting what might come of it. For example, in 2009, I predicted Russia would inevitably invade Ukraine. I was able to say that, for example, Poland, Japan, Turkey are going to emerge as major players on the world stage in due course. They're doing so now. So when I talk about Latin America, these are not things I advocate. It's not things that I hope to happen. It's not things that we somehow believe we have contact with presidents. The fact of the matter is we depersonalize it in the same way that economists depersonalize economics. We look at presidents, leaders as people who became that because they could shape themselves to what was necessary to become the leader and then act in the world by what is necessary. If you understand the forces at work, you understand what they're going to do. So we forecast last year that the United States is going to be pulling back from the Eastern Hemisphere and concentrating on the Western Hemisphere. And there it went. This sometimes makes it appear that we're at this point simply echoing Trump, but no, we're preceding him. We're saying, so every year we take a look at the next year and try to think about what it's going to look like. And our forecasting has been not perfect, but very, very good compared to what other things are being said. And every January, what we do is we put out an annual forecast that the past was, you know, fairly, quite capable, in the past was fairly good. And I'm proud of that. But what we do is forecast it is not. We, we don't advocate, we don't in brace leaders or anything like that, regard the geopolitical system, like the economic system, a system on its own being forced by



its own processes and so forth. There are issues involved that people have to decide on, but their decisions are kind of predictable. So what we're doing this year is on January 9, if we make it, we will release our annual forecast. And in doing that, we will try to talk about all of these things and what's going to happen in next year. Some things that we are predicting and we'll have, there is an accommodation between the United States and China, both militarily and economically. This year we're predicting a range of other things on that order that's worth seeing, I think. And in general, we have a good track record.

**Christian Smith:** And you can go to [geopoliticalfutures.com](http://geopoliticalfutures.com) if you want to become a subscriber and see those, those forecasts when they come out. And I'll also dangle a carrot by just saying that if you want to. Our director of analysis, Alison Federka, has done a breakdown of sort of the options available to the United States in Venezuela with regards to Nicolas Maduro and you can go and read that detailed breakdown of these options and what ones are the most likely on the [geopoliticalfutures.com](http://geopoliticalfutures.com) website. But George, you've got me excited for the forecast next year. I hope you go and enjoy a lovely break. Enjoy Rochester, enjoy the cold. And to you out there, thanks again very much for listening this year. It's been fantastic having you tune in. We really appreciate all your comments and feedback. We'll be back again next year with more podcasts of course, but until then, you enjoy the festive period. Take care and goodbye.

**George Friedman:** Goodbye and thank you for speaking to me all year long. Hope to do next year too.

**Christian Smith:** Find all of our expert geopolitical analysis at [analysis@geopoliticalfutures.com](mailto:analysis@geopoliticalfutures.com).

**George Friedman:** Sa.