US Strikes Venezuela — Jeffrey Sachs on War, Law and Power

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in. I'm your host Zain Raza. Before we begin this video, I would like to provide you with the fourth update to the progress of our crowdfunding campaign. To provide you some context first, in last year's campaign we managed to raise €62,000 thanks to 2200 donors. And in this year's campaign, due to a difficult economic environment and increased costs, we are aiming to raise €80,000. If we do not achieve this target, we will be left with no choice other than to drastically scale back on our capacities or in the worst case even shut down our YouTube channel. So let's get to the update. As of 2nd January 2026, we've managed to raise €46,000 thanks to 1200 donors. Compared to last year at this stage, we managed to raise €42,000. There are only 10 days left, and with the amount raised so far, we can continue operating until July or August of next year. However, if we reach our target, we'll be able to make it through until next year's crowdfunding campaign.

I want to sincerely thank everyone who donated to our campaign so far. At the same time, however, it's important to put the number 1200 donors into context, which is fewer than the least watched videos on our channel. Our channel was watched 240,000 times in December alone and has over 165,000 subscribers. If you've not donated so far and are watching our videos, please consider doing so now, even if it's just €1 to €5, or by simply sharing the link to our crowdfunding campaign within your network. There are only 10 days left, and the actions of each and every one of you counts and will determine whether we can continue broadcasting in the coming months ahead. On the screen now, you will see a PayPal QR code appear. If you click on pause and scan it with your phone's camera, you will be able to donate immediately without any hassle. For more detailed information on our crowdfunding campaign, our past work, the challenges and costs that we face this year, and how you can participate, please see the link in the description of this video. I thank you for your love, generosity and support.

Today I'll be talking to Jeffrey Sachs about the breaking development in Venezuela. Jeffrey serves as the director for the Center of Sustainable Development at Columbia University, where he holds the institution's highest academic rank. He's also a world-renowned economist, best-selling author, innovative educator, and a global leader in sustainable development. Jeffrey, welcome back to the show.

Jeffrey Sachs (JS): Thank you. Good to be with you.

ZR: According to multiple news sources, today, on January 3rd, 2026, the United States carried out a large-scale strike on Venezuela, with at least seven explosions and low-flying aircraft reported over Caracas and other regions, and President Donald Trump stated on truth social account that US forces had captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife and flow them out of the country following those military actions. The Venezuelan government has condemned the strikes as military aggression, declared a state of emergency, rejected the legitimacy of their reported operation, and demanded international scrutiny through an emergency UN Security Council meeting. This follows months of escalating pressure from Washington, including a significant military buildup in the Caribbean, repeated strikes on alleged drug smuggling vessels since at least September 2025, and the labeling of elements of the Venezuelan state apparatus as a terrorist organization. Can you comment on the current situation and talk about its significance?

JS: Well, the significance is very great because the United States has brazenly attacked another country in the most crude and utter violation of the UN Charter. The US basically under Trump has completely ripped up the UN Charter. It never abided by it very strictly, but now it has completely ripped up any kind of international constraint or binding principles of international law or comity between countries. So this is a very serious event, but it's not a recent event of just the last days or weeks.

This is a long-term project of the United States since at least 2002 to bring down a leftist government in Venezuela. A government that the United States doesn't like, starting with

Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chavez, against whom the US attempted a coup in 2002. The coup failed, Chavez kept his power. But this campaign to overthrow the Chavista era has been going on for more than twenty years. Almost every president has been part of it. Obama used emergency declarations to put sanctions on Venezuela. When Trump came in, he was determined to overthrow the government. There was an interesting dinner of Latin American leaders with President Trump in the first year of his first term, where Trump openly opined about the US should invade Venezuela. By the way, he didn't talk about narco-trafficking or anything like that. That's what we would call blah, blah, blah, or just narrative for what is a regime change operation for other reasons which is against leftism, for the nationalization or strict measures against foreign companies in the energy sector, for the grab of Venezuela's energy reserves, which after all are the largest reserves on the planet. So this has been going on for a long time. Incidentally, at that dinner in 2017, two of the presidents that were at that dinner told me about it independently, the same story and how amazed they were at the crudeness of it. But this campaign, therefore, is a long-term campaign, as US deep state operations tend to be. It didn't end today. The government is still in charge. The United States did not land troops, it just attacked and kidnapped a president and his first lady, in a rather stunning manner. But the regime change operation is not over yet. And the experience of US regime change operations is that US plans almost never work according to US planning. And so we may be in for a lot of turmoil in the days ahead.

I think when it comes to Venezuela's call for a UN Security Council meeting, the UN is almost more redundant at this point. The US has almost destroyed it. Whether it survives this remains to be seen. The League of Nations did not survive the brazen assaults on peace of the 1930s. Whether the UN survives this depends not on the United States, which is not going to abide by the UN but on the rest of the world. And if as typical Europe bows down to the US and says, "You're so wonderful, thank you for bringing back democracy and peace and all the rest", well, this would be another nail in the coffin of the United Nations itself.

ZR: Talking about Europe, what stands out just as much as the US military action itself is Europe's response, or lack thereof. According to Reuters' reporting on January 3rd today, the European Union and several European governments, including Germany, have reacted to the US attacks in Venezuela by calling for restraint, de-escalation, and adherence to international law. However these statements stop short of explicitly condemning the US bombing or directly challenging Washington's justification for the operation. How do you assess this response? Does it go far enough?

And secondly, putting the governments aside, why should people in Europe care about this development? Many may see this as something happening far away in Latin America with no immediate consequences for their own lives. What should people in Europe be demanding now from the governments, in your view?

JS: Well, Europe's response to anything the United States does is pathetic. Europe cannot find a voice that defends international law and a voice of reason on almost anything. And so Europe's response now reminds me of what happened a few months ago when the United

States bombed Iran. And there was of course an emergency UN Security Council meeting soon afterwards, and I went to that meeting, attended it. And what did the European ambassadors say? They called on Iran to exercise restraint. Iran was bombed, and the message was not to Israel and the United States that were bombing Iran, but to Iran. Don't overreact. Keep cool, don't respond. This is Europe. No principles right now. Europe is killing itself for the lack of principles. Look at the respect of the European people for their own leaders. It doesn't exist right now. Every leader in Europe virtually is without support of their own populations. Macron and Merz, Starmer, They're support is disappearing because this isn't what the public wants. And this, I should emphasize, is not what the American people want. The American people have no say at all in any of this. The European public has no say at all in any of this.

The idea that this is somehow democracy at work, absurd. The idea that this is constitutionalism in the slightest, absurd. This is Donald Trump, of course, representing the military industrial complex and the CIA carrying out actions by executive order, not by constitutionalism. The US Constitution vests the power of war in the US Congress. But the Congress does nothing. One Congressman today said that he doubted the constitutionality. And Trump said, "What are you whining about, this constitutionality? What are you whining about?" And Trump means it, "Constitution? This is ridiculous. I'm your I'm your leader. You follow me.".

This is how the world is right now. And so I don't think the leaders in Europe reflect the interests of the European people. I don't think the leaders of the United States reflect the interests of the American people. I don't think the publics in Europe or the United States want the lawlessness, recklessness, thuggery of the United States. But it doesn't seem to change the calculus of the particular politicians who maybe were brought to office because they were good stewards of the military-industrial complex. Maybe they weren't weeded out by the United States but rather favored with their fellowships and their seats on the board of the Atlantic Council or the German Marshall Fund or some other transatlantic wonderful alliance. And that's how they came to power is to be absolutely good and loyal followers of the United States. It doesn't work for the public.

What should the public want? That we avoid World War III, that we avoid lawlessness, that we have a United Nations that functions, that we have a UN Charter, that we respect diplomacy, that we actually recognize that diplomacy can work rather than bombing. But this is not the world that we're in right now made by our politicians. And as brazen and reckless and dangerous as the US actions are today, maybe we're gonna wake up in a few days and Israel's gonna be bombing Tehran again. Trump gave Netanyahu the blessing for that explicitly a couple of days ago. Trump said, if we don't like how the Iranian government is handling protests against the economy, well we'll intervene. We're loaded and ready, he said, our military. So he's already announcing this, and then it will happen and will people be surprised? Well, they may look surprised, but please open your eyes, pay attention. We're in a state of lawlessness where the United States is threatening or intervening, fighting Israel's wars, most likely about to attack Iran, attacking Venezuela, and in the immediate moment

getting away with it at a political level within the ambit of the so-called West, whatever that is.

ZR: In the media here in Germany, the framing around Venezuela is always that Maduro is an authoritarian dictator. He's suppressing human rights and democracy. They, for example, elevate Maria Machado, the Nobel Peace Prize winner. And for the people that are watching this version, especially the younger folks or people who are just tuning in when they just saw Venezuela on the news and have no idea about this, how would you respond to this media framing that elevates human rights and democracy and puts geopolitics aside?

JS: Well, the first thing I would say is that even if the characterization were true, if that is taken as a license for war, we're not going to survive on this planet. If one group of countries says, we don't like your government, we don't like how you operate, therefore we attack you, we will end up all dead in a war. Because the whole purpose of the UN was to move beyond that. It was to say that countries cannot attack each other other than in self-defense or through the mandate of the UN Security Council. That is the reason why the UN was created. If it just becomes a decision by one leader who says, I don't like how the other country is governed, we will have a war of all against all. So even if that characterization were true, it is to my mind absolutely wrong to follow it with the idea that therefore this attack is right. And I think the award of the Nobel Prize to Machado was making it the Nobel War Prize, not the Nobel Peace Prize. Because whatever one thinks about Maduro, to award the prize to somebody who calls openly for a US attack on her country in violation of international law, in my view is the winner of the war prize, not a peace prize. So this is the first point.

The second point that is not accepted or understood and I don't know whether European leaders are like this because of the way they are raised and chosen or out of willfulness or out of political calculation, as ignorant as they sound. But in Europe there's never any history. There's only something immediate. So if you look at the actual Venezuelan history over the last quarter century, this has been an attack by the United States on Venezuela for a quarter century. It's been, as I described it, a project of the CIA and the American deep state. And you can trace it step by step. I've seen some of it with my own eyes. I've watched closely how president after president has deliberately destroyed the Venezuelan economy. Through sanctions and through confiscation of reserves. In Trump's first term, he just named another president and he said that the leader of the assembly, Juan Gaido is president. It was farcical. But how many European leaders just fell into line? Because they like playing a farce. They don't want to think or they don't understand, I don't know what it is. But that fell apart because it was such a blatant, idiotic charade. But the European leaders are in this again. Instead of attacking Maduro, why doesn't the German government attack the brazen violation of international law, the ripping up of the UN charter by the United States, or the deliberate destruction of the economy through comprehensive sanctions, seizure of assets, and so forth. Oh, but I forget because the German chancellor wanted to seize Russia's assets against international law the same way.

So we're in a period where people don't want rules. They want to play whatever games and use whatever narratives they want. And they think that that kind of rule of the jungle is somehow to their advantage. It isn't. It's going to end up in disaster if we continue on this line. And we're very close to this. And because Trump's making a war threat every day right now. And by the way, don't be surprised, please, if the United States invades Europe, because Trump has announced clearly that Greenland is going to be the United States. He's announced it. Don't be surprised. And let's not run and say, oh, how did he do that? When he says that, which European leaders react to it? Well, maybe Denmark a little bit. "Please don't be mean to us. We'll give you more, Mr. Trump." But the European Union doesn't stand up and say, "how dare you threaten Europe? How dare you threaten Europe?" No, United Europe doesn't say that at all. So please don't be surprised, because this is what Trump has announced. He announced a special envoy for Greenland just last week, the governor of Louisiana, who said, well, Greenland should be America's. It's a national security issue for the United States. Where was Europe's voice on that? A direct US threat. Did Europe call for a UN Security Council meeting to condemn this kind of threat, which by itself is against the UN Charter? Of course not. It didn't even react. It said, "Oh, please be nice to us, Donald". Maybe Mr. Rute said, "Daddy, please don't talk that way." This is how Europe is right now. You know, the only reason I am reacting this way is that the stakes are extremely high to just bury international law.

Zain Raza (ZR): Jeffrey Sachs, world-renowned economist and best-selling author, thank you for this interview in such short notice on this breaking development. It's always a pleasure talking to you.

JS: Great to be with you. I appreciate it. Thanks a lot.

Zain Raza (ZR): And thank you for tuning in today. If you liked the journalism that we undertook in this video and would like to follow us going forward, then make sure to click on the subscribe button below. And don't forget to participate in our crowdfunding campaign. Only 10 days are left, and if we don't achieve our target, we will be left with no choice but to scale back on our capacities or completely shut down our YouTube channel. Our independent media outlet does not take any money from corporations or governments. Hence we only depend on you, our viewers, to continue with our work that you just won't hear in the corporate media. I thank you for your support and generosity. I'm your host Zain Raza. See you next time.

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