

# Venezuela: Performative murder

by GWYNNE DYER

'If you're on a boat full of cocaine or fentanyl or whatever, headed to the United States, you're an immediate threat to the United States,' said US Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week. So it's perfectly reasonable for the US armed forces to kill everybody on that boat (including a 'double tap' on any survivors in the water).

That's a good place to start unraveling what the Trump administration is really up to, because it is literally impossible for a motorboat off the coast of Venezuela to be heading to the United States. All 22 boats destroyed and all 87 people killed by US missiles were going somewhere, or more likely many different places, but the United States was not one of them.

The shortest distance between the Maracaibo region of Venezuela and the Florida Keys, the nearest bit of the United States, is about 1,000 nautical miles (1,160 statute miles). Most of the boats are twin outboards of various designs, so their maximum fuel capacity cannot be much more than 200 gallons.

Assuming that the boats have 125 hp motors and are doing 20 knots (seems about right, from the drone footage), they will run out of fuel after something between 120 and 200 nautical miles. So they will need to stop between five and eight times to refuel. That's a major nuisance because it would mean many detours and many different customs to clear.

Alternatively, they could just fill lots of jerry cans and carry at least a thousand gallons of extra fuel on the boat. Unfortunately, a thousand gallons of fuel weighs about three tonnes, which is a lot more than those boats are built to carry.

This is basically a stupid idea, and definitely not the way that drugs reach the United States.

Everybody who grew up in countries where they teach basic geography knows that, and so do many Americans. But even if Donald Trump does plan to escalate to air strikes on Venezuela (as he says he will) or an actual invasion of the country (not yet confirmed), why would he start by killing random people in small boats?

It is performative murder, and the intended audience is not just Venezuelans. We are all back in the 19th century, when the Western Hemisphere was the exclusive domain of the United States. As former US Secretary of State Richard Olney said in 1895, citing the Monroe Doctrine: 'The United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law.'

Since the other people who share 'the Americas' with the USA, from Canadians to Chileans and Argentines, have grown unfamiliar with this perspective, they have to be reminded of it. Indeed, they have to be re-taught it, and how better than by giving the uppity Venezuelans a good thrashing? Not only instructive, but enjoyable as well.

Trumpworld is going to be a world in which the great powers do what they want, limited only by the strength of other great powers, while the lesser countries do what they are told. If you prefer that in a more diplomatic format, it's all there in this week's 'US National Security Strategy', 33 pages setting out how the Trump administration sees the world.

The Western Hemisphere section offers us a 'Trump Corollary' to the old Monroe Doctrine: 'After years of neglect, the United States will assert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region. [Key geographies? Hmm. Like mines and stuff, maybe?]

'We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to...own or control strategically vital resources in our Hemisphere. This 'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine is a common-sense and potent restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests.'

There's no need to read between the lines. It's right there on the page: 'We'll do what we want, and you'll do what we want too.' But for slow learners the US armed forces will be staging a series of demonstrations in and around Venezuela in coming days. Stay tuned.

If this analysis is right, then we may have an answer to the question 'Why bother?' that normally bedevils debates about a US invasion of Venezuela. After all, nobody really needs its oil, and nobody in the Trump administration gives a toss about bringing justice, democracy or 'freedom' to Venezuelans.

But if Trump or whoever is doing the thinking for him needs a horrible example of what happens to any country that defies the United States, Venezuela will do fine. In that context, some performative murders as an opening act for the main event makes perfectly good sense.