

Navigating global politics and defending our right to self-determination

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The first month of 2026 has exposed the fragility of every small nation's right to self-determination in a geo-political environment regulated, not by international law, but by the "law of the jungle". The notion that "might is right" and that sovereign nations can be coerced to bow to the barrel of a gun, speaks to our present reality. As a small resource-rich country Namibia has to navigate the minefield of imperial politics that allow military might to trample on others' national sovereignty and international law. The key question is how countries like Namibia can navigate the current global politics and preserve their right to self-determination?

The mask comes off

The US attack on Venezuela at the beginning of this year and the kidnapping of the country's elected president Nicolas Maduro and his wife marked a new violent turn in the history of U.S. imperialism. It constituted an unlawful assault on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Venezuela and was also a blatant breach of the UN Charter – the very charter that was developed to prevent such acts of aggression. The attack was preceded by statements of US president Trump in which he claimed US ownership over Venezuela's resources, including oil, minerals and land. In other words, the US gave Venezuela an ultimatum of surrendering its autonomy and resources or face a brutal onslaught.

Those who might think that this only applies to Latin America which the US condescendingly described as its "back yard" and part of its sphere of interest need to take a second look at the US empire today. It shows clear signs of decline but still maintains an unmatched military presence with over 800 military bases in more than 80 countries. Its proclaimed sphere of interest covers virtually all significant oil and minerals-rich countries as it desperately tries to limit the growing economic importance of China. In past decades, the US still sugarcoated its interests in the guise of promoting democracy and human rights but the Trump administration no longer subscribes to such diplomatic niceties. Instead, the transactional demands are tabled openly, not only against Venezuela but also towards countries like the Ukraine ("give us your minerals in exchange for military support"). Namibia is not immune from this transactionalism. In her recent article (*The Namibian*, 23 January 2026), Matuikuani Dax pointed out how the US offers aid for Namibia's health sector in exchange for access to Namibia's minerals. This shows that coercion is already upon us and it will worsen if and when we become an oil producing country.

Sidelining the UN

In recent months it has become clear that the current UN structures are incapable of defending even the most basic rights as enshrined in the UN charter. These rights could simply be shredded and trampled upon by the US and its allies. The self-proclaimed champions of democracy remained mute and hardly anybody dared to speak out. The slavish applause that Trump received at the UN General Assembly last

year speaks volumes. In Gaza, Israel committed (and continues to commit) a US-supported genocide and most of the European countries played along. Now that Trump wants to take over Greenland, Europeans are alarmed and try to find a way out for the “middle” countries - meaning themselves. These are merely shifts within the Western Alliance with very limited impact on Africa.

How then can African and other countries of the Global South defend themselves and their right to make their own political, economic and developmental decisions? Thus far, the responses of countries outside the Western Alliance have been muted. While most have condemned the attack on Venezuela, hardly any were willing to take a principled stance and confront the US. Russia had signed a defense pact with Venezuela supplying some weapons and air defense systems but could not prevent the attack on that country. Ships carrying Venezuelan oil to China were abducted by the US without a significant Chinese response.

Containment?

Instead, there was a widespread attempt to quietly “contain” US imperialism by trying to safeguard some political space without directly offending the bully. This was done by countries like Colombia, Mexico and even Venezuela under acting president Delcy Rodriguez. Likewise, India and China relied on some kind of diplomatic response while continuing to diversify their political and economic relations beyond the US.

South Africa, supported by Namibia and a few others, was one of the few countries to take a more principled stance on the genocide in Gaza. It has (so far) withstood significant US pressure to withdraw the case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). South Africa also condemned the aggression against Venezuela, defended the core principles of the UN charter and conducted a joint naval exercise with several BRICS states earlier this year. This signaled that the countries of the Global South do not just have to capitulate to military might.

What next?

Beyond the short-term approach of containment, there is an urgent need to build new strategic alliances not on the basis of short-term opportunism but based on shared values and principles. This has to ensure collective security against imperialist attacks and it must safeguard our right to self-determination in the political, economic and social spheres. In essence, our hard-won democratic rights are at stake and just like we fought against colonialism we must prepare ourselves to confront imperialist interests in whichever form or shape they might present themselves.

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