Opinion
Guest Voices




Protesters hold up signs outside the Organization of American States building Jan. 6 at the OAS in Washington. (AP/Jacquelyn Martin)



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At least President Trump doesn't pretend what his motivation was for attacking Venezuela. Let others carry on about drugs and gangs, those are flimsy excuses. After all, he just pardoned the ex-president of Honduras, who was convicted of leading a drug smuggling operation. No, it was about the oil; he said so. And even more ominously, he asserted a right to intervene in any country in the Western Hemisphere. So, according to Trump, Columbia's president, who is a Catholic, had better "watch his a**" for criticizing the attack.

This is a straight-up return to 18th- and 19th-century imperialist practices. Great powers had "spheres of influence," where they could direct the affairs of vassal states. It was a tragic doctrine, of course, and led to the terrible wars of the 20th century. Catholic social teaching has, for over 150 years, condemned the theory. The conduct of foreign affairs between nations has to be premised on international respect for sovereignty. Explicitly, nations may not exploit the natural wealth of other countries. The principle shouldn't need repeating, yet the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been notably silent about this egregious violation.

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Pope Leo XIV, however, immediately underscored the need to maintain Venezuela's sovereignty and denounced violence as a legitimate means of addressing a dispute with the U.S. There is little doubt that Maduro is a thug or that his regime has been a disaster for the country. But we've learned time and again how thoughtless intervention can make a bad situation immeasurably worse. It's a law of unintended consequences. A history of enmity between Latin America and the U.S. over our interference to promote U.S. corporate interests is about to be rekindled. It has always ended badly for all parties.

A worse fate may now await Taiwan and the lessons China can take from our actions. Taiwan will be treated as a "rogue province." Chinese President Xi Jinping surely sees it as well within China's sphere. Trump can hardly argue the point. And our hypocrisy will now be self-evident in the struggle for Ukraine. What more could

Putin want? The Baltic Republics? This is the way the world goes when the U.S. abandons even the pretense of principle. Russia has a long history of expansionism. They are only deterred by strength. Now they have proof that the U.S. will not stop their territorial ambition.

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It is vitally important that the U.S. bishops speak out. We can't have the world taking a lesson on Catholic teaching from the likes of JD Vance and Marco Rubio. A strong statement by the bishops could make an important difference in American public opinion, and may deter further military escalation. That's not insignificant. Military incursions take on a momentum of their own.

Mercifully, we have an American pope. Let's see the American bishops back him up.