

Fall 2025 - Marcellus Policy Analysis

## **A Case for Rethinking US-Venezuelan Relations: An Approach of Realism and Restraint**

**By Nick Tselikov**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Ever since Hugo Chávez became President of Venezuela in 1999, U.S. policy towards the country has been characterized by antagonism. This has been especially so as Venezuela has been forging closer ties with Russia, China, and Iran. The U.S. government has increasingly ramped up sanctions against the country, as the Venezuelan leadership has refused to back down on its behaviors. These tensions have culminated under the second Presidency of Donald Trump. With Secretary of State Marco Rubio leading the regime change effort, the Administration has amplified anti-government rhetoric, authorizing strikes against alleged drug boats, and accusing the Venezuelan regime of aiding cartel operations.

The official rationale behind this push has been that Caracas employs an anti-American outlook and drives for more isolation away from the United States. The Venezuelan leadership has also been accused of deliberately facilitating the drug trade to harm Americans and harboring Hezbollah networks within its territory. However, while these claims are serious, contrary evidence suggests that these claims have little basis.

Beyond that, stubborn calls for antagonism are unlikely to lead to any productive solutions. The South American

---

**Nick Tselikov** is an undergraduate student at the University of Washington, double majoring in international studies and history and minoring in data science. He is interested in general Western history and its application to modern geopolitics, as well as great power competition and Middle Eastern politics.

The John Quincy Adams Society is a nonpartisan, independent national network of professionals and students focused on U.S. foreign policy, with a centering vision of restraint. The Society does not take specific policy positions and all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be those of the author.

country is home to a large population and an array of natural resources, including the world's largest oil reserves, and large amounts of other high-value minerals. Instability, and especially war, in Venezuela is likely to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis that it is already experiencing, and is more likely to imperil access to its bonanza of resources. Upon this line of reasoning, this article argues that while Caracas' policy towards Washington has been unfavorable, engagement is ultimately the best option to assume.

## Historical Background

The inauguration of Hugo Chávez as President of Venezuela ushered in a de facto strain within Washington-Caracas relations. Chávez's rise to power itself followed roughly a decade of neoliberal-aligned presidents like Carlos Andrés Pérez and Rafael Caldera, who practiced the Washington Consensus-prescribed policies of spending cuts, currency devaluation, and privatization. These neoliberal policies, while deemed by some as necessary for economic recovery, instead turned out to significantly increase unemployment and cause wide discontentment. They fed the flames of the violent Caracazo of 1989, where large-scale riots and street clashes broke out in Caracas in opposition to President Pérez.<sup>1</sup> In this environment of economic downturn and deteriorating living conditions, Chávez appeared as a viable election candidate. He campaigned on promises to assist the poor, restore public services, and assert a nationalist foreign policy. When the polling day came, Venezuelans elected the populist comandante: Chávez won with 56.2% of the popular vote.<sup>2</sup>

Upon taking office in February 1999, Chávez ushered in the Bolivarian Revolution, which Venezuela has continued to uphold to this day. Named after the 19th century anti-colonial revolutionary Simón Bolívar, its main tenets became economic nationalism, populist foreign policy, and Latin American integration.<sup>3</sup> The regime has facilitated these policies through various means. It carried out further nationalizations of the oil sector, aggressive land reform, and increased military spending. Caracas co-founded the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) organization with Cuba in 2004, which prioritized inter-American cooperation with the intentional exclusion of North America.<sup>4</sup> It also created the Latin American-owned Telesur media

company, which has preached anti-neoliberal and anti-Washington rhetoric. It additionally joined the São Paulo Forum, a coalition of left-wing Latin American parties.<sup>5</sup>

Partly due to Chávez's anti-imperialist mindset, his government began to pursue warmer relations with America's geopolitical rivals: Russia, China, and Iran. It hosted Russian military exercises in the South Caribbean in 2008, and accepted a \$37 billion loan from the People's Republic in 2010.<sup>6 7</sup> It has additionally bought extensive Russian, Chinese, and Iranian weaponry, and has supported all of the aforementioned countries diplomatically.<sup>8</sup> During all this time, Chávez pursued quasi-unrestrained anti-American rhetoric, decrying "yanqui imperialism" in past and contemporary U.S. interventions.<sup>9</sup> Chávez likewise threatened Washington that Caracas would cut off oil exports to Washington if the United States were to take action against it.<sup>10</sup>

These developments naturally concerned the Washington establishment, as the leftist and integrationist policies directly clashed with the policies of the Washington Consensus. Chávez's policies additionally risked clashing with the Monroe Doctrine's prescription of dominance in the Americas and blockage of other great powers from the Western Hemisphere. A combination of these factors, among others, prompted the Bush Administration to back a coup d'état in the country in 2002, with advisor Elliot Abrams spearheading the operation.<sup>11</sup> Since the coup attempt failed, Washington began to pursue other means of putting pressure on Caracas, such as imposing targeted sanctions in 2005.<sup>12</sup> The sanctions packages only continued to intensify after Maduro replaced Chávez as the president of Venezuela in 2013. One came under the Obama Administration with the signing of the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014. Following the legislation, sanctions continued to intensify with a 2015 executive order imposing more targeted sanctions.<sup>13</sup>

## Escalating tensions under Trump Administrations

Under the first Trump Administration, Washington imposed an unprecedented array of financial barriers. Most notably, a 2017 executive order<sup>14</sup> blocked

Venezuela from borrowing in U.S. financial markets, which did significant damage to its economy.<sup>15</sup> The Administration then carried out further executive orders, which froze Venezuela's U.S.-based assets and punished other countries for buying Venezuelan crude. These actions increasingly crippled the country's economy, contributing to Venezuela's hyperinflation and humanitarian crisis.<sup>16</sup>

In the aftermath of the disputed 2018 Venezuelan elections, the Trump Administration declared Juan Guaidó, the pro-Washington candidate, to be the real winner. Consequently, Washington pronounced the government in Caracas and its president, Maduro, to be illegitimate. In turn, Maduro broke off diplomatic relations with Washington for the first time in history. Shortly after, Washington tacitly backed a new coup attempt in April 2019.<sup>17</sup> When the Guaidó-led putsch failed, the U.S. government opted to again adopt its maximum pressure approach. In February 2020, it unleashed punitive sanctions on Russian and Mexican firms for aiding Venezuelan oil sales.<sup>18</sup>

The same policies were rather seamlessly pursued by the Biden Administration, save for two exceptions. It issued a permit to Chevron to conduct operations in November 2022, and temporarily provided sanctions relief after the October 2023 Barbados Agreement between the Venezuelan government and its opposition, which pledged a roadmap for free and fair elections.<sup>19</sup> However, the relief ended in April 2024 after the country's Supreme Tribunal banned María Corina Machado, a former legislator, from participating in Venezuelan presidential races, in violation of the Agreement.<sup>20 21</sup>

Finally, this hardline posture solidified following Trump's second inauguration. Washington dropped Guaidó in favor of Edmundo González Urrutia as Venezuela's legitimate President and increased support for the opposition's leader, Machado.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. government then began to build pressure on Caracas and its trading partners, launched an attack spree on "narcoterrorist" boats in the Caribbean Sea, sailed multiple warships to the Southern Caribbean, and seized Caracas-controlled tankers. Trump likewise officially authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to conduct covert operations within the country, with the agency carrying out an operation against a port in the country in late December 2025.

<sup>23</sup> The culmination of this was the January 3 military operation, where U.S. forces conducted a raid to abduct President Maduro, along with his wife, from his residence. However, despite the breach of the country's sovereignty and the limited military strikes, the country's regime and infrastructure remained intact. The Administration may thus be said to have later continued its maximum pressure campaign without a full-scale war, though it has risked starting one.

## The Other Side

In spite of the aggressive policies pursued by Washington, the Venezuelan government has pursued a more hybrid approach. It indeed continued to cooperate with states often construed as American adversaries, such as China, Cuba, Iran, and Russia. Maduro additionally pursued intensified regional integrationism away from Washington, and kept loud-mouthing what he viewed as American imperialism. Nevertheless, he also attempted to pursue dialogue between the two countries. In 2016, he sent his congratulations to President-elect Trump, hoping for a new era in bilateral relations.<sup>24</sup> Despite the diplomatic cutoff in 2019, Maduro still congratulated Biden in 2020 and Trump in 2024 upon their election victories, always emphasizing the respect for sovereignty and interstate dialogue.<sup>25 26</sup>

Maduro offered more significant concessions upon the further deteriorating relationship in 2025. For instance, he offered help in tracking down the leaders of the Tren de Aragua cartel upon pressure reduction from Washington.<sup>27 28</sup> Additionally, *The New York Times* reported that Caracas offered to give U.S. oil companies more leverage in the country, as well as promising to slash deals with Chinese, Russian, and Iranian firms.<sup>29</sup> President Trump himself admitted to this when he stated that Maduro had "offered him everything."<sup>30</sup> It is important to assert these details because they demonstrate that the United States could have achieved its interests as they pertain to Venezuela without having to resort to the military instrument. It displays an opportunity that Washington has not even attempted to tap.

## Will Maintaining Present Policy Lead to Postive Results?

A rationale for intervening against Caracas certainly exists. Since Venezuela has pursued closer geopolitical and ideological alignment with China, Russia, and Iran, it may thus be considered a threat to U.S. national interests. Removing the regime would additionally remove Venezuela from being an operational hub for the aforementioned countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Additionally, due to the authoritarian practices under both Chávez and Maduro as well as their human rights abuses, it would seem rather attractive to intervene to bolster America's image as a protector of democracies and human rights. Moreover, toppling a "drug-dealing" regime would curb the drug flow to the United States, which would bolster domestic stability by reducing incoming narcotics. Most significantly for the current Administration, toppling the Caracas government would mean asserting the Monroe Doctrine and Washington's dominance over Latin America.

Even though this is logically valid on a surface level, such conclusions ultimately present multiple strategic misunderstandings; these will be addressed one by one.

## **Caracas Aligning with the "Axis of Authoritarianism"**

This argument states that Moscow, Beijing and Tehran are growing closer geopolitically due to their ideological similarities, themselves being an "axis of dictators" pitted against the liberal international order. If it were true that states mainly align due to shared ideology—and especially regime type—it does not explain why Washington aligned with many authoritarian regimes worldwide during the Cold War, despite having a republican government. It also does not explain how Middle Eastern states that Washington was inimical against, such as Libya and Syria, became its partners during the War on Terror, with both providing it critical intelligence on al-Qaeda.<sup>31 32</sup> Finally, this conclusion omits the fact that modern history has been rife with conflicts between two authoritarian powers (Nazi Germany vs. the Soviet Union; the Korean War; the Iran-Iraq War; mainland China vs. Taiwan pre-1992; China vs. Vietnam in 1979; etc.).

This leads to the natural conclusion that self-interest, as opposed to ideology, is more of an important factor in deciding alignment than common ideology. Hence, one may analyze the relationship between the Eurasian powers and Caracas on the basis of self-interest. As Venezuela encountered hostility from Washington after its Bolivarian Revolution, it may have believed it had no choice but to turn to alternative powers to uphold its place in the international arena.

From this, Caracas was able to secure weapons shipments, economic deals, and diplomatic support. In return, Russia, China, and Iran were able to obtain an important partner that sold them oil and resources, and gave them diplomatic support in the Western Hemisphere. These developments ended up being mutually beneficial for both parties, while gradually leaving out the United States.<sup>33</sup> Though these countries have vaguely shared the same anti-Atlanticist thinking, the above factors arguably trumped the rhetorical side of their calculus. If the material agreements and conditions offered by Washington were more favorable than those by the Russia-China-Iran coalition, Caracas would have likely pursued closer cooperation with America, despite its rhetoric and outlook.

A comparative case of this arrangement may be seen in the engagement between the United States and Vietnam in the 1990s. Despite the two having completely different government structures and having fought a war, the countries ultimately became partners. In fact, after establishing full diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995, Washington eventually became one of Hanoi's biggest economic and security partners in the region.<sup>34</sup> This rapprochement was driven by the shared perception that China posed a greater threat to each than their counterpart. Vietnam accordingly seized the opportunity to counterbalance against China with Washington's help. It assumed this doctrine to secure its self-preservation, despite being ideologically aligned with Beijing. Material and security concerns triumphed over ideological ones.

Another case study is Libya during the War on Terror. The Arab nationalist, and socialist regime indeed practiced anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric. Due to its ideological commitment and strained relations with the West, it at times carried out direct attacks on U.S. citizens (namely the 1986 Berlin discotheque bombing and the 1988 Pan Am flight



bombing).

However, both Washington and Tripoli were eventually able to find common ground during the Bush Administration's campaign against terrorism. Upon the restoration of full diplomatic relations in 2006, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi abandoned his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program and provided the Bush Administration with valuable information on Islamist terror groups.<sup>35</sup> This, in turn, eased tensions between the two countries. Tripoli additionally paid large sums of reparations for the American victims it killed during its prior attacks (at least \$2.7 billion).<sup>36</sup>

In the Venezuelan case, the regime in Caracas has likewise shown signs of being open to engagement, as demonstrated by Maduro promising to hunt down the leaders of Tren de Aragua gang and cooling relations with Eurasian powers.<sup>37 38</sup>

## **US National Security in the Western Hemisphere**

According to some analyses, Russia, China, Iran, and other actors strengthening ties with Venezuela would present a security concern to U.S. positions in the Western Hemisphere. Since the Eurasian powers have armed it with modern weaponry, backed it diplomatically, and forged economic and security partnerships, U.S. positioning in the Americas has naturally been threatened. As such, to prevent regional countries from forging security guarantees or alliances with the aforementioned powers, maximum pressure and a pre-emptive regime change intervention would appear justified.

In truth, sanctions and otherwise inimical policies have only pushed Caracas closer to Beijing and Moscow. Since Caracas, despite its pleas, has failed to obtain a partner in Washington, the only viable option left to it was to align more with Eurasia as opposed to North America. Since the threat to Venezuela's sovereignty was perceived, it judged that alignment with the Eastern powers was appropriate to counterbalance against American hemispheric power.

This argument is additionally connected to the Monroe Doctrine, especially pronounced in the current Administration's policies. In general, it is true that

U.S. security would be better served by pursuing a model of hemispheric leadership and deterring other great powers from intervening in the Americas. However, large-scale interventions are likely to undermine a potentially wholesome U.S. leadership model for the region, in several ways.

As seen in the Pink Tide trend that has characterized much of 21st century Latin American politics, leftist movements were bolstered by U.S. interventionism; they gained rhetorical fuel from which to blame "yanqui imperialism." The regimes that came into power (e.g. in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, etc.) were thus less likely to cooperate with the United States and more likely to balance against it. Even though there has been a resurgence of right-wing governments in recent years, this trend could reverse with reckless U.S. intervention. President Trump has already threatened the leadership of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Cuba;<sup>39</sup> this risks of antagonizing them even more and driving them into Latin American integrationism.

Additionally, further intervention runs a big risk of further antagonizing Caracas' extant partners: Russia, China, and Iran. Through brash actions, it risks provoking them, not deterring them. All three would consolidate their current anti-Western stances and rhetorically employ U.S. interventionism as imperialism. In the worst case scenario, alienated leftist governments in the Americas would choose to align with the Eurasian powers in order to build up deterrence against U.S. intervention, as happened with Caracas. This would be a direct failure of the Monroe Doctrine and could present genuine security concerns for the United States, such as formal security alliances with the Eurasian powers, or extrahemispheric military presence (meant as a reassurance force for regional countries against U.S. aggression).

## **Los Narcos**

As stated above, curbing drug trade remains the Trump Administration's main reason for its current strategy. Part of President Trump's team, notably Rubio and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, have claimed that Maduro has been facilitating drug trafficking to poison Americans. These claims specifically accuse the Venezuelan regime of being in charge of the Tren de Aragua and Cartel de los Soles cartels, or at least

collaborating with them to destabilize the United States. As such, Rubio has led the initiative to declare the latter cartel as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and to accordingly take action against Venezuela.

Despite the gravity of these claims, experts on the criminal organizations have been suspicious of the accusations. Specifically, InSight Crime, a think tank that documents armed criminal groups, has reported that Washington's rhetoric has significantly mischaracterized the Cartel de los Soles, as it has been in reality more of a loose network of corruption within Venezuela's military ranks than a hierarchical organization.<sup>40</sup> In other words, it is not a top-down cartel with a kingpin at the top, but a system of drug selling based on profit—not political ends.

The accusations regarding Tren de Aragua are even weaker. Not only has the gang been more linked to human trafficking and extortion than to drug trafficking; Maduro himself has also dealt big blows to its leadership. In September 2023, the Venezuelan government launched a raid on the Tocarón prison in Venezuela, which fractured the group's leadership and dispersed it.<sup>41</sup> Maduro has likewise worked with Colombia to arrest several of the group's leaders in 2025,<sup>42</sup> and has furthermore continued to crack down on Colombian drug cartels in Venezuela proper. Finally, a U.S. intelligence memorandum from April 2025 had stated that "the Maduro regime probably does not have a policy of coordinating with TDA [Tren de Aragua] and is not directing TDA movement to and operations in the United States."<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, the boat strikes launched by the second Trump Administration are certainly more political than actually inimical to drug trafficking. While being launched against alleged "narco terrorists," there has not been any due process for any of the strike victims, nor any substantiation of involvement with drug trafficking. This is coupled with the fact that the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has found Venezuela to be only a minor drug trafficking hub, compared to Colombia or Mexico, and even declared the country to be "free" of drug cultivation.<sup>44</sup> The preponderance of these strikes in the Southern Caribbean further suggests that they have been mainly a sign of pressure against Maduro.

## Hezbollah

The push against the Venezuelan government has been sustained by claims that it closely cooperates with Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based, pro-Iran militant group. It has been claimed that Hezbollah operates freely in Venezuela, conducts drug trafficking, and has state-sponsored training camps.

The evidence for these claims, however, is not as strong as some wish. A 2020 Atlantic Council report on the issue of Hezbollah-affiliated drug networks itself states that direct evidence for Venezuela-Hezbollah cooperation is difficult to find.<sup>45</sup> It also asserts that most of the clans it accuses of facilitating Hezbollah's drug trafficking have no ties to the Venezuelan government, and that only one has had direct political sway. Specifically, it accuses the Nasseraddin family of arranging meetings between Venezuelan officials and Hezbollah members in Damascus, and then carrying out a clandestine arms deal between Hezbollah and Columbia's leftist FARC group.<sup>46</sup> It further claims that the family has held a powerful position on Margarita Island, which more recent reports have extrapolated to Hezbollah operating there.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, even the Nasseraddins are not claimed to be part of Hezbollah's chain of command, but rather as "fixers" who allegedly connect Venezuelan officials with those of the militant group.<sup>48</sup>

Training camp accusations likewise do not evince of firm substantiation. The reports about alleged training camps on Margarita Island most often rely on rumors and allegations. The only public figure to have explicitly claimed their existence is Marshall Billingslea, a former Trump Administration official at the Department of the Treasury. He has alleged that Hezbollah and Hamas militants "operate freely" within Venezuela.<sup>49</sup> Aside from his testimonies, evidence only appears to rely on neoconservatives' regurgitation of the same allegations and more unsubstantiated rumors.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, no satellite technology has detected camps controlled by Hezbollah operatives within Venezuela. As such, Hezbollah may be said to have a low-bar presence, where its cells potentially provide support to illicit drug businesses or covert, diplomatic back channels.

The weakness of substantiation is likewise compounded by the limited security threat of

Hezbollah to regional U.S. troops, let alone the mainland United States. The last time Hezbollah is confirmed to have attacked U.S. forces was in the 1980s, in the same decade that Washington intervened militarily in Lebanon. After the decade, the Lebanese group gradually shifted its strategy to a regional focus, i.e. fighting Israel and backstopping Baathist Syria. There have likewise been no documented instances of Hezbollah militants attacking the United States from Venezuela. This would moreover make no strategic sense from either Hezbollah's or Caracas' perspective, as such attacks would achieve no meaningful end and would only provoke Washington. Finally, even if the allegations about Hezbollah in Venezuela are true, it would only be evidence that its establishment has coordinated with hostile actors in order to counterbalance against Washington. This, in turn, has come in part from all recent administrations being reluctant to soften its approach toward Caracas.

## **Humanitarian Intervention**

The humanitarian argument, expressed above, states that by supplanting the current Venezuelan government with a pro-Western one, its human rights situation would be improved. While a Washington-aligned government would perhaps be more cognizant of this factor, the transitional intervention to get there would incur drastic humanitarian costs on the population. Similar case interventions in Panama, Libya and Iraq help paint the picture.

In Panama, U.S. military actions led to thousands of civilian deaths, damage to the nation's infrastructure and economy, and regional condemnation of the attack.<sup>51</sup> The 2003 Iraq invasion and the toppling of the Baathist regime plunged the country into a humanitarian crisis, especially after allied attacks against its energy grid. The power vacuum was likewise exploited by radical Islamists, who began to attack their opponents and obtain better resources. It also fueled existing tensions among its inhabitants, which led to a brutal civil war in 2006. The overall intervention led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. The Libyan intervention in 2011 continued the same trends: the intervention caused tens of thousands of deaths, and overthrew a centralized regime that was already combating Islamist extremism.<sup>52</sup> According to the Harvard Belfer Center, the NATO intervention increased the conflict's death toll by at least seven

times, "while also exacerbating human rights abuses, humanitarian suffering, Islamic radicalism, and weapons proliferation in Libya and its neighbors."<sup>53</sup> Terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda, were able to exploit the power vacuum in their favor, and thus launched attacks on civilians, Americans, and other Western officials. The country, furthermore, witnessed a new civil war, a massive migration crisis, and became an international playing ground.<sup>54</sup> These repercussions may easily manifest themselves in a similar, full-scale assault against the Venezuelan regime.

Besides these considerations is also the military prospect of a full-scale conflict. Even though the United States has engaged in Latin American regime change operations in recent history, such as Operation Just Cause, a military invasion of Venezuela would have to take place on a much bigger scale. This is due to the fact that Venezuela's geographic size, relatively large population, and amount of military personnel is unlike that seen in recent Latin American interventions. Venezuela now has a population of over 28 million people, compared to Panama in 1989, which had 2.4 million.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, while exact numbers are difficult to obtain, the total number of active armed Venezuelan soldiers appears to be at least 100,000 strong, with roughly 220,000 paramilitaries making the country have at minimum 320,000 military personnel.<sup>56</sup> This would make the government a much more serious opponent than Panama in 1989, whose defense forced only had roughly 16,000 fighters.

Besides this, a full-scale invasion is likely to do great infrastructural and economic damage, as happened during the invasion of Panama.<sup>57</sup> Damage to the oil sector, the nation's historical main source of revenue since the 1920s, is likely to be high as well. Thus, taking into account all the above factors, this concoction would likely brew a significant crisis for the country that will have dire humanitarian and regional consequences. Besides, even after this chaos, it is not guaranteed that the new leadership will be wholly committed to human rights, as the regime changes in Panama and other places have shown.<sup>58</sup>

## **The Influence Game: Drivers of US Policy**

Another important factor to consider on decision-making regarding Venezuela is what, and who, ultimately influences policy. Despite the anti-American appearance of Venezuelan policies, a standard move would be to exhaust diplomatic avenues for change before escalating. However, this has not been U.S. policy, as Washington has backed anti-Chavista pushes as far back as 2002. Private and ideological actors have exerted undue influence on U.S. policy and continue to do so today. This coalition has consisted of powerful neoconservatives on Capitol Hill, the executive branch and the foreign policy establishment, the Venezuelan opposition lobby, defense contractors, and corporations with vested interest.

### **Neoconservatives and the Venezuelan Lobby**

The strongest drive for regime change in Venezuela appears to come from the neoconservative faction. Emerging from the Cold War as militant anti-communists, neoconservatives have been staunch advocates of spreading democracy, often by military intervention, and backstopping pro-Western regimes (especially Israel). They have also been characterized by their support of free market policies and economic deregulation, or neoliberalism. While they may have peaked in power under George W. Bush, neoconservatives still maintain powerful positions in the current Administration, on Capitol Hill, and within the foreign policy establishment. In this case, the most influential neoconservative on policy is Rubio. A career advocate of regime change in Latin America as well as a firm anti-communist, he became the Secretary of State in the second Trump Administration.

Rubio has called Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba “enemies of humanity.”<sup>59</sup> His first foreign trip as Secretary of State was to Latin America, where he visited countries already geopolitically aligned with Washington, such as Panama and Guyana. Besides this, Rubio has likewise been the kingpin of drug dealing accusations against the Maduro government, accusing him of being complicit in the Cartel de los Soles and Tren de Aragua.<sup>60</sup> Besides Rubio, other GOP members of Congress from the Cuban diaspora, such as Maria Elvira Salazar, Mario Diaz-Balart, and Carlos A. Gimenez (all from Florida) have advocated

strongly for sanctions and regime change in Caracas.<sup>61</sup>

Outside of Rubio, other prominent neoconservative regime change advocates have included Abrams, Lindsey Graham, and Ted Cruz. Abrams has been involved in regime change campaigns for decades, having served in several Republican administrations. He has expressed his fierce advocacy for toppling Venezuela’s government since the Bush Administration.<sup>62 63</sup> Since Abrams left the first Trump Administration, he held high positions in the Council on Foreign Relations, the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), *Foreign Affairs*, and the Vandenberg Coalition.<sup>64</sup> Graham has called Venezuela a “drug caliphate” that needs to be met with the same action as ISIS, and has also accused Maduro of cooperating with Hezbollah.<sup>65</sup> Cruz has openly demanding regime change in Venezuela of both Trump and Biden Administrations.<sup>66</sup>

The neoconservatives’ efforts have been further facilitated by the Venezuelan lobby. Venezuelan opposition figures, as well as their supporters, have fiercely advocated for putting pressure on the regime in Caracas. The most prominent advocate as of recently has been Machado. She has held direct conversations with President Trump and has advocated before such establishments as the The Inter-American Dialogue, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the America Business Forum. For instance, at an America Business Forum event in early November 2025, she called for regime change in her own country, as well as in Cuba and Nicaragua.<sup>67</sup> Besides Machado, the U.S. government and various Congress officials have supported other opposition figures, such as Juan Guaidó and Leopoldo López.<sup>68 69</sup>

Another source of strong support for regime change has been the Venezuelan-American émigré community, which is concentrated in southern Florida. Many members of the community have voiced their personal concerns with the Maduro government.<sup>70</sup> They have been calling for Washington to exercise military action to remove the country’s extant regime, and have expressed their wishes through their votes for pro-regime change candidates.<sup>71</sup> In fact, their concerns may be said to have manifested in Rubio’s election as Florida’s senator in 2011, as well as of other pro-intervention candidates from the Cuban community, such as Salazar, Gimenez, and Diaz-Balart. Despite



the fact that many members of this group likely have suffered hardship from the Chavista establishment, their priorities appear to differ from those of the broader American public. Disproportionately focusing on the interests of one group while excluding the majority fundamentally asserts special interests over those of the majority, distorting U.S. foreign policy in an interventionist direction out of steps with U.S. interests.

## **The Military-Industrial Complex, Big Oil and Think Tanks**

Pentagon contractors also play an outsized role in building the pro-intervention consensus. As part of the SOUTHCOM military buildup across 2025, the Department of Defense signed several multi-billion dollar contracts with arms manufacturers. For instance, it ordered 837 Tomahawk missiles from RTX, signed a \$14.1 billion deal with General Dynamics to maintain its MQ-9 Reaper systems, and Lockheed Martin received a \$3.9 billion contract to maintain its Aegis support systems.<sup>72</sup> As is documented in Stavroula Pabst's piece in *Defense Priorities*, the "primes" of the military-industrial complex (MIC), including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and RTX, are expected to reap the most profit, as well as others with an established reputation.

With the new revenue streams coming in, the MIC firms will have more resources with which to influence Congress through its already well-established lobbying network on Capitol Hill.<sup>73</sup> As Stephen Semler, co-founder of Security Policy Reform Institute, has stated, "Lobbying efforts will be built around the prospect of war with Venezuela, having the combined effect of driving up the Pentagon budget, thereby rewarding all military contractors".<sup>74</sup> Since the contractors profit from war-making, they have a financial interest in a more aggressive U.S. posture. Simply put, the contractor firms will be more likely to convince Congress of military action through lobbying efforts, as was precedent in other U.S. interventions.<sup>75</sup>

Outside of the MIC is the influence of oil lobbying. Despite U.S. interest in maintaining secure oil flows, corporate lobbying has nonetheless focused on maximizing corporate benefits at the expense of strategic benefits for the United States. This has manifested itself in a scandal a scandal between

Venezuela and ExxonMobil. It began in 2007, when Venezuela nationalized the last private oil fields in the country.<sup>76</sup> While the World Bank ordered Caracas to pay \$1.6 billion as compensation to the previous field holders (which it fulfilled), ExxonMobil balked. The conglomerate's CEO, Rex Tillerson, said that the real value of the fields was at least \$10 billion. This eventually prompted the company to align with the Guyanese government, and perform oil exploration in waters claimed by Venezuela.<sup>77</sup> Georgetown has also signed a multi-billion dollar agreement with Exxon to advance its exploration activities.<sup>78</sup> The altercation's repercussions ultimately rekindled tensions between Washington and Georgetown on one side and Caracas on the other, as the oil conglomerate has backed Guyana. Subsequently, on Rubio's first trip as Secretary of State, he visited Guyana and declared that "It would be a very bad day for the Venezuelan regime if they were ever to attack Guyana or attack ExxonMobil," raising implicitly the prospect of a U.S. security guarantee.<sup>79</sup>

Besides this, the conglomerate has funded various Beltway think tanks that have strongly supported the U.S. campaign against Venezuela. The most notable one has been CSIS, which has hosted Machado, Guyanese President Irfaan Ali, and whose scholars have called for interventions against Caracas.<sup>80</sup> While the think tank also receives funding from Chevron—ExxonMobil's chief competitor in Venezuela—it has attacked the Chevron Model, a strategy of engagement with Caracas in return for oil drilling. The same think tank, and others calling for similar policy choices, likewise have received millions of dollars from the MIC.<sup>81</sup> As such, the influence of the oil lobby on policy making, mixed in with neoconservative ideology, has already distorted the most important objectives of Washington-Caracas relations.

As we can see, these actors, with significant levels of influence, have consistently called for hostility against Caracas. They have done so in a way that distorted national aims and put ideology over strategic gains. Similar precedent has existed with the purported Israel lobby and its influence over U.S. foreign policy. As Stephen M. Walt and John Mearsheimer explain in their book, *The Israel Lobby*, the pro-Israel coalition conditioned U.S. policymakers to support a more ideologically Zionist commitment than a more limited one critical to national security concerns.<sup>82</sup>

As such, support for Tel Aviv was based upon vague premises about Israel being a democracy or having the same values as the United States, while the Jewish state remained more of a liability than an asset (as unconditional support drew the United States closer to conflict with Iran and served as recruiting fodder for anti-U.S. terrorists). This arrangement furthermore antagonized various regional actors within the Mideast, ultimately leading to the September 11 attacks and the War on Terror.

The U.S.-Venezuela scenario appears to be a rather clear analogue. This coalition of ideologues, corporations and special interest groups have molded the bilateral relationship to fit entrenched interests, as opposed to those of the entire nation.

## **The Case for Engagement**

If policymakers are to uphold U.S. interests in the region, they must find a different way of pursuing Washington-Caracas relations. They must recognize the influence of special interests upon this relationship and how it has warped U.S. interests. As such, it would be better for the U.S. government to alter its policy of interventionism in favor of diplomatic engagement with Caracas.

As expressed above, national self-interest, while not the only factor in international relations, is a more important one than ideology. As such, it would be likely that Caracas could pursue closer relations with Washington than with the Eurasian powers if circumstances become more favorable for it. This has recently been expressed in Maduro's willingness to remove agreements with Chinese, Russian, and Iranian firms upon Washington agreeing to stand down.<sup>83</sup> Maduro himself has continuously voiced support for dialogue and cooperation with Washington, congratulated President Trump upon his electoral victories<sup>84</sup> and, as stated in the introduction, made multiple entreaties to engage.

One must also understand that, despite the ideological disparities of Washington and Caracas, peaceful coexistence is still very possible (as was shown in the Vietnam and Libya case studies), and is in the interest of both nations. Finally, cooperation with Venezuela carries the potential to assist the U.S. campaign to tackle Latin American drug cartels.

Since both Washington and Caracas view the criminal organizations as agents of instability, they could act as a common ground for cooperation, which would be mutually favorable.

Additionally, engagement may offer more avenues on cooperation regarding humanitarian concerns. One such area could be the welfare of the general population, which could be improved through the allowance of medical supplies into the country (prohibited under current sanctions). Another could be cooperation on persecuted opposition figures, as had happened during the brief 2024 engagement process. A reference model could be the engagement with Cuba under the Nixon-Ford Administrations, when Havana was able to return many political prisoners and otherwise coordinate more with Washington in pursuit of a more normalized relationship.<sup>85</sup>

A policy of greater engagement would produce several boons for the United States. It would furnish a more secure—and proximate—oil flow, as Venezuela contains the largest proven oil reserves on the planet. This would alleviate the need for large oil shipments from the Middle East, a region that is generally more volatile and divided. Non-antagonism would also introduce more incentive to cooperate with the United States as opposed to isolate away from it, which would consequently integrate Caracas more into the global economy and undermine its anti-American outlook.

Cooperation would additionally bolster the chances of effective counterinsurgency against drug cartels in the region, as a bilateral partnership is likely to produce a more effective deterrent. Finally, it would likely lead to more regional stability, would alleviate the emigration crisis, and would establish a better model of U.S. leadership by consent, cooperation, and example rather than solely coercion within the Hemisphere. Since all of these considerations are of high importance to U.S. interests, engagement appears to be the most reasonable option.

## **The Blueprint**

A process of engagement could manifest in several ways. However, before beginning the process, one of the most important actions to take would be to limit the influence of ideologues and private interests. In other words, the negotiations must be predicated upon

national interest; disproportionate intervention by ideologues and special interest groups would ideally be circumscribed. In this way, compromises could be more easily reached. One of the core aims of the United States should be to further sway Caracas closer to Washington, according to the Monroe Doctrine. This would subsequently enhance U.S. security in the Western Hemisphere. Other aims should be promoting regional stability, cooperation against drug cartels, and rooting out hostile organizations from Venezuela's territories (e.g. Hezbollah).

The executive branch could begin by gradually phasing out sanctions upon successful cooperation with the United States. This could manifest as partnership on anti-cartel actions, toning down anti-U.S. rhetoric, and cooling down deals with U.S. rivals. Washington, in turn, could instantly undo previous executive orders that have imposed the current sanctions regime. It could start with any of the following: E.O. 13808 (massive August 2017 sanctions), E.O. 13850 (November 2018 sanctions), E.O. 13692 (2014 order sanctioning Venezuelan officials), E.O. 13884 (August 2019 sanctions), E.O. 13827 (March 2018 sanctions prohibiting transactions related to Venezuelan-issued digital currency), and more.

Engagement would likewise benefit through the instant removal of the 25% secondary tariffs imposed since March 24, 2025 that punish other nations for buying Venezuelan oil. This would open the door for more basic goods to enter the country, the lack of which (under U.S. sanctions) has reportedly contributed to thousands of deaths.<sup>86</sup>

Congress could begin work to undo the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 and similar acts of legislation. Additional acts imposed by the legislative branch against Caracas could be undone with collective effort, again upon fulfillment of necessary conditions by the Venezuelan side.

Next, the U.S. government should make an effort to cease referring to the current Venezuelan regime as illegitimate. From then on, diplomatic relations could be reinstated with the restoration of diplomatic relations. After this, both branches could focus on areas of economic cooperation. Most likely, this would

manifest itself as resources and oil from Caracas in exchange for readily-made goods, technology, and services from Washington. Upon further fulfillment of the necessary stipulations by Caracas, more cooperation could occur against drug cartels through intelligence coordination. Progress additionally would be made to cooperate on Venezuela's improving the treatment of its citizens.

Details of the engagement process could be modeled on several historic instances. For instance, initial steps could be modeled off of the tensions relief in 2023-2024 under the Biden Administration. The Chevron Model could be applied for obtaining oil, natural gas, and minerals, which would preclude the need of direct U.S. control of the resources. The Barbados Agreement may also serve as a case study for bilateral negotiations. It may also be modeled off of the post-September 11 lifting of most sanctions against Libya in 2004, in exchange for Tripoli agreeing to key U.S. demands.

## Conclusion

This piece focused on the Washington-Caracas relationship. It sketched the background for the present deterioration of relations between the two sides. It then evaluated several argumentation points raised by the current Administration to intervene within the country. These range from Russia-China Iran alignment, the Monroe Doctrine, drug-dealing, Hezbollah, and humanitarian concerns. It addressed them individually and presented counterarguments with the best available evidence. The essay then proceeded to describe the main drivers for antagonism against Venezuela, arguing that they have been more ideologically than nationally premised. The treatise gradually adjudicated that engagement logically appears to be the choice more in favor of U.S. national interest than military action. Finally, it concludes by stating the benefits of engagement and peaceful coexistence, and outlining the pathways for gradually accomplishing it.



## Endnotes

- 1 Tarver, M. (2018). *The History of Venezuela*, 2nd Edition. ABC-CLIO.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The Final Call. (2024, December 23). 20 years of ALBA-TCP. <https://new.finalcall.com/2024/12/23/20-years-of-alba-tcp/>.
- 5 Impunity Observer. The São Paulo Forum's Modus Operandi. <https://impunityobserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/IO-Memo-Sao-Paolo-Forum.pdf>
- 6 Tarver, M. (2018). *The History of Venezuela*, 2nd Edition. ABC-CLIO.
- 7 Romero, S. (2010 April 18). Chávez Says China to Lend Venezuela \$20 Billion. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/19/world/americas/19venez.html>.
- 8 Humire, J. (2024, May 21). Why Iran Is Helping Venezuela Prepare for War. *Middle East Forum*. <https://www.meforum.org/why-iran-is-helping-venezuela-prepare-for-war>
- 9 Tarver, M. (2018). *The History of Venezuela*, 2nd Edition. ABC-CLIO.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Vulliamy, E. (2002, April 21). Venezuela coup linked to Bush team. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/21/usa.venezuela>.
- 12 Seelke, C. R. (2025, June 4). Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions Policy. *Congress.gov*. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10715>.
- 13 E.O. 13692.
- 14 E.O. 13808.
- 15 Weisbrot, M. & Sachs, J. (2019, April). *Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela*. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Lawler, D. & González, O. (2021, April 29). The day Maduro almost fell: The inside story of a failed uprising. *Axios*. <https://www.axios.com/2021/04/29/venezuela-juan-guaido-maduro-april-30-uprising>.
- 18 Rodríguez, F. (2024, December 26). Sanctions and Venezuelan Migration. *Francisrodriguez.net* <https://francisorodriguez.net/2024/12/26/sanctions-and-venezuelan-migration/>.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Goodman, J. & Garcia, R. (2024, April 17). US reimposes oil sanctions on Venezuela as hopes for a fair presidential election fades. *Yahoo!finance*. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/us-reimposes-oil-sanctions-venezuela-193218475.html>.
- 21 Chávez, A. (2024, November 7). Maduro Congratulates Trump on Election Win, Calls for Renewed, 'Respect-based' Relations. *Venezuelanalysis*. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/maduro-congratulates-trump-on-election-win-calls-for-renewed-respect-based-relations/>.
- 22 Office of the Spokesperson. (2025, January 22). Secretary Rubio's Call with the Rightful President of Venezuela González Urrutia and Venezuelan Democratic Opposition Leader Machado. *US Department of State*. <https://www.state.gov/secretary-rubios-call-with-the-rightful-president-of-venezuela-gonzalez-urrutia-and-venezuelan-democratic-opposition-leader-machado>.
- 23 Barnes, J. & Pager, T. (2025, December 29). C.I.A. Conducted Drone Strike on Port in Venezuela. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/29/us/politics/cia-drone-strike-venezuela.html>
- 24 Aporrea. (2016, November 9). Maduro sostuvo conversación telefónica con Secretario de Estado John Kerry. <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n299951.html>
- 25 AFP. (2020, November 9). Maduro hopes to resume 'decent' dialogue with US after Biden win. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/9/maduro-hopes-to-resume-decent-dialogue-with-us-after-biden-win>
- 26 Chávez, A. (2024, November 7). Maduro Congratulates Trump on Election Win, Calls for Renewed, 'Respect-based' Relations. *Venezuelanalysis*. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/maduro-congratulates-trump-on-election-win-calls-for-renewed-respect-based-relations/>.
- 27 Bloomberg News. (2025, September 26). Maduro Offers to Help Trump Hunt Feared Venezuelan Gang Leaders. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-09-26/maduro-offers-to-help-trump-hunt-feared-venezuelan-gang-leaders>.
- 28 Pittock, D. (2025, September 27). Behind Maduro's offer to help Trump target Tren de Aragua. *Straight Arrow News*. <https://san.com/cc/whats-behind-maduros-offer-to-help-the-trump-admin-target-tren-de-aragua/>.
- 29 Kurmanaev, A., Barnes, J., & Turkewitz, J. (2025, October 10). Venezuela's Maduro Offered the U.S. His Nation's Riches to Avoid Conflict. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/10/world/americas/>



- maduro-venezuela-us-oil.html.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Silverstein, K. (2005, September 4). How Kadafi Went From Foe to Ally. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-sep-04-fg-uslibya4-story.html>.
- 32 Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2007). The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0801/2007024183-s.html>.
- 33 Weisbrot, M. & Sachs, J. (2019, April). Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf>.
- 34 US Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam. Chronology of U.S. – Vietnam Relations. <https://vn.usembassy.gov/chronology-of-u-s-viet-nam-relations/>
- 35 Silverstein, K. (2005, September 4). How Kadafi Went From Foe to Ally. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-sep-04-fg-uslibya4-story.html>.
- 36 Kreindler LLC. Libya Pays \$2.7 Billion to Families of Pan Am Flight 103. <https://www.kreindler.com/cases/final-settlement-payment-pan-am-flight-103>
- 37 Bloomberg News. (2025, September 26). Maduro Offers to Help Trump Hunt Feared Venezuelan Gang Leaders. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-09-26/maduro-offers-to-help-trump-hunt-feared-venezuelan-gang-leaders>.
- 38 Pittock, D. (2025, September 27). Behind Maduro's offer to help Trump target Tren de Aragua. Straight Arrow News. <https://san.com/cc/whats-behind-maduros-offer-to-help-the-trump-admin-target-tren-de-aragua/>.
- 39 Manchester, J. (2026, January 5). Trump issues threats against multiple countries following Venezuela strike. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5672700-trump-venezuela-cuba-mexico-threats/>
- 40 InSight Crime. (2025, August 1). US Sanctions Mischaracterize Venezuela's Cartel of the Suns. <https://insightcrime.org/news/us-sanctions-mischaracterize-cartel-of-the-suns-venezuela/>.
- 41 LaSusa, M. (2025, April 7). Debunking 3 Myths About Tren de Aragua. InSight Crime. <https://insightcrime.org/news/debunking-3-myths-about-tren-aragua-us/>.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Roston, A. (2026, January 4). Maduro indictment attempts to link Venezuelan leader to Tren de Aragua. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/04/maduro-indictment-trump-tren-de-aragua>.
- 44 United Nations World Drug Report. (2025). World Drug Report 2025. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2025.html>.
- 45 Humire, J. (2020, October 9). The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-backed Networks Prop up the Venezuelan Regime. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-maduro-hezbollah-nexus-how-iran-backed-net-works-prop-up-the-venezuelan-regime/>
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Lachter, E. (2025, December 20). On Maduro's 'terror island,' Hezbollah operatives move in as tourists drift out. FOX News. <https://www.foxnews.com/world/hezbollah-shifts-operations-closer-us-border-israel-strikes-force-strategic-retreat-venezuela>
- 48 Humire, J. (2020, October 9). The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-backed Networks Prop up the Venezuelan Regime. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-maduro-hezbollah-nexus-how-iran-backed-net-works-prop-up-the-venezuelan-regime/>
- 49 Arcadia Foundation. (2025, October 22). Venezuela facilitates expansion of Hezbollah in Latin America. <https://arcadiafoundation.org/venezuela-accused-of-facilitating-hezbollah-expansion-in-latin-america/>
- 50 Jfeed Staff. (2026, January 6). The Hezbollah-Venezuela Connection: What You Don't Know. Jfeed. <https://www.jfeed.com/news-israel/hezbollah-venezuela-connection>
- 51 Shapiro, A., Ayuso, T., Dorning, C., Zamora, K., Arrieta, R. (2025, February 3). When the U.S. invaded Panama. VPM. <https://www.vpm.org/npr-news/npr-news/2025-02-03/when-the-u-s-invaded-panama>.
- 52 Silverstein, K. (2005, September 4). How Kadafi Went From Foe to Ally. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-sep-04-fg-uslibya4-story.html>.
- 53 Kuperman, A. (2013, September). Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene. Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/lessons-libya-how-not-intervene>.
- 54 Purple, M. (2017, December 5). The Ideologues Who Wrecked Libya. The American Conservative. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-ideologues-who-wrecked-libya/>.
- 55 World Bank. (2024). Population, total - Panama, Venezuela, RB. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>

SP.POP.TOTL? locations=PA-VE.

56 Global Firepower. 2025 Venezuela Military Strength. [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=venezuela](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=venezuela)

57 Shapiro, A., Ayuso, T., Dorning, C., Zamora, K., Arrieta, R. (2025, February 3). When the U.S. invaded Panama. VPM. <https://www.vpm.org/npr-news/npr-news/2025-02-03/when-the-u-s-invaded-panama>.

58 Yagoub, M. (2017, May 30). How Panama's Criminal Landscape Has Changed Since the Days of Narco-Dictator Noriega. InSight Crime. <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/how-panama-criminal-landscape-changed-since-narco-dictator-noriega/>.

59 France 24. (2025, April 2). Rubio accuses Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela over migration crisis. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250204-rubio-accuses-cuba-nicaragua-venezuela-over-migration-crisis>.

60 Vaz, R. (2025, November 17). Venezuela: Rubio Pushes 'Foreign Terrorist' Designation While Trump Floats Maduro 'Discussions.' <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/venezuela-rubio-pushes-foreign-terrorist-designation-while-trump-floats-maduro-discussions/>.

61 US Congressman Mario-Diaz-Balart. (2024, July 29). Díaz-Balart, Salazar, and Giménez Urge the Biden-Harris Administration to Condemn Maduro's Brutal Grip on Power and Reimpose Sanctions Immediately.

62 Ellner, M. (2025, November 26). How to topple Elliot Abrams' delusion: A Response to Elliot Abrams's Latest Call for Regime Change in Venezuela. *Pressenza*. <https://www.pressenza.com/2025/11/how-to-topple-elliott-abrams-delusion-a-response-to-elliott-abramss-latest-call-for-regime-change-in-venezuela/>.

63 Abrams, E. (2025, November 20). How to Topple Maduro. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-topple-maduro>.

64 The Vanderberg Coalition. Advisory Board. <https://vanderbergcoalition.org/advisory-board/>.

65 Forbes Breaking News. (2025, November 6). 'We Have A Drug Caliphate In Our Backyard': Lindsey Graham Defends Trump's 'Narcoboat' Strikes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9USVV9dh-Cw>.

66 Mordowanec, N. & Rouhandeh, A. (2024, February 28). Ted Cruz Wants to Topple Venezuela President to Help Save the Border. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/cruz-wants-topple-maduro-1874430>.

67 America Business Forum. (2025, November 18). María Corina Machado on Courage and the Future of

Venezuela | America Business Forum Miami 2025. <https://youtu.be/12J2JtO8R9Q>.

68 López, L. (2023, March 28). Leopoldo Lopez Testifies Before the Foreign Relations Committee on US Support of Democracy and Human Rights. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/leopoldo-lopez-testifies-foreign-relations-committee-us-support-democracy-and-human-rights>.er 23). 20 years of ALBA-TCP. <https://new.finalcall.com/2024/12/23/20-years-of-alba-tcp/>.

69 U.S. Embassy Caracas. (2020, February 6). Secretary Michael Pompeo's Meeting with Interim President Juan Guaido of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. <https://ve.usembassy.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeos-meeting-with-interim-president-juan-guaido-of-the-bolivarian-republic-of-venezuela/>.arch 28 <https://new.finalcall.com/2024/12/23/20-years-of-alba-tcp/>.

70 Martin, M. & Tong, S. (2025, November 25). Venezuelan migrants in Florida weigh the call for regime change back home. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/11/25/nx-s1-5619163/venezuelan-migrants-in-florida-weigh-the-call-for-regime-change-back-home>.

71 Ibid.

72 Pabst, S. (November 12, 2025). The top US military contractors cashing in on Caribbean operations. *Defense Priorities*. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/venezuela-us-military>.

73 Losey, S. (2021, March 7). This Is How the Biggest Arms Manufacturers Steer Millions to Influence US Policy. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/03/07/how-biggest-arms-manufacturers-steer-millions-influence-us-policy.html>

74 Ibid.

75 Auble, D. (2022, April 14). Capitalizing on Conflict: How U.S. arm sales fuel the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. *OpenSecrets*. <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/reports/capitalizing-on-conflict/yemen-case-study>.

76 Bouchard, J. & Cleveland-Stout, N. (2025, August 25). Venezuela oil US non-profits 'in the tank' for Exxon, Chevron over Venezuela oil. *Responsible Statecraft*. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/venezuela-oil-us/>.

77 Ibid.

78 Berger, H. (2025, October 18). Venezuela Regime Change Helps Exxon—not Americans. *The American Conservative*. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/venezuela-regime-change-helps-exxon-not-americans/>.

79 Wong, E. (2025, March 27). Rubio Vows

‘Consequences’ if Venezuela Tries Seizing Territory From Guyana. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/27/world/americas/marco-rubio-exxonmobil-venezuela-guyana.html>.

80 Bouchard, J. & Cleveland-Stout, N. (2025, August 25). Venezuela oil US non-profits ‘in the tank’ for Exxon, Chevron over Venezuela oil. Responsible Statecraft. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/venezuela-oil-us/>.

81 Think Tank Funding Tracker. Quincy Institute. <https://thinktankfundingtracker.org/think-tank/center-for-strategic-and-international-studies/>

82 Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2007). The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0801/2007024183-s.html>.

83 Kurmanaev, A., Barnes, J., & Turkewitz, J. (2025, October 10). Venezuela’s Maduro Offered the U.S. His Nation’s Riches to Avoid Conflict. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/10/world/americas/maduro-venezuela-us-oil.html>.

84 Reuters. (2025, November 6). Venezuela’s Maduro says Trump re-election “new start”. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-govt-congratulates-trump-election-victory-2024-11-06/>.

85 Garcia, Maria (1996). Havana USA Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994. University of California Press. pp. 47–53. ISBN 9780520919990.

86 Weisbrot, M. & Sachs, J. (2019, April). Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf>.