**Pressure Counterplan**

Pressure Counterplan – Table of Contents

[Summary 3](#_Toc364427441)

[Glossary 4](#_Toc364427442)

[1NC Venezuela Pressure Counter Plan 5](#_Toc364427443)

**Answers to Affirmative**

[Answers to: Pressure fails Maduro 6](#_Toc364427444)

[Answers to: Pressure fails in the case of Venezuela 6](#_Toc364427445)

[Answers to: Pressure fails in the case of Venezuela 8](#_Toc364427446)

[Answers to: Must Recognize Maduro 9](#_Toc364427447)

[Answers to Maduro says No 1](#_Toc364427448)0

[Answers to: Cooperation is key 1](#_Toc364427449)1-12

[Answers to: Permutation “Do Both” 1](#_Toc364427450)3-14

[The Counterplan solves Appeasement Turns 1](#_Toc364427451)5-16

[Answers to: Counterplan doesn’t solve oil industry 1](#_Toc364427452)7

[Answers to: Counterplan doesn’t solve the economy 1](#_Toc364427453)8

### **Summary**

The Pressure Counterplan takes the opposite strategy as from the Affirmative on how to get Venezuela to change policies. People often use the analogy of a carrot or a stick to describe these approaches. If you want a horse to pull a wagon to market you can put a carrot in front of its face and lead it forward with an enticement or you can hold a stick and threaten to hit the animal if it does not move. The affirmative offers a carrot of oil investment in the hopes that a stable Venezuela will become friendly with the United States and align with our policy goals (Democracy, regional stability, free markets to encourage growth). The counterplan is one of the biggest diplomatic sticks the US can carry. Reform your government and host free elections or the US will impose trade sanctions on you. Since the US is Venezuela’s largest trading partner this would have huge effects on the economy in the country. The best net benefit to this counterplan is the appeasement turns on case. Since the counterplan would result in a stable Venezuela without keeping the anti-US and anti-democracy government in power. Either disad could also be a net benefit since the counterplan would not alter the amount of oil available for the world market or China.

### **Glossary**

CCP - Chinese Communist Party, the ruling political party in the People's Republic of China

Chavistas - supporters of Hugo Chavez, former president of Venezuela

Dissent - The expression or holding of opinions at variance with those previously, commonly, or officially held.

Empirically - Verifiable or provable by means of observation or experiment

Flooding the market - introducing a large supply of a product into a market to artificially reduce the price; usually a tactic used by large producers to prevent new entrants into a market

Nicolas Maduro- newly elected president of Venezuela

OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) - an organization formed in 1961 to administer a common policy for the sale of petroleum. Its members are Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela

Zero Sum - a contest in which one person’s loss is equal to another person’s gain

### **1NC Venezuela Pressure Counter Plan**

#### **Text: The United States federal government should threaten to implement economic sanctions if the government of Venezuela does not implement election and anti-corruption reforms.**

#### **The counterplan competes engagement and sanctions are distinct strategies to persuade Venezuela to change its internal policies, one offers economic opportunity one denies access to those opportunities..**

#### **The net benefit is the appeasement turns on case.**

#### **Economic engagement fails absent a demand for election reform—only the counterplan solves relations in the long-term**

Christy, Senior policy analyst at the Foreign policy Initiative, 2013

(Patrick, “Obama Must Stand Up for Democracy in Post-Chavez Venezuela” US News, , 3/15/13 http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blo/world-report/2013/03/15/after-chavez-us-must-encourage-democratic-venezuela)

What's perverse is how the Obama administration's move to "reset" relations with Maduro is doing more to legitimize him as the rightful heir to Venezuela's presidency than to resuscitate relations between the two governments. The move showed itself to be even more naive after Maduro accused the United States of plotting to poison Chavez shortly after the strongman's death.¶ [Check out our editorial cartoons on President Obama.]¶ Washington must realize that a strategy of engagement alone will not ensure a renewed and improved partnership with Caracas. Failure to realize this will not only undermine whatever influence America has in the months ahead, but also send a troubling signal to Venezuela's increasingly united political opposition. The Obama administration should instead pursue a more principled policy towards a post-Chavez Venezuela. In particular, it should: Pressure Caracas to implement key election reforms. Venezuela's opposition faces formidable obstacles. Interim President Maduro will use the government's near-monopoly control of public airwaves, its established networks of political patronage and last-minute public spending programs to bolster his populist agenda.¶ Washington should stress publicly and privately that any attempts to suppress or intimidate the opposition runs contrary to Venezuela's constitution and the principles defined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was adopted by Venezuela in 2001. To this point, José Cárdenas, a former USAID acting assistant administrator for Latin America, writes,¶ The Venezuelan opposition continues to insist that the constitution (which is of Chavez's own writing) be followed and have drawn up a list of simple electoral reforms that would level the playing field and better allow the Venezuelan people to chart their own future free of chavista and foreign interference.¶ Demand free, fair and verifiable elections. Although Venezuela announced that a special election to replace Chavez will be held next month, it is important to remember that elections alone do not make a democracy. Indeed, Chavez long embraced the rhetoric of democracy as he, in reality, consolidated executive power, undermined Venezuela's previously democratic political system and altered the outcomes of election through corruption, fraud and intimidation

### **Answers to: Pressure fails Maduro**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Economic sanctions work and force Maduro to reform**

Halabi , co-founder of Global Risk Insights , 2013

(Sammy, “Reasons for Optimism in Venezuela”; May 3, 2013; http://globalriskinsights.com/2013/05/03/spring-is-coming-we-should-be-optimistic-about-venezuela/)

Though Venezuela will continue to be able to export oil, slightly mitigating some of Chavez’s more disastrous economic policies, Maduro sits on a ticking time bomb. Inflation is sky high, moving past 30%. Murder rates are skyrocketing while foreign investment continues to plummet due to past expropriations. And with increased American energy independence the era of $100 oil may be coming to an end.¶ Chavez had both the ideological conviction and public support necessary to withstand pressures to liberalize and integrate the Venezuelan economy in the face of such terrible indicators. Yet given his weakened mandate, and the fractured political climate under which he operates, Maduro will not be able to withstand such pressures for long.¶ Already there have been signs that Venezuela is inching towards change, with Maduro going so far as to temporarily open a back-channel with the US State Department during Chavez’s cancer treatments. While it would be difficult to see an overnight reversal of US-Venezuelan relations, these subtle steps are more indicative of a pragmatist than an ideologue. This is cause for optimism, and may be the root of better ties with Venezuela’s biggest export market in the medium term.¶ In the short term, expect Venezuela to pursue its liberalization on a more regional basis. Importantly, Brazil very quickly recognized Maduro’s government in spite of the electoral controversies. Additionally, Brazil and Peru have shown that there is a viable “third way” through which Venezuela can integrate into the international system. States like these have contributed to the general decline in anti-American sentiment, and give Venezuela a workable model for change.¶ For all the fever and emotion associated with Latin America, the logic of Venezuela’s economic problems remains cold and calculating. Maduro is not the reincarnation of Chavez and attempts to analyze Venezuela’s future on its Chavismo past are superficial at best. In short, spring is coming.

### **Answers to: Pressure fails in the case of Venezuela**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Sanctions are justified and empirically work in Venezuela—forces them to promote US interests**

GPO, the Committees on Oversight and Government Reform and Foreign Affairs 2011 (

(“VENEZUELA’S SANCTIONABLE ACTIVITY”; June 24, 2011; http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg71297/pdf/CHRG-112hhrg71297.pdf)

Venezuela continues to extend a lifeline to Colombian¶ narcotrafficking organizations by providing significant support and safe haven along the border, and it remains one of the most preferred trafficking routes for the transit of cocaine out of South¶ America. U.S. sanctions have successfully targeted and applied financial measures against narcotic traffickers and their organizations in Venezuela, helping to ensure regional security. Venezuela¶ has proven that it cannot be trusted and the United States should¶ take the necessary measures to stifle its powers and ensure regional security, but we must do so in a tactful manner, as not to¶ further empower Chavez. The national security threats posed by¶ Venezuela are complex. We must implement the appropriate measures to protect the people of Venezuela and promote U.S. interests

### **Answers to: Pressure fails in the case of Venezuela**

#### **[ ] A pressure strategy will democratize Venezuela and provide stability for the transition.**

Walser and Zuckerman, Senior Policy Analyst for Latin America and Research Associate at Heritage, 2013

(Ray and Jessica—in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies; “Venezuela After Chavez: U.S. Should Rally to Democracy”; http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/venezuela-after-death-of-chavez-us-should-rally-to-democracy)

A principled U.S. policy toward Venezuela should be guided by continued commitments to broad-based—not just electoral—democracy enshrined in the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter. Preservation of the constitutional order in Venezuela requires new elections that are not only free but fair. The interests of the U.S. will be best served with the return of fully functioning democracy (separation of powers, rule of law, protection of individual rights and liberties) in Venezuela. To achieve these objectives, the Obama Administration should:¶ Deliver by public diplomacy channels a comprehensive report on the costs and consequences of the Chavez regime;¶ Insist on maintaining the 30-day electoral timetable and press for real international electoral observation;¶ Signal clearly that anything other than free and fair elections will open the door to possible diplomatic and economic sanctions;¶ Continue to investigate narco-corruption and collect intelligence on criminal, terrorist, and Iranian activity in Venezuela; and¶ Refrain from restoring relations at the ambassadorial level without a firm Venezuelan commitment to cooperate in fighting drug trafficking and international terrorism.¶ Too Big to Ignore¶ The weeks and months ahead are a period of opportunity and peril in Venezuela. The Obama Administration should not be content with leading from behind or claiming more pressing engagements. From defending democracy to preserving stability, a post-Chavez Venezuela is too big to ignore.

### **Answers to: Must Recognize Maduro**

[ ]

#### **[ ] Recognition of Maduro in any form will undermine democratic signals to the entire region**

Baverstock, Foreign Correspondent for Christian Science Monitor, 2013.

(Alasdair, “Venezuela's Maduro still waiting on Washington's recognition” Christian Science Monitor, [http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0517/Venezuela-s-Maduro-still-waiting-on-Washington-s-recognition][MG]

The US’s reluctance to accept the new leader affects little in economic terms; the heavy crude is still flowing steadily from the Venezuelan oil fields into US refineries, a trading relationship upon which Venezuela relies heavily, particularly following the recent slump in global oil prices. In fact, many believe the US’s reluctance to legitimize Maduro amounts to little more than a message to other regional observers. “Maduro is certainly now the president of Venezuela,” says Mark Jones, professor of political science at Rice University in Texas. “The US’s refusal to recognize him is more symbolic than anything else. Ignoring Maduro’s win sends a signal to other Latin American countries that these elections didn’t meet minimum democratic standards.”

### **Answers to Maduro says No**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] An economic sanction would spark Venezuela reaction**

Duddy ’12 (Patrick D. Duddy is a senior lecturer in international studies at Duke University and former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela; “Political Unrest in Venezuela”; September 2012; http://www.cfr.org/venezuela/political-unrest-venezuela/p28936)

Economic Interests: A significant number of U.S. companies have operations in Venezuela; it remains an important market for U.S. goods and some services, especially oil services. Many of these companies could be at risk if violent internal conflict broke out. Venezuela is consistently among the five largest foreign suppliers of oil to the United States. The United States is Venezuela's largest market, buying up to nine hundred thousand barrels of oil daily, up to 45 percent of Venezuela's total oil exports. Around six hundred thousand barrels of Venezuelan crude per day are refined at CITGO facilities in the United States. Although a cut off of Venezuelan oil to the United States is theoretically possible, it is unlikely given Venezuela's dependence on the U.S. market.¶ The United States is now less vulnerable to a cut off of supply from Venezuela as U.S. domestic production has risen and imports from elsewhere could relatively quickly replace Venezuelan oil. Venezuela's economy, on the other hand, has become more dependent on petroleum. Although production has stagnated since 2003, oil accounts for over 95 percent of Venezuela's export earnin, and export revenue pays for nearly 50 percent of the government's budget. Thus, although Venezuela is vulnerable to pressure via its dependence on its oil exports generally and the U.S. market and refineries specifically, global markets would likely react negatively to either an interruption of Venezuelan production or a crisis in U.S.-Venezuelan relations that threatens the bilateral trade in oil.

### **Answers to: Cooperation is key**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Pressuring Maduro solves relations and stability—now is key**

Pagano, contributing editor for Truman National Security Projec. 2013

(James, t, “Moving Venezuela to the Center”; 3-18, http://trumanproject.org/doctrine-blog/moving-venezuela-to-the-center/)

Venezuela’s next president will have to decide whether to reverse these trends, or continue the slide to outright authoritarianism. The United States can and should influence this decision.¶ The United States must support the democratic process and engage the likely winner of April’s election, Chavez’s chosen successor, Nicolás Maduro. He will have a real opportunity to put Venezuela back on the path to a free-market democracy.¶ The next president will face an extremely politicized Supreme Court and military and reforms are likely more palatable if made by Maduro. Changes to apportionment, food subsidies or tax rates coming from Enrique Capriles (the opposition candidate) could spark a legal challenge from the supreme court; or worse, opposition from the military.¶ What should the U.S. role be? It must work with its Latin American allies in the region, Chile, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico to gently pressure Maduro into making the types of institutional and economic changes necessary for Venezuela to prosper. Failure to do so could lead to the reemergence of authoritarianism in Latin America, instability in world oil markets and serious regional security repercussions.¶ Chavez was infamous for his anti-American tirades. George W. Bush’s poor global standing gave Chavez an easy target. With a more positive global image, the most important step President Obama can take is to normalize relations with Cuba. As Venezuela’s closest ally, Cuba has remained a persistent problem in U.S.-Latin American relations.¶ By normalizing relations, Obama would take a huge step in reducing anti-Americanism in Venezuela. Simultaneously, Obama would ingratiate himself to the rest of the region by ending the dated embargo. Perhaps most importantly, eliminating this issue would give Venezuela’s next president the political cover necessary to mend relations with the United States.¶ The U.S. should push for economic reform with the help of Brazil which seeks a greater role in international and regional politics. Former Brazilian President Lula da Silva has close ties to Venezuela, and touting the recent successes of his center-left government in Brazil could help persuade Maduro to moderate his government.¶ Brazil has made huge societal gains without suffering the kind of economic setbacks seen in Venezuela. Friendly cajoling, along with the promise of closer economic ties could help lead Maduro onto a path of economic reform necessary to extend certain “Chavista” social programs.¶ Colombia, Brazil and the U.S. also have a shared interest in improving Venezuelan security. Under Chavez, Venezuela became on the most violent countries in Latin America, as drug related crimes skyrocketed.¶ Violence is the number one concern of Venezuelans, and significant reductions would be a major political victory for whoever is in power. Brazil and Colombia together should pressure Venezuela to accept sorely needed D.E.A assistance with the tacit acceptance of modest political reforms, most importantly freer press.¶ The death of Chavez is a critical juncture in U.S.-Latin American relations and it is important the United States not miss this opportunity. Having a stable trustworthy Venezuela would allow the United States to continue to draw down operations in the ever-volatile Middle East, fight narcotrafficking and expand trade.¶

### **Answers to: Permutation “Do Both”**

[ ]

[ ] Our threat is the only way to solve—there have to be repercussions without concessions—giving carrots to Venezuela links to the appeasement turn.

Ros-Lehtinen, member House Foreign Affairs Committee, 2013

(Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is; 3/14/13; “Venezuela after Chavez: What comes next?”; http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/mar/14/venezuela-after-chavez-what-comes-next/)//

The United States’ role in the post-[Chavez](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/hugo-chavez/) era should be to support democratic order by continuing to promote the Venezuelan [civil society](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/civil-society/) and ensuring that their rights are respected. The freedom-hungry people of [Venezuela](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/venezuela/) fear that the United States is too weak to counter interim President [Nicolas Maduro](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/nicolas-maduro/). Support for pro-democracy leaders cannot be accomplished if the [Obama administration](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/barack-obama/) continues to cozy up to their oppressors and refuses to draw a line in the sand for [Mr. Maduro](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/nicolas-maduro/), demanding an end to these undemocratic policies.¶ Last year, it was reported that the [Obama administration](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/barack-obama/) was seeking to exchange ambassadors in an attempt to normalize relations between the countries. The [U.S. State Department](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/department-of-state/)’s approach was extremely premature, and it, unfortunately, legitimized [Mr. Maduro](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/nicolas-maduro/) without even questioning whether the Venezuelan Constitution was being upheld. The [Obama administration](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/barack-obama/) continued to send mixed messages and to undermine the opposition by sending a delegation to attend [Chavez](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/hugo-chavez/)’s funeral services last week, alonide enemies of the United States, such as Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Words matter, but actions matter more, and this decision not only sends mixed signals to the people of [Venezuela](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/venezuela/), but reiterates the failed policy of attempting to re-establish diplomatic relations.¶ It is in our best interest if political and economic reforms come to [Venezuela](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/venezuela/), but all signs currently point to the contrary. As the leader of the Chavista movement, [Mr. Maduro](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/nicolas-maduro/) could potentially be worse for the Venezuelan people and for U.S. national security interests. [Mr. Maduro](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/nicolas-maduro/) still controls all branches of government, stifles free speech and was indoctrinated with socialist ideology. He has traveled to Tehran and has strong ties with Iran, [supports](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/mar/14/venezuela-after-chavez-what-comes-next/) the Assad regime in Syria and has become a lap dog for Cuba’s Castro brothers.¶ In January, the Castros orchestrated the violation of the Venezuelan Constitution when [Chavez](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/hugo-chavez/) did not take the oath of office. The [U.S. State Department](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/department-of-state/) responded that it is up to the Venezuelan people to decide if there was a violation, and that it would not interpret the constitution. However, those sentiments were nowhere to be found in 2009 when the [State Department](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/department-of-state/) led the charge against the people of Honduras, helped expel Honduras from the Organization of American States, and did not recognize Honduras’ constitutional authorities. Why the double standard? Democratic rights under the Inter-American Democratic Charter cannot be selective; they must be uniform.¶ The United States should be telling the leaders of [Venezuela](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/venezuela/) that they need to respect the constitution, abide by the Inter-American Democratic Charter and uphold democratic principles. These democratic processes can only be enforced if the Venezuelan leadership thinks that there will be serious repercussions if they do not take responsible actions to fulfill their obligations. This is an opportunity for the United States and responsible nations to demonstrate a commitment to restoring true democracy to [Venezuela](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/venezuela/), and I hope the opportunity isn’t missed.

### **The Counterplan solves Appeasement Turns**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Economic sanctions effectively promote democracy—comparative study**

Collins, Assistant Professor in Political Science and International Affairs at Kennesaw State University, 2009

(“Democracy Sanctions: An Assessment of Economic Sanctions as an Instrument of Democracy Promotion”; December, http://www.tfd.org.tw/docs/dj0502/069-096%20Stephen%20D.%20Collins.pdf)

Democracy promotion is often dismissed as a futile American foreign policy endeavor. Economic sanctions conventionally are derided as ineffective and counterproductive. Consequently, one might predict that the use of economic sanctions to promote democracy would represent a hopelessly inept strategy. This study finds, conversely, that sanctions represent a relatively effective instrument of democracy promotion. The idea that sanctions were futile was minted in the bipolar era, when the structural attributes of the international system limited the effectiveness of superpower sanctions. After the marked shift in the polar configuration of power upon the disappearance of the Soviet Union, however, the structural attributes of the system presented a more benign environment for the sanctions efforts of the United States. A comparative analysis of the use of democracy sanctions in the bipolar era versus those implemented in the 1990s reveals that sanctions became significantly more effective. This essay examines the causal origins of the increase in the effectiveness of democracy sanctions, and considers whether the high success rate for the approach can be sustained into the near future in light of recent challenges to American hegemony.

### **The Counterplan solves Appeasement Turns**

#### **[ ] Threatening economic pressure solves democratization—Guatemala proves**

Collins, Assistant Professor in Political Science and International Affairs at Kennesaw State University, 2009

(“Democracy Sanctions: An Assessment of Economic Sanctions as an Instrument of Democracy Promotion”; December, http://www.tfd.org.tw/docs/dj0502/069-096%20Stephen%20D.%20Collins.pdf)

In a number of instances, democracy-promotion sanctions delivered deep and rapid results. In 1993, when Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano dissolved Congress and the judiciary, and attempted to establish an autocratic government, the United States led a coalition of states in terminating all nonhumanitarian aid, and threatening sharp trade sanctions if democracy was not immediately restored. The grave threat of comprehensive sanctions worked to drive a wide number of sectors in Guatemalan society-including business, the military, and civil society-to abandon Serrano. The disgraced Serrano was ousted by the military, Guatemala’s human rights ombudsman took over as president, and the country’s democratic institutions were restored. The coup was reversed within days.26

### **Answers to: Counterplan doesn’t solve oil industry**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Only counterplan can force the reforms necessary to jump start Venezuela’s oil infrastructure. Mismangement not international investment is the problem.**

Coronel, president of Agrupacion Pro Calidad de Vida, 2008 (

(Gustavo “The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela”; [http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/corruption-democracy-venezuela)//](http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/corruption-democracy-venezuela)/GS)

High levels of mismanagement at the state-owned petroleum company, Petroleos de Venezuela. Corruption here takes many shapes. It includes the naming of six presidents and boards in seven years, in an effort to control the company politically. This finally was accomplished by naming the Minister of Energy and Petroleum president of the company, in violation of good management practice, since he now supervises himself. As a result, oil production has declined by some 800,000 barrels per day during the last decade. In a recent public hearing, Luis Vierma, the firm’s Vice President for Exploration and Production, admitted giving an oil well drilling contract for some $20,000,000 to a company with only three employees and no ri.

### **Answers to: Counterplan doesn’t solve the economy**

#### **[ ]**

#### **[ ] Corruption reform solves the economy—Maduro key**

Helios Global, 2013

(Independent news agency covering Latin American affairs in conjunction with Fair Observer; “Change in Venezuela Yields Political and Economic Uncertainty”; 6/4 http://www.fairobserver.com/article/change-venezuela-yields-political-and-economic-uncertainty)

Nicholas Maduro’s narrow electoral triumph over opposition leader Henrique Capriles Radonski in Venezuela’s April 14 elections — to serve out the remainder of the late president Hugo Chavez’s current presidential term — signifies a turning point in Venezuelan politics. Maduro’s victory has also reverberated beyond Venezuela’s borders. Due to its role as a major source of oil, the course of political events in Venezuela also has important implications for the world economy. The death of Chavez has also raised concerns about the prospects of social, political, and economic stability in Venezuela. The victory of Chavez’s heir apparent – Chavez and his supporters went to great lengths to ensure the survival of the Bolivarian Revolution launched by Chavez’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela (known by its Spanish acronym PSUV) – in a politically charged and polarized climate has already resulted in unrest and violence between Maduro’s supporters and his opponents. Venezuela’s increasingly dire economic predicament has further exacerbated tensions across the country.¶ Despite a contentious bilateral relationship, Venezuela remains the fourth-largest supplier of imported oil to the United States. Given the peculiarities of its oil, namely, the category of relatively low quality heavy crude oil that represents the bulk of its oil capacity, Venezuela relies heavily on US refineries located in the Gulf of Mexico that were designed to refine oil from Venezuela (and Mexico). Roughly 40 percent of Venezuela’s oil exports are delivered to the United States. Consequently, the United States is Venezuela’s top trade partner. This is the case even as US imports of Venezuelan oil have steadily declined in recent years. In 1997, the United States imported about 1.7 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) from Venezuela. In contrast, only about one million bpd of Venezuelan oil makes its way to the United States today. Venezuela also boasts major natural gas reserves, possibly the second-largest natural gas reserves in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, Venezuela’s oil production capacity continues to deteriorate due to mismanagement, corruption, and antiquated infrastructure.