AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

# VENEZUELA AT A CROSSROADS

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

**Serial No. 116–4**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: Ahttp://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/, http://docs.house.gov,
or http://www.govinfo.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
35–362PDF WASHINGTON : 2019

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York, *Chairman*

BRAD SHERMAN, California
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island
AMI BERA, California
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
DINA TITUS, Nevada
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, New York
TED LIEU, California
SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania
DEAN PHILLPS, Minnesota
ILHAN OMAR, Minnesota
COLIN ALLRED, Texas
ANDY LEVIN, Michigan
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia
CHRISSY HOULAHAN, Pennsylvania
TOM MALINOWSKI, New Jersey
DAVID TRONE, Maryland
JIM COSTA, California
JUAN VARGAS, California
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas, *Ranking Member*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
TED S. YOHO, Florida
ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
LEE ZELDIN, New York
JIM SENSENBRENNER, Wisconsin
ANN WAGNER, Missouri
BRIAN MAST, Florida
FRANCIS ROONEY, Florida
BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
JOHN CURTIS, Utah
KEN BUCK, Colorado
RON WRIGHT, Texas
GUY RESCHENTHALER, Pennsylvania
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee
GREG PENCE, Indiana
STEVE WATKINS, Kansas
MIKE GUEST, Mississippi

JASON STEINBAUM, *Democratic Staff Director*
BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Republican Staff Director*

# CONTENTS


Page

WITNESSES

Abrams, Hon. Elliott, U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela, U.S. Department of State ..... 13
Oudkirk, Sandra, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Energy Resources, U.S. Department of State ..... 20
Olive, Steve, Acting Assistant Administrator, Bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean, U.S. Agency for International Development ..... 25

APPENDIX

Hearing Notice ..... 68
Hearing Minutes ..... 69
Hearing Attendance ..... 70

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Amensty International letter submitted by Chairman Engel ..... 71
Article from The Wall Street Journal submitted by Representative Smith ..... 78

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD WITH RESPONSES

Chairman Eliot L. Engel ..... 83
Representative Chris Smith ..... 85
Representative David Cicilline ..... 86
Representative James Sensenbrenner ..... 89
Representative Michael Guest ..... 90

# VENEZUELA AT A CROSSROADS

**Wednesday, February 13, 2019**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
*Washington, DC*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:09 a.m., in Room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eliot Engel (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ENGEL [presiding]. The committee will come to order.

As the situation in Venezuela continues to unfold, it is important that the Foreign Affairs Committee hear from policymakers in the Trump administration on the latest developments and how the United States will continue to engage on this issue. So, I am glad to welcome our panel, whom I will introduce prior to their statements.

And let me also welcome all our members, the public, and the press, and we are glad to have our friends from C–SPAN here this morning to cover our hearing.

Before we start, without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules.

Chairman ENGEL. Let me start by saying that the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is simply heartbreaking. Ninety percent of Venezuelans are living in poverty, more than 1 in 10 children suffer from malnutrition, and nearly 10 percent of the country's population of 31 million has fled overseas. What makes it even more heartbreaking is that this crisis is entirely manmade. Venezuela should be one of the wealthiest and most prosperous countries in the hemisphere; it once was. But the corruption, incompetence, and mismanagement of Nicolas Maduro, and Hugo Chavez before him, have driven that country off of the edge of a cliff. The blame lies squarely with the crooked officials who have repressed the Venezuelan people for years, doing everything from throwing political opponents in jail to rigging elections, to gunning down protesters in the street.

Now some consider it a good sound bite to say that Venezuela represents the failure of socialism, but we should be honest that Venezuela is not a socialist country. It is a kleptocracy. It is a cruel and oppressive regime, pocketing every dollar it can, even if it means that the country's people are literally starving to death.

Nowhere is Nicolas Maduro's disregard for his fellow Venezuelans clearer than his decision to block humanitarian aid from entering the country last week at the Colombia-Venezuela border. This was a disgrace, and we need to keep looking for ways to get this assistance to those who need it without provoking a confronta-

tion that could lead to the loss of life. The Venezuelan people deserve better. They deserve the future they choose for themselves and their country.

So, our question is, how do we help them attain that future? How do we stand with the people of Venezuela as they seek a peaceful democratic transition?

First, governments around the world, and especially here in our neighborhood, need to support the Venezuelan National Assembly and Juan Guaido they work toward free and fair elections, elections that must be monitored by credible international observers, including the OAS, the Organization of American States. The EU-Latin America contact group can play a potentially crucial role in laying the groundwork for these elections in an area where our own administration can provide financial and political support.

What about U.S. policy more broadly? I will credit the administration. In the last few weeks, we have seen good multilateral engagement to grapple with this crisis. I am glad the White House rejects Nicolas Maduro. I think we should reject authoritarians, regardless of the ideology, and that would include despots like Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un.

But I do worry about the President's saber rattling, his hints that the U.S. military intervention remains an option. I want to make clear to our witnesses, and to everyone else watching, U.S. military intervention is not an option. Congress decides when, where, and how the U.S. military is used around the world, and Congress would not support military intervention in Venezuela.

Venezuela's neighbors feel the same way. Just last week, Colombia's Deputy Foreign Minister said that, and I quote him, "In no way would the Colombian government permit or agree with any type of military intervention," unquote, in Venezuela.

With respect to new sanctions on the PDVSA, I appreciate the need to squeeze Maduro, but the White House must think through the potential repercussions that these sanctions could have on the Venezuelan people if Maduro does not leave office in the coming weeks. We need to continually evaluate their effectiveness.

My biggest concern about the administration's policy is what appears to be missing. What are we going to do about the more than 3 million Venezuelans who have already left the country? This has become Latin America's biggest migration crisis in recent history, and I fear the United States may make things worse.

For starters, we should be taking in more Venezuelan refugees, but our admission numbers are at their lowest in recent history. Worse, the immigration policies of the White House have resulted in more Venezuelans being deported back to Venezuela, and that is like sending people back into a burning building.

The President could fix that with the stroke of a pen. He could grant temporary protected status, or TPS, to Venezuelans living in the United States. I hope he does so. And I have also cosponsored a bill written by Representative Soto that would take this step.

There is more we can do legislatively. Mr. McCaul and I have spent the last 2 weeks trying to draft a bipartisan resolution on this matter. We were about 95 percent of the way there, but hit a roadblock, similar to the Senate, on how to deal with questions

about the use of force in Venezuela. This is a policy difference, and it is a debate worth having, including during this hearing.

We also have pending a few substantive bills introduced by Representatives Mucarsel-Powell, Shalala, and Wasserman Schultz, that would help alleviate the humanitarian crisis and dial up pressure on Maduro. I hope we are able to move them forward during our next markup.

For now, I am eager to hear from our witnesses to get a fuller picture of the administration's approach to this volatile situation. But, first, let me yield to my friend, our ranking minority member, Mr. Michael McCaul of Texas, for an opening comments he may have.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When Nicolas Maduro was handpicked by Hugo Chavez in 2013, it was clear that he would follow in his socialist dictatorship footsteps. Since that time, Maduro's policies, rampant corruption, and violent crackdowns on peaceful political dissent have turned Venezuela into a failed State. Hyperinflation has skyrocketed, food and medicine are scarce, and, according to the United Nations, up to 3 million have fled the country since 2014.

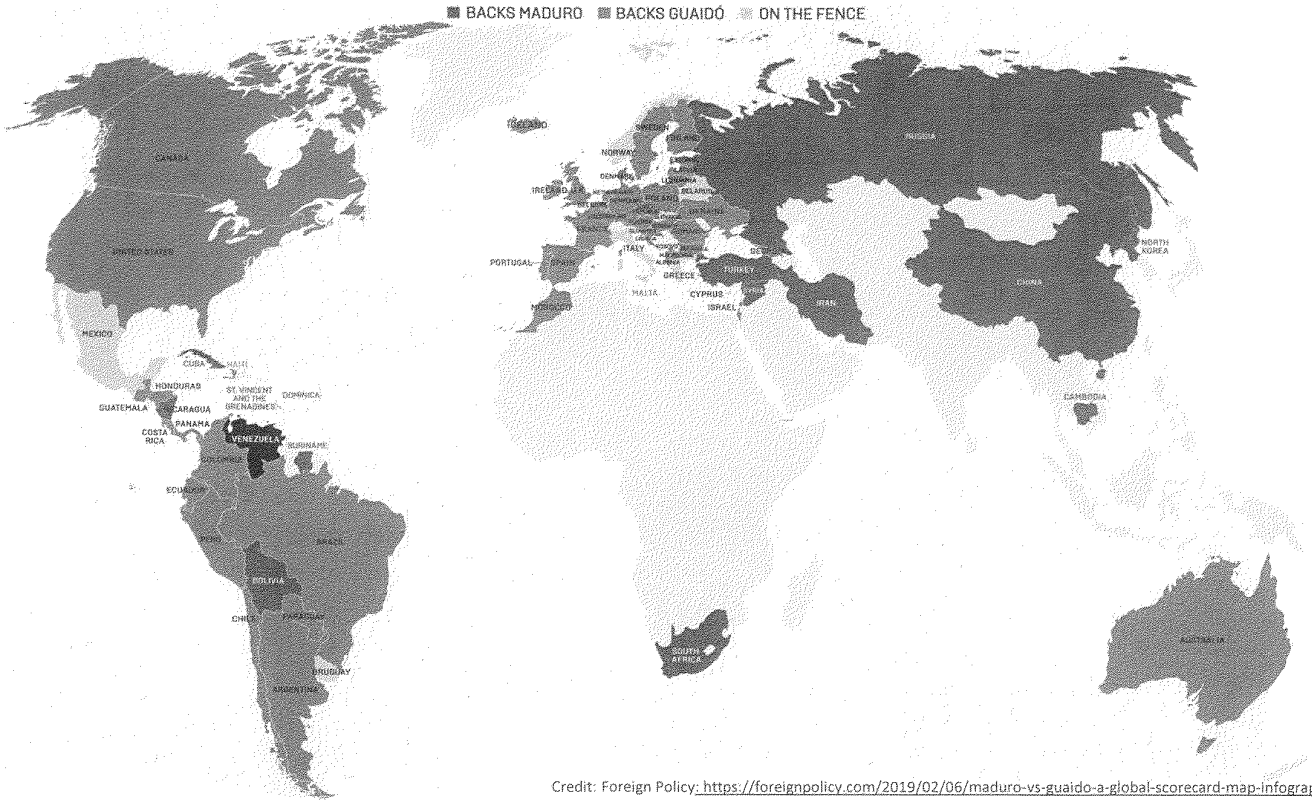
Last week, a fuel tanker and two shipping containers were placed on a bridge to block the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid, as seen on the screen. This act highlights how evil the Maduro regime really is.



Credit: AP: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/08/us-says-maduro-is-blocking-aid-starving-people-venezuelan-says-his-people-arent-beggars/?utm_term=.86ae07307f93

The current crisis highlights the horrifying impact of socialism. Those who continue to preach or show sympathy do not understand its history and the abject suffering it has caused. Let us be clear, the suffering of the Venezuelan people at the hands of the Maduro regime is not caused only by its ideology. The Maduro regime is full of criminals that oversee a mafia State backed by U.S. adversaries like, Russia, China, and Iran, and is linked to drug trafficking and other illicit activities.

Today, the people of Venezuela have had enough, and over the last month they have started to take back their country that they love. Inspired by Juan Guaido, leader of the National Assembly and Interim President, millions of protesters have rallied in the streets across the country and stood up to the Maduro dictatorship. Bolstered by the leadership of the United States, many nations around the world, including most Latin American and European countries, are standing with them, as the TV monitor shows.




Credit: Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/06/maduro-vs-guaido-a-global-scorecard-map-infographic/

I commend the President for recognizing Juan Guaido as the legitimate Interim President, for supporting his efforts to call for free and fair elections, and for imposing sanctions that hold the regime responsible for their criminal actions.

This week, I will be introducing a resolution. I continue to work with the chairman in a bipartisan manner to condemn the criminal actions of Nicolas Maduro and countries like Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, and Syria for supporting his regime. It also clearly recognizes Juan Guaido  Interim President and urges the international community to support the humanitarian and economic assistance for Venezuela.

The Venezuelan people need to know that America is on their side, but it should also be known that we do not aim to choose their next leader. We simply want the conditions that would allow the people to choose for themselves. Our role must be a supportive one, but one that stands for universal principles of freedom and democracy. And today's hearing will allow us to discuss how we can play that role to the best of our ability.

In January, I was pleased that the President and Secretary Pompeo called on Eliot Abrams to serve as Special Envoy for Venezuela. As a seasoned diplomat who has served in numerous foreign policy and national security positions, I believe that Mr. Abrams is the right man for the job. And I look forward to hearing his testimony, as well as the testimony of the other experts here today.

I believe this is an issue that both parties can come together on and do what is best for the people of Venezuela to support this noble cause.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our witnesses.

Mr. Elliott Abrams is the U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela at the U.S. Department of State. He is currently on leave at the Council on Foreign Relations, where he serves as a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies in Washington, DC. Mr. Abrams served as Assistant Secretary of State in the Reagan Administration and as the Senior Director of the National Security Council for Near East and North Africa Affairs under the George W. Bush Administration. I love his first name, even though he spells it incorrectly.

[Laughter.]

And I look forward to hearing what he has to say today.

Ms. Sandra Oudkirk is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Diplomacy. Ms. Oudkirk is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. From 2017 to 2018, she served as the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Threat Finance and Sanctions in the Bureau of Economics and Business Affairs. Her previous overseas assignments include consular assignments in Taipei, at the U.S. Embassy in Dublin, Deputy Principal Officer in Istanbul, and Narcotics Affairs Section Chief in Jamaica.

Mr. Steve Olive is Acting Assistant Administrator for USAID's Latin America and Caribbean Bureau. Mr. Olive served as the Acting Director of the Foreign Service Center in the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management from 2017 to 2018. Previously, he

served as Deputy Mission Director for Somalia, Deputy Mission Director for Haiti, as well as numerous other roles across nearly two decades at USAID.

We are grateful for your service and your time this morning.

All witnesses' testimony will be included in the record of this hearing.

And now, I would like to recognize our witnesses for 5 minutes each. We will start with Mr. Abrams.

**STATEMENT OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS, U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR VENEZUELA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on our efforts to restore democracy in Venezuela.

[Audience members interrupt hearing.]

Chairman ENGEL. OK. The Chair will remind all persons in the audience that any manifestation of approval or disapproval of proceedings is in violation of the rules of the House and its committees.

Mr. Abrams——

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you.

Chairman ENGEL [continuing]. I apologize. Please continue.

Mr. ABRAMS. Venezuela is at a crossroads. Over the past month, we have witnessed a massive outpouring of hope and courage and tenacity by the Venezuelan people. We saw it again yesterday, as they have taken to the streets to protest that has brought them nothing but poverty and misery and repression.

They have placed their hopes in a young, dynamic, and legitimate leader, Juan Guaido, to lead them through a transition to democracy. And we join the Venezuelan people in this effort.

Under the Maduro regime, the situation inside Venezuela will only get worse. Venezuela has become the most violent country in the world. Hyperinflation is spiraling out of control and will reach a million percent or more. There is widespread hunger. Communicable diseases that are easily preventable are resurging once again.

[Audience members interrupt hearing.]

Chairman ENGEL. The Chair will remind all persons in the audience, if we have to clear the hearing of spectators, we will do it.

[Audience members interrupt hearing.]

OK. I want to again say the Chair will remind everyone that any manifestation of approval or disapproval of proceedings is in violation of the rules of the House and its committees. If this continues, we will have to just clear out the hearing room of people who are here. It is unfortunate, but, apparently, there are some people who only believe they are the only ones who should be heard. The last time I looked, we were a democracy and everyone has the right to be heard.

So, please continue, Mr. Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. And oil production has fallen from 3 million barrels a day to about a million. It will probably go down to about 500,000 by the end of the year.

More than 3.5 million Venezuelans, as you have said, Mr. Chairman and Mr. McCaul, have been forced to flee their country and spread throughout the region in search of food and medicine and work and protection.

The light in all this darkness is Venezuela's National Assembly, the last democratic institution in Venezuela. Interim President Juan Guaido has provided new hope to those who want to return to a free and democratic Venezuela. Through his efforts, we look forward to a democratic and multiparty transition, an economic recovery that benefits all, and competitive, free, and fair Presidential elections, truly representative of the will of the people.

We have always recognized that the solution to Venezuela's political and economic crisis must be led and achieved by the Venezuelan people. The U.S. Government role is to support that effort.

And as we meet today, Mr. Chairman, the State Department and its interagency partners are hard at work responding to Interim President Guaido's call for international humanitarian assistance. We invite international partners to join us in helping to fill warehouses and assistance centers with basic supplies the Venezuelan people so desperately need. We also continue our implementation of over $140 million in existing programming to address the regional humanitarian crisis.

As you have said, Maduro and his cronies are conspiring to prevent this lifesaving assistance from reaching the Venezuelan people. But, of course, those at the top of the regime are well-fed. They impose misery on the Venezuelan people, but they do not share it.

The United States has effectively levied individual and sectoral sanctions on the Maduro regime. We have exponentially increased the cost of doing business for the regime in the gold sector, the financial sector, now in the oil sector, the combination of which has created enormous pressure on Maduro and his band of thieves. We have frozen bank accounts. We have revoked visas of those who benefit from their corruption and complicity.

And this is not a U.S. effort alone. It is now more than 50 democracies in this hemisphere and around the world. The Venezuelan desire for freedom has galvanized the global effort on behalf of Interim President Guaido.

As a result of this growing pressure, there is a storm brewing inside the Maduro regime that will eventually bring it to an end. While it is impossible to predict the moment this will happen, we believe the current political and economic environment is unsustainable and that he will not be able to weather it much longer.

For those remaining supporters of the regime, we have one simple message: your time is up. A new, free, and prosperous Venezuela will rise, and your fellow citizens will remember who stood by them in their struggle.

This includes especially the armed forces who will be needed in the future to build a secure Venezuela where law and order defeat criminality and violence. Now is the time for the armed forces to support the Venezuelan people and reclaim their own legitimacy.

Over the next weeks and months, we will continue our pressure against Maduro and his inner circle. Last week, I announced visa restrictions and revocations on members of the illegitimate Con-

stituent Assembly. Today, we can add we have imposed visa restrictions and revoked visas on members of the TSJ, the illegitimate supreme court.

But we will also provide off-ramps to those who will do what is right for the Venezuelan people. We will support Venezuela's Interim President, the National Assembly, the new government, and its aspirations to create a new Venezuela. We will continue pressing for humanitarian assistance delivery with the help of regional partners and the international community.

And we are hopeful and confident that the Venezuelan people will succeed in their quest for liberty. And when they do achieve this monumental goal, it will show despots and dictators not only in our hemisphere, but in the rest of the world that the will of the people for freedom will prevail over those who try to suppress it.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me here today, and thank you for the continuing interest and support that this committee has shown, bipartisan interest, in supporting the struggle for freedom in Venezuela.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

VENEZUELA AT A CROSSROADS

TESTIMONY OF
ELLIOTT ABRAMS
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR VENEZUELA
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BEFORE
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FEBRUARY 12, 2019

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our efforts to restore democracy to Venezuela, one of the Administration's top priorities. Venezuela is at a crossroads. Over the past month we have witnessed a massive outpouring of hope, courage, and tenacity by the Venezuelan people as they have taken to the streets to protest a regime that has brought them nothing but poverty, misery, and repression. They have placed their hopes in a young, dynamic, and legitimate leader, Juan Guaidó, to lead them through a transition to democracy.

We join with the Venezuelan people in this effort. The United States has a compelling national interest in stopping the destabilization that Venezuela's decline has brought to the region as more than 3 million people have been forced to flee in one of the largest migration crises in the world today.

Under the illegitimate and unrecognized Maduro regime the situation inside Venezuela will only get worse. Consider the following:

- Venezuela has become the most violent country in the world. In large part this is due to poverty and desperation, directly caused by the former Maduro regime's disastrous mismanagement of the economy and policy of social divisiveness. It is also due to Maduro's neighborhood gangs—or "colectivos"—who prey on the poor through extortion, kidnapping, and murder.

- Hyperinflation, thanks to Maduro's economic policies, mismanagement, and regime corruption, has spiraled out of control. Within the last month

it grew by 220 percent. In total, by the end of 2019, it could reach 10 million percent.

- One of the most significant consequences of Maduro's disastrous economy is food insecurity. Only 30 percent of the protein required in the regular diet of the Venezuelan population is available. Scarcity and high prices have reached critical levels for food processors and grocery markets. In the meantime, the regime's subsidized food program, known as "CLAP," only arrives regularly to known Maduro supporters, a cruel source of political manipulation. The rest of the population sees its delivery only once a month or less, if at all.

- Cases of malaria and tuberculosis are rising exponentially. Measles and diphtheria, which are preventable through vaccination and had been once eliminated in Venezuela, are resurging due to the lack of needed medicine and treatment.

- And the resources that could save Venezuela from its economic crisis have been misappropriated. Over the last ten years, Maduro and his cronies looted over $11 billion of national wealth. PdVSA, once considered *the Venezuelan people's* crown jewel, has functioned as an ATM for Maduro and his inner circle. Refineries are operating at less than 25 percent capacity; most of Venezuela's oil engineers have fled the country, and oil production – from the country sitting on the world's largest proven oil reserves – is on track to fall to less than one million barrels of oil per day this year.

As a result of the corruption, violence, and mismanagement by the former Maduro dictatorship, more than 3 million Venezuelans – more than 10 percent of Venezuela's population – have been forced to flee their country in order to survive. They have spread throughout the region in search of food, medicine, work, and international protection. Generous neighboring countries have opened their doors to these refugees and migrants, but these countries now are finding themselves challenged to continue to absorb the daily outpouring of desperate Venezuelans.

The light in all of this darkness has been Venezuela's National Assembly—the last democratic institution in Venezuela. This courageous group of patriots struggles to set Venezuela free, in the face of threats from Maduro and his thugs. They have called the Venezuelan people to action, and the people have responded. *Interim* President Juan Guaidó has provided new hope to those who want to return

to a free and democratic Venezuela – a Venezuela that benefits all Venezuelan citizens, not just Maduro and his inner circle. Through his efforts, we look forward to a democratic and multi-party effort to lead their transition, an economic recovery that benefits all, and competitive, free, and fair presidential elections truly representative of the will of the people.

We have always recognized that the solution to Venezuela's political and economic crisis must be led and achieved by the Venezuelan people. The U.S. Government is doing everything within its power to support that effort. We do this because the restoration of peace, democracy, and prosperity would reunite Venezuela with the democratic community of the hemisphere. It would also refute the false promise of authoritarianism championed by a small number of dysfunctional states, most notably Cuba which has provided direct support for Maduro's repressive tactics including the recent deployment of its most feared units, the Black Wasps.

On January 24, Secretary Pompeo announced "The United States is ready to provide an initial sum of $20 million in humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela." As I speak to you today, Mr. Chairman, the State Department and its interagency partners are hard at work responding to Interim President Guaidó's call for international humanitarian assistance with this initial contribution. We invite international partners to join us in helping to fill warehouses and assistance centers with basic supplies the Venezuelan people so desperately need. We also continue our implementation of over $140 million in existing aid and development programming to address the regional humanitarian crisis.

Maduro and his cronies are conspiring to prevent this life-saving assistance from reaching the Venezuelan people. A few days ago we learned that one of the Maduro regime's inner circle thugs in Tachira State, Freddy Bernal, upon learning of our humanitarian assistance plans, immediately cancelled gasoline shipments designated for the state in order to paralyze the state government's ability to support the entry of humanitarian aid. Others, like Diosdado Cabello, have labeled his own people as "traitors," "selfish," and "disgusting" for wanting to receive international aid.

Maduro's actions, and those of his enablers, have not and will not go unanswered. We have effectively levied individual and sectoral sanctions on the former Maduro regime. And they are making a difference. We have exponentially increased the cost of doing business for the regime in the gold sector, the financial sector, and now the oil sector—the combination of which has created enormous

pressure on Maduro and his band of thieves. We have frozen the bank accounts of the regime's most notorious gang leaders and revoked their visas and those of their immediately family members who benefited from their corruption and complicity. They and their families are no longer welcome in the United States. We are asking other nations who recognize the legitimate Guaido government to do the same and revoke visas of regime leaders.

As a result of this growing pressure, there is a storm brewing inside the inner circle; a growing dissatisfaction and distrust that will eventually bring about an end to Maduro's reign of terror. While it is impossible to predict the moment this will happen, we believe the current political and economic environment is unsustainable and that he will not be able to weather it much longer.

We stand in common purpose with regional partners such as the Lima Group, which came together in August 2017 to find a peaceful exit to the crisis in Venezuela. The group declared in its first statement its full support and solidarity to the democratically elected National Assembly. That statement rang as clear and true then as it does now.

Other international actors, including the Organization of American States and the United Nations Security Council, are also instrumental in this pivotal moment for Venezuela. They establish the critical international framework and consensus necessary for restoring democracy. We recognize global diplomacy is required to ensure a peaceful and inclusive transition.

This is not an effort by the United States alone but an effort by what is now near 50 democracies in this hemisphere and around the world. We are witnessing a historic shift in our hemisphere toward democratic solidarity. The Venezuelan desire for freedom has galvanized a global effort and wide recognition for *Interim* President Guaidó has poured in, further isolating Maduro.

And for those remaining supporters of the former Maduro regime, we have one simple message: your time is up. A new, free, and prosperous Venezuela is rising, and your fellow citizens will remember who stood by them in their struggle. This includes especially the armed forces and all security forces, who will be needed in the future to build a secure Venezuela where law and order defeat criminality and violence. Now is the time for the armed forces to support the Venezuelan people, reclaim their own legitimacy, and turn to helping build tomorrow's Venezuela.

Over the next weeks and months, the international community will take full advantage of the momentum built over the last few weeks.

- We will continue our pressure against Maduro and his inner circle by a variety of means. But we will also provide off-ramps to those who will do what is right for the Venezuelan people.

- We will support Venezuela's interim president, the new government, and its aspirations to create a new Venezuela – full of hope, promise, and potential – and we will work together toward a democratic transition.

- We were all thrilled to see newly appointed Ambassador to the United States Carlos Vecchio in the chamber for the State of the Union Address. He is getting set up in Washington as he represents the legitimate government to our country and government.

- We will continue pressing our humanitarian assistance delivery with the help of our regional partners and the international community.

- And we will expose and speak out against Maduro and his enablers' cruelty and violence, recognizing the Venezuelan voices that have witnessed it firsthand.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Nicolas Maduro and his cronies are reeling from the force of Venezuela's own people, who are determined to live in freedom and dignity.

We are hopeful and confident the Venezuelan people will succeed in their quest for liberty. And when they do achieve this monumental goal, it will show despots and dictators not only in our hemisphere, but in the rest of the world, that the democratic will of the people will always outlive and outshine those who try to suppress it.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me here today and thank you for the continuing interest and support this Committee has shown toward the struggle for freedom in Venezuela. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[Audience members interrupt hearing.]

Chairman ENGEL. The Chair will remind all persons in the audience that any manifestations of approval or disapproval of proceedings is in violation of the rules of the House and committees.

OK. Ms. Oudkirk.

**STATEMENT OF SANDRA OUDKIRK, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF ENERGY RESOURCES, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ms. OUDKIRK. Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul——

Chairman ENGEL. Can you push the microphone a little closer? Good.

Ms. OUDKIRK. Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

On January 28th, the United States designated Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A., PDVSA, under Executive Order 13850. This action extends to entities that are majority-owned by PDVSA. These new sanctions are intended to place pressure on the illegitimate former Maduro regime, minimize its receipt of revenue from the United States, and safeguard the U.S. financial system. The designation of PDVSA will also preserve Venezuela's national assets for the Venezuelan people.

The United States is holding accountable those responsible for Venezuela's tragic decline. As Special Representative Abrams noted, under the former Maduro regime, Venezuelan oil production steadily declined due to mismanagement, corruption, and a lack of investment.

PDVSA has long been associated with allegations of corruption and a variety of schemes designed to embezzle billions of dollars for the personal gain of corrupt Venezuelan officials and businessmen. These sanctions aim to prevent the illegitimate Maduro regime and other corrupt actors from further enriching themselves at the expense of the Venezuelan people.

Concurrent with this action, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control issued general licenses that authorized certain transactions and activities with PDVSA to help mitigate unintended consequences on U.S. companies, interests, and allies. These licenses provide equal treatment to U.S. refineries that import Venezuelan crude oil. Any payments made to PDVSA must, however, be made into a blocked interest-bearing account located in the United States. These funds will be preserved for the people of Venezuela.

CITGO, a wholly owned U.S. subsidiary of PDVSA, is authorized to continue business operations for the next 6 months. However, this license does not extend to dealings with PDVSA. The license for U.S. companies operating in Venezuela will allow them to continue operations with minimal exceptions. The oil sector is an integral part of the Venezuelan economy and its revival will be essential to the country's economic recovery.

We have engaged allies, including those in other regions, such as Europe and Asia, who have joint ventures with PDVSA in Venezuela, on the goals and objectives of these sanctions. We are working to avoid disruptions in vulnerable energy sectors in the Carib-

bean and Central America in light of PDVSA's integrated role in those local and regional energy markets.

The United States continues to work with oil producers and consumers all over the world to ensure access to reliable and affordable energy supplies. We believe disruptions are unlikely since oil markets are adequately supplied. And U.S. oil producers are a key reason why markets are well supplied. Over the past year, U.S. crude oil production increased by nearly 2 million barrels a day and exports increased by a million barrels a day. This added to market liquidity. U.S. production and exports are poised to continue to grow over the coming months.

And so, in closing, I would like to note that we are carefully considering ongoing U.S. involvement in, and links with, the Venezuelan energy sector, as we balance our effort to support the restoration of democracy and the eventual rebuilding of Venezuela. U.S. sanctions need not be permanent. They are intended to change behavior. The path to sanctions relief for PDVSA is through the expeditious transfer of control of the company so that it is no longer a tool for the former Maduro regime's illegitimate uses.

Thank you for your attention, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Oudkirk follows:]

VENEZUELA AT A CROSSROADS

TESTIMONY OF
SANDRA OUDKIRK
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
BUREAU OF ENERGY RESOURCES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BEFORE
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FEBRUARY 12, 2019

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As you know, President Trump officially recognized President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaido, as the Interim President of Venezuela on January 23. The President also issued an Executive Order to make clear that United States sanctions continue to target the illegitimate former Maduro regime.

On January 28, the United States determined that persons operating in Venezuela's oil sector may now be subject to sanctions pursuant to Executive Order 13850. In addition, Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) has been designated for operating in this sector. This action extends to entities that are majority owned by PDVSA.

These new sanctions are intended to place pressure on Maduro and his cronies, minimize its receipt of revenue from the United States, and safeguard the U.S. financial system. The designation of PDVSA will preserve Venezuela's national assets for the Venezuelan people. I also want to underscore that these new sanctions do not target the innocent people of Venezuela and will not prohibit humanitarian assistance including the provision of medicine and medical devices, which are desperately needed after years of economic destruction under Maduro's rule.

The United States is holding accountable those responsible for Venezuela's tragic decline. Under the former Maduro regime, Venezuelan oil production steadily declined due to mismanagement, corruption, and lack of investment. Analysts estimate that PDVSA production will fall to less than one million barrels

of oil per day this year, down from nearly three million per day when Maduro became president.

PDVSA has long been associated with allegations of corruption and a variety of schemes designed to embezzle billions of dollars for the personal gain of corrupt Venezuelan officials and businesspeople. It currently serves as a key vehicle through which Maduro and his cronies plunder Venezuela's wealth for their own corrupt purposes. These sanctions aim to prevent the illegitimate former Maduro regime and other corrupt actors from further enriching themselves at the expense of the Venezuelan people.

Concurrent with this action, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has issued General Licenses that authorize certain transactions and activities with PDVSA, within specified timeframes, which will help mitigate unintended consequences on U.S. companies, interests, and allies.

For example, CITGO, a wholly owned subsidiary of PDVSA, is authorized to continue business operations for the next six months, however, this license does not extend to dealings with PDVSA. This license can be extended beyond the initial six-month period by Treasury's OFAC, if appropriate.

These licenses provide equal treatment to U.S. refineries that are importing Venezuela crude oil, offering the same 90-day wind down period for purchasing and importing petroleum products from PDVSA. Any payments made to PDVSA, however, must be made into a blocked, interest-bearing account located in the United States. These funds will be preserved for the people of Venezuela.

Several alternative sources of the same type of heavy sour crude oil that Venezuela produces exist, which include sources from Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Canada, and the Middle East. While there may be a short-term adjustment period, we do not assess that this adjustment will have a sustained negative impact on the U.S. refineries that import Venezuelan oil.

The license for U.S. companies operating in Venezuela will allow them to continue normal operations there, with minimal exceptions. The oil sector is an integral part of the Venezuelan economy and its revival will be essential to the country's economic recovery.

A license has also been issued to allow U.S. persons in Venezuela to purchase petroleum products for personal, commercial or humanitarian purposes.

As part of our mitigation efforts, it will be essential to coordinate action with allies as appropriate, by previewing our policy strategy and through high-level government engagement, particularly with those in other regions, such as Europe and Asia, who have joint ventures with PDVSA in Venezuela. We are also working to avoid disruptions in vulnerable energy sectors in the Caribbean and Central America, given PDVSA's integrated role in those local and regional energy markets.

The United States continues to work with oil producers and consumers all over the world to ensure access to reliable and affordable energy supplies. Over the past year, U.S. crude oil production increased by nearly two million barrels per day and exports increased by over one million barrels per day, adding to market liquidity. Over the next year, U.S. production is forecasted to increase to an all-time high of more than 12 million barrels per day. Disruptions are unlikely since oil markets are adequately supplied.

The United States continues to have grave concerns about the activities of the former Maduro regime and its affiliates to: perpetuate human rights violations and abuses; conduct arbitrary arrests and detentions of pro-democracy protestors; curtail press freedom; and harass political opponents. We will continue to use the full suite of our diplomatic and economic tools to support Interim President Juan Guaidó, the National Assembly, and the Venezuelan people's efforts to restore their democracy.

U.S. sanctions need not be permanent; they are intended to change behavior. The path to sanctions relief for PDVSA is through the expeditious transfer of control of the company so that it is no longer a tool for the former Maduro regime's illegitimate uses. We will also carefully consider on-going U.S. involvement in and links with the Venezuelan energy sector, as we balance our effort to support the restoration of democracy and the eventual re-building of Venezuela.

Thank you for your attention and now I am happy to take any questions that you may have.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Ms. Oudkirk.
Mr. OLIVE.

**STATEMENT OF STEVE OLIVE, ACTING ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. OLIVE. Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today on this critical and timely subject. I am grateful for the committee's longstanding bipartisan support for Latin America and the Caribbean, especially Venezuela.

I am proud of the work that we have done to help Venezuelans and the neighboring communities that are hosting them. Administrator Green and I met some of these Venezuelans who had fled their homeland when we visited Cucuta, Colombia last July.

However, we know that humanitarian assistance alone will not address the root causes driving people away from Venezuela. Lasting political and economic reforms are the only sustainable solutions to this crisis. This is a pivotal moment in the history of Venezuela. The people are standing up against the dictator; they are not alone. As USAID Administrator Mark Green said, and I quote, "We proudly stand with the people of Venezuela who are yearning for freedom and a true democracy." End quote.

Venezuelans have endured steady erosion of human rights and fundamental freedoms under the corrupt and repressive Maduro regime. We have seen widespread shortages of essential food and medicine. There have been major outbreaks of diseases like diphtheria, measles, and malaria, which had previously been under control or eliminated.

On January 23d, the people peacefully took to the streets to protest against Maduro's regime. The National Assembly, the only legitimate body, has asserted its constitutional authority and put power back in where it belongs-in the hands of the Venezuelan people.

The struggle for democracy in Venezuela is led by the Venezuelan people themselves. I am proud that USAID has a long tradition of standing by Venezuelans who have continued to assert their democratic rights. USAID supports local human rights defenders, civil society, independent media, electoral oversight, and the democratically elected National Assembly.

Over the past 5 years, we have provided close to $40 million in democracy assistance to these groups, including the planned $15 million in Fiscal Year 2018 funding, which cleared Congress yesterday. Thank you.

I salute the bravery of the Venezuelans who have kept up the fight for democracy even when their cause seemed nearly impossible. USAID Administrator Mark Green and I have spoken by phone with Interim President Guaido d have met with Venezuelan ambassadors Vecchio and Borges to coordinate USAID's humanitarian response and support to the National Assembly, as they restore democracy and prosperity in Venezuela.

Our most immediate priority will be to get food and medicine to those who need it. USAID will always be ready and willing to help vulnerable Venezuelans. When Interim President Guaido quested

urgent humanitarian assistance from the United States, Secretary of State Pompeo announced that we are ready to provide initial humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela. USAID has prepositioned food, nutritional supplements, hygiene kits, and medical supplies in Cucuta. The U.S. is coordinating with Interim President Guaido d his team of experts, governments in the region, and humanitarian partners on the logistics of deploying aid, to mobilize a response that is efficient and safe.

Since Fiscal Year 2017, the United States has provided approximately $140 million, including nearly $97 million in humanitarian assistance and approximately $43 million in development assistance, to support affected countries' emergency efforts and build their long-term capacity to host the more than 3 million people who have fled Venezuela.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the committee, thank you again for this opportunity to testify today. I thank you for your continued bipartisan support and look forward to engaging with you further as the United States helps the people of Venezuela to return to peace, prosperity, and democratic and citizen-responsive governance. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Olive follows:]

**Prepared Testimony of Steve Olive**
**Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean**
**United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**
**"Venezuela at a Crossroads"**
**House Foreign Affairs Committee**
**Wednesday February 13, 2019**

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today on this critical, timely subject. I am grateful for the Committee's long-standing support for Latin America and the Caribbean, especially Venezuela. By forging partnerships with civil society, faith-based and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and like-minded governments to build free and prosperous societies, USAID advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.

**Development Context**

This is a pivotal moment in the history of Venezuela. The people are standing up against a dictator. They are not alone. As USAID Administrator Mark Green said, "We proudly stand with the people of Venezuela who are yearning for freedom and a true democracy."

The Venezuelan people have endured a steady erosion of human rights and fundamental freedoms under the Maduro regime. With a handpicked Supreme Court effectively abolishing all the powers of the country's democratically elected National Assembly, the creation of an illegitimate Constituent Assembly, and a corrupt electoral council that responds to the regime, Maduro gave himself almost unlimited powers. This culminated in early, sham, so-called elections last year, after which Maduro attempted to steal another six-year term.

These maneuverings, combined with decisions that devastated Venezuela's once-robust economy, led to a man-made crisis that has driven more than three million Venezuelans from their homeland since 2014. The effects of the regime's mismanagement have hit all sectors of society: the International Monetary Fund estimates that inflation exceeded one million percent

in 2018 and forecasts inflation of 10 million percent in 2019;[1] Venezuelans face widespread shortages of essential food and medicine. As the health system collapsed, the country saw major outbreaks of diseases such as diphtheria, measles, and malaria, which had previously been under control or eliminated. Crumbling infrastructure has disrupted basic services, including water and sanitation.

On January 23, 2019, the people said, "enough," and peacefully took to the streets to protest against Maduro's regime. The only remaining democratic institution in the country–the National Assembly – asserted its constitutional authority, took control away from Maduro, and put power back where it belongs – in the hands of the Venezuelan people. The United States quickly recognized National Assembly President Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's Interim President, and President Trump made our support to the Venezuelan people clear: "I will continue to use the full weight of United States economic and diplomatic power to press for the restoration of Venezuelan democracy."

**Long-Term Programming: USAID Democracy Assistance**

The struggle for democracy in Venezuela is led by the Venezuelan people themselves. I am proud that USAID has a long tradition of standing by those who have continued to assert their rights and maintain a democratic voice in the face of dictatorship.

USAID supports local human rights defenders, civil society, independent media, electoral oversight, and the democratically elected National Assembly in Venezuela. Over the past five years, we have provided close to $40 million in democracy assistance to these groups, including the planned $15 million in Fiscal Year 2018 funding.

For example, the regime has tried to impede the democratically elected National Assembly from pursuing its constitutional responsibilities to represent the will of the Venezuelan people, exercise oversight of the Executive branch, and carry out its Legislative agenda. USAID has offered technical expertise enabling the National Assembly to continue to serve the

[1] https://www.imf.org

Venezuelan people. Our assistance has been available to all members of democratic parties in the National Assembly.

I salute the bravery of the Venezuelans who have kept up the fight for democracy even when their cause seemed nearly impossible. Their efforts are coming to fruition. Moving forward, USAID will build on our long-term programs to support interim President Guaidó and the National Assembly as they restore democracy and prosperity in Venezuela.

**Crisis Response: USAID Humanitarian Assistance**

Given the dire conditions within the country, USAID's most immediate priority will be to get food and medicine to those who need it. USAID has always been ready and willing to help vulnerable Venezuelans. But as Maduro has tried to conceal the consequences of his mismanagement and corruption, the three million Venezuelans fleeing their country have told a different story. So, too, has Venezuela's Interim President, who has requested urgent humanitarian assistance from the United States. In response, Secretary of State Pompeo announced on January 24, 2019, that the United States is ready to provide more than $20 million in initial humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela.

The U.S. is coordinating with Interim President Guaidó and his team of experts, governments in the region, and our humanitarian partners on the logistics of deploying aid, to mobilize a response efficiently and safely. We are prepositioning relief items—including food, nutritional supplements, hygiene kits, and medical supplies—in Colombia so that they are available to reach Venezuelans in need, as soon as is safe and logistically possible.

The United States is already providing robust support for response efforts throughout the region as the growing impacts of Venezuela's crisis spill into neighboring countries. Since Fiscal Year 2017, the United States has provided approximately $140 million—including nearly $97 million in humanitarian assistance and approximately $43 million in development assistance—to support affected countries' emergency efforts and build their long-term capacity to host the more than three million people who have fled Venezuela. USAID deployed a

Disaster Assistance Response Team that is on the ground throughout the region conducting assessments, identifying priority needs, and coordinating the U.S. government's response efforts. Administrator Green and I met with some of the Venezuelans who fled their homeland when we visited Cucuta, Colombia, last July. I am proud of the work we have done to help them and the neighboring communities hosting them. However, while humanitarian assistance will help to alleviate the immediate needs of many Venezuelans, it will not—and cannot—address the root causes of Venezuela's instability, and it is not a long-term solution. Lasting political and economic reforms are the only sustainable solutions to the crisis.

**Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I thank you for your continued support and look forward to engaging with you further as the United States helps the people of Venezuela to return to peace and prosperity and see the open, transparent, citizen-responsive government that they deserve.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much, Mr. Olive.

Let me start the questioning, and let me ask Mr. Abrams: as I said in my opening statement, I am certainly willing to give credit where it is due in terms of elements of the administration's approach to Venezuela. But my biggest concern about the policy is what seems to me is clearly missing, and that is an effort to deal with the 3 million Venezuelans who have fled the country. The administration has pushed countries in the region to open their homes and hearts to Venezuelans, and I certainly support this effort. But how can we call on other countries to admit Venezuelans while continuing to close the doors of our own country to these same individuals?

So, my question is, will the Trump administration reassess its historically low refugee admission numbers, and will President Trump grant temporary protected status, or TPS, to the many Venezuelans here in the United States who should not be forced to return to Maduro's Venezuela? I would urge you to do so. I would like to hear what you have to say about it.

Mr. ABRAMS. I cannot speak about the broader refugee question. It is just not within my own remit. The question of Venezuelans, in particular, the doors are not closed, certainly, for those who have a reasonable fear of persecution and can apply for political asylum.

But, on the broader question, I think you are raising an important question, and it is one that I intend to discuss with the Secretary when he completes the current trip to Europe, the question of Venezuelans who are in the United States.

Chairman ENGEL. I hope we can continue to have dialog on it because I think it is really, really important. The situation, as you have said, with the refugees should really be paramount or at least upfront in terms of things that we are doing and things that we could do to help diffuse this crisis. So, I am going to pursue that, and I hope that we can get some more answers.

Let me ask you again, Mr. Abrams, and maybe Ms. Oudkirk can also comment: when it comes to the new sanctions on the Venezuelan oil sector, I certainly understand the need to squeeze Maduro, but I hope that the White House has thought through the potential impact that these sanctions could have on the Venezuelan people if Maduro, by some reason, manages to remain in power. So, has the administration assessed the humanitarian impact of these sanctions on the Venezuelan people if there is not a quick transition? Have you considered the impact on U.S. refineries and their employees which process Venezuelan oil? And can you please share those assessments with us?

Mr. ABRAMS. On the humanitarian impact, the money that the United States was paying to PDVSA was not going to the Venezuelan people. I mean, if it were, the kind of starvation, the kind of reappearance of communicable diseases would not be taking place. So, I do not think the sanctions alone are going to have that impact. But, in any event, we want to do a very big humanitarian surge with the many allies we have in this effort to help the Venezuelan people to make sure that their own situation is not worsened.

Chairman ENGEL. OK. I hope that we can continue to have further dialog on it.

Ms. Oudkirk, do you have a comment on that?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Yes, Mr. Chairman. On your question related to the impact on the United States, on refineries, we have been looking at that very closely and we are in very close contact with the 12 Gulf Coast refineries that imported the majority of Venezuelan crude oil that came into the United States. There are a number of license applications pending with OFAC that will provide some specific relief, and we at State are working, in concert with our Treasury colleagues, to process those as quickly as possible. And we are committed to remaining in contact with U.S. industry as the situation progresses.

Chairman ENGEL. All right. Thank you very much.

I would now like to call on Mr. McCaul, our ranking member.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Abrams, I think we really have an historic opportunity to transform what has been a socialist dictatorship that has been a humanitarian crisis into a democracy supported by freedom and the people, and at the same time, I think for the first time in decades, have an influence on Cuba and the Western Hemisphere. As I look at the Russians in Venezuela and Iran, the Chinese, that worries me about our backyard.

But I want to ask you this question: how important is it for the U.S. Congress to recognize the legitimacy of the Interim President Guaido?

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. McCaul, I think it would be very important. I mean, we have 51 countries, including the United States now, that recognize him as the interim legitimate President of Venezuela. I think it would be really valuable for the Congress to join that crowd.

Mr. MCCAUL. I will continue to work in that effort with the chairman.

Let me ask you about the military. I think the majority of the military supports the people and President Guaido. I think, unfortunately, the ones at the top, there is corruption; there is narcoterrorism, cartels. How do we get the military to move away from Maduro to support the people and President Guaido?

Mr. ABRAMS. This is the toughest question. And our answer thus far has been, first, to pressure them, sanctioning many members of the upper ranks. Second, to tell them continually that there are off-ramps if they decide to side with the people of Venezuela. Thus far, obviously, that has not happened except in a few isolated cases.

But we are hearing a lot of discontent in the military. I mean, for one thing, if you are a general and look down at the ranks, you know that your own people in the army are starving. And what about their brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers? So, we think that this opinion is spreading within the military that the current situation is untenable. We hope that there will be a decision on the part of many in the military, first, not to support the Maduro regime, but, second, not to block desperately needed humanitarian aid.

Mr. MCCAUL. I was impressed by your optimism about the situation, that eventually that will happen.

Mr. Olive, on the humanitarian aid issue, we saw the pictures of the roads being blocked off by Maduro, not allowing the humani-

tarian assistance from the Lima Group that agreed to send this down there. We just met with the President of Colombia, and he was talking about this very issue. How can we get that assistance into Venezuela to help these desperate people? And have you thought about possibly using not just the land borders, but the sea as well?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Ranking Member McCaul.

We are, indeed, looking for ways of distributing the assistance safely and effectively within the country. We are in daily communication with Interim President Guaido and his team on finding out those avenues to do so. We are also committed to prepositioning goods and supplies in other parts, if that is necessary. We also are looking at scenarios of flying things in, as the situation permits.

But, right now today, the Maduro regime is not allowing access. And we do hope that, through the diplomatic efforts we are making and the internal efforts by the Interim President Guaido d his team, we will change that scenario shortly.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, and I think as the people of Venezuela see what their, I would say, illegitimate President is doing and what the military is doing to block this humanitarian aid, that they will rise up even more so, and hopefully, return this country to a democracy. It could be such a great country with such great natural resources.

And so, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. McCaul. Mr. Sherman?

Mr. SHERMAN. Wherever Russia goes, people flee. We have 3 million Syrians who have left their country and nearly the same number of Venezuelans.

There is talk here of Venezuela being a socialist country. I would say that various governments in Scandinavia have adopted policies of democratic socialism, and I do not think there is anyone in this room that would call the Maduro regime democratic socialist.

We have got a situation where Russia expects to be repaid. Mr. Abrams, what steps are we considering to support an action by the Venezuelan people to say, "OK, we owe you so much minus the $2, $3, $10 trillion of harm you did to our country by supporting this criminal Maduro; therefore, you only owe us $1 trillion instead of $2 trillion."? Mr. Abrams, are we discussing with the Russians how we can make it plain that in the permanent future of the Venezuelan government that they do not have to pay Russia and that they will not suffer any demerits in their credit rating for Western agencies and Western banks?

Mr. ABRAMS. We have begun to have those discussions. Primarily, of course, it would be led by Treasury. But the interim government, the National Assembly, has said that they would repay debts. Some of those debts I think were never approved by the National Assembly. Ultimately, it is a decision with most of these that they are going to have to make.

Mr. SHERMAN. But have we put the Russians on notice that we would support, and require our banks to support, a decision by the Venezuelan government to offset that by trillions of dollars of claims against Russia, and that we would prohibit, we might

choose to prohibit our banks from looking at any credit rating that was impaired by failure to repay Russia?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not believe that exact message——

Mr. SHERMAN. I hope you will.

In this room we were told that Turkey is a great friend of the United States, and therefore, we should turn a blind eye to history and not recognize the Armenian genocide. Mr. Abrams, can you work inside the administration so that they have an understanding that Turkey is not a friend of ours here in our own hemisphere, and that, accordingly, the administration would announce that it would not object to this committee, once again, as it has in the past at the committee level, passing the Armenian genocide resolution?

Mr. ABRAMS. You are going to get me in trouble here with these questions.

Mr. SHERMAN. That is the job.

Mr. ABRAMS. That is the idea.

The role that Turkey is playing in Venezuela is to give all-out support to the Maduro regime. There are very few countries that are doing that. Turkey has decided to align itself with Russia/Cuba in taking that position. And I will certainly take your message back to the Department.

Mr. SHERMAN. Are you directly in contact with the Turkish government regarding their policies in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am not personally.

Mr. SHERMAN. I hope you would talk to those who are——

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Mr. SHERMAN [continuing]. And make it plain that the administration, if you just go neutral on this, Congress will be the conscience of this country.

And we also have Venezuela reportedly owe China $20 billion. I know that China's policy toward Maduro is different than that of Russia, but what is China doing now to help the legitimate government of Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. They are not doing anything to help Mr.——

Mr. SHERMAN. Are they providing any additional funds to Maduro?

Mr. ABRAMS. No. My information is that they will not lend any more money because they are worried about getting back what they have already lent. And the message that we have passed to them is, if you continue to back Maduro and the economy of Venezuela descends further, you will never get paid back.

Mr. SHERMAN. And I would point out that countries repay loans because they fear they will not be able to borrow more because of the credit ratings that come from basically New York, and that there may be times when we need to instruct credit-rating agencies and banks not to regard as a demerit a failure to repay a criminal loan.

I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our very distinguished witnesses, and it is great to see Elliott Abrams who has done a tremendous job for decades.

Let me just ask, first, on sex tourism, there are about 3 million people who have become refugees and an undetermined number

are IDPs. Many are along the border of Colombia. We know that the gangs very often turn these women into sex slaves. So, my question is, what are we doing to try to combat that? Venezuela has been a Tier 3 country for many, many years, including currently, an egregious violator, and that is even before the latest crisis.

Second, as was pointed out, Mr. Olive, 300,000 children are at risk of death from malnutrition. You underscore the resurgence of once eradicated diseases like diphtheria. I am wondering, have vaccinations ceased in Venezuela? I remember in the 1980's President Duarte in El Salvador had days of tranquility. And I have actually traveled down when—and Elliott will remember this very well—when Duarte and the FMLN had days of tranquility to vaccinate the kids because so many were dying from preventable diseases. Would days of tranquility be perhaps a way forward to get these kids vaccinated?

Let me also point out that the Foro Penal, the Venezuelan human rights group, said, between January 21st and 31st, the number of Venezuelan political prisoners jumped from 273 to 966. How many of those are being tortured? And why has not the U.N. been even more outspoken against this horrific mistreatment of these people, including young people, adolescents?

And finally, The Wall Street Journal reported that the government of Juan Guaido has held debt negotiations here in Washington with China. Are we a part of that? Are we encouraging it?

Not much time, but if you could answer those questions?

Mr. ABRAMS. Let me just begin on the trafficking of persons. We get no cooperation from the Maduro regime, of course. There are efforts—and Mr. Olive can talk about that—on the Colombian side of the border to offer not only food and medicine, but some protection as well.

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman.

And that is absolutely correct. On the border areas, especially in Colombia that is, our funding does help with that issue. It is a very large issue that we cannot control completely, but our programs do address that.

Mr. SMITH. Can you provide for the record some elaboration on that, and how well the TIP office is engaging on this as well?

Mr. OLIVE. I will defer to State for the TIP offices. But, for our programs that we are providing in Colombia, they include identifying vulnerable people who might be vulnerable for trafficking, working with youth on the issue, et cetera, as part of the programming.

Sir, in terms of vaccines, yes, it is true that inside Venezuela there are less and less medicines and vaccines available, and therefore, less children and other people being vaccinated. We have seen an increase, then, in these diseases, as a result. We are monitoring that carefully in Colombia, again, as part of our assistance. The Colombian medical system is very concerned about being overwhelmed and having these diseases to be on the increase in their country as well. And so, that is part of our assistance package, and eventually, the assistance package that goes into Venezuela will also include vaccines.

Mr. SMITH. Did you want to comment on the debt issue and whether or not the Chinese negotiations with the——

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not believe there are any negotiations, using that terms narrowly.

Mr. SMITH. OK. Talks?

Mr. ABRAMS. Discussions, sending of messages, have taken place. There have been some reports in the press, also, about additional talks that the Chinese have denied. And I have not had a chance to find out whether they have actually taken place.

Mr. SMITH. If you could speak to the use of torture? And is the Convention on Torture and the experts at the U.N. treaty body looking into this? Anybody know?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are many reports of use of torture in Venezuela, but they have not permitted the various U.N. Special Rapporteurs to come in for quite a while. So, that is one of the things we would like to see, for the regime to admit the Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Mr. OLIVE. Congressman, your committee and Congress has provided us with increasing assistance to Venezuela, and it includes defending victims of human rights and helping them on these issues.

Mr. SMITH. Again, on the trafficking issue, are there any estimates as to how many women and/or children have been trafficked?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not have those. I do not know of the TIP office has them. We will find out and come back to you.

Mr. SMITH. OK. I appreciate that. Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]

Chairman ENGEL. We are going to have to end the questioning. Thank you, Mr. Smith. Mr. Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Democracy is the key for me. And I have got a deep and long history with Venezuela. I do not like the fact that there is no democracy in Saudi Arabia. I do not like the fact that there is no democracy in North Korea. And I speak out about it and, then, some of these places, they do not have any elections. I do have confidence in the Venezuelan people.

I was back and have been involved in Venezuela when many were not here. I was part of a bipartisan delegation. It was Cass Ballenger from North Carolina, Bill Delahunt from Massachusetts, and myself who engaged with then-President Hugo Chavez. And I saw back then that individuals who were poor, who had never had anything from any other government, never any consideration, where I was on the ground to see that they, for the first time, were getting schools and hospitals, and getting their fair share under—and this President, Hugo Chavez, was elected in a free and fair election.

I have seen, because I was there; I witnessed several of these elections, when the United States—and this is why the United States cannot lead in this matter—I was there several times for elections and I watched people line up in a peaceful way and waited for hours to vote, and elected Hugo Chavez. I saw recall elections, and Hugo Chavez allowed the democratic process to continue, and he faced those recall elections and won, fair and square.

So, I, then, saw that there was an attempted coup in Venezuela in 2002. And as certain CIA evidence has now been revealed, we, the day after the coup, acknowledged the coup government. The people of Venezuela went back in the streets and demanded that their democratically elected President was restored.

So, the context and the reason why I say that is it is complicated and difficult for us in the United States to take the lead when, in fact, the Venezuelan people also know that we acknowledge not a democratically elected President, but we try to undermine them.

So, for me, democracy is important, and that is why I do, and I am worried about democracy when it has failed. And I have known Nicolas Maduro. We had this group called Grupo de Boston. And I have tried my best to try to bring both sides, opposition and at that time Chavistas together, and we had people working collectively.

I must admit, under the Nicolas Maduro, I have seen the situation continue to deteriorate, and people of Venezuela are suffering. And I have seen him avoid some democratic elections. I have seen the National Assembly get democratically elected. So, there is democracy in Venezuela. That is why I recognize the National Assembly, and the National Assembly speaks, for me, for the people of Venezuela, which is why our focus should be on having free and fair elections in Venezuela.

I am concerned about the conversations that the President is having with the threat of sending military into Venezuela. What our focus should be is to make sure that we are doing all that we can, supporting the Lima countries, the OAS, and the others, to have a free and fair election conducted, because the Venezuelan people believe in democracy. And that is why you see the National Assembly now where the opposition is.

And I am continuing to talk with members of the opposition, members of the National Assembly, and members of the military, et cetera, about working together, so that we can have a free and fair election, so that the voices, not of the United States, but of the people of Venezuela is clearly heard.

I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Meeks. Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

It is really sad to see one of the greatest countries of our hemisphere, Venezuela, which was one of the wealthiest countries of Latin America. I know that over the years our families had wonderful associations with Venezuelans that is just so reassuring. And I believe, too, in the people of Venezuela.

And that is why I am very grateful that the National Assembly has elected President Juan Guaido, and the recognition by 51 countries of his presidency, and this is on behalf of the people of Venezuela.

Additionally, I am very grateful for the United States Agency for International Development, Mr. Olive. People need to know how effective USAID has been around the world, helping persons in relief efforts, and, in particular, at this time, $97 million has already been provided; another $20 million from the State Department.

But, of course, it is very clear that the aid has been blocked by the Maduro regime.

And so, what efforts are being made to get around this blockage, Mr. Olive? And what can be done to help get more aid to the people of Venezuela?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman, for your question.

We are on a daily basis with calls with members of the interim government of Guaido's regime, of his presidency talking about ways we can get aid into the country. There are many scenarios being put forth. We are overturning every stone to see what is possible. There are diplomatic efforts that I am sure the Special Representative can also speak to. But, rest assured, daily we are trying to find a way to get this assistance to the people who need it most.

Mr. WILSON. And we are very fortunate, again, to have 51 countries recognize the Guaido presidency. What efforts are being made internationally, not just USAID, to help the people of Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. There is a very broad effort. You will have heard, at the Ottawa meeting about a week ago, Canada announced $53 million in additional aid. Each day, you find one or another country, mostly in Europe now, announcing another contribution to this effort. So, it is an increasingly international effort.

Mr. WILSON. And to reassure the people of Venezuela, what efforts are being made that it, indeed, gets to the people of Venezuela, as opposed to what has occurred in the past of where there has been looting?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman.

We share that same concern, that the delivery of assistance must be done safely. It must be done efficiently. And those provisions need to be in place for us to be effective in delivering assistance to the Venezuelan people.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would just add that I think that is true of all aid, including U.N. aid, and we have looked at that, too. That is, the regime has used aid—first of all, they have stolen a good deal of it, but they have also directed it to their political supporters. And we are trying to make sure that any path of aid that goes in is not diverted either for corruption or for political purposes.

Mr. WILSON. Well, it just makes a difference for the people, and it is just encouraging to see bipartisan support for this aid.

Ms. Oudkirk, it has been reported that the Maduro regime is either transferring or selling the assets of the people of Venezuela, which is their gold reserves. What is the latest on protecting the gold reserves for the people of Venezuela?

Ms. OUDKIRK. I am sorry, Mr. Congressman, I, unfortunately, do not work with gold reserves. I can take that question back, though.

Mr. WILSON. And additionally, with that, we have sanctions. I hope that, as you get back with me, that we identify who the possible purchasers are and who is facilitating this, so that sanctions can be in place.

And then, Mr. Abrams, again, thank you for your service for our country.

We know that there is drug trafficking, significant, out of the regime, the Maduro regime; human trafficking. What is being done? And also, terrorists, harboring of Hezbollah, FARC. And what is

being done to identify this and block efforts that would threaten American families?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, it is very difficult when you have a regime that is, in fact, very much in favor of doing that. ELN, a guerilla group from Colombia, is protected on their side of the border. There is a lot of drug trafficking that benefits the top officials of the regime.

What can we do? Well, one thing we can do is sanction those who are involved in this. In some cases, we can prosecute people involved in this, and try to assemble the information. Because the day will come when Venezuelans will take back control of their own government and their own country and they will be able to pursue this.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you. We look forward to a bright future for Venezuela. Thank you very much.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Chairman, for holding this meeting.

And thank you to the witnesses that are here today.

Ms. Oudkirk, can you talk to me a little bit about the oil sanctions? I know that, in light of reports that Juan Guaido plans to name a new board of directors for CITGO, the process will require the U.S. to legally recognize the new board members. Would a new board have access to U.S. bank accounts with proceeds from Venezuela's oil sales that are being blocked by the sanctions?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Thank you, Mr. Congressman.

So, as I noted in my remarks, the key to sanctions relief for PDVSA is the transfer of control of that company away from Maduro and his cronies and to a democratically elected representative of the Venezuelan people.

With regards to CITGO, CITGO operations in the United States are covered by a general license that Treasury issued on the day the sanctions were announced. So, CITGO's operations here in the U.S. are continuing under that license, and that license covers them for 6 months from the date of announcement. The ban is on remitting payments back to PDVSA as long as it is under the illegitimate control.

Mr. SIRES. What would a board do named by Guaido? What would that do if he names a new board?

Ms. OUDKIRK. For CITGO?

Mr. SIRES. Yes.

Ms. OUDKIRK. I will have to get back to you on the details of that. I do not have the answer for you right now. I am sorry.

Mr. SIRES. Mr. Abrams, do you?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we do not want any funds to go to the regime. So, that would not be permitted. But I think there are a lot of lawyers in Washington who are making a lot of money trying to figure out the answer to your question.

Mr. SIRES. Well, my daughter is lawyer. Let's not kill the lawyers.

[Laughter.]

Go ahead.

Well, you know, my thing is, if we are able to get this money in U.S. banks, and obviously, under the sanctions, could that money be used for humanitarian purposes in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. It can. All these funds, all Venezuelan government funds are, in our view, rightly available to the legitimate Interim President, Mr. Guaido, and the National Assembly. So, they can use those funds to purchase additional humanitarian assistance.

There are a lot of procedures to go through to get them actual control of it. And they have made it clear that they want to be extremely careful. They are going to be accused of misusing the funds. So, everything has to be totally transparent. But, in principle, yes.

Mr. SIRES. OK. And I know that Maduro is propped up by the Cubans in Venezuela. How many Cubans are really actually in Venezuela propping him up?

Mr. ABRAMS. To give you a round number, it is in the multiple thousands. It is not a few hundred. It is several thousand Cuban officials, including intelligence people.

Mr. SIRES. And getting back to the money, I know that he made an effort to move a billion dollars into Uruguay in gold. And Uruguay rejected it. Did you read that article?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are continuing efforts, and some of them, I am sorry to say, look as if they have been successful, in which a private jet comes in and gold is put on it, and off it goes. And then, the gold is sold, and the money goes to people in the regime.

Mr. SIRES. Now they are opening an account in Russia? That was the latest that I read. They moved the money into Russia?

Mr. ABRAMS. I have seen that information, too. Most Western banks, not just American banks, European banks, will not touch any of this. So, they need to go look for things like a Russian bank that will deal with it.

Mr. SIRES. But if we prevent the money from going into Venezuela, where are they getting this money to move to Russia? Can you speak to that?

Ms. OUDKIRK. So, I think the point of the sanctions is to do exactly what you just described, to keep the money in these blocked interest-bearing accounts in the United States, so that they do not flow back to Venezuela and are not, then, you know——

Mr. SIRES. Disappear?

Ms. OUDKIRK [continuing]. Disappeared. However, the sanctions were only announced a couple of weeks ago. So, money that had gone back before then is available to the illegitimate regime to be used for these purposes. So, the point is, from now going forward, keeping that money in the blocked accounts, so that it cannot be misused.

Mr. SIRES. OK. Thank you very much. My time is up.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much. Mr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the panel being here.

As we know, the Maduro disastrous economy has created a food insecurity. Only about 30 percent of the protein requirements are being met. There are cases of malaria and TB increasing. In a failed State, you see measles, diphtheria; sanitation goes down. So, it is a bad situation and it is going to get worse.

Yet, over the last 10 years, Maduro—and I am going to, in a spirit of bipartisanship, I am going to agree with my colleague, Gregory Meeks about Chavez in the beginning. Because there were some

rapid changes that did benefit the people in the lower tiers of the economy. However, that got absconded in his third and fourth term, and then, Maduro just lost it.

Maduro has taken over $11 billion from the Venezuelan people, and it is the most violent country on the planet today. And you think of all the things going around as far as murders per capita. And then, you look at who is supporting Maduro. It is Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, Bolivia, Turkey, certainly not cheerleaders of democracy or certainly America.

And then, I look at Cuba, and we have heard numbers over the course of the last few years that Maduro has Cuban security guards around him because he does not trust the Venezuelans. We have heard numbers up to 40,000 Cuban soldiers in Venezuela. Are they playing a role of surveillance and intimidation, in your experience, in the information you have, toward the Venezuelan people?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, and toward the Venezuela security forces, Mr. Yoho. I think you are exactly right, that they are the security guards directly around Maduro. And one of their really important roles is to spy on and surveil the security forces, the army, to make sure that everybody shows loyalty to Maduro. He does not trust his own people.

Mr. YOHO. You know, I am glad you brought that up, the surveillance. We just heard last week from a very reliable source that China, via ZTE, is offering their facial recognition to the Maduro government, so that they can control their people like China is doing. Russia wants that technology. They are going to do it. Iran wants that. And I think we are seeing things played out.

History is repeating itself with a failed State that creates a vacuum, that vacuum will be filled. And so, we have got a choice. We can allow Russia, China, Iran, Cuba, people that are anti-democracies, anti-American, fill that void. The people of Latin America, Venezuela in particular, will really suffer. Or we can get behind the legitimate Interim President, President Guaido. And with us and the 51 nations, as Mr. Wilson talked about, stand behind them because that is the right thing to do, and it is the right thing to do for the Venezuelan people.

Something came up in a question. Do the people of Venezuela have gun ownership rights or was that taken away by Chavez or Maduro?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not know the answer to that.

Mr. YOHO. OK.

Mr. ABRAMS. I will have to find out.

Mr. YOHO. But it is interesting that a socialist country that turns to a dictatorship does not have the means to protect themselves. Yet, the criminal gangs do and the narco-terrorists have those, and the military has those.

Mr. ABRAMS. We do know that the Maduro regime has distributed arms to its gangs.

Mr. YOHO. They have, and I think that, again, goes to just the breakdown of Maduro, because he knows he is not legitimate. And if we are going to honor legitimate elections, we know that President Guaido is the one that we need to follow.

Ms. Oudkirk, you were talking, the question came up about CITGO. If the legitimate President gets recognized around the

world, President Guaido, that money that CITGO is producing, if we were to remove the sanctions, or keep the sanctions on, that money can go into escrow, cannot it, so that we know it does not go to Maduro? And when things get sorted out, it will go back to the rightful owners, the Venezuelan people, right? We can do that, cannot we?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Yes, Mr. Congressman. The point of the license, the general license that was provided for CITGO operations, was to allow CITGO to continue to operate here in the United States, and for any funds that would have been remitted back to the PDVSA parent in Venezuela, to be held in a blocked interest-bearing account here for the future use of the democratically elected representatives of the——

Mr. YOHO. Thank you. I am out of time. And I appreciate your expertise. Thank you.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Abrams, you said that there is a coalition of 51 countries joining with us or that we are part of. How many of those countries have said that the use of military force is an option and should be on the table? How many of those other countries have stated that?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not know of any that have Stated it.

Mr. KEATING. I do not, either, and that is why I asked the question. So, we are the only ones that have Stated that, have their leaders say that?

Mr. ABRAMS. We are the only one probably in a position——

Mr. KEATING. Oh, no, that is not what I asked. I mean, the other thing is, Ambassador Bolton, just a couple of weeks ago, was seen holding a notepad and it captured "5,000 troops to Colombia". And the President, last weekend, is again stating that the use of U.S. military force is an option. And my concern is, if it were part of a coalition, we should be working in concert with that, not standing alone having an option like that on the table.

And I think that, as you look at our actions in that respect, I think, indeed, it can backfire on us. I think it plays right into Maduro's rhetoric about the U.S. involvement. And I think it is something that will not help the cause of that.

Has President Guaido, has he ever said anything or uttered anything about the use of U.S. military force as an option? Has he said that?

Mr. ABRAMS. He actually made a comment a few days ago relating to humanitarian——

Mr. KEATING. No, I mean military force, I am talking about.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. Related to getting humanitarian assistance in. But this is not the path, I think you can see, that the U.S. Government is pursuing.

Mr. KEATING. Then, why are we saying it, though? That is my question.

Mr. ABRAMS. Because we always say it in all——

Mr. KEATING. You know, Section 3 of the War Powers Resolution says the President should be consulting with us. I think we are doing so many things that could be helpful. We are working in concert with other countries. All those things are good. But the statement—I mean, I do not think it was a mistake perhaps that that

notebook phrase from Ambassador Bolton was captured. And why would he have that on his notebook? Why would that come out? And why would the President be saying this without working in concert with the other countries in the coalition or without having, first, a sincere dialog with Congress on this matter? Doesn't that make your job more difficult?

Mr. ABRAMS. It has not because we always take the position that all options are on the table.

Mr. KEATING. Well, perhaps that is not a good option right here. I believe strongly that we are hurting our cause and the cause of the Venezuelan people.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, in the work that we are doing—and we are doing it—on the diplomatic front and on the economic front, on the humanitarian front, with lots of other countries, this issue does not get in the way.

Mr. KEATING. Well, I think it plays right into the hands of the dictator that is our adversary right now. And I think it really undercuts the ability and our involvement with the Venezuelan people themselves. Because, ultimately, I think we all agree the resolution, if there is going to be any kind of significant, tangible resolution, will come at the hands of the Venezuelan people themselves to make that.

Mr. ABRAMS. I agree.

Mr. KEATING. Just a quick question then. Before we recognized President Guaido, were there actions taken to make sure our embassy personnel were secure before that was uttered? Was there actual policy discussion before that was uttered?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. This is a matter of the utmost significance to all of us, to the Secretary. We speak to the charge' in Caracas literally every day. I talked to him this morning again about the question of security. It is on the minds of everybody in the Department and it was then.

Mr. KEATING. I would suggest, too, as a final comment, that it is too late now, but, as we go forward, before the administration is talking about the use of military force in this situation, keeping that as an option, that they should have sincere discussions with this committee and with Congress, and then, make declarations like that.

I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Ms. Wagner.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing this hearing.

And thank you to our witnesses for their time and certainly for their service.

Mr. Abrams, in keeping with the prior questioning, I can say that, in the wake of Maduro's abortive attempt to expel U.S. diplomats, the United States is negotiating with the Venezuelan foreign ministry to establish a U.S. interest office, I have been told. Mr. Abrams, can you provide an update on these negotiations? And again, what security measures have been taken to keep our diplomats safe?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, on the security measures, I wouldn't want to go into that at an open hearing. But the security question is one, again, that is on our minds every day. We are not negotiating an

intersection. An intersection is used in a case where there is a government and we do not recognize that government. But in Venezuela there is a government we do recognize, which is——

Mrs. WAGNER. So, is there a U.S. interest office being stood up, or no?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, there is not.

Mrs. WAGNER. There is not? All right.

Mr. ABRAMS. There is not.

Mrs. WAGNER. I am amazed at the breadth of the international coalition now calling for change in Venezuela. Principles of sovereignty and non-interference have in the past limited some Latin American countries from speaking out against regional abuses, but Latin America is truly stepping up to the plate and taking a strong stance against our neighbor.

Mr. Abrams, what was the tipping point for Latin American States that have called for Maduro to step down and how is the U.S. working to unify this coalition of hemispheric States to stand against human rights abuses in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the tipping point has really been Maduro conduct, the conduct of the government. And when Venezuelans in the National Assembly came together behind Interim President Guaido, that I think was the moment when—and I agree with you, it is really quite——

Mrs. WAGNER. Remarkable.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. Remarkable to see so many countries of Latin America, and also in Europe, which is against their usual practice, you know——

Mrs. WAGNER. Correct.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. To come forward and recognize him.

We are in touch with really all of them constantly as we talk about now, for example, we had the Lima Group meeting; we had the meeting in Ottawa. We have tomorrow a humanitarian assistance meeting hosted by the OAS. So, there is a constant——

Mrs. WAGNER. To that point, Mr. Abrams—and I do not mean to interrupt—but, as a followup, I know that the Organization of American States has also been uncharacteristically critical of Maduro and refused to recognize Maduro's legitimacy last month. I understand that Venezuela is seeking to leave the OAS. But how can the Organization continue to support free and fair democracy in Venezuela? Can the OAS aid the United States and these other coalitions in enforcing sanctions on the Maduro regime?

Mr. ABRAMS. At some point, there may be a credentials fight in the OAS because, until there is, the Maduro regime is the recognized government, according to the OAS. And we have the same problem in New York at the U.N. as well. But, to the extent that the Organization can help, particularly on the humanitarian side, they are trying to do so.

Mrs. WAGNER. I know OAS last month refused to recognize Maduro's legitimacy. So, that is a good development.

Venezuela has longstanding ties with Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy and terrorist organization. Mr. Abrams, to what extent does the Maduro regime rely on proceeds from illicit activities supported by groups like Hezbollah and drug trafficking networks for its survival? What are we doing to address this? Thank you.

Mr. ABRAMS. The regime has made a great deal of money, and higher-ups in the regime have made a great deal of money, over the last decade, in particular, out of things like drug trafficking. It is very hard for us to address when the government in place, of course, is behind all of this and is profiting from it, and the people who ought to be engaged in law enforcement are, in fact, themselves making money from this.

So, what do we do? We sanction them. We cancel visas in some cases. We can try to go after them through criminal prosecutions in some cases, and we have. There are some people in jail in the United States, Venezuelans, for engagement in drug trafficking, people who are connected to the regime. But the real solution to this is to get a democratic government in place that will fight drug trafficking with us.

Mrs. WAGNER. I thank you.

My time has expired. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much. Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses.

We have all watched in horror as the Maduro regime has destroyed Venezuela's economy, starved its people, and engaged in widespread corruption and repression. We all want a better future for the people of Venezuela and want to end this manmade humanitarian crisis. And we all believe that the Venezuelan people have the right to pick their own leaders, a right Maduro has denied his people by refusing to hold free and fair elections.

However, we must be very careful, in my opinion. It is not the job of the United States to choose leaders in other countries. The United States has a long and not-all-together positive history of involvement in Latin America, which I believe you are all familiar with.

And each transition in Venezuela must be truly democratic and led by the people of Venezuela. The United States must work with the National Assembly and other governments in the region in a supporting role.

And I want to turn to my first series of questions because I am concerned by continuing comments from the Trump administration, noting that the use of military force is, as the President said, "an option". And so, for you, Mr. Abrams, my first question is, we have not, of course, the Congress of the United States has not declared war on Venezuela. Correct?

Mr. ABRAMS. Correct.

Mr. CICILLINE. Is there an existing statutory authorization that would allow for a military intervention in Venezuela? Yes or no?

Mr. ABRAMS. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. CICILLINE. Has Venezuela attacked the United States, its territories or possessions, or its Armed Forces?

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Mr. CICILLINE. Has the administration increased troop deployments to countries, including Colombia, neighboring Venezuela at any point in the last month?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not believe so.

Mr. CICILLINE. Are there currently any plans to, or discussions about, moving additional combat troops to Colombia or any other country that neighbors Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. CICILLINE. Is anyone at the White House, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, or any other agency, making plans for U.S. military engagement in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is a question I cannot answer. I know of no such planning, but——

Mr. CICILLINE. Well, consistent with the War Powers Act, I have introduced legislation that expressly prohibits the administration from taking military action in Venezuela without consulting Congress. Will you pledge that the Trump administration will not take any military action regarding Venezuela without consulting with Congress, in accordance with the War Powers Act?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not know that I can answer that question, Mr. Cicilline. A series of Presidents, you know, have taken a jaundice view, I might say, of the War Powers Act. So, I am really not in a position to speak——

Mr. CICILLINE. OK. Well, under our Constitution, as you know, only Congress can declare war, and we have neither declared war nor granted the administration the authority to send the Armed Forces into hostilities in Venezuela. In my view, it would be illegal under U.S. law, inappropriate, and reckless to attempt a military intervention. The United States must show leadership in our hemisphere and we must continue to provide aid to suffering Venezuelans.

But I want to just build on Mr. Keating's question, because you said, of the 51 countries in this coalition, we are the only one that has threatened the use of military force. And in response to a question from Mr. Keating, you said, because we are the only one capable of doing it. Surely, you are not suggesting the other 50 countries do not have the military capability to engage in a military action, if they so elected, do you?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, some do and some do not.

Mr. CICILLINE. So, some do? We are not the only ones that have that ability.

Mr. ABRAMS. We have not threatened military action in Venezuela.

Mr. CICILLINE. You said we are not the——

Mr. ABRAMS. I mean, all options are on the table.

Mr. CICILLINE. My question is, we are not the only one that has that capability? So, when you said that to Mr. Keating, that was not accurate?

Mr. ABRAMS. We are the only one with the kind of capability, obviously, that——

Mr. CICILLINE. OK, but others have military capability and have not made the same assertion of that being an option? Isn't that correct?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am actually not sure of the answer to that, of what other governments have said.

Mr. CICILLINE. OK. So, Mr. Abrams, what is particularly concerning to me is that, in light of the fact there is no legal authority to express the use of military force as an option, it is unclear to

me how the President or anyone in the administration can claim it is an option on the table, because it is not. And to the extent that we are suggesting that it is, we are misleading the international community or misleading the people in Venezuela. So, I urge you to take back the message to the administration that it is not authorized and not helpful.

And I would now like to turn to Mr. Olive to talk a little bit about the politicization of aid. Is it true that, historically, American humanitarian assistance has been offered on the basis of need alone?

Mr. OLIVE. Yes, correct.

Mr. CICILLINE. And would you say that, in order to provide life-saving assistance in war zones and dangerous areas, humanitarians need to be able to operate in a neutral and apolitical way?

Mr. OLIVE. Correct.

Mr. CICILLINE. And is it true that the United States, through USAID, is prepositioning humanitarian aid in the border of Venezuela?

Mr. OLIVE. Yes, we are.

Mr. CICILLINE. Do you have any concerns that tying humanitarian assistance to a particular political outcome could have unintended consequences or harm our ability to deliver assistance in Venezuela or to other countries? And what steps is the administration taking to ensure that aid does not become a flash-point?

Mr. OLIVE. Administrator Green has said we will always, as the U.S. Government, be ready to help those in need. There are people in need in our hemisphere right now as a result of this crisis, and we are preparing—we already are supporting them in these border areas. We are doing what we can to build the capacity in-country to receive and distribute aid securely and efficiently, and be able to monitor those distributions, and that is our focus.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. CICILLINE. I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Mr. Wright.

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all three of you for being here today. And, Mr. Abrams, I am very glad you are here. I agree with our ranking member that you are exactly the right person for the job.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you.

Mr. WRIGHT. I have always believed that it is ill-advised, if not self-defeating, to broadcast to ruthless dictators what the United States is willing or unwilling to do; that it is a mistake to tell someone like Maduro that we are willing to use a manual screwdriver, but never a power drill; and that, in fact, we should not remove any tools from the toolbox.

My question, Mr. Abrams, is, does the War Powers Act require that the President of the United States get permission from Congress to even speak about using military force?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not believe so.

Mr. WRIGHT. I did not think so. And is it not true that military action is always an option, unless Presidential action triggers the War Powers Act and the Congress says no?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think that is correct.

Mr. WRIGHT. That is what I thought. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. All right. Thank you. Mr. Bera.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am going to continue asking questions in the same line as my colleagues, Mr. Keating and Cicilline. And I do not want any of this to be construed as—you know, I think what the Chavez regime and the Maduro regime have done to Venezuela is an absolute disaster and the humanitarian crisis that they have created is a disaster, and we have to do everything to support the people of Venezuela. But our Framers, by their genius and design, created separation of powers, keeping the Nation's purse and sword separate.

Congress is empowered to declare war, provide for and regulate the Armed Forces. The President, as Commander-in-Chief, has the responsibility to direct the Armed Forces as they conduct the hostilities.

We have been talking a little bit about the War Powers Resolution. It is absolutely very clear it provides the President to introduce U.S. Armed Forces into situations of hostilities or imminent hostilities as exercised only pursuant to, one, a declaration of war; two, specific statutory authorization, or, three, a national emergency created by an attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its Armed Forces.

Mr. Abrams, my colleagues have already pressed you a little bit on the use of military force in Venezuela. I would like to ask you a yes-or-no question. Do you agree with the War Powers Resolution which States, quote, "The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situation where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces," until they "are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations."? Yes/no?

Mr. ABRAMS. I cannot give you a yes-or-no answer to that. I mean, this is a long debate, as you know better than I. Presidents, including the most recent President, President Obama, have used force in cases where there was a big debate about the War Powers Act. And Presidents sometimes have said, "I'm submitting a report, but I'm not sure that I'm obliged to do so." I just cannot get into that debate today. I am not prepared to do so.

Mr. BERA. Again, I think the War Powers Act is very clear in when the President is authorized to introduce U.S. forces.

Mr. Olive, I am going to shift to you. As I mentioned prior to the hearing, I also do publicly want to acknowledge the men and women that serve this country every day from our State Department, our diplomats, our aid and development folks. We are proud of them, and I think we cannot acknowledge their work and contribution and patriotism to our country enough.

Can you give me a quick assessment of how bad the humanitarian crisis in-country is at this juncture and how much worse it has gotten over the past few weeks?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you for your kind words to my colleagues. I will definitely take that message back to them.

Mr. BERA. Thank you.

Mr. OLIVE. The situation is deteriorating on a daily basis. The reports that we have gotten from inside the country are hospitals are drastically reducing their supplies and not able to have surgical equipment, vaccines, et cetera, available to even do routine types of surgeries, let alone more complicated ones.

We are very concerned about the power grid. There are numerous power outages throughout the country that, of course, affect then, hospitals and clinics, et cetera.

Food is available, but it is controlled by the regime and used as a tool. And that is something that is deteriorating the country as well. So, people are having trouble getting food. We are hearing of increasing amounts of malnutrition amongst infants in being able to get the nutrients that they need at those early stages of life.

So, yes, our reports are pretty steady that this is declining on a daily basis.

Mr. BERA. Well, thank you.

In my limited time, Mr. Abrams, given this deterioration and the circumstances on the ground, and given the unique situation where the Venezuelan military really does have a lot of power in terms of which direction things go, have you seen a shift in open sources that suggests the military is now moving away from Maduro or support for Maduro is changing?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think we have seen some indications of that. It is probably a subject better discussed in closed hearing.

Mr. BERA. Great. Thank you.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. BERA. And I will yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Mr. Reschenthaler.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to everybody who came in today to testify.

Mr. Abrams, as a veteran of the Iraq War, I just want to thank you for everything that you did in service of the country.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you.

Over the past several months, we have witnessed the brave people of Venezuela rise up against the despot and dictator Nicolas Maduro. Since Maduro's rise to power in 2013, Venezuela has been plagued with poverty, death, and misery. The regime's authoritarian role and socialist policies have led to over 3 million Venezuelans fleeing the country, 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line, and 300,000 children at risk of starvation. It is one of the most violent countries in the world, rampant with murder. And hyperinflation is expected to reach 10 million percent by the end of 2019. Venezuela is in the midst of an extreme humanitarian crisis that must be addressed immediately.

Mr. Abrams, how have the socialist economic policies of the Maduro regime led to Venezuela's collapse?

Mr. ABRAMS. I would say it was a combination of mismanagement, corruption, and policy. For example, what has happened with PDVSA? Instead of treating it as a private company, what they have done is basically looted it and put all sorts of regime supporters in there. There is no State of law in Venezuela, So that private property, in a sense, really does not exist. If the regime does

not want you to have private property, they will just take it away from you. So, it has been a disastrous downward spiral.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. What are the core functions of the Maduro relationship with Cuba, Russia, and China?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think in the case of China and Russia, they have gotten a lot of money. That is enormous loans, tens of billions of dollars. Cuba is different. Obviously, they do not have any money to give. What they give is people, largely intelligence and military people, to surround this regime and act as a kind of loyalist corps. As Venezuelans become more and more disillusioned with this regime, Maduro surrounds himself with Cubans who he trusts more than his own people.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Do you see a situation arising where the United States would become involved militarily in Venezuela? And if you do see that, how do you foresee that scenario playing out?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not see it. I do not see it. And one of the things that is sort of notable about the discussion about the use of force is that that is not the policy of the United States. The policy is to pursue humanitarian, economic, diplomatic paths forward to try to support the Venezuelan people's desire for democracy. When we say all options are on the table, that is because all options are always on the table. That is not the preferred route and that is not the route we are going down.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you, Mr. Abrams.

Mr. Olive, what is the best way for the U.S. to support Venezuela's democratic opposition? Is the United States ready to assist the organization with free and fair elections?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman, for your question.

And absolutely. Your body has provided now $15 million in Fiscal Year 2018, and a portion of that can go to ensure that an electoral process is fair and transparent. And we will work alongside our State colleagues on whatever assistance may be needed, but it will have to be requested, and, as the Special Representative said, Venezuelan-led.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. If we do have a future democratic government in Venezuela, are we ready to engage in assisting the new free nation, such as nation-building?

Mr. OLIVE. We are looking at different scenarios. Again, it has got to be Venezuelan-led. They will determine their priorities. They are part of our hemisphere. We stand ready to assist. But the most important thing is to get the government and the power back in the hands of the Venezuelan people.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you, Mr. Olive.

And I yield back the remainder of my time.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Mr. Castro.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairman.

I have in the past supported sanctions against the Maduro regime because, as Mr. Meeks mentioned, I do believe in many ways that Mr. Maduro has oppressed his people. At the same time, I believe that the role of the United States is to promote democracy, freedom, and human rights around the world. The role of the United States is not to handpick the next leader of Venezuela.

Mr. Abrams, I have a question for you. My question is whether you are aware of any transfers of weapons or defense equipment

by the U.S. Government to groups in Venezuela opposed to Nicolas Maduro since you were appointed Special Representative for Venezuela.

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Mr. CASTRO. And I want to be respectful of you, but also honest. The reason that I ask that question, there has been a McClatchy news report of such an incident. Are you aware of that news report?

Mr. ABRAMS. Saw the report, yes.

Mr. CASTRO. I ask this question because you have a record of such actions. In Nicaragua, you were involved in the effort to overtly provide lethal aid to the Contras against the will of Congress. You ultimately pled guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress in regard to your testimony during the Iran-Contra scandal. So, I ask you the question, can we trust your testimony today?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, you can make that decision for yourself, Mr. Castro. I can tell you that the answer to your question is no. It is a simple and unequivocal no. There has been no such transfer of arms.

Mr. CASTRO. I also want to ask you—I mentioned the promotion of democracy and the fact that the Venezuelan people have to pick their own leader—what is the administration's strategy for encouraging elections as soon as possible in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, that is the heart really of administration policy. That is, after the Maduro regime, a short transition to an election, and that is the view of all of the 51 nations that are supporting Mr. Guaido.

I completely agree with the way you started. It is not for us to choose the next President of Venezuela. It is for Venezuelans. We can help, as a lot of other countries can help, in facilitating a free election, because, as you know, there is a lot of experience, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, Freedom House. And equivalents in other countries are really quite good at giving assistance.

Mr. CASTRO. Also, I know that you have spoken about the fact or you mentioned that all options are on the table. And in a private setting, we had a conversation about that, which I will not get into. But I want to reiterate one point and one of the reasons that I disagree with that approach. The reason that I disagree with the statement and the approach is because I believe that it gives license to countries like China and Russia to, then, further engage with Venezuela and do it in the name of protecting Venezuela sovereignty by drumming up the idea that the United States is going to invade the Nation of Venezuela. I strategically think that it was a bad statement.

With that, I yield back.

[Applause.]

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

The Chair will remind all persons in the audience that any manifestation of approval or disapproval of proceedings is in violation of the rules of the House and its committees.

Mr. BURCHETT.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I guess the good thing, or the bad thing about being a freshman is all the good questions already get asked, but I still have a couple that have not been asked.

I think it has been established that Cu ta, the Cu tan regime is in line with Maduro. How would you recommend that we could separate that?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not think that lectures to the Cu tans are going to have much impact. I think, in fact, that is going to happen when there is a freely elected democratic government, and Venezuela will just send them home.

Mr. BURCHETT. I agree with you. Thank you.

Could you all followup just a little bit more detail on the Russian influence in Venezuela and what you would recommend that the United States would do to limit that influence? We talk a lot about sanctions and all that, but, I mean, honestly, that is sort of like my momma saying, "I'm going to tell your dad," and then, dad would say, "I'm going to tell your momma." And then, you know, kids, they shriek in horror, but, in reality, they just go off and giggle a little bit.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, there have been some conversations with the Russians, and I am sure there will be more, but I cannot say they have done any good thus far. Again, it is partly a matter of just seeing Venezuela move to a freely elected democratic government, which can then make independent decisions about the relationships it wants to have.

For example, when sanctions come off, they will not need to turn to Russia to say, "How do we deal with these sanctions?", through Rosneft or through Russian banks or anything like that. The Russians I think, at this point are not putting any more money into Venezuela because they are worried about getting paid back the money they have already put in. And once there is a freely elected government that can deal, again, with the World Bank and the IMF, and a broad international program and support, I think the Russian role will diminish very quickly.

Ms. OUDKIRK. And, Mr. Congressman, if I can add onto that, if we look at Russian involvement in the hydrocarbon sector, one of the reasons why this administration made a decision to license the continuing involvement of U.S. companies——

Mr. BURCHETT. Right. Can I ask you a question? I already know what hydrocarbons means, but Mr. Pence does not. Could you explain that to him?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Oil and gas.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Thank you.

Ms. OUDKIRK. And so, one of the reasons why we licensed the continued involvement of U.S. companies in upstream oil production in Venezuela was because the oil and gas sector is the key pillar of the Venezuelan economy, and it will be going forward. And keeping the U.S. corporate presence there, with their best practices, with their adherence to all the sorts of practices that we expect here in the United States, is, we believe, one of the best ways to ensure that in the future Venezuela is able to return to prosperity and sort of an economy that functions normally.

Mr. BURCHETT. Where we have seen that they have nationalized these industries, we have seen the prices, in fact, spiral upwards, is that correct? Not artificially, but legitimately?

Ms. OUDKIRK. It depends really, but I think what we are focused on here, we are looking at an oil sector that is in profound crisis, and the general economic crisis in Venezuela exacerbates that. The trained staff are voting with their feet. They are going to other countries. Key equipment is being stripped of copper wire, so electricity cannot be transmitted. So, it is all knitted together, but we do believe that Western involvement in the upstream oil sector will leave us positioned to have both the U.S. private sector and the U.S. Government assist with eventual economic recovery. And we are a counterweight to the Russian and the Chinese investment, which is otherwise very prevalent in that industry.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield the remainder of my time.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Ms. TITUS.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

President Trump seems averse to international cooperation and multilateral agreements. He seems to prefer go-it-alone, shoot-from-the-hip, mano-a-mano type of diplomacy, such as it exists. But some of us believe that, if we are going to be successful in helping Venezuela survive and recover through political means, not military means, and through humanitarian assistance, we are going to need to work with the Lima Group and with OAS. So, I would ask you, Mr. Abrams, do not you think that your role on the National Security Council in the George W. Bush Administration during the 2002 Carmona coup in Venezuela hurts your credibility with Latin American countries and makes it difficult, if not impossible, for you to serve now as a Special Representative of Venezuela, to foster these kind of agreements?

[Applause.]

Chairman ENGEL. Excuse me. The gentlewoman will suspend.

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Chairman ENGEL. The Chair will remind all persons in the audience that any manifestation of approval or disapproval of the proceedings is in violation of the rules of the House and its committees. So, I please ask the audience to cooperate or else we will have to have people removed, which I would not like to do.

Go ahead and respond.

Mr. ABRAMS. My answer is no.

Ms. TITUS. And you do not think that your appointment sends the wrong message to our allies in Latin America?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I have been in contact with an awful lot of them. I have talked to a lot of people on the phone in the last couple of weeks. I have met with a bunch of foreign ministers in the last couple of weeks. These have been very good meetings and we are all cooperating because we all want the same thing in Venezuela, which is democracy.

Ms. TITUS. Well, I hope so, too, but I think your "no" puts you in the minority.

I will go from there to a broader question. What happens if Maduro is ousted? Will he, then, go to Russia or to Cuba, or will

we have a truth commission? Will he be imprisoned? What about these corrupt oligarchs we have heard about? What about the heads of the military? And what is going to be the U.S.'s position at that point? Would some of you comment on that?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I would say, first, these are, for the most part, Venezuelan decisions. They are decisions that a new democratic government is going to have to make. The decision on where Maduro goes is for Maduro. Does he want to go to Cuba or Russia or someplace else?

But, you know, there have been a lot of democratic transitions in the world, happily, in the last few decades. Each one is a different case. They have to make these decisions internally about how much do they want to do in prosecuting people. Do they want to have amnesties? And, you know, the National Assembly has already passed an amnesty bill. These are not our decisions. We are not Venezuelans.

Ms. TITUS. I appreciate that, but we often hear about some subversive activity that encourages one kind of approach or another. And I suspect that would be the case again, too.

Comment about what we do after the fact, once Maduro goes?

Mr. OLIVE. Yes. From the development standpoint, we are prepared to help the new government in its priorities of rebuilding the country. USAID's assistance is very public. We will use our normal mechanisms that we have done in other countries, and we will be transparent and happy to share any information that we have, when we reach that day where we are having plans and we have responded to a request from the government.

Ms. TITUS. We have heard a lot about the security folks from Cuba. What about the teachers and the doctors that came from Cuba to Venezuela? Will we be able to work with them after the fact?

Mr. ABRAMS. My guess would be that many of them will be withdrawn. They are sent there, in large part, as a political message of solidarity with Maduro. So, after Maduro—again, that is a decision for the Venezuelans to make, not for us.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Ms. Titus. Mr. Pence.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To all the witnesses today, thank you for your time.

As a Marine, I am proud when America plays a leadership role with our allies and partners in support of democratic principles and the rights of free people in Venezuela and around the world. As Americans, there is no higher calling in our diplomatic endeavors than to stand with free people against tyranny.

I want to focus on how United States leadership has help build a coalition of support for the Venezuelan people. Over 40 countries have now recognized Juan Guaido as the Interim President of Venezuela, a number that has effectively doubled in recent weeks. I am proud that the United States was among the first to stand alongside Interim President Guaido d the Venezuelan people.

I also believe that it is important to provide support to Venezuela's neighbors like Colombia, who are generously hosting millions of Venezuelans fleeing the country and the crisis.

Mr. Olive and Mr. Abrams, Mr. Abrams, you Stated more than 3 million Venezuelans, more than 10 percent of Venezuela's population has been forced to flee their country to survive. You also mentioned today in your testimony, and I quote, "Maduro cannot weather much longer." My question is, how concerned are you about the effects of this on neighboring countries and what are the implications of this on the larger region?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I can begin the answer. There is a steady outflow. That 3 million, or it may even be 3.6 million, grows every day. And if the regime stays in power throughout this year, it can reach 5 million. So, we will be hearing a lot more from Brazil and Peru, and especially Colombia, about the need for help in dealing with continuing massive outflows of Venezuelans. This will stop only if there is a democratic turn in Venezuela and a beginning of economic recovery.

Mr. OLIVE. Congressman Pence, thank you for your question.

We have been in constant contact, especially with the Colombian government, on these issues and it is supportive of them. Administrator Green is meeting with President Duque tomorrow to have this very conversation. One part of it will be how can we continue to assist Colombians todeal with the amount of Venezuelans migrating into Colombia at this time. We are concerned about it and are prepared to go shoulder to shoulder with Colombians.

Mr. PENCE. Is there any concern that the blockade is going to attract even more people faster with the humanitarian supplies sitting across the border?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it is a concern, and it is one of the reasons why we all want to get the aid in. Venezuelans need it very, very badly.

Mr. OLIVE. When Administrator Green and I were there in July, it was clear that they were saying, and we saw it firsthand, that 90 percent of the Venezuelans that were coming into Colombia to get support were going back into Venezuela. So, they were just coming in to be able to get the vaccines or health care or food or generate some income to be able to go back into the country. And we expect that to continue until when we are allowed to bring in our humanitarian assistance into the country in a safe and efficient manner, in a manner that we can monitor where it goes and make sure that it gets to the people who are in need of it most.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you. I just want to say I am proud that President Trump and Secretary Pompeo continue to speak with clarity and provide the leadership our values require on the situation in Venezuela.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. ESPAILLAT.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think that we can say today that probably all, if not most, of the members of this committee are really concerned with the violence in Venezuela, the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela affecting thousands of families that has led to an unprecedented migration of Venezuelans throughout the region. And, of course, the presence of Hezbollah there as well. I, myself, have cosponsored legislation to address that particular problem.

But, Mr. Abrams, many of our allies have expressed concern of your appointment to deal with this problem. Some have characterized it as being perhaps like appointing Exxon to lead a discussion on the Green New Deal or maybe even appointing MBS to lead a discussion on fairness in journalism and accessibility to journalism.

Do you feel that your past actions in Iran-Contra have permanently impaired your ability to fairly and transparently deal in the region, since we all know the outcome of what happened then? Do you feel that that is a major problem, baggage that you bring to the table?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not, and now I have been doing this job for two whole weeks. And I can tell you that Members of Congress have raised it. No Latin American of any nationality with whom I have dealt has raised it. And we have had lots and lots of discussions about how we are going to promote democracy in Venezuela.

I guess I should say, since I have been attacked now three times, in my own defense, if you look at the Reagan record of 8 years, when we came in, there were military dictatorships all over Latin America.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Mr. Abrams, that is not an attack. That is a fact of history.

Mr. ABRAMS. And when we left in country after country after country there had been transitions that we supported. Chile is a very good example. So, I think it is actually a record of promoting democracy, and I think a lot of Latin Americans know the——

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Respectfully, I differ with you. I think it is a fact of history. We should not dig our heads in the sand and make believe that this never happened because it did. And you were at the helm of that and you——

Mr. ABRAMS. I was at the helm of promoting democracy in Latin America.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Well, you may want to characterize it that way, but I do not. I think you were involved in the Iran-Contra deal, and I think that permanently damages you to be a fair and impartial arbiter in a conflict that is leading to a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented levels in Venezuela.

So, I want to get to my next question, which is, do you believe that there could be a peaceful, diplomatic solution to this crisis? And if so, has our Nation engaged the Vatican, the United Nation, Mexico, and Uruguay in their efforts to resolve this peacefully without any bloodshed?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we have had discussions with the Vatican, with the U.N. I spoke to the Secretary General actually yesterday morning. Mexico and Uruguay are somewhat different because they have a different approach, which is the kind of dialog with Maduro that has been tried and failed in past years, tried by the Venezuelans who are pushing for democracy in their own country.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And the opposition has in some instances asked to be armed. Do you feel that that is a viable for protecting themselves or do you feel that arming the opposition will lead to a civil war?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it is a terrible idea. I think that the question of security for the opposition—well, it is not really the opposition. It is now, in our view, the legitimate government of Venezuela

and the National Assembly. Security for them, security for individuals like Interim President Guaido is a real issue, but the solution to it is replacing this government with the interim government, and then, allowing the people of Venezuela to choose their government.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Finally, do you feel that there are currently any individuals in the armed forces or in government that are applicable to receive Magnitsky Act levels of sanctions and options?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, I think there are.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. And are you willing to share those——

Mr. ABRAMS. Not in a public hearing. I think we need to go over the names again. But, certainly, some of the people rise to that level of human rights violations.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Mr. Chairman, let me just, again, reiterate my concern for a potential human crisis emerging in the region, potential civil war, famine, if we do not go the diplomatic way and abandon our old, bad ways of Iran-Contra.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. GUEST.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Abrams, in your written testimony you talk about that Cuba has provided direct support for Maduro repressive tactics, including the recent deployment of its most feared units, the Black Wasp. Can you kind of expand upon this military unit and what they are doing in the country of Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. We have seen Maduro reinforcing his Cuban guard corps. Again, it is a lack of confidence in his own people or it is a knowledge that his own people want him gone. So, there were Cubans. There are Cubans surrounding him. That is the palace guard. This special forces unit has now come in. This is in the last few weeks. And I think it is really quite striking that he does not trust the Venezuelan people or the Venezuelan armed forces.

Mr. GUEST. And so, the Cubans have sent special forces units into Venezuela to prop up this regime?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is correct.

Mr. GUEST. And then, since January the 23d, we have seen a host of nations join us in our ability to affect change in the Nation of Venezuela. Actually, one of the nations that has yet to take a position one way or the other—and you touched on it very briefly a moment ago—was Mexico. And again, can you kind of talk about why they have failed to take a position one way or another on this particular important matter?

Mr. ABRAMS. They are quite isolated in Latin America, you are right, when you look at the other larger democracies. I think I would say it is just the ideology. It is an old view on the part of their President that this is all about American interventionism. And when we say, well, it isn't; you have got 51 countries, including most of the major democracies in Latin America, plus Canada, saying this, this isn't about the United States and Venezuela. We have not been able to persuade them, at least to this point.

Mr. GUEST. And you also talk about in your written testimony that Maduro and his cronies are conspiring to prevent lifesaving assistance from reaching the people of Venezuela. Can you expand on that just briefly as well?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. Well, perhaps Mr. Olive could do so as well. But what we are seeing visibly in the blocking of that bridge is a policy on the part of the Maduro regime. And Maduro himself has said, "We do not need humanitarian assistance." He is completely blind to the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

Mr. GUEST. And you also talked about in your written testimony that they have also canceled gasoline shipments, so that you would be unable to transport humanitarian aid. Is that correct?

Mr. ABRAMS. Do you want to comment on that? I have not seen that exact report.

Mr. OLIVE. We have not seen it as a major concern now. If we have full access to being able to get things into the country, we will overcome that, whatever fuel shortages there may be.

Mr. GUEST. And so, we currently have, for lack of a better term, a dictator who is refusing humanitarian aid and a country of great crisis, and has also aligned himself with the Cuban government, to the point that there are Cuban special forces currently in Venezuela at this time. Is that correct?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is correct.

Mr. GUEST. I would yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Ms. OMAR.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you all for being here and thank you for your testimoneys.

Mr. Abrams, in 1991, you pleaded guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress regarding your involvement in the Iran-Contra affair, for which you were later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush. I fail to understand why members of this committee or the American people should find any testimony that you give today to be truthful.

Mr. ABRAMS. If I could respond to that——

Ms. OMAR. It was not a question.

Mr. ABRAMS. I——

Ms. OMAR. That was not, that was not a question.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would——

Ms. OMAR. I reserve the right to my time.

Mr. ABRAMS. It is not right——

Ms. OMAR. That was not a question.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. That members of this committee can attack a witness who is not permitted——

Ms. OMAR. On February 8th——

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. To reply.

Ms. OMAR. That was not a question. Thank you for your participation.

On February 8th, 1982, you testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about U.S. policy in El Salvador. In that hearing, you dismissed as communist propaganda report about the massacre of El Mozote in which more than 800 civilians, including children as young as 2 years old, were brutally murdered by U.S.-trained troops. During that massacre, some of those troops bragged about raping a 12-year-old girl before they killed them, girls before they killed them. You later said that the U.S. policy in El Salvador was a "fabulous achievement". Yes or no, do you still think so?

Mr. ABRAMS. From the day that President Duarte was elected in a free election to this day, El Salvador has been a democracy. That is a fabulous achievement.

Ms. OMAR. Yes or no, do you think that massacre was a "fabulous achievement" that happened under our watch?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is a ridiculous question, and I——

Ms. OMAR. Yes or no?

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Ms. OMAR. I will——

Mr. ABRAMS. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. OMAR [continuing]. Take that as a yes.

Mr. ABRAMS. I am not going to respond to that kind of personal attack, which is not a question.

Ms. OMAR. Yes or no, would you support an armed faction within Venezuela that engages in war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide, if you believed they were serving U.S. interest, as you did in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am not going to respond to that question. I am sorry. I do not think this entire line of questioning is meant to be real questions. And so, I will not reply.

Ms. OMAR. Whether under your watch a genocide will take place and you will look the other way because American interests were being upheld is a fair question, because the American people want to know that anytime we engage a country that we think about what our actions could be and how we believe our values are being furthered. That is my question. Will you make sure that human rights are not violated and that we uphold international and human rights?

Mr. ABRAMS. I suppose there is a question in there, and the answer is that the entire thrust of American policy in Venezuela is to support the Venezuelan people's effort to restore democracy to their country. That is our policy.

Ms. OMAR. I do not think anybody disputes that. The question I had for you is that, does the interest of the United States include protecting human rights and include protecting people against genocide?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is always the position of the United States.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you. I yield back my time.

Chairman ENGEL. Mr. Watkins.

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My questions are for Mr. Abrams. Sir, it is well known that members of Maduro regime have ties to drug trafficking. Now we are hearing allegations of ties with terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah and FARC. Can you walk me through the nature of those ties and what kind of concern that poses to the U.S. security?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, some of this I guess we should do in a closed hearing. But the group that stands out most is the ELN, the Colombian terrorist group that is harbored in Venezuela. They have not just escaped into Venezuela. I mean, that is government policy on the part of the Maduro regime. They also have, obviously, extremely close ties to Cuba. There is a Hezbollah presence all over Latin America, and I believe they are engaged in fundraising in Venezuela, and the regime does nothing to prevent that. So, these

are security concerns that are going to exist as along as this group is in power.

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you.

Is there concerns about the safety and security of U.S. diplomats and contractors, and do you know of any steps being taken to assure that they are safe?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, there are a lot of Americans in Venezuela. The number of official Americans is small, but there are a lot of American citizens who live there. Unfortunately, we have very limited ability to protect them. We do supply some consular services. Every couple of days, we may give out an emergency passport to an American. But the staff size is limited and our ability to protect people is limited. And so, we rely on the regime, actually, which controls the guns to make sure that no harm comes to Americans. And we have made it clear that that is their responsibility under international law.

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you, Mr. Abrams.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much.

Mr. LEVIN.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to the witnesses for coming today.

First, I would like to followup on the chairman's questions about temporary protected status, where we began. Mr. Abrams, do you think it is fair to call the humanitarian situation in Venezuela dire, given the Venezuelan people's need for basics like nutritious food and medical supplies?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Mr. LEVIN. I understand, as you mentioned to him, that you are discussing designating Venezuela for TPS with others in the administration, given that dire situation. While you were Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs a generation ago, we might say——

Mr. ABRAMS. A generation or two.

Mr. LEVIN [continuing]. You testified at a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee that concerned TPS for Salvadorans. At that hearing, you testified, and I quote, "Some groups argue that illegal aliens who are sent back to El Salvador there meet persecution and often death. Obviously, we do not believe these claims, or we would not deport these people." End quote. Is that correct?

Mr. ABRAMS. I take your word for it. You know, it has been a while.

Mr. LEVIN. Yes, I understand. That was at a hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law of the committee, on a bill numbered H.R. 4477, Temporary Suspension of Deportation of Certain Aliens., on April 12th, 1984.

And is it correct that, when you testified at that hearing in 1984, death squads controlled by the Salvadoran government, which had the backing of the United States, were committing horrific acts of violence against the Salvadoran people? I do not have a lot of time. Were they or were they not, sir?

Mr. ABRAMS. The death squads were certainly active, although I cannot remember the exact years, but the amount of death squad

activity came down under President Duarte and under American pressure.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, just to remind you, as The Atlantic pointed out, more than 75,000 Salvadorans were killed in the fighting, most of them—most of them—victims of the military and its death squads, more than 75,000. "Peasants were shot en masse, often while trying to flee. Students and union leaders had their thumbs tied behind their backs before being shot in the head, their bodies left on roadsides as a warning to others."

I would just ask, sir, you, of all people, to use your offices to try to help promote TPS for Venezuelans in need.

Mr. Olive, let me ask you a question. I am the son of an official of USAID. So, I also appreciate the work of you and your colleagues there.

It is my understanding that sanctions on the Venezuelan State-owned oil company that the Trump administration imposed last month are meant to cutoff Maduro's cashflow and force his exit. What I want to know is, what is the administration's plan if this approach does not work? The Wall Street Journal reported last month, quote, "If the standoff endures, the U.S. move could prove devastating for Venezuela's economy which relies on oil exports for 95 percent of its hard currency income." End quote. Which obviously isn't a great thing.

But my question to you is, what does the Trump administration plan to do if these new sanctions squeeze the Venezuelan economy, but Maduro remains? Have you examined what will happen to the Venezuelan people?

Mr. OLIVE. First, Congressman, thank you for your kind words to my colleagues. I will take that back to them. Thank you.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you.

Mr. OLIVE. Most of this, I would defer to the State Department. But, from a humanitarian assistance point of view, we do see many of these resources that were coming into the Maduro regime were not getting to the people, and the ones that were were used as a tool, such as their CLAP program, et cetera. We do expect the situation to get worse, and that is why we are prepositioning goods right now on the border, ready to go into Venezuela. And we are prepared to do much more when we have access where we can securely and efficiently monitor its distribution, and that is what we are prepared to do.

For the remainder of your question, I will defer to the State Department.

Mr. ABRAMS. No, I agree with that.

Mr. LEVIN. All right. Well, we are very concerned about deepening the crisis that we are trying to prevent.

Let me, finally, Mr. Chairman, just end by I noted, and I really appreciate the bipartisanship here, a number of our friends on the other side of the aisle have called Venezuela "the most violent country in the world" and "the most dangerous country in the world," things like this. I do not understand that, if you look at Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Yemen, and South Sudan. I just hope that we stick to the facts here. The situation is bad enough as it is.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SIRES [presiding]. Thank you.

We now recognize Steve Chabot from Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Olive, what is the State of press freedoms in Venezuela, and how are we countering the regime's propaganda and ensuring that Venezuelans are aware of the support that the U.S. and the international community are providing?

Mr. OLIVE. Thank you, Congressman, for your question.

We are providing supporting for independent media. We are now up to, with the approval of the congressional notification that has now expired, and we can now use our 2018 funding. We have spent about approximately $40 million, or that are available for—one of the areas is independent media.

The groups that we are working with, Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, NDI, and others, are working to preserve an independent media within the country.

They are very challenged. They have been threatened, and some have been arrested, et cetera. Some of their operations have been disruptive.

Administrator Green, on two occasions, one in Washington in December, one in July in Miami, met with Venezuelan diasporas who raised this issue. And he said, we are a lifeline to many of those independent journalists and media, and we will do everything we can to remain so.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

And my final question would be for Mr. Abrams as well as Ms. Oudkirk. What role do energy and oil continue to play in the Maduro regime's ability to maintain the loyalty of countries in the region? And, Mr. Abrams, I will begin with you.

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it is very important. I mean, the only real asset that they have got is money that comes from oil sales and the oil itself. We have seen that most in the Caribbean, where they have been involved in an awful lot of activities that have produced a political result. And you can see that, actually, in some of the OAS votes, where, unfortunately, some democracies in the Caribbean have not joined this group of 51 countries around the world in supporting Interim President .

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

Ms. Oudkirk, would you like to add anything to that?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Yes, Congressman Chabot. The Petrocaribe program, which is, I think, what you are referring to, has largely wound down, with the exception of sort of concessional oil sales or oil deliveries to Cuba.

However, as Special Representative Abrams noted, there are a variety of countries in the Caribbean and Central America who have a large sort of debt overhang with PDVSA. And this is really a problem. The coercive use of energy sales, whether we see it here in the Western Hemisphere or farther afield, is a real challenge. And I think the key here is that, as the sanctions bite on PDVSA, their ability to use, to take the oil proceeds themselves and use them directly as money is going to be largely cutoff.

The United States used to, prior to the sanctions, import about 40 percent of Venezuela's oil exports, but we paid about 75 percent

of oil receipts because so much of the other oil went for debt-for-oil swaps with China and Russia. So, cutting off that financial flow is really a key focus of the sanctions. And then, separately, really working with these vulnerable economies and jurisdictions close to Venezuela to figure out a way for them to extricate themselves from a dependence3 on PDVSA is a crucial piece of work that we have in front of us going forward.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. In the interest of members making votes, I will yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

We will now recess. Votes have been called. I will urge all the members to please come back after the three votes that we have. Thank you very much. Just be a little patient.

[Recess.]

Mr. SIRES. The hearing will come to order.

Mr. MALINOWSKI.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. There we go. My voice carries, but that is better.

Let me just start out by saying that, in my view, what we are dealing with here is an anti-democratic coup, a slow-motion anti-democratic coup that was carried out by the Maduro regime, a regime that packed its supreme court with loyalists, that tried to render null and void a Congress that was elected by the vast majority of the Venezuelan people, that imprisoned and tortured Venezuelan citizens who exercised their human right to protest against these outrages, that prevented the opposition from fielding a candidate against the leader of this regime.

This is not a left or right issue. This is not an issue that should divide us on ideological grounds. If any of us in the United States, whether we are liberal or conservative, progressive, whatever, experienced that in our country, we would be on the streets screaming about it, just as the vast majority of Venezuelans are doing.

And because of that, I am a critic of much of the administration's foreign policy, as you guys will not be surprised to hear, but I feel like in the case of Venezuela this is a policy that, broadly speaking, I can support, and I certainly pray for its success, given what has been happening to the Venezuelan people.

I know a number of the issues have been raised already. But, with that foundation, I do want to ask Mr. Abrams a handful of questions that relate Venezuela to our overall approach to the world.

I think you know, Mr. Abrams, based on your work over many, many years, that the one argument that dictators like Maduro and Putin and others throw at us all of the time, when we try to do the right thing, as I think we are trying to do here, is that we are inconsistent, that we aim our democracy and human rights policies at our adversaries, or at our ideological adversaries, not our friends. Sometimes that is an unfair charge; sometimes it is more fair. But I wonder if, as a general matter, you would agree that we need to strive, where possible, for moral consistency.

Mr. ABRAMS. I do agree. I think it is impossible to achieve in the end for any administration because——

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Try for.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. We are balancing so many American interests. But it is something we are striving for.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Would you, then, agree, as a general matter—and I know, I am sensitive to the fact you are here representing the administration's Venezuela policies; you cannot necessarily speak for everything else—but, as a general matter, would you agree that, if we are going to be condemning a president who is trying to attain absolute power for life, contrary to constitutions and the democratic process in Venezuela, that we should do so in other countries, such as Egypt, when similar situations arise, as a general matter?

Mr. ABRAMS. I really should not respond beyond the question of Venezuela. It is really not my remit at the Department and not while I am up here. You and I go back a ways, and you know that my view is, generally, that the United States should be supporting the expansion of democracy all over the world.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you.

Would you agree that, if we are going to be condemning socialism and effects on the people of Venezuela, that we should be condemning even more strongly communism in North Korea, rather than talking about how the economy of that country might be about to explode in a positive direction?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the human rights record in North Korea is pretty well known, but I really in this hearing cannot go very far down that path.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. OK.

Mr. ABRAMS. It is just not my responsibility.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. And would you agree that, if we are going to be asking countries to help the millions of Venezuelans who are fleeing their country, to take in refugees for the time period necessary to give them protection, that we, as a country, should also maintain our tradition of keeping our doors open to refugees fleeing persecution around the world, as a general matter?

Mr. ABRAMS. As a general matter, yes. And Venezuelans who feel that they would be in danger by going home should apply for, and are eligible for, asylum here.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you. Again, I would note that the refugee numbers have made it difficult to meet the demand from Venezuelans and from people fleeing repression and war all over the world.

Thank you so much, Mr. Abrams.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

Congressman ROONEY.

Mr. ROONEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to, first, thank Secretary Abrams for coming here and speaking so candidly and clearly, and bringing the great depth and length of his experience in Central America and South America to bear on our problems that we face together.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you.

Mr. ROONEY. The question I have is one that apparently was not asked earlier. It is about the political transition and Maduro's threatening to hold these early elections, and how big a threat would they be to the legitimate National Assembly's continuing efforts to institutionalize itself?

Mr. ABRAMS. They would be a threat. I think as we saw last year in the May 2018 elections, any elections that Maduro funds are not going to be credible elections. There needs to be a free and fair Presidential election in Venezuela, but it is not going to happen if it is under Maduro's control.

Mr. ROONEY. Thank you.

Mr. SIRES. I have a question. The continued outflow of Venezuelans outside of Venezuela, how much of a destabilizing factor would that have in the region if it continues at the rate that it is going now, which is 5,000 a day going into——

Mr. ABRAMS. About 5,000 a day net leaving. It will place an even larger burden on the countries that are already feeling this, and Colombia, of course, most of all. Peru has about 700,000 Venezuelans, I believe. So, the impact on their health system, for example, is very great now, and you are increasing this, potentially, by about 60 percent.

Perhaps Mr. Olive would add a comment?

Mr. OLIVE. Yes, we are very concerned about that. Administrator Green is meeting with President Duque of Colombia tomorrow, and that is going to be one of the topics discussed. The Colombians have expressed a great interest that their medical systems, schools, and social services are being overwhelmed not just in the border area, but throughout the country, and are concerned that, if they cannot continue to provide those services to their citizens, that it will disable or destabilize the country potentially. And that goes for Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago as well.

Mr. SIRES. In a meeting earlier that we had with the President Duque, he said that they already have 400 cases of measles that they have been able to track.

At this time, I would like to recognize Congresswoman Mucarsel-Powell from Florida.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much for allowing me to participate in this hearing today.

And, Mr. Elliott Abrams, Sandra Oudkirk, thank you for being here today, and thank you, sir, for coming.

This is an extremely important issue for me personally. I am the first South American Representative ever to be elected to Congress. So, I bring that perspective to these discussions. I have visited that country many times. I have very close friends that have had to flee this oppressive narco-regime, which is what we all call it. And I have some family members that are still in Venezuela.

So, it is something that I have been very outspoken about for many years, and this has been escalating for the past 15 years. And I am glad that we are now finally having these conversations. I just hope that this is the beginning of several others that we will have, so that we can do everything in our power from the United States to help the people of Venezuela.

So, my first question, one of the things that I have been focusing on is humanitarian aid. So, that is why I have been working on this humanitarian aid bill.

And I wanted to ask Mr. Abrams, how much has actually been delivered in the humanitarian aid that we have seen, that you started with with the first 20 million? Do you have details on how much has actually already been delivered?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am going, if you will permit, turn to Mr. Olive.

Mr. OLIVE. Of that new 20 million that Secretary Pompeo announced, we have used that money to preposition goods currently in Colombia, and we are also looking at other neighboring countries and other parts of the Colombia. That is how we have spent it so far.

In terms of getting goods in the country, we have not been able to do much. With the money that comes to our Latin American and Caribbean bureau, which was $9 million in 2017 and will be $15 million with 2018 funds, we have built the capacity of civil society organizations and tested their ability to distribute humanitarian assistance. But it is very small. The security of those partners is very much of a concern of ours. So, we have had to keep it more low profile at this point.

And then, the only other assistance that is getting into the country is what Administrator Green and I saw when we were there in Cucuta in July, and that is the Venezuelans crossing over the border, getting the medical services or vaccines or food, or things that they need in Colombia, and then, going back in.

But that is all we have been able to do so far. We really need Maduro to allow this assistance that we are building up on the border into the country and distributed correctly.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. And are we working very closely with the United Nations and some of their members in providing this aid?

Mr. OLIVE. Yes, we are in constant conversation with them. At the moment, they have some restrictions as well, which I think Special Representative Abrams can go into. But we are having those discussions and being transparent on what our plans are.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. OK. Great.

I also wanted to ask you, Mr. Abrams, Cuba, as we have discussed before, has clearly been a major contributor to Maduro's illegitimate regime. And they have been providing support on a number of fronts, including military personnel. I would like to get a little bit more detail on what you can tell us about the Cuban officers that are on the ground in Venezuela at this time. And also, why have not we sanctioned these people who are helping prop up Maduro and his illegitimate regime?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are thousands of Cuban, let's call them, security and intelligence people on the ground. They form a kind of palace guard around Maduro. As I noted before, what it suggest is he does not trust Venezuelans. He does not trust the Venezuelan military. So, he brings in Cubans to surround him and provide security. They also spy on members of the Venezuelan military. They also police the Venezuelan military. So, that is what he uses them for, because he sees, I think, his own support among all Venezuelans, including in the military, crumbling.

Now sanctioning them, you know, many of them are, if you will, just security officers in the ranks whose identities we do not even know. We have sanctioned high-level people in the Maduro regime. We continue to do that, civilian and military. And we will continue to do that. We have announced some expansions this week for the constituent assembly and the supreme court, the TSJ.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. OK. I am running out of time, but I have one very important question. One of the discussions that I have heard from some colleagues here on the floor is that they are concerned that the sanctions that we are imposing to PDVSA are going to hurt the Venezuelan people. And I want to make it very clear that I am in full support of these sanctions to PDVSA.

But I wanted to ask, what is the administration's plan, should these sanctions begin to affect and, indeed, exacerbate the humanitarian crisis for the people that are living right now in the country?

Mr. ABRAMS. Let me just say, this horrendous humanitarian situation in Venezuela that we have all been talking about existed 2 weeks ago, before there were sanctions on PDVSA. So, they have not used those billions of dollars in income to help the Venezuelan people to buy food, to buy medicine for them. In that sense, we know that this funding stream that we have tried to cutoff does not go to the Venezuelan people.

Mr. OLIVE. And, Congresswoman, that is exactly why, when Interim President Guaido called Administrator Green, even though he realized that he may need future assistance on electoral processes, civil society, and independent journalism, et cetera, he said the No. 1 need is humanitarian assistance, and he asked that it be prepositioned and ready to get in the country. We do not have that access yet, but we work daily on trying to get that.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you so much.

Mr. SIRES. Congresswoman Shalala.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. That is why my focus has been the humanitarian aid.

Thank you, Chairman, for allowing me to participate.

Ms. SHALALA. Thank you, Chairman, for allowing me to participate as well.

And I want to add that I absolutely support the other members of the south Florida delegation. It is a huge issue for us in south Florida. And I hope you hear in our voices bipartisan support for most of what you are doing.

I have a quick question to followup on the humanitarian aid. And that is, aid to Colombia, because so many of the Venezuelans have gone over the border, and possibly to Brazil, but I think Colombia, in particular, is feeling the need for humanitarian aid.

Mr. OLIVE. Yes, the U.S. Government has provided $140 million for neighboring countries and, in particular, Colombia, which $97 million of that USAID has administered. Administrator Green is meeting tomorrow with President Duque of Colombia to talk precisely of recalibrating where we are, what support have we been able to provide, what more is needed, and have those kinds of discussions, because those impacts have been severe on neighboring countries, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Equador, and Trinidad, Tobago.

Ms. SHALALA. Thank you very much.

And, Mr. Abrams, I am going to keep asking you the same question about TPS. And I want to reinforce what my colleagues—for those of us, in your testimony you talked about how more than 10 percent of Venezuela's population has been forced to flee their country. As you know, many of them have come to south Florida, to Debbie's district, to my district, to Mario Diaz-Balart's district,

to Debbie Wasserman Schultz's district. And we are very concerned.

And I want to reiterate to the administration, we have introduced bipartisan legislation to extend TPS to Venezuelans. I am well aware that the administration is trying to take away TPS designations for so many people in my community, and I want to be supportive of them, but also to emphasize adding TPS for Venezuelans.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, thank you. This is, obviously, a very important question. It is one I have discussed with Secretary Pompeo, and I will take it back and let him know of your views.

Ms. SHALALA. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Congresswoman Spanberger.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses who are here today.

And, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity today for asking questions.

My colleagues have highlighted our collective and serious concerns about the use of military force, potential use of U.S. military force in Venezuela. And even in hearing caution, we have heard Admiral Stavridis talk about limited and well-intentioned intervention for humanitarian purposes, saying that a military response would "foment rage in the region and internationally". I am in complete agreement that a military solution, particularly on the part of the U.S., is not answer.

But I do have a couple of questions about what we might anticipate from other countries. To your knowledge, are there any other countries who are contemplating direct involvement, such as Russia or China? We have seen Russia come to the aid of autocratic leaders elsewhere in the world. Do you see any indication that Moscow may consider something similar, deployment of advisors or military forces to Venezuela? And I will open that up to all of the witnesses.

Mr. ABRAMS. We did see some Russian bombers, if I recall correctly, fly to Venezuela, which was a Russian display of—I do not know—support for the regime, I guess you would say. But they have not put armed personnel on the ground the way they have in some other countries.

Ms. SPANBERGER. OK. And Russia has been known to at times use hybrid warfare and transnational criminal organizations to further some of their objectives and obscure their direct role in doing so. Do we have any indication that this may be happening in Venezuela or any concerns that it may happen on the horizon?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, it is always a concern, and they have an investment in this regime literally in financial terms, but, obviously, in political terms as well. And they have been defending it. They made a very strident appearance in the Security Council, for example, on January 25th, when Secretary Pompeo was there, a lot of cold war rhetoric really. But it is a very interesting question as to how far they would actually go. And we ask ourselves that question all the time.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Any additional? OK. And then, another question on this same line of questioning. To your knowledge, what is

the role of the colectivos or the armed civilian militias? Are they receiving, to your knowledge, any external support, training, or weapons? And if so, do you know where that is coming from or how the U.S. and our partners in the region might be able to prevent such support and use of such support?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am not aware of foreign support for the colectivos. It is clear that they work for the regime, and the regime in some cases has armed them. And they are kind of an auxiliary to the normal, legitimate, if you will, security forces. But the regime has the means, unfortunately, to organize and arm them. I have not seen evidence of a relationship between the colectivos and foreign powers.

Ms. SPANBERGER. And for Ms. Oudkirk I have a question about the sanctions and potential impact of the sanctions. We are well aware of the fact that for many years Venezuela has been able to invest heavily and in some cases buy the loyalty of Caribbean States through the sale of its crude oil. And some of these Petrocaribe States have supported actions of the Organization of American States to put diplomatic pressure on Maduro, which has now led to him threatening economic retaliation.

With concerns of the potential for destabilization or humanitarian crises in other parts of Latin America, my question is, do you expect any economic reverberations from Venezuela? And what is the administration doing to reduce the risk of economic damage potentially to these countries, many of whom, like Jamaica, for example, have also borrowed heavily from Venezuela in the past?

Ms. OUDKIRK. Thank you very much for your question, Congresswoman Spanberger.

So, one of the things that we did to mitigate ancillary consequences on neighboring jurisdictions was OFAC issued General License 11, which gave a 60-day period to wind down U.S. person involvement in third-country interactions with PDVSA. So, this was designed to sort of smooth out the removal from the transaction chain of U.S. persons, so both individuals and companies. And we are looking on a sort of country-by-country, jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis at the involvement of PDVSA in these various basically small countries and islands, and figuring out what it is that needs to be done during that 60-day period to ensure that the focus of this sanction's impact remains on PDVSA, not on these small markets.

Ms. SPANBERGER. OK. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for your patience, and the members who attended today's hearing.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:35 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

# APPENDIX

## FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Eliot L. Engel (D-NY), Chairman**

February 13, 2019

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/):

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 13, 2019

**TIME:** 11:00 a.m.

**SUBJECT:** Venezuela at a Crossroads

**WITNESSES:** The Honorable Elliott Abrams
U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela
U.S. Department of State

Ms. Sandra Oudkirk
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Energy Resources
U.S. Department of State

Mr. Steve Olive
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
U.S. Agency for International Development

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

# COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Wednesday* Date *February 13, 2019* Room *2172*

Starting Time *11:09 a.m.* Ending Time *2:35 p.m.*

Recesses *1* (*1:28* to *2:12*) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

**Presiding Member(s)**

*Chairman Eliot L. Engel*
*Rep. Albio Sires*

*Check all of the following that apply:*

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☑

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

**TITLE OF HEARING:**

*Venezuela at a Crossroads*

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*See attached.*

**NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Rep. Donna Shalala*
*Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell*

**HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes** ☑ **No** ☐
*(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)*

**STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD:** *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

***IFR - Engel***
***IFR - Smith***
***QFR - Engel***
***QFR - Smith***
***QFR - Cicilline***
***QFR - Sensenbrenner***
***QFR - Guest***

**TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE** _____
or
**TIME ADJOURNED** *2:35 p.m.*

**Full Committee Hearing Coordinator**

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

*FULL COMMITTEE HEARING*

| *PRESENT* | *MEMBER* |
|---|---|
| X | Eliot L. Engel, NY |
| X | Brad Sherman, CA |
| X | Gregory W. Meeks, NY |
| X | Albio Sires, NJ |
| | Gerald E. Connolly, VA |
| X | Theodore E. Deutch, FL |
| X | Karen Bass, CA |
| X | William Keating, MA |
| X | David Cicilline, RI |
| X | Ami Bera, CA |
| X | Joaquin Castro, TX |
| X | Dina Titus, NV |
| X | Adriano Espaillat, NY |
| X | Ted Lieu, CA |
| X | Susan Wild, PA |
| X | Dean Phillips, MN |
| X | Ilhan Omar, MN |
| | Colin Allred, TX |
| X | Andy Levin, MI |
| X | Abigail Spanberger, VA |
| X | Chrissy Houlahan, PA |
| X | Tom Malinowski, NJ |
| X | David Trone, MD |
| X | Jim Costa, CA |
| X | Juan Vargas, CA |
| X | Vicente Gonzalez, TX |
| X | Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, FL |
| X | Donna Shalala, FL |

| *PRESENT* | *MEMBER* |
|---|---|
| X | Michael T. McCaul, TX |
| X | Christopher H. Smith, NJ |
| X | Steve Chabot, OH |
| X | Joe Wilson, SC |
| X | Scott Perry, PA |
| X | Ted Yoho, FL |
| | Adam Kinzinger, IL |
| X | Lee Zeldin, NY |
| | James F. Sensenbrenner, Jr., WI |
| X | Ann Wagner, MO |
| | Brian J. Mast, FL |
| X | Francis Rooney, FL |
| | Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA |
| X | John Curtis, UT |
| | Ken Buck, CO |
| X | Ron Wright, TX |
| X | Guy Reschenthaler, PA |
| X | Tim Burchett, TN |
| X | Greg Pence, IN |
| X | Steve Watkins, KS |
| X | Michael Guest, MS |

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

February 12, 2019

Rep. Eliot Engel
*Chair*
House Foreign Affairs Committee

Rep. Michael McCaul
*Ranking Member*
House Foreign Affairs Committee

**RE: Amnesty International Statement for "Venezuela at a Crossroads" Hearing**

Dear Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Amnesty International[1] and our more than two million members and supporters in the United States, we hereby submit this statement for the record.

Amnesty International is an international human rights organization with national and regional offices in more than 70 countries, including in the U.S. and in Venezuela. Our organization has been monitoring the situation in Venezuela for many years and wishes to share its grave concerns with the Committee regarding the mass violations of human rights in the country, as well as recommendations to improve the the dire situation and alleviate the tremendous human suffering taking place there.

## I. The Venezuelan Government Has Engaged in Brutal Crackdowns on Political Dissent.

The institutional crisis in Venezuela – fueled by deep political polarization and marked social deterioration in the country – has had a devastating impact on human rights. In 2017, Venezuela's highest judicial authority, the Supreme Court of Justice, took on the powers of the National Assembly (which was, and continues to be, led by the opposition). This led to a wave of protests between April and July 2017 which were violently repressed by the government of Nicolas Maduro. Between April and July 2017, more than 120 people were killed and around 1,958 injured in conjunction with the protests; an additional 5,000 people were detained.[2]

---

[1] Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

[2] Amnesty International, "Q&A on the Human Rights Crisis in Venezuela," 7 Feb. 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/9809/2019/en/.

In the wake of these protests and their deadly aftermath, Amnesty International published two reports documenting the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. The first, *Silenced by Force: Politically Motivated Arbitrary Detentions in Venezuela*, relied on interviews with a panoply of current and former detainees and their lawyers to conclude that the government had engaged in the "abusive and arbitrary use of criminal law as a mechanism by which to detain and prosecute people who hold opinions critical of the Venezuelan government's policies."[3] The second, *Nights of Terror: Attacks and Illegal Raids on Homes in Venezuela*, documented a pattern of government security forces engaging in indiscriminate raids of civilian homes, frequently demanding to know the whereabouts of political dissidents and terrorizing individuals into acquiescing to the government's demands.[4]

Since Amnesty International published these reports, the crackdown on political dissent in the country has further deteriorated. Just weeks ago, on January 22 and 23, 2019, there were numerous mass protests against the government of Nicolas Maduro, particularly in working-class areas where pro-government armed groups (called "*colectivos*") are concentrated. In response to the protests, the Venezuelan state responded by deploying armed tactical police, and there have been reports of significant human rights violations, which Amnesty International is working to verify. According to the Venezuela-based organization *Foro Penal*, 988 people were arbitrarily detained in the last ten days of January 2019, 741 of whom were still held as of February 6, 2019. On a single day – January 23 – there were 770 arbitrary detentions.[5] Several Venezuelan civil society organizations have reported that 40 people have died in the context of the January 2019 protests.[6]

---

[3] Amnesty International, "Silenced by Force: Politically Motivated Arbitrary Detentions in Venezuela," 2017, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5360142017ENGLISH.PDF.

[4] Amnesty International, "Nights of Terror: Attacks and Illegal Raids on Homes in Venezuela," 2017, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5372852017ENGLISH.PDF.

[5] Foro Penal, *"Reporte Sobre La Represión En Venezuela,"* Jan. 2019, available at: https://foropenal.com/2019/02/05/reporte-sobre-la-represion-en-venezuela-enero-2019/.

[6] Vasco Cotovio & Emanuella Grinberg, "At Least 40 Venezuelans Have Been Killed in Recent Protests," CNN, 29 Jan. 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/29/americas/venezuela-protests-deaths/index.html.

Particularly disturbing is the widespread arbitrary detention of children: in just a single week in January, 77 children under the age of 18 were detained in Venezuela, including a 12-year-old girl.[7] Judges are reportedly being pressed to punish children as a means of deterring anyone in Venezuelan civil society from engaging in protest.

In addition, the government has routinely violated the right to freedom of expression. At least 19 media workers – both Venezuelan and foreign nationals – have been arbitrarily detained or expelled from the country.[8]

## II. The Government's Failure to Adequately Respond to the Socioeconomic Crisis Violates Venezuelans' Human Rights.

The Venezuelan government's failure to acknowledge the crisis of scarcity, let alone to put in place urgent and appropriate responses to guarantee Venezuelans' rights to health and food, violates Venezuelans' basic human rights. The lack of access to these basic rights has been a central issue in the ongoing political protests in the country as well as an impetus for the forced migration of millions of Venezuelans, as documented by Amnesty International in its "Emergency Exit" campaign.[9]

The skyrocketing rate of inflation – which currently stands at one million percent and is envisioned to increase tenfold by the end of 2019[10] – has left Venezuelans unable to afford even basic goods. On top of that, Venezuela is experiencing a severe shortage of food products and essential medicines. As a result, Venezuelans are left both starving and sick: as of 2018, the country was missing eighty-five percent of essential

---

[7] Amnesty International, "Tell the Venezuelan Government: Children Must Not Be in Prisons," Feb. 5, 2019, https://act.amnestyusa.org/page/38052/action/1?ac=W1902EACPR1&ea.url.id=1764056.

[8] Amnesty International, "Q&A on the Human Rights Crisis in Venezuela," Feb. 7, 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/9809/2019/en/.

[9] Amnesty International, "Venezuela: Unattended Health Rights Crisis Is Forcing Thousands to Flee," Mar. 9, 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/venezuela-unattended-health-rights-crisis-is-forcing-thousands-to-flee/.

[10] "Venezuela Crisis: How the Political Situation Escalated," BBC NEWS, Jan. 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877.

medicines,[11] and nearly two-thirds of its population had reported involuntary weight loss.[12]

The Venezuelan government's refusal to act in the face of this severe lack of medicine and food violates its citizens' human rights to adequate food and the right to health. The right to adequate food requires that food be available, accessible, and acceptable.[13] The right to the highest attainable standard of health requires not just timely and appropriate health care but also access to the underlying determinants of health, including safe and potable water and adequate sanitation and an adequate supply of safe food and nutrition.[14] In failing to acknowledge the crisis of scarcity in the country, let alone take appropriate action to urgently secure the rights to food and health for its citizens, the Venezuelan government is violating these core human rights tenets. The government's failure to act calls into question its willingness to comply with its obligation to guarantee access to these rights for all, without discrimination of any kind.

In some cases, the grave socioeconomic situation has exacerbated the already deleterious violations of political rights in Venezuela, constituting what advocates have termed a "double discrimination" against political activists in the country. For example, Amnesty International learned of the death, just days ago, of a young man named Virgilio, who was detained without cause after participating in a political protest.[15] While in detention, he was presented with rotting food, sometimes filled with worms,

---

[11] Samantha Raphelson, "Venezuela's Health Care System Ready to Collapse Amidst Economic Crisis," NPR NEWS, Feb. 1, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/02/01/582469305/venezuelas-health-care-system-ready-to-collapse-amid-economic-crisis.

[12] Vivian Sequera, "Venezuelans Report Big Weight Losses in 2017 as Hunger Hits," REUTERS, Feb. 21, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-food/venezuelans-report-big-weight-losses-in-2017-as-hunger-hits-idUSKCN1G52HA.

[13] Amnesty International, "Human Rights and Human Dignity: A Primer on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights," available at: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/8000/pol340012014en.pdf, at 42.

[14] *Id.* at 48.

[15] Vanessa Moreno Losada, "Tras sufrir una hemorragia, muere en Uribana joven detenido en protestas de 2017," EFECTO COCUYO, Feb. 7, 2019, http://efectococuyo.com/sucesos/tras-sufrir-una-hemorragia-muere-en-uribana-joven-detenido-en-protestas-de-2017/.

and could not access potable water. He soon developed a fever for which he was denied treatment. Though he was eventually evacuated to a hospital in a severely dehydrated state, it was too late: Virgilio, just 20 years old, died of a hemorrhage on February 5, 2019 – a death directly attributable to the combination of his illegitimate detention and authorities' refusal to provide him with adequate food, water, and medication while he was detained.

## III. The United States Government's Response to the Venezuela Crisis Must Account for Effects on Venezuelans' Human Rights.

The United States has taken an active role in responding to the ongoing institutional crisis in Venezuela, including the imposition of sanctions and proposed provision of humanitarian assistance. Amnesty International takes this opportunity to remind the U.S. government of the paramount importance of considering the effect any such measures will have on the human rights of Venezuelans. Amnesty International provides its views as an impartial organization which does not take positions in support of or opposition to any particular political leader or party.

Regarding the **petroleum sanctions** imposed by the United States on January 28, 2019, Amnesty International reminds the U.S. government that it must take full account of the impact any sanctions will have on the enjoyment of human rights, especially among the most vulnerable groups in society. Sanctions should be targeted, with specific objectives and a clear timetable, and their effectiveness and humanitarian impact must be monitored.

Regarding any threats of **military intervention**, a responsible approach to the current situation would focus on guaranteeing, without delay, the rights of the Venezuelan people, rather than diverting attention towards possible military intervention. The international community has an obligation to prevent escalation of the conflict in Venezuela. In particular, the U.S. government should work in concert with other governments to ameliorate the extreme shortages of food and healthcare that put the lives of millions of Venezuelans at risk.

Regarding **humanitarian assistance**, states that can provide assistance should do so when necessary, in a manner that comports with human rights, including consulting

with civil society and ensuring that resources are distributed without discrimination. However, the widespread suffering of people in Venezuela should not be used as a lever in political negotiations or as a bargaining tool to exert political pressure on the government. Amnesty International opposes all conditions on international assistance and cooperation that result or may result in human rights abuses and encourages the House Foreign Affairs Committee to carefully examine any conditions on U.S. humanitarian assistance to ensure that compliance with them does not lead to rights abuses.

Finally, regarding the **exodus of Venezuelan nationals** from the country, which already numbers over three million individuals and is expected to increase to five million by the end of 2019, Amnesty International encourages the United States to assist Venezuelan nationals seeking international protection, including nationals seeking protection within the United States, who now make up the largest group by nationality of individuals seeking asylum in the United States.[16] The widespread violations of human rights in Venezuela has put the lives, freedom, and safety of those fleeing the country at great risk. The United States should extend protections to Venezuelan nationals and should ensure that they are not forced to return to a country where they would face grave harm.

## III. Amnesty International's Policy Recommendations to Congress and the Executive Branch

Amnesty International believes that the international community, including the United States, has an obligation to prevent the escalation of the crisis in Venezuela, ensure that its actions do not violate international law or perpetrate futher human suffering, and support national actors in creating conditions that will ensure the lasting enjoyment of human rights in Venezuela.

To that end, Amnesty International calls on Congress to:

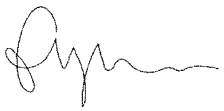
---

[16] Gisela Salomon, "Venezuelans Find U.S. Asylum Surprisingly Elusive," AP NEWS, 29 Aug. 2018, https://apnews.com/6af09ae70e554cab8403c29012ad00b1.

- Denounce the policy of repression in Venezuela, which, in recent years, has manifested itself in politically motivated arbitrary detentions, torture and the excessive use of force by security forces;
- Work with relevant executive branch agencies to fulfill the United States' obligation to provide humanitarian assistance to address shortages in food and essential medicines, symptoms of the debilitating socioeconomic crisis in the country. This assistance must be coordinated and without conditions, ensuring that it directly reaches those who are suffering as a result of the crisis – especially groups exhibiting particular vulnerabilities. The United States must exercise due diligence to ensure that any assistance provided does not result in human rights abuses of any kind;
- Defend and strengthen support for Venezuelan civil society organizations and human rights defenders;
- Ensure that Venezuelans seeking international protection in the United States are granted unrestricted access to territory and protection from return;
- Assist in the safeguarding of specialized human rights mechanisms – including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – so that they have access to the country to document the human rights situation, produce reports, and engage discussions on how to guarantee human rights in Venezuela.

For more information, please contact Charanya Krishnaswami at +1 202 675 8766 or ckrishna@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,



Charanya Krishnaswami
Americas Advocacy Director
Amnesty International USA

ON CALL WITH WSJ

Hear from WSJ experts on how to navigate the new tax landscape created by last year's overhaul. Register Now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

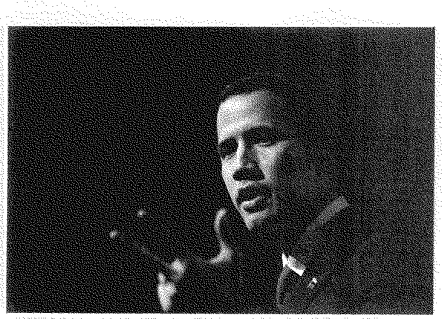
This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit https://www.djreprints.com.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-holds-talks-with-venezuelan-opposition-on-debt-oil-projects-11549993261

LATIN AMERICA

# China Talks With Venezuela Opposition to Protect Investments

Chinese diplomats discuss debt, oil projects with Guaidó camp as pressure mounts against ally Maduro



Representatives of Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, above in Caracas on Feb. 5, have met with Chinese diplomats to discuss China's loans and oil investments in the country. PHOTO: FEDERICO PARRA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

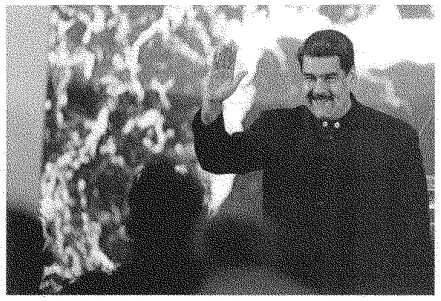
*By Kejal Vyas*

Updated Feb. 12, 2019 2:01 p.m. ET

CARACAS, Venezuela—China has been holding talks with Venezuela's political opposition to safeguard its investments in the troubled Latin American nation, hedging its bets as pressure builds on Nicolás Maduro, the embattled leader for whom Beijing has been a vital ally.

Chinese diplomats, worried over the future of its oil projects in Venezuela and nearly $20 billion that Caracas owes Beijing, have held debt negotiations in Washington in recent weeks with representatives of Juan Guaidó, the opposition leader heading the U.S.-backed efforts to oust Mr. Maduro, according to people familiar with the talks.

"China recognizes the increasing risk of a regime change and does not want to be on the bad side of a new regime," said R. Evan Ellis, an expert on Chinese relations in Latin America at the U.S. Army War College. "While they prefer stability, they realize they have to put eggs in the other basket."



Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro has resisted pressure at home and abroad to cede power to Mr. Guaidó. PHOTO: MANAURE QUINTERO/REUTERS

The talks are a sign of the apprehensions building with creditors of Venezuela's leftist government. Over nearly two decades, loans-for-oil deals with China and Russia have provided vital support for Venezuela. Relations flourished under Mr. Maduro's predecessor, the late socialist strongman Hugo Chávez, who fortified ties with those countries, Cuba, Iran and even India in an effort to combat U.S. power.

But commercial and financial ties with these countries have been strained since Mr. Maduro, Mr. Chávez's handpicked successor, took power in 2013 and the economy began to shrink, with oil production plummeting by more than half after years of rampant graft and mismanagement.

Sanctions leveled by Washington last month on Venezuela's oil industry have exacerbated Mr. Maduro's difficulties, cutting off Venezuela's only meaningful source of income and portending further declines in oil output.

China's Foreign Ministry didn't respond to a request for comment about Beijing's contacts with the Venezuelan opposition. In recent weeks, the ministry has suggested that discussions are taking place and Beijing wants to see its interests respected.

Asked about rumored talks at a media briefing on Feb. 1, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Beijing "has been in close communication with all parties in various ways on the situation in Venezuela."

"No matter how the situation evolves," Mr. Geng said, "China-Venezuela cooperation should not be undermined."

Mr. Guaidó has publicly extended olive branches to China and Russia. The young National Assembly chief, whom lawmakers chose to lead an interim presidency in a direct challenge to Mr. Maduro, has argued that political change would be a precursor to economic reforms to restore stability.

Venezuela, which sits atop the world's largest oil reserves, should maintain ties with China, the world's biggest oil importer, he said.

The fall of the Maduro government could work to China's advantage, said Mr. Ellis. "Guaidó could help lift [U.S.] sanctions and get oil flowing again. At the end China has everything to gain from Guaidó," he said.

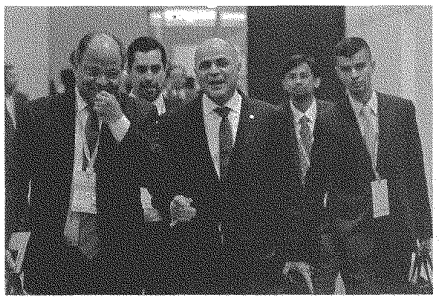
People familiar with the debt-repayment talks said there are significant hurdles. Venezuela has borrowed from China more than $50 billion in a series of loans-for-oil agreements since 2007, and according to estimates by China's Commerce Ministry it still owes Beijing around $20 billion.

China is unwilling to take a significant loss on its loans, as some of the opposition's economic advisers have suggested for lenders, including holders of the country's defaulted bonds, according to two of the people familiar with the talks. Both sides have been discussing grace periods on repayment plans to give any potential Venezuelan transitional government breathing space, they said.

Opposition lawmakers have also long clamored to make the terms of China's loan deals with Venezuela more transparent, which Beijing opposes, according to two of the people familiar with the negotiations.

Like China, Russia has publicly supported Mr. Maduro but has shown little willingness to prop up the government with fresh funds. Neither ally has granted large loans to Venezuela in recent years. Their joint oil ventures in Venezuela have been subject to the corruption and operational difficulties felt across the country's oil industry, energy consultants said.

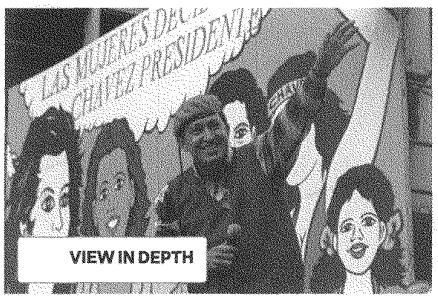
One director of a company that provides oil-field valves and tubes to Chinese and Russian state firms operating in Venezuela said the company had only made one sale in all of 2018. "The Chinese, the Russians, I just don't see them putting any money in," the director said.



Venezuela's Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo, center, in India on Monday, where his ministry said he was seeking buyers for Venezuelan oil. PHOTO: ANUSHREE FADNAVIS/REUTERS

Moscow is open to dialogue with Mr. Guaidó, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov suggested this month, saying Russia expected to maintain cooperation with Caracas "regardless of political developments in the country."

Paradise Lost: Venezuela's Path from Riches to Ruin




JOHN VAN HASSELT/SYGMA/GETTY IMAGES

The Trump administration's sanctions aim to redirect oil assets and revenue away from Mr. Maduro and into the hands of Mr. Guaidó, closing off access to Venezuela's biggest cash customers.

Venezuelan officials have been seeking new buyers for their heavy oil, which until January could be refined at specially fitted American installations.

On Sunday, the state-run Saudi tanker company, Bahri, said one of its vessels had traveled to Venezuela to load crude for one of Caracas's regular customers in India. Bahri said the shipment would be completed before the end of a grace period set by U.S. sanctions.

On Monday, Venezuela Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo was in New Delhi, seeking to increase sales to India, his ministry said.

But Indian officials have said privately that they have grown impatient with Venezuela, which for several years has delayed repayment of nearly $500 million owed to state oil company ONGC Videsh Ltd.

Venezuela's government has also fallen into arrears with Indian pharmaceutical companies that once thrived here, forcing many of them to shift operations out of the country as social and economic conditions deteriorated.

"Private entities in India have little reason to go out of their way to ramp up imports in such a chaotic situation," said Smita Purushottam, a former Indian ambassador to Venezuela who recently retired from the Foreign Ministry.

"My view is that the people of Venezuela are fighting for survival," she said. "They have suffered for too long and perhaps the only way forward is to start anew, under international supervision, to minimize their suffering and rekindle hope."

*—Benoit Faucon in London, Charles Hutzler in Beijing and Ginette Gonzalez in Caracas contributed to this article.*

**Write to** Kejal Vyas at kejal.vyas@wsj.com

*Appeared in the February 13, 2019, print edition as 'China Hedges Bets With Venezuelan Opposition.'*

Copyright © 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit https://www.djreprints.com.

**Questions for the Record from Chairman Eliot L. Engel**
**Venezuela at a Crossroads**
**February 13, 2019**

**Question:**

Has the Administration assessed the humanitarian impact of the PDVSA sanctions on the Venezuelan people if there is not a quick transition? **Please provide the Committee with this assessment.**

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

*Ms. Oudkirk did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

Has the Administration considered the impact of the PDVSA sanctions on U.S. refineries and their employees which process Venezuelan oil? **Please provide the Committee with this assessment.**

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

*Ms. Oudkirk did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

We all hope that there is a peaceful, democratic transition in Venezuela as soon as possible. If this is not the case, what is the Trump Administration's Plan B approach to Venezuela? **Please provide the Committee with Plan B options for Venezuela.**

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

The Trump Administration has pushed countries in the Americas to open their homes and hearts to Venezuelans. I support this effort. **But**, how can we call on other countries to admit Venezuelans while continuing to close the doors of our own country to these same individuals?

(a) Will the Trump Administration reassess its historically low refugee admission numbers?

(b) Will President Trump grant Temporary Protected Status to the many Venezuelans here in the United States who should not be forced to return to Maduro's Venezuela?
(c) When, if at all, does the Administration plan to make a decision on TPS for Venezuelans living in the United States?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Questions for the Record from Representative Chris Smith**
**Venezuela at a Crossroads**
**February 13, 2019**

**Question:**

"We have heard reports that refugees from Venezuela are falling prey to human trafficking by guerillas along the border and by highly organized criminal networks who are transporting the victims to countries in Europe for exploitation.

a) What is the Administration doing to work with the Government of Colombia in particular to prevent human trafficking during this humanitarian disaster?"

**Answer:**

**Mr. Steve Olive:** USAID shares your concern about vulnerable Venezuelan women and girls who have left their country and are subject to exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, as local public services are strained by large numbers of Venezuelans, there are increased risks of xenophobia. USAID's assistance to Venezuelans across the region provides support to host communities to reduce xenophobia and discrimination.

Through our Transforming Communities to Protect Women and Girls program, USAID addresses these vulnerabilities primarily in three departments in Colombia that are hosting significant numbers of Venezuelans. This program is working with local and national health systems to prevent and protect against GBV and combat xenophobia and discrimination. Specifically, the program aims to strengthen the healthcare system's ability to plan for migrant services, improving information systems, and facilitating focalized service provision for approximately 4,000 women. USAID will also work with targeted municipalities to help them implement local response plans to combat GBV.

We will continue these efforts to ensure security for Venezuelans and the communities hosting them in neighboring countries.

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

*Ms. Oudkirk did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Questions for the Record from Representative David Cicilline**
**Venezuela at a Crossroads**
**February 13, 2019**

**Question:**

- Has the Administration increased troop deployments to countries, including Colombia, neighboring Venezuela at any point in the last month?
- Are there currently any plans to or discussions about moving additional combat troops to Colombia or any other country that neighbors Venezuela?
- Is anyone at the White House, National Security Council, Department of Defense or any other agency making plans for U.S. military engagement in Venezuela?
- Will you pledge that the Trump Administration will not take any military action in regarding Venezuela without consulting with Congress in accordance with the War Powers Act?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

The Administration – just like many Members of Congress and members of this Committee – is hoping that Nicolás Maduro steps down from power soon.

- What is the Administration's long-term strategy for Venezuela?
- What planning is in place if the situation in the country further deteriorates, possibly even toward civil war?
- What is the contingency plan if Maduro clings to power?
- What kind of preparation is the Administration doing for what happens when and if Maduro steps aside?
- What would the United States role be in supporting a democratic transition, rebuilding Venezuela, and supporting long-term stability?
- The Administration has attempted to slash budgets for development assistance and humanitarian aid – how do you plan to fund the support needed to rebuild Venezuela?
- Have any lessons from the intervention in Libya been taken into consideration?
- What precautions are being taken to ensure the safety and security of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Venezuela?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

What plans are in place to ensure that humanitarian aid is actually delivered to the Venezuelan people?

**Answer:**

**Mr. Steve Olive:** The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State are working through a network of implementing partners to deliver assistance to Venezuelans in the region. Millions of people have left Venezuela due to the crisis created by Maduro. The United States Government is supporting many of those displaced individuals and families, and they receive our assistance every day.

As of February 13, 2019, the United States Government has provided more than $97 million in humanitarian assistance to the region, along with $43 million in development assistance for the Venezuelans who have fled the country and host communities in the region that are impacted by the crisis.

USAID is coordinating with representatives of Interim President Guaidó on their humanitarian, logistics and distribution planning. They have established arrangements for warehousing, as well as distribution through civil society organizations, once access allows for cross-border delivery.

**Question:**

Mr. Maduro has already blocked the entry of food and medicine into the country, so how do you plan to get aid into the country?

**Answer:**

**Mr. Steve Olive:** It is deplorable that the Maduro regime, through the security forces and armed gangs (colectivos) they control, has not allowed the necessary assistance to reach the Venezuelan people. The U.S. Government is looking at all options to deliver aid to the people of Venezuela. We are working with Interim President Guaidó and responding to his requests for humanitarian assistance. We are also working closely with other governments in the region, including the administration of President Duque in Colombia in coordinating this effort.

**Question:**

How could it be distributed in a transparent and safe way without becoming a political tool?

**Answer:**

**Mr. Steve Olive:** The humanitarian assistance that we are providing to the people of Venezuela is about helping people affected by a massive crisis, plain and simple. The United States and our international allies are responding to Interim President Guaidó's request for humanitarian assistance for the people of Venezuela, who are suffering from a crisis caused by the illegitimate Maduro regime's gross economic mismanagement and corruption.

We know the lack of food and medicine continues to get worse with each passing day. Our efforts are to send supplies that can help those who are suffering. We will always focus first on providing the right supplies to match the needs on the ground.

**Question:**

U.S. Air Force planes are now being used to pre-position aid in Colombia. Is the U.S. military leading this humanitarian relief effort? Are you concerned about the appearance of militarizing aid?

**Answer:**

**Mr. Steve Olive:** The U.S. military has a long history of supporting U.S. civilian-led humanitarian missions and coordinating with interagency partners—including USAID and the State Department—to ensure that aid reaches people impacted by life-threatening disasters.

Recent examples of military air support include the Mexico earthquake (2017), Caribbean hurricane (2016) and Nepal earthquake (2015). The use of military aircraft to pre-position aid in Colombia is part of a whole of U.S. Government effort to address the humanitarian needs of the Venezuelan people.

**Question:**

In your written testimony submitted to the Committee, you noted that more than 3 million Venezuelans have had to flee their country. I was glad to see you thank "generous neighboring countries" who are welcoming these "desperate Venezuelans."

- Could you tell me how many Venezuelan refugees the United States admitted last year? The year before?
- How many Venezuelans applied for asylum in the United States in 2018? And how many were granted asylum?
- Do you find it at all contradictory that as you thank Venezuela's neighbors for their generosity in opening their doors, President Trump wants to build a wall to keep these same people out?
- Is the Administration considering granting Temporary Protected Status to Venezuelans living in the United States?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question for the Record from Representative James Sensenbrenner**
**Venezuela at a Crossroads**
**February 13, 2019**

**Question:**

Yesterday the Wall Street Journal reported that China was now having conversations with acting President Juan Guaido. The report indicated that the Chinese, who for years have supported the regime through purchasing Venezuelan oil, are now beginning to hedge their bets on the Maduro regime surviving this opposition movement.

- In your view, does this shift of support away from Maduro change your calculus on the chances of the regime surviving?
  - If so, what new steps can the U.S. take to increase the likelihood of a new democracy being established?
- How does the loss of Chinese support change Maduro's tactics going forward?
  - Will he become more brazen in his methods to repress the opposition?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Questions for the Record from Representative Michael Guest**
**Venezuela at a Crossroads**
**February 13, 2019**

**Question:**

You discussed the ongoing implications of the crisis for the oil industry both in Venezuela and for U.S. companies operating in or partnering with Venezuela. There are concerns that these U.S. oil companies could be negatively affected and that some U.S.-based assets are being put at risk by the recent sanctions on PDVSA.

1. Can you explain to what extent U.S. companies were being consulted leading up to the decisions to impose sanctions?

2. Regarding these U.S. oil companies, what are their main concerns, and how much were they considered in the decision-making process?

3. Referring to post-crisis Venezuela, how is the U.S. preparing to help Venezuela regain the barrels per day production that it had pre-Maduro? And, what is the impact of that resurgence outside Venezuela?

**Answer:**

*Ms. Oudkirk did not submit a response in time for printing.*

**Question:**

Referring to post-crisis Venezuela, how is the U.S. preparing to help Venezuela regain the barrels per day production that it had pre-Maduro? And, what is the impact of that resurgence outside Venezuela?

**Answer:**

*Mr. Abrams did not submit a response in time for printing.*

○