

Let's Make a Good Deal: Trump's Venezuela Deal

Trump's big Venezuela oil deal is very popular among MAGA supporters and very unpopular among Venezuelans—both here and in Venezuela. I want to argue that Trump is making an America First deal, and it very well may be the best deal to do now. But it comes at a price—a political price—and that price is worth paying only if there is a critical follow-up to the deal that comes after the November midterms. Let's start by reviewing the basic elements of the deal itself. 65 billion barrels! Over 25 years! Oil production of more than million barrels per day! The US gets a controlling share. Venezuela also benefits.

This collaboration by the way is not unfair to Venezuela. It's not a rip-off. Venezuelan oil is not ready to use; it must be refined. The U.S. provides the refining. This is how it was in the 1950s through the 1980s. Venezuelan prosperity, contrary to the mythology of some young Venezuelans, was not accomplished by Venezuela alone. It was accomplished through a collaboration. Venezuela's restoration will most likely involve a revival of that collaboration.

Trump says the Venezuelan oil bonanza will replenish the U.S. strategic oil reserve. It is likely to have wide-ranging effects that go way beyond that. Sure, oil prices are likely to drop significantly, and that's good! But remember that virtually everything that is sold in America has to be transported. Oil prices are built into the prices of many products that have no direct relationship with oil. Consequently, we're likely to see a decline in prices of food, housing materials, everything that gets moved around in trucks. Trump may well be betting on his Venezuela deal to drive oil and egg prices down, and to propel the stock market up, and bitcoin up. If this happens it not only produces a new

economic climate; it also produces entrepreneurial optimism and consumer optimism.

In short, Trump's deal might save the midterms for the Republican Party, and this may well be part of why it was done the way it was done. This is the part that the Venezuelans might be missing. Trump's effectiveness is tied to the success of his party in holding both Houses of Congress. Trump will be tied down for two years if the Democrats win the House and begin impeachment proceedings, which is crazy, but we're dealing with some crazy people. So when the Venezuelans says, "This deal is not good for Venezuela," this is the wrong way to think about it. Trump is not the president of the USA to save Venezuela.

He is elected to represent the interests of the United States. He might want to make Venezuela great again, but his focus—his primary if not his sole concern—must be with making America great again. But Trump might also understand that by protecting his majority in both houses of Congress, he can do more for Venezuela in the long term. To put it differently, it is in the interests of the United States, and also in the interests of Venezuelans, here and abroad, for Trump to remain strong. When Trump is strong, he can drive a strong, undistracted foreign policy. For this reason, I do not go along with the idea that this is an unremittingly bad deal, Trump and Rubio are being suckered, this may be good for America but it's deeply unfair to Venezuela, the deal will only strengthen the Chavista regime headed by Delcy Rodriguez, and so on.



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This view misses what Trump might be seeking to do domestically, and that is not unrelated to what he can accomplish internationally. So here's the best case scenario. Trump uses the hastily produced deal to consolidate his

political position at home, and once the GOP has held its position in the midterms, Trump and Rubio immediately announce a transition to democracy in Venezuela, with free elections, supervised by the United States, to take place in mid-2027. In that case, the short-term outrage of the Venezuelans will melt away, because they will see that Trump is indeed giving them a way to make Venezuela great again. A free Venezuela is good for America, and good for Venezuela. It allows the two countries, through their legitimate governments, backed by the votes of the people, to make a long-term economic pact that will redound to the economic prosperity of both nations.

It will pull Venezuela into the alliance of free and pro-American countries in Latin and South America. It's a win-win for the good guys! But there is a grave risk that goes with this deal, and I hope and pray that Trump and Rubio are fully aware of it. I'm also doing this monologue to drive the point home, in case it has escaped either of them. Here is the minefield that is sitting right in the middle of this deal. Trump says the deal is "a gift from Venezuela to the people of the United States." But it's not Venezuela that is offering the gift. It's Delcy Rodriguez. It's the Chavista regime. So before we go any further, we must inquire into who these people are, and why they are proving so cooperative with this deal.

The Chavista regime is made up of socialists and Communists. They are the ideological comrades of the Castro regime in Cuba. They are the natural allies of the enemies of the United States: China, Russia and Iran. They want nothing more than to push the United States away, take back their tyrannical socialist government, and bring back the Chinese, the Russians and the Iranians. Their plan is to wait Trump out. They might sign on to 25year plans, but they know Trump will be gone in two years and five months. Who knows what comes next? Even if it's a Republican president, who knows how committed that person will be to this deal? Who knows if there will be a

Republican or Democratic Congress? The Chavistas are of course rooting for the Democrats. If the Democrats win, they get their Communism back. Their formula—endorsed by the Democrats—is “Make Venezuela Socialist Again.” And then of course they can dump the Trump deal. They can renegotiate with the Democrats to get a different deal, which the Democrats would be happy to do.

But right now the Chavistas are happy with this deal. Why? Because the Venezuelan economy is in shambles. The socialists have driven it into the ground, and they have no solution to lifting it up. What this means is that they are hated by the people for destroying their lives and livelihoods. If there are free elections, how can these people expect to even compete? They can't. They can't even show their faces in public right now. And so they are desperately looking for a way to improve the economy, so that they can jump in front of the camera and say, “We did this for you.” The deal is a very good one for Delcy Rodriguez. Trump called her the “highly respected” Delcy Rodriguez. Venezuelans and Venezuelan Americans are going nuts over this. But it's Trump.

Usually what he means by “highly respected” is a person who is doing what he wants. That's how you get to be “highly respected.” In reality, Trump knows she's not highly respected. Even so, the deal does give “highly respected” Delcy Rodriguez a chance to save the floundering economic record of the socialists. That's why she is enthusiastic about the deal. She's not just succumbing to Trump; she's wholeheartedly on board. She's posting on social media about what a great deal it is. She says it's a good deal for Venezuela but what she means is it's a good deal for her.

She knows the deal, and the ensuing economic improvement, is could salvage the reputation of the Chavistas and even consolidate their hold on power. Trump's deal may hold for the short term, but it is inherently fragile because it is a deal with an illegitimate and hostile regime. As my Venezuelan wife

Debbie puts it, "It's like making a deal with the squatters. We need to make a deal with the true owners—in other words, with a government that legitimately represents the Venezuelan people." Otherwise oil prices might go down for a bit, and go right back up when the bad guys—by which I mean the Chavista regime and the Democrats here in America—are in a position to nix or redo the deal.

If Trump and Rubio direct a transition to free elections in Venezuela—and this cannot be delayed too much; it needs to happen in 2027—then the US is creating the framework for a long-term prosperous relationship between the two countries, one that might very well last 10 years or even more. It's a genuine partnership between nations that have a likeminded dedication to free elections and free markets. Anything short of this is a band-aid, a short term solution, even a non-solution if seen in a wider timescale. By removing Maduro, Trump has already taken the biggest step. He has already earned the respect and even love of many Venezuelans. But most of those people are now heartbroken; they believe Trump has sold them out. These are pro-American Venezuelans.

Many of them live in Texas and Florida. They are an important segment of the GOP coalition. And right now they are wavering, because they suspect the GOP is raiding the oil wealth of Venezuela while offering only the regime—not Venezuelans—any lasting benefits. I don't think Trump and Rubio have any illusions, but if I'm wrong, they need to relinquish them. There is nothing good or trustworthy about Delcy Rodriguez and her tyrannical socialist gang. These people are not our friends, and no deal is stable if it's made with a gang that is just looking for ways to screw you over and go their own way. There is simply no downside for Trump and Rubio to declare, either now or right after the midterms, that there is now a prosperity deal in place, Venezuela has been stabilized, and here's the schedule for free elections. This involves admitting the main opposition leader, MariaCorina Machado, who

was on my show recently, back into the country, so that she can begin organizing her campaign to compete with the Chavistas. It's almost a sure thing that she would win that election, and that would be very good for the United States, and indescribably great for Venezuela. Their long night of socialism would be over.

And we who are working to prevent socialism from gaining an enduring foothold in the United States should celebrate that. It means freedom for Venezuela, but it also means locking in a beneficial long-term pact with an oil-rich, mineral-rich, strategically important country led by a pro-American government. Remember the old game show, "Let's make a deal"? Yeah, let's make a deal, but let's make it a good deal. This means wrapping a schedule for elections into the overall deal. In this way, we continue to make America great again while we help the Venezuelans make Venezuela great again.

And that's the way I see it.

*Born in Mumbai, India, **Dinesh D'Souza** came to the United States as an exchange student in 1978. After graduating from Dartmouth College, he served as a policy analyst in the Reagan White House and a scholar in two prominent think tanks, the American Enterprise Institute and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He is a New York Times best-selling author who has written books on politics, religion, culture, and economics—including Illiberal Education, The End of Racism, What's So Great About America, and United States of Socialism—and three books on Christian apologetics: What's So Great About Christianity, Life After Death, and Godforsaken. D'Souza has made eight political documentary films and produces a daily podcast called The Dinesh D'Souza Podcast, which is seen and heard by about 100,000 people daily. His new book, The Stones Cry Out: Biblical Archaeology, Prophecy, and the Last Days, is available on .*