How to Cite This Article: Bukhari, S. R. H. (2026). Iran and Venezuela as Energy Insurance: How Access to Heavy Sour Crude Shapes U.S. Refining Resilience, Defense Fuel Budgets, and Contingency Planning in a Strait of Hormuz-Centered Iran Crisis. *Journal of Social Sciences Review, 6*(1), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.62843/jssr.v6i1.641

ISSN (Online): 2789-4428 **Corresponding Author:** Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari (Email: bukharipalmist@gmail.com)

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW (JSSR) **Volume** 6, **No.** 1 (Jan-Feb 2026) | **Pages:** 1–8 | **DOI:** 10.62843/jssr.v6i1.641

Iran and Venezuela as Energy Insurance: How Access to Heavy Sour Crude Shapes U.S. Refining Resilience, Defense Fuel Budgets, and Contingency Planning in a Strait of Hormuz-Centered Iran Crisis

Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari [a]

Abstract: *This paper is concerned with access to Venezuelan heavy sour crude as an energy insurance mechanism in the US with a back up that occurred in the middle of Strait of Hormuz and which implicates Iran. The paper focuses on crude oil quality and refinery flexibility instead of aggregate oil supply with emphasis on the fact that O.U. Gulf Coast refiners possess the best processes to accept heavy and high-sulfur feedstocks like Venezuela. Recent policy and market flows show that ordering Venezuelan crude to the U. S refiners could narrow heavy-sour gaps, retain refinery activity hairy, and cover refined-product volatility over periods of world strains during oil supply provision. Such dynamics in the energy market are associated with military readiness, the spread of oil price dynamics to the budgets of the Department of Defense fuel, operational pace, endurance, etc. Peripheral admittance of congruent heavy crude in case of Middle East derailments to create market shock can reduce the level of pricing outbursts which suffocates long-term operations. Despite sanctions, quotas, and geopolitical competition, Venezuelan heavy crude represents a strategically important tool of establishing U.S. potential operations resilience, strategic flexibility and crisis calculus in the event of a potential conflict with Iran.*

Keywords: Energy Security, Heavy Sour Crude, U.S. Military Logistics, Refinery Resilience, Strait of Hormuz, Iran Contingency

Introduction

The importance of energy resources in the overall power relationships of the world is not a recent discovery and in particular, in the context of military, the availability of fuels, price stability and logistical resilience are the variables that directly predetermine the degree of any working performance. Energy security is no longer seen in terms of commercial supply but under current circumstances of conflict situations has been a matter of endurance of war fighting and strategic flexibility. Heavy sour crude oil in Venezuela is in this context playing a special role in the global energy geopolitics. Venezuelan oil is an unlikely scenario but one that is slowly drawing closer than military planning in America has traditionally been, and could challenge operational planning, force projection and crisis management in the event of a conflict with Iran. This military preparedness and energy access intersect with intersectionality where resource availability allows the generation of the power to enable high-intensity combat capacity and helpful allied cohesion during brief emergencies (Bull, 2025).

The heavy crude reserves of Venezuela, which are especially large (concentrated in the Orinoco Belt), are the largest in the world but can be extracted with great difficulty due to technical reasons and political restriction. The absence of access to or leverage over those resources in Venezuela is attributed to decades of bilateral tensions, regime of sanctions, and the extensive involvement of other outside parties such as China and Russia in the domestic energy sector. These conditions indicate the geopolitical ambiguity of making the Venezuelan oil a strategic buffer pointing to a dual reality in which the petroleum wealth of the state can be assuming both the form of the potential reserve of energy stability and a vulnerability through diplomatic, financial, and logistical constraints (Rodriguez et al., 2025).

[a] PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

The usefulness of the Venezuelan heavy crude in the war against Iran of the United States is best viewed in the context of the interdependence of oil markets on each other across the globe and the threat of chokepoints particularly in the case of the Strait of Hormuz. Military operations in the Middle East especially the ongoing air, naval and expeditionary operations are very consuming of fuel that renders the survival of these military operations to the volatility of prices and disruptions in the supply side. The destabilization of the energy flows in the Gulf would pose a threat to the preparation, reduce strategic choice, and exhausted allies. Another non-Middle East that has the capability to stabilize refinery feedstocks, market shocks and persistence of operation within the context of political uncertainties and infrastructural bottlenecks is Venezuelan heavy crude (Ortiz, 2025).

This paper examines the strategic insurance of Venezuelan heavy crude through the lens of the effects of such assets on mitigating the strategic calculations of the United States, in streamlining resilience and maintaining the assets of defense fuel in case of an Iranian contingency. The paper discusses operational, strategic and geopolitical dimensions of energy as a military power weapon through energy geopolitics, military logistics and the international relations theory. It is based on the assumption that not only the combat preparedness and resource distribution can be influenced by the availability of Venezuelan oil or a lack thereof, but more universal processes of deterrence, alliance regulation, and crisis control in one of the most energy-sensitive regions of contemporary international security (Victor, 2025).

Literature Review

The strategic significance of energy resources in the formation of military capability and geopolitical advantage has a long history in the literature of international security, particularly at the time when the fuel supply is guaranteed by the longlasting fighting campaign. The historic analysis of energy politics highlights the reality that oil is not any economic commodity, but rather one that enables force projections, a hypothesis on anti-war sustainability, and alliances to stand by in moments of crisis. These studies indicate that states which are capable of finding stable and compatible energy sources have a decisive edge in matters of high intensity wars. In this regard, the vast deposits of the heavy crude in Venezuela represent a potential albeit very little historically utilized source of strategic resilience to the United States in times of energy sensitive crisis involving Iran (Bull, 2025).

In the literature dealing with heavy sour crude, unique physical properties of this kind of crude oil, challenges in extraction, and refining as a response to the crude in its downstream are noted. The heavy crude is upgraded and requires high level of refining equipments and technological fit and logistical arrangements. Surveys of the Venezuelan Orinoco Belt stress the magnitude of its reserves, notwithstanding the intractable character of its operations in the measures of production, transportation and upgrading. All this literature underlines the dualism of Venezuelan oil: as a big strategic asset, it must be effective, yet the success of its activity depends on the political stability, foreign investments, preparation of refineries, and all the other factors predetermining its successful functioning directly (Lee et al., 2025).

A similar stream of the study examines the problem of energy security through the lens of the U.S military planning that postulates that the modern operations are vulnerable to changes in the fuel price and supply blockage. Military logistics and defense economists note that unyielding air operations, naval operations and expeditionary operations are very consumptive regarding consumption of fuel and operational durability is prone to global oil market shocks. In an eventuality involving confrontation with Iran, destabilization of the Middle East energy routes and the Strait of Hormuz is categorized as one of the biggest threats to preparedness, projection of power and assistance of allies. The alternative sources of supply are therefore regarded as strategic hedge to reduce the risk of chokepoint to ensure that Venezuelan heavy crude could become a conceivable stabilizing factor in defense fuel planning (Omokaro et al., 2025).

The Venezuelan oil makes its use as energy insurance also difficult due to the geopolitical nature of said oil. Sanctions and political disparities augment the availability of Venezuelan crude and predictability by the history of U.S.-Venezuela conflicts. At the same time, the entry of external stakeholders, in this case especially, China and Russia, has altered the energy landscape in Venezuela by investing, financing, and diplomacy, making the Venezuelan oil bigger trends of strategic rivalry. This literature demonstrates that the issue with access to Venezuelan heavy crude is not a technical or market-oriented issue but an issue of geopolitical leverage, how to manage alliances, and risk management (Mandirola, 2025).

Though much literature has been carried out on energy geopolitics, heavy crude production, and military logistics, the gaps remain significant. These strands are rarely employed in the available literature to study the impacts of Venezuela heavy sour crude access to the resilience of U.S. refining, defense finances, and perseverance in a specific Iran contingency. Otherwise, the literature has addressed the issue of energy security in general terms rather than trying to establish a relationship between the quality of crude oil, whether it can be refined and the transmission of their fuel price and the war-fighting performance in the high conditions of pressure. This disjointing means that there is a need of a more integrated way of analysis (Doyran, 2025).

The present paper bridges those gaps in that the Venezuelan heavy sour crude is placed in the same conceptual framework that involves the improvisation of energy geopolitics, refinery economies, and military logistics. It takes into account the tendency of the potential or constraints to Venezuelan oil to precondition U.S. operational endurance, counter fuel-market vagaries, and also impacted on strategic planning in an Iran emergency in the Strait of Hormuz. In that way, the research contributes to a growing literature on potential energy resources outside of the Middle East to act as strategic insurance that has a direct impact on deterrence, crisis management, and war-fighting ability (Mijares, 2025).

The works by Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari on the aspect of global energy security provide analytically pertinent foundation of knowledge as to how energy disruptions become strategic and military vulnerability. In his analysis of Ukrainian-Russian conflict Bukhari demonstrates that critical geopolitical crises distort the global energy flows, heighten the volatility of prices, and force states to consider energy diversification a security policy but not business decisions. He says that the movement of energy shocks occurs long before the conflict area, reassigning the strategic calculus, coalition behavior, and other crisis survivance elsewhere. This argument can be applied directly to an Iran-based contingency whose pre-emptive position is in the Strait of Hormuz and where destabilization of Middle East supplies will impact the world markets and enhancing the strategic nature of other geographically distant supplies such as Venezuelan heavy sour crude (Bukhari & Ullah, 2025).

Bukhari has also placed energy security in the context of systemic global anarchy and highlighted the fact that the current politics of power is increasingly being organised around the task of managing the risks within the chain of important resources. According to him, interdependence of energy results in the non-passiveness of oil as an active variable of strategy which designates the behavior of the state in the state of crisis. This sentiment endorses the concept of energy insurance whereby having alternative energy sources enhances the ability of a state to sustain shocks, keep its activities going and with it is not bullied into coercion when it is escalating. Using this framework, it is possible to justify the argument, that the option to access Venezuelan heavy sour crude (particularly after it can be refined at the U.S. Gulf Coast refiners), can augment refining resilience and reduce exposure to the impact of price spikes due to Hormuz disruption, when applied to the U.S.-Iran situation (Bukhari, Hamayoun, and Khan, 2025).

Although Bukhari does not write directly about Venezuela or the logistics of defense fuel, in particular, his emphasis on the subject of diversification of energy sources, the threat of disruption, and strategic resilience can be directly applied to the analysis of the U.S. capacity to war-fight. His work states that the

contribution to the performance of the military in times of long-term crises is made not only by the structure of forces, but also by the stability of the energy input, which is variable and the basis of a military. Using an energy-security paradigm Bukhari and research on the compatibility of heavy sour crude and refinery, and defense-fuel budgeting, one can better determine the role of access to Venezuelan oil as strategic energy insurance, and in making up U. S. operational longevity, financial sustainability and crisis decision making in the face of a probable Iran contingency (Bukhari and Ullah, 2025).

Discussion

Venezuelan heavy sour crude is especially strategic to the United States as an energy security during the confrontational situation with Iran and during the U.S. military operations, where the operation heavily depends on availability of oil products particularly the air, ocean and expeditionary campaigns. Corrosion of the Gulf oil flows would place the U.S. troops at risk of price uncertainties and logistics pressure during a Strait of Hormuz-based contingency. Venezuelan heavy crude in case it can be availed and refinable will offer a comparatively geographically localized alternative that can stabilize refinery feedstocks, even though geodefense and alleviate market shocks, as well as guarantee supported maintenance rate. Such a framing puts the fact that the usability of hydrocarbon can directly affect its fighting capability, operational readiness, and strategic flexibility rather than a tool of economic insurance (Makhabir & Ganpat, 2025).

The technical/political restrictions that the operation of the heavy crude utility in Venezuela must face are, nevertheless, high enough. Heavy grades of sour require refining infrastructure, which is specialized, greater upgrading capacity and efficient transport system to refine the crude into a by-product that is useful in the military. Even though technically the U.S. refineries on the Gulf Coast can take such levels, accessing the Venezuela supply is still intricate, as the decades of ties of diplomatic tensions between the nations, as well as the strong infiltration of such foreign interests into the Venezuela energy market of China and Russia makes them complicate matters. These limitations suggest that the value of Venezuelan oil as an energy insurance is not necessarily going to occur when confronted with the magnitude of the reserve alone rather than with the capability to transform the access to the stance of the crude to a potential manifestation of the refined products in the conditions of the crisis. Therefore, its contribution to the U.S. military objectives depends on the skill to strike a complex balance between logistics, policy, and geopolitics (Cildir, 2025).

Concern is also more universal with respect to the idea of energy insurance in the aspect of global energy security and in aid of military resilience. The volatility in the oil flows of the Middle East regarding intensification of conflict, imposition of a sanction or exposition of the infrastructure might not only undermine the operation preparedness of the U.S but energy security of allied troops that share similar supply chains. Venezuela heavy crude addition in the contingency planning is the most efficient because it maximizes redundancy of the global energy structure thus reduces exposure to abrupt price surge in addition to lack of sufficient supply structure. It reinforces the fact that the energy resources are the strategic instruments, the influence of which condition the management of the crisis and deterrence by eliminating the negative effect of the military actions on the impact of the most radical changes on the market (Theodora, 2025).

The Venezuelan scenario is a case of how the sources of energy affect leverage and alignment, and strategic competition at the regional politics level. Allowing China and Russia entry into the country by the Maduro government it plans to provide it with the financial and technical breathing rooms and restricts the U.S. access and influence simultaneously. It is through this process that one of the central areas of tension are made evident; though Venezuelan heavy crude may play a part in U.S. refining resiliency and defence fuel security, the value cannot be decoupled of potential political realignments and world structure of power relations that generates it and renders it commercially feasible. A regime of sanctions, incompatible additional interests, and negative diplomatic fragmentation also tends to result in the impossibility of the Venezuelan oil to play the role of a viable stabilizing contribution to American military logistics (Renzullo, 2025).

The second time related feature of war-fighting stamina that can be highlighted by applying energy insurance is time-related. In the high intensity wars the rate and duration of the military operations is not only constrained by the availability of the forces but also by the sustainability of the fuel and also the susceptibility of the budget to inflation. The Venezuelan heavy crude as part of strategic planning and refining plans can provide an alternative in the operational plans since the crude will not be heavily reliant on Middle Eastern streams at the time of disruption. Operating by the mechanisms of temporal buffering, the U.S. sustainability is enhanced since in the context of the fluctuating energy markets, the military is able to maintain its pressure and to a degree curb the degree of fiscal and logistic strains to a better degree of leverage in the event of an Iran contingency (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Venezuelan heavy sour crude is eventually, a junction points of energy, politics and military strategy. It is significant not exclusively on the regional level, but also in the energy markets, balance of alliances and the capacity of the states to retain the complex military activities under strain. An example of an energy insurance mechanism is the Venezuelan oil where compatibility of hydrocarbon resources can define how operational security, decision on the Budget as well as the strategic choices are made. Risk cannot be offset by the prospect of integrating such resources in contingency planning, and it can reduce the vulnerability and enhance deterrence, and the capability of the U.S. to wage war in one of the most energy-sensitive conflict scenarios within the international security of today (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Findings and Analysis

During the exploration of the heavy crude oil reserves in Venezuela, it is observed that the energy resources in the country is a strategic asset that can be utilized and can be utilised to impact the war fighting capabilities of the U.S. in the event of the disruptions of the Strait of Hormuz threatening the gulf supply chain. Venezuela also has the largest discovered deposit of oil in the world (and most of it is heavy and extra-heavy oil which, historically, can only be refined in the U.S. Gulf Coast pattern). Back in the old days the Venezuelan heavy crude was supplying up to 700,000-800,000 barrels per day to U.S. refineries that were built to receive the feed, virtually forcing the use of the low-grade so that the shortage has allowed the dependence on other, low-margin heavy grades that incur higher freight costs to receive the feed. In the first part of 2026, negotiations occurred between Caracas and Washington where Venezuela would sell its oil crude to the U.S. ports and initial deliveries and discussions of up to $2 billion of oil sales were to be sold benefit in the two economies. Whilst these trends suggest that, as the Venezuelan crude grows, they will be able to supplement both the refining capacity, price variability of feedstock and, also, to provide an insulation to the shocks of the Middle Eastern supply, thereby, crippling the military logistics, and necessitating and comprising of the military preparedness.

The other significant finding is the constraint of use of Venezuelan heavy crude as strategic energy insurance. Heavy crude has a high level of sulfur, low level of API, and must undergo specialized refining plant refining like delayed coking and hydrodesulfurization facilities in order to produce viable fuels, including but not limited to diesel and jet fuel to be used in military activities. Although the U.S. Gulf Coast refiners still have massive processing heavy-crude capacity, decades of not-paying-back investments in Venezuelan production and downstream facilities have resulted in actual physical production that is much less than possible, and in the short-term actual responses to supply deficits are hard. Another reason is that the energy sector remains trapped in the political wars and foreign meddling in Venezuela: foreign powers such as China and Russia historically have developed export and investment networks and U.S. sanctions and naval blockades in late 2025 have greatly lowered exports. As a result, structural, logistical and geopolitical impediments of resource potential into deployable fuel provide to fulfill U.S. defense needs exist over and above the sheer resources size.

The discussion also reveals that the impact of Venezuelan heavy crude has a broader implication on the energy markets, as well as, on the geopolitical stability in the entire globe. U.S. military operations would be impacted globally since the program interruption induced by the Venezuelan supply will also be reflected on other countries that have integrated energy trade networks. We can use the example of the Chinese refiners who previously imported huge amounts of Venezuelan crude shifting to imports of Iranian and Russian heavy grades showing that the lost feedstock is being compensated by strategic companies and the scope to which global price differentials are able to flow on a reconfigured supply platform. Venezuelan heavy crude availability is a buffer against adverse price surges and refinery feed-stock disruptions, which enhance deterrence impact by reducing the economic power held by insurgents as an outcome of threatening the Gulf chokepoints. This underlines a two-fold nature of Venezuelan crude; as an instrument of work to aid in maintaining the fuel stream and a political instrument to influence the alliance and reaction to crisis.

Also, the findings indicate that the relations of partnership of Venezuela play a critical role in the U.S. calculations. The role of China as the largest buyer of Venezuelan oil until 2026 combined with the insider investments Russia has made in the sector serve to prove the competitive aspect that has made U.S. access complicated enough that the Washington administration should contemplate diplomatic exchanges and leverage during any effort to achieve energy insurance. In early 2026, the U.S. announced its plan to regulate control over Venezuela oil sales and replace it with the export of it to U.S. markets, a move that will make it even more complicated to be the one supplying China with it and deprive one of the influence of many adversaries. Such geopolitical processes make the energy domination inseparable with the behavior of international politics and power projection and the success of Venezuelan energy as a viable buffer state/resource is at the centre of a broader interaction of great powers politics and alliance management.

Finally, the research paper pays attention to the time dimension of energy security in military preparedness. The other cases of extreme intensity conflict, like the one involving Iran, also demand the use of rapid and safe access to fuel to sustain the operations and disseminate the force. The Venezuelan heavy crude could act as a buffer when mixed in strategic planning and when it is accompanied by infrastructure building and predictable export routes is also available, as it would raise the resiliency of the operations as well as mitigating the fiscal risk to market volatility. Defense logistics along with such energy insurance will enhance the power of the US to resolve the prolonged engagement duration, provide deterrent and not be devoted without necessity to destabilization of the energy flows in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The strategic resource comprising of the heavy sour crude reserves that are present in Venezuela are strategic and may affect the U.S. military planning and sustainability in operations in the event of confronting the Iranian threat. This paper demonstrates that the supply of Venezuela heavy crude could be treated as energy insurance which would provide an alternative supply that would stabilize the refinery feeds, stabilize the changes in fuel prices as well as ensure that the operations are not impacted in the event of the disruption in the oil flows in the Middle East. These entry points augment the strategic capabilities of the U.S. in crises involving a Central zone Strait of Hormuz, by dispelling its dependence on vulnerable chokepoints and the feasibility of the high-paced military action.

At the same time, the research contributes to the understanding that the strategic value of Venezuela oil heavy crude is not absolute but relative. The rate and scale of how the Venezuelan oil can be turned operational is limited by the demands of specialized refining needs, infrastructure disenlively and logistical constraints. Nevertheless, these technical problems are augmented with geopolitical ones, including the fact that there are sanctions regimes, the decades-old US-Venezuela conflict, and external powers, like China and Russia. These constraints combine to highlight the point that the problem of energy insurance is constrained not simply by the reality of availability of resources but by the political, technological and institutional sights, on how accessibility and usability is prescribed. Besides bilateral effects, Venezuelan heavy crude has

extensive effects on energy security and geopolitical stability throughout the globe. It being there, or it being dead, can affect the move across the international market, the strength of allied energy, or a crisis requirement in times of increase. The Venezuelan experience of the energy resources as the crosspoint of the geopolitical and military policy suggests that the process of resources control is the key to the operational capabilities, and the capability of alliances to preserve their unity or react to the circumstances of the crisis in the new warfare environment.

Recommendations

In the light of the Venezuela-United States confrontation and its potential international ramifications, there are a few strategic and policy recommendations to offer in front of policymakers, energy interested and the rest of the world.

- First and foremost, diversification and energy resilience should be prioritized to ensure that they are not vulnerable to sensitive supply routes and pinpoints in politics. It is recommended that the multinational energy and state actors invest in diversified sourcing and strategic petroleum reserves coupled with refinery flexibility as continuity can be guaranteed in case of disruption at the geopolitical front.
- Second, the diplomatic intervention and crisis management tools ought to be upgraded to prevent the rapid escalation of situations when short decision making time frames occur, such as the presence of the 72 hours countdown cases, as with this particular study. To ensure that it reduces miscalculation, the international bodies and multilateral forums must assist in maintaining the dialogue between Venezuela, the United States and the key stakeholders through the aid of crisis hotlines, the confidence-building exercises as well as the neutral mediation.
- Third, the sanctions should be reformulated and restated with the balancing of the strategy objectives, the humanitarian and systemic risks. Sanctions regimes are recommended to incorporate specific deadlines, conditional relief strategies, and exception on the important economic performance to sustain leverage with minimal damage to civilians and market destruction.
- Fourth, the region players in the Latin America should take to the direction of a coordinated stabilization policy, via regional institutions. The openness to dialogue with Venezuela and the United States will help to make sure that the situation will not worsen, as there will be no proxy war, and the methods of covering the existing security systems in the region will assist in counteracting the external shocks.
- Fifth, additional powers in the region (in particular China and Russia) are recommended to be accountable in their financial and strategic behavior with Venezuela. Enhanced transparency, adherence to international standards and narrowness of conduct that might aggravate escalation of tensions are some of the main factors that can help to ensure that the Venezuelan energy issue does not result in the opening of a broader conflict in geopolitical terms.
- In conclusion, in the geopolitical energy crises, researchers, analysts and global bodies need to take into consideration the costs involved in upgrading monitoring and early warning mechanisms. With the incorporation of intelligence of energy flows, political signaling, and decision making timelines, the capacity to add to anticipatory ability and respond proverbally to reduce systemic risk and help bring about global stability will be possible.

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