

5. **The Armed Forces**

Venezuela has four distinct armed forces: The Army (with 34,000 personnel), the Navy (10,000), the Air Force (7,000) and the National Guard, which is a federal police force (20,000), for a total of 71,000 personnel, one of smallest defense forces of Latin America. All four have ground and air components.

The military has generally been apolitical. Declining living standards among the lower level officers combined with a kind of misguided heroic vision of saving the country called "Bolivarianism" have fostered subversive elements which led to the two coup attempts, but these seem to be a small minority.

The Defense Minister is traditionally chosen by the President from among the military.

7. **Canada/Venezuela Bilateral Relationship**

Canada and Venezuela have a significant and growing bilateral relationship based on variety of respective **national interests**. Canada sees Venezuela as a major Western hemisphere oil producer, an open, market-oriented trade partner, a resource-rich investment partner, a leader in the new wave of democracy that has swept Latin America, a strategic actor (and often collaborator) in hemispheric, including Caribbean affairs and a holiday site for large numbers of Canadian winter tourists.

Venezuela sees Canada as a welcome moderating influence and counterweight to the U.S. within the interamerican system, a source of investment and trade partner (a new source of interest being the eventual extension southwards of NAFTA), a like-minded partner in dealing with various regional issues (eg Haiti, Cuba) and a friendly, trustworthy interlocutor from the industrialized countries of the G-7 and the OECD.

Political Consultation. In recent years the practice of frequent consultation between the two governments has grown up. There is a growing number of issues of common concern and interest related to global, regional and bilateral affairs. The problem of Haiti, and OAS developments have been particularly active subjects of our consultation between us. The Canadian Prime Minister and the Venezuelan President are often in direct contact with each other