

Oil and Gas News Briefs

Compiled by Larry Persily

January 5, 2026

U.S. in 2025 became first country to ship 100 million tonnes of LNG

(Reuters; Jan. 2) - The U.S. in 2025 became the first country to export more than 100 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas in a single year, powered by the startup of production from new plants, preliminary data from LSEG showed. The world's largest LNG exporter sold 111 million tonnes of the fuel, almost 20 million more than its nearest rival Qatar and nearly 23 million more than the U.S. shipped last year, LSEG data showed. U.S. shipments accounted for roughly a quarter of all global exports last year.

Venture Global's Plaquemines facility in Louisiana — the country's second-largest export plant — delivered 16.4 million tonnes in 2025 after sending its first cargo in December 2024, LSEG data showed. Alex Munton, director of global gas and LNG at research firm Rapidan Energy Group, said the U.S. 24% year-on-year growth came down to high utilization across onstream terminals and a rapid ramp-up at new facilities.

The annual record was supported by a monthly milestone in December when the U.S. exported 11.5 million tonnes, a record for a single month, the data showed. In 2025, the U.S. set five monthly production records. "It is remarkable that in nine years the U.S. has gone from zero LNG exports to over 100 million tonnes, and the success validates the U.S. approach of selling free on board (no destination restrictions) and pulling gas off the grid and the reliability of U.S. supplies," Jason Feer, head of business intelligence at shipping firm Poten and Partners, said on Jan. 2.

Higher U.S. natural gas prices forecast amid rising LNG demand

(Argus; Dec. 31) - Analysts have consistently forecast significantly higher U.S. natural gas prices in 2026 despite varying weather expectations, suggesting that gas prices may be more resilient to heating and cooling demand changes in the coming years. The Energy Information Administration forecasts higher gas prices in 2026 caused by U.S. gas production not keeping up with growing demand for liquefied natural gas exports.

The U.S. has about 17.5 billion cubic feet per day of gas liquefaction capacity in operation and 15 bcf per day under construction, with more than half of this additional capacity expected to be commissioned by the end of 2028. U.S. gas production will likely be unable to completely meet this demand growth, as the EIA's most recent forecast shows U.S. dry gas production only growing 1% in 2026 to 109 bcf per day.

As a result, while heating and cooling demand will continue to effect daily and weekly spot-market price swings, gas prices in 2026 and beyond are very likely to rise above 2025 levels regardless of the weather. The EIA's most recent price forecast for 2026 puts the average at \$4.01 per million Btu, roughly 14% higher than the 2025 average of \$3.50 and 83% above \$2.19 average in 2023.

Maduro's departure creates uncertainty for Venezuela oil industry

(CNN; Jan. 3) - Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has been captured and flown out of the country following a U.S. strike on Caracas, leaving behind uncertainty for the country — and its huge oil reserves. Venezuela is sitting on 303 billion barrels worth of crude — about a fifth of the world's reserves, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That trove of crude will play a central role in the country's future.

The near-term impact on the price of oil is a bit of a guessing game and dependent on how the next couple of days shake out. Maduro's socialist government has been unfriendly to the global oil industry and allowed its infrastructure to crumble. It's unclear in the immediate aftermath of the strike what the political future of Venezuela holds — and whether the next government will keep a tight grip on its dilapidated oil industry or unlock its potential with a friendlier stance to the international market.

"For oil, this has the potential for a historic event," said Phil Flynn, senior market analyst at the Price Futures Group. "The Maduro regime and Hugo Chavez basically ransacked the Venezuelan oil industry." The potential of its oil reserves far outweighs its output: The country produces less than 1 million barrels of oil per day — about 0.8% of global production. That's less than half of what it produced before Maduro took control in 2013 and less than a third of the 3.5 million it pumped before the socialist regime took over.

The kind of oil Venezuela is sitting on — heavy, sour crude — needs special equipment and a high level of technical prowess to produce. International oil companies have the capability to extract and refine it, but they've been restricted from doing business in the country. The U.S. has light, sweet crude, which is good for making gasoline but not much else. Heavy, sour crude like the oil from Venezuela is crucial for certain refined products, including diesel, asphalt and fuels for factories and other heavy equipment.

Analysts doubt Maduro's ouster will shock oil markets

(CNBC; Jan. 3) - President Donald Trump's overthrow of President Nicolas Maduro in oil-rich Venezuela is unlikely to shock energy markets in the near term, analysts told CNBC on Jan. 3. While the scale of the U.S. attack was unexpected, markets had already priced in a conflict with Venezuela that would disrupt oil exports, said Arne Lohmann Rasmussen, chief analyst and head of research at Global Risk Management.

Venezuela, a founding member of OPEC, has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. But the nation produces less than a million oil barrels a day, less than 1% of global oil production. It exports just about half its production, or some 500,000 barrels, Rasmussen said. The conflict also comes as the global oil market is oversupplied and demand is relatively weak, a customary pattern in the first quarter of the year, he said.

“Despite this being a huge geopolitical event that you would normally expect to be positive or push up oil prices,” he said, “the bottom line is there’s still too much oil in the market, and that’s why oil prices will not go ballistic.” Analyst Bob McNally of Rapidan Energy said he was advising clients before the weekend that a third of Venezuela’s oil production was at risk. He does not expect that all of that output would be cut off, and he told CNBC that it would not pose a meaningful risk to oil markets in the short term.

Oil prices may decline as the regime overthrow raises the possibility of boosting oil production in Venezuela, analysts said. Saul Kavonic, head of energy research at MST Financial, estimated exports could approach 3 million barrels in the medium term if a new Venezuelan government led to lifting of sanctions and a return of foreign investors.

U.S. refiners could be big winners from Venezuela’s heavy oil

(Wall Street Journal; Jan. 4) - American oil refiners stand to be big beneficiaries if Venezuela's vast crude reserves eventually flow more freely into the world market. Refineries along the Gulf and West coasts were generally designed before the U.S. shale-drilling boom to turn heavy, sour grades of crude imported from Venezuela and Mexico into gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other products. These facilities aren’t equipped to process light, sweet crude with which U.S. frackers have swamped the market.

That is a big reason why many U.S. refiners have struggled despite the drilling boom that has pushed domestic oil output to records and depressed benchmark crude prices. It also explains why the U.S. imports about 6 million barrels a day as it simultaneously exports more than 4 million barrels a day of its own crude.

“Soaring U.S. crude production is great, but due to its light quality, U.S. crude has never been able to be fully leveraged by its domestic refinery system,” said Jaime Brito, executive director of refining and oil products at OPIS. “Being able to access the (Venezuelan) reserves — the largest in the world, by the way — of the most important heavy crude producer will be a game changer for U.S. Gulf Coast and West Coast refiners in terms of profitability,” Brito said.

U.S. oil companies face obstacles to rebuild presence in Venezuela

(Wall Street Journal; Jan. 3) - The Trump administration's move to oust Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro in a military operation Jan. 3 will pave the way for U.S. oil companies to regain a foothold in the South American nation, according to President Donald Trump. "We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure, the oil infrastructure, and start making money for the country."

But getting foreign companies to flock back to Venezuela will be a massive challenge. Chevron is the only major U.S. oil company there. Others will be forced to gauge the stability on the ground in a country where the industry has fallen into disarray after more than two decades of mismanagement and corruption. The other obstacle facing Trump's effort to put more of Venezuela's viscous crude into the global market is that the world doesn't have much of an appetite for more oil. Low prices discourage investment for most American producers, and global supplies are expected to continue rising this year.

"One thing that works against it is the price of oil," said Ali Moshiri, the former head of Chevron's operations in Latin America and Africa. "In the environment we're in, if you're going to invest, do you put it in the Permian (Basin in the U.S.) or do you put it in Venezuela? That's going to be a tough choice." The U.S. hasn't detailed the mechanics of how it would bring more American oil companies into Venezuela to boost production. Analysts say it could facilitate a process that would allow companies to bid for oil and gas blocks, and question whether European companies could also bid.

Chevron in prime position to increase oil production in Venezuela

(Wall Street Journal; Jan. 3) - Chevron is the only major U.S. company in Venezuela and finds itself in prime position to deliver on President Donald Trump's pledge of Jan. 3 to rejuvenate the Latin American country's oil business. The oil giant has spent years navigating the country's political and economic turmoil while its rivals pulled out — or were kicked out by Venezuelan dictators. Exxon Mobil's assets were nationalized in the mid-2000s. ConocoPhillips left and sued the country for more than \$20 billion.

Venezuela's government says its proved oil reserves top 300 billion barrels, which, if true, would make its bounty the world's largest, ahead of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Following years of economic turmoil and little investment to maintain its oil infrastructure, Venezuela currently pumps just 900,000 barrels of oil a day, down from 3 million barrels a day in 2013, according to state-run company Petróleos de Venezuela, known as PdVSA. Chevron is responsible for about one-third of that.

The 2026 energy story will be about electricity more than oil

(Forbes columnist; Jan. 1) - If 2025 felt like a year of mixed signals in energy markets, 2026 will feel like a contradiction. We are entering a year defined by divergence — a paradox in which the world has too much of what once worried us most, and not nearly enough of what we assumed would always be there. For much of the past half-century, “energy security” essentially meant oil supply. In 2025, that definition began to change. The new constraint is not barrels — it is electrons. Reliable, dispatchable power has become the scarcest energy commodity in the developed world.

The year ahead will be shaped by two opposing forces: a surplus of liquid fuels and a growing shortage of firm electricity. Oil still dominates energy headlines, but the fundamentals heading into 2026 are unmistakable. The International Energy Agency warns of an “unusual level of (oil) surplus” forming in global markets. Meanwhile, demand growth is losing momentum. China — long the single most important source of incremental oil demand — is undergoing a structural shift. Its rapid adoption of electric vehicles likely represents a permanent erosion of future oil consumption.

But the most consequential energy story of 2026 is the power grid. The scale of data center construction is running into a system built for decades of stagnant demand. After nearly 20 years of flat electricity demand, the U.S. is seeing sustained load growth of 2% to 3% a year. For a capital-intensive industry accustomed to stagnation, this is transformative and disruptive. Wind and solar continue to expand but cannot solve this problem alone. Data centers require reliability. That reality is forcing a pragmatic shift in 2026. Natural gas generation is staging a revival and as utilities delay coal retirements.

OPEC+ makes no changes in oil production targets

(Reuters; Jan. 4) - OPEC+ kept oil output unchanged on Jan. 4 after avoiding discussions of the multiple political crises affecting the producer group's members, from the Middle East as well as Russia, Iran and Venezuela. The meeting of eight members of OPEC+, which pumps about half the world's oil, came after oil prices fell more than 18% in 2025 — their steepest yearly drop since 2020 — amid oversupply concerns.

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE flared last month over a decade-long conflict in Yemen, when a UAE-aligned group seized territory from the Saudi-backed government. The crisis triggered the biggest split in decades between the former allies. On Jan. 3, the U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and U.S. President Donald Trump said Washington would take control of the country until a transition to a new administration becomes possible, without saying how this would be achieved.

"Right now, oil markets are being driven less by supply–demand fundamentals and more by political uncertainty," said Jorge Leon, head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad Energy and a former OPEC official. "OPEC+ is clearly prioritizing stability over action."

OPEC+ members raised oil output targets by around 2.9 million barrels per day in 2025 to regain market share, then members agreed in November to pause output hikes for January, February and March due to relatively low demand in the Northern Hemisphere winter. The eight countries will meet next on Feb. 1, OPEC+ said.

Brent crude prices down 19% in 2025; largest decline since 2020

(CNBC; Dec. 31) - Oil prices fell on Dec. 31 and recorded an annual loss of nearly 20%, as expectations of oversupply increased in a year marked by wars, higher tariffs, increased OPEC+ output and sanctions on Russia, Iran and Venezuela. Brent crude futures shed about 19% in 2025, the most substantial annual percentage decline since 2020 and its third straight year of losses, the longest such streak on record. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude logged an annual decline of almost 20%.

On the last day of the year, Brent futures settled at \$60.85 a barrel, down 48 cents. WTI crude fell by 53 cents to settle at \$57.42 a barrel. BNP Paribas commodities analyst Jason Ying anticipates Brent will dip to \$55 a barrel in the first quarter before recovering to \$60 a barrel for the rest of 2026 as supply growth normalizes and demand stays flat. "The reason why we're more bearish than the market in the near term is that we think that U.S. shale producers were able to hedge at high levels," he said. "So the supply from shale producers will be more consistent and insensitive to price movements."

OPEC+, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allied producing nations, paused oil output hikes for the first quarter of 2026 after releasing an additional 2.9 million barrels per day into the market since April. Most analysts expect supply to exceed demand next year, with estimates ranging from the International Energy Agency's 3.84 million barrels per day to Goldman Sachs' 2 million barrels per day.

LNG imports have changed European energy market

(Bloomberg; Dec. 31) – Europe's natural gas prices are heading for a sharp annual drop despite unusually low inventories, a sign of how dramatically the market has changed since the energy crisis as a wave of liquefied natural gas reshapes supply expectations. Prices are on track to finish 2025 at roughly half the levels reached earlier this year, reversing concerns that Europe could face a tight winter with reserves well below recent norms. Instead of focusing on thinner buffers, traders have taken comfort in the sheer volume of gas available on the global market.

The shift reflects how Europe's energy safety net has evolved since the crisis triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Pipeline flows that once anchored the market gave way to an intense focus on building up stockpiles, but this year attention

has increasingly turned to seaborne supplies. Europe's liquefied natural gas imports are expected to have hit a record in 2025, according to the International Energy Agency.

As a result, storage levels — currently around 63%, compared with a five-year seasonal average of about 74% — have done little to unnerve the market this winter. Steady flows of LNG cargoes from the U.S. and elsewhere are giving buyers flexibility that has barely existed in recent years. The relaxation in energy markets is likely to be a welcome salve for an economy that has been battered by setbacks, though it may be coming too late. Years of elevated costs have hollowed out parts of Europe's industrial core, and cheaper energy alone is unlikely to help shuttered factories reopen.

China received 22 cargoes of Russian LNG last year

(Reuters; Jan. 2) - China received 22 shipments of liquefied natural gas last year from two export projects in Russia sanctioned by the United States and European Union, shiptracking data showed. Depending on the pricing structure, the cargoes could have been worth more than half a billion dollars. One shipment was from Portovaya on the Baltic Sea and the rest were from the Arctic LNG 2 project in Russia's Far North, showed data from Kpler and LSEG. The U.S. and EU have sanctioned the projects to curb revenue reaching Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Corp. and China National Offshore Oil Corp. each own 10% of the Arctic LNG 2 project. All of the shipments were delivered to the Beihai LNG terminal in China's southwestern Guangxi region, designated by China to receive sanctioned LNG cargoes. PipeChina — operator of the Beihai terminal — did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. Reuters could not find contact information for the owners or managers of the tankers.

European firms propose multibillion-dollar data centers in Alberta

(Bloomberg; Jan. 2) - A data center project in Alberta that's backed by European firms has the potential to be worth as much as €8 billion (\$9.4 billion) over the next several years, says the head of one of the companies involved. Data District, a division of Swiss-based manager Alcral, has partnered with Technologies New Energy (TNE) on a proposal for multiple data centers in the western province. The €780 million first phase, announced in December, begins with a site in Olds, about an hour north of Calgary.

The longer-term blueprint envisions a much larger investment, with the group eventually building 1 gigawatt of data center capacity, said Carlos Caldas, Data District's chief executive officer. Alberta, the heartland of Canada's energy industry, is pitching itself as an attractive place for artificial intelligence-capable computing power because of its vast, cheap reserves of natural gas.

Data District and TNE were “considering Texas for our North American roadmap but we decided to allocate most of our resources to Alberta instead,” Caldas said in an email. “We were very impressed with the province’s approach to business and data centers in specific.” If fully built, the data center investment would be one of the largest projects in the province. The first phase will be funded by Alcral and a U.K. firm, according to Caldas, who said the project received interest from Asian sovereign investors.

Court allows oil production from 3 platforms offshore California

(CalCoastNews.com; Jan. 2) - Sable Offshore can now resume offshore oil production at all three of its platforms off the Santa Barbara County coastline in California, following a federal appeals court ruling on Dec. 31. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled against a request by environmental groups to stay enforcement of the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration’s emergency special permit for the Las Flores Pipeline System that serves the platforms.

In 2015, a pipeline ruptured near Refugio State Beach, causing more than 100,000 gallons of oil to spill. About 21,000 gallons flowed into a culvert and then into a ditch that drains into the ocean. The spill spread over 9 miles of mostly sandy beaches and led to the closure of the three offshore drilling platforms and the pipeline, which are now owned by Sable. In May, Sable resumed oil production in federal waters. It started extracting oil from one of three platforms that had been closed since the 2015 spill.

The resumption of oil production began just a month after the state fined Sable \$18 million and ordered a halt to the work for not obtaining necessary permits. The company disputes the finding, arguing it has all the required permits. Environmental groups that criticized the production restart had sought a court injunction, citing risks to sensitive habits and species. The company now plans to restart the flow from all three platforms.

Chevron-led venture will develop more gas reserves for Australia LNG

(Journal of Petroleum Technology; Dec. 10) - Chevron has announced it has taken a final investment decision together with its joint-venture partners to launch Stage 3 of the Gorgon gas field development off the northwest coast of Western Australia. The nearly US\$2 billion backfill project targeted for completion by 2030 will connect the offshore Geryon and Eurytion gas fields in the Greater Gorgon Area to Gorgon’s existing subsea gas-gathering infrastructure and processing facilities on Barrow Island.

The development is intended to counter declining reservoir pressure to sustain gas deliveries to Western Australia’s domestic market and to support liquefied natural gas exports to Asia, Chevron Australia President Balaji Krishnamurthy said in a Dec. 5 statement. The Chevron-operated Gorgon Project is a joint venture between the

Australian subsidiaries of Chevron (47.33%), ExxonMobil (25%), Shell (25%), Osaka Gas (1.25%), MidOcean (1%), and Japan's JERA (0.417%).

Gorgon shipped its first LNG cargo in March 2016. The project is expected to maintain gas and LNG production over a lifespan of 40 years. Part of the original Gorgon development plan, Stage 3 is the first in a series of planned subsea tiebacks. Six wells will be drilled in the Geryon and Eurytion fields which lie about 65 miles northwest of Barrow Island in 4,200 feet of water. Gorgon has the capacity to produce 15.6 million tonnes of LNG per year.