

## **Maduro vs. Biden: Diplomacy and strategy in an election year**

Antonio De La Cruz  
Executive Director  
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*"Diplomacy in times of crisis requires not only skill and patience but also the courage to explore unconventional paths."*

In a pivotal year for the United States government, the Biden administration is seeking reelection with a multi-dimensional strategy. This strategy tackles the refugee crisis at the southern border, aims to stabilize fuel prices with West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil targeted to remain between 70 and 80 dollars per barrel, and seeks a resolution to the political crisis in Venezuela. This approach has positioned U.S. diplomacy on a high-risk stage, aiming to realign geopolitical dynamics while addressing urgent domestic and international challenges.

For over a year, the Biden administration engaged in covert negotiations with Nicolás Maduro's regime, moving away from the Trump era's "maximum pressure" strategy. The dialogue aimed to lift sanctions on the oil and gas sector—which accounts for 94% of Venezuela's foreign exchange earnings—in exchange for democratic reforms, including free elections and the release of unjustly detained American citizens. The agreement reached in Barbados last October suggested a potential thaw in relations between the U.S. government and the Bolivarian regime, marking a step toward Venezuela's democratic restoration.

However, this optimism was short-lived. Maduro and his associates quickly undermined the agreement, ignoring the results of the opposition's primary election in 2023 and reneging on electoral commitments. This reversal exposed Biden to criticism, particularly for suspending economic sanctions and controversially releasing Colombian businessman Alex Saab—Maduro's main frontman—despite evidence linking him to severe crimes. Meanwhile, Maduro's regime intensified its authoritarian tactics, increasing repression against the opposition, especially against leaders of Vente Venezuela, María Corina Machado's party, and exacerbating territorial disputes with Guyana.

Maduro's bold defiance casts doubt on Biden's ability to lead the world's foremost power, especially in the eyes of voters in the upcoming presidential election. At a crossroads, the Biden administration confronts Maduro's challenge to the agreement for democracy in Venezuela. The clemency pardon for Saab raises questions about Washington's commitment to judicial independence and suggests that pressure tactics may result in impunity.

In response, the White House threatened to let the license expire that allows Maduro to earn foreign exchange through oil exports, to which the regime countered by ending the program for repatriating Venezuelan migrants from the United States.

At this critical juncture, Biden is recalibrating his strategy, aiming for effectiveness without resorting to maximum pressure, which he considers ineffective in Venezuela. To salvage the Barbados agreement, the U.S. government has sought mediation from Colombia's President Gustavo Petro. This effort aims to break the current deadlock and move towards a peaceful and democratic resolution.

Brazil, another ally of Maduro, has defended the continuation of agreements for elections in Venezuela, reaffirming the support of Brazil and the United States for the dialogue mediated by Norway.

The mediation by regional figures like the president of Colombia and the support from Brazil underline the situation's complexity and the need for innovative solutions. These actions demonstrate a preference for diplomacy and negotiation, emphasizing that any solution must be pragmatic and result-oriented.

A potential meeting between María Corina Machado and Nicolás Maduro, facilitated by Petro, could be crucial for de-escalating tensions and promoting constructive dialogue.

In summary, the situation in Venezuela poses a significant challenge for the Biden administration, especially in a crucial election year in the United States. The pursuit of mediation by regional leaders and support from Brazil reflects an effort to balance diplomacy and negotiation while addressing Maduro's usurpation. The Biden administration's ability to manage this situation effectively will have a significant impact on the future of Venezuela and the United States' influence in the current global landscape, highlighting the importance of adaptability and strategic thinking in contemporary diplomacy.