

## **Navigating the uncertain waters of venezuelan politics: The Maduro regime and Biden response**

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*"Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it." - Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism*

In the intricate political landscape of Venezuela, the recent actions of the Supreme Court of Justice under Nicolás Maduro's regime, coupled with other maneuvers by the dictatorship, have engendered an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension. The reaffirmation of María Corina Machado's disqualification and Maduro's demands directed at the Biden administration pose severe challenges to the democratic process in Venezuela.

The Supreme Court combined the admission of an appeal, its subsequent rejection, and a precautionary measure in a single decision. This approach was the legally agreed path in the negotiations between the White House (Unitary Platform) and Miraflores, intended to ensure democratic guarantees for the 2024 presidential elections and help resolve Venezuela's prolonged political and institutional crisis.

Two weeks ago, Maduro accused the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) of the United States of sowing "confusion" in Venezuela, alleging that the CIA base in Colombia, along with Colombian Army intelligence agents and the DEA, were orchestrating violent, terrorist, coup-plotting, and unconstitutional actions against Venezuela from Colombian soil.

Four days ago, during a working session with the Federal Government Council Plenary, Maduro expressed that the Barbados agreements were critically wounded: "I declare them in intensive care. Hopefully, as Jorge Rodríguez said, we can save them today without any sinister plans to threaten my life".

He also demanded an end to the judicial persecutions against him and his allies, effectively calling for the removal of the bounties placed by the US justice system for capturing members of the Cartel of the Suns or for information leading to their arrest.

Since Hugo Chávez's ascent to power, Venezuela has been a land where governance rules are improvised, despite having a tailored constitution since 1999, often disregarding the letter of the law or established precedents. It makes predicting outcomes of this year's presidential election extraordinarily uncertain, with Maduro's political will dictating the rules of how, when, or even if the election will occur.

In this volatile context, María Corina Machado's candidacy hinges on ongoing negotiations, steadfastness of her position, and her ability to maintain popular support against the regime. Legal maneuvers and verdicts under Maduro serve as a façade, lending an institutional guise to what is broadly recognized as an illicit process.

Maduro and his inner circle are intimidated by the substantial challenge posed by María Corina in the electoral sphere, causing them apprehension. Historically, the opposition, represented by the Democratic Unity Roundtable and G-4, abstained from participating due to the regime's manipulation of the electoral process, a strategy that ultimately proved futile.

The opposition, spearheaded by María Corina, is adeptly responding to Maduro's attacks, counteracting and even seizing the initiative. They have crafted their strategies to surmount the hurdles set by the regime. The primary election, which the Maduro regime failed to halt, was a testament to this. The opposition successfully conducted it, establishing Machado as the primary candidate and opposition leader, earning widespread support to confront Maduro's capriciousness in selecting the opposition candidate.

The Biden administration extended a "credit" to Maduro by suspending economic sanctions, including those on the oil sector, gold, and bonds, and handed over Alex Saab, Maduro's primary collaborator, without a prior judicial process in December, aiming to promote a fair and democratic electoral process. However, Maduro, utilizing his cunning, might be planning to exploit the shift in rules - a new request and a breach of the Barbados agreement - to secure impunity ultimately.

As a result, the Biden administration and several European governments warned about possibly reinstating sanctions should Maduro violate the established agreements. Their failure to fully enforce these threats has undermined the credibility of their previously established "red lines". Paradoxically, this could be advantageous, increasing the regime's challenges. In scenarios where adversaries embrace chaos, risks escalate for all involved parties.

In Venezuela, the realization of free, fair, and competitive elections is unlikely to occur simply because the Bolivarian Republic's Constitution mandates it.

This moment in history represents a confluence of challenges and opportunities, wherein the resilience of the Venezuelan people, María Corina's leadership, and the concerted efforts of the international community –mobilizing more significant support and awareness– will play pivotal roles in restoring a democratic future.

Suppose the Biden administration aspires to be an effective change agent in promoting free and fair elections in Venezuela. In that case, it must adopt a more robust, coherent, and strategic approach, moving away from a foreign policy that has proven ineffective and inconsequential, particularly in an environment where Maduro frequently alters the political rules.