

## **Trump's new approach to Venezuela: stability over democracy**

Antonio De La Cruz  
*Executive Director*  
18/Feb/2025

*"Man and vanity move the world."  
– Michel Foucault*

Donald Trump has always been a transactional politician. He does not act based on ideology but on interests. And now, as he returns to the center of power, Venezuela appears to have shifted from a democratic cause to just another piece on his global influence chessboard.

During his first term, Trump pursued a maximum-pressure strategy against Nicolás Maduro, employing sanctions and diplomatic isolation. His administration bet everything on Juan Guaidó's interim government, hoping for an internal split within the Chavista regime, but Maduro endured. Now, with a new administration in the White House and a pragmatic approach taking shape, an inevitable question arises: Will Trump continue pressing for change in Venezuela, or will he prefer to strike a deal with Maduro?

### **Trump's new priorities: power and business**

Unlike his first term, Trump returns with a vision in which the United States no longer seeks to be the "world's policeman." His priorities now revolve around securing geopolitical stability — security through strength— and economic advantages—prosperity, *Made in USA*— rather than regime change.

In this new landscape, Venezuela is no longer seen as an imminent security threat but rather as a strategic opportunity. The United States has reached record levels of oil and gas production, cementing its position as the world's top producer. It no longer depends on Venezuelan energy supplies, reducing the urgency to pressure Maduro. Instead of trying to oust him, Trump may seek a functional relationship with Maduro to secure other key interests.

This logic explains the recent rapprochement between Washington and Caracas. From sanction relief to the release of American prisoners, the gestures exchanged between the Venezuelan usurper and the Republican president suggest room for a different kind of relationship. While the Biden administration initiated this rapprochement, Trump's team may take an even more transactional approach: Who negotiates is less important than what can be gained in return.

## **Maduro: the survivor**

Maduro has shown a remarkable ability to adapt. While maintaining his anti-imperialist rhetoric, he has made calculated moves to buy time and legitimacy with Washington. The release of American prisoners and the reduction of oil shipments to Cuba this past January are no minor gestures. These are signals that he is willing to make concessions if they guarantee his stability and hold on power.

So far, this strategy has worked. Despite his overwhelming electoral rejection on July 28, 2024—when over 70 percent of Venezuelans voted for Edmundo González Urrutia—Maduro has entrenched himself in Miraflores through state terrorism tactics. He controls the security forces and the informal economy that sustain his grip on power.

If Trump sees Maduro as someone who can ensure stability and prevent a larger migration crisis toward the United States, he may prefer negotiations over pushing for his removal.

## **The challenge for María Corina Machado**

The democratic opposition faces a complex dilemma. They won the July elections by a wide margin, yet they have not converted this support into real power. González Urrutia and María Corina Machado have worked to consolidate international recognition for the president-elect, but the coalition propping up the regime remains intact.

At the Munich Security Conference, González Urrutia stated that 70 to 80 percent of the armed forces support him. However, silent backing is not enough. In politics, sympathy alone does not matter—action does. If the military's top brass does not perceive the costs of supporting Maduro as greater than those of allowing a transition, the regime will not crack.

Trump does not back weak alternatives. If González Urrutia fails to project himself as a credible power contender, he risks being reduced to a symbolic figure. After all, stability in Venezuela is more important to Washington than democracy. If Maduro can provide it without triggering mass unrest, maintaining the *status quo* may become the most convenient option for the 47th president.

## **Time is running out**

Every move on this chessboard has consequences. If González Urrutia and Machado do not adjust their strategy and exert real pressure on Maduro's regime, they risk becoming irrelevant. Meanwhile, Maduro will continue adapting, seeking to position his continued rule as the least risky option for all involved parties.



The challenge for the president-elect and the opposition leader is to prove that they can govern, not just win elections. They need to consolidate domestic support, activate effective pressure mechanisms, and convince international actors that change in Venezuela is both viable and necessary.

If they fail to do so soon, the question will no longer be whether Trump abandoned the fight for democracy in Venezuela—but whether he ever considered it a priority in the first place.