

## Venezuela: The time for negotiation and change

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*"Let's go, buddy, because a neck doesn't grow back."*

*– General Luis Llovera Páez, 1958*

During her recent campaign in Trujillo state, María Corina Machado not only solidified her leadership among the democratic forces but also deepened the emotional connection with those who once supported Chavismo but now see her as the sole catalyst for the much-desired change in the country.

The Trujillo campaign has become a watershed moment in Venezuelan politics. María Corina has emerged as a symbol of resistance and hope amid a deep crisis that has plunged most Venezuelans into hardship. Her ability to empathize with the people's needs and sufferings has secured her place in the hearts of many, who see her not just as a politician but as the leader who could free the country from the clutches of the criminal band in Miraflores, integrated by Diosdado Cabello, Cilia Flores, Nicolás Maduro, Vladimir Padrino López, and Jorge Rodríguez, known as the Gang of Five.

Maduro's regime has shown signs of concern in response to this situation. As a result, they have organized events to weaken María Corina's emotional connection with the public, manipulate the size of public attendance, and hold simultaneous rallies in the same cities to reduce the visibility and impact of her message.

However, Maduro has begun to explore even more desperate strategies to retain power after an imminent electoral defeat on July 28 and cannot commit a mega fraud because of the high turnover. The latest includes provoking a conflict with Guyana, which would justify declaring a state of exception and the subsequent postponement of elections. This move mirrors unsettling parallels with international conflicts like Ukraine-Russia, using rhetoric that stokes nationalism to justify extreme measures.

During his participation in recent military maneuvers in El Pao, Cojedes state, related to the Esequibo claim, Maduro broadly stated that Guyana had become the center of the highest threat against peace in South America, hosting twelve CIA bases and fourteen secret Southern Command bases. "We will soon show evidence", he stated.

Meanwhile, Diosdado Cabello has actively used conspiracy theories to link María Corina Machado, who is seen as a significant electoral threat to the regime, with arguments that could suspend her role in the presidential election. The PSUV vice president claimed, "María Corina is sending her people to meet with dissidents from the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB),

both inside and outside the country. She is in talks with a retired general who still has influence within the Armed Forces. Simultaneously, some bankers in Miami held a meeting advocating that Maduro cannot be removed through votes and perhaps, hiring a mercenary army to capture him would be a better option”.

The most plausible hypothesis for destabilization involves a conflict with Guyana at the recently built Anacoco bridge constructed by Venezuela to facilitate the mobilization of personnel and military equipment. It is suspected that Maduro is organizing an operation to destroy it, which would involve irregular forces from the ELN or FARC dissidents, who would presumably keep the operation secret and force Guyana to seek international mediation to avoid the military confrontation sought by the PSUV candidate.

This strategy would allow Maduro to justify accusations of military confrontation and strengthen his narrative of an external invasion and threat, following Cabello’s arguments about international conspiracies. At this critical moment, Chávez’s successor would present evidence of his claim, supported by images of recent joint maneuvers between the United States and Guyana. He would likely choose to do this just days before June 24, coinciding with Army Day.

As a result, the presidential elections would be suspended, and the defense of territorial integrity against alleged acts of aggression by Guyana would be used as a justification. This strategy could resemble the one adopted by Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky in November last year, after the Russian invasion, when he declared: “It is the moment of battle, on which the fate of the state and the people depends”, and defended the decree of a state of emergency, which preventing the calling of elections and banning several parties aligned with Russia.

In summary, the maneuver to declare a state of exception follows a predictable script, linking Guyana and the United States as actors in supposed aggression, which would justify extraordinary actions, including suspending the July 28 elections.

Thus, a scenario looms in which Maduro, facing imminent defeat, opts for the riskiest option to maintain power.

This maneuver not only exposes the regime to significant international rejection from critical allies like Brazil and Colombia but also to global isolation—including China, which has interests in Guyana—, the end of what remains of the ALBA political, economic, and social alliance, rejection from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), discontent, and possible civil disobedience within Venezuela, particularly among the ranks and file in the FANB, who might see this ploy as too risky.

The suspension of the July 28 election would be one of Maduro's last mistakes before leaving power. His best option is to negotiate for an orderly and electoral transition, despite the opposition from some members of the Gang of Five who believe they can still survive the demand for change that the people, led by Edmundo González Urrutia and María Corina Machado, insist on through the vote.