

Delcy Rodríguez is Bending Over Backward to Accommodate Washington

BY STEVE ELLNER

Venezuelan provisional president Delcy Rodríguez's all-smiles photo op with Trump in a Manhattan hotel on September 22 proved too much for some of her erstwhile supporters. For the Spanish leftist Juan Carlos [Monedero](#), a staunch defender of Hugo Chávez, Maduro and at first Rodríguez, her New York appearance "clashed with the previous socialist and anti-imperialist discourse" of her movement.

Shortly before the encounter, Rodríguez evaded a [reporter's](#) question about whether she would visit jailed Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro in Brooklyn. Her decision to stay clear of Maduro is consistent with her attempt to chart a new course for Venezuela.

Rodríguez became interim president following the bloody U.S. military incursion on January 3, 2026 that resulted in the kidnapping of Maduro and the First Lady Cilia Flores. Facing the prospect of a second, more devastating military attack, Rodríguez shifted sharply toward Washington on foreign and oil policy while reshuffling the public administration and military at the expense of hardline pro-Chávez (Chavista) loyalists.

Rodríguez's strategy goes too far

Rodríguez's strategy from the outset was to demonstrate that she was not cowardly submitting to Washington's dictates or acting as a collaborationist à la Vichy France. Her wholehearted embrace of policies pushed by Washington is designed to dispel any impression that she is bowing to U.S. pressure. On many key issues, she has become as Catholic as the Pope with regard to Trump, while retaining the Chavista label. Shortly after January 3, Rodríguez affirmed "[there](#) is no foreign agent" governing Venezuela, a claim unconvincingly echoed by the second in command Diosdado Cabello who alleged "[we don't](#) depend on anyone."

In a different vein, pro-Rodríguez [analysts](#) argue that the interim president has zero options given the U.S. threats. Either submit to Washington or expect massive bombardment and/or a return of the old regime.

But there is clear evidence that Rodríguez has some latitude, albeit limited, which she has declined to fully exercise. That's because Trump is fully wedded to his partnership with her.

Trump decided to recognize Rodríguez rather than right-wing leader María Corina Machado – much to the disappointment of Miami-based anti-Communist hawks – for good reasons. A [confidential](#) CIA report requested by the Trump administration prior to January 3 warned that the Venezuelan opposition lacked support within the pro-

Chavista armed forces as well as the police force. The conclusion was obvious: turning power over to Machado was a recipe for chaos, if not civil war.

Trump has assimilated the Pentagon's assessment of "de-Baathification" following the U.S. invasion of Iraq as a "[complete](#) disaster," responsible for the endless internecine conflict in that nation. Trump has repeatedly invoked the Iraq fiasco when discussing the Rodríguez government. At one press conference he noted with reference to Venezuela "[We](#) had, as you remember, Iraq, where everybody got fired...And you know what they turned into? ISIS. And we don't want that."

Moreover, the decision to recognize Rodríguez rather than Machado was not taken on a whim but rather followed months of careful [deliberation](#) at the highest level of the Trump administration. He now touts his partnership with Rodríguez as a major success at a time in which he has very few of them to tout. It is thus unlikely that Trump will readily turn his back on Rodríguez. The upshot is that Rodríguez has some room to maneuver.

How much wiggle room?

The Chavista movement under Rodríguez has retreated from its defining banner: the uncompromising defense of national sovereignty. To its credit, the movement's leadership continues to cast itself as an opponent of the traditional elite and a defender of the collective production units known as "communes." But these positive features fall short for a movement that once raised such high expectations. While retaining a sense of realism, Rodríguez could have at least maintained a more neutral position on issues that compromised national sovereignty.

One of the most troubling examples was Venezuela's collaboration in the extrajudicial killing of Niño Guerrero, leader of the criminal Tren de Aragua, in a U.S. Southern Command missile strike in the state of Bolívar in June 2026. The Venezuelan government, which provided intelligence information to the Southern Command, issued a statement in which it "[congratulated](#)" all participants in the operation. In doing so, Caracas lent credence to Trump's false narrative that drug traffickers are terrorists. At the very least, the Rodríguez government could have stayed out of the operation while maintaining a neutral public posture.

Equally striking was the marked presence of Israeli military officers, including senior army officer Brigadier General Elad Edri, at a formal farewell meeting on July 21 in which Rodríguez thanked Israel for its earthquake relief efforts. U.S. and Israeli military involvement in the recovery operations drew [objections](#) from Chavista social movements, such as the famed Caracas barrio-based Coordinadora Simón Bolívar. They especially resented the conspicuousness of the presence of military personnel of both nations, symbolized by a controversial [photograph](#) of a beaming Diosdado Cabello shaking hands with U.S. Southern Command chief Francis L. Donovan, who

had overseen the January 3 incursion. This, then, was another instance in which the Chavista leadership offered Washington a level of support that went well beyond what was necessary given the circumstances.

Still another example of the lengths to which Rodríguez has gone in accommodating Washington is her willingness to accept the Pentagon's participation in the Venezuelan oil industry. The mega oil deal reached between Washington and Caracas in late August gives the Pentagon 35 percent ownership of the operating company that is to exploit 17 Venezuelan oil fields representing nearly 150 percent of U.S. proven reserves. But there is no precedent for the Pentagon's equity ownership of this nature which is of dubious legality. Venezuelan analyst Phil Gunson, who has been briefed on the deal, told the *Guardian* that the major oil companies "are [concerned](#) about the irregularities." From Venezuela's viewpoint, the involvement of the Pentagon in the nation's oil business makes little sense.

From the perspective of the Pentagon and its Israeli counterpart, Rodríguez's conciliatory stance appears to be a vindication and a reversal of Chavista defiance – if not a payback for past grievances. In January 2000 Chávez turned back a sizable relief operation that the same U.S. Southern Command was in the process of sending in response to catastrophic floods, which had devastated the state of Vargas the previous month. Chávez's [decision](#) was an embarrassing rebuff for the Pentagon, if not humiliating.

Along similar lines, Roni Kaplan, spokesperson for the Israeli armed forces and a member of his nation's aid mission, told CE Noticias Financieras-English on July 22, "it's like when you fight with someone and they come to apologize, and when they say they're sorry, you say, "'I've already forgotten all about it.'" Kaplan's statement puts in sharp relief the extent to which Rodríguez's posture breaks with the Chavista past.

Where things now stand

The pro-Chavista think tank Misión Verdad puts a positive spin on Rodríguez's strategy. According to its take, the Manhattan meeting with Trump marked the point at which "[Washington's](#) asymmetric coercion and the strategic adaptation deployed by the Chavista movement converge." For both Trump and Rodríguez, the aim was the same: "stabilization... to reduce political costs by sacrificing ideological orthodoxy." The asymmetry according to the Misión Verdad statement "does not erase the agency of the quantitatively weaker actor; it alters its tactics, shifting it from open confrontation toward strategic adaptation."

The adaptation demanded by the asymmetry is captured in a slogan championed by Diosdado Cabello: "Venezuela: Reborn United." Strip away the Misión's lofty language, and the message is that the Chavista movement needs to make a fundamental break with its past in important ways.



Adaption is understandable given the circumstances of January 3. But if Chavismo abandons the banner of defense of national sovereignty, little remains of what defined the movement. And that is precisely where the strategy of being “as Catholic as the Pope” in accommodating Washington has led.

That's not to say there are easy answers or that an alternative strategy would necessarily succeed, particularly given Trump's notorious unpredictability. Nor does it mean that Rodríguez deserves to be demonized as a sellout as so many on the left are doing. Such demonization underestimates the challenges and uniqueness of the situation, at the same time that it divides the solidarity movement. The relative unity of the Chavista leadership has been one of its strengths ever since Chávez's death in 2013, and the same needs to be preserved in the solidarity movement.

The problem is that the options available to Rodríguez are scarce, whereas Trump has many. He need not pull off another January 3. Nearly all Venezuela's oil-derived revenue is in a U.S. account handled by Marco Rubio. All Rubio has to do is to withhold it or scale it back whenever Rodríguez steps out of line with Washington.

Furthermore, the Trump administration can at any moment insist on the calling of presidential elections, which if electoral contests in other Latin American countries are any indication, will involve direct involvement by Washington in favor of candidates on the right.

Even with this reality hanging over her, Rodríguez and other Chavista leaders have put forward two major demands: free Maduro and Flores and an end to the sanctions, which remain largely intact. Rodríguez, however, has not put these two demands front and center in her dialogue with the Trump administration – not by a long shot.

As pressure from Miami grows for Venezuela to set an electoral timetable, the position that elections and harsh sanctions are incompatible would shift responsibility for any delay onto Washington. Last Spring, Chavista leader Ernesto Villegas, who headed the government's Program for Peace and Democratic Coexistence, called for "[elections](#) free of sanctions." Linking elections explicitly to the lifting of sanctions would allow the Rodríguez government to reclaim some distance from Washington, even as U.S. blackmail severely limits its ability to fully assert national sovereignty.

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Steve Ellner is a retired professor of the Universidad de Oriente in Venezuela where he lived for over 40 years and is currently Associate Managing Editor of *Latin American Perspectives*. He is the author and editor of over a dozen books on Latin American politics and history. In 2018 he spoke in over twenty cities in the U.S. and Canada as part of a Venezuelan solidarity tour.

