

# Venezuela's Maduro appeals to Wall Street and warns of "civil war" ahead of Sunday's elections

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The presidential elections scheduled for Sunday will provide no resolution to the explosive and intersecting global and local political crises gripping Venezuela. Instead, amid warnings of "civil war" and threats by the main contenders to reject any unfavorable results, the vote will mark an inflection point.

A drop in oil prices, US sanctions, mismanagement and corruption have devastated the economy and provoked a humanitarian catastrophe. The economy has shrunk to a fifth or less of its size in 2014; government programs are relying on a budget 97 percent smaller; at least nine out of ten Venezuelans are poor; and nearly 8 million have emigrated.

With bipartisan backing, US imperialism continues to starve the population into submission with 350 sanctions in the past seven years. Access to oil reserves—the largest in the world—is being used to reduce dependence on Russian and Middle Eastern oil among US "partners" in Europe and Asia, but the strategic objective is blocking Chinese access to these reserves.

While maintaining brutal sanctions on companies that trade Venezuelan oil, the US Treasury Department has handed special permits to a number of US, European and Canadian companies, as well as to Trinidad's NGC and India's Reliance Industries and Jindal Power.

In response, to secure a share of the profits for its faction in the ruling class and fend off an invasion, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who is running for re-election, and his Socialist United Party (PSUV) government, have tightened economic and military ties with Russia and China, granting this week oil production contracts to two Chinese companies.

In a signing ceremony Wednesday for a joint natural gas project with Trinidad and Tobago, Maduro declared, "We are ready and willing to negotiate with whomever." Shortly after, the agreements with Chinese companies were leaked to the media.

Caracas has combined this with subservient appeals to US business interests. Citing anonymous sources, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote Tuesday that "some U.S. oil executives and Wall Street creditors quietly embrace president" Maduro as a guarantor of stability and profits. There has been a positive response to a trip by Maduro to a recently reopened plant of US-

based Chevron, where he declared: "We guarantee stability, legal security, peace, win-win relations."

Maduro has also reportedly "floated the possibility of pledging future oil revenues and directly negotiating a restructuring of some \$60 billion in debt without traditional intermediaries like the International Monetary Fund."

These promises not only imply massive attacks against Venezuelan workers and social programs, but they are word-for-word what the US-backed opposition leaders are pledging in the *Financial Times* and other corporate outlets.

Despite often leading the chorus denouncing Maduro as a "socialist" and "communist," the *Wall Street Journal* adds: "Maduro at times has even interceded personally to facilitate business."

While the US-based energy corporations begin with their immediate profit interests, the US government may well consider disruptions triggered by a change of regime acceptable in the broader pursuit of transforming Latin America into a bastion against its geopolitical rivals.

To this end, the Biden administration negotiated the organization of presidential elections and now backs the candidacy of ex-diplomat Edmundo Gonzalez, a stand-in for Washington's long-time right-wing "asset" Maria Corina Machado.

The fascistic leader of the Unitary Platform, Machado was disqualified by the Venezuelan courts from running. The Platform parties and its leaders have acted openly for decades as paid tools of the CIA in its regime change operations.

Both Maduro and Gonzalez-Machado claim major leads in the polls. There is no question that the opposition and Washington will refuse to recognize a victory of the PSUV.

Desertions by factions of the *chavista* ruling coalition point to Maduro's increasing inability to keep them happy, especially as oil production remains a third or less than its capacity a decade ago. But most significantly, Maduro's statements reflect a growing fear that sections of the military will support regime change, especially if the opposition wins the vote.

During a rally in Caracas last week, Maduro declared: "If you do not want Venezuela to fall into a bloodbath, into a fratricidal

civil war, a product of the fascists, let us guarantee the greatest triumph, the greatest victory in the electoral history of our people.”

The slide into civil war would undoubtedly involve a more direct intervention by US imperialism and regional powers loyal to Washington. Stopping such an outcome would require the independent intervention of the Venezuelan working class for its own interests, something which is opposed by both of the right-wing alternatives in Sunday’s election.

For Maduro and his inner circle, the prospect of suffering the fate of Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi makes it less than likely that he will accept any guarantees from Washington. While US officials speaking on condition of anonymity with the *New York Times* claim they have offered “amnesties, guarantees for those leaving office,” Washington maintains a bounty for Maduro’s arrest on drug trafficking charges.

In another self-indictment, the Maduro administration has blocked the participation in the election by candidates to its left, including those of the Stalinist Communist Party (PCV), which only recently broke with the government.

Such anti-democratic measures are an acknowledgement that the government’s unpopular policies have destroyed its supposed “anti-imperialist”, “developmentalist” and “socialist” credentials. These policies include Maduro’s timely payments to foreign creditors and brutal attacks on living standards, which have gone a long way in turning one of the richest countries in the region into a massive source of ultra-cheap labor.

Putting first the attraction of foreign investments and the privileges of the military leadership and the *boliburguesía*, Maduro has slashed healthcare and public education to among the lowest levels as a percentage of GDP in Latin America. Following other tax cuts, he just ended this month a Tax on Large Financial Transactions in the local currency, Bolívares, in a clear appeal to ruling circles.

According to the country’s constitution, any transition would not take place until January 10, leaving nearly six months for the political crisis to explode.

While the ruling elites in backward nations have moved far to the right and financial monopolies have become far more ruthless since this period, Trotsky made a pertinent analysis in 1938, as World War II approached, about a boycott by Britain against Mexican oil after the partial expropriation of the resource under the bourgeois nationalist Lázaro Cárdenas, who had granted Trotsky asylum. He wrote:

The oil magnates are not rank-and-file capitalists, not ordinary bourgeoisie. Having seized the richest natural resources of a foreign country, standing on their billions and supported by the military and diplomatic forces of their metropolis, they strive to establish in the subjugated country a regime of imperialistic feudalism,

subordinating to themselves legislation, jurisprudence, and administration. Under these conditions expropriation is the only effective means of safeguarding national independence and the elementary conditions of democracy.

Like today’s absurd claims by the corporate media and politicians that the much more limited shared ownership schemes and concessions under the *chavistas* are “communist” and favorable to China and Russia, Trotsky points to the fact that British and French imperialists called Cárdenas a “communist” and his reformist measures plots by Hitler for “depriving the great-hearted ‘democracies’ of oil in case of war.”

“The international proletariat has no reason to identify its program with the program of the Mexican government. Revolutionists have no need of changing color, adapting themselves,” Trotsky adds. But all working-class organizations must “take an irreconcilable position against the imperialist robbers, their diplomacy, their press, and their fascist hirelings.”

Trotsky was referring to the Theory of Permanent Revolution that he developed and which guided the October Revolution in Russia. In the epoch of imperialism, Trotsky established, democracy in countries with belated economic development, which fundamentally includes independence from imperialist oppression, cannot be secured under capitalist rule, but requires that the working class takes power.

As imperialism moves to re-divide and re-colonize the planet through a Third World War, workers and youth in semi-colonial countries like Venezuela, as well as in the imperialist countries, can secure their future only by taking up the fight to build the World Party of Socialist Revolution, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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