Venezuelan puppet Delcy Rodríguez to meet Trump in New York

Andrea Lobo
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Venezuela's Acting President Delcy Rodríguez arrived in New York on Monday to address the United Nations General Assembly and to meet Donald Trump on Tuesday, in the first encounter between a US and a Venezuelan head of state in more than 11 years.

It will take place a few miles from the federal jail in Brooklyn where president Nicolás Maduro has been held since US forces seized him during an unprovoked invasion of Venezuela on January 3.

She was received on the tarmac by John Barrett, the US chargé d'affaires in Caracas, who is the latest official assigned to act as her handler.

The White House announced the meeting last Friday. US Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz specified that it would be "informal" rather than a "formal bilateral." On the same day Trump will deliver his General Assembly address, hold a formal bilateral with the British prime minister, chair a meeting of Gulf leaders, and return to Washington that night.

Meanwhile, the acting president of a country whose oil he has just taken gets a "pull-aside" in the corridor. This is part of the message: Washington has established a protectorate, whose administrator gets treated with disrespectful informality.

It is a demonstration staged for every government in the hemisphere of the terms on which Washington now proposes to do business. The Pentagon and Trump's own lackeys have taken Venezuela's oil openly, outside any constitutional or legal framework, and the government in Caracas has signed for it.

Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores have been held at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn since January. Both pleaded not guilty to cocaine trafficking charges and have moved to dismiss the indictment on grounds of head-of-state immunity, which Washington rejects. Their trial is set for June 1, 2027.

Despite having the legal standing to request a visit, there is no indication Rodriguez has sought one. In no meeting with US officials since January has she even raised the release of the abducted president.

Speaking in the same UN chamber in 2019 as Maduro's vice president, Rodríguez called US sanctions "state terrorism" waged not with bombs but with "banks and insurers," and accused Trump of "extending his imperial claws." Several delegations walked out. She returns as head of a government that has handed those claws unrestricted political and economic control.

The context of the visit is marked by the deal announced last month giving the United States privileged access to more than 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan oil reserves, which Trump called "a gift from Venezuela to the American people."

The Pentagon's Office of Strategic Capital now holds a 35 percent equity stake in North American Blue Energy Partners, the private firm granted the concessions. As such, the US armed forces have acquired a direct revenue-producing interest in foreign military operations, outside the constitutional requirement that Congress appropriate their funds.

Speaking for financial circles, CNBC's Brian Sullivan, who was flown to Caracas to watch the contracts get signed, reported back:

> It's not rocket science to know that the most cynical among us are going to say that the United States is "taking" the oil or that this is some sort of new form of American colonialism. Wrong on both counts…. I'd take the U.S., Italy and other western countries over Russia and China any day of the week and twice

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on Sunday.

What is happening in practice is the blatant dishing out of Venezuelan resources to Trump's business partners. As reported by *El País, i*n April, the heirs of the Venezuela magnate Oswaldo Cisneros found representatives of Pacific Coast Energy Company, a little-known California firm owned by Belgian billionaire Alshair Fiyaz, walking their Orinoco oilfields. On May 21 the Hydrocarbons Ministry opened a sanctioning proceeding against their company for failing to meet investment commitments. Five days later, before it had concluded, Pacific Coast signed six contracts covering twelve fields. The new contract took effect July 1. The previous owner's rights had run to 2042.

"They simply took the assets from us and disappeared. Nobody answers the phone," said Silvestre Tovar Leopardi of DP Delta Finance, the Cisneros partner.

Pacific Coast was brought in by Alejandro Betancourt, the investor under criminal investigation for money laundering in Spain and Switzerland who brokered the US oil framework last month, and backed by Mauricio Claver-Carone, until recently Washington's informal envoy to Caracas.

On September 16, Continental Resources, owned outright by Trump donor Harold Hamm, took the Ayacucho 2 block and its estimated 30 billion barrels, assigned in 2025 to the Chinese firm Anhui Guangda, an arrangement rescinded without justification.

Energy Secretary Chris Wright has stated that China may not claim revenues from new production against past debts. In the *Financial Times*, Leo Lewis called it the end of the "win-win" era.

The semi colonial arrangement and corruption have been furnished with a human rights certificate. Days before the trip, Human Rights Watch met with Rodriguez and declared that she "has overseen a pause to the most overt forms of repression" and urged that "the United States should use its leverage to play a leading role in pushing for meaningful human rights change in Venezuela."

Meanwhile, inside Venezuela, any opposition faces immediate threats. Speaking to *El País*, a human rights defender in exile said the US embassy "is compiling files on people who have been criticizing the tutelage." When relatives of political prisoners planned a vigil outside it, diplomats telephoned the committees to ask them not to take part. "We have exchanged the arepa muzzle for the hamburger muzzle," the activist said, adapting the name Venezuelans gave to censorship bought with food under Chavismo. A State Department spokesman replied that "your anonymous sources are wrong."

The opposition long backed by the US State Department has largely fallen in behind the occupation. Former opposition leader María Corina Machado has confined her criticism of the oil deal to the legitimacy of the Rodríguez government which signed it, saying nothing against Washington.

Rodríguez travels to New York three months after the June 24 earthquakes. As of September 10, authorities reported at least 7,422 dead and more than 226,696 injured. Estimates of the disappeared range from roughly 18,000 to 50,000, and no one can say which is nearer the truth. The Development Bank of Latin America has announced a multi-donor fund of up to $200 million to rebuild Maiquetía airport, shut for over two months. By comparison, Chevron alone is investing some $7 billion across three Venezuelan oil projects.

In this context, Venezuela remains under sanctions and on the US list of countries facing entry restrictions. "We are an appendix of the United States with many obligations and few rights," an oil executive said.

The meeting in New York is the culmination of the "Bolivarian revolution" in which a nominally left nationalist regime has delivered the country to US imperialism and taken the office of colonial administrator in payment.

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