

CIA-backed opposition leader María Corina Machado sent back to Venezuela to contain social protests

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María Corina Machado, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and longtime US-funded leader of Venezuela's right, surfaced without warning on Sunday morning at mass in a chapel in Santa Rosa, outside Barquisimeto, in the western state of Lara, where the right-wing opposition has drawn some of its strongest support. She then led a caravan 400 kilometers through Yaracuy, Carabobo and Aragua, past thousands of supporters and onlookers. She reached Caracas after 9 p.m.

Machado had left the country in December, smuggled out by a US team. According to Reuters, she flew from Panama to Colombia and crossed overland in an operation coordinated with the US, Panamanian and Colombian governments, approved by Donald Trump and guarded by US security contractors.

David Alandete, Washington correspondent of the Spanish daily *ABC*, reported that "the Trump administration was divided until the last moment." What proved decisive, his sources said, was "the pressure of Florida legislators, who warned the White House of the grave political cost of appearing to block the return of the Nobel Peace laureate, especially a few days before the November 3 elections."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio claimed the return as Washington's achievement:

The conditions allowing for the safe return of Ms. Machado to Venezuela is the direct result of the US supported reconciliation talks which has already seen hundreds of political prisoners freed and hundreds of political opposition figures return from exile.

Trump claimed to know nothing about it, calling her "a very nice woman" and adding, "But we're doing really well in Venezuela." The same weekend he told Fox News that the US "totally has control of Venezuela" and is "taking out millions of barrels of oil" every week.

Machado has not been brought home to challenge the protectorate Washington runs through Acting President Delcy Rodríguez but to help contain opposition to it.

A movement of workers against poverty wages, blackouts and the plunder of the country's oil is growing, and neither the Chavista apparatus, nor the opposition at the US-sponsored negotiating table, nor the union bureaucracy has been able to contain it. Washington is betting that the best-known opposition politician in the country can channel that anger behind the talks and the promise of elections.

On January 3, the day US special forces seized Nicolás Maduro, Trump brushed Machado aside: "She doesn't have the support within or the respect within the country." Washington turned instead to Rodríguez and the Chavista state machine, which commands the army and police, and kept Machado out of the talks.

Rubio explained why in September: an elected government would "inherit a complete catastrophe, economic and social." A source told *Axios* "a democratic government is going to be facing massive street protests over inflation, the economy. It could threaten the entire thing." The concern was never legitimacy. It was the working class.

Machado nonetheless remains the most prominent opposition figure. She won the 2023 opposition primary with over 90 percent of the vote, and an AtlasIntel poll conducted October 2-7 gave her 52 percent against 19 percent for Rodríguez.

Sources in Caracas told *El País* that for Rodríguez and

Minister of Interior Diosdado Cabello, Machado is “above all a factor of destabilization,” threatening “the balance they have managed to maintain under Washington’s imperative tutelage.” They bet that “unable to solve the everyday problems of Venezuelans,” her strategy of mobilization “will end up turning against her.” The paper called it “an uncertain bet,” since the effect of her return on the streets “is still quite unpredictable, as is the role the United States has reserved for her.”

US officials had asked her to postpone her return, Reuters reports. Waving her in now shows they judge the situation unstable enough that diverting popular anger needed all hands on deck.

The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict documented 1,101 protests in September, 37 a day and nearly six times the 187 of September 2025. Of these, 531 were over electricity.

The second cause was wages. The minimum wage has been frozen since March 2022 at 130 bolívares, now worth less than 30 US cents. Public workers get \$240 in bonuses that do not count toward pensions, while food for a family of five cost \$761.35 in September.

On October 13, health and education workers marched in central Caracas until police blocked them from reaching the Miraflores palace.

On October 20, active and retired oil workers in Zulia walked out against wages of \$5 a week, warning of a national oil strike. A Committee of Blackout Victims and Communes, a current of dissident Chavista groups, has called a national protest for Tuesday. “They take the oil, they leave us the darkness,” the committee declared.

On October 24, Rodríguez boasted of record output at Petrozamorá and 17 energy agreements with the US, the day after a State Department economic adviser toured the Bachaquero field with Alejandro Betancourt, head of the Pentagon-backed oil venture NABEP.

Caracas must still seek US permission to spend its oil revenues, the *Financial Times* reported in September. “Do you know how much money we’re taking out of Venezuela? Hundreds of millions of dollars,” Trump told a Kentucky rally on October 17. On October 14, the Treasury lifted sanctions on Rodríguez’s brother Jorge.

Machado’s spokeswoman signaled her role, saying on Monday she is ready to sit down “not only with Delcy, but with whoever must sit down,” since “there is no credible process of transition or election without the strength and legitimacy of the people she represents.” The offer is to deliver that “strength” to the negotiations.

The opposition Unitary Platform hailed her return as a

push toward a “democratic, peaceful and orderly transition” in line with the Trump administration’s three-phase plan. US chargé d’affaires John Barrett said Saturday the objective was “to reach the third phase.” The talks closed their third round last week by agreeing to review the law on political disqualifications and to form a joint commission over Venezuelan gold held at the Bank of England. Nothing was agreed on wages.

The union bureaucracy moves in step, adding presidential elections “as soon as possible” to the workers’ demands. On September 24 it handed the platform of a march on the Labor Ministry to Juan Pablo Guanipa of the right-wing Primero Justicia party.

The estimation is that a political channel is necessary for unrest as even more unpopular economic measures are implemented.

This month the government eased tax requirements on small businesses, cut the registry of high-income “special taxpayers” from 132,000 to 44,000 and promised a tax reform to “harmonize the tax burden” for private production. With the employers’ federations FEDECAMARAS and FEDEINDUSTRIA and the government-aligned union central CBST, it is preparing a “Labor Emergency Law” to cut labor costs, aimed above all at the 2012 provision that calculates severance on a worker’s last salary. Machado, who has long advocated privatizing the state oil company PDVSA and radical deregulation, speaks for the same business interests.

The plunder Washington intends requires a working class kept poor and politically disarmed. Machado’s return will not resolve the crisis of bourgeois rule in the protectorate but only deepen it.



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