

Carlos Romero: “The fundamental priority of the U.S. government is to seek stabilization with Venezuela”

Carlos Romero, PhD in Political Science and professor at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), highlights that the Chavista regime seeks to “establish a modus vivendi” with the new Trump government, emphasizing that beyond energy and migration concerns, “no U.S. administration has ever abandoned democracy and human rights as priorities.”

Donald Trump left and Joe Biden arrived. Now Biden has left and Trump is back. And Nicolás Maduro is still there. Despite the contrasting policies and strategies of the last two White House administrations, Venezuela’s political crisis remains unresolved. On the contrary, following the fraud on July 28, the situation has deteriorated further, continuing to pose a serious challenge for the global democratic community.

Political Scientist and professor at the Central University of Venezuela, Carlos Romero, believes that the new Trump administration may attempt to approach the Maduro regime without implying a renunciation of its democratic demands.

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Romero, who in the 1990s was advisor to Venezuela's Foreign Ministry, argues that a military option is off the table for the Republican president, who, in this upside-down world, would not be interested in sparking a crisis in his own "backyard."

–Trump tried "maximum pressure" and failed. Biden attempted negotiation and also fell short. How do you assess U.S. policy toward Venezuela in recent years? Why do you think neither approach has managed to pave the way for a transition in the country?

U.S. foreign policy during the Trump administrations, his first term, and Biden's government has had similarities and differences. The similarities include maintaining the policy of sanctions and "maximum pressure". The differences, on the other hand, are shown in Biden's inclination toward a framework of negotiations. In any case, it's not that the United States has failed in supporting a transition, but rather that the internal factors in Venezuela have not become sufficiently clear to enable the move toward a return to democracy. Because all of these changes are originally forged for internal, domestic reasons, and in reality, there has been a significant gap between the United States' efforts to carry out a transition policy and the maintenance of an effective opposition strategy that could have complemented that U.S. desire.

–All around the world, there is speculation about what Trump's second term will be like. In the case of Venezuela, some believe he may arrive with a "pragmatic" vision, to the point of reaching an understanding with Maduro, while others claim

that he will increase pressure against the regime. Do you lean toward either of these?

On several occasions, I have expressed support for a negotiation process between the Trump administration and the Venezuelan government. There is still room to find some common ground, and above all, to speak frankly about what each actor wants from the other. Venezuela has often played the anti-American card, seeking alliances with so-called radical actors such as China, Iran, Turkey, Russia, and Cuba. But the truth is that what the Venezuelan government really wants is to establish a *modus vivendi* with the United States —that is its priority.

—Many expectations have been raised with the appointment of Marco Rubio as Secretary of State. What impact might Rubio have on the Trump administration's policy toward Venezuela?

Not much should be expected from the role Marco Rubio will play as Secretary of State. The Venezuela issue will be handed off to a special envoy (Richard Allen Grenell), who will focus specifically on the cases of Venezuela and North Korea. Thus, initially, Rubio won't be involved in managing day-to-day relations with Venezuela. Rubio holds a deeply ideological stance on the Venezuelan situation and will likely be an obstacle to any potential negotiations between Venezuela and the United States. Personally, I don't have much faith that Rubio will remain in that position, as his personality is likely to clash with Trump's.

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–U.S. interests seem focused on energy and migration. Will democracy and human rights be sidelined on the agenda?

There is no doubt that the Trump administration will prioritize energy and migration issues, but the democratic and human rights agenda remains a constant presence in U.S. foreign policy. It's not a matter of focusing exclusively, but of balancing and giving greater consideration to energy-related issues. However, no U.S. administration has ever abandoned the matter of democracy and human rights. Thus, there will be a coexistence of topics in the U.S. foreign policy agenda toward Venezuela –and vice versa.

–Maduro has shown a willingness to reach an understanding with the new Trump administration. In light of what happened on July 28 and the reaction of the democratic international community, do you believe a "normalization" of bilateral relations is possible?

It is not out of the question that the Trump administration might consider negotiating with Maduro. At this moment, given the global conflicts, I don't think the United States is seeking a military problem with Venezuela. I believe it is too early to predict the direction Trump's approach to the Venezuelan case will take. Therefore, normalization of bilateral relations is possible, which would begin with the restoration of diplomatic relations that have been severed since 2019.

–During his first term, Trump uttered his famous phrase: “All options are on the table.” Do you think that in this new term he might consider the option of military intervention?

Military intervention is a topic that cannot be set aside, but at this moment the fundamental priority of the U.S. government is to seek stabilization with Venezuela. Although many Venezuelans have expressed willingness to support a military solution, I do not see it being considered in the near future. Getting involved in a war scenario in the Latin American context carries very high costs for the United States at this time. First, because the U.S., and Trump in particular, see Latin America as a safeguard region for the U.S., what is called the “backyard.”

Therefore, the priority of the United States is to prevent the Venezuelan case from leading to the internationalization of the region. Historically speaking, twice the U.S. has faced the danger of internationalization: with the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and with the Falklands War in 1982. In each of those situations, the U.S. sought to limit the impact of the internationalization of its foreign policy toward Latin America.

Taken as a whole, the relations between the United States and Venezuela are crucial for maintaining a favorable international balance in the Western Hemisphere, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. On the one hand, most countries favor reconciliation between the United States and Venezuela; on the other hand, the United States does not want to add more problems to its already complex international agenda, which includes issues such as the Middle East, Ukraine, and China.

Secondly, the majority of countries that are aligned with the United States do not necessarily support a military solution.

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Considering a military option is nothing more than the desperation of those who cannot achieve a political transition, which remains the priority in Venezuela at this time.

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