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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Will Come of Recent Gestures by Venezuela's Maduro?



Several recent actions by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro have been seen as conciliatory. // File Photo: @NicolasMaduro via Twitter.

**Q** Venezuela's ruling party-controlled National Assembly on May 4 named two opposition leaders as election officials, a move that some analysts see as President Nicolás Maduro's latest conciliatory signal to the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden. Other actions included granting house arrest to six U.S. citizens known as the "Citgo 6" and allowing the U.N. World Food Program back into the country. However, an unnamed White House official told Reuters that the administration needed to see "concrete actions" before changing its policy toward Venezuela. How significant are the Maduro government's recent moves, and are they likely to lead to real change in Venezuela? What influence does the Venezuelan opposition have both in public and behind the scenes, and what factions within the opposition are playing the most important roles at this moment? What "concrete" measures by Maduro does the Biden administration want to see, and to what extent can it leverage the Venezuelan government's latest steps to push for even more compromises before easing sanctions or shifting strategies?

**A** Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organization of American States: "A common error is referring to the illegitimate National Assembly as Venezuela's ruling party-controlled National Assembly. The Permanent Council resolution of Dec. 10, 2020 rejected the fraudulent election of Dec. 6. The legitimate National Assembly is the institution elected in 2015. The so-called 'conciliatory signals' from the regime such as the designation of an illegitimate National Electoral Council are not significant or conducive

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## TODAY'S NEWS

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## Nicaragua's Opposition Appears Still Fractured

The Citizen Alliance opposition group registered to participate on its own in Nicaragua's upcoming presidential election, showing the opposition as still fractured.

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### BUSINESS

## Air France, Airbus to Face Trial in 2009 Crash

A French court of appeals ordered the companies to face involuntary manslaughter charges in the deadly 2009 crash of an airliner en route to Paris from Rio de Janeiro. All 228 people aboard were killed.

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### POLITICAL

## U.S. Envoy Meets With El Salvador's Bukele

U.S. Special Envoy Ricardo Zúñiga said he raised concerns about the recent removal of high-court magistrates during a meeting with Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele.

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Bukele // File Photo: Salvadoran Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Nicaragua's Ortega Appears Boosted by Fractured Opposition

Nicaragua's Citizen Alliance opposition group on Wednesday registered to participate on its own in the country's presidential elections scheduled for November, making it less likely that the wider opposition will come together in a bid to oust President Daniel Ortega, Reuters



Ortega // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

reported. Ortega has been in office since 2007, after having led Nicaragua from 1985 to 1990. The Central American nation's fractured opposition for more than two years has tried to reach an agreement to form a single coalition to oust Ortega, whom analysts believe will be re-elected if the opposition remains divided. The Supreme Electoral Council had set May 12 as the hard deadline for the opposition to register as a single alliance. Instead, several opposition parties registered as presidential contenders. Kitty Monterrey will run for the Citizens for Freedom party, representing the broader Citizen Alliance opposition group. The bloc had sought to join forces with the Democratic Restoration Party, part of a National Coalition umbrella group that represents anti-Ortega leftists, evangelical Christians and students, among others, Reuters reported. "We sought unity until the last moment," Monterrey said. "We were waiting for them until the end, and they did not arrive [to an agreement.]" Also on Wednesday, in a special session of the Organization of American States, Secretary General Luis Almagro described the planned elections in Nicaragua as the "worst election

possible" due to the lack of guarantees that it will be a free, fair and transparent process, local newspaper Confidential reported.

## Guatemala's High Court Rules in Favor of NGO Law

Guatemala's Constitutional Court on Wednesday overturned an earlier decision that had blocked controversial legislation that targets nonprofit organizations working in the country, paving the way for it to become law, La Prensa reported. In one of the new court's first major rulings, the court said it had revoked a previous decision that gave a reprieve to NGOs that had sued against the "NGO law" that Congress passed in February of last year, Reuters reported. The measure, which grants the government greater oversight over organizations' affairs and finances and ultimately the power to dissolve them, had spurred criticism from Washington over graft and impunity concerns. "The law seems to have a dual purpose. On one

“The law ... protects criminal structures linked to state corruption.”

— Kathryn Klaas

hand, it protects criminal structures linked to state corruption," Kathryn Klaas, manager of the Migration, Remittances and Development program at the Inter-American Dialogue, told the Advisor in a Q&A published on March 4, 2020. "The second effect would be to institutionalize mechanisms for silencing social demands," she added. Supporters of the law argue that there needs to be better regulation of nonprofit organizations working in the Central American country. "Because of Guatemala's tragic and violent past, social activist organizations from Western Europe and the United States often seem to focus disproportionately on Guatemala as the unsolicited recipient of their prolific efforts to effect global societal

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Thousands Take to Streets in Colombia as Protests Enter Third Week

Thousands of demonstrators marched in cities across Colombia and also participated in a national strike on Wednesday as protests sparked by a now-canceled tax reform entered their third week, Reuters reported. More than 40 people have been killed during the protests, which revolve around discontent over unemployment, poverty and police brutality.

## U.S. Special Envoy Meets With El Salvador's Bukele

U.S. Special Envoy to the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúñiga spoke with Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele on Tuesday in an in-person meeting that Zúñiga described as "cordial," Reuters reported. Zúñiga said he raised Washington's concerns about the Salvadoran National Assembly's recent removal of constitutional magistrates and the attorney general, calling the moves unconstitutional. Bukele's Nuevas Ideas party controls the legislature. The president had reportedly declined to meet with Zúñiga during a previous visit to El Salvador.

## Argentina's Fernández Meets With Pope Francis During Visit to Vatican

Pope Francis met with Argentine President Alberto Fernández on Thursday during the president's trip to Europe, Reuters reported. The meeting came months after Argentina legalized abortion with Fernández's support, despite a personal plea from Pope Francis, who is an Argentine, and opposition from the Catholic Church. In a break from usual protocol, the Vatican did not say what issues the two leaders discussed during their meeting, which took place in a side study off the Vatican's auditorium. Official state visits are usually held in the Apostolic Palace, according to the report.

goals ... with the results often crippling industries and even some important public projects," James Meyer, partner at Harper Meyer in Miami, wrote in the same edition.

## BUSINESS NEWS

# Air France, Airbus Ordered to Face Trial in Deadly 2009 Crash

A French court of appeals ruled Wednesday that Air France and Airbus must stand trial on charges of involuntary manslaughter related to the 2009 crash of Flight AF447 that went down in the Atlantic Ocean after departing Rio de Janeiro, en route to Paris, Agence France-Presse reported. The crash, which occurred on June 1, 2009, killed all 228 passengers and crew members on board. It took two years to find the wreckage of the Airbus A330 jet, which was finally located through the use of remote-controlled submarines 13,000 feet below the surface of the ocean. It was the deadliest crash in Air France's history and the deadliest involving the Airbus A330. Prosecutors have accused Air France of indirectly causing the crash by allegedly failing to provide adequate training for pilots on how to react in the event of a malfunction of the so-called Pitot tubes, which allow pilots to monitor aircraft speed, AFP reported. The pilots reacted incorrectly after speed sensors froze over and the plane stalled. Two investigating magistrates assigned to the case decided in 2019 that they could not blame the companies because of the pilot error. Prosecutors contested that decision, leading to Wednesday's ruling by a Paris court of appeal. Families of the victims welcomed the latest ruling, but Air France and Airbus said they would seek to overturn it at France's highest appeals court, the Cour de Cassation, Reuters reported. "The court decision that has just been announced does not reflect in any way the conclusions of the investigation," Airbus said in a statement. Air France said it "maintains that it committed no criminal fault at the root of this tragic accident."

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to the restoration of democracy and justice in Venezuela. These recent moves only show the dictatorship's determination to toy with the international community and trick it into thinking that it is acting in good faith. This sort of action is not new. The dictatorship has made similar moves leading to a dozen previous dialogue processes. What is necessary is strong leadership from all pro-democracy and pro-human rights domestic and international actors and continued pressure on the regime. Significant moves would be releasing all political prisoners and stopping political persecution and the use of torture; holding free and fair presidential, parliamentary and regional elections with the participation of international election observation; adopting a comprehensive electoral reform; moving toward achieving justice for crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations; and allowing into the country international humanitarian aid that Venezuelans desperately need. In the short run, it is essential that the democratic international community continue to support and work closely with the Guaidó interim government, as well as all democratic forces in the country. Supporting the legitimate National Assembly—the only democratic element that remains in the country—and calling for the adoption of an independent National Electoral Council should be a common, shared strategy of the pro-democracy international community. In the long run, the international community should learn and transition from common errors to common strategies when facing serious regional crises."

**A** **Vanessa Neumann, former Juan Guaidó-appointed Venezuelan ambassador to the United Kingdom:** "Maduro's recent moves are all about heightening his legitimacy, both to try to access international markets and funds and to sideline Guaidó. Maduro's deep loathing of all things Guaidó was evidenced when Maduro blew up the Covax negotiation that was supposed to be a confidence-build-

ing measure toward a broader negotiation for transition. Instead, Maduro tried to go it alone with vaccine suppliers, and it was only when that failed that he came back to the Covax table, allowed in the World Food Program and made the moves now being hailed as 'positive.' The inclusion of two opposition members in the new electoral commission is deeply problematic for Guaidó, whose international leadership was born of the fraudulent 2018 presidential elections. The upcoming regional elections put Guaidó and Voluntad Popular in serious jeopardy. All indications are that Primero Justicia and Acción Democrática will go to the elections, leaving Guaidó to face a grim choice. The 2015 National Assembly over which Guaidó had presided is out of constitutional mandate, leaving his political base nearly as questionable as Maduro's. However, if Guaidó runs for the regionals, he will effectively admit that he is one more opposition politician and not interim president. Voluntad Popular does not have the political infrastructure to win big in regional elections, even if they were not rigged under the regime. Maduro will always cheat and bully. International partners must ensure that any 'positive moves' are toward the goal of comprehensive reform that gets Venezuela to free and fair elections, which the dictatorship has no reason to accept unless its international masters tell it to. While it would be a moral and strategic failure not to keep herding Maduro toward the exit, the path to Venezuelan democracy will still be long and complicated. A new opposition will rise from the political ashes sooner rather than later."

**A** **Gregory Meeks, member of the U.S. House of Representatives (D-N.Y.) and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee:** "While President Maduro's recent moves will not by themselves bring an end to the conflict, I believe that these gestures from Caracas send a signal to Washington that

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there's a willingness to open conversations toward reaching a negotiated solution in Venezuela. The formation of Venezuela's new National Electoral Council leaves a lot to be desired, but it's important that we don't lose sight of the fact that this is the first time since 2006 that two of five election officials on the council are from the opposition. It is also notable that many of the recent actions Maduro has taken have been a result of pressure by an increasingly organized civil society coalition that is taking shape in Venezuela. While the Biden administration should continue engaging with the Guaidó-led alliance, it is also necessary to recognize that there is a fractured opposition in Venezuela, and other leaders such as Henrique Capriles must be considered. It is important to remember that the only person who benefits from a fractured opposition is Nicolás Maduro. Unfortunately, former President Trump's 'maximum-pressure' policy on Venezuela has failed. Now is the time for the Biden administration to make sure all voices of the opposition have a seat at the table. As the Biden administration rightfully continues to pressure Maduro to end crackdowns on civil society and legalize opposition parties, it must also consider restoring permits to allow Venezuela to swap crude oil for diesel. We cannot let this window of opportunity close."

**A** **Marco Rubio, member of the U.S. Senate (R-Fla.):** "The Maduro narco-regime has failed to negotiate in good faith in the past and continues to prolong the agony of the Venezuelan people as it grasps onto its illegitimate power. The chosen members of the National Electoral Council (CNE) lack legitimacy and international validity. We must remain firm in our support of credible negotiations led by Interim President Juan Guaidó and the democratically elected National Assembly, which include clear conditions that represent the interests of Venezuelan civil society and the best solution to the Venezuelan crisis."

**A** **Alejandro Velasco, associate professor at New York University:** "On the surface, these latest moves appear minor: the Citgo 6 could return to jail, the United Nations could be kicked out and the CNE remains a majority pro-government body. But after years of deepening authoritarianism, humanitarian crisis and frozen diplomacy, they represent clear, if fraught and tentative, steps toward a scenario in which Venezuelans themselves decide their future via free and fair elections. The question is: why now? Certainly, Maduro wants sanctions relief. But the reality is that these moves come from a position of strength, not weakness, by the government. It's clear that Trump's 'maximum pressure' strategy harmed no one less than Maduro, who found ways and partners to remain in power and outlast both Trump and the Juan Guaidó-led opposition. Moreover, some Trump sanctions—on diesel fuel and oil for food, for instance—backfired, harming everyday Venezuelans far more than Maduro, while undermining opposition credibility at home. The United States now faces a three-fold challenge. Any sanctions relief will incur wrath from opposition hardliners in the United States and elsewhere. But that is a manageable concern, and statements from U.S. officials suggest the Biden administration is willing—as it should—for the opposition itself to determine how to proceed rather than dictate strategy. A second challenge is that by refusing even minimal sanctions relief, the Biden administration will signal it has no intention of actually changing Trump-era policies despite rhetoric to the contrary, helping extend Venezuelans' suffering. The third and bigger challenge, however, is that any sanctions relief, coupled with continued opposition chaos, may help lay the groundwork for the unthinkable: free and fair elections that chavismo actually wins as the economy recovers and voters see no credible alternative. But that is a risk the United States should take, if its commitment to a democratic outcome is genuine."

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**Erik Brand**

Publisher  
[ebrand@thedialogue.org](mailto:ebrand@thedialogue.org)

**Gene Kuleta**

Editor  
[gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org)

**Anastasia Chacón González**

Reporter & Associate Editor  
[achacon@thedialogue.org](mailto:achacon@thedialogue.org)

**Diana Roy**

Editorial Intern  
[droy@thedialogue.org](mailto:droy@thedialogue.org)



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Subscription inquiries are welcomed at [ebrand@thedialogue.org](mailto:ebrand@thedialogue.org)

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