

# Dialogue in Barbados: will it yield results?

## Description

A new process of international dialogue to solve the crisis in Venezuela is taking place in the Caribbean island of Barbados. After the frustration caused by the failure of previous negotiations, especially the Santo Domingo talks in 2018, and the uncertainties surrounding the dialogue process initiated in Oslo in 2019, will the Barbados round produce a credible solution?

A new process of international dialogue to solve the crisis in Venezuela is taking place in the Caribbean island of Barbados. After the frustration caused by the failure of previous negotiations, especially the Santo Domingo talks in 2018, and the uncertainties surrounding the dialogue process initiated in Oslo in 2019, will the Barbados round produce a credible solution?

Venezuelans, suffering an incomparable tragedy at a historical level, have legitimate reasons to question what is being discussed in Barbados and its possible consequences. But some clearly visible results out of the new political context in Venezuela have created a new situation that is both urgent and likely to produce real solutions.

## The Bachelet Report

One of the factors that could change the situation in Venezuela is the Bachelet report. There is no doubt that the devastating report on human rights violations in Venezuela presented in Geneva on July 5 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, marks a turning point in the Venezuelan crisis that began with the appearance of Juan Guaidó last January and the subsequent support and legitimacy he received as interim president.

Both Guaidó and Bachelet, in one way or another, have altered the Venezuelan constellation of forces (internationally and domestically) against Nicolás Maduro's attempt to illegitimately extend his mandate. If Guaidó had not appeared in Venezuela's political horizon nor had international pressure intensified to raise awareness of human rights violations and the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, would a report like Bachelet's even be possible?

Nevertheless, the reaction to the report by Maduro and his representatives of his regime and his reluctance to accept the recommendations contained in the report, clearly blur the bargaining landscape in Barbados and the possibility of reaching a consensus.

After the publication of the “Bachelet report,” the European Parliament renewed the sanctions against the Maduro regime for “repression and torture.” Meanwhile Maduro continues losing allies in other countries as well. In Greece—as a result of recent elections that shifted the country to the right—the new government Kyriakos Mitsotakis recognized Guaidó as the legitimate president, a demonstration of the importance of the appearance of Guaidó and the publication of the Bachelet report.

But given the changing geopolitical environment and Maduro’s uncompromising attitude, can we picture a transition soon? Or rather, is this a strategy, orchestrated from Havana, to delay, disperse and “win” some extra time? Doubts posed both on the effectiveness of the Barbados dialogue and on whatever is agreed upon, having an not only regarding the future of Venezuela immediate geopolitical effect Russia, Cuba, and China

## 2020 electoral outlook

With successes, but also some tactical errors, Guaidó has managed to erode “*chavista-madurista*’s” hold on popular and state power, leaving the government cornered and defensive. Bachelet noted the shift during her visit to Caracas last June, a key factor that shaped the report.

With these strong points in its favor, the Venezuelan opposition in Barbados will try to negotiate the exit of Maduro and bet on an electoral calendar, predictably by 2020, with Maduro already out of power. Such an outcome would represent a tactical compromise but would align with Guaidó’s objectives since the beginning of the year: end the usurpation; form a transition government; and free and fair elections.

But as both parties return to the negotiating table in Barbados conditions have changed. Among those changes are: 1) political damage done to the Maduro government caused by the sudden release of Leopoldo López last May—despite the subsequent failure of the civic-military insurgency; 2) the escape to the U.S. of Iván Simonovis—one of the most emblematic political prisoners—as well as that of former SEBIN director Christopher Figuera, both publicly undermining and exposing the criminal nature of the “Madurista” power structure; 3) the internal and external pressure Bachelet report Court (ICC)

; 4) death by torture of Corvette Captain Acosta Arévalo and 5) the invocation of the Inter-American the tribunal, by the National Assembly via Guaidó.

## International and internal support wanes

Even Russia seems to have publicly resigned to an electoral solution without Maduro. And China holds on to its “vigilant observation” policy, urging for consensus through dialogue and negotiation. These perceptions confirm that both Beijing and Moscow practically perceive a transition scenario in Venezuela as a “*fait accompli*.”

And inside the regime’s power structure, the recent ratification of Vladimir Padrino as Minister of Defense can be analyzed as a tactical move by the “Madurista” regime to give the FANB a key role in what is seen as an inevitable transition. These are possible signs in Venezuela that, this time, the next round of negotiations can be decisive.

As a result, it’s reasonable to believe that the Barbados dialogue may produce a real, credible solution. Even the Venezuelan opposition—which always seems fragmented and disjointed by its electoral interests—looks forward to a possible electoral candidacy of Guaidó, an obvious prize for his devotion to their cause.

Similarly, within the Maduro power structure, there appears to be a hunt for Maduro’s replacement, previsión current governor of the state of Miranda and a member of the controversial National Constituent Assembly (ANC). An eventual election cornering Rodríguez to accept the candidacy—presumably endorsed by both Cuba and the FANB—also points to a possible future without Maduro in power.

Whatever the expectations, the dilemmas, the skepticism, and even the frustrations about what will be discussed in Barbados, this time negotiations appear to have a real path forward to resolving the Venezuelan crisis.

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