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CIA director traveled to Venezuela to meet country's acting president

UPDATED JAN 16, 2026 By  Zachary Cohen,  Kaanita Iyer

CIA director had two-hour meeting with new Venezuelan leader in Caracas

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CIA director John Ratcliffe met Venezuela's Interim President Delcy Rodriguez in

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CIA director meets Venezuela's acting president in Caracas



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By  Zachary Cohen,  Kaanita Iyer

CIA Director John Ratcliffe speaks during a cabinet meeting at the White House on August 26, ...

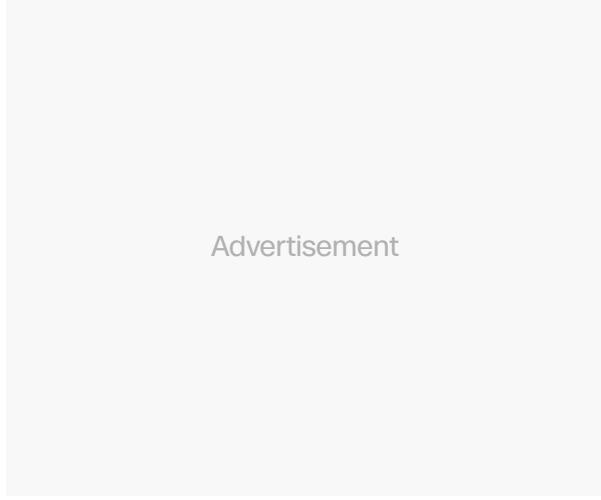


CIA Director John Ratcliffe met with Venezuela's acting president Delcy Rodríguez in Caracas on Thursday, according to a US official.

"During the meeting in Caracas, Director Ratcliffe discussed potential opportunities for economic collaboration and that Venezuela can no longer be a safe haven for America's adversaries, especially narcotraffickers," the official said.

The meeting, which was first reported by **the New York Times**, comes as Trump has asserted control over Venezuela, particularly its oil production, saying the US will effectively "run" the country following its capture of Nicolás Maduro earlier this month.

Trump has shown support for Rodríguez, a longtime regime insider, over opposition leader María Corina Machado, who met with the president on Thursday and even **gifted him her Nobel Peace Prize medal**.



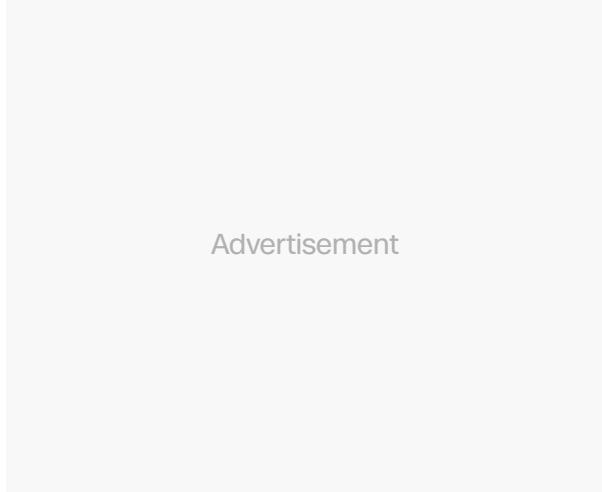
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Trump administration officials insisted to lawmakers in a briefing after Maduro's capture that the move was not a regime change operation since the Venezuelan government remains largely intact and is now led by Rodríguez, who was Maduro's deputy, sources familiar with the briefing **previously told CNN**.

The administration's policy decision to back Rodríguez over Machado was informed by a classified CIA analysis on the impact of Maduro no longer being president and near-term implications of his potential removal, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The tightly held intelligence product was commissioned by senior policymakers, and the CIA was expected to continue providing similar recommendations on the leadership situation in Venezuela going forward, multiple sources previously told CNN.

The **CIA was also involved** in the plan to capture Maduro. In August, the agency had covertly installed a small team inside Venezuela to track Maduro's patterns, locations and movements, which helped bolster the operation earlier this month, sources familiar with the plans told CNN.



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The assets included a CIA source operating within the Venezuelan government who assisted the United States with tracking Maduro's location and movements ahead of his capture, one source briefed on the operation told CNN.

Ratcliffe's meeting with Rodríguez this week was meant to build trust, according to the US official, and reflects the CIA director's emphasis on human intelligence gathering and wanting the agency to be less risk averse.



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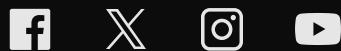
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CIA director had two-hour meeting with new Venezuelan leader in Caracas

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Jamie Whitehead

BBC News



CIA director John Ratcliffe met Venezuela's Interim President Delcy Rodríguez in Caracas on Thursday "at President Trump's direction," a US official has said.

The two-hour meeting was aimed at building trust and communication following the US seizure of Venezuela's former president Nicolás Maduro almost two weeks ago.

Ratcliffe and Rodríguez discussed potential economic collaboration and that "Venezuela can no longer be a safe haven for America's adversaries", according to the US official.

The meeting took place on the same day Rodríguez gave her first state of the union address since taking over as interim president, where she announced oil industry reforms to allow more foreign investment - a move away from Maduro's policies.

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During her speech to the nation, Rodríguez said she was not afraid to face the US "diplomatically through political dialogue," adding Venezuela had to defend its "dignity and honour".

President Donald Trump has said US oil companies will move into Venezuela and make money that will go to people there and to the US, with a top official saying the US would control sales of sanctioned Venezuelan oil "indefinitely".

Trump has asked oil companies to invest at least \$100bn (£75bn) in Venezuela, but one executive said last week the country is currently "uninvestable".

Rodríguez, the former vice-president, was sworn in on 5 January after US forces seized Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in an operation in Caracas. They are now detained in New York, where they have pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking and other charges.

The US official described the meeting between Rodríguez and Ratcliffe as "historic", adding that Ratcliffe was the first cabinet-level official to travel to Venezuela.

The meeting also happened on the same day that Trump met opposition leader María Corina Machado in Washington, who presented the US president with her Nobel Peace Prize winning medal.

In her state of the union address, Rodríguez told Venezuelans it was "very difficult" to deliver Maduro's annual report, saying that the two were working on the speech together until six hours before his seizure on 3 January.

Noting the US is a nuclear power, the interim president said she was not afraid to engage in diplomacy, saying "we have to go together as Venezuelans to defend sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and also defend our dignity and our honour".

She continued that if she needed to travel to Washington DC to meet with Trump, she would do so "walking on her feet, not dragged there".

She added that "all of Venezuela is threatened", and called for national unity to "wage the diplomatic battle".

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In her address, Rodríguez announced the proposal to reform the country's hydrocarbon law, saying she had asked the legislative body to approve it.

Until now, Venezuela's hydrocarbon law has stated foreign partners must work with the country's state-owned oil and gas company, PDVSA - which must hold a majority stake.

The reforms, Rodríguez said, would allow investment to flow to new fields.

She said she had instructed her government to create two sovereign funds - one for social protection so that "foreign currency goes directly to hospitals, schools, food, housing" and the second for infrastructure and social development to invest in water, electricity and roads.

Venezuela has been facing an economic crisis, with a sharp rise in food prices and the lack of purchasing power. Before the US operation to seize Maduro, Venezuelans told the BBC they were concerned about what they were going to eat.

"We're more worried about food. Venezuela is in bad shape. Inflation is eating us alive," one man said.

Rodríguez's reforms come as Trump and American investors eye opportunity in Venezuela, which holds the world's largest proven oil reserves.

Bosses of the biggest US oil firms who attended a meeting at the White House last week acknowledged that Venezuela represented an enticing opportunity.

But they said significant changes would be needed to make the region an attractive investment.

Trump said his administration would decide which firms would be allowed to operate.

"You're dealing with us directly. You're not dealing with Venezuela at all. We don't want you to deal with Venezuela," he said.

Trump also said that "one of the things the United States gets out of this will be even lower energy prices".

Venezuela has had a complicated relationship with international oil firms since crude oil was discovered in its territory more than 100 years ago.

Chevron is the last remaining major American oil company still operating in the country.



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POLITICS

CIA director meets Venezuela's acting president in Caracas

BY [DAVID KLEPPER](#)

Updated 12:10 PM GMT-7, January 16, 2026

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WASHINGTON (AP) — CIA Director John Ratcliffe has traveled to Venezuela to meet with acting President Delcy Rodríguez, becoming the highest-ranking Trump administration official to visit the South American country after the [U.S. raid that captured former leader Nicolás Maduro](#).

The meeting Thursday in Caracas, the capital, lasted two hours, according to a U.S. government official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke Friday on condition of anonymity.

The official said the meeting came at the urging of President Donald Trump and was meant to demonstrate the desire by the U.S. for a better relationship with Venezuela. It occurred the same day Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado [presented her Nobel Peace Prize](#) medal to Trump at the White House even as he has effectively sidelined her.

Ratcliffe's visit is likely to be seen as another sign of Trump's [willingness to work with Ro](#) been Maduro's second in command until the audacious U.S. military operation two week him to the United States to [face drug trafficking charges](#).



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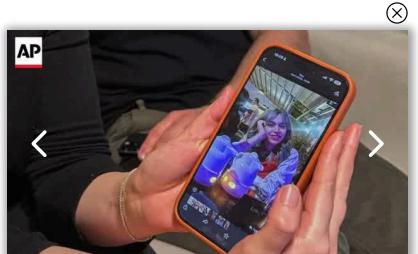
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The visit, which included a small team of American officials and was first reported by The New York Times, was intended to lay the groundwork for additional cooperation between the Trump administration and Venezuela's new leaders, the official said.

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Venezuela's Machado says she presented her Nobel Peace Prize to Trump during their meeting



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Ratcliffe discussed potential economic collaboration between the two countries and warned that Venezuela can never again allow the presence of American adversaries, including drug traffickers, the official said. (X)

The CIA played a [key role in the operation](#) to apprehend Maduro, providing critical intelligence as well as mounting an earlier drone strike on a dock used by cartels, U.S. officials have said.

A day after Ratcliffe's visit to Caracas, Machado told reporters in Washington that she was "profoundly confident that we will have an orderly transition" to democracy in her country.

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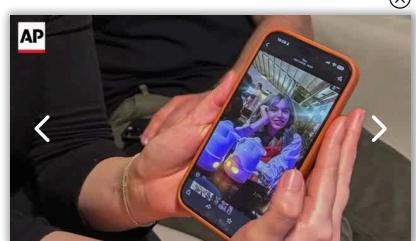
Machado said she rejected the notion that Trump has chosen to work with Rodríguez over her opposition movement, which is widely believed to have won the 2024 presidential election.

Rodríguez used her [first state of the union message](#) as acting president Thursday to advocate for opening the [War powers resolution](#) [AP-NORC poll](#) [Opposition figures released](#) [What next for Maduro?](#) [Oversee Venezuelan crude sales.](#)

US-VENEZUELA

Trump has raised doubts about his stated commitment to backing democratic rule in Venezuela, giving no timetable on when elections might be held. In turn, Machado took pains when pressed Friday to avoid giving any details on her plans to return home or when elections might be held.

Trump has said it would be difficult for Machado — the longtime face of the fight for democracy in Venezuela — to lead her country because she “doesn’t have the support within or the respect within the country.”



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