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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Did Maduro Accomplish on His Middle East Trip?



During his recent tour of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro met with officials including Kuwait's prime minister, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah. // File Photo: @NicolasMaduro.

**Q** Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro this month visited Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey and Algeria, among other countries, during a tour of the Middle East and Mediterranean. The trip overlapped with the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, which the Biden administration did not invite Maduro's government to attend. What were Maduro's goals for his recent trip, and what did he achieve? Which regional relationships matter most to Venezuela? What do the countries Maduro visited offer Venezuela, and what does Venezuela offer them?

**A** Ryan Berg, director of the Future of Venezuela Initiative and senior fellow in the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: "Nicolás Maduro's regime was not invited to the Summit of the Americas—quite rightly in a summit about consolidating and strengthening democracy. As a response, he went on a diplomatic tour, intended to show that he is, in fact, not diplomatically isolated. The governments he visited were, at best, hybrid regimes, and at worst, decidedly undemocratic countries. Venezuela does not maintain robust economic relations with many of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa that Maduro visited—indeed, a country like Venezuela that has experienced one of the largest economic contractions outside of conflict doesn't maintain robust economic relations with many countries at all. In fact, Venezuela's oil production and presence in OPEC makes it somewhat of a competitor. As a result, the trip was heavy on bromides of brotherly solidarity and wishful thinking about

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### ECONOMIC

## Puerto Rico Hikes Power Rate for Seventh Time This Year

Officials in Puerto Rico announced the U.S. territory's seventh electricity rate increase this year. The rate increase takes effect Friday.

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### BUSINESS

## Argentina's President, Chinese Company Discuss Battery Venture

Argentine President Alberto Fernández and the chairman of Chinese battery maker Gotion High-tech discussed a venture to develop electric bus batteries.

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### POLITICAL

## Nicaragua Closes 101 More Civic, Charity Groups

Nicaragua shuttered 101 additional nongovernmental organizations, including the local office of the Missionaries of Charity. President Daniel Ortega's government has closed more than 700 such groups in recent years.

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Ortega // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Nicaragua Closes 101 More Civic, Charity Organizations

Nicaragua's government on Wednesday closed an additional 101 charity and civic organizations, including the local office of the Missionaries of Charity, which Mother Teresa established, the Associated Press reported. The latest round of closures, which Nicaragua's National Assembly approved, brought to 758 the number of nongovernmental organizations that President Daniel Ortega's government has shuttered in recent years, the AP reported. The government said the groups failed to register as "foreign agents" under a 2020 law. The Missionaries of Charity had operated in Nicaragua for 34 years and ran a children's center, a home for girls and also a facility for elderly people. Missionaries from the group offered music and theater classes to children, in addition to vocational training for children who had been the victims of violence, the AP reported. "It makes me very sad that the dictatorship has forced the Missionaries of Charity of Teresa of Calcutta to leave the country," Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez of Managua, who is currently based in Miami due to concerns over his safety,

said in a tweet. "Nothing justifies depriving the poor of charitable care," he added. Nicaragua's government has targeted a wide variety of nongovernmental groups for closure. Among them are the Society of Pediatrics, the Nicaraguan Development Institute, the Confederation of Nicaraguan Professional Associations and the Nicaragua Internet Association," the AP reported. In addition to closing nongovernmental organizations, Ortega's government has also arrested dozens of opposition leaders, including nearly anyone who could mount a serious challenge to him, in the months leading up to his re-election last November. Tens of thousands more Nicaraguans have gone into exile, the AP reported.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Puerto Rico Hikes Electricity Rate for Seventh Time in 2022

Puerto Rican officials on Wednesday announced the U.S. territory's seventh electricity rate increase this year, which will go into effect on Friday, the Associated Press reported. The new rate for a client who consumes 800 kilowatt hours (kwh) will go up to 33 cents

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Mexican Reporter Fatally Shot, Becomes 12th Journalist Killed This Year

A veteran reporter for local newspaper *Expreso* was fatally shot Wednesday in Mexico's Tamaulipas state, becoming at least the 12th journalist killed this year in Mexico, the Associated Press reported. Antonio de la Cruz, 47, was a reporter at *Expreso* for nearly three decades and was killed as he was leaving his home in Ciudad Victoria. At the time, he was with his 23-year-old daughter, who was seriously injured in the attack. De la Cruz had reported on rural and social topics including water shortages, the AP reported.

## Colombia's Petro Names Ocampo Finance Minister

Colombian President-elect Gustavo Petro said today that he has tapped José Antonio Ocampo to be finance minister in his government, Reuters reported. Ocampo, who is set to join Petro's administration following his inauguration in August, served as former President Ernesto Samper's minister of finance and is currently a professor at Columbia University. "José Antonio Ocampo will be our finance minister [to] build a productive economy and an economy for life," Petro said in a Twitter posting.

## Volkswagen Workers in Brazil Approve Investment for New Model

Workers from the Volkswagen Group at a plant in Brazil's São Paulo state on Wednesday agreed to allow for a 1 billion real (\$192.97 million) investment for the production of a new Volkswagen model starting in 2025, Reuters reported, citing a statement from the local metalworkers' union. The Taubaté plant currently produces the Voyage and Gol models, and it is starting a new production cycle following the company's implementation of a "MQB" modular design strategy, the wire service reported.

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the emergence of a multipolar international order that somehow excludes the United States. It is likely that Maduro secured the commitment of several leaders to favoring his continued presence in power. This is unsurprising: autocrats have an interest in ensuring their own survival and that of their ilk. By far the most important visit was to Iran, followed by Turkey. Venezuela and Iran signed a 20-year agreement to cooperate on wide-ranging issues and to continue flouting U.S. sanctions architecture. Iran has been critical to Venezuela's oil production by sending condensates to refine crude, as well as furnishing ships to lift oil. The deepening

of this strategic partnership is significant in all aspects."

**A** **Giorgio Cafiero, CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics:** "As the United States tries to fill a void resulting from Washington's ban on Russian energy imports, the Biden administration is signaling a softening of its policies toward Venezuela. Yet questions remain open vis-à-vis the future of Washington-Caracas relations. Against this backdrop, Nicolás Maduro's government seeks to bolster Venezuela's relationships in Eurasia, which help Caracas circumvent pressure

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per kwh, four cents more than the previous 29 cents per kwh. In the United States, the average electric rate is 14 cents per kwh, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the wire service reported. The new rate will be reviewed by the beginning of October by the U.S. territory's energy regulator, the NEPR, according to Cuban state news agency Prensa Latina. The electricity rate hikes are related to Luma Energy's takeover of Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority's transmission and distribution, the AP reported. Puerto Rico has in recent months witnessed the electricity sector's deteriorating infrastructure and lack of maintenance. In April, a fire at a power plant caused a blackout across the island. Petroleum generates approximately 97 percent of electricity in Puerto Rico, amid power plants' dependence on the fossil fuel to operate. The Puerto Rican government has promised to increase its use of renewable energy for electricity generation, the AP reported.

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Fernández, Chinese Company Discuss Bus Battery Venture

Argentine President Alberto Fernández hosted a meeting with Li Zhen, the chairman of Chinese electric vehicle (EV) battery maker Gotion High-tech, on June 24, during which they discussed a joint venture between Gotion

“We welcome Chinese investment in Argentina.”

— Alberto Fernández

High-tech and auto parts manufacturer Corven in order to develop electric bus batteries, the Chinese company said Tuesday in a statement. They reportedly discussed the ways that Gotion High-tech's investments in Argentina can aid in the country's efforts for new energy. Fernández pointed out that Argentina has the second largest lithium reserves in the world,

## THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

### What More Can Latin America Do to Control Cancer?

**Q** **The Covid-19 pandemic has hindered the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases such as cancer in Latin America, according to a recent report from the Americas Health Foundation. In the region, cancer is the second leading cause of death, with more than 700,000 recorded deaths in 2020, according to the report. How well were policymakers addressing cancer care in the region before the pandemic, and what gaps existed? In what ways has the pandemic worsened cancer prevention, diagnosis and care in the region? What best practices for fighting cancer should be shared and replicated more widely? What can public-private collaborations do to address cancer care, and what short- and medium-term investments in health can help the health sector prepare for the next crisis?**

**A** **Silvana Luciani, chief of the noncommunicable diseases unit at the Pan American Health Organization:** “The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on cancer care in the Americas has resulted in decreases and delays in identifying new cases and delivering timely treatment. These problems, if unmitigated, will likely increase cancer morbidity and mortality for years to come. While data is still emerging, a PAHO/WHO survey on disruption of health services in

calling the country “privileged,” Argentine state news agency Télam reported. “The world is already shifting to renewable energy. Argentina has made incentives for lithium, wind power, photovoltaic and other industries,” Fernández said, according to the statement from Gotion High-tech. “We welcome Chinese investment in Argentina. Gotion High-tech's industrial investment activities in Argentina, [covers] the development, processing and battery products

Latin America and the Caribbean from April 2021 shows that cancer screening and treatment services were disrupted in 52 percent and 32 percent of countries, respectively. We know that Covid-19 has overwhelmed health systems, which has important implications for cancer care: while data remains limited, patients appear to be more vulnerable to infection, as well as a greater need for ventilator support and higher Covid-19 mortality; diagnosis has been delayed as many countries suspended screening programs, and patients have been more reluctant to present to health care services; treatment pathways have been altered to minimize potential exposure of patients with cancer to Covid-19; and aspects of ongoing care have been deprioritized to enable health systems to respond to the pandemic. Many clinical cancer trials have also been suspended, which has reduced current therapy options for patients who might have participated. PAHO has issued guidance on reorienting cancer services, prioritizing those people with treatable cancer, avoiding cumulative delays in treatment and preventing an increase in avoidable deaths.”

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in Tuesday's issue of the Advisor.

of lithium resources, which accelerates the development of local lithium resources and it will help the development and progress of Argentina's new energy industry,” Fernández added. Gotion High-tech's chairman noted that China's Belt and Road Initiative has strengthened ties between Argentina and China. “It provides strategic guidance, points out the direction and lays the foundation for enterprise cooperation,” Li Zhen said.

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from Washington and its policies aimed at delegitimizing Venezuela's administration internationally. By visiting several countries which are close U.S. allies and partners, Maduro sent a powerful message to the White House that Washington's efforts to isolate Caracas have proven futile and that Venezuela is a country with diverse friends worldwide. By visiting gas- and oil-rich Arab countries and Azerbaijan, Maduro wants to increase foreign direct investment in the Venezuelan economy, which has for years suffered from many serious problems. Wealthy Gulf Arab countries such as the two that Maduro recently visited are highly important to Venezuela. Kuwait and Qatar offer much in terms of cooperation across many domains including air travel, agriculture, banking, culture, energy and tourism. Additionally, Qatari financial institutions have helped Venezuela's economy with significant loans, underscoring Doha's willingness to assist Caracas notwithstanding the close Qatar-U.S. alliance. Cultural links on top of decades of friendly diplomatic relations are part of the grander picture, with Venezuela being home to 1.5 million Arab immigrants. Venezuela, which has more oil reserves than any other country in the world, is important to these Arab countries from the standpoint of their economic, trade and investment interests."

**A** **Javier Coronado, partner, and Ibrahim Amir, associate attorney, both at Diaz, Reus & Targ, LLP:** "In response to President Biden's decision not to invite him to the Summit of the Americas held in early June, President Nicolás Maduro embarked on an ambitious tour in the Middle East and Mediterranean to strengthen cooperation ties and promote investments in Venezuela. President Maduro visited the business leaders of countries that—like Venezuela—

are long-established players in the energy market, including Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey and Algeria. Maduro's tour objectives included enhancing and reinforcing cooperation in science, technology, agriculture, transportation, energy and culture; boosting tourism in Venezuela; and reactivating business and

“**While Maduro's tour seems to be fruitful for his foreign policy interests, only time will tell of its results.**”

— Javier Coronado & Ibrahim Amir

diplomatic ties. Maduro also exchanged views with the leaders of the Gulf countries on the key changes awaiting Latin America, which is taking a noticeable turn to the left with the results of the presidential election in Colombia. Notably, during his visit to Iran, Maduro praised the supreme leader of that country for sending badly needed fuel to Venezuela despite U.S. sanctions and signed a 20-year cooperation agreement with him to expand trade ties in the fields of oil, petrochemicals, defense, agriculture, tourism and culture. This agreement is particularly significant for both countries as they continue to face U.S. sanctions (although a U.S. delegation landed in Venezuela last week to discuss a 'bilateral agenda'). Leaders of Iran and Algeria further agreed with Maduro to soon launch direct flights from Caracas to Algiers and Tehran. While Maduro's tour seems to be fruitful for his foreign policy interests, only time will tell of its results."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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