Fernando Casado

The Myth of the "*Cartel of the Suns*"

Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Politics in Venezuela

Essay

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1st Digital Edition, El Perro y la Rana Publishing Foundation, 2020

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www.elperroylarana.gob.ve

www.mincultura.gob.ve

Deposited According to Law.

ISBN: 978-980-14-4687-3

Legal Deposit: DC2020000520

Introduction

In 2017 we published a work referring to the "*Cartel of the Suns*" scandal, which we described as "a new invention to attack Venezuela" (Casado, 2017). The objective of our work from the beginning was to find any kind of evidence, beyond rumors, suspicions or speculations that could lead us to prove the existence of the famous "*Cartel of the Suns*" that occupied so many headlines of the renowned international press.

However, the search was unsuccessful and the lack of evidence on that occasion led us to conclude that the vaunted "*Cartel of the Suns*", as portrayed by the media, simply did not exist.

The "*Cartel of the Suns*" is then a construction whose objective was and still is to portray Venezuela as a narco-State, that is, a rogue State with which nothing can or should be negotiated. Coupled with this narrative, Nicolás Maduro would therefore no longer be a President, but rather the Cartel's kingpin, and in consequence would be dispossessed of the power and legitimacy of a Head of State. Moreover, Maduro would no longer be considered a dictator but rather a criminal who together with his gang of thugs is getting rich with the drug business. As a result, any intervention to overthrow a ruler turned drug-trafficker and put an end to the illegal organization ruling Venezuela would be justified.

In fact, as time passes, this narrative has been promoted and amplified together with the hostility of the ultra-conservative government of Donald Trump, which has hampered any kind of rapprochement between opposition and government in Venezuela and who dreams of an armed intervention in the country and an outcome like that of Manuel A. Noriega in Panama in 1989.

Four years after our first study on the "*Cartel of the Suns*", the objective remains the same, to gather the evidence that proves its existence. But most importantly is to find the ties between Nicolás Maduro and his top officials with the criminal organization.

The media and certain interested organizations have not stopped publishing high-profile headlines trying to position the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a rogue State. Recent reports and headlines have openly affirmed the Venezuelan

government's relationship with drug trafficking: "Venezuela: A Mafia State? Venezuela Has Become an Axis of Organized Crime in the Region" (Insight Crime, 2018)[1]; "Venezuela, Drug Trafficking Bridge, Also Becomes a Producer"[2]; "Venezuela's Regime Fills Its Pockets with Drug Money"[3]; "The Papers that Explain 'State Drug Trafficking' in Chavista Venezuela"[4].

The imposition onto international public opinion that Venezuela is indeed a narco-State justified, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic at the end of March 2020, that the U.S. placed a price on Nicolás Maduro's head of 15 million dollars.

Our intention is to elucidate how much truth there is in these accusations which to the press and certain political actors have always been irrefutable evidence, despite the lack of rigorous sources and reliable studies.

Author's Warning About this Research

As already mentioned, during the course of this investigation our main objective has been to obtain evidence of the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*", therefore, all the steps were taken to obtain more information from those sources that claimed to have the certainty of the existence of evidence or that published compromising information about the "*Cartel of the Suns*".

It was then a matter of contacting various sources for further inputs. First, the International Narcotics Control Board, a supposedly independent body attached to the UN, was contacted. As we will analyze later in depth, it stated in its 2019 report, published in early 2020, that it had evidence of the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". Second, the Insight Crime organization was contacted. In one of its reports dated 2018 and dedicated to Venezuela, it claimed to have contacted anonymous sources at the Department of Justice. Its co-director, Jeremy McDermott, gave interviews to countless media outlets, yet in our case, they did not even deign to reply to our emails. Finally, Herald Tribune reporter Antonio

[1] The 2018 report of the Insight Crime organization that we will analyze later: https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Venezuela-Estado-mafioso-InSight-Crime-Observatorio-de-crimen-organizado.pdf
[2] https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-venezuela-puente-narcotrafico-convierte-tambien-productor-201909220238_noticia.html
[3] https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/regimen-de-venezuela-llena-sus-bolsillos-con-dinero-del-narcotrafico/
[4] https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2019-10-29/narcotrafico-venezuela-colombia-chavismo-historia_2299840/

María Delgado was also contacted. He had assured that his newspaper had access "to the extradition request for former Chavista spy chief Hugo Carvajal", a 140-page document "that shows a detailed X-ray of the so-called '*Cartel of the Suns*'"[5].

Up until the submission deadline for this piece, there was no response from those who allegedly had the evidence on the existence and functioning of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". This silence does constitute evidence of the lack of transparency and access to data surrounding an organization that has come to be called "*Cartel of the Suns*", which according to our hypothesis, belongs more to the world of fairies and unicorns than to the real one.

Recalling the "*Cartel of the Suns*" and the Initial Scandal

There is a broad consensus that the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" dates back to the early 1990s, specifically to 1993 "when two Bolivarian Guard generals, anti-narcotics chief Ramón Guillén Dávila and his successor Orlando Hernández Villegas, were investigated for drug trafficking" (Insight Crime, 2018, p. 6), that is, the term was first used long before the Bolivarian Revolution appeared on the scene.

Since President Chávez came to power, accusations against him of collaboration with the so-called "narco-guerrilla" of the FARC were recurrent. No evidence was ever presented, but the relationship between drug trafficking and the Bolivarian Revolution appeared recurrently in the media. In fact, it was one of the mainstays for discredit the revolutionary process. In 2008, the renowned British newspaper The Guardian published extensive reports with headlines such as: "Revealed: Chávez's Role in Cocaine Trail to Europe"[6]. But we always met with the same lack of sources that were minimally rigorous.

The climax of the so-called "*Cartel of the Suns*" scandal barged in 2015, the surrender to the U.S. secret services of Leamsy Salazar, a member of President Hugo Chávez's security and later of Diosdado Cabello's, was turned into living proof of the existence of a drug trafficking organization led by high officials of the

[5] https://www.elnuevoherald.com/site-services/newsletters/bol-venezuela/article234981682.html
[6] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/03/venezuela.colombia

Maduro government and high-ranking members of the Armed Forces, which is why it was called the "*Cartel of the Suns*".

The international press even disputed the "honor" of having broken the story, as the right-wing Spanish daily ABC still does. In an article published on March 26th, 2020, it headlined: "ABC Exclusively Revealed the Links between the Chávez Regime and Drug Trafficking"[7]. According to the Spanish journal, *The Wall Street Journal* later corroborated the news uncovered by *ABC*. This image was the one that illustrated Leamsy Salazar's proximity to Chávez and Cabello and gave credibility to their testimonies:

At that time, the Spanish journal published fantastic stories by Leamsy Salazar as established facts:

> As an assistant in permanent accompaniment of Cabello, Salazar witnessed situations and conversations that incriminate the president of the National Assembly. In particular, he saw him give direct orders for the departure of boats loaded with tons of cocaine and has provided evidence about places where mountains of dollars in cash from this illicit business are stored, according to sources familiar with the investigation, conducted by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)[8].

By mid-May 2015, major U.S. newspapers were crediting the State Department and DEA's allegations with juicy reports. *The Wall Street Journal* published the headline: "Venezuelan Officials Suspected of Turning Country into International Global Cocaine Hub."[9].

[7] https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-abc-destapo-exclusiva-vinculacion-regimen-chavista-venezuela-narcotrafico-202003261738_noticia.html
[8] https://www.abc.es/internacional/20150127/abci-venezuela-cabello-eeuu-201501262129.html
[9] https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelan-officials-suspected-of-turning-country-into-global-cocaine-hub-1431977784

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Venezuelan Officials Suspected of Turning Country into Global Cocaine Hub

U.S. probe targets No. 2 official Diosdado Cabello, several others, on suspicion of drug trafficking and money laundering

Immediately, the rest of the U.S. press published very similar notes: *The New York Times*: "U.S. Focuses on Top Venezuelan Officials in a Broad Cocaine Inquiry"[10]; *The Washington Post*: "A Drug Cartel's Power in Venezuela"[11].

In this way the U.S. press became an amplifier of its country`s intelligence services' propaganda and installed in the rest of the *Western* press the "*Cartel of the Suns*" as a criminal gang whose bosses were the leaders of the government of Venezuela.

The only problem with all the published information was that there was not a single piece of evidence for the allegations made. As analyzed by an organization dedicated to the exposing the work of the media, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the only sources were anonymous sources, from the Department of Justice, and a defector's testimony (Koerner & Vaz, 2019)[12].

After the American press came the Spanish and Latin American newspapers that make the facts even more sensational in their search for sales opportunities and scoops, the fictional reality continued to derive in fantastic stories. The Spanish took the lead. *El Mundo* headlined: "Former Chavistas Point to Diosdado Cabello as Kingpin"[13], by the way, the text had *The Wall Street Journal* as its sole source. *El País* published a juicy report entitled "New Light on the Mysterious

[10] "U.S. Focuses on Top Venezuelan Officials in a Broad Cocaine Inquiry", The New York Times, (May 19th, 2015), [online] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/20/ world/americas/us-focuses-on-top-venezuelan-officials-in-a-broad-cocaine-inquiry. html?smid=tw-share&_r=0

[11] "A drug cartel's power in Venezuela", The Washington Post (EE.UU.), (May 24th, 2015), [online] http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-drug-cartels-power -in-venezuela/2015/05/24/9bc0ff14-ffd6-11e4-8b6c-0dcce21e223d_story.html?posts hare=7051432978251605

[12] https://fair.org/home/media-continue-to-push-misinformation-about-venezuela-and-drug-trafficking/

[13] https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2015/05/19/555b878222601d874d8b4599.html

"*Cartel of the Suns*""[14], but it did not tell anything concrete and is an ode to speculation, and if anyone doubts me can waste time reading the article. But the lack of journalistic rigor was even worse in the chronicles that what appeared in the *La Razón* daily: "Either we would load the drugs or they would kill us," which shamelessly but brazenly made up, that in drug seizures that occurred three years before the "U.S. DEA believes that the *Cartel of the Suns* is involved"[15].

But on this occasion, as in so many stories related to Venezuela, the press was a sufficient source for the press when the origin of the information is anonymous leaks from the intelligence services. This has happened in countless examples of *anti-journalism* related to the Bolivarian Revolution, such as when "Hugo Chávez offered Russia his territory for military bases"[16] (Casado, 2011); or when Chávez himself planned together "with Iran to build a nuclear village"[17]. Just as drug traffickers launder money from their illegal activities in legal companies, intelligence services turn their propaganda into news through the media (Casado, 2015).

The *Cartel of the Suns'* 4-year Fall into Oblivion

After the journalistic euphoria of mid-2015, the "*Cartel of the Suns*" disappeared from the headlines of the international press, to appear only intermittently on websites and in small newspapers.

This is how we find notes in 2016 in *El Nuevo Herald*: "Venezuelan Officer, Alleged Member of the '*Cartel of the Suns*' Arrested"[18]; in 2017 in the Panam Post: "Colombian Vice President: The '*Cartel of the Suns*' Operates at All Levels of the Venezuelan Armed Forces"[19]; and, in 2018 in *CyberCuba*: "Former Pablo Escobar Hitman: 'Nicolás Maduro is the Kingpin of the *Cartel of the Suns*'"[20].

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[14] In the following link you can read the article: https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/20/actualidad/1432081421_097807.html

[15] https://www.larazon.es/internacional/o-cargabamos-la-droga-o-nos-mataban-CM9824510/

[16] https://www.nacion.com/el-mundo/hugo-chavez-ofrece-a-rusia-territorio-para-bases-militares/NSIDC4SFONHS5BA2NMEEIM6ZNU/story/

[17] https://www.elespectador.com/impreso/articuloimpreso160540-villa-nuclear-de-chavez

[18] https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article84639037.html

[19] https://es.panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2017/09/18/cartel-de-los-soles-narcotrafico/

[20] https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2018-04-11-u1-e129488-s27061-jefe-sicarios-pablo-escobar-nicolas-maduro-gran-capo-cartel

But how surprising that despite the seriousness of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" file we have not heard anything about the progress of the investigations for almost five years. What happened to the evidence and witnesses? Where are the tons of white powder that the Venezuelan high-ranking military officers are supposed to transport regularly to the U.S. and Europe?

Five years ago, the newspapers of the Western world all at once crowed and replicated information being "leaked" to them by the DEA, the Department of Justice and other intelligence services, which we know is a recurring practice as part of their disinformation and propaganda work. Nevertheless, not a single journalist from the reputable newsrooms of the major newspapers questioned the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". But neither did anyone ask again what happened to the architects of the Venezuelan narco-State; no one wanted to investigate how far the judicial inquiries and investigations have gone [21]. Investigative journalism is not in fashion, and even less so if the result is that there is nothing at all, zero sales, no more scoops, we are left without blood. But now, once again, the game is repeated, the intelligence services are once again positioning the case of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" through the media, publishing the new "disinformation" without saying a word.

The Return of the "*Cartel of the Suns*"

The impatience of the U.S. for overthrowing Nicolás Maduro, together with Juan Guaidó's loss of legitimacy among his own (as we will explain later in this piece), are among the reasons that have caused the issue to be strongly positioned once again in the media as of the second half of 2019. This time, although the lack of evidence is the same as always, with Department of Justice not only the media, but also the International Narcotics Control Board, a theoretically independent body linked to the United Nations, has played along. But let's first look at the behavior of the media and think tank-type organizations that are linked to the U.S. intelligence agencies.

[21] http://mppre.gob.ve/opinion/que-paso-cartel-soles-por-fernando-casado/

Insight Crime: The foundation with Blind Faith in the Existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*"

The Insight Crime Foundation, which is defined as a hybrid: “part informative media, part academic media and part think tank”[22], has written a lot about the “*Cartel of the Suns*”, unfortunately reproducing the same disinformation that has characterized everything that we know about this criminal organization. Insight Crime, on its website, in the profile it has dedicated to Venezuela states:

> There is evidence indicating that, from the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, corrupt elements in the security forces intensified their role in the [drug trafficking] business, forming an informal network called the *'Cartel of the Suns*'[23].

The evidence, as always, is conspicuous by its absence, but we hoped to find it in the report published in 2018 by Insight Crime entitled "Venezuela, A Mafia State?" in which they dedicate a chapter to the “*Cartel of the Suns*” (Insight Crime, 2018)[24].

As we will repeat endlessly, the obsession of our work is to find the proofs, beyond the darn evidence, suspicions, and speculations. However, the aforementioned report warns us:

> We have 123 files. However, for legal reasons we will not publish the complete list. Instead, we attached here some data on those against whowe think we have very solid evidence.

But, when trying to find the solidity of the evidence, the sources that could lead us to know more about the "*Cartel of the Suns*" and the high officials of the Maduro government, what we found is unconvincing. The first of those involved would be Diosdado Cabello, who is identified as the number two of the Maduro government: "Sources from the United States Department of Justice spoke about Cabello with Insight Crime on condition of anonymity." First source found, anonymous, but also what it contributed in relation to the alleged criminal is of little substace:

[22] https://es.insightcrime.org/quienes-somos/#methodology
[23] https://es.insightcrime.org/venezuela-crimen-organizado/venezuela/
[24] https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Venezuela-Estado-mafioso-InSight-Crime-Observatorio-de-crimen-organizado.pdf

> Look, this guy is up to his neck in all kinds of illegal activities in Venezuela and we are putting together a case against him. However, he knows how to protect himself and keep distance from dirty work", said the source (p. 17).

The second of those indicated would be the then Vice President Tareck El Aissami. The report (p. 18) first refers to a note published by the Insight Crime Foundation of 2017 that was entitled "New Vice President of Venezuela Linked to Drug Trafficking"[25], and upon reading this note, the only source for such claims is: "El Aissami had been linked to drug trafficking in various newspaper reports mentioning U.S. officials whose identity was not disclosed." That is to say, this "think tank" uses the media as a reference and they use anonymous sources. The formula is not based on the credibility of the message, but rather the credibility of the messenger is enough to not doubt the message.

The third person mentioned in the report on the web of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" is Néstor Reverol, the Minister of Interior Relations and commander of the Bolivarian National Guard at the time. In his case the report notes:

> The pile of charges against him claims that Reverol alerted drug traffickers to operations against them, obstructed investigations, released arrested drug traffickers and ensured that seized narcotics were returned to the traffickers (p. 18).

Sources in which this information is endorsed: none.

Finally, the report indicates that "Cilia Flores, wife of President Maduro and therefore the First Lady, has also been implicated in drug trafficking by association." The association would be the conviction of her nephews accused of drug trafficking in the U.S. and the investigations carried out for this same crime against her son. For the report, that alone already makes her guilty of the crime of illicit association. Where is the presumption of innocence? Who knows?

But the very definition and existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" is quite contradictory, to the point that Insight Crime would be acknowledging that there is no such organization or at least it cannot be said that it is linked and controlled by the Bolivarian government:

[25] https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/nuevo-vicepresidente-venezuela-representa-reciente-caso-alto-funcionario-vinculado-narcotrafico/

> The drug trafficking structures in the Venezuelan state are not a cartel, but a series of often antagonistic networks entrenched within the Chavista regime, with links dating back almost two decades (p.18).

In conclusion: The "*Cartel of the Suns*" "is not a cartel", but "often antagonistic" criminal networks.

But the report mentions other top Venezuelan officials. Do you know where their sources came from? None other than the Raúl Reyes computers. Those computers that had high international media and political resonance after Operation Phoenix, carried out in 2008 and through which Colombia invaded Ecuadorian territory and several members of the FARC were killed along with Mexican university students who were in the camp during the attack. Although in the Insight Crime report the alleged information from these computers is sufficient reason to incriminate a large number of Venezuelans who have held high political and military positions, so far, in more than a decade, not a single court has used this information as evidence. Why? Well, because in the seizure of the famous computers, the chain of custody was broken and today we do not even know if the computers existed or were "planted" by the Colombian army/government, whose head of State at the time was Álvaro Uribe.

An additional problem in relation to the Insight Crime Foundation is not only the lack of rigor and credibility of the reports they publish on the "*Cartel of the Suns*", which, as we can see, do not withstand a minimum analysis, but that this information and the foundation's spokespersons are frequently used by the international media to give credibility to their journalistic articles. An example of this is the *BBC* report entitled "Reward for Maduro: What is Known About the "Hazy" '*Cartel of the Suns*', Accused of "Flooding the U.S. with cocaine" from Venezuela"[26], published in late March 2020, where Jeremy McDermott, co-director and co-founder of Insight Crime, is by far the most cited source by the reporter.

[26] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52058974

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) Enters the Game

The INCB is an independent and quasi-judicial body made up of experts that was established under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. It is made up of thirteen members, ten elected by the UN Economic and Social Council and three by the World Health Organization. Once elected, their members should exercise their functions impartially and personally, with complete independence from governments[27].

In its report of the year 2019 specifically in paragraph 578, INCB expressly mentioned the "*Cartel of the Suns*" for the first time, it seems that at last a serious and reputable body was going to give us more information about this criminal organization. However, again there is talk of "signs" in the collaboration of the Bolivarian Armed Forces with the "*Cartel of the Suns*".

> 578. In recent years, organized criminal groups have transported large quantities of illicit drugs to Europe and the United States from Colombia, passing through the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. To control this traffic, in particular cocaine trafficking through Central America to the United States, organized criminal groups control seaports and use light aircraft, with which they carry out illegal flights. There are indications that criminal groups in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have managed to infiltrate government security forces and have created an informal network known as the 'Cartel of the Suns' to facilitate the entry and exit of illegal drugs (INCB , 2020)[28].

That is to say, the same lack of credibility in the sources of information that has always been identified. The problem is that this time it is an international legal entity that joins the speculations, which were given a new twist. As expected, the INCB report was replicated by the media, which has constantly been used as loudspeakers of propaganda around the "*Cartel of the Suns*".

The Insight Crime organization got the headline: "INCB recognizes the influence of the "Cartel of the Suns" of Venezuela in drug trafficking"[29]. For its part,

[27] https://www.incb.org/incb/es/about.html
[28] https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2019/Annual_Report/Spanish_ebook_AR2019.pdf
[29] https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/influencia-soles-de-venezuela-en-narcotrafico/

the EFE news agency spread this information, which was replicated in the international press under headlines such as Eldiario.es: "The UN Sees Signs that Drug Traffickers Have Infiltrated the Venezuelan Armed Forces"[30]. It is interesting to see how the text of this story reproduces information from Insight Crime, once again highlighting how contradictory the existing information about the "*Cartel of the Suns*" is:

> The center points out that 'there is no family tree for such an unclear structure' like the aforementioned cartel, and that there is only 'a list of names published' by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) from the U.S. Treasury Department and "a lot of speculation".

To summarize what we have so far is: a) Indications everywhere but not a single piece of evidence; b) An alleged criminal organization called "*Cartel of the Suns*", but which is not actually a Cartel, since it has a shady structure (above "Insight Crime" described the alleged Cartel as a set of antagonistic criminal networks); c) OFAC, a completely interested actor that depends on the White House, is in charge of determining the list of the members of the "*Cartel of the Suns*"; d) Too much speculation.

After the impact of the INCB report, Luis Otarola Peñaranda, a lawyer member of the organization was interviewed by the United Nations itself, and when asked about the "*Cartel of the Suns*" he limited himself to stating that the sources were "reliable and verified", but so far we do not know any of them[31].

Another contradiction is that the same INCB Annual Report 2019, in its paragraph 583, states that the seizure of cocaine hydrochloride in Venezuela during 2018 was extensive (35.5 tons) only surpassed by Colombia (INCB, 2020). Several factors should be taken into account for the interpretation of this seizure data: a) Venezuela is not a producer of this substance, but Colombia is; b) The transit of cocaine through Venezuela is far less than the transit of cocaine from the Colombian Caribbean and the Colombian and Ecuadorian Pacific basin (as we will analyze in depth below), therefore the seizure of the Venezuelan authorities is in absolute and relative terms of great magnitude; c) Given this volume of drug

[30] https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/ONU-indicios-infiltrado-FFAA-Venezuela_0_1000200228.html
[31] https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/02/1470231

seizures it is difficult to think that there is a State policy in Venezuela dedicated to drug trafficking.

It is interesting to briefly analyze the INCB reports from 2015, when the case of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" breaks out in the media, to 2020, when the INCB makes the first mention of this criminal organization in its 2019 Report. Venezuela is only mentioned in the 2017 and 2015 reports; where the country's management in its fight against drugs was complimented. Paragraph 216 of the 2017 Report noted a model behavior on the part of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:

> 216. The Board notes that, since its mission to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2014, the Government has taken a number of actions to implement the recommendations of the Board and that progress has been made in certain areas of the fight against drugs. Shortly after the mission of the Board, the Government adopted the National Anti-Drug Plan 2015-2019, which is aimed at reducing drug abuse and intensifying drug prevention activities. The National Anti-Drug Office has expanded its anti-drug education and awareness-raising programmes on drug use, reduction and prevention activities throughout the country (INCB, 2018)[32].

Something similar happens in 2015, where Venezuela has always followed the guidelines agreed by the INCB:

> 193. The cooperation of the Government with INCB has been satisfactory, as has its compliance with the International Drug Control Treaties. A new national drug control plan is being elaborated. The Board notes that the Government continues to work to combat drug trafficking from bordering countries and to effectively finance the activities of the various government agencies responsible for control and prevention (INCB, 2016).

For these reasons, the INCB's accusations, which reproduced U.S. government's unsubstantiated allegations, still do not seem right. Until evidence is presented on the "*Cartel of the Suns*" drug trafficking activity with the consent and participation of the Venezuelan government, we will consider the INCB's work to be lax at best, and at worst, like that of an organization under the gringo payroll.

[32] https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2017/Annual_Report/S_2017_AR_ebook.pdf

The Fight against the "*Cartel of the Suns*" Under the Aegis of the United States

Since Obama declared Venezuela a "threat to the national security of the U.S." by executive order[33], the relations between the two countries have been in free fall, although they were never good. The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House made the situation worse. The ultraconservative President has repeatedly harassed Venezuela. Not only has he imposed draconian unilateral economic sanctions prohibited by International Law (Casado, 2018) but on several occasions he has threatened, expressly [34] and tacitly [35], with a military intervention of the country.

The most recent action against Venezuela, announced in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, has been to offer a $15 million reward for the capture of President Nicolás Maduro[36]. This announcement officially declared the Venezuelan President to be the leader of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" and inserted the term "drug trafficker" alongside with the terms "dictator" and "illegitimate President". In light, or rather, in the shadow, of the lack of veracity surrounding the "*Cartel of the Suns*", the reward for President Nicolás Maduro seemed like a bad joke, but unfortunately the U.S. sent with it a message that validates any action against Venezuela. As the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional* would headline a few days after the reward was issued: "Donald Trump Auctions Off Nicolás Maduro"[37]. As a result, only a few weeks later, the fiasco of the attempted invasion of Venezuela in the so-called Operation Gideon took place. In conclusion, a total disregard for international legislation and the imposition of the Law of the Jungle.

The U.S. Attorney General William Barr's charade in his indictment of President Nicolás Maduro and the rest of those accused as members of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" will sooner or later be part of films and documentaries that will show how the strategies of imperialism worked in the year 2020, but for now they are

[33] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2015/03/150309_ultnot_eeuu_venezuela_sanciones
[34] https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/08/11/espanol/trump-opcion-militar-venezuela-nicolas-maduro.html
[35] https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/eeuu-y-canada/donald-trump-no-descarta-ninguna-posibilidad-sobre-crisis-en-venezuela-273430
[36] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52049695
[37] https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/donald-trump-subasta-a-nicolas-maduro/

dangerous warmongering moves that have an uncertain immediate future. The main axis of the accusation revolves around the fact that the "*Cartel of the Suns*" has set itself a target: "To flood the United States with cocaine and impose its harmful and addictive effects on the users of this country"[38]. While Iraq was accused of having weapons of mass destruction, in the case of Venezuela it is cocaine.

In the referred accusation, in the part dedicated to President Maduro, lacking sustenance, as always, we clearly identify an example of what has come to be turning politics into soap operas (Bouza, 2007), the use of the soap opera resources, in this case of cartel kingpins and gangsters, applied to political action:

> In his role as a leader of the *Cartel of the Suns*, Maduro Moros negotiated multi-ton shipments of FARC-produced cocaine; directed that the "Cartel of the Suns" provide military-grade weapons to the FARC; coordinated foreign affairs with Honduras and other countries to facilitate large-scale drug trafficking; and requested assistance from the FARC leadership in training an unsanctioned militia group that functioned, in essence, as an armed forces unit for the *Cartel of the Suns*[39].

The Press Strikes Again

The media spread the indictment against Maduro and other senior government officials without ever questioning it, checking the veracity of the sources or questioning the geopolitical interests of the indictment imposed by the U.S. Attorney General.

In fact, the way for the new onslaught from the international press on Venezuela has been paved since September 2019, when a report, once again from *The Wall Street Journal*, awoke from a four-year hibernation of not tracking the "*Cartel of the Suns*", by publishing the story: "Hugo Chávez's Venezuela Worked to Flood the U.S. with Cocaine, U.S. Prosecutors Say" and by subtitle: "Documents prepared by U.S. federal prosecutors outline for the first time the possible role of

[38] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52058974

[39] https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nicol-s-maduro-moros-and-14-current-and-former-venezuelan-officials-charged-narco-terrorism

the former Venezuelan president in drug trafficking"[40]. The FAIR organization described this text as follows: "This 'deep state' fiction genre reached new heights with its latest on Venezuela"[41]. *The Wall Street Journal* report was written by Juan Forero, the same person who broke the news in 2015, and who, by the way, on previous occasions never wanted to give me an interview. For a change, this report is the result of "confidential documents" to which *The Wall Street Journal* had access, but when going to the sources, it is based solely on the prosecutor's accusation and the testimony of a defector. In conclusion, the same line of argument as always continues to exist: nothing.

But the purpose of this report, where, in fact, *The Wall Street Journal* "had" not accessed "confidential documents", but rather had been supplied by sources interested in making the information public, paved the way for the alleged role of the Venezuelan government in drug trafficking to make the front pages of the international media once again.

Barely one month later, in the same tone as *The Wall Street Journal*, the website *El Confidencial,* released other "unpublished documents" that gave rise to the report: "The papers that explain 'State drug trafficking' in the Chavista Venezuela". The race for the scoops and to position Venezuela as a rogue country dedicated to drug trafficking had begun again. This newspaper brazenly stated: "Venezuela is a country of processing and transit of drugs originating in Colombia. Since 2000, its justice system began to investigate the connections of drug trafficking with the Army and the Government".

A few weeks after the announcement of Maduro's reward, the *Voice of America*, which, as is known, belongs to the U.S. government's international radio and television service, published an interview with the Vice-Minister of Honduran Security, Luis Suazo, entitled "Honduran Vice-Minister Accuses Venezuela of Drug Trafficking"[42] and in which the newspaper stated: "Vice-Minister of Security, Luis Suazo, assured that 100 percent of the aircraft loaded with cocaine and passing

[40] https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelas-hugo-chavez-worked-to-flood-u-s-with-cocaine-u-s-prosecutors-say-11568557780
[41] https://fair.org/home/media-continue-to-push-misinformation-about-venezuela-and-drug-trafficking/
[42] https://www.voanoticias.com/america-latina/viceministro-hondure%C3%B1o-acusa-venezuela-de-narcotr%C3%A1fico

through Honduras in transit to the United States, come from Venezuela". As we will see below when analyzing the cocaine routes, this does not make any sense. This information was reinforced in May 2020, when the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional* published the following headline related to the statements of Claudio Sandoval, Ambassador of Juan Guaidó's government in Honduras: "Honduras, Belize and Guatemala are on the route of the '*Cartel of the Suns'*"[43]. The information in *El Nacional* is limited to repeating what was previously published by the *Voice of America.*

In mid-April, the Nicaraguan newspaper *La Prensa* published the headline "Nicaraguan Army in operation to hit the '*Cartel of the Suns'*, linked to Nicolás Maduro". In fact, the news refers to "Operation Orion V", an international naval campaign constituted by several countries in the region to fight drug trafficking, but the newspaper takes advantage of the situation to affirm the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*" and its links with Nicolás Maduro[44].

As expected, reports with striking information took off, the *Infobae* portal even found links between the Sinaloa Cartel and that of the Suns in Venezuelan territory:

> Venezuela has been playing a leading role in the drug trafficking of the Cartel of Sinaloa. Since the late 1990s, the organization founded by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, and the '*Cartel of the Suns'* —linked to Nicolás Maduro — have found a safe route that allows them to traffic drugs from Colombia to the United States[45].

In another report by the same media outlet, which refers to the former DEA Director of International Operations Mike Vigil as a source, claimed that both cartels are bringing between 200 and 250 tons of cocaine into the United States each year[46].

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[43] https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/honduras-belice-y-guatemala-en-la-ruta-del-cartel-de-los-soles/

[44] https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2020/04/14/politica/2662729-ejercito-de-nicaragua-en-operacion-para-golpear-al-cartel-de-los-soles-al-que-vinculan-a-nicolas-maduro

[45] https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2020/04/18/el-cartel-de-sinaloa-y-su-poderio-en-san-felipe-el-poblado-venezolano-que-convirtio-en-su-bastion-criminal/

[46] https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2020/03/26/el-cartel-de-sinaloa-y-el-de-los-soles-al-que-ligan-a-nicolas-maduro-trafican-droga-a-eeuu-desde-hace-20-anos-mike-vigil/

From then on, the onslaught of notes continued and unsubstantiated headlines were disseminated by recycling what has been said by others, always with marked sensationalist features that are attractive to a mediocre audience. An example of this is the headline of the *Militar Digital Diálogo magazine*: “Venezuela's Regime Fills its Pockets with Drug Money”[47].

The Future of the “*Cartel of the Suns*”

Along with the reward offered for the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, a price was also put on the heads of other Venezuelan officials or former officials. Among them was Clíver Alcalá, for whom the reward was ten million dollars, twice as much as for Chapo Guzmán, and who had been living in Colombia for several years and who was criticizing the government of Nicolás Maduro, even collaborating with those who attempted the invasion of Venezuela in Operation Gideon[48].

Alcalá turned himself to the DEA days after the reward for his capture was published, which again prompted multiple headlines about the functioning of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". As stated by the British newspaper, *The Telegraph*: "The 'Cartel of the Suns': How Venezuela's Maduro and his generals allegedly built a huge drugs empire”[49].

There is no doubt that the former defector-turned-DEA collaborator will "contribute" new information. He must do so because right now drug trafficking is the main prop of the U.S. attack against Venezuela and the excuse to carry out all kinds of aggressions against its government and for this it needs new informants to give renewed veracity to its accusations.

“Guaidó’s Mafia”

In early 2019, Juan Guaidó, a practically unknown politician, was elected president of the National Assembly (Legislative Branch), to later "self-proclaim"

[47] https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/regimen-de-venezuela-llena-sus-bolsillos-con-dinero-del-narcotrafico/
[48] https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/video/venezuela-cliver-alcala-operacion-gedeon-juan-carlos-nieto-entrevista-fernando-del-rincon-conclusiones/
[49] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/03/cartel-suns-venezuelas-maduro-generals-allegedly-built-huge/

himself "interim president" of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela during a rally. Immediately the government of Donald Trump and much of Latin America and *Western* Europe gave their support and recognition to Guaidó. This international recognition is undoubtedly a disastrous precedent that had not been seen in the modern history of International Law in Latin America, where a president created by a group of countries is given a blank check to act as he pleases against democratic principles themselves.

Since then, Guaidó's strategy as "interim President" has been to end what he calls the usurpation by the Nicolás Maduro government. The narrative of the usurpation allowed Guaidó and his *Western* allies to justify any type of action, be it legal or illegal, peaceful or violent, to overthrow Nicolás Maduro. The involvement in illegal and criminal actions by Guaidó and his supporters is the reason why we have decided to call this chapter "Guaidó's Mafia", a term much more in line with reality than the accusations about the existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". The dictionary of the Spanish language of the Royal Spanish Academy grants four meanings to the word mafia:

1. f. A criminal and secret organization of Sicilian origin.
2. f. Any clandestine criminal organization.
3. f. Dismissive. An organized group that tries to defend its interests without much scruples. The oil mafia.
4. f. P. Rich. Deception, trap, trickery.

Except for the first, all the other definitions of mafia would fit with the unscrupulous actions promoted by Guaidó since his self-proclamation in early 2019, such as receiving the support of drug traffickers, embezzling the nation's economic assets, incurring in acts of corruption with funds received in support of his cause or attempted coup d'états and paramilitary invasions of his country, just to mention part of the endless number of charges against him. Below, we will review some of the milestones of Guaidó's Mafia.

A few weeks after their self-proclamation, there was the burning of the trucks with alleged humanitarian aid that were attempted to be brought into Venezuela from the Colombian border. International media headlines crowed that it

was Maduro's henchmen who burned the humanitarian aid being attempted to be brought into Venezuela. But a simple investigation by *The New York Times* ruined this version, showing that it was the protesters themselves in favor of Guaidó who, by throwing Molotov cocktails at the Venezuelan forces guarding the border, ended up lighting the trucks carrying humanitarian aid on fire[50].

In the early morning of April 30, 2019, Guaidó led an attempted coup in Caracas with some members of the Bolivarian National Guard in the vicinity of La Carlota military base, with which he hoped would provoke a widespread popular and military uprising. This new attempted coup d'état was given the high-sounding name of "Operation Freedom", but Guaidó's aspirations were dashed, the actions were quickly controlled, and the coup leaders disarmed.

But Guaidó has not only dedicated himself to destabilizing Venezuela, he has also acted as head of State in the countries that have recognized him as "interim President", although without territory or population to govern. Several diplomats appointed by Guaidó occupy diplomatic headquarters in different countries and in others coexist with those of the Maduro government in a legal status that is difficult to explain. Guaidó's influence has reached international organizations where his allies are in the majority and his envoy currently acts as a de facto ambassador to the OAS with voting rights[51].

The delegates of Guaidó have also seized Venezuela's economic assets, as happened with the Citgo company, located in U.S. soil and confiscated by the Donald Trump administration after the self-proclamation. Citgo owns three refineries in the states of Texas, Illinois and Louisiana (one of which is the sixth largest in the U.S.) as well as a network of some 10,000 gas stations across the country, a total worth of approximately $13 billion[52]. After the confiscation, Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has reported that Guaidó delegates have lost $300 million in the administration of Citgo during the first quarter[53].

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[50] https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/03/10/espanol/america-latina/venezuela-ayuda-incendiada.html
[51] https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/el-enviado-de-guaido-asume-como-embajador-facto-venezuela-ante-la-oea/20000035-3949549
[52] http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/EE-UU-autoriza-a-empresa-minera-a-confiscar-acciones-de-la-venezolana-CITGO
[53] https://www.telesurtv.net/news/guaido-saqueo-citgo-perdidas-millonarias-petroleo-venezuela-20191211-0026.html

Guaidó's administration, beyond its illegality, has been tainted by several scandals, some related precisely to his relationship with drug cartels. This information, despite the existing documentation and evidence, is something that the big international media has barely talked about.

In September 2019, compromising images were published in which Guaidó was portrayed with El Brother and El Menor, two commanders of the paramilitary group Los Rastrojos, a Colombian group dedicated to paramilitarism and drug trafficking.

The photographs were taken by Wilfredo Cañizares, a human rights defender in the northern area of Santander, and were taken on February 22nd, when the *Aid Live* concert was held on the border between Colombia and Venezuela. Guaidó arrived at the concert and crossed from Venezuela to Colombia through an area of the border controlled by the Rastrojos. Faced with Guaidó's allegations that those photos were one of many he took with people asking for a selfie, Cañizares said that no one could cross that border crossing without an agreement with the Rastrojos. In fact, in an investigation carried out by Cañizares, "on the orders of Los Rastrojos, no one in Puerto Santander was authorized to leave their homes during the time that the Venezuelan interim president was

passing through"[54]. After the publication of the photographs, the threats against Cañizares meant that he had to leave his home in Cúcuta for three weeks and was about to leave the country, the Rastrojos in their eagerness to find out who had leaked the photos killed "a bunch of people" (ibidem).

Several corruption scandals have appeared during Guaidó's "management", discrediting him before international public opinion and among his own acolytes. The first case was in mid-2019 and was called the “Cúcuta Case,” in which members of Guaidó's own party diverted funds destined for humanitarian aid and the livelihood of the Venezuelan military defectors stationed in Colombia, spending it in luxury hotels, liquor and prostitutes[55]. This case ended with the removal of several of those involved in the criminal acts, although details such as the total money diverted or the names of all those involved in the scandal were never disclosed. At the end of 2019, Guaidó dismissed his "ambassador" in Colombia, Humberto Calderón Berti, who accused people from the "interim President’s" inner circle of being involved in the embezzlement of funds intended for the acquisition of the humanitarian aid that was to be introduced into Venezuela and that, as we saw before, ended up being burned[56]. Also, at the end of 2019, another case of corruption came to light, called “Operation Green Briefcase”, in which Colombian businessmen involved in the distribution of food in Venezuela allegedly paid bribes to Venezuelan opposition deputies, including several from Guaidó’s opposition party, Popular Will[57].

The most recent crime in which Guaidó may be involved is the so-called “Operation Gideon”, executed and dismantled on May 3rd, 2020, in which a group of former Venezuelan and U.S. military turned mercenaries and paramilitaries, hoped to assassinate Nicolás Maduro and other members of his government. The failed incursion was made through a contract with the company Silvercorp[58], somehow emulating the Corsican patents of the colonial era. Guaidó would,

[54] https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/wilfredo-canizares-el-hombre-que-revelo-las-fotos-de-guaido-con-los-rastrojos-articulo-894753
[55] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48681343
[56] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50608678
[57] https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/la-operacion-maletin-verde-las-claves-del-escandalo-de-corrupcion-que-salpica-a-gobierno-y-oposicion-en-venezuela/642999
[58] https://albaciudad.org/2020/05/contrato-silvercorp-41-paginas-guaido-rendon-goudreau-pdf/

therefore, be involved in crimes against humanity and terrorism, where he had also committed the resources of the nation in advance since the cost of the services of the contract for more than $200 million was guaranteed with Venezuelan oil. A nefarious enterprise that took the lives of eight of the adventurers and the rest were detained by the Venezuelan Armed Forces, including two U.S. mercenaries.

Guaidó, like he has done during each of the failures and crimes that he's been accused of, has denied any involvement in the events, but the evidence obtained shows the opposite. The person who has indeed acknowledged his role is his advisor Juan José Rendón, who has also said that he informed Guaidó of his movements[59]. In the best scenario, this shows that Guaidó was aware of the entire Operation Gideon, but it is difficult not to think that he was one of the organizers of the paramilitary invasion. In the case that he was involved, which is quite obviouse, even *The Washington Post* has demanded "an independent investigation" (Ibidem).

But behind the responsibility of Guaidó is that of the U.S. Government itself. It is unlikely that Trump was not only aware of, but also gave the green light to the coup movements of his protégé, in particular, after Guaidó was honored to be present at the State of Union address in February 2020 where he received a standing ovation. This gesture was a clear endorsement by the U.S. to try to end the dissent that Guaidó raises within the Venezuelan opposition, which is becoming more fragmented and less satisfied with the role played by the "interim President".

It would not be first time in the region's recent history that the U.S. has been involved in shady businesses related to drug trafficking in order to support the faction of its choice, however illegal and in violation of human rights the operation is. That is how the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s took place, when the Reagan Administration financed, trained and armed the Nicaraguan Contras against the Sandinista government (Thompson, 2000, p. 296). An aggression against Nicaraguan sovereignty would not end until 1986, when the International Court of Justice in the case of *Nicaragua vs. The United States* issued a ruling in favor of

[59] https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2020/05/07/operacion-gedeon-venezuela-se-tambalea-entre-medias-verdades-y-grandes-mentiras/

the former and found the existence of military and paramilitary activities financed by the U.S. to overthrow the Sandinistas (Case concerning the military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua, 1986).

Most Colombian Cocaine Routes Do Not Pass through Venezuela

In all of the entanglement regarding the media and political functioning of the *Cartel of the Suns*, something that will never cease to surprise is how all the attention is placed on the alleged relationship of the Maduro government with drug trade, yet a deaf ear is turned to the increase in cocaine production in Colombia.

Venezuela does not produce cocaine, which is not questioned, despite what some sensationalist media such as the *ABC*, which has been known to publish fantasy stories related to Venezuela, published headlines such as: *Venezuela, a Drug Trafficking Bridge, Also Becomes a Producer*[60]*.* In this story, which could perfectly be described as fake news, despite the fact that the information comes from the accusation by the director of an organization called FundaREDES, a certain Javier Tarazona, the newspaper makes it its own and editorializes the information that appears without attribution of the source nor does it quote it in order to display at least the most basic respect for the rules of journalism.

But turning back to the Colombia issue, it is also a fact noted by international organizations and the U.S. government itself, that in recent years there has been an increase in territory dedicated cocaine cultivation and production.

In March 2020, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), an organization dedicated to human rights advocacy in Latin America, published an enlightening research study on drug routes from Colombia to Venezuela called "Beyond the Narco-State Narrative. What U.S. Drug Monitoring Data Says About Venezuela" (Ramsey & Smilde, 2020)[61]. This report uses as a reference the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB), a collection of multiple sources on drug trafficking worldwide taken from intelligence databases focused on the detection and surveillance of drug routes.

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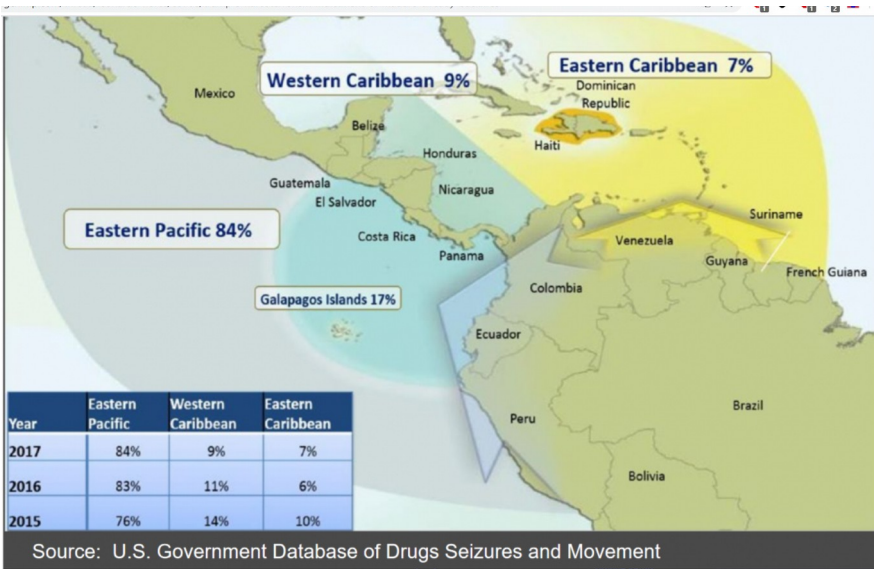
[60] https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-venezuela-puente-narcotrafico-convierte-tambien-productor-201909220238_noticia.html

[61] https://www.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Narcostate-memo-EDITED.pdf

The data collected by the WOLA research contradicts the narratives that claim Venezuela would be a narco-State. First, it dismantles the claim of increased cocaine and narcotics trafficking through Venezuela, and second, that the route most used to transport drugs from the producing countries (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, which monopolize cocaine production in the world) is Venezuela.

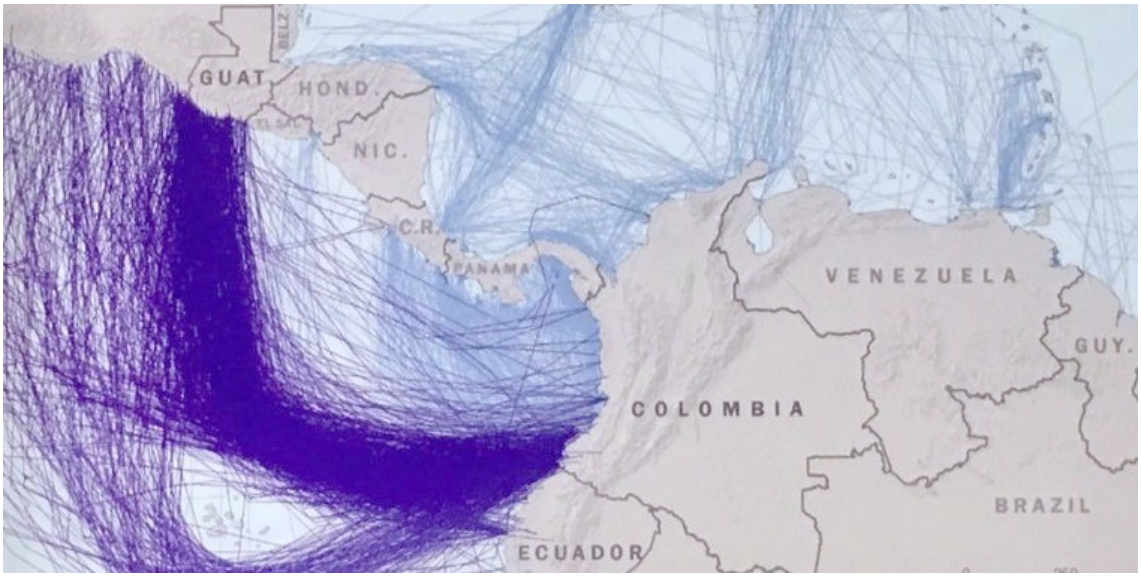
As one can see on the first Graph provided by the U.S. intelligence sources themselves (CCDB), (Ramsey & Smilde, 2020, p. 5) the least used route for drug transport is Venezuela, which by 2017, according to the most recent data, accounts for only 7% of the total of drug transport. Transport directly from the Colombian Caribbean would be 9%, but the bulk of the traffic is through the Pacific route, including the Galapagos Islands which accounts for 84% of transport. But in addition, when looking at the three-year period covered by the study (2015-2017), the use of the eastern Caribbean route, which would correspond to Venezuela, fell from 10% to 7%.



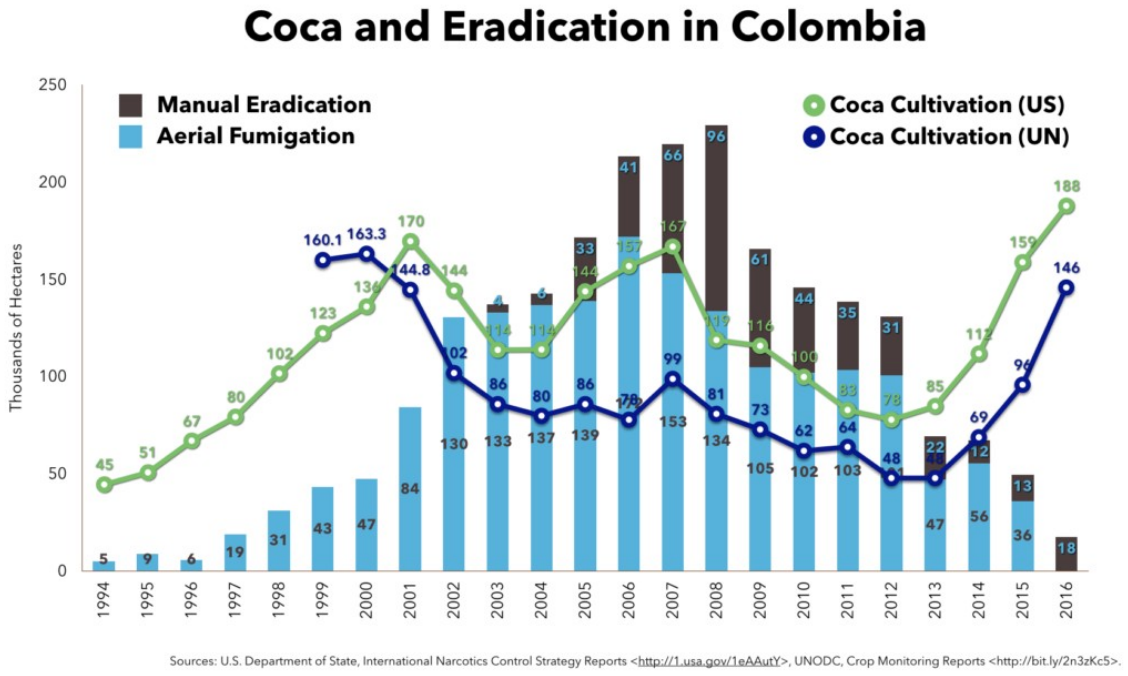
Year	Eastern Pacific	Western Caribbean	Eastern Caribbean
2017	84%	9%	7%
2016	83%	11%	6%
2015	76%	14%	10%

Source: U.S. Government Database of Drugs Seizures and Movement

In the second graph represented in the WOLA report (Ramsey & Smilde, 2020, p. 6) which represents the air traffic of aircrafts that would transport drugs and whose source is the U.S. Senate Committee for International Narcotis Control, the reflected transit from the Pacific coast and the Colombian Caribbean coast is notoriously greater than from Venezuela.



But these are not the only sources and data we should take into consideration. In another report produced in 2017 by WOLA, the nefarious Colombian policy of coca plantations eradication is represented (Isacson, 2017) [62]. With data from the U.S. State Department and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), we note that in recent years all sources agree that drug eradication has declined dramatically at the same time that cultivation has expanded.



[62] https://www.wola.org/analysis/important-trends-colombias-drug-policy-explained/

In fact, the hundreds of thousands of hectares cultivated between 2017 and 2019 have reached historic highs every year, and in 2019, data not reflected in the previous graph, would have reached 212,000 hectares, far exceeding the figures shown in the graph and increasing the area of crops identified by 2% by 2018[63].

These investigations provide concrete data that demystify the alleged collaboration between the Venezuelan government and the drug cartels, while showing us how Colombia, the preferred ally of the United States in the region, is not only the largest producer of cocaine, but is also strengthening its position in this illegal market every year. Efforts and criticism should be directed at cutting off production and trafficking from Colombia and leaving Venezuela alone.

Conclusions

After reading this work and having analyzed the most "reputable" sources in the study field of the "*Cartel of the Suns*", the most important conclusion is that there is no such Cartel. In the worst-case scenario, there would be criminal gangs in Venezuela that are dedicated to drug trafficking, but this does not in any way constitutes a State policy in Venezuela.

The strategy of the United States is to show and demonstrate to international public opinion that Venezuela is a rogue State, in order to justify any aggression that would otherwise be inconceivable. From there, surreal situations arise from the perspective of Political Science, such as the fact that *Western* countries that proclaim themselves to be democratic recognize the impostor Juan Guaidó as the legitimate head of State.

The international organizations that have investigated the "*Cartel of the Suns*" have no proof of its existence, so the way to give credibility to its information is through the use of media that in turn lack rigorous sources. This is the way in which, going round and round, quoting one media outlet to another, together with so-called specialists, the information is finally laundered, although beyond the wrapping, there is only a huge void. The result is that bodies like the INCB incur in

[63] https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2020/03/06/la-produccion-de-coca-en-colombia-permanece-en-su-maximo-historico/

media-like speculation, turning speculation into evidence and playing into the hands of malign political actors like the Trump Administration.

Those accused of being drug traffickers in the Venezuelan government and its armed forces do not have their basic rights respected, and the accusations against them are based on the presumption of guilt, thus destroying the basic tenets of the rule of law.

The Trump administration, the DEA, the Department of Justice and the intelligence services are the architects of the myth of the "*Cartel of the Suns*". In fact, they are the main and only source that feeds this myth by "leaking" information from anonymous sources without verification. At the same time, they are the main actor of political destabilization in Venezuela with their unrestricted support to the self-proclaimed "interim President" and encouraging all kinds of adventures including terrorist invasions. If the unfolding of events is not stopped, it could lead to devastating consequences for the region.

Let's hope that this piece accomplishes the generation of a serious debate about the non-existence of the "*Cartel of the Suns*", and that the organizations, media, institutions and people directly identified in this study as biased and not very rigorous will respond, offering arguments and evidence that prove them right and that I, in the best scenario, am wrong or in the worst, am a mental moron. However, I have a sense that the aforementioned will respond as always, with silence, hiding in the fact that they possess the hegemonic media and therefore have dominion over the truth, which exempts them from giving any kind of reason to my allegations. In fact, replying to me would mean exposing themselves and that would blur the halo of truth in which they disguise themselves and which is nothing more than an outright lie.

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The Myth of the "Cartel of the Suns",
Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Politics in Venezuela
was finally edited in digital format
in Caracas, July, 2020
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela