

NEWS

# Venezuela Decries \$50M ‘Narcoterrorism’ Bounty on Maduro as ‘Ridiculous Smokescreen’

Caracas has condemned the drug trafficking accusations as baseless efforts to further regime-change narratives.

Ricardo Vaz | August 9, 2025



Washington has offered no evidence to sustain the grave accusations against high-ranking Venezuelan officials. (Efe)

Caracas, August 9, 2025 ([venezuelanalysis.com](#)) – The Venezuelan government has fiercely condemned the US government’s decision to raise the reward for information leading to the arrest of President Nicolás Maduro from US \$25 million to \$50 million.

“The pathetic ‘reward’ announced by [Attorney General] Pamela Bondi is the most ridiculous smokescreen we have ever seen,” Foreign Minister Yván Gil wrote on social media. “We repudiate this clumsy political propaganda operation.”

Gil called the announcement a “desperate distraction” from domestic US issues and an effort to please Venezuelan far-right sectors. The move also drew condemnation from [Cuba](#), [Nicaragua](#) and [Iran](#). The latter’s foreign ministry declared that Washington’s latest actions showcased its “addiction to aggressive unilateralism.”

On Thursday, Bondi stated in a press conference that US authorities were doubling the bounty against Maduro, whom she accused of collaborating with criminal organizations such as Tren de Aragua and Cartel de los Soles to “flood” the United States with cocaine.

“Under President Trump’s leadership, Maduro will not escape justice, and he will be held accountable for his despicable crimes,” the US official claimed. A New York Times [exposé](#) published Thursday, citing inside sources, reported that the Trump administration directed the Pentagon to start using military force against Latin American drug cartels in a significant escalation of US extra-territorial reach.

The lofty reward was originally introduced by the US Justice Department during the first Trump administration in March 2020 following “narcoterrorism” [indictments](#) against Maduro and other high-ranking officials.

Former President Joe Biden [raised](#) the amount from \$15 to \$25 million shortly before leaving office in January, while also introducing \$25 million and \$15 million similar rewards for Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello and Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López, respectively.

On July 25, the US State Department [designated](#) the so-called “Cartel de los Soles,” a purported criminal outfit run by Venezuelan military officers, as a terrorist organization.

However, neither the US Justice Department nor the US State Department have presented any evidence of criminal activity or ties to high-ranking Venezuelan officials. Likewise, no court-tested evidence has linked the so-called “Cartel de los Soles” to specific drug seizures or any identifiable trafficking infrastructure.

On Thursday, Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello [described](#) the so-called drug cartel as a long-standing White House “invention” designed to justify aggression against Venezuela, calling it a “big lie and manipulation.”

Cabello asserted that the “biggest cartel” in the world is operated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which he claimed has “no competition.”

[Reports](#) from the DEA and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) state that less than 10 percent of US-bound cocaine [flowed](#) through Venezuela and the Eastern Caribbean corridor, contradicting the administration’s assessment of Venezuela as a major actor in the narcotics trade. The same documents conclude that the bulk of drug shipments reach US territory via Washington-allied countries in Central America.

Caracas has consistently repudiated the drug-trafficking accusations, labeling them as propaganda to fuel regime-change narratives and pointing to the DEA’s involvement in criminal activities and past scandals such as Iran-Contra.

Venezuela [ceased](#) cooperation with the DEA in 2005 under former President Hugo Chávez. Leaked documents [published](#) by The Intercept disclosed espionage activities and information sharing between the DEA and the National Security Agency (NSA).

In early 2024, a leaked memo seen by the Associated Press revealed that the DEA ran an illegal [operation](#) with undercover agents in Venezuela in an effort to incriminate high-ranking officials in drug trafficking activities.

Since breaking relations with the DEA, Venezuelan counter-narcotics efforts have reportedly improved year by year. In early July, Venezuelan Attorney General Tarek William Saab [announced](#) the seizure of 356 tons of drugs from 2017 to 2025, along with 208 aircraft, 782 properties, 6,946 vehicles, 2,454 weapons, and 218 vessels. More than 19,000 drug-related convictions have also been made.

Foreign policy analysts, including those from the Venezuelan [opposition](#), have pointed out the Trump administration’s competing approaches in its Venezuela foreign policy. While hardline factions, led by figures such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio, have favored attacks against the Maduro government, other officials have lobbied for engagement.

In July, Caracas and Washington negotiated the [return](#) of 252 migrants who had been deported to El Salvador’s notorious CECOT prison, in exchange for 10 US nationals and residents detained in Venezuela. Days later, the US Treasury [issued](#) a license allowing Chevron to resume oil operations in the Caribbean nation.

*Edited by Cira Pascual Marquina in Caracas.*

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