

Geopolitical, Legal, and Economic Justification for United States Actions Against the Regime of Nicolás Maduro

Date: January 4, 2026

Classification: Special Report / Strategic Analysis

Subject: Analysis of the legal grounds for arrest, devastation of the energy sector, terrorist ties (Hamas, Hezbollah), and Russian influence in Venezuela.

1. Introduction: Strategic and Legal Context of the Intervention

The events of January 2026, culminating in the United States military operation and the arrest of Nicolás Maduro and his inner circle, mark a turning point in the geopolitical history of the Western Hemisphere. These actions, often misinterpreted by critics as solely politically or imperialistically motivated, are in reality the finale of a multi-year investigative process conducted by independent US federal agencies, including the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, based on hard data and evidence, that deconstructs the narrative of "illegal aggression" and reveals the true nature of the power structure in Caracas – not as a government within the meaning of international law, but as a transnational organized criminal group known as the *Cartel de los Soles*.

The analysis focuses on three key pillars that form the foundation of the justification for the actions taken: the systematic destruction of the extractive industry and the theft of assets from foreign investors (including US and Canadian companies), the active support of international terrorism (Hamas, Hezbollah), and the transformation of Venezuela into a strategic military foothold for the Russian Federation, threatening US national security. Each of these elements will be subjected to a detailed dissection based on indictments, arbitration tribunal awards, and intelligence reports.

2. Legal Architecture: Narco-Terrorism and the Cartel de los Soles

The foundation of US actions is not ideology, but criminal law. Nicolás Maduro was not detained as a head of state, but as the leader of a criminal organization. Understanding this distinction is crucial to refuting criticism regarding the violation of sovereignty. State sovereignty does not constitute immunity for narco-terrorist activity directed at other nations.

2.1 Genesis and Structure of the Department of Justice Indictment

In March 2020, the US Department of Justice announced breakthrough indictments against Nicolás Maduro and 14 other current and former Venezuelan officials. These charges were not the result of a sudden political decision, but the effect of over a decade of investigations led by federal prosecutors from the Southern District of New York (SDNY), Washington, and Florida. The indictment details how Maduro and his associates utilized state institutions – including the judiciary, intelligence agencies, and armed forces – to facilitate drug trafficking on an industrial scale. Central to the indictment is the existence of the *Cartel de los Soles* (Cartel of the Suns), named after the sun insignia worn on the uniforms of Venezuelan generals. Unlike traditional Mexican or Colombian cartels that corrupt the state from the outside, in Venezuela, the state became the cartel. According to evidence presented by the DOJ, Maduro not only knew of these activities but actively managed them, negotiating multi-ton shipments of cocaine produced by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

2.2 Alliance with FARC: Narcotics as Asymmetric Weaponry

The 2020 indictment, and subsequently the updated charges of 2026, point to a strategic alliance between the Maduro regime and FARC. The goal of this alliance was to "flood the United States with cocaine" to inflict health and social damage on American citizens. Prosecutors termed this "narco-terrorism." Evidence indicates that Maduro and his co-defendants supplied FARC with military-grade weaponry, including machine guns, ammunition, and even surface-to-air missile systems, in exchange for

drug proceeds.

This cooperation dates back to 1999, when the defendants began partnering with FARC, designated at the time by the US State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The Venezuelan airbase in Apure state and other military installations were made available for the takeoff of aircraft filled with cocaine bound for Central America and subsequently the USA. Utilizing his political position, Maduro provided political cover for these operations, paralyzing any internal attempts at investigation.

2.3 Legal Escalation and Arrest in 2026

The events of January 2026 are a direct consequence of Maduro ignoring earlier indictments. The new indictment, announced by Attorney General Pam Bondi, expanded the charges to include narco-terrorist conspiracy, conspiracy to import cocaine, and possession of destructive explosive devices. The fact that the USA set a reward of \$15 million in 2020, and then raised it to \$50 million in 2025, demonstrates the priority treatment of this threat.

Critics arguing that the arrest is a "coup d'état" overlook the fact that Maduro is treated by the US legal system analogously to Manuel Noriega of Panama or Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. It is the enforcement of law against the leader of an organized criminal group who forfeited sovereign immunity by transforming the state apparatus into a tool of transnational crime. Under international law, a state sponsoring terrorism and drug trafficking that refuses cooperation regarding extradition exposes itself to interventionist actions in defense of global security.

3. Economic Devastation and Asset Theft: Debunking the Sanctions Myth

One of the most damaging myths propagated by defenders of the regime is the claim that the catastrophic state of the Venezuelan economy and oil industry is the result of US sanctions. Analysis of historical data, production statistics, and international arbitration tribunal awards unequivocally indicates that this destruction began long before the imposition of key sectoral sanctions in 2019 and is the result of a deliberate policy of expropriation (theft) and systemic corruption.

3.1 The Collapse of PDVSA: Chronology of the Breakdown

Venezuela possesses the largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at over 303 billion barrels. Despite this potential, oil production fell from a level of over 3 million barrels per day (bpd) in the late 90s to below 1 million bpd in recent

years. Understanding the timeline of this collapse is key.

The precipitous drop in production began after 2013, upon Nicolás Maduro taking power, and well before sanctions were imposed on PDVSA in 2019. The main cause was the policy of personnel purges initiated by Hugo Chavez, who after the PDVSA strike fired over 18,000 qualified employees – engineers, geologists, and managers – replacing them with party loyalists lacking technical competence. This led to the loss of intellectual capital necessary to operate complex heavy oil fields in the Orinoco Belt.

Lack of investment in maintenance and infrastructure modernization led to a situation where refineries operate at merely 10-20% of their processing capacity. Venezuela, a country "floating on oil," was forced to import fuel and diluents from Iran to maintain heavy oil extraction. The 2019 US sanctions merely sanctioned the factual state, cutting the regime off from the US financial system, but internal policy led to the collapse. The standard of living for Venezuelans dropped by 74% between 2013-2023, representing one of the greatest economic collapses in modern history not caused by war.

3.2 Theft of Foreign Assets: The Case of ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips

Between 2007-2009, the Venezuelan regime conducted a massive nationalization of oil projects in the Orinoco Belt, in which US corporations such as ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips had invested billions of dollars. These actions were not a legal buyout, but unlawful expropriation, as confirmed by numerous awards from the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

Arbitration tribunals found that Venezuela violated bilateral investment treaties by not offering fair market compensation for seized assets. In the case of ConocoPhillips, the tribunal ruled that the expropriation was "unlawful" because the government did not negotiate in good faith. ConocoPhillips obtained an award amounting to \$8.7 billion, and ExxonMobil, after a 15-year legal battle, secured confirmation of awards amounting to over a billion dollars. The Maduro regime systematically refused to recognize these awards, which led to the seizure of Venezuela's foreign assets, including the Citgo refinery in the USA. The USA did not "steal" Citgo; rather, creditors are enforcing their rights after Maduro stole their investments in Venezuela.

3.3 Mining and Arbitration: Crystallex and Rusoro

A similar mechanism of plunder was applied in the mining sector. The Canadian firm Crystallex, which invested hundreds of millions of dollars in developing the Las

Cristinas gold mine (one of the largest deposits in the world), was expropriated without compensation. The ICSID tribunal awarded the firm \$1.2 billion plus interest, deeming Venezuela's actions a violation of the treaty on investment protection and the standard of fair and equitable treatment.

Another glaring example is the case of Rusoro Mining. This firm held 58 mining concessions that were nationalized by the regime. An arbitration tribunal awarded Rusoro compensation of over \$1.4 billion (including interest). US courts confirmed that PDVSA is an "alter ego" of the Venezuelan state, allowing creditors to pursue claims against oil assets. These cases prove that the Maduro regime systematically violated international law, destroying investor confidence and leading to the country's economic isolation by its own choice.

4. Axis of Evil: Cooperation with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran

The Maduro regime did not limit itself to drug crime; it actively integrated Venezuela into the global network of Islamic terrorism, creating a strategic threat to hemispheric security. Venezuela became a logistical and financial hub for organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as a key ally of Iran.

4.1 Tareck El Aissami and the Hezbollah Network

A key figure in building the bridge between Caracas and the Middle East was Tareck El Aissami, former vice president and oil minister (currently removed as a result of internal purges, which does not alter the fact of his long-standing role). The US Department of the Treasury sanctioned him for ties to drug traffickers, but his role in facilitating Hezbollah's expansion is equally significant.

Intelligence reports and think-tank analyses indicate that Venezuela became a money-laundering center for Hezbollah. Utilizing the Venezuelan financial system and trade in Venezuelan gold, this organization transfers funds from Latin America to the Middle East, financing terrorist operations. Clans linked to Hezbollah, such as the Rada or Nassereddine families, integrated with the Maduro regime, operating in the "gray zone" of the Venezuelan economy.

4.2 The Passport Scandal: Identity for Terrorists

One of the most alarming aspects of the regime's cooperation with terrorists is the practice of selling Venezuelan identity documents. Investigations (including by CNN)

revealed that Venezuelan embassies in Iraq and Syria issued authentic passports and ID cards to individuals linked to Hezbollah and other extremist groups. It is estimated that this scheme could have involved thousands of documents. Possession of a Venezuelan passport allows terrorists to travel freely to over 130 countries without a visa (including the Schengen Area prior to the introduction of restrictions) and facilitates infiltration of borders in the Americas. This is a direct threat to US national security, as terrorists can "legalize" their identity as Hispanic citizens.

4.3 Support for Hamas and Iran

Following the barbaric attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, Nicolás Maduro unequivocally sided with the aggressors. The regime not only failed to condemn the crimes but actively expressed solidarity with Hamas, accusing Israel of genocide. Venezuela hosted solidarity conferences with Palestine, which served as a propaganda platform for extremist groups.

Cooperation with Iran has a strategic dimension. The "gold for fuel" exchange mechanism between Tehran and Caracas allows both regimes to evade sanctions. Venezuelan gold, mined under conditions violating human rights, is transported to Turkey and the Middle East, where proceeds from its sale fund, among others, the Quds Force and Hezbollah. The Maduro regime thus became a link in the chain of financing global terrorism.

5. Russian Fortress in the Caribbean: Military Threat

Criticism of Maduro's arrest as "interference" ignores the fact that Venezuela itself became a platform for foreign military intervention – Russian. Maduro opened the door for a permanent Kremlin military presence in the Western Hemisphere, violating the doctrine of regional security.

5.1 Wagner Group: Praetorians of the Regime

The Russian private military company Wagner Group is present in Venezuela, as confirmed by numerous intelligence reports. Russian mercenaries, known for brutality in Ukraine and Africa, serve as personal security for high-ranking regime officials (including Maduro himself) and secure strategic installations, such as gold mines. Their presence proves that Maduro does not fully trust his own armed forces and must

rely on foreign mercenaries to maintain power.

5.2 Strategic Bombers and Military Bases

Military cooperation extends beyond mercenaries. Russia regularly demonstrates its force by sending Tu-160 "Blackjack" strategic bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, to Venezuela. These visits (e.g., in 2008, 2013, 2018) are an open provocation against the USA. There are credible reports of plans or actual use of La Orchila island as a logistical and operational base for Russian strategic aviation. The presence of Russian S-300 air defense systems and Sukhoi fighter jets in the Venezuelan arsenal further complicates the security situation in the region, creating an Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) zone in the Caribbean.

5.3 Rosneft and Sanctions Evasion

The regime's economic survival was largely possible thanks to the Russian giant Rosneft. This company took control of a significant portion of Venezuelan oil exports, helping PDVSA evade US sanctions through a complex network of ship-to-ship transfers and reflagging of tankers. Russia uses Venezuela as a tool to destabilize energy markets and undermine the effectiveness of Western sanctions.

6. Ecocide and Blood Gold: Arco Minero del Orinoco

The final, often overlooked aspect of the regime's criminal activity is the environmental catastrophe in the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc (*Arco Minero*). In a desperate search for hard currency following the collapse of the oil sector, Maduro issued a decree in 2016 opening 12% of the country's territory to mining exploitation, de facto handing this area over to criminal groups.

6.1 Uncontrolled Environmental Devastation

Gold mining in this region takes place without respect for any environmental standards. The widespread use of mercury for gold amalgamation leads to irreversible poisoning of the soil and waters of the Orinoco basin, posing a threat to the entire ecosystem of the Caribbean Sea. Deforestation is progressing at an alarming rate, destroying unique rainforests and biodiversity habitats. This is a crime of ecocide sanctioned by the state.

6.2 Regime Financing and Violence

Gold from the *Arco Minero* does not enter official economic circulation transparently. It is controlled by so-called *sindicatos* (armed gangs), ELN guerrillas, and the aforementioned Wagner Group. Proceeds from this practice, estimated at billions of dollars, bypass the central budget and go directly into the pockets of the military and political elite, ensuring their loyalty to Maduro. Violence in the region has reached the level of a war zone, with reports of massacres of miners, forced labor, and human trafficking.

7. Key Facts

Topic 1: Maduro is a cartel boss, not a politician

Fact	Context
Narco-Terrorism	The US Department of Justice charged Maduro with leading the <i>Cartel de los Soles</i> . Evidence indicates he personally negotiated with FARC terrorists to ship tons of cocaine to the USA as a weapon in hybrid warfare.
Alliance with Criminals	The regime supplied FARC terrorists with machine guns and anti-aircraft missiles in exchange for drug profits. This is not politics; it is organized crime.
Bounty on Head	The USA set a \$50 million reward for information on Maduro. They treat him like El Chapo, not a president, because the evidence for drug trafficking is irrefutable.

Topic 2: The economy was destroyed by socialism and theft, not sanctions

Fact	Context
Collapse before Sanctions	Oil production fell from 3 million to <1 million barrels per day <i>before</i> major sanctions were imposed in 2019. The

	reason? Firing 18,000 engineers from PDVSA and corruption.
Theft of Investments	International tribunals ordered Venezuela to pay billions of dollars to ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, and Crystallex for unlawful expropriation of their assets. Maduro simply stole these factories and mines.
Humanitarian Disaster	Venezuela's GDP shrank by 74% in a decade. This is the fault of internal policy, not external.

Topic 3: Venezuela supports Hamas and Hezbollah

Fact	Context
Airbridge of Terror	Vice President El Aissami created a transit channel between Caracas and Tehran/Damascus. Venezuela is a money laundry for Hezbollah.
Passports for Terrorists	Investigations showed that Venezuelan embassies issued hundreds of passports to people linked to Hezbollah, enabling them to travel freely around the world.
Gold for Hamas	Venezuelan gold is used by Iran to evade sanctions and finance terrorist groups such as Hamas.

Topic 4: Venezuela as a Russian military base

Fact	Context
Wagner Group in Caracas	Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group are stationed in Venezuela, protecting Maduro and gold mines from his own people.
Nuclear Weapons at the Gates	Maduro provides bases for Russian Tu-160 strategic bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons. This is a direct threat to the USA.

8. Conclusions

Analysis of available evidentiary materials leaves no illusions regarding the nature of the Nicolás Maduro regime. We are not dealing with an ideological government, but

with a hybrid criminal-state structure (*criminalized state*).

- **Legality:** The arrest of Maduro is based on solid legal grounds (Title 18 and Title 21 U.S. Code) regarding combating narco-terrorism.
- **Economic Responsibility:** It is the Maduro regime, through unlawful expropriations (confirmed by ICSID awards) and incompetence, that destroyed the Venezuelan oil industry. Sanctions were a reaction, not the cause.
- **Global Security:** The alliance with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Russia, as well as the passport scheme, make Venezuela a platform for force projection for enemies of the West in the Western Hemisphere.

US actions are therefore a necessary intervention from the standpoint of restoring the rule of law, protecting property, and neutralizing a direct terrorist threat. Any attempt to defend Maduro as a "victim" must confront the fact that he is the leader of a drug cartel responsible for ecocide, the misery of his own people, and supporting global terror.

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