

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024038987102 SHARE The Cachiros were one of Honduras' largest transport groups, with a net worth close to \$1 billion. Made up of a family of former cattle rustlers, the organization became a major player in the movement of cocaine between Colombian and Mexican organizations. The group is thought to have bought drugs from Colombian organizations, possibly in Nicaragua, as well in their native Honduras. They then moved the cocaine to the Sinaloa Cartel and other Mexican groups. The Cachiros had large business and political interests that reached to the top of the Honduran elite. They had strong contacts in the military and the police at their service — particularly in their former stronghold in Colón. The Honduran government had mostly ignored the group until recently. However, the United States government took a special interest in the Cachiros, targeting the group's assets and pushing the Honduran government to seize somewhere between \$500 million to \$800 million in properties in September 2013. In a deal reportedly negotiated with the US Drug Enforcement Administration, the two leaders of the Cachiros surrendered to US authorities in January 2015, initiating the end of the group's reign. History The Cachiros began as small-time cattle rustlers. Operating along the Olancho-Colón border, the Rivera Maradiaga brothers, apparently with their father's blessing, began stealing and reselling cattle. Their own properties expanded with time, and at some point in the late 1990s or early 2000s, they teamed up with the largest underworld figure in the area, Jorge Anibal Echeverría Ramos, alias "El Coque." Coque was well positioned both financially and politically. He dated one of then-Congressman Ramon Lobo's daughters, Margarita. His group was a tight crew in a small town. The oldest Rivera Maradiaga, Javier, dated Coque's sister. For his part, Lobo owns scores of land in the region, although no one has formally linked him to criminal activities. At some point, Coque and the Rivera Maradiaga family had a squabble that turned bloody. The first attempt on Coque's life happened in San Pedro Sula. He survived. The second attempt occurred in Costa Rica. Again, he survived but was subsequently deported to Honduras and jailed. Three days after being imprisoned, he was assassinated. With Coque out of the way, the Cachiros took over. Javier ran the operation. They began running regular shipments from Gracias a Dios to western Honduras or Guatemala, where they would hand off the merchandise to Mexican buyers or their Guatemalan counterparts. The timing was propitious. The Mexicans were taking over more of the distribution chain, channeling their product through the isthmus. Honduras was also going through political turmoil. In 2009, President Manuel Zelaya was removed from power by the military and ushered from the country. The interim government that followed spent most its time dealing with the resulting political upheaval. Drugs flowed freely, and Honduras became a major bridge between the Colombian and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The Cachiros took advantage, charging between \$2,000 and \$2,500 per kilo they moved. They also took control of aerial drug routes: a 2013 US Treasury Department Kingpin Designation claimed the group controlled 90 percent of the clandestine airstrips in Honduras. The profits have been enormous, as the 2013 seizures by the Honduran government illustrated. The leaders of the Cachiros are currently in the custody of US authorities. During his trial in New York, Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga accepted his participation in the murder of 78 people, including the anti-drug czar Julián Arístides Gonzáles, former National Security Advisor Alfredo Landaverde and journalist Anibal Barrow. In addition, his statement implicates members of the political and economic elite in drug trafficking and bribery activities. Among those involved are members of the powerful Rosenthal family, the late Honduran tycoon Mauricio Facussé, the brother of the current president of Honduras, Antonio "Tony" Hernández, and former President Porfirio Lobo and his son Fabio. And those implicated by Rivera Maradiaga's testimony have started to fall. In July 2017, Yani Rosenthal pleaded guilty in a US federal court to one money-laundering charge as one US attorney said he "moonlighted as a money launderer for a ruthlessly violent drug trafficking organization known as the Cachiros." And in August, Yani's cousin, Honduras' former investment minister Yankel Rosenthal, also pleaded guilty in a US court to laundering money for the Cachiros organization. Additionally, Fabio Lobo, the son of former Honduras President Porfirio Lobo, who pleaded guilty in 2016 to conspiring to import cocaine into the United States, was sentenced to 24 years in a US prison for drug trafficking with the Cachiros. Rivera Maradiaga's 2017 testimony also revealed that the current president's brother and former congressman, Tony Hernández, accepted \$50,000 in bribes from the Cachiros in exchange for the government paying a debt to a company used by the drug cartel to launder money. Tony Hernández was arrested by DEA agents in Miami in November 2018 on charges of drug trafficking. Hernández's

was found guilty in October 2019 after a trial in New York. Another case linked to the Rivera Maradiaga testimony is that of a former regional commander of Honduras' special criminal investigations unit (Dirección Nacional de Investigación Criminal – DNIC), Carlos Alberto Valladares Zuñiga. Valladares was charged in 2018 with having conspired with Los Cachiros to protect the group's drug trafficking activities, eliminated rivals, and recruited police officers to provide logistical support and security. Additionally, former Honduras congressman Midence Oquelí Martínez Turcios has been charged with controlling drugs flowing from Colombia through Honduras and onto Mexico. US authorities have requested Martínez Turcios' extradition. Since the Rivera Maradiaga brothers' trial in 2017, Honduran authorities have continued to seize a number of assets and properties linked to the Cachiros organization and their partners, a sign that investigations into the group's illicit activities may still be ongoing and that additional criminal charges could be brought against new suspects in the future.

**Leadership** The Cachiros were known as a tight-knit, family-run operation, contracting out much of their work to locals, to whom they owed little allegiance and with whom they had little contact; this minimized their risk if any individual cell were to have been compromised. The group's alleged leaders were Javier Eriberto Rivera Maradiaga, alias "Javier Cachiro," and his brother Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga. Fears of being killed in Honduras prompted both brothers to turn themselves in to the DEA in January 2015. Javier Rivera pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking charges in February. According to Honduran media reports, the last leader of Los Cachiros, Hernán Natarén, was killed along with his wife in July 2016.

**Geography** The group operated in the Colón province on the northeastern coast of Honduras. Its territory stretched east to Gracias a Dios, south to Olancho and west to the region's criminal hub, the city of San Pedro Sula. They also had operators in Nicaragua. Contractors received and moved product from the Mosquito Coast through Gracias a Dios and Colon, where it was broken into smaller and smaller shipments as it made its way across the country.

**Allies and Enemies** The Cachiros reportedly supplied cocaine and other drugs to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and had ties to the Colombian criminal organization the Rastrojos. The group also used gangs to transport some drugs, parceling out the drugs and stuffing them into backpacks to be carried on motorbikes that could more easily avoid military checkpoints by using back roads.

**Prospects** With both leaders imprisoned in the United States, the reign of the Cachiros as a major drug transport group is over. However, with the brothers' cooperating with US authorities, it is possible that testimony they provide could continue to shed light on networks of elites that aided their group's activities. In recent years, the testimony of the Rivera Maradiaga brothers have provided a powerful tool against organized crime in Honduras. It has led to a string of connections between Honduras presidents and organized crime, including Manuel Zelaya, Porfirio Lobo and the current president, Juan Orlando Hernández.