

Venezuela Dismisses US Justice Department ‘Narco-terrorism’ Accusations

Cliver Alcala, also indicted, confessed to organizing a coup plot against the Maduro government.

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Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro rejected US drug trafficking accusations against his person and senior members of his government.

In a televised address Thursday evening, Maduro blasted the State Department’s “racist cowboy methods” of offering money for information leading to his and other Venezuelan leaders’ arrest. The president likewise touted Venezuela’s role in fighting the drug trade and in the Colombian peace process.

“Our spirits are high,” he said. “We’ve had record numbers of drug busts in the past 15 years, ever since we got rid of the [US] Drug Enforcement agency.”

Earlier in the day, a [communiqué](#) from the Foreign Ministry likewise refuted the accusations as “miserable, vulgar and baseless.”

“At a time when humanity is facing a pandemic, Donald Trump attacks the Venezuelan people once more with miserable, vulgar and baseless accusations,” the statement reads.

In a press [conference](#) Thursday morning, US Attorney General William Barr unsealed an indictment against Maduro, accusing the Venezuelan leader of conspiring with Colombia’s FARC rebels to “to flood the United States with cocaine” as far back as 1999 when he was first elected to congress.

Fourteen current and former officials were also charged in parallel indictments, including National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez, Supreme Court President Maikel Moreno, Industry Minister Tareck El Aissami, former intelligence chief Hugo Carvajal, and retired major general Cliver Alcala.

FARC leaders Ivan Marquez and Jesus Santrich were similarly indicted. The two head a dissident faction that took up arms again last year, blaming the Colombian government for the collapse of the 2016 peace accords.

“For more than 20 years, Maduro and a number of high-ranking colleagues allegedly conspired with the FARC, causing tons of cocaine to enter and

devastate American communities,” Barr claimed.

Washington has long accused Caracas of drug smuggling, previously sanctioning other Venezuelan senior officials, including then Vice President [El Aissami](#) in 2017, on the same grounds.

However, US officials have so far declined to provide concrete [evidence](#) implicating top Venezuelan leaders, while data from the Drug Enforcement Agency shows that only a fraction of [drug routes](#) pass through Venezuelan territory, with the majority of cocaine entering the US via Central America and Mexico.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a US \$15 million reward for “information related to” Maduro and \$10 million for that pertaining to Cabello, Carvajal, Alcala, and El Aissami. Carvajal has reportedly been missing for several months, with Spanish authorities having approved his extradition to the United States.

Cliver Alcala made headlines on Wednesday after an arms shipment was seized by authorities in Colombia. The Venezuelan government claimed the weapons were part of a coup attempt by the retired general.

Alcala has since confirmed the plot, claiming that the weapons belonged “to the Venezuelan people” and had been acquired as part of a signed agreement between himself, self-proclaimed “Interim President” [Juan Guaido](#), longtime anti-government strategist J. J. Rendon and “US advisors.”

In a radio interview and later in Twitter videos, Alcala explained that the goal was to form a “liberation force” to “surgically take out targets in Venezuela.” He went on to blame members of the opposition for leaking the plan, claiming that opposition leaders Guaido and Leopoldo Lopez were “very much aware” of the operation.

“He [Guaido] can’t deny it because I have the contract waiting for the moment that justice [officials] comes to my house, to present the indictments,” he told W Radio.

Reacting to the Justice Department indictment, Alcala denied the charges, stating he had previously met with US officials on no less than “seven occasions.” He said he would await authorities’ inquiries at his residence in Barranquilla, Colombia.

For his part, Attorney General Tarek William Saab announced Thursday afternoon that his office was launching an investigation against Alcala, Guaido and “other conspirators” following the former’s public statements. Saab lashed out against Washington and Bogota on Twitter, slamming their efforts to “promote assassinations and terrorist attacks.”

The Attorney General’s Office has launched several investigations against Juan Guaido ever since his [self-proclamation](#) in January 2019. Guaido had his parliamentary immunity [revoked](#) by the Supreme Court, but has yet to be taken into custody.

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Featured image: U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman announcing charges against Maduro and other high ranking officials. (US Attorney's Office)

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