

Statement of Franklin Camargo

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight

Committee on the Judiciary

U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing: The Legal Basis for Action Against Venezuelan Drug Traffickers

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Raskin, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your invitation to share my experience and offer my thoughts on recent American action against Venezuelan criminals.

One of those criminals, Nicolás Maduro, once accused me of being a terrorist. But thanks to President Trump and his administration's Operation Absolute Resolve, today the real terrorist is behind bars.

I was born in Venezuela, and soon experienced the failures of socialism. When I spoke out against Maduro's regime and his failed policies, I was accused of terrorism under a so-called Law Against Hatred. I could have been sentenced to up to 20 years in prison. I escaped, but my family wasn't so lucky. My cousin was tortured and spent more than two years in political prison.

I was blessed to legally immigrate to this country, and received asylum during the first Trump administration.

And today I work at PragerU where I promote American values.

One value that made the United States the greatest country on earth is moral clarity. Ronald Reagan was quite clear when he called the Soviet Union an "evil empire."

And for that same reason it is important to be clear today:

Nicolás Maduro was not simply a bad president. He is an evil narco-terrorist who committed crimes against Americans. There are others here today who can testify to the legality of United States action in Venezuela. I want to testify to its necessity.

Venezuela is very close to the United States. Caracas is about 1,400 miles from Miami. That means Venezuela is closer to Miami than Miami is to Los Angeles. For that reason alone, what happens in Venezuela should matter to the United States.

Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. Before Maduro was captured, close to 90% of Venezuela's oil exports were going to China.

Let me first explain why Maduro's capture serves American interests. The Maduro regime turned Venezuela into a drug cartel. Between 200 and 250 metric tons of cocaine move through Venezuela each year under the protection of a criminal network—intimately linked to

high-ranking Maduro officials—known as the Cartel of the Suns (Cartel de los Soles). 30,000 Americans die from cocaine overdoses every single year. When a narco-regime floods the hemisphere with dangerous drugs, American families pay the price.

That is why the Department of Justice indicted Nicolás Maduro in 2020 for narco-terrorism. The Biden administration was no less committed to bringing Maduro to justice when it increased a reward offered for information leading to his arrest .

But drug trafficking was not Maduro's only crime. The regime established an official government conspiracy of sending violent criminals to the United States. Among them were members of the dangerous gang Tren de Aragua who were responsible for robberies, sexual assaults, and murders. Some of these criminals were connected to cases that shocked the country, including the murders of Laken Riley and of Jocelyn Nungaray.

This was not an accident. It was part of a deliberate regime strategy.

Consider Hugo “El Pollo” Carvajal who served as the head of Venezuela's military intelligence and as one of the most powerful political figures in Venezuela.

Carvajal stated that he personally witnessed how the government of Hugo Chávez turned into a criminal enterprise, later led by Nicolás Maduro. According to Carvajal, this structure operates as the Cartel of the Suns, a drug trafficking network embedded inside the Venezuelan armed forces. Carvajal revealed the truth about drug trafficking was not only to make money; drugs were deliberately used as a weapon against the United States.

Carvajal detailed how the regime worked together with Colombian guerrilla groups, Cuban intelligence operatives, and even Hezbollah to weaponize drug trafficking.

In other words, one of the architects of the policy itself testified the Venezuelan regime coordinated drug dealers, gangs, and other bad actors all with the goal to destabilize the United States.

The capture of Nicolás Maduro therefore was not some rogue act of international aggression. It was a defense of the sovereignty and security of the American people.

Some suggest Venezuela also has a right to sovereignty, of self-determination. I agree. A majority of Venezuelans agree. But are those claiming to advocate for Venezuela talking about sovereignty of the Venezuelan people or about sovereignty of the regime?

Any conflation of self-determination with Maduro confuses things. A mafia who hijacked the Venezuelan state has no right to sovereignty. It is the Venezuelan people who are sovereign.

Some argue capturing Nicolas Maduro would be equivalent to another country “invading” the United States and “kidnapping” our president. But that assumes Maduro was a legitimate president—he wasn't. Most international observers concluded Maduro stole the elections in 2013, 2018, and 2024. Neither the Trump administration nor the Biden administration recognized Maduro as president. Maduro was not “kidnapped.” He was a fugitive indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Maduro is a narco-terrorist who used the Venezuelan state to traffic drugs and to export criminals with the expressed purpose of destabilizing the United States and of harming Americans. That is reason enough to indict Maduro, to capture him, and to bring him to justice. Anything less would've amounted to a dereliction of duty in the face of an active threat to the American people.

When we protested in Venezuela, some would carry American flags. They did so because that flag represents something very powerful, something innate in each of us: freedom. Today, I've never seen Venezuelans this optimistic. If the country of my birth finally becomes free, it would benefit both Venezuela and the United States.

The United States is safer without a narco-terrorist operating just 1,400 miles from Miami. The American economy would be stronger and more prosperous alongside a free Venezuela— a natural ally that no longer does business with adversaries like China. We are safer, stronger, and more prosperous with a free venezuela.

The capture of Nicolás Maduro was not only justified. It was necessary for the security of the American people.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.