

Max Blumenthal: Venezuela - Deal-Making, Plunder & the Rule of Law

Max Blumenthal discusses the US attack on Venezuela and the subsequent deal-making, plunder and abandonment of the rule of law. Blumenthal is the editor-in-chief of The Grayzone, Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling Republican Gomorrah, Goliath, The Fifty One Day War, and The Management of Savagery. He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including Killing Gaza. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buyameacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're very privileged today to be joined by Max Blumenthal, an award-winning journalist and editor of The Grey Zone. Thank you for coming back on. I was hoping you could shed some light on what's happening now with this U.S. push into Latin America. As we know, Washington outlined a lot of reasons why they had to attack Venezuela. They moved in, killed a lot of people, and kidnapped the president and his wife. Now there's a trial in New York. What is actually happening at the moment? It's very difficult for outsiders to get a clear overview of this massive mess.

#Max Blumenthal

Well, it's difficult for me—and I wouldn't really call myself an insider—but it's hard to get a clear understanding of what the hell happened on January 3rd, which I happened to be up late enough to virtually observe. It was, in many ways, a terrorist assault on Caracas. It was the kidnapping of the head of state and his wife, who, according to Diosdado Cabello—one of the most important power brokers in the Chavista movement—in an address last night, said that Cilia Flores, the first lady of Venezuela, demanded to go with her husband as he was being kidnapped and may have saved his life in the process. Their presidential guard was mostly massacred. Thirty-two Cuban officers were killed.

Many civilians were killed as well, but apparently there was no U.S. loss of life. No helicopters were taken down—they were flying at about a hundred feet. So my first reaction was either a stunning military collapse on the Venezuelan side, for an invasion they'd been preparing for since 2005, or something else entirely. The CIA had been preparing for this too—so much so that they telegraphed

their plan for a HALO, a high-altitude, low-opening operation, into Miraflores Palace in the *Jack Ryan* series, and explained exactly what they intended to do. That's basically what the Delta Force did where Nicolás Maduro was staying, and it just proceeded almost unimpeded. So I thought, this is probably some kind of military collapse—or Maduro was betrayed.

And I think the first explanation is probably true. I asked the former foreign minister of Venezuela, Jorge Arreaza, who is a confidant of the new acting president, Delcy Rodríguez—someone I've interviewed in the past—he worked for Nicolás Maduro, knew him very well, and also knew Hugo Chávez, the sort of intellectual architect of the Bolivarian Revolution, so closely that he had married his daughter and was essentially a family spokesman. So, a pretty well-placed person who fervently denied the idea that there had been any kind of betrayal or inside deal to sell out Maduro.

And I think, at least based on everyone he knows, I take him at his word on that. Although, yeah, I mean, I have to take him at his word. And there's no evidence of any such thing, at least at a high level—or that it would have been possible to order some kind of military stand-down from within the Venezuelan leadership without being exposed. And knowing those people, I just couldn't see that happening. There is deal-making, which we'll talk about in a second—backroom deal-making with the U.S.—but that was always taking place under Maduro. So Arreaza openly admitted that their communication systems had been taken out.

The U.S. bombed the two major bases that would have allowed Venezuela to respond instantly, and they also hit communication towers. They had—and still have—drones operating in Venezuelan airspace. From that point on, there was no reason to respond. I think the question is whether there was an order not to scramble the Sukhoi jets for a counterattack, because by that point you'd just be escalating the casualty count by engaging directly with the Americans. So it was just a staggering failure of intelligence, counterintelligence, and the military that allowed this to happen.

At the same time, you have evidence of a kind of long-term success of the Chavista movement and of this government, which has faced so much pressure—violent pressure, assassination attempts, street riots, years and years of crushing sanctions. The success is that regime change has not occurred. There is no regime change. And you have a Chavista stalwart in the acting president, Delcy Rodríguez, who is committed to the vision of national sovereignty, who is president right now, and who's also committed to returning Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores to Venezuela.

You have Diosdado Cabello, who has been in the streets and is addressing the nation. He has the confidence of the military—the military structure is still in place. The defense minister, Vladimir Padrino López, was not assassinated as was said early on. The colectivos, or the militant Chavistas, are in the streets. So if Trump has to deal with anyone, he has to deal with this movement, because they control the institutions and the evidence of a deal. Leaving aside all of Trump's statements—which we can talk about later—I've been saying it's better to let actions speak louder than words when we look at any deal-making. And the Venezuelan government has announced today that it's releasing, quote-unquote, political prisoners.

And when you think about political prisoners, these are often people who plotted violent riots, who carried out violence, who plotted coups—people who were essentially members of a U.S.-backed opposition that the U.S. would never tolerate on its own territory. The U.S. would never tolerate people funded and trained by foreign countries, especially ones more powerful than itself, to conduct subversive or insurrectionist activities on its own soil. But that's what Venezuela is mostly dealing with when it's dealing with political prisoners. And there may have been some people who got a bad rap or were unfairly treated, but I don't have the names. And you know who else didn't have the names until very recently?

It was the United States government. And we know this because Trump's envoy to Venezuela, Ric Grenell, who was in Caracas about a year ago, was negotiating directly with Nicolás Maduro for a deal that would have extended Chevron's drilling license in exchange for Venezuela accepting deportees—Venezuelan migrants from the U.S. Ric Grenell has said that it was the radical U.S.-backed opposition, led by María Corina Machado, that failed to provide the names of the so-called political prisoners it wanted released to make a deal possible, because they didn't actually want a deal and didn't want to allow the Trump administration to negotiate directly with Maduro.

Their whole game was to delegitimize Maduro, not allow Venezuela to make a deal that would even let their own people out of prison—let them out of the supposed torture centers. So if they were being tortured so horribly and treated so badly, why wouldn't you immediately treat this like an emergency and get them out? It's because you're a cynical sociopath. And Marco Rubio was part of that process of obstructing a deal at that time, which is why he did something even more sadistic. Instead of directing a plane of Venezuelan migrants to be deported directly to Caracas, he sent the plane—without any negotiations completed—to El Salvador, to his buddy, the local comprador strongman, the self-described "world's coolest dictator," Nayib Bukele. This was last March 2025, right when Trump had come into power for the second time.

And they were sent to the Seacott actual torture prison. They were publicly humiliated coming off the plane, portrayed as terrorists when less than 50 percent of them had ever been convicted of any crime, and only three out of 250 had ever been convicted of a violent crime. They had their heads shaved on camera. They were beaten and pushed around on camera. Then they were put into the prison with MS-13 members, where guards brutalized them. When they came out, some of them testified to *60 Minutes* about what took place—our supposedly premier investigative broadcast magazine show. And Trump lackey, or Trump toady, Bari Weiss, spiked the broadcast because it was so embarrassing to Rubio and Trump adviser Stephen Miller. But why did Rubio do that? Why did he have these Venezuelan migrants tortured by his boy Bukele?

Because he couldn't allow them to go back to Venezuela—because once again, that would allow direct negotiations. So now that's one reason. It would also allow Venezuela to have revenue through the extension of Chevron's drilling license. And there's more to it; I just don't want to go too far down the rabbit hole that really exposes how sick this administration is. But Grinnell was

sidelined, and by doing so, for months they prepared this operation. It starts with mass deportations, labeling all the Venezuelan migrants as, you know, enemies of the United States who are connected to a gang, Tren de Aragua—which actually had no connection to Maduro but was supposedly part of a foreign invasion. And that paves the way for them to begin preparing an invasion of Venezuela.

January 3rd, they kidnap Maduro, remove the head of state, and now they suddenly have a deal where these, quote-unquote, political prisoners come out. I think that's part of a larger deal. Trump has said that the larger deal includes Venezuela agreeing to sell 30 to 50 million barrels of oil to the U.S.—the U.S. buys it straight from Venezuela—and then the state gets the revenue on the condition that they use it to buy American products, which will supposedly boost the U.S. economy. Trump has done this before. But there's another crazy, I would say disturbing, aspect to that part of the deal, and I don't know if that part of the deal has actually been authorized by Caracas.

And that's that the money will not be held in the U.S. Treasury, which is supposedly accountable to the U.S. public. It's going to be held in offshore accounts, which means Trump Incorporated could plunder the money. The CIA could use it for black operations. It would basically become a Trump-world slush fund that exists outside the control of any ostensibly democratic institution. So they're clearly up to something very devious and very revealing about what Trump wants in Venezuela and what this is all about. At its base, for Trump and his cronies, it's just about plunder. It's just about money. That's what Trump's golden age is all about.

Trump's golden age is just about maximizing profits off the carcasses of global capitalism for Trump and his inner circle of militant Zionist 0.1-percenters, and imposing a regime of terror across the Americas to pulverize any force that might get in the way—from Minneapolis to Caracas. We're witnessing it all play out right now. And Venezuela, while they're still asserting their sovereignty—the Chavista movement and the Bolivarian government—because of the military collapse they experienced on January 3rd, because of the overwhelming preponderance of force the U.S. has in its hemisphere and its capacity for perpetual kinetic action against any target, they do have to make a deal here. But Maduro was always open to that deal. Maduro would have made the deal. For whatever reason, they just couldn't allow it to be made with him.

#Glenn

It's hard to see what all this plunder has to do with narco-terrorism. I think they've strayed a bit from the plot. But in terms of deal-making, it seems as if the deals would have to cover a larger ground, because Trump said, you know, "We are now running Venezuela." But that's a bit strange, because they only kidnapped the president and killed some people. It's unclear why—they're not controlling the government. Then he made this comment that acting President Rodríguez could keep her position if she did as she was told. And of course, he's tweeting about this oil deal. But unless they're going to go in full strength, do something like Iraq—which doesn't seem to be something Trump wants to do—it's hard to see where this is going.

I think he prefers the low-hanging fruit—getting what he wants through threats and a bit of bombing. But what kind of deal-making do you think he's after? It seems like he wants to pressure the Venezuelan government to accept how he wants the country to be run. In other words, they can run it as long as it's on his orders. But what he's demanding seems a bit too much. It's not just about selling some oil; he's talking about cutting off Venezuela from China, Russia, and other partners—essentially turning it into the exclusive gas station of the United States. Have you heard anything about this kind of deal they're trying to reach? Because if you listen to Trump, it sounds like they've already conquered Venezuela.

#Max Blumenthal

Well, I think in my last extended answer I said everything I know about what's public, and any aspect of negotiations between Caracas and Washington that is public has already been disclosed. But there will certainly be more. And as you said, Trump's demands of Caracas are onerous—he's definitely asking too much. His claim to own Venezuela's oil is not just exaggerated, it's false, because there hasn't been a regime change. He can't tell Delcy Rodríguez to do whatever he wants, because behind Delcy Rodríguez are the institutions of the state. Trump has two options: he can negotiate with Delcy Rodríguez, who, like Nicolás Maduro, is a dealmaker and does not want her country to be destroyed. She's a Venezuelan patriot who doesn't want to see Venezuela descend into the kind of decades-long civil crisis or civil war that Colombia did, or into the destabilization we saw in Libya.

Trump and Rubio don't have an exogenous enemy force to arm and weaponize against the Chavista movement inside Venezuela, like they did elsewhere—with Mohammed Jolani, a.k.a. Ahmed al-Sharah, in Syria, who operated under the fake cover of "moderate rebels." Or, like, if you were a Trotskyist, you might have thought there were these democratic anarchists, local action people who were going to storm in—but they don't have that in Venezuela. They tried the violent riots known as the Guarimbas. That failed. They tried Juan Guaidó and the so-called humanitarian intervention with USAID. That failed. Everything they've tried has failed so far, and now they've gotten some leverage with this military raid. They killed a lot of people—it was kind of an Israeli-style operation.

But if they continue to attack Caracas and keep pulverizing the country, it will be destabilized. And this is a point that Jorge Arreaza, the former foreign minister, made to me in our interview: with us in power, we guarantee stability. We keep the peace. So you have to deal with us. Trump does not own Venezuela. Venezuela owns Venezuela. The managerial structure, first of all, of PDVSA kicked out the opposition managers back in 2005 and then tried to push ExxonMobil to play by its rules, which meant making a win-win deal where Venezuela gets a portion of the revenue from the oil pumped from its own soil. Since then, Venezuela has—well, that's when Venezuela finally controlled Venezuela. That's really what the Bolivarian Revolution was about.

At its base, it's a nationalist revolution. You can see it as socialist because it took inspiration from Cuba—in its symbols, its concepts, in the comunas and cooperativos they've established throughout the country, and in some of the economic nationalization that especially occurred under Chávez. But it's basically just a nationalist revolution to control their own resources. It makes Venezuela a strong country and a powerful player on the world stage by leading the vanguard of multipolarism. And I don't see this government, or the people who control it, shedding that model or the basic Bolivarian ideology.

And the card they can put on the table is: us or catastrophe. And we're in your hemisphere. It's not that I see them threatening the United States with migrants—it's just the reality that if Venezuela is destabilized, there will be another massive wave of migration, and the region will be destabilized. South America will be destabilized if there's a civil war; we saw that happen in Colombia. And that's why I think the Cuban Americans in the Trump administration—Marco Rubio being the kind of front man for this cadre, but behind him is a fairly radical Cuban American who's dedicated himself, like his life mission, to regime change in Havana. His name is Mauricio Claver-Carone. That's why I think they sidelined María Corina Machado.

Because in order to bring María Corina Machado to power—and they've pretty much said this publicly—they would have had to militarily occupy Venezuela with U.S. troops. They would have had to destroy the Venezuelan military, which is not a neocolonial force trained in the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, like the militaries of the comprador strongman countries across the region. They would have had to kill lots and lots of people; there would have been bloodshed. And they understood there's a more elegant way of doing this, so they kicked her to the curb. Many of the Democrats who had gotten behind her are furious. The human rights industrial complex is furious. They thought she was some kind of democratic hero.

They're mad that, you know, Trump did all this without caring about democracy or human rights. The whole cover of the regime-change lobby in Venezuela has been lifted, and we can see that it's just about oil now. It's just about resources—raw, kind of Monroe Doctrine-style resources—neocolonialism interpreted through this cretinous Monroe Doctrine model and great-power politics. And so this is also, as you alluded to, Glenn, a message to Russia and China. Trump is pushing Venezuela to roll back its ties with Russia and China, and Russia and China have already been challenged—Russia directly through Trump's seizure of the **Marinera**, which was known as the **Bella One** tanker in the North Atlantic, in coordination with probably the front line of the anti-Russian NATO group.

The UK and the U.S. worked together to seize this runaway tanker, which belonged to Russia and was carrying oil, I think, from Iran—but it wasn't sanctioned. It officially belonged to Russia, and Russia appeared to have been protecting it with submarines but stood down to avoid a military clash with the United States. So what does that say about Trump's negotiations with Russia when he's willing to do that to implement the Monroe Doctrine?

And then we saw President Xi of China sending envoys to Miraflores Palace to meet with Nicolás Maduro just hours before he was kidnapped. It was clearly a show of support for Venezuela. What happened to them? Were they given fair warning by the U.S. that there was going to be this dangerous military assault? Clearly, it was also a message to China itself, which has vast investments in the Orinoco Belt—the oil-rich region of Venezuela—and in Venezuelan minerals, construction, and projects across Latin America. It's a way of severing the Belt and Road from the Americas. Trump is openly saying that Venezuela basically needs to be American property.

I think this has implications in the Sahel, for Burkina Faso, which has developed relations with Russia after experiencing so much security instability under the regime—de facto control of France and NATO. It's a message to Mali and all those countries like Niger that have tried to adopt a more multipolar model and sought to use their own resources for the public good. There's a message being sent to them. There's also a message being sent to Iran, obviously. Trump meeting with Lindsey Graham, holding a "Make Iran Great Again" hat in his hand, you know, embracing the image of the neocons—the third coming of Bush's first term, or the second Bush's first term—and then threatening Iran after he conducts this successful kinetic operation in Caracas suggests that some kind of assault on Iran could be coming soon.

And while I can't predict when it might take place, we have to consider that the midterms are coming up, and that the Democrats—as poorly as that party is being run inside the United States—are surging. There's a lot of outrage across the U.S. public at Trump's behavior and his policies. People are upset about the economy; they're upset about the unaffordability of goods, which is partially due to his tariffs. What took place in Minneapolis yesterday, where a 37-year-old mother was practically executed by an ICE officer—an ICE goon—shot almost point-blank while driving away in her car.

A mother who seems to have just been living in the area and may not even have been an activist. This is a pivotal moment, I think, in the Trump campaign—in Trump's second term—that's leading him toward electoral doom in the midterms. And that means Israel and the forces that want to attack Iran are getting antsy, because without Trump, or without a strong Trump and a Republican Congress, it's going to be harder for them to, for example, avoid the kind of war powers resolution that was finally authorized today in the Senate, forcing Trump to go to Congress to authorize further military action against Venezuela.

So what if a similar vote comes down on Iran? They don't want that, so they're angling for an attack, possibly by February. There's actually been an anonymous account placing something like a \$400,000 bet on Trump striking Iran—or Israel striking Iran—by January 31st. Was it an Israeli army insider? All kinds of money has been made off of María Corina Machado's various moves, including winning a Nobel Prize through insider trading on PolyMarket. So this looks like more insider trading, and it's a good way to forecast. I think if Iran were to attack Israel right now, as we're speaking, it would be, by definition, a preemptive attack.

#Glenn

Yes, a war against Iran. Yeah, why not? They already said Greenland, Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba, Colombia—so the list is getting quite long. I know what bothered the Europeans, though. We were always ready to support any wars by the United States, but we were kind of hoping the U.S. would lean into the whole liberal-democratic justification strategy—just say he's a dictator and you want to bring democracy, and you'd have our full support. But Trump kept saying, "No, we want their oil." And that kind of takes me to my last question about the legality of all this. Because, I mean, even the arrest of Maduro—did he actually do something wrong?

What do they base it on? Do they have witnesses or evidence? And also, the way he was taken—I know they have to call it an arrest, but this is a kidnapping. Can you even put a head of state in a court in New York? It just seems like a contradiction. It seems very illegal. Also, what happens if he's found innocent? Is it possible they can allow that? What are they going to do—send him back to Venezuela and say, "Sorry, we murdered all these people"? I was just wondering if you could say something about the legality of this whole issue, and at least how they're presenting it as legal, or if they're just ignoring that altogether.

#Max Blumenthal

Great questions. Before I get to that, I want to make one point I meant to add to my last comments. For the neoconservative movement in Washington that orchestrated the invasion of Iraq, and for the liberal humanitarian interventionists who provided the intellectual fodder for the bombings of Yugoslavia, Libya, and the dirty war in Syria—all in the name of spreading democracy—they're experiencing a resurgence right now because of what happened in Venezuela. They're proclaiming, through Trump, that they've finally overcome Iraq War syndrome. And that's what's so dangerous about the moment we're in. The United States has the most powerful military in world history.

It's a maritime power. It can conduct kinetic activity in the Western Hemisphere almost anywhere, and few can challenge it in certain scenarios. The Achilles' heel of the U.S. military is that the American public is not historically accustomed to large numbers of casualties and hasn't been since the so-called Greatest Generation. The Vietnam War syndrome hasn't been broken, and the Iraq War syndrome hasn't been broken, because the American public hasn't been tested by losing large numbers of soldiers—or even by having a Black Hawk Down-type scenario, like what happened in Mogadishu, Somalia, under Clinton. And I think if even one helicopter carrying U.S. soldiers had gone down in Caracas, it would have been an absolute disaster for Donald Trump.

And this could take place in Iran, so it's something to keep in mind, because this is one of the major debates happening right now. I think one of the main intellectual or ideological debates in Washington is taking place mostly within Republican Party circles. To the question of the legality of taking Nicolás Maduro: first of all, under the International Court of Justice case Democratic Republic of the Congo versus Belgium, it is illegal to kidnap a head of state and place him or her on trial in a

national court. It has to be done through an ICC indictment, and then you bring them to The Hague. That's the same procedure that has gotten Netanyahu indicted.

So I would totally support any government in the world capturing Netanyahu and then taking out the rage of tens of thousands of families from Gaza who lost their children because of him. And without anesthetic—because those children got none. Thousands of children in Gaza got none, without anesthesia. But that's not what's happening, because it's just not even something that has been tested in the rules-based post-World War II order. So what the Trump administration is doing by kidnapping Maduro and putting him on trial in the Southern District Court of New York is testing the entire post-World War II order. And the case will determine whether international law exists anymore. I think most people watching this will say, well, yeah, it doesn't exist—we're in the law of the jungle.

But that case will really put a nail in the coffin of international law if Maduro can be convicted. Donald Trump—the U.S. regime—wanted to do the same thing to Julian Assange: kidnapping him, putting him on trial in a U.S. court, locking him away for the “crime” of journalism. The problem wasn't international law; the problem was the First Amendment—he was just doing journalism, and he wasn't a U.S. citizen. Then, you know, if you look deeper, if you look into the indictment, the narco-terrorism conspiracy is a complete fraud. The 2020 indictment of Maduro accused him of being the head of this “Cartel of the Sons,” a supposed narco-terror criminal syndicate that actually didn't exist. I've been saying for some time it didn't exist.

And what's more, when it did exist, it was essentially a creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, which established its own drug conspiracy during the Reagan era, when it began shipping cocaine into the United States through a network of Venezuelan National Guard generals that it controlled. It was essentially ordering them to send cocaine, unchecked, into the United States so the DEA could supposedly gather intelligence on drug trafficking networks in the U.S. When some DEA officials learned of this essentially criminal operation the CIA was running, they went to **60 Minutes**, and **60 Minutes** exposed it along with **The New York Times**. They called it the Cartel of the Suns simply because those generals, who were CIA assets, wore suns as patches on their military uniforms.

So they just keep bringing up this idea of the Cartel of the Suns to attack Venezuela's government. We didn't hear the term “Cartel of the Suns” between that **60 Minutes** special and probably 2014. That's when the U.S. government started putting the squeeze on the former head of military intelligence under Hugo Chávez, as Nicolás Maduro came into power. His name was Hugo “El Pollo” Carvajal. They called him “El Pollo” because he kind of looks like a chicken. He was accused of being the leader of a corrupt network of Venezuelan generals who were shipping cocaine into the U.S., and they just said, “Oh, the Cartel of the Suns.” That was in his first indictment. He was arrested in Aruba in 2014 but was returned to Venezuela.

Then they hit him with two more indictments in 2017. Carvajal goes from being the most loyal general under Chávez to publicly denouncing Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. Then he seeks asylum in Spain, the base of the anti-Chavista opposition. And in 2019, he sides with Juan Guaidó and says, "This is the real president." So he's starting to position himself as this whistleblower from inside the Venezuelan deep state — a principled dissident who can't take any more of Maduro's crimes. And at the same time, Marco Rubio announces, "Hugo Carvajal is coming to the U.S. We've extradited him, and he'll supply us with all the dirt we need to convict Nicolás Maduro."

"A bad day for the Maduro crime family." That was a public tweet by Senator Marco Rubio in 2019. So this is an operation and a process that had been in motion for some time. Carvajal was extradited from Spain in 2023. The U.S. did everything to block him from getting asylum in Europe and to bring him to the Southern District Court in New York. Before the same judge who will preside over Maduro's trial this June, Carvajal was convicted of a narco-terror drug conspiracy. He signed a secret plea deal with the Trump administration to provide dirt on Maduro, and in exchange, his possible 50-year sentence could be reduced to just a few years.

All he has to do is be the star witness in the trial against Maduro. In a letter to Trump, he pledged that he would provide evidence that Venezuela's Smartmatic voting machine company actually helped rig the 2020 election in favor of Joe Biden—indulging one of Donald Trump's favorite conspiracy theories. So that's the witness against Maduro. And this is how the U.S. Department of Justice finessed its case against Maduro, as the U.S. military developed an operation to seize him from Caracas.

#Glenn

This is wild. This is how the rule of law is supposed to work.

#Max Blumenthal

It's one mafia against a phony narco-terror conspiracy. This is really just like a sophisticated mafia operation. You have to give them credit for pulling it off the way they did, but it's gangster—it's government by gangsterism.

#Glenn

Well, we spoke about a month ago, and you said that this whole, uh, Cartel de los Soles was fake. And then, three days ago, after the attack, the Washington Post comes out with an article saying it's not an actual organization. And you say the same for French TV as well—France 24 said the same thing. So, is this an actual organization, or is it made up? You know, I'd say they should've listened to you instead. It's a bit late to come up with this now.

#Max Blumenthal

The DOJ now acknowledges it. In the new superseding indictment against Maduro, unsealed on the day of the raid when they got him, the “Cartel of the Sons” is referred to simply as a loose network. In the 2020 indictment, though, it’s mentioned 32 times as a straight-up cartel, like a real criminal syndicate. So they realized that was going to be one of the weak points in their case. I’d questioned whether they also wanted to avoid discovery about the CIA shipping drugs—learning more about how the “Cartel of the Sons” was a cover for that. And I’ve since learned something really interesting. This is the first time I’ve talked about it in any interview.

And I’m still trying to nail down the details, but there’s this one flight that’s mentioned in the indictment—a flight that went from Venezuela’s Simón Bolívar International Airport to Campeche, Mexico, on a DC-9 jet, which is kind of like a private plane, carrying tons of cocaine. They allege that this jet was managed by Pollo Carvajal and that, behind the scenes, Diosdado Cabello—who’s still in the Venezuelan government and is a defendant in Maduro’s indictment—oversaw this shipment of cocaine, which was supposedly intended for the U.S. But they had no evidence that any of that cocaine was actually going to the U.S. It was outside U.S. jurisdiction, so it could be thrown out on that basis.

But the flight did occur. Some things aren’t mentioned in the indictment. It looks like the flight stopped in a Colombian city for some time, which is where it may have picked up the cocaine. The DC-9, known as “Cocaine One,” was owned by a U.S. company that had exchanged hands with another U.S. company, whose owner was a Jeb Bush associate. It appears very clear that this DC-9 was owned by some kind of CIA-linked shell company. So Pollo Carvajal—Hugo Carvajal—when he made his defense in the Southern District Court of New York, confronted this allegation and actually sought to call as a witness the owner of the DC-9 jet.

And Judge Hellerstein, who will preside over the Maduro trial, refused to allow that witness. That witness presumably could have provided evidence or testimony showing that the CIA actually controlled that flight and was running it in order to compromise Venezuelan leadership from Carvajal on down. So it looks to me like this judge will not allow further testimony that would expose the CIA, which is extremely unfortunate, because I think the political context in which the assault on Venezuela has occurred over the last 25 years is really important in Maduro’s defense.

#Glenn

And this could be a very embarrassing trial. Well, we’ve run out of time, so thank you very much for joining us.

#Max Blumenthal

Thanks a lot, Glenn.

