

Maduro played a hands-on role in Venezuela's drug cartel, unsealed indictment says

BY ANTONIO MARIA DELGADO
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He might not have been among the first officials asked to participate when late President Hugo Chavez decided to get into the drug business, but current ruler Nicolas Maduro ended up playing a leading role and exerting great influence in the Cartel de Los Soles as his power inside Venezuela grew, according to a newly unsealed federal indictment.

A previously sealed indictment introduced in a federal court in New York against leaders of the Venezuelan drug cartel alleges Maduro's involvement in the drug trade was more extensive than previously thought, and he eventually became one of the top bosses of the organization.

Maduro "helped manage and, ultimately, lead the Cartel de Los Soles as he gained power in Venezuela," the indictment reads.

While officially charged in the U.S. in 2020 as being one of the Venezuelan officials responsible for turning the country into a drug-trafficking state, the prevalent view has been that Maduro played a minor role in the cartel, with the leadership of the organization frequently being attributed to former National Assembly Presi-

dent Diosdado Cabello and his now disgraced rival, former Vice President Tarek El Aissami.

Maduro's name does not often appear in court documents describing the initial meetings held by Chavez with his top lieutenants as he moved to set up a partnership with the guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, to ship cocaine to the United States.

But Maduro's influence in the cartel grew following Chavez's death as he assumed the Venezuelan presidency and as the interests of the drug-trafficking operations began to intertwine with the matters of state, court documents show.

The FARC, which eventually entered into a peace process with the Colombian government, was for many years considered one of the largest producers of cocaine in the world. The U.S. State Department placed the annual volume of the drug transiting through Venezuela at more than 250 tons. Experts believe the current volume going out of Venezuela doubles that amount.

The Venezuelan regime has two key reasons for entering the drug trade, the indictment says.

The Cartel de Los Soles sought not only to enrich its members and enhance

their power, but also to "flood" the United States with cocaine and inflict the drug's harmful and addictive effects on users in this country," the document says.

The previously sealed indictment says Maduro participated in negotiations to secure multi-ton shipments of cocaine from the FARC in exchange for the delivery of money and weapons to the guerrilla group.

U.S. officials also accuse him of coordinating with the authorities of Honduras and other Central American countries for the uninterrupted passage of drug shipments heading toward the United States.

Those efforts helped set up an "air bridge" of drugs in the region. The State Department reported that 75 flights of small planes suspected of carrying drug loads were detected in Honduran airspace in 2010 alone. But flights are just one of several methods used by the cartel; a large portion is shipped by speedboats on established routes through the Caribbean.

"The maritime shipments were shipped north from Venezuela's coastline using go-fast vessels, fishing boats, and container ships. Air shipments were often dispatched from clandestine airstrips, typ-



Estimates by the U.S. Department of Justice say the annual volume of drugs passing through Venezuela by 2020 was around 220 tons.



JUAN BARRETO / AP Photo/Getty Images/TAS
Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro

ically made of dirt or grass, concentrated in the Apure state" in southwestern Venezuela, the document says.

The indictment claims Maduro was asked by Chavez in 2005 to help the cartel identify judges unwilling to provide protection to the FARC and their drug-trafficking activities so they could be fired.

The indictment also says around that time, Maduro obtained \$5 million from the drug trade and got involved in a money-laundering operation involving the palm-oil business.

NICOLAS MADURO 'HELPED MANAGE AND, ULTIMATELY, LEAD THE CARTEL DE LOS SOLES,' THE INDICTMENT READS.

Eventually, the cartel used the state-run Petroleos de Venezuela to launder funds from its drug-trafficking operation.

As the partnership with the FARC grew, Maduro found himself getting more involved in the operation, participating in meetings with the rebel group to get more drugs in exchange for weapons and more money. One of his roles as foreign minister under Chavez was to ensure that the border with Colombia remained open to allow shipments coming from the neighboring country to enter without disruptions.

The operation continued to grow after Maduro became president in 2013 following Chavez's death, with his family members seeking to benefit directly from the drug trade.

Maduro's nephews, raised by First Lady Cilia Flores, were arrested in 2013 in a DEA sting for attempting to export 800 kilos of cocaine to the United States. They were extradited and found guilty the following year and were sentenced to 18 years.

The nephews, who were released in 2022 as part of a prisoner swap with Venezuela, had told DEA informants during a sting operation that they had sought to obtain \$20 million to help finance Flores' election campaign to the Venezuelan National Assembly.

Their aim was political in nature, they claimed in the recorded conversations.

While describing Maduro as his father, one of the nephews said "what we want is for him to take control again of the National Assembly," which was at the time controlled by the opposition.

After the arrests, two of the DEA informants involved in the sting were murdered.

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CITY OF MIAMI BEACH
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

COLLINS CANAL HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION

ORDINANCE AMENDING THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS BY DESIGNATING THE COLLINS CANAL, LOCATED BETWEEN BISCAYNE BAY AND LAKE PANCOAST, AS A HISTORIC SITE TO BE KNOWN AS "COLLINS CANAL"

JULY 24, 2024

CITY COMMISSION MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that on July 24, 2024, at 5:03 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard, the Mayor and City Commissioners of the City of Miami Beach will hold a Second Reading/Public Hearing on the following Proposed Ordinance:

COLLINS CANAL HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, AMENDING THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS OF THE CITY CODE, BY AMENDING CHAPTER 2 OF THE RESILIENCY CODE, ENTITLED "ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW PROCEDURES," ARTICLE XII, ENTITLED "HISTORIC PRESERVATION," SECTION 2.13, ENTITLED "HISTORIC DESIGNATION," AT SUBSECTION (E)(I), ENTITLED "HISTORIC PRESERVATION SITES (HPS)," BY DESIGNATING THE COLLINS CANAL, LOCATED BETWEEN BISCAYNE BAY AND LAKE PANCOAST AS AN HISTORIC SITE TO BE KNOWN AS "COLLINS CANAL," AS MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED IN THIS ORDINANCE; PROVIDING THAT THE CITY'S ZONING MAP SHALL BE AMENDED TO INCLUDE THE COLLINS CANAL AS AN HISTORIC SITE, ADOPTING THE DESIGNATION REPORT ATTACHED HERETO AS APPENDIX "A"; PROVIDING FOR INCLUSION IN THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS OF THE CITY CODE; AND PROVIDING FOR COORDINATION, REPEALER, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE. This Ordinance is being heard pursuant to Chapter 2, Article IV of the Resiliency Code. Inquiries may be directed to the Planning Department at 305.673.7550.

During the July 24, 2024, Commission Meeting, the City of Miami Beach will host a Hybrid Commission Meeting. During this Hybrid Commission Meeting, the City Commission will be physically present in the Commission Chamber, located at 1700 Convention Center Drive, 3rd Floor, Miami Beach, Florida 33139.

Members of the public who wish to attend this Commission Meeting or provide public comment in person may appear at the Commission Chamber. Applicants and members of the public who wish to participate or provide comment virtually during the Commission Meeting may join the webinar at: <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/cityhall/cityclerk/agenda> or by telephone at: 1.305.224.1868 (U.S.) or 808.475.4489 (Toll-Free). Webinar ID: 81392857671. Members of the public wanting to speak virtually on an item during the meeting must click the "raise hand" icon in the Zoom app or press "9" on the telephone to raise their hand.

INTERESTED PARTIES are invited to take part in this meeting or be represented by an agent. The public may submit written comments on Commission Meeting items by either submitting an eComment through the agenda page at <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/cityhall/cityclerk/agenda> and clicking the comment bubble icon in the "Current and Upcoming Meetings" section or by emailing CityClerk@miamibeachfl.gov with the Agenda Item Number in the subject line. Comments received, in either format, will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. the day before the meeting. All submissions will be forwarded to the Mayor and Commissioners and included in the meeting record.

Copies of Agenda Items are available for public inspection at: <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/cityhall/cityclerk/agenda>. This meeting, or any item therein, may be continued, and under such circumstances, additional legal notice need not be provided.

Pursuant to Section 286.0105, Fla. Stat., the City hereby advises the public that if a person desires to appeal any decision made by the City Commission concerning any matter considered at its meeting or hearing, such person must ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. This notice does not constitute consent by the City for the introduction or admission of otherwise inadmissible or irrelevant evidence, nor does it authorize challenges or appeals not otherwise allowed by law.

To request this material in an alternate format, sign language interpreter (five-day notice required), information on access for persons with disabilities, and/or any accommodation to review any document or participate in any City-sponsored proceedings, call 305.604.2489 and select 1 for English or 2 for Spanish. Then option 6; TTY users may call via 711 (Florida Relay Service).

The City Commission Meeting will be broadcast live on Miami Beach TV (MBTV), viewable on the City's website at <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/government/mbtv/>, as well as on BreezeLine Cable channel 860, AT&T U-verse channel 99, Hotwire Communications channel 395, and Roku device on PEG-IV channel, and on social media at <https://www.facebook.com/cityofmiamibeach>.

To review the Business Impact Estimates for the above proposed Ordinance, please visit <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/cityhall/cityclerk/meeting-notices>.

Parking
Meeting attendees can park at the City Hall Garage, 1755 Meridian Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 33139

RAFAEL E. GRANADO, City Clerk
City of Miami Beach
CityClerk@miamibeachfl.gov
305.673.7411

AD: 0724024-10

CITY OF MIAMI BEACH
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

ELIMINATE THE 0.5 FAR BONUS FOR HOTELS IN THE CD-2 DISTRICT

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE RESILIENCY CODE TO ELIMINATE THE FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR) BONUS FOR HOTEL USES IN THE CD-2 DISTRICT ALONG ALTON ROAD, NORMANDY DRIVE, 71 STREET, AND COLLINS AVENUE NORTH OF 63 STREET

JULY 24, 2024

CITY COMMISSION MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that on July 24, 2024, at 10:30 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard, the Mayor and City Commissioners of the City of Miami Beach will hold a Second Reading/Public Hearing on the proposed Ordinance:

ELIMINATE THE 0.5 FAR BONUS FOR HOTELS IN THE CD-2 DISTRICT

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, AMENDING THE RESILIENCY CODE OF THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH, BY AMENDING CHAPTER 7, ENTITLED "ZONING DISTRICTS AND REGULATIONS," ARTICLE 11, "DISTRICT REGULATIONS," SECTION 7.2.11, "CD-2 COMMERCIAL, MEDIUM INTENSITY DISTRICT," BY AMENDING SECTION 7.2.11.3, ENTITLED "DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS (CD-2)," TO ELIMINATE THE FLOOR AREA RATIO BONUS FOR HOTEL USES IN THE CD-2 DISTRICT ALONG ALTON ROAD, NORMANDY DRIVE, 71 STREET, AND COLLINS AVENUE NORTH OF 63 STREET; AND PROVIDING FOR COORDINATION, REPEALER, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE. This Ordinance is being heard pursuant to Chapter 2, Article IV of the Resiliency Code. Inquiries may be directed to the Planning Department at 305.673.7550.

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