

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 4, 2021

The Honorable Eugene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) provide an assessment of the scope of the transnational criminal network threat within and from Venezuela, as well as a review of the effectiveness of the United States Government's policies actions, and authorities to combat these criminal threats.

In July 2009, GAO issued a report in response to a request by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Richard Lugar regarding an investigation into U.S. policies designed to interdict narcotics being trafficked from Venezuela. In its conclusions, GAO noted that the lack of Venezuelan counter-narcotics cooperation significantly hindered U.S. capacity to stop narcotics flows into the U.S., and that continued safe haven and support from Venezuela for illegal armed groups were likely to threaten the security gains made in Colombia since 2000. Since then, the actions of the Maduro regime have made the situation much worse.

In May 2019, a study by IBI Consultants and the National Defense University described a Venezuelan government that had morphed into a vast criminal enterprise spanning the world and involved in falsified oil sales, illegal mining, fraudulent infrastructure projects, and financial crimes. According to the study, this criminal network may have stolen as much as \$43 billion between 2007 and 2018, with the help of the political leadership of Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Suriname, and El Salvador.

In March 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice announced indictments against 15 current and former Venezuelan officials, including former President Nicolas Maduro, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez, and Supreme Court Chief Justice Maikel Moreno, for allegedly collaborating with senior members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) terrorist organization to use cocaine as a weapon to "flood" the United States. In announcing the charges, U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman said that "[t]he scope and magnitude of the drug trafficking alleged was made possible only because Maduro and others corrupted the institutions of Venezuela and provided political and military protection for the rampant narco-terrorism crimes described in our charges."

There are a number of questions I would like the GAO to address in its investigation:

1. To what extent is the Maduro regime providing safe haven to transnational criminal organizations, including U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations?
2. What are the main transnational criminal organizations operating within Venezuela?

The Honorable Eugene Dodaro

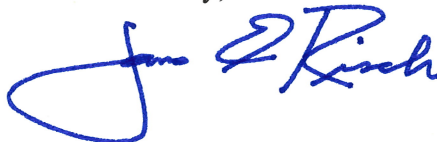
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3. To what extent do senior members of the Maduro regime support and protect various transnational criminal groups operating within the borders of Venezuela?
4. What is the nature of the relationships between senior members of the Maduro regime and transnational criminal organizations?
5. What is the nature of the relationships between Venezuelan security forces and transnational criminal organizations?
6. What are the geographic routes of illicit narcotics flows into Venezuela, inside Venezuela, and outbound from Venezuela?
7. What are the avenues of illicit finance flows into Venezuela, inside Venezuela, and outbound from Venezuela?
8. Does active support of members of the Maduro regime and members of the military facilitate the manufacturing and/or transportation of narcotics in Venezuela or outbound from Venezuela?
9. Is there a credible counter-narcotics effort underway in Venezuela?
10. Do actions by the Maduro regime related to transnational criminal activities undermine U.S. counter-narcotics cooperation with Colombia? Do actions related to transnational criminal activities undertaken by the Maduro regime undermine the 2016 Colombian agreement with the FARC?
11. What are the potential implications of the actions by the Maduro regime related to transnational criminal organizations for the countries of the Caribbean? What are the potential implications for US security and economic cooperation in the Caribbean?
12. What are the potential implications of involvement of the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) in transnational criminal activities within Venezuela for Cuba's relations with the ELN?
13. What are the available U.S. legal authorities to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle the threat of transnational organized crime from Venezuela, and to what extent have these authorities been employed?

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member