

The great hoax against Venezuela: Oil geopolitics disguised as ‘war on drugs’

written by Pino Arlacchi
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The Trump administration’s main interest is to access Venezuela’s massive oil

reserves. (Miraflores Palace)

During my time as head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), I frequently traveled to Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, but never to Venezuela. There was simply no need.

The Venezuelan government's collaboration in the fight against drug trafficking was among the best in South America, rivaled only by Cuba's impeccable record. This makes Trump's narrative of a "narco-state" in Venezuela sound like geopolitically motivated slander.

The 2025 World Drug Report tells a story that is the opposite of the narrative peddled by the Trump administration. Piece by piece, the report dismantles the geopolitical lie built around the "Cartel de los Soles", an entity as mythical as the Loch Ness Monster, but which is useful for justifying [sanctions](#), blockades and threats of military intervention against a country which, incidentally, sits on one of the planet's largest oil reserves.

Venezuela: A marginal country in the global drug trade

The 2025 UNODC report is crystal clear and should embarrass those who have demonized Venezuela through rhetoric. The report only briefly mentions Venezuela, stating that a small amount of Colombian drug production passes through the country en route to the United States and Europe. According to the UN, Venezuela has consolidated its status as a territory free from the cultivation of coca leaves, cannabis and similar crops, as well as from the presence of international criminal cartels.

This document merely confirms the findings of the previous 30 annual reports, which did not address Venezuelan drug trafficking because it does not exist. Only 5% of Colombian drugs transit through Venezuela. For context, in 2018, while 210 tons of

cocaine passed through Venezuela, Colombia produced or traded as much as 2,370 tons—ten times more—and Guatemala produced or traded 1,400 tons.

Yes, you read that right. Guatemala is a drug corridor seven times more important than the Bolivarian “narco-state” allegedly is. However, no one talks about this because Guatemala has historically accounted for only a tiny share of the global total—0.01%—of the one drug that interests Trump: oil.

The mythical “Cartel de los Soles”: Hollywood fiction

The “Cartel de los Soles” is a product of Trump’s imagination. It is allegedly led by the president of Venezuela. However, it is not mentioned in the report from the world’s leading anti-drug agency or any other anti-crime agency, whether European or otherwise. Not even a footnote. This deafening silence should make anyone with a shred of critical sense reflect. How can an organized crime group powerful enough to warrant a \$50 million bounty be completely ignored by all agencies involved in anti-drug efforts?

In other words, what is marketed as a super-cartel worthy of a Netflix show is actually a collection of small, local networks—the kind of petty crime found in any country, including the United States, where nearly 100,000 people die each year from opioid overdoses unrelated to Venezuela, but all to do with American Big Pharma.

Ecuador: The real hub that no one wants to see

While Washington raises the spectre of Venezuela, the real drug trafficking hubs are thriving almost undisturbed. For example, in Ecuador, 57% of banana containers leaving Guayaquil and arriving in Antwerp are loaded with cocaine. European authorities seized 13 tons of cocaine on a Spanish ship coming from Ecuadorian ports, which are controlled by companies that are protected by Ecuadorian

government officials.

The European Union produced a detailed report on Guayaquil's ports, documenting how "Colombian, Mexican and Albanian mafia groups all operate extensively in Ecuador." Ecuador's homicide rate has soared from 7.8 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020 to 45.7 in 2023. Yet Ecuador is rarely mentioned. Is it perhaps because Ecuador produces only 0.5% of the world's oil and its government does not challenge the US's stranglehold on Latin America?

The real drug routes: geography vs. propaganda

During my time at the UNODC, one of the most important lessons I learned was that geography does not lie. Drug routes follow a clear logic based on proximity to production centers, ease of transport, the corruption of local authorities and the presence of established criminal networks. Venezuela fails to meet almost all of these criteria.

Colombia produces over 70% of the world's cocaine. Peru and Bolivia cover most of the remaining 30%. The most logical routes for reaching the American and European markets are via the Pacific to Asia, through the eastern Caribbean towards Europe and overland through Central America towards the United States. Geographically, Venezuela is disadvantaged for all three main routes, as it borders the South Atlantic. Criminal logistics mean that Venezuela plays only a marginal role in the grand theater of international narcotrafficking.

Cuba: The embarrassing example

Geography does not lie, but politics can override it. Even today, Cuba represents the gold standard of anti-drug cooperation in the Caribbean. Although it is an island not far from the coast of Florida—a theoretically perfect base for narcotrafficking towards the United States—in practice, it is irrelevant. I have repeatedly observed

DEA and FBI agents admiring the Cuban communists' rigorous anti-drug policies.

Chavista Venezuela has consistently followed the Cuban model in the fight against drugs, inaugurated by Fidel Castro himself, involving international cooperation, territorial control and the repression of criminal activities. Neither Venezuela nor Cuba has ever had large areas of land cultivated with coca and controlled by organized crime.

The European Union (EU) has no particular oil interests in Venezuela, but it is interested in combating the drug trafficking that affects its cities. The EU produced its European Drug Report 2025. This document is based on real data, not geopolitical wishful thinking, and does not mention Venezuela even once as a corridor for the international drug trade.

This is the difference between honest analysis and a false and insulting narrative. Europe needs reliable data in order to protect its citizens from drugs, which is why it produces accurate reports. In contrast, the United States requires justification for its oil policies and therefore produces propaganda disguised as intelligence.

According to the European report, cocaine is the second most commonly used drug in the 27 EU countries, and the main sources of supply are clearly identified: Colombia for production, and Central America and various routes through West Africa for distribution. Venezuela and Cuba simply don't feature in this picture.

Yet Venezuela is systematically demonized, contrary to every principle of truth. In his memoir following his resignation, former FBI Director James Comey revealed the unspoken motives behind American policies towards Venezuela. Trump told him that Maduro's government was "sitting on a mountain of oil that we have to buy." This is not about drugs, crime or national security. It is about oil that the US would rather not pay for.

It is Donald Trump who deserves an international bounty for the crime of “systematic slander against a sovereign state aimed at appropriating its oil resources.”

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