

## **Will Alex Saab be saved from American justice?**

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Colombian Alex Saab, a suspected figurehead for Nicolás Maduro and on whom the United States government had placed a red alert, was detained in Cape Verde, where, en route to Iran, he landed his plane to refuel. The operation of the DEA, the FBI, and the Financial Crime Control Network of the United States Treasury Department seek his prosecution for the alleged crimes of conspiracy, money laundering, and illicit enrichment in the United States. It is the third time that US justice has the opportunity to apprehend a significant figure from the criminal enterprise of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro's Bolivarian mafia state.

The first to be apprehended was Walid Makled, of Syrian origin, alias "El Turco", for cocaine trafficking by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). He was arrested in August 2010 in the Colombian city of Cúcuta in a joint operation by the Bogotá authorities and the DEA. The US Attorney of the Southern District of New York accused him of having "controlled and operated airstrips located in Venezuela". To facilitate the shipment of several tons of cocaine to Central America and Mexico via numerous drug trafficking organizations, a portion of which went to the United States. At the time, he was considered the *capo di tutti capo*, even among global narcotics traffickers.

At that time, Makled's arrest terrified the military leadership that was linked to the drug trafficking business, among whom were General Hugo "el Pollo" Carvajal, director of Military Intelligence of Venezuela; General Henry Rangel Silva, head of the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces; General Luis Motta, commander of the National Guard, and General Néstor Reverol, head of the National Anti-Drug Office. They then exerted intense pressure on Chávez to prevent Makled's extradition to the United States, according to reports released by Wikileaks, by the private intelligence firm Stratfor.

In the end, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos accepted his extradition to Venezuela. Santos gave him to "his new best friend", Chavez. Moreover, the only testimony the United States (DEA) obtained from Makled was during a Bogotá prison interview. Hence, American justice was left empty-handed at that time. However, El Turco threatened the Chavez regime with the possession of videos and documents that linked more than 50 senior civil and military officials with his businesses.

The second time was four years later on the island of Aruba. Its authorities arrested retired Major General Hugo "El Pollo" Carvajal, former director of military intelligence and one of the most feared men in Venezuela at the time. He arrived on the island by a private plane. At the

request of US authorities, who hoped to transfer him to American soil as soon as possible, he was arrested at Queen Beatrix International Airport. He was blacklisted by the United States Department of the Treasury in 2008 for his alleged involvement in FARC drug trafficking operations since el Pollo had become one of the most influential people in the participation of the Venezuelan National Armed Forces in drug trafficking operations.

El Pollo Carvajal controlled drug trafficking movements, operations, deliveries, and money laundering. He was in control of the entire process. His arrest and possible extradition to the United States set off alarms in the Bolivarian mafia state to such an extent that Nicolás Maduro sent a special team to Aruba with the task of ensuring his release.

The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry stated that “Venezuela strongly rejects the illegal and arbitrary arrest of the Venezuelan diplomatic official, holder of a passport that accredits him as such”. It happened that Pollo Carvajal had been appointed consul general of Venezuela in Aruba, an autonomous state of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. However, at the time of his arrest, he did not have the credentials accepted by the chancellery of Holland, which would grant him immunity from international justice.

Such was the fear that American justice would judge El Pollo that Nicolás Maduro moved heaven and earth to avoid it. Argentinian President Cristina Kirchner (2007–2015) was the safe passage. She appealed to Queen Máxima of the Netherlands, born in Argentina, for the State acceptance of the consul’s credentials. It granted him the diplomatic immunity necessary to nullify the extradition to the United States.

Once again, the Bolivarian mafia state was saved -the Cartel de los Soles and the FARC. And again, American justice was empty-handed. It also allowed protecting the peace process between the Santos government and the FARC negotiated between 2012-2016.

Currently, there is the possibility that Alex Saab will unveil the diagram of international relations and financial engineering of the illicit businesses of the Bolivarian mafia state’s criminal enterprise. Saab’s betrayal of the enterprise would put Maduro and his gang in check; it would be a game-changer in Venezuela’s political evolution.

The mafia state has tried to move quickly, as in the case of El Pollo Carvajal. It argues that Saab is a Venezuelan official on a humanitarian mission and that he has diplomatic immunity. This time, Maduro is working with Russia, Cuba, China, Spain, and even Portugal to achieve his liberation. It is the third time that American justice will have the opportunity to take one of the most influential people of the Bolivarian mafia state, “third time lucky”.