



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on August 8, 2025

Report: Trump Orders Military to Take On Drug Cartels. Bounty on Maduro Now \$50M

President Trump has ordered the military to use force against the drug cartels that he designated as terrorist organizations on his first day in office.

[The New York Times](#) reported the development this morning, a day after U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi announced that a reward for the arrest of Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro — also kingpin of the [Cartel los Soles cartel](#) — has doubled to \$50 million dollars.

Attacking the cartels was one of Trump's key campaign promises. Border Czar Tom Homan said Trump would destroy them.



AP Images

Breaking News: President Trump has secretly signed a directive to the Pentagon to begin using military force against certain Latin American drug cartels. <https://t.co/PdVkd0b4sb>

— The New York Times (@nytimes) [August 8, 2025](#)

Details

Not yet published at the White House website, the “order provides an official basis for the possibility of direct military operations at sea and on foreign soil against cartels,” the [Times](#) reported:

U.S. military officials have started drawing up options for how the military could go after the groups, the people familiar with the conversations said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive internal deliberations.

But directing the military to crack down on the illicit trade also raises legal issues, including whether it would count as “murder” if U.S. forces acting outside of a congressionally authorized armed conflict were to kill civilians — even criminal suspects — who pose no imminent threat.

It is unclear what White House, Pentagon and State Department lawyers have said about the new directive or whether the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel has produced an authoritative opinion assessing the legal issues.

On July 25, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned the Cartel los Soles as a “specially designated” terrorist organization.

It has “provided material support to Tren de Aragua and the Sinaloa Cartel,” the department said. TdA and Sinaloa on the list of terrorist organizations the [State Department released](#) in February, pursuant to Trump's [executive order](#).



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“Tren de Aragua is a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) that originated in Venezuela and is involved in the illicit drug trade, human smuggling and trafficking, extortion, sexual exploitation of women and children, and money laundering, among other criminal activities,” the [department said](#):

The Sinaloa Cartel is an FTO and one of the oldest and most powerful cartels in Mexico, responsible for a significant portion of deadly drugs trafficked into the United States from Mexico. In addition to trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine, and other illicit drugs into the United States, the Sinaloa Cartel is engaged in widespread violence.

The cartel, Treasury averred, is “headed by” Maduro and other top Venezuelan officials.

U.S. on the Front Lines

“Unilateral military assaults on cartels would be a marked escalation in the long drive to curb drug trafficking, putting U.S. forces in a lead role on the front lines against often well-armed and well-financed organizations,” the [Times fretted](#):

A sustained campaign would also likely raise further issues related to Mr. Trump’s push to use the military more aggressively to back a variety of his policies, often in the face of legal and constitutional constraints.

Past U.S. military involvement in countering drug operations in Latin America have sometimes pushed at legal limits. But those operations were framed as providing support for law enforcement authorities.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush sent more than 20,000 troops into Panama to arrest its strongman leader, Manuel Noriega, who had been indicted in the United States on charges of drug trafficking.

Ahead of the operation, William P. Barr, who then led the Office of Legal Counsel and was the attorney general in Mr. Trump’s first term, wrote a disputed memo saying it was within Mr. Bush’s authority to direct law-enforcement arrests of fugitives overseas without the consent of foreign states. The United Nations General Assembly condemned the Panama action as a “flagrant violation of international law.”...

But Mr. Trump’s new directive appears to envision a different approach, focused on U.S. forces directly capturing or killing people involved in the drug trade.

“We cannot continue to just treat these guys as local street gangs,” Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Marco Rubio [told EWTN](#):

They have weaponry that looks like what terrorists, in some cases armies, have. They control territory in many cases. Those cartels extend from the Maduro regime in Venezuela — which is not a legitimate government.

American forces not only participated in the operation that toppled Noriega in 1990 but also assisted Colombian forces in hunting Pablo Escobar. He was head of the Medellin Cartel. Delta Force and SEAL Team Six operators, along with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), were in the country when Colombian cut him down on a rooftop on December 2, 1993. Writing in [Killing Pablo: The Hunt For The](#)



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[World's Greatest Outlaw](#), Mark Bowden reported that a Delta Force sniper might have fired the killing shot.

Today, [@TheJusticeDept](#) and [@StateDept](#) are announcing a \$50 MILLION REWARD for information leading to the arrest of Nicolás Maduro. pic.twitter.com/D8LNqjS9yk

— Attorney General Pamela Bondi (@AGPamBondi) [August 7, 2025](#)

As for Maduro, the bounty on his head, again, doubled to \$50 million.

Nicolás Maduro and his cronies think they're untouchable. They're wrong. We're increasing our reward offer for Maduro to up to \$50 million. <https://t.co/mEomEgWLCt>
pic.twitter.com/ltq1cdMUji

— US Dept of State INL (@StateINL) [August 8, 2025](#)

"Maduro uses foreign terrorist organizations like TdA, Sinaloa and Cartel of the Suns to bring deadly drugs and violence into our country," Bondi said.

DEA, she said, has seized 30 tons of cocaine traced to Maduro and his gang. The agency traced another seven tons to "Maduro himself." Maduro, she said, is "one of the largest narcotraffickers in the world and a threat to our national security."

Erroneous *Times* Reports

On the subject of the cartels, the *Times* beclowned itself in two recent pieces. In March, [it falsely claimed](#) that Maduro does not control TdA. A former top CIA officer told the *Miami Herald* that the outfit is a paramilitary arm of the Maduro regime.

In January, three days after Trump designated cartels as terrorist organizations, the [Times whined](#) that the designation would "hurt the U.S. economy." Notably, avocado consumers — people likely to read the *Times* — would be among the victims of Trump's policy.

Homan warned at last year's Republican National Convention that the cartels were doomed.

"I got another message ... to the criminal cartels in Mexico," [he said](#):

You smuggled enough fentanyl across this country to kill 148,000 young Americans. You have killed more Americans than every terrorist organization in the world combined. And that's why when President Trump gets back in office, he's going to designate you a terrorist organization, and he's going to wipe you off the face of the earth! You're done! You're done!



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