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U.S. Targets Maduro-Linked Cartel for Aiding Terror-Designated Gangs

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The U.S. government has officially designated a Venezuelan regime-linked group as supporting foreign terrorist organizations, notably the Tren de Aragua gang and Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel. This move intensifies pressure on the Nicolás Maduro regime and underscores the Biden administration's focus on confronting state-backed criminal networks in the Americas.

The U.S. State Department identified the group as the Cartel de los Soles, a network allegedly composed of senior Venezuelan officials, including Maduro himself. The cartel is accused of enabling drug trafficking operations and providing logistical support to violent criminal organizations across Latin America. This designation blocks any assets under U.S. jurisdiction and prohibits American entities from engaging in transactions with the group.

This announcement follows a series of enforcement actions. Earlier in July, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on six senior leaders of Tren de Aragua, including its head, Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, known as "Niño Guerrero." The gang is blamed for widespread human trafficking, drug smuggling, extortion, and violent crime across Latin America and parts of the United States. OFAC described the group as one of the most dangerous criminal syndicates operating transnationally.

To bolster enforcement, the U.S. State Department also offered up to \$5 million in rewards for information leading to the capture of Guerrero and smaller bounties for other high-ranking members. In total, American authorities have allocated over \$12 million in reward offers targeting Tren de Aragua's leadership.

Tren de Aragua originated in a Venezuelan prison and has since spread into multiple countries, including Colombia, Chile, Peru, and even the United States. The gang has been exploiting migrant routes and communities, making its presence a growing concern for border and homeland security officials.

Venezuelan authorities have rejected the allegations as politically motivated. Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello called the designations part of a smear campaign and claimed that Tren de Aragua has already been dismantled within Venezuela. However, U.S. officials have pointed to credible intelligence linking the Maduro government to continued criminal facilitation.

This latest move by the U.S. signals a firmer approach toward regimes perceived as enabling organized crime. It also reflects a broader policy stance that seeks to uphold regional stability and deny authoritarian leaders the ability to profit from illicit activities. The designation reinforces Washington's commitment to tackling transnational crime while challenging state complicity in narcotrafficking.