

Organization Attributes Sheet: Cartel del Sol (AKA: Los Soles)

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Suns Cartel is an organization comprised of corrupt current and former high-ranking Venezuelan military officers who assist in, protect, and facilitate drug trafficking operations that enter into Venezuela from neighboring Colombia.• The group is called the “Suns Cartel” because officers in the Venezuelan National Guard wear insignias of suns on their uniforms instead of stars.¹• Implicated in the 2004 killing of a Venezuelan journalist named Mauro Marcano, who wrote a piece on members believed to be in the cartel and the level of corruption involved in their trafficking operations.²
B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,
a. In general
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drug trafficking, murder.
b. <i>Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Suns Cartel facilitates the trafficking of cocaine and heroin from Colombia into Venezuela.³• The cartel uses the resources of the Venezuelan military to protect shipments of cocaine crossing the border to airfields. From within Venezuela the cocaine is flown to various locations that ultimately end up in the United States or Europe.• The group has also provided traffickers with security credentials to protect them in the event of capture.• Believed to smuggle 3 to 5 tons of cocaine, along with 20 to 30 kilograms of heroine into Venezuela from Colombia each month.
C. Scope and Size
a. Estimated size of network and membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least 40-50 present or former high-ranking officers of the Venezuelan armed forces are involved.⁴
b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Border region between Colombia and Venezuela.
D. Leader Characteristics
a. Who is/are the leader(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General Frank Morgado Joaquin.• General Alexis Maneiro.⁵
b. Leadership timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information not found.
c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information not found.
E. Organizational Structure
a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hierarchical – members are military personnel so it there is a rigid hierarchy within the organization.
b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Core membership is derived from high-ranking officials (General Rank) of the Venezuelan Army and National Guard. Informal/nonmembers and their networks carry out the trafficking under the auspices of the core group.

c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

- Information not found.

F. Resources

a. Financial

- Large quantities of cocaine/heroine yield significant wealth.

b. Human

- High-ranking military officers who possess extensive knowledge of the drug trade.

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- The organization has access to the resources of the Venezuelan armed forces. Therefore it can be assumed that there is no shortage of personnel, weapons, or vehicles.

ii. Key routes

- Shipments are headed to Europe are usually flown from Venezuela to the Caribbean, while those heading to the United States are flown from Venezuela to Central America, specifically Honduras.⁶

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Overland passages and trails along the Venezuela/Colombia border.

ii. Sea

- Information not found.

iii. Air

- Use of Small planes flying from Colombia to airstrips under control of the Suns cartel.⁷ This includes Maiquetia Airport, outside of Caracas and airfields in Apure.⁸

iv. Intermodal container

- Information not found.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- Cartel uses the positions of its members within the military to facilitate drug trafficking between Colombia and Venezuela.

b. Concealment

- Information not found.

c. Deception

- Provision of security credentials to drug traffickers in case they are caught by legitimate authorities.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Border between Colombia and Venezuela is porous, making it easy to smuggle drugs into Venezuela.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- Previously worked with Colombian drug lord Walid Makled before his arrest.
- In cooperation with the Guajiro cartel.⁹

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In cooperation with FARC.
<p>b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is believed that drug trafficking is encouraged among elite officials within the Chavez administration.
<p>c. <i>Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No connections have been determined.
<p>I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found.
<p>J. Technical Sophistication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found.
<p>K. Penchant for Innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found.
<p>L. Activities in United States</p> <p>a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found. <p>b. <i>Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found. <p>c. Linkages with US groups</p> <p>i. Market/transaction links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found. <p>ii. Stable supplier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found. <p>iii. Franchise arrangement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found. <p>iv. HQ and Branch office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found.
<p>M. Evaluations</p> <p>a. Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The members' status within the Venezuelan military apparatus affords them a heightened level of impunity and freedom of action, in addition to operational resources. <p>b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, their status is also a potential weakness in light of increased international concern over drug-related-corruption within the Venezuelan government. <p>c. Additional insights</p>
<p>Other Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which the leaders share the anti-US sentiments of the Chavez regime is uncertain but could be an important determinant of any threats the organization might pose. As the Suns cartel seems to operate without molestation and even encouragement from Venezuelan authorities, it appears unlikely that their trafficking operation will end any time soon.

¹ Mcdermott, Jeremy. "Venezuela is key link for the drug smugglers." *Telegraph* 19 Jul 2007: Web. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1557941/Venezuela-is-key-link-for-the-drug-smugglers.html>

² "Arrest of man suspected of ordering killing of journalist Mauro Marcano." *Reporters Without Borders* 4 Sep 2006: Web. <http://en.rsf.org/venezuela-arrest-of-man-suspected-of-04-09-2006,18762.html>

³ Jeremy McDermott, "Makled's Window into Trafficking in Venezuela Closing," *Insight Crime*, April 19, 2011. <http://www.insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/793-insight-walid-makled-a-look-into-drug-trafficking-in-venezuela>

⁴ McDermott and "Diputada pide investigar conexión de Makled con el Cartel de los Soles en el oriente del país," *Mundo Oriental*, <http://www.mundo-oriental.com.ve/DetalleNoticia.aspx?IdNoticia=15989>

⁵ JIATF. "South Weekly Counternarcotics Report." April 21 – May 5, 2006, OSC: FBS20060505748213

⁶ Patrick J. O'Donogue, "Brits and USA Accuse GN Officers of Protecting Narco-traffickers," October 04, 2005, <http://www.vheadline.com/readnews.asp?id=46231>

⁷ "GN Seizes 141 Kg of Cocaine in Bolívar State," *Correo del Caroni*, (Internet Version-WWW) in Spanish, August 1 - 11, 2008, OSC: LAP20080815042001

⁸ McDermott.

⁹ JIATF. "South Weekly Counternarcotics Report." March 7 – March 14, 2006, OSC: FBS20080314724738
Additional Sources

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