

Organization Attributes Sheet: Walid Makled Organization

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- Walid Makled García (AKA: “El Turco” or “El Arabe”) is a Syrian born Venezuelan citizen. For many years the Makled family was respected as it ran many prosperous businesses, including the biggest airline in Venezuela, Aeropostal. Back then Walid Makled and his brothers were considered prestigious businessmen in that country. In the last decade the Makleds have been linked to drug trafficking activities in Venezuela.
- In May 2009 the White House designated Walid Makled as a "Significant Foreign Narcotics Trafficker" under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. On November 5, 2010 Makled was indicted by the US Attorney for the southern district of New York, for trafficking tons of cocaine into the United States. Makled is also considered a Consolidated Priority Organization Target ("CPOT"), a Department of Justice designation reserved for the most dangerous and prolific narcotics traffickers.¹ According to the Manhattan Court indictment, between 2006 and August 2010, using airstrips within Venezuela, Makled facilitated the transport of multi-ton quantities of narcotics from Venezuela to Mexico and Central America for multiple trafficking organizations.² Makled assures that members of the Venezuelan government recruited him to traffic the cocaine.³
- Makled was arrested in Colombia on United States charges on August 18, 2010. In an interview from Bogota's Picota prison, broadcast by Univision, Makled said he paid \$5.5 million in 2005 or 2006 to Venezuela's current navy commander for a major warehouse concession at the country's main port of Puerto Cabello – which is also Venezuela's maritime drug smuggling nexus.⁴ Makled also offered greater detail on the number of recipients of the \$1 million in payoffs he said he made monthly to senior Venezuelan military commanders.⁵
- After being in custody in Colombia, Makled was extradited to Venezuela, where in addition to narcotics trafficking, Makled is wanted for several killings, including the murder of journalist Orel Sambrano in January 2009. Since his arrest, Makled has alleged that he had close links with high-level Venezuelan officials and that he paid millions of dollars for favors and protection.⁶
- Some identify Makled's organization as the “Mafia del Puerto” (Mafia from the Port) as most of the cocaine his organization trafficked was exported from Puerto Cabello.⁷
- It seems Makled had a role in the 2008 killing of Wilber Varela, known as “Jabón,” or “Soap,” one of Colombia's most wanted drug traffickers. Varela was found shot to death in the Venezuelan city of Mérida.⁸ It is likely Varela's death was the result of account settling between drug trafficking organizations operating in Venezuela. However, Makled has refused to acknowledge any participation in Varela's death.
- Makled claims to have information on Chavez's help to Hezbollah and other Middle Eastern terrorist groups operating in the Venezuelan soil. Makled stated in an interview that Hezbollah is "absolutely" active in Venezuela. He also says that he has information on the flights between Venezuela and Teheran, a serious source of concern for the United States.⁹
- It is not known if someone succeeded Walid Makled as the head of this organization considering his brothers are already being prosecuted in Venezuela.

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

- a. In general

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Drug trafficking. Large scale transportation of cocaine from Venezuela to the United States and Europe via Central America and the Caribbean. The Makled Organization reportedly exported up to 10 tons of Cocaine a month from Venezuela.¹⁰
- Money laundering of drug trafficking proceeds. Based on continued investigation of the Caracas International Banking Corporation, related to the Makled brothers' drug trafficking organization, the DEA Caribbean Division/Money Laundering Group identified 49 bank accounts belonging to Venezuelan brokerage houses. The brokerage houses were acting as unlicensed money remitters, by moving hundreds of millions of dollars from Venezuela to and/or through U.S. financial institutions.¹¹

b. Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in

- The indictment against Makled García states that from approximately 2006 through August 2010, this man operated and controlled airstrips located in Venezuela. It also states that he used them to facilitate the shipment of multi-ton quantities of cocaine from Venezuela to Central America and Mexico by numerous drug trafficking organizations, knowing a portion were destined for the United States. It is believed that to secure the safe passage of these cocaine shipments, Makled bribed Venezuelan officials with fees he extracted from the drug trafficking organizations.¹²

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- Based on the size of operations it is likely that Makled's network is quite large. It includes government officials and other criminal organizations.

b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group's operating area)

- Venezuela (Apure state and Maracaibo).

D. Leader Characteristics

a. Who is/are the leader(s)

- Walid Makled García (AKA: "El Turco" or "El Arabe"). Makled was captured in Cúcuta, Colombia, close to the frontier with Venezuela by Colombian authorities in an operation that received support from the Drug Enforcement Administration on August 19, 2010.¹³
- Makled is charged with one count of conspiracy to import cocaine into the United States.¹⁴
- Adel Makled García, Alex José Makled García, Al Chair Abdullah Makled García, Basel Makled García and Anderson Makled García (Walid Makled's brothers) are also members of this drug trafficking organization and all of them are already being prosecuted in Venezuela.¹⁵
- It is not known if someone else besides the Makleds is coordinating the drug trafficking now that all the Makled brothers are being prosecuted in Venezuela.

b. Leadership timeline

- Walid Makled was arrested in Colombia (August 19, 2010).
- Walid Makled was extradited to Venezuela (May 9, 2011).

c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)

- Information not found.

E. Organizational Structure

a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)

- Hierarchical

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

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?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
c.	Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized.
F. Resources	
a.	Financial
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on available information about Makled’s former operations, it can be assumed that the organization had significant financial resources. However, since his capture, it is unlikely that such resources are accessible. On November 2, 2009, the DEA Caribbean Division/Money Laundering Group seized \$48,171,000 in U.S. currency from accounts connected to Walid Makled, as well as 3 accounts he had in the Caracas International Banking Corporation. The total seizures to date in this investigation exceed \$92 million in U.S. currency.¹⁶ The Makled Group managed individually and by means of corporations in domestic and foreign financial institutions plenty of financial instruments. Through them, they managed over USD 93 million in 2004-2008. Out of this amount, USD 42 million belonged to Makled brothers' personal accounts.¹⁷ The Makled Group -the economic empire has trade relations with the state-run oil holding Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvs), with Pdval (Venezuelan Food Producer and Distributor), a Pdvs subsidiary, and with CASA (Agricultural Services Supply Corporation), a subsidiary of the Ministry of Food. The Makled Group also had concessions granted by the Carabobo state government under the then governor Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez, in the port of Puerto Cabello and other ports elsewhere in the country, where companies of the group operate in areas related to customs, reception and transport of commodities.¹⁸
b.	Human
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exact numbers are unknown but it is possible the organization had access to significant human resources from the Venezuelan military owing to Makled’s connection to the Cartel de los Soles. Makled’s organization has its own gang of contract killers for account settling: “Los Piloneros”.¹⁹
c.	Logistical
	<p>i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makled said he paid \$5.5 million in 2005 or 2006 to Venezuela's current navy commander for a major warehouse concession at the country's main port of Puerto Cabello.²⁰ Makled used that warehouse to store Colombian cocaine before it was trafficked to Central America. <p>ii. Key routes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venezuela (San Fernando de Apure, southwest Venezuela) – Honduras – Mexico – United States.²¹ Walid Makled revealed that he became personally aware of the dispatch of at least ten shipments on DC-9 jets from Caracas to Mexico, each consisting of more than 5 tons of cocaine.²²
d.	Transportation
	<p>i. Land</p>

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Insufficient information.

ii. Sea

- Multi-ton shipments from Puerto Cabello to the U.S. and Europe.²³

iii. Air

- Makled used Venezuelan airports, including the presidential runway, to transport cocaine for FARC and the Venezuelan military. The flights were headed to the United States, Mexico and Central America.²⁴
- Makled said in an interview that 5 or 6 airplanes loaded with cocaine were leaving San Fernando de Apure to Honduras each day.²⁵

iv. Intermodal container

- Insufficient information.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- The Makled organization used contacts with corrupt government and military officials to facilitate the shipment of other organization's cocaine.²⁶ Makled declared that he bribed government officials making payments to the governor of Carabobo state, Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez.²⁷
- Makled said in an October interview with Venezuela's El Nacional newspaper that he paid millions of dollars to government officials and top military brass and has the vouchers and bank account numbers to prove it. Makled's family owned a shipping business and he said he made the payments to be allowed to operate at some of Venezuela's largest ports.²⁸
- Makled affirmed that he bribed the general Henry Rangel, from the Venezuelan National Guard and Hugo Carvajal, the head of Venezuelan Military Intelligence.²⁹ Makled also said that he sponsored Hugo Chavez's referendum (\$2 million dollars in 2007) and that some members of the Venezuelan National Assembly owned illicit crops in that country.³⁰

b. Concealment

- Information not found.

c. Deception

- Information not found.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Information not found.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- There are reports that Walid Makled organization maintained a cooperative business relationship with Cartel de los Soles, which is made up of corrupt officials from the Venezuelan military. Makled also worked with Cartel de los Comisarios but when both factions started to fight for the control of routes, Makled chose to work with Cartel de los Comisarios and Venezuelan high rank government officials (close to Cartel de los Soles) decided to go after Makled, making public that he was a drug trafficker.³¹
- Jose Maria Corredor (AKA: El Boyaco) (cooperative). Colombian national extradited to the United States. Corredor was indicted for supporting terrorism as he coordinated weapons for cocaine deals for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Corredor was FARC's representative in Venezuela for the coordination of drug traffic Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

in that country.³²

- Gerardo Álvarez Vásquez (AKA: El Indio) (cooperative). Makled maintained a close relationship with Álvarez Vásquez, one of the kingpins in the Beltrán Leyva cartel. According to Mexico's Secretariat of National Defense, Álvarez controlled organized crime in the states of Guerrero, Morelos and Mexico, and served as contact for buying cocaine from suppliers in Central and South America, including Makled.³³
- Cartel del Norte del Valle (conflictual). The fact that Walid Makled has been accused of Colombian drug lord Wilber Varela's death, suggested problems existed between the groups..

b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.

- See above.

c. *Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.*

- FARC. Makled coordinated cocaine for weapons deals with this group.³⁴

I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)

- Information not found.

J. Technical Sophistication

- Information not found.

K. Penchant for Innovation

- Information not found.

L. Activities in United States

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- Information not found.

b. *Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities*

- Information not found.

c. Linkages with US groups

i. Market/transaction links

- Information not found.

ii. Stable supplier

- Information not found.

iii. Franchise arrangement

- Information not found.

iv. HQ and Branch office

- Due to Makled's connections with Venezuelan officials and his knowledge of their government's involvement in the drug trade it is possible that he might receive light sentence in return for recanting his previous statements and refraining from divulging more incriminating information regarding Venezuelan officials.

d. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities

- Walid Makled was arrested in Colombia and has since been extradited to Venezuela. Due to his intimate knowledge of and statements regarding corruption in the Venezuelan government it is also possible that he might be silenced with a harsh sentence. In addition, the arrest and information gained from Makled might lead to a complete dismantling of his organization.

e. Additional insights

- Makled is of significant importance as a result of his Syrian background and ties to the pro-Iran, Venezuelan government. His arrest does not necessarily remove his

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importance as his network and contacts might still be in place.

Other Notes

- The U.S. State Department, in its most recent report on international drug trafficking, emphasized the prominence of Mexican-Venezuelan drug networks and made reference to reports of “an increased presence of Mexican drug trafficking organizations, including the Sinaloa cartel and Los Zetas in operations to smuggle drugs through Venezuela.”³⁵

¹ “Manhattan U.S. Attorney announces indictment of one of the world’s most significant narcotics kingpins,” United States Attorney Southern District of New York Press Release, *U.S. Department of Justice*, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/November10/makledwalidindictmentpr.pdf>.

² Ibid.

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 Vivian Sequera, “Walid Makled, Jailed Drug Kingpin, Implicates Chavez Government” *Huffington Post*, April 04, 2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/04/walid-makled-chavez-government_n_844347.html

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mark P. Sullivan, “Venezuela: Issues in the 111th Congress”, Congressional Research Service, *U.S. Department of the State*, November 24, 2010, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/152611.pdf>.

⁷ “Fiscalía venezolana investiga denuncias de Makled,” *Semana*, April 5, 2011, <http://www.semana.com/mundo/fiscalia-venezolana-investiga-denuncias-makled/154623-3.aspx>.

⁸ “Drug Trafficking Suspect Wanted by U.S. Is Arrested in Colombia,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/21/world/americas/21colombia.html>.

⁹ Anna Mahjar-Barducci, “Hizballah in Venezuela: The Man Who Knows Too Much,” *Hudson New York*, April 15, 2011, <http://www.hudson-ny.org/2041/hizballah-in-venezuela>.

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ “Drug Enforcement Administration Congressional Budget Submission, FY2011 Performance Budget,” U.S. Department of Justice, <http://www.justice.gov/jmd/2011justification/pdf/fy11-dea-justification.pdf>.

¹² “Manhattan U.S. Attorney announces indictment of one of the world’s most significant narcotics kingpins,” United States Attorney Southern District of New York Press Release, *U.S. Department of Justice*, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/November10/makledwalidindictmentpr.pdf>.

¹³ “Policía detiene al presunto asesino de alias 'Jabón',” *Semana*, June 7, 2010, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/policia-detiene-presunto-asesino-alias-jabon/143296-3.aspx>.

¹⁴ “Manhattan U.S. Attorney announces indictment of one of the world’s most significant narcotics kingpins,” United States Attorney Southern District of New York Press Release, *U.S. Department of Justice*, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/November10/makledwalidindictmentpr.pdf>.

¹⁵ “Makled keeps silence in court; continues remanded in custody,” *El Universal*, May 13, 2011, <http://english.eluniversal.com/2011/05/17/makled-had-deals-with-pdval-and-casa.shtml>.

¹⁶ “Drug Enforcement Administration Congressional Budget Submission, FY2011 Performance Budget,” U.S. Department of Justice, <http://www.justice.gov/jmd/2011justification/pdf/fy11-dea-justification.pdf>.

¹⁷ “Makled had deals with Pdval and CASA,” *El Universal*, May 17, 2011, <http://english.eluniversal.com/2011/05/17/makled-had-deals-with-pdval-and-casa.shtml>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Fiscalía venezolana pide la extradición de dos presuntos cómplices de Makled,” *Semana*, May 16, 2011, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/fiscalia-venezolana-pide-extradicion-dos-presuntos-complices-makled/156832-3.aspx>.

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- ²¹ "Fiscalía venezolana investiga denuncias de Makled," *Semana*, April 5, 2011, <http://www.semana.com/mundo/fiscalia-venezolana-investiga-denuncias-makled/154623-3.aspx>.
- ²² Casto Ocando Hernandez, "Venezuela and Mexico at the Crossroads," Univision, May 30, 2011, <http://univisionnews.tumblr.com/post/5869504960/venezuela-and-mexico-at-the-crossroads>.
- ²³ 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>
- ²⁴ "Narcotrafficker in Colombian Custody Implicates 40 Chavista Generals, Dozens More in Drug Corruption; Alludes to Hezbollah Activities," *InterAmerican Security Watch*, April 4, 2011. <http://interamericansecuritywatch.com/2011/04/04/narcotrafficker-in-colombian-custody-implicates-40-chavista-generals-dozens-more-in-drug-corruption-alludes-to-hezbollah-activities/>
- ²⁵ "Fiscalía venezolana investiga denuncias de Makled," *Semana*, April 5, 2011, <http://www.semana.com/mundo/fiscalia-venezolana-investiga-denuncias-makled/154623-3.aspx>.
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- ²⁷ "Walid Makled Claims Collusion by Government Officials in Drug Trafficking," Caracas, *Globovision*, (Globovision.com in Spanish), Sep. 30, 2010, OSC: LAP20100930215002
- ²⁸ "Accused drug kingpin extradited to Venezuela," *CNN News*, May 9, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-09/world/venezuela.colombia.extradition_1_drug-trafficking-venezuelan-officials-top-drug-lords?_s=PM:WORLD.
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- ³¹ "El hombre que sabe demasiado," *Semana*, November 6, 2010, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/hombre-sabe-demasiado/146908-3.aspx>.
- ³² "Informe detalla nexos entre empresario venezolano y narco colombiano," *Semana*, December 11, 2009, <http://www.semana.com/narcotrafico/informe-detalla-nexos-entre-empresario-venezolano-narco-colombiano/132521-3.aspx>.
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