

# Tampa Bay Times

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Guest Column

**Robert Mazur**

## ***Why you should care that the Honduran president's brother is going to prison for life | Column***

Tony Hernandez was central to a huge cocaine-trafficking syndicate that sent 200 tons of cocaine to the U.S., plunged Honduras into a narco-state, impoverished its people and contributed to the exodus of its citizens to the U.S. border.



Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernandez, brother of Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernandez, has been sentenced to life in prison for his conviction on drug charges in Manhattan federal court. [ FERNANDO ANTONIO ]

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The brother of the president of Honduras is going to prison for life in the United States for violent drug crimes. His crimes, which implicated the Honduran president himself, helped ship 185,000 kilograms of cocaine to the United States, turned Honduras into a narco-state

and reduced much of the population to abject poverty and fear. His crimes are one of the reasons that Hondurans are at the U.S. border with Mexico right now, trying to flee their homeland.

In passing sentence on Juan Antonio “Tony” Hernandez this week, Judge Kevin Castel concluded: “The trial evidence was strong. ... Here, the trafficking was indeed state-sponsored.”

Tony Hernandez “acted as a facilitator in bribes to politicians, including his brother, (President) Juan Orlando Hernandez and the National Party,” the judge said. He added that the defendant was selling protection from the Honduran government in the person of his brother, the president.

The judge detailed two murders carried out at Tony Hernandez’s behest; one was a co-conspirator he feared might cooperate with authorities.



Robert Mazur stands in front of the private jet he used during the operation when he worked undercover inside the Medellin Cartel. [ Courtesy of Robert Mazur ]

At the sentencing hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew Laroche defined Tony Hernandez as a central figure in one of the largest and most violent cocaine-trafficking conspiracies in the world. He added that, for 15 years, Hernandez used his social and

political power to operate Honduras as a narco-state. “They were able to do so by conspiring with some of the most powerful individuals in that country,” Laroche said, “including his brother, the current president of Honduras.”

Laroche listed a litany of horrifying acts: Tony Hernandez corrupted law enforcement and military forces in Honduras with payoffs that led to their participating in drug trafficking and committing brutal acts of violence, including murders. Hernandez also accepted millions in drug money and funneled it into the National Party campaigns in exchange for promises of protection for drug traffickers. “What sets this case apart is the depth of corruption that involved this defendant and co-conspirators,” he said.

Hernandez’s lawyer tried to blame Americans for their own drug habits. I’d heard this exact same argument before, when I lived undercover within the Medellin Cartel. The likes of Pablo Escobar always jokingly suggested that, “If there was no demand, there’d be no supply.”

The massive corruption transformed Honduras into one of the principal transshipment points for cocaine in the world, and caused the country to become one of the most violent places on the planet. In 2013, the city of San Pedro Sula was the deadliest place in the world, and two out of three Hondurans now live in poverty.

The judge noted that the amount of cocaine Hernandez helped ship to the United States amounted to 1.5 billion doses. Based on the judge’s calculations, that’s equivalent to 4½ snorts for every American.

The judge compared the significance of Tony Hernandez’s prosecution to the importance of America attacking the leaders of La Cosa Nostra in the 1970s. That initiative, he said, led to the American Mafia becoming a shadow of what it once was. It was the judge’s opinion that Tony Hernandez’s sentence would begin that journey with the dismantling of the threat from the Honduran narco-trafficking syndicate.

From his looming life in prison, the most important thing that Tony Hernandez can do for the people of Honduras and the United States is to become a witness to the truth about the role his brother played in the horrific crimes carried out by the narco-state of Honduras.

*Robert Mazur, a federal agent for 27 years, is a court-certified expert in money-laundering related matters in both the U.S. and Canada. He is the New York Times best-selling author of “The Infiltrator,” a memoir of his life undercover as a money launderer within the underworld, and was an executive producer of the film by the same name. He is president of KYC Solutions, a company that provides speaking, training, consulting and expert witness services globally.*