

# Tampa Bay Times

[Opinion](#)

Guest Column

Robert Mazur

## ***Trump's Honduran ally could face life in prison***

In order for the Honduran people to save their families and their way of life, the U.S. must continue to help them by maintaining reliable and trustworthy collaboration between our respective law enforcement agencies and support their fight against decades of systemic corruption, the author writes.



Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, center, is taken in handcuffs to a waiting aircraft as he is extradited to the United States to face drug trafficking charges at an Air Force base in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on April 21, 2022. Hernández's trial in New York starts Monday. (AP Photo/Elmer Martinez, File) [ ELMER MARTINEZ | AP ]

Published Feb. 9, 2024|Updated Feb. 12, 2024

In 2021, then-President Donald Trump praised Juan Orlando Hernández, the president of Honduras, for “working with the United States very closely” and for his help “stopping drugs at a level that has never happened.” Contrary to what Trump told the world about the Honduran president, agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration, prosecutors with the

Department of Justice and anyone who listened to the truth, knew that Juan Orlando Hernandez was an enemy of the American people.

At the very moment that Trump claimed the Honduran president was a drug-fighting ally, that same president's brother, Tony Hernandez, was set to go to trial in a New York federal court for his role in a drug trafficking and murder conspiracy that caused more than 185,000 kilograms of cocaine to flood into the United States, causing the death of countless Americans. Unless former President Trump ignored his advisers, he had to know that there was overwhelming evidence that the president of Honduras that supported his immigration policy was the kingpin of a drug and murder conspiracy that involved a room full of corrupt Honduran politicians and some of the most ruthless drug traffickers in the world, including "El Chapo" Guzman, the former head of Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel.



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 ]

In late 2021, Hernandez's hand-picked successor ran for the Honduran presidency and lost to an anti-corruption candidate. Only months later, with Joe Biden in the White House, the new Honduran president complied with a request from the U.S. to arrest and extradite Juan Orlando Hernandez to the U.S. to face a massive indictment that, if he's convicted, will put him behind bars for the rest of his life.

The trial of Juan Orlando Hernandez is set to begin next week, but what happened this week appears to have sealed the former Honduran president's fate. Until this week, he was one of three defendants in the upcoming trial; the other two defendants are people he knows very well. One, Mauricio Hernandez Pineda, a former high-ranking member of the Honduran National Police, is his cousin. Hernandez Pineda is alleged to have, in coordination with Juan Orlando Hernandez and others, provided protection for massive drug movements, trafficked illegal drugs, sold traffickers law enforcement secrets, and

much more. Unfortunately for the former Honduran president, this week, his cousin decided to plead guilty and become a government witness.

Far worse for the former president is the decision made today by his other co-defendant, Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares, also known as “El Tigre” (*The Tiger*), his hand-picked head of the Honduran National Police. He entered a plea of guilty and will also testify against Juan Orlando Hernandez. According to many witnesses who will be called in the Honduran President’s trial next week, Bonilla Valladares not only provided an army of Honduran police officers to protect and escort dozens of truckloads of illegal drugs headed to the United States, he was also an enforcer that witnesses say killed on behalf of the drug conspiracy that was run by the former Honduran president, his brother, and a score of dirty Honduran politicians.

One might wonder why the president of a country would do what Juan Orlando Hernandez is alleged to have done. There are two simple answers to that question: money and power. Witnesses will confirm that he and others on his behalf accepted millions in cash used to finance his political campaigns, to buy the loyalty of other politicians who turned a blind eye to his corruption, and to rig elections.

The saga of Juan Orlando Hernandez’s sale of his country to drug cartels will not only unfold from the lips of his two former co-defendants, but it will also be heard from dozens of other witnesses whose testimony is corroborated by covertly recorded conversations, intercepted electronic communications, photos, ledgers and much more. U.S. prosecutors detailed their evidence in a [Motion in Limine](#) filed in May of last year, and [another one filed last month](#). The details in these motions tell you much more than just why the government believes the evidence incriminating the former Honduran president is far beyond any reasonable doubt, it also helps you to understand why so many Hondurans who were subjected to the tyranny imposed by those in control of their government were gravely concerned about their safety, and the safety of their families.

Juan Orlando Hernandez will face justice next week. We should never forget that, although very brave DEA agents and U.S. prosecutors deserve significant credit for that achievement, there are other unsung heroes that made significant contributions, including many brave journalists that have been murdered. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 38 journalists and media workers were killed in Honduras from 1992 to 2024. Other organizations suggest that number is much higher. There are also countless Honduran police officers and military personnel that refused to be bought, which caused their death.

The same man that was praised by former President Trump for his assistance in immigration matters and his alleged leadership in the war on drugs is quoted by witnesses to have offered another motive for his crimes. As it is reported, with a big smile, he is quoted to have said that “We will shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos.” That rings of an effort by an enemy that wants to rain hell on American families, a motive that is shared by major trafficking organizations around the world. They want to destroy the American family and our way of life.

In order for the Honduran people to save their families and their way of life, we must continue to help them by maintaining reliable and trustworthy collaboration between our respective law enforcement agencies and support their fight against decades of systemic corruption. We must build reliable friendships and common goals in every manner possible. This is a formula needed throughout Central and South America because, although very few are willing to admit it, Juan Orlando Hernandez is not an anomaly. Too many people around the world suffer at the hands of too many strong men like Juan Orlando Hernandez, and some of us will have to risk our lives to stop them.

*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.*