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## What a Murder in Chile Reveals About Maduro's Relationship With Tren de Aragua

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12 Feb 2025



The Venezuelan government's relationship with Tren de Aragua has come under scrutiny after allegations its interior minister may have been involved in a plot to hire the gang to carry out a political assassination in Chile.

Chilean authorities are seeking the extradition of multiple alleged **Tren de Aragua** members accused of **kidnapping and murdering** former Venezuelan military official Ronald Ojeda in Chile's capital

Santiago. Ojeda's body was discovered in a suitcase, buried under cement, on March 1, 2024, nine days after he was forcibly taken from his apartment by a group dressed as Chilean police officers.

One of the individuals in the crosshairs of Chilean prosecutors is Luis Alfredo Carrillo Ortiz, alias "El Gocho." Colombian police arrested the alleged member of the **transnational Venezuelan criminal gang** on **February 6**.

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A Chilean court has also approved extradition requests to Colombia and the United States for two of the leaders and another member of the same Chilean Tren de Aragua cell, known as Piratas de Aragua. Rafael Enrique Gámez, alias "Turko," is currently locked up in the United States, while Carlos Francisco Gómez Moreno, alias "Bobby," is behind bars in Colombia, as is Piratas member Dayonis Orozco Castillo, alias "Boti."

Ojeda had escaped Venezuela in 2017 after having been accused of being behind an attempted coup. He allegedly participated in another coup attempt in late December 2023. One month before he was kidnapped, Venezuela's defense ministry **condemned** him for "conspiratorial acts."

Three witnesses have claimed the Venezuelan government ordered the crime, according to Chile's Attorney General's Office. One of these witnesses stated that Venezuela's Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello made the request to Tren de Aragua's head leader, Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, alias "**Niño Guerrero**."

Cabello has denied any Venezuelan government involvement in Ojeda's murder, while Venezuela's attorney general **claimed** that the crime was a "false flag" operation involving Chilean intelligence officials aimed at disrupting international relations.

Chile's interior minister Carolina Tohá stated the country will seek Cabello's extradition if investigators find he was involved, although Chilean authorities seem to be under no illusion that the Venezuelan government would agree to such a request.

"From the point of view of the channels at the government level, we are in the situation of the greatest cooling that we have had in relations with Venezuela," Tohá told Chilean news outlet **Cooperativa**.

# InSight Crime Analysis

If the Venezuelan government was behind Ojeda's murder, it would recontextualize its relationship with Tren de Aragua.

Shortly before Ojeda's kidnapping, Venezuela's leaders, such as President Nicolás Maduro and Diosdado Cabello, appeared to have stripped Tren de Aragua of the protection it once enjoyed.

The authorities' September 2023 **takeover** of Tocarón prison in Aragua state, which had functioned as the headquarters for the criminal organization, marked a clear turning point in Tren de Aragua's domestic fortunes, and its members have **continued to face arrest** ever since. However, the gang's main leader, Niño Guerrero, is believed to have escaped the crackdown and remains at large.

But if state officials did contract Tren de Aragua to carry out a political murder, then their apparently relentless pursuit of the gang within Venezuela runs contrary to their permissive relationship toward its international cells.

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Rather than simply being Tren de Aragua's ally or enemy, if the government played a role in Ojeda's death, it would mean that state officials have a pragmatic willingness to work with the gang, as long as it does not impact Venezuela's national security situation.

But Tren de Aragua is not about to become the state's international assassination agency.

The **arrests** of multiple **leaders** and large-scale security operations in Peru, Chile, and Colombia have weakened the organization's power, and there is **tenuous evidence** linking many of the supposed cells in the United States to Tren de Aragua's central organization.

Ojeda's murder drew international attention to accusations of the Venezuelan government's involvement, attention Maduro's government would be keen to avoid increasing.

*Featured image: Alleged Tren de Aragua member Luis Alfredo Carrillo Ortiz, alias "Gocho," and Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello. Credit: Attorney General's Office of Colombia / RRSS*

