Bolivia jails prosecutor investigating Trump operative Cerimedo on Washington's orders

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2 October 2026

Bolivian police arrested Attorney General Roger Mariaca late Wednesday night at Viru Viru International Airport in Santa Cruz, less than 48 hours after the Trump administration revoked his US visa and accused him of taking bribes from drug traffickers. Mariaca was leading the case against Fernando Cerimedo, the Argentine political operative tied to Donald Trump's inner circle. After serving as Bolivian President Rodrigo Paz's top adviser, he has been jailed since August, accused of ordering the murder of his former partner.

Santa Cruz departmental prosecutor Alberto Zeballos was arrested with Mariaca. The same night, hooded police agents occupied the Attorney General's headquarters in Sucre, breaking up a press conference denouncing his "kidnapping." Defense Minister Ernesto Justiniano has said he does not rule out extraditing Mariaca to the United States.

Washington has publicly backed the operation. On Monday, September 28, the State Department announced visa restrictions on 27 officials and businessmen from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru "in support of fellow Shield of the Americas participants." The list included Mariaca and more than 20 Bolivian prosecutors and judges. After the arrest, Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote that the administration "stands firmly with President [Paz] and Bolivia's democratically elected government as it takes bold and decisive actions."

The arrest makes clear the abject subordination of Paz and the Shield of the Americas governments to Washington and confirms that the Cerimedo case had opened a Pandora's box. It threatened to expose the money, disinformation machinery and alleged drug-trafficking ties behind the far-right governments Washington has helped bring to power across the region.

Shutting down the Cerimedo case

Cerimedo was charged on August 20 with attempted femicide after his partner, Bolivian lawyer and activist Nadia Beller, survived a shooting in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Prosecutors then opened investigations for illicit enrichment, for protecting irregular flights allegedly carrying drugs from Beni toward Brazil, and in the so-called "narcoencomiendas" case.

His connections run directly to Trump. His business partner is Brad Parscale, Trump's former campaign manager. He has been linked to Roger Stone, the longtime Trump confidant who lobbied for the pardon of former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, convicted of trafficking cocaine into the United States. In February, Cerimedo was named "Hispanic Political Consultant of the Year" at Mar-a-Lago, and Rubio later appeared alongside Paz and Cerimedo at the Shield of the Americas summit in Doral, Florida. Cerimedo ran digital operations for Javier Milei's 2023 campaign in Argentina and spread claims of fraud in Brazil's 2022 election in support of Jair Bolsonaro. A serious investigation into who financed his bot farms and micro-targeting operations would expose the efforts to install governments that serve as instruments of US policy.

Ten days before his arrest, Mariaca warned "high officials of the executive" who sought to "block" the Cerimedo investigation to "be ready to face the consequences."

The government's case against Mariaca rests largely on a video of Sebastián Marset, the Uruguayan drug trafficker captured in Bolivia in March and handed over to the United States, in which he allegedly calls the prosecutor "my friend" and claims to have paid him and a former minister half a million dollars. On Thursday, Government Minister Marco Antonio Oviedo admitted that the government had had the video since March. It did nothing for six months, moving only after Mariaca's office jailed the president's own adviser and Washington issued its sanctions. Oviedo now calls the attorney general the "head of a narco-terrorist structure."

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not vouch for Mariaca, who was appointed in 2024 by a legislature controlled by the

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Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo—MAS) and headed the Santa Cruz prosecutor's office when Marset escaped a police operation in 2023. But his personal honesty is not the issue. A foreign government singled out the official prosecuting one of its own operatives, and the Bolivian government jailed him within two days. Cerimedo's lawyer now says his client could be released by November.

IMF austerity under a state of exception

The crackdown on the Public Ministry coincides with the harshest austerity program Bolivia has seen in decades. On September 18, Paz abolished the diesel subsidy, raising the price per liter 83 percent, from 9.80 to 17.95 bolivianos. He then promulgated a $1.9 billion agreement with the International Monetary Fund that commits Bolivia to eliminating all fuel subsidies from 2027, cutting the fiscal deficit and loosening the exchange-rate regime. The state of exception in force since June, which restricts freedom of movement and assembly, was extended for another 90 days.

This is the second such offensive in less than a year. A December 2025 decree raised gasoline prices 86 percent and diesel more than 160 percent, provoking an indefinite strike that the leadership of the Bolivian Workers Central (Central Obrera Boliviana—COB) called off in January.

In May, a COB general strike and peasant and indigenous blockades grew into a 51-day uprising. On May 18, police and soldiers killed at least four protesters in La Paz, and terrorism warrants were issued against COB leader Mario Argollo and 24 other union leaders. A leaked audio shows Cerimedo and Paz discussing a "soap opera" that described protesters as "narco-terrorists" to justify the repression.

On June 19, Argollo signed a "pacification" agreement with Paz and called off the blockades. Less than 24 hours later, a decree suspended the right to demonstrate and authorized the military to clear highways without a court order.

The military side of the arrangement with the US is clear. In May, at the height of the uprising, the Shield's member states issued a joint statement condemning the highway blockades and backing Paz. On September 22–24, days after the diesel subsidy was abolished, 70 troops from the US, Bolivia and four other Shield countries trained together in La Paz in crowd control. "US Armed Forces are on the ground in Bolivia," boasted Joseph Humire, US Assistant Secretary of War for Americas Security Affairs.

The *dieselazo* (the massive diesel price hikes and austerity measures unleashed by the Paz government) has now provoked opposition from miners, teachers, transport workers and indigenous organizations, who are threatening renewed blockades and national strikes. The renewed state of exception suspending democratic rights, combined with the "narco-terrorist" case against Mariaca, is aimed at preparing an even more brutal crackdown of social opposition.

"This is only beginning," declared presidential spokesman José Luis Gálvez. "Narco-terrorism" charges, warrantless raids and an army trained by US forces in crowd control are ready for use against the working class.

Former President Evo Morales of the MAS has denounced the arrest as an effort "to save Cerimedo," but his answer is to call on the armed forces to defend the "sovereignty of the homeland." The army is an instrument of the Bolivian ruling class, under the MAS as under Paz. Two decades of MAS rule kept the capitalist state intact and opened the way for Paz.

Bolivian workers cannot defeat IMF austerity and US domination through the COB bureaucracy. The task is not to "pressure" the COB to "make the general strike effective" either. That is precisely the line of the Morenoite pseudo-left, both of the Bolivian MST and of the Revolutionary Workers League-Fourth International (LOR-CI), affiliated with the Permanent Revolution Current, which with its rhetoric of "self-organization" and "cabildos" (open assemblies) cloaks its rejection of building an independent Marxist leadership. Its function is to manage the revolt and keep workers oriented toward pressuring the rotten apparatus, rather than drawing the necessary political conclusions from its betrayals.

The answer to an internationally coordinated offensive of capital can only be an internationally coordinated and politically independent offensive of the working class: in Bolivia's mines, schools and neighborhoods, in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia, and in the United States itself, where the same oligarchy enforcing austerity and repression abroad is dismantling every social and democratic conquest won by workers at home.

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