

Mexican security chief confirms cartel family members entered US in a deal with Trump administration

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A truck burns on a street in Culiacan, Sinaloa state, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023. (AP Photo/Martin Urista, file)

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico’s security chief confirmed Tuesday that 17 family members of cartel leaders crossed into the U.S. last week as part of a deal between a son of the former head of the Sinaloa Cartel and the Trump administration.

Mexican Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch confirmed a report by independent journalist Luis Chaparro that family members of Ovidio Guzman Lopez, who was extradited to the United States in 2023, had entered the U.S.

Guzmán Lopez is one of the brothers left running a faction of the Sinaloa Cartel after notorious capo Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán was imprisoned in the U.S. Video showed the family members walking across the border from Tijuana with their suitcases to waiting U.S. agents.

Rumors had circulated last week that the younger Guzmán would plead guilty to avoid trial for several drug trafficking charges in the U.S. after being extradited in 2023.

García Harfuch confirmed the family members' crossing in a radio interview and said it was clear to Mexican authorities that they were doing so after negotiations between Guzmán López and the U.S. government.

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He believed that was the case because the former cartel boss, whose lawyer said in January he had entered negotiations with U.S. authorities, had been pointing fingers at members of other criminal organizations likely as part of a cooperation agreement.

"It is evident that his family is going to the U.S. because of a negotiation or an offer that the Department of Justice is giving him," Garcia Harfuch said.

He said that none of the family members were being pursued by Mexican authorities and that the government of U.S. President Donald Trump "has to share information" with Mexican prosecutors, something it has not yet done.

The confirmation by García Harfuch comes the same day that the U.S. Attorney General's Office announced it was charging a number of top cartel leaders with "narcoterrorism" for the first time since the Trump administration declared a number of cartels as foreign terrorist organizations.

While prosecutors declined to comment on the video of the family, U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon for the Southern District of California and other officials sent a warning to cartel members, repeatedly citing the Sinaloa Cartel by name.

"Let me be direct, to the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel, you are no longer the hunters, you are the hunted. You will be betrayed by your friends, you will be hounded by your enemies, and you will ultimately find yourself and your face here in a courtroom in the Southern District of California," Gordon said.