

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak today about a common enemy we all face and must unite against. This threat represents the most significant national security and public safety threat to the American people. It is the threat we face from the Mexican cartels and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs).

I am grateful for the opportunity today to share my experience as someone who had a long and rewarding 24-year career in Texas law enforcement, retiring as a Captain with the Texas Department of Public Safety's Intelligence & Counter-Terrorism division, commanding the Texas Rangers Border Security Operation Center (BSOC), which operates as a cross border operations center, working closely with U.S. intelligence agencies, federal, state, and local law enforcement along the border region.

During my career, I was assigned to nine different duty stations across Texas and on the U.S.-Mexico border in multiple cities, including El Paso, Brownsville, and Laredo, Texas. I have worked and led some of the most complex investigations and intelligence collection against several cartels, including the most hyper-violent at the time, the Los Zetas. It would be their tradecraft and discipline brought into the narco-underworld that would cause the rise of the Mexican cartel evolution from organized crime, into an insurgency, to terrorism, and ultimately into a parallel government as we see them today.

While today's focus is on the impact of Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), it is crucial to address the distinction that exists between TCOs and the Mexican cartels. By comprehending this distinction, elected leaders can better develop comprehensive strategies to combat the Mexican cartels and set priorities that will leverage new authorities for the Homeland Security Enterprise's (HSE) success to defeat these dark networks.

It is imperative to understand the vast disparity between TCOs and the Mexican cartels. In South Texas, for example, it is common for law enforcement to apprehend juveniles almost daily who smuggle people, drugs, and act as lookouts or halcones (falcons), as they are also known across the southwest border. I have personally witnessed young juveniles as young as 12 years of age smuggling hundreds of pounds of narcotics in a stolen vehicle; ultimately, crashing into a residence after fleeing from law enforcement. There are many instances of juveniles crossing into the United States overseeing stash houses who direct the care, custody, and control of dozens of economic migrants who illegally entered the U.S. These activities constitute the distinction of a TCO.

The Mexican cartels on the other hand control territory, which stretches far beyond Mexico's borders. The Sinaloa Cartel and Cartel Jalisco New Generation (CJNG) are Mexico's two largest cartels. Their activities are no longer isolated to Mexico. These complex dark networks span the world building relationships with other underworld networks now impacting nations in every region of the globe.

The Mexican cartel's evolution would also spark mass hyper-violence upon innocent Mexican citizens and economic migrants seeking a better life just trying to pass through Mexico. Since 2007, there have been over 340,000 murders in Mexico with disappearances now exceeding 100,000 people. The cartels have a saying, "You can't count a body that doesn't exist." Therefore, they have begun mass incineration of human bodies known as "Guiso," where human remains are cut into pieces and their remains are cooked to ash.

The cartels leverage what is known as "Sicario's," trained assassins who operate as enforcers. Today, they employ tens of thousands of these individuals, including possessing entire enforcement wings within the organization. What is not well known publicly is that many of these sicarios go through basic, intermediate, and advanced training. Most of the training is conducted by former law enforcement and special forces operators like Guatemalan Kaibiles, Mexico's elite Gafe (similar to American Green Berets), and many other countries. Training is also conducted by known terrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) which are designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the U.S. State Department.

The cartels employ a vast array of military-grade weaponry, comprising of surface to air missiles, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons like the AT4, LAW rockets, RPGs, heavy weapon mounted systems including 50 cal. belt-fed machine guns, grenade launchers, 40mm grenades, hand grenades, and fully automatic-machine guns manufactured from around the world. The majority of these military-grade weapons are purchased through corruption in armories throughout Central American countries. The cartels also operate first, second, third, and fourth-generation armored vehicles as they battle for control of territory. The cartels over time have learned mobility is life, and with each generation of armored vehicles, they employ lighter more agile armored vehicles.

The cartels contract globally with long-haul smugglers and their alien smuggling organizations. They have adjusted from a human smuggling model over the last 2 ½ years, into a human trafficking model, placing hundreds of thousands of economic migrants into debt bondage. As an

example of this transition, Cartel del Golfo also known as CDG, which operates along the Texas/Mexico border from Brownsville to Roma, Texas was so emboldened in February of 2021, by the mass migration of economic migrant's numbers that they began placing wristbands on men, women, and children to ensure the tax/piso (payment process) was established. This process created an ongoing payment model, which first collects the migrant's personal identifying information (PII) into the cartel's database. This provides the ability to keep them into debt bondage as their family's personal information in the country of origin is firmly documented including establishing the migrants' destination in the U.S. This ensures future payments can be secured in the long term. For the first time in American history, people both legally and illegally in the United States are in debt bondage to terrorist/criminal organizations, operating in a foreign country for years, if not decades to come. This transition firmly establishes America's new slave trade.

As someone who has documented the cartel's evolution into a parallel government, led some of the most complex investigations, and sent critical real-time intelligence supporting precision-led operations with Mexico's most elite special forces, to both rescue migrants from mass murder and apprehend leaders with the cartels, I want to be very clear, the Mexican cartels will not stop, they are going to have to be stopped. The entire approach for success against the cartels hinges on new authorities, prioritizing tools of national power, allowing the use of network theory, and a desperately needed departure from the failed law enforcement investigative model.

The Mexican cartels have no choice but to increase their capabilities. Their fears are driven by territorial disputes and new advancements by rival cartels that could result in their destruction. This is the reason for their ever-increasing development of new tradecraft, technology, and the weaponization of controlled substances. Examples are the evolution of fentanyl analogs by cartel chemists from regular fentanyl, into para-fentanyl, then to cera-fentanyl, and the recent introduction of xylazine (or tranq, as it is referred) and their increasing appetite for horrific acts of hyper-violence against the innocent.

The Mexican cartels are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans over the last several years and yet they are still not designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). There is not one designated terrorist organization in the world responsible for killing this many Americans, and yet we still see no action from the U.S. government to hold the Mexican government, and the Mexican cartels, accountable for the deaths of so many Americans.

Conclusion

In closing, there is a vast disparity of capabilities between TCOs and the Mexican cartels. The threats from the Mexican cartels to our citizens today are unparalleled. It is imperative that we marshal our collective will and direct the full force of our national power to confront these organizations. The time for half-measures and fragmented efforts has passed. Now is the moment for decisive and unwavering action to restore safety and security to our communities. This body must be committed to the protection of our citizens (your constituents) as the utmost priority. The future of our great nation depends on our focus against this common enemy.

To all mothers, fathers, and loved ones who have lost someone to these cartels, you are not forgotten. It is with steadfast commitment that I stand before you today, knowing that there can be no appeasement or reasoning with this evil. This is a good versus evil fight. May history remember this day as an important moment when our nation committed in a resounding decree to end the Mexican cartels, to protect American citizens, and in doing so, we secure a brighter future for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to taking your questions.