

# Commentary: The Genius of Trump's Terrorist Designation for Mexican Cartels

Despite the measures the United States takes on our side of the border, our border security will not be fully addressed until the Mexican state itself is a reliable partner.

President Trump last week signaled his intention to designate the Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO). In doing so, he takes the most aggressive step yet toward addressing the brutal violence that plagues Mexico and is fueling a migrant crisis at the southern U.S. border.

Mexico's ongoing descent into a gangland is brought into current focus with the horrific murders of six women and children of dual Mexican and American citizenship. This came on the heels of Mexican government forces being routed by the cartels, who were ultimately successful in releasing the son of notorious cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. Over several hours, heavily armed cartel gunmen fought the government with military weapons in a conflict that looked like something out of Yemen, rather than mere miles from the U.S. border.

The murder rate in Mexico has climbed to its highest levels over the previous two years, featuring grotesque displays of cartel barbarism including hanging people from bridges, burning them alive in cages, dismembering victims, or dissolving them in acid. Just last week, the Zetas cartel dumped 11 bags full of dismembered human body parts in the Mexican border state of Nuevo Leon in an effort to intimidate authorities.

More than 250,000 people have been killed in cartel violence since 2006, according to the Mexican government. Around 40,000 people remain missing.

The cartels flourish because of the complicity of government officials, many of whom are paid handsomely by the cartels, and lately, by an administration that apparently is in denial about the scope of the problem. "Hugs, not bullets," was the platform that current Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador offered to address cartel violence.

## When an FTO Designation Is Necessary

The power of the cartels lies not simply in their size or resources. It's in the infrastructure that allows them to flourish. And that is what an FTO designation is aimed at addressing.

The Mexican cartels are about much more than the illegal drugs business. In many ways, the Mexican cartels are intertwined with the rest of the Mexican state.

Over the past decade, they've diversified into oil and gas, agriculture, commercial fishing, and more recently, the mass smuggling of Central American migrants across the U.S. southern border—an enterprise that generates billions annually. They are aided in these efforts by a host of politicians, bankers, lawyers, accountants, and the rest of the infrastructure that facilitates commercial activity.

An FTO designation would make it much more difficult to carry on this activity with impunity. Once a particular group is designated as a terrorist organization, it is illegal for people in the United States knowingly to offer their support to the group and its members cannot enter the country. Critically, financial institutions that become aware they have funds connected to the group must block the money and alert the Treasury Department.

In short, an FTO designation starves the cartel of the business, government, and banking networks it relies upon by targeting its patrons—largely the Mexican elite in the business, government, and financial sectors.

Wealthy and connected Mexicans rely heavily on the American financial system to manage their wealth and American property holdings. Many of their children attend American universities, and they often travel to the United States for health care.

Now, as these wealthy Mexicans find themselves connected to an FTO, all of that access will be eliminated. Facilitating business or government connections for the cartels suddenly will have the potential to exact a much higher price from the complicit. And squeezing the financial, governmental, and business networks that provide resources the cartels will be invaluable in diminishing their influence.

This will hold particularly true if President Trump heeds the advice of Reps. Chip

Roy (R-Texas) and Mark Green (R-Tenn.) who have introduced legislation calling for the FTO designation to be applied to three of the most ruthless and politically violent cartels: the Renosa/Los Metros faction of the Gulf Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and the Cartel Del Noreste faction of Los Zetas.

Such a targeted move will focus resources on the biggest sources of violence, but it will also limit the destabilizing impact a more blanket designation could have on Mexico as a whole.

## **Grasping for Serious Complaints**

Mexican president López Obrador, for his part, has rejected the idea, citing “sovereignty” concerns, and has requested a meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. One hopes this move from the White House will motivate López Obrador finally to get serious about addressing the cartel violence that is literally killing his country from within.

Meanwhile, those desperate to find something to criticize worry that an FTO designation will “harm Mexico’s reputation,” as if the bodies hanging from bridges weren’t doing that already.

León Krauze at *Slate* fretted that the designation will “backfire” because Trump will use it to further vilify the country—an interesting claim if one considers that Mexicans living in areas controlled by cartels designated as FTOs will actually have a stronger case for asylum in the United States.

But those who truly understand the dynamics in Mexico, what’s fueling the migrant crisis, and how dangerously close we are to having a failed state on our southern border have applauded the move. Because despite the measures the United States takes on our side of the border, our border security will not be fully addressed until the Mexican state itself is a reliable partner. And that will not happen—indeed, it cannot happen—until the deadly grip of the cartels is loosened for good.

*This is a commentary submitted and published with the author’s permission. If you wish to submit a commentary to Texas Scorecard, please submit your article to [submission@texasscorecard.com](mailto:submission@texasscorecard.com).*



Rachel Bovard

Rachel Bovard is the senior director of policy at the Conservative Partnership Institute.

---

Source:

<https://texasscorecard.com/commentary/commentary-the-genius-of-trumps-terrorist-designation-for-mexican-cartels/>

[Disclaimer]