

Trump administration labels cartels as foreign terrorist organizations as CIA flies drones over Mexico

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20 February 2025

The Trump administration officially designated eight Latin American gangs, including six Mexican drug cartels, as “foreign terrorist organizations” (FTOs) on Wednesday. This designation, traditionally reserved for politically motivated groups targeted by the Pentagon and CIA, allows for stricter sanctions and, under the ever-expanding interpretation of legislation that launched the “War on Terror” after 9/11, paves the way to military actions in Mexico and the broader region.

Despite concerns in the corporate media that this move could harm trade and business relations globally due to fears of potential US prosecution and sanctions, the FTO designations are aimed at setting a precedent for ever-more predatory US foreign policies and military interventions.

Revealing the wide net being cast by the decision, Trump’s initial executive order outlined the three main rationales for the designations: 1) the groups’ convergence with “antagonistic foreign governments”; 2) that they are “entities engaged in insurgency and asymmetric warfare”; 3) and their alleged “infiltration into foreign governments across the Western Hemisphere.”

This framework makes clear that the FTO designations use the claim of countering drug trafficking and violent criminal organizations as a pretext for promoting war against geopolitical rivals, building up the repressive apparatus against working class opposition, and regime change operations.

Additionally, the FTO designations open up another line of attack in the Trump administration’s war against migrants. US immigration law prohibits granting asylum to individuals who have provided material support to terrorist organizations, regardless of the

circumstances. Migrants coerced into paying cartels for safe passage or those who have been victims of extortion might be deemed ineligible for asylum based on these interactions.

Even though the media and US officials repeatedly cite it as the main reason behind the escalation of operations against cartels, fentanyl and the tens of thousands of overdose deaths in America are not mentioned in Trump’s order.

The designations coincided with reports by CNN and the *New York Times* of increased CIA-operated drone surveillance over Mexican territory. According to US authorities, the flights, utilizing MQ-9 Reaper drones, are aimed at monitoring cartel activities and locating fentanyl production labs in northern Mexico, with the intelligence gathered being shared with the Mexican government.

The expansion of drone surveillance began under the Biden administration, and has intensified under Trump, especially after the FTO executive order in January. Trump also appointed former Green Beret and CIA paramilitary officer, Ronald Johnson, as US ambassador to Mexico.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum responded to these reports on Wednesday insisting that there is “nothing illegal” about the CIA drone surveillance flights since they were agreed to by her predecessors. The flights were “part of the dialogue,” she said.

But the lack of transparency surrounding these missions, which had never come to light before, suggests that they are part of the escalating US violations of international law. Each week brings new revelations or actions by the Trump administration reaching further toward a wide and indefinite presence

of US forces in Mexico under the pretext of fighting the drug cartels and smuggling of migrants.

Accordingly, Sheinbaum has expressed opposition to the FTO designations, viewing them as potential infringements on Mexican sovereignty, while at the same time advocating for calm and national unity along with increased cooperation and joint investigations with the US military and intelligence apparatus.

On Wednesday, Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander of the US Northern Command, which oversees operations in North America, and Gen. Ricardo Trevilla Trejo, the Mexican Army chief, met and signed a Joint Statement of Understanding on cooperation along the border. This followed the approval by the Mexican Senate green-lighting the deployment of a small group of US Special Forces into Mexico to train Mexican Marines for counter-cartel operations.

On February 3, Washington agreed to suspend 25 percent trade tariffs against Canada and Mexico for 30 days in return for concessions, including the deployment of 10,000 troops by both countries to the borders with the United States. These concessions have not stopped Trump from including both neighboring countries in his planned global tariffs on aluminum and steel.

US officials speaking anonymously with the *Times* gave assurances that the CIA has not yet been authorized to employ drones in lethal actions inside Mexico.

However, billionaire Elon Musk, appointed by Trump to implement much of his economic agenda, responded to the FTO designations by writing on his platform X: “That means they’re eligible for drone strikes.”

The Trump administration sees the consolidation of a Fortress North America subordinated to the geopolitical and economic diktats of the American ruling class as a precondition to advancing its strategic conflicts with Russia and China. As in the calls for Canada to become America’s 51st state and threats to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal, Trump seeks to subordinate Mexico politically to his fascist and neo-colonial agenda through threats of military and economic war.

The Mexican bourgeoisie, like its counterparts across the region, has made clear its inability to counter the eruption of US imperialism amid the deepening crisis of global capitalism. Only a unified political movement

of workers across the Americas and internationally to overthrow the profit system can stop the emerging threats of world war and fascism.



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