

# Trump orders Pentagon to use military force against Latin American drug cartels

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15 August 2025

Citing anonymous sources, the *New York Times* reports that President Donald Trump has ordered the Pentagon to “begin using military force against certain Latin American drug cartels,” claiming they threaten the peace and security of the US.

The Mexican cartels targeted are the Sinaloa Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, the Cartel del Noreste, the Gulf Cartel and the Nueva Familia Michoacana.

The August 8 report did not say whether specific strikes have been suggested to the Pentagon, although these plans are already being drawn up by military officials, according to the *Times*.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum responded quickly to the report. “We were informed that this executive order was coming and that it had nothing to do with the participation of any military personnel or any institution in our territory,” she said, adding that the directive referred exclusively to actions within US territory, although Trump has already sent close to 10,000 troops to the border.

“No,” she said, “absolutely not. The United States is not going to send its military into Mexico. We cooperate, we collaborate, but there will be no invasion. That’s ruled out ... because, in addition to what we’ve stated in all our conversations, it’s not allowed, nor is it part of any agreement.”

When asked about the *Times*’ reporting that the directive authorized military use abroad, on land and sea, Sheinbaum dismissed that claim, too.

But the US has already sent two warships to patrol the coasts of Mexico—one in the Pacific Ocean, the other in the Gulf of Mexico—a use of naval force without precedent in US border security operations.

When pressed further to explain if the reporting was inaccurate, Sheinbaum demurred, suggesting she had not seen the directive. “Well, we’ll have to see how the executive order is [written],” she said, “but there’s no risk that they’ll invade our territory.”

Sheinbaum emphasized that a “lot of work has been done to reduce homicides, and the flow of fentanyl across the border has been reduced by 50 percent,” which US Ambassador to Mexico Ronald Johnson has confirmed. In a post on X, Johnson said that the collaboration of Sheinbaum and Trump resulted in cartels “going bankrupt and our countries are safer for it.”

Sheinbaum also ordered the extradition on August 12 of 26 alleged cartel members to the US. This follows the turning over of 29 Mexican prisoners to Washington in February for prosecution in federal courts. But facts don’t deter Trump and US imperialism.

Until Trump’s directive, US officials reportedly believed that Mexico relations with the US were on the upswing. US ambassador Johnson said in July that the greatly reduced drug flow and border crossings were “due to a secure border” and “increased collaboration between the US and Mexico.”

According to Todd Robinson, who was the assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement affairs in the Biden administration, that collaboration will vanish with an invasion. “If the US does this without Mexico’s consent, it will set the relationship back a hundred years,” he said.

US troops in fact have not entered Mexico since the US Army chased the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution in 1916. But there can be little doubt that the US military is already war-gaming expeditionary forces crossing the border from Arizona and Texas, maritime attacks on ports such as Tampico, Mazatlán and Manzanillo, and even a lightning air strike on Mexico City’s Felipe Ángeles International Airport and other major airports.

In February, Trump’s State Department designated the six largest Mexican drug trafficking groups as foreign terrorist organizations, along with Tren de Aragua of Venezuela and Mara Salvatrucha of El Salvador (known as MS-13), saying that they constituted “a national-security threat beyond that posed by traditional organized crime.”

These designations have the perverse effect of combining the “war on drugs,” which has been used to justify US military action in Latin America, with the “war on terror,” the pretext for Washington’s wars of aggression in the Middle East. In both cases, the real aim of US imperialism is to assert its hegemony over resource-rich regions, markets and sources of cheap labor.

Two weeks ago, the Trump administration added to that list the Venezuelan Cartel de los Soles, or Cartel of the Suns, which it alleges works with Mexico’s Sinaloa Cartel. The administration asserted that this cartel is headed by President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, on whom it has placed a \$50 million bounty, and other high-ranking military officials in his administration. “Soles” refer to the insignia worn by Venezuelan generals, and the name was coined to indicate the collaboration of individual officers with drug traffickers. There is no evidence that such a “cartel” exists.

Caracas claims it has shot down 312 planes used by drug traffickers since 2012 and emphasized last week that Venezuelan authorities have seized 51 tons of drugs so far this year. Colombia’s President Gustavo Petro, meanwhile, issued a

statement stressing Venezuela's collaboration in counter-narcotics operations and warning that any US military action against the country would be treated as "an aggression against Latin America and the Caribbean."

The US has been using drones and spy planes since Trump's first term to surveil Mexican drug cartels, an action that Sheinbaum said was "part of a coordinated operation between the US and Mexican governments." Drone flights over Mexico have hunted for fentanyl labs according to US officials. But the US military, unlike spy agencies, did not enter Mexican airspace.

In his first term, Trump wanted to bomb drug labs in Mexico. His defense secretary at the time, Mark T. Esper, later portrayed the idea as ludicrous in his memoir, while Mexican officials claimed to be outraged.

According to Rear Adm. James E. McPherson (ret), who served as the top uniformed lawyer for the Navy in the early 2000s, it would be "a major breach of international law" to use military force in another country's territory without its government's consent, absent criteria not present here.

International law did not, however, deter the US when President George H.W. Bush sent more than 20,000 troops into Panama to arrest President Manuel Noriega, who had been indicted in the US on charges of drug trafficking. The United Nations General Assembly condemned that invasion as a "flagrant violation of international law."

Now, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is claiming the administration's right "to use other elements of American power, intelligence agencies, the Department of Defense, whatever, to target these groups if we have an opportunity to do it." There is no suggestion of a role for Congress, or the need for the target country's consent.

Within the Trump administration figures such as Vice President Vance, Attorney General Pam Bondi and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth are also pushing direct intervention against the cartels in Mexico. The country is increasingly denounced as a US adversary along the lines of Iran, China or North Korea in MAGA circles.

In contrast, Trump's immigration adviser, the fascist Stephen Miller, reportedly opposes using the military against cartels in Mexico, but only because it would damage the cooperation of the Mexican government needed to stifle migration.

And although major US business sectors undoubtedly fear the economic disruption of a military assault on Mexico, the largest US trading partner, little has been heard from the corporate media voicing objection to this madness, or from Democratic Party leaders.

Recently Mexican security analyst Vito Hernández Ochoa, who was an adviser to Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, and is the current director of the Latin American Institute for Strategic Studies, warned in *El Universal* that US military intervention in Mexico is "imminent."

Significant right-wing sectors in Mexico also apparently favor the idea of US military intervention in Mexico as a means to wipe out the cartels, clean up widespread corruption, and debilitate the ruling MORENA party.

Drone attacks are already on the agenda. Trump has also floated sending kill teams to take out cartel leaders.

But drone warfare also allows smaller or technologically less advanced actors such as cartels to defend themselves against larger adversaries. Mexican cartels operate as paramilitary entities with deep financial resources, global supply chains and sophisticated logistical networks that extend into the US. They can take retaliation across the border.

It is highly likely that US forces will end up killing many civilians if they go after cartel members in Mexico. The areas where US forces operate will become much less secure. Violence overall will likely increase, and that will spur new waves of migration from the destabilized regions. However many cartel members the US manages to kill, there will always be new recruits ready to fill the vacuum.

A US invasion of Mexico could rupture relations between the two countries, blow apart the USMCA trade agreement, and lead to another US forever war, with millions of US residents of Mexican origin also up in arms. The economic fallout would be on a huge scale.

Facing an upsurge in the class conflict stemming from deepening economic and geopolitical instability, Trump seeks to browbeat Mexico City into an even greater militarization to secure key suppliers to US industry while making preparations for direct US involvement in the repression of Mexican workers.

Sheinbaum's strategy for dismantling the cartels differs little from the failed strategies of the last four Mexican presidents, at least two of whom were likely corrupted by the cartels. Her government falsifies the figures on deaths and disappearances. It also maintains pacts of impunity for politicians bought off by the cartels.

Despite Sheinbaum's rhetoric, it is likely the Mexican ruling class would capitulate to US imperialism.

In the final analysis, it is only the Mexican working class, united with workers in the US and throughout Latin America, that can and must put an end to this descent into the maelstrom. This requires building the International Committee of the Fourth International in the Americas, and internationally.



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