

# US-backed “execution” of Jalisco Cartel chief threatens greater carnage in Mexico

Andrea Lobo  
23 February 2026

The killing of Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, “El Mencho,” leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), in a joint US–Mexican operation in Tapalpa, Jalisco, has unleashed a new wave of chaos and bloodshed across Mexico.

The operation and immediate reprisals left 25 soldiers, 30 alleged CJNG members and three civilians dead, including a pregnant woman, and led to 70 arrests across seven states, as detailed by Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch.

Far from marking a “victory” in the so-called war on drugs, the “execution” of El Mencho under US pressure threatens to provoke an even more violent and destabilizing struggle within and between cartels, which will in turn be used as the pretext for a massive strengthening of the repressive apparatus against the working class.

Defense Secretary Ricardo Trevilla openly acknowledged that US intelligence was decisive. El Mencho was located after being tracked when he traveled to meet a lover already under surveillance.

“This administration has greatly strengthened its relationship with the US Northern Command, and there has been an exchange of information and data. This is a very important flow of information, and that is how we arrived at this specific case,” Trevilla said.

At the same time, Trevilla insisted that the operation demonstrated the “strength of the Mexican state” in a nationalist statement suggesting that the Mexican state can act on its own. The White House confirmed that Northern Command played a key role and publicly “thanked” the Mexican military for the “successful execution” of Oseguera.

Nevertheless, US President Donald Trump added contemptuously on social media: “Mexico must intensify its efforts against the cartels and drugs!”

Trump’s statements underscore the openly colonial

attitude of US imperialism. Only days before, in a Fox & Friends interview, he declared that “the cartels are running Mexico. She’s not running Mexico,” referring to President Claudia Sheinbaum, and again threatened to deploy the US military south of the Rio Grande.

Earlier this month, the White House marked the 178th anniversary of the Mexican–American War by celebrating it as a “legendary” conquest that shapes Washington’s strategy for dominating the hemisphere today.

According to the government, the assault in Tapalpa was carried out by Mexican Army and National Guard special forces, supported by six helicopters. Officials claim that four CJNG members were killed on the spot and three—among them Oseguera—died while being transported, with two others arrested, a narrative already questioned by well-connected investigative journalists.

Anabel Hernández, who has sources in both US and Mexican security agencies and among cartel leaderships, reports that El Mencho “may have been executed when he was already in custody” like Sinaloa Cartel leader Pedro Inzunza Coronel (“Pichón”) last December. In her words, “he was better dead than extradited, revealing the dirty secrets of officials linked to this criminal organization during the current administration.”

The immediate aftermath of the killing revealed the depth of CJNG’s penetration and firepower. Authorities admitted that at one point the cartel had erected 252 roadblocks across 20 of Mexico’s 32 states. By Monday morning, they reported having cleared all of them.

There were reports of coordinated arson attacks: 69 Oxxo convenience stores and 20 branches of the state-owned Banco del Bienestar were burned, as well as dozens of vehicles. In one incident captured on video, an Oxxo worker ran out of a store engulfed in flames. Air travel was disrupted as airlines, including Aeroméxico, canceled flights involving Jalisco, Colima and Nayarit. Ten state governments suspended in-person classes in

basic education.

The US embassy issued a security alert for Jalisco, Tamaulipas, Michoacán, Guerrero and Nuevo León, instructing US citizens to “shelter in place until further notice,” while France, Germany, Russia, India, Ukraine, Spain, the Netherlands and Argentina all urged their nationals in Mexico to take extreme precautions.

Faced with this national convulsion, President Sheinbaum sought above all to project “normality” and bolster the image of the armed forces. She continued her tour in Coahuila, limiting herself to a social media statement congratulating the military and calling for calm. At her morning press conference Monday, she insisted that “the country is at peace and... what is most important, we are working.” Workers across Mexico understand perfectly what this means: whatever the danger posed by cartel violence or militarized operations, the priority of the ruling class is that they show up to factories, offices and workplaces to produce profits.

The Drug Enforcement Administration describes the CJNG as operating globally, with tens of thousands of members, associates and facilitators in at least 100 countries and estimates that it operates in 21 Mexican states. It is widely considered the most powerful cartel in the country.

Hernández, who has pointed out that the CJNG could well be called the “California New Generation Cartel,” given its massive presence and distribution infrastructure in that state, warns that the elimination of the CJNG’s historic leader opens the door to vicious infighting to succeed him and a wider war with rival organizations, leading to “real carnage.”

Another veteran journalist, Diego Enrique Osorno, reports that a former intelligence official told him the government previously knew where Mencho was, but that capturing him risked triggering worse violence because his likely successors were “even more bloodthirsty.”

Even “lower” homicide totals remain at wartime levels: 2025 registered around 20,674 homicides, still comparable to the early years of the militarized “war on drugs.” The arrest of Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada, the Sinaloa cartel’s long-time leader, has likewise fueled violent reconfiguration within that organization, which the government appears content to “let run its course.” The killing of El Mencho in this context has the character of pouring gasoline on a fire.

At the center of this process is Omar García Harfuch, the Security Secretary whose public profile has been dramatically raised by the operation. In 2020, as Mexico

City police chief, he survived an assassination attempt attributed to the CJNG, which has since been used to bolster his “tough on crime” credentials.

García Harfuch, a long-time favorite of the US embassy, has received multiple trainings, certificates and awards from US agencies, and was deeply implicated in the 2014 Iguala massacre of 43 teaching students, in which military, police and cartel forces collaborated. He comes from a dynasty of repression: his father and grandfather were top security officials involved in dirty-war operations and cartel collusion, and his half-brother Javier García Morales was assassinated by a rival cartel. Most recently, he has boasted of having detained 40,000 “high-profile” criminals under Sheinbaum’s tenure.

That such a figure now sits atop the Mexican security apparatus and is being groomed as a likely future president is a warning of the authoritarian turn underway.

The timing is not accidental. In three months, Mexico is scheduled to co-host the FIFA World Cup with the US and Canada. The ruling class, in close consultation with Washington, will exploit the current crisis to demand an even greater build-up of the Army, Navy, National Guard and intelligence agencies, diverting resources from social spending at a moment when economic indicators are deteriorating and layoffs are mounting.

The fundamental reality facing Mexico—the Hitlerian ambitions of the White House for neocolonial control, the major social crises in both the United States and Mexico and the country’s geographic position feeding countless billions into drug trafficking—lays bare that capitalism offers no solution to the mass violence ravaging Mexico.

The safety of workers and their families do not depend on strengthening the Army, the National Guard or their ties to the Pentagon. It cannot be achieved through any of the bourgeois parties—from Morena to the PRI and PAN—or through nationalist appeals to “unite the nation” behind the security forces. On the contrary, it is only possible through an international political struggle against all factions of the ruling class and against imperialism, aimed at dismantling the entire apparatus of capitalist exploitation and repression.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**