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Hearing**

Titled: The Expansion of Mexican Cartels

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Chairman Cornyn, Co-Chair Whitehouse, and distinguished Members of the Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Michael Brown. I recently retired from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration as a senior agent after 32 years of service. I graduated from the DEA Academy, Class BA 64, in 1989 and began my career in the Detroit Field Division.

Seeking more specialized operational roles, I volunteered for a lateral assignment to the U.S. Army Ranger Training Battalion in Columbus, Georgia, supporting a Department of Justice special operations counter-drug program. There, I received advanced training in combat operations. After graduating, I was selected for DEA's foreign drug suppression program, Operation Snowcap. I served four tours of duty in Central and South America (1994–1996), working alongside host country special forces in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Honduras.

I retired from the DEA in 2021 and started my own mitigation consulting firm. Today, I want to share my perspective on the alarming rise of Mexican drug cartels, which I see as an urgent and growing threat—specifically regarding the now-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). I also want to explain how their partnership with U.S.-based drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), along with the rapid proliferation of what I call the “cottage industry” of independent traffickers, represents the rapid evolution of the American drug trafficking paradigm.

The Sinaloa and CJNG cartels have become deeply entrenched transnational criminal organizations, posing a serious strategic threat to the United States. Over the past decade, they have built close working partnerships with major U.S.-based DTOs and prison gangs, including the Crips, the Bloods, the Aryan Brotherhood, the Latin Kings, and the Mexican Mafia. These alliances have transformed once-regional criminal groups into primary distribution networks for cartel-produced fentanyl, reaching every state, county, and neighborhood.

The result is a decentralized criminal ecosystem. It includes large scale U.S. based DTOs, established gangs, and a new player at the table that I refer to as the “cottage industry digital trafficker”. The cottage industry trafficker is composed of ordinary people cashing in on the new digital drug marketplace. Thousands of semi-independent trafficking cells operate below the radar, with no single leader or clear hierarchy. Take down one cell, and it self-replicates into another cell.

This entire system relies on two critical capabilities: the cartels' steady access to precursor chemicals, and their ability to smuggle fentanyl into the United States, often hidden in vehicles and among legitimate commercial cargo. As long as the supply remains in place, the U.S. fentanyl market will remain saturated. The cartel-US/DTO partnership now runs on a business

model that accepts mass murder as part of its daily distribution cycle resulting in the deaths of 80,000 to 100,000 Americans every year as just “good business.”

The Cartel crisis has outpaced our laws and enforcement agencies. This isn't just a “drug problem” anymore—it's a critical threat to public health, national security, and foreign policy. If the U.S. designated the cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and treats fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction, the next logical move is clear: designate U.S.-DTOs as domestic narco-terrorist organization under the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act. These groups are key allies in a single criminal network. There are no shades of gray.

If we don't address the rapid expansion of the Mexican cartels through the evolution of US criminal networks, we risk the normalization of mass murder as an excitable and predictable outcome.

Thank you for your attention. I welcome your questions.