

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Pamela J. Bondi
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Secretary Noem, Secretary Rubio, and Attorney General Bondi:

We write to you today regarding the Trump Administration's recent designation of eight Latin American cartels and gangs as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), a move aimed at addressing the growing harms these organizations are causing in the United States.¹ As you know, the primary source of strength and control that these criminal organizations exert over the U.S./Mexico border stems from one source: American firearms. We were pleased that President Trump agreed to address the outflow of hundreds of thousands of American-made firearms across the southern border when he initially postponed the implementation of tariffs on our ally Mexico.² Accordingly, we urge you to utilize the FTO designation to take aggressive action to stem the flow of American guns to the cartels.

It is a well-established fact that the overwhelming majority of the weapons used by Latin American cartels are manufactured in the United States. In fact, anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 are smuggled into Mexico every single year³ and a whopping 70 percent of firearms recovered at crime scenes in Mexico are traced to the U.S.⁴ Alarming, although Mexico has just

¹ Verza, M. (2025). A look at the 8 Latin American crime groups designated as terrorist organizations by the US. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/gangs-cartels-sinaloa-aragua-trump-terrorist-organizationsb223f4eb513105fb8d965f80a6cecfb>

² Alfonsi, S., Chasan, A., Kerbstat, K., DuCharme, E. (2024). Mexico fights to dam "iron river" sending guns from U.S. to cartels. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/guns-from-us-ending-up-in-mexico-60-minutes/>

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office (2021). Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Disrupt Gun Smuggling into Mexico Would Benefit from Additional Data and Analysis. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-322>

⁴ Lopez, O. (2022). As Mexico's epidemic of violence rages on, authorities seem powerless to stop it. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/08/as-mexicos-epidemic-of-violence-rages-on-authorities-seem->

a single gun store in the entire country, it still endures approximately 30,000 firearm related deaths every year.⁵ This steady supply of weapons coming in from the north has allowed these criminal organizations to gain control over fentanyl and human trafficking across the border and undermine Mexican law enforcement.

Put simply, if we do not stop the flow of American-made guns across the southern border to Mexico, we cannot stop the flow of fentanyl into our country over that same border.

The new FTO designation for these cartels provides additional legal tools to bolster interagency coordination, disrupt their financial networks, and impose stricter penalties on those who provide material support to these criminal enterprises. Specifically, under current statute, it is unlawful to knowingly provide material support or resources to a Foreign Terrorist Organization and those who do so can be fined or imprisoned for up to 20 years.⁶ Individuals and entities that provide weapons, funds, equipment, or other tangible support to designated terrorist organizations can face serious federal prosecution if found liable.

To leverage this designation most effectively, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of State (DOS) must take immediate steps to crack down on the “Iron River” of illegal arms flowing into Mexico by taking the following actions:

- Increasing interagency cooperation to track, target, and dismantle smuggling rings that facilitate weapons trafficking across the Mexican border.
- Expanding inspections at border crossings to intercept vehicles carrying firearms, related munitions, and other contraband into Mexico.
- Increasing law enforcement efforts against straw purchasers and firearm dealers that knowingly provide material support to smugglers.
- Strengthening our intelligence-sharing with Mexican authorities and trusted partners to target and disrupt arms traffickers and their networks.

Given that this issue has been a key topic of discussion between President Trump and President Sheinbaum of Mexico ⁷ – which has resulted in the U.S. government agreeing to work together to stop the flow of firearms into Mexico – we hope that you move swiftly and use these new legal authorities to combat southbound arms trafficking. We stand ready to assist in this effort in any way we can, including through legislation that expands your programmatic authorities to address this critical issue.

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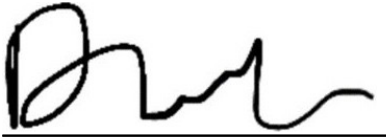
⁵ Wagner, J., Villegas, P. (2025). How Mexico’s President Avoided U.S. Tariffs, for Now. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/04/us/trump-mexico-tariff-negotiations.html>

⁶ 18 U.S.C. § 2339B (2024)

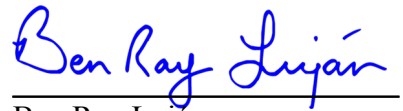
⁷ Boak, J., Sanchez, F., Gillies, R. (2025). Trump agrees to pause tariffs on Canada and Mexico after they pledge to boost border enforcement. AP. <https://apnews.com/article/trump-tariffs-canada-mexico-china-sheinbaumtrudeau-017efa8c3343b8d2a9444f7e65356ae9>

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



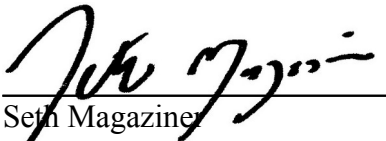
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



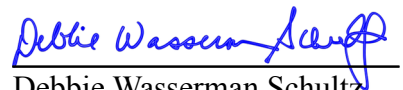
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



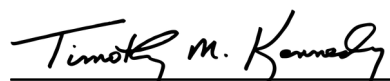
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress




JM Tokuda
Member of Congress



Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress



Nellie Pou
Member of Congress



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress