



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Transnational Criminal Organizations: The Menacing Threat to the U.S. Homeland

June 7, 2023

I am pleased the Subcommittee is exploring threats to the Homeland from transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and the fact that violence perpetrated by TCOs is one of many reasons that people migrate to the U.S. southern border. Violent crime has caused thousands across the globe to flee in fear for their lives, particularly in Central America, a region that experiences some of the highest crime rates in the world.

As migrants seek a better, safer life, and embark on a journey to the United States, they face extortion and violence on migration routes through Mexico which the cartels control and charge large sums to allow the migrants to pass.

Increasingly, we hear awful stories of migrants being assaulted, robbed, abandoned, and even murdered along the way. Some experts assess that the increased violence toward and extortion of migrants may be a result of heightened profit competition among the various cartels. That is important for us to factor into today's conversation – the cartels are profit-driven. They are violent, and criminal, but they are not political. They act with callousness toward migrants, perpetrate horrendous acts of gun violence, profit from illicit drug trafficking at the expense of American lives, and disrupt the much-needed border trade helping to lift millions of our Latin American neighbors out of poverty.

However, designating Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations will do nothing to stop them. They are not deterred by anything unless it affects their bottom line – which terrorist designations will not accomplish. What designating these transnational criminal organizations as terrorists will succeed in is damaging our relationship with the government of Mexico. Comments from Republicans suggesting we invade Mexico only make matters worse.

As I have said before, and will say again, it is high time the Majority stop focusing on trying to score political points – especially when those “points” work to our nation's detriment. I urge my colleagues across the aisle to join Democrats in seeking real solutions to address the threats posed by heinous TCOs. For example, we ought to reinstate the interagency Joint Task Force-Investigations – which coordinated efforts across the Federal government to dismantle TCOs, prevent their reconstitution, and reduce illicit flows. Unfortunately for us and fortunately for the cartels, the Trump Administration shut this task force down.

We must improve the Department of Justice's Transnational Organized Crime Actor Detection Program. At my request, the Government Accountability Office recently conducted a review of this program and recommended that DOJ build on its success by increasing participation and information sharing among partner agencies and developing analysis from the shared data.

We must support DHS's surge operation against fentanyl, known as "Operation Blue Lotus," which in its first month of operation stopped over 4,000 pounds of fentanyl at ports of entry, where more than 90 percent of fentanyl is trafficked.

We must also support our Customs and Border Protection officers at points of entry since they are on the frontlines of the battle against fentanyl.

Democrats were disappointed to see Republicans vote down our amendments to their border bill that would have authorized Operation Blue Lotus and ensured CBP is well-staffed and resourced to seize fentanyl.

I am hopeful we can begin to work together to further address the dangers posed by the cartels.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978