September 6, 2023

RESEARCH REPORT | Center for Homeland Security & Immigration

The America First Approach to Defeat the Cartels

Kristen Ziccarelli

TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ The Mexican drug cartels are Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) that are public enemy number one to the American people.
- ★ Their advanced weaponization of modern technology has enabled successful illicit drug smuggling and trafficking operations, especially fentanyl, across the U.S. southern border and into American communities.
- ★ The America First approach to defeat the cartels is an 'all of the above' set of policy solutions that recognize their threat to national security and the homeland.

I. Introduction: The Mexican Drug Cartels

The Mexican drug cartels are not just simple street criminals. Instead, they are technologically advanced criminal enterprises with members numbering in the hundreds of thousands that control vast regional territories in Mexico. Over the years, cartel violence and crime have wreaked havoc on the communities of Mexico, Central America, and beyond. But in the past 27 months, policy changes that have opened our Nation's border have become a vehicle for the cartels to infiltrate American communities and hurt innocent citizens. One of the most significant threats to the homeland is the cartels' smuggling of illicit fentanyl, a drug that an advocacy organization's analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports has become the *top killer* of young Americans aged 18-45 (FAF, 2022). This troubling fact alone is a testament to the significant power the cartels wield in the region. Estimates from Mexico's Center for Economic Research and Teaching report at least 150 organized crime gangs operating in the Mexican state, many of which are allied with the two major cartels: the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG). Other prominent TCOs claiming sizeable territory throughout the Mexican state are Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, and Juarez Cartel (Global Guardian, 2023). Total membership across all of the cartels is estimated to be close to one million nefarious actors, and these groups rival each other in their illicit

drug trafficking, money laundering, violent crimes, and other illegal activity (Reina, 2023).

For the Sinaloa and CJNG, the precise number of members is unknown, but the most recent concrete data from the U.S. Department of Defense in 2009 estimates the Sinaloa cartel's membership at 100,000 (Washington Times, 2009). The CJNG is a newer organization, with less information available on their structure and membership, but the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) stated they are more dangerous than the Sinaloa Cartel and has declared them a top U.S. threat and Mexico's best-armed criminal group (CRS, 2022). The CJNG controls or has influence in about 85% of Mexican city-states (See Figure 1)(Graziosi, 2022).

Figure 1: Mexican Cartel Territory and Conflict Zones

Source: Created by CRS. Data provided by James Bosworth, Hxagon LLC
Notes: CJNG = *Cartel Jalisco Nuevo Generación.* Map data was compiled through open-source research and interviews with journalists and analysts operating in Mexico. Only major organizations are shown. Updated as of late 2021.

The DEA also reports that the CJNG controls territory around the entire Western Hemisphere and has a presence in almost every major U.S. city (Montes, 2020)(DEA, 2021). To put the cartels' growth and influence into perspective, reports from April 2021 estimated that the cartels made $14 million per day from fees collected from human trafficking and smuggling alone. Estimates from 2022 indicate the cartels netted a total of $13B that year (La Jeunesse, 2021)(Jordan, 2022). This is up from a total of $500 million in 2018, according to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (WaPo, 2018). The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimates the Mexican cartels launder about $25 billion per year via Bitcoin and e-commerce (AP, 2022).

II. The Cartels Are Sophisticated Actors

Advanced Weapons and a Monopoly on Violence

The cartels wield extraordinary power because they have a monopoly on violence in an increasing number of regions throughout Mexico. The tactics the cartels are known to employ to exert influence and control include intimidation, bribery, extortion, and brutal acts of violence. The cartels are also known to purposefully leave gruesome displays of violence to terrorize local citizens. Estimates from a 2018 special report from Mexican policy organization revealed that between one-third and one-half of homicides in Mexico are believed to be linked to the cartels (Justice in Mexico, 2023). The cartels use high-powered assault weapons and military-grade weapons like the AK-47, M16, and Galil ACE (Chaparro, 2022). Since 2006, Mexico's homicide rate has tripled, and crime-related violence has resulted in an estimated 150,000 deaths. In 2018, Mexican cartels killed at least 130 candidates and politicians before their presidential elections (CFR, 2023). Local police are known to be extremely susceptible to bribery and co-governance to protect their drug shipments, control the economy, and keep a tight hold on territory (Sheridan, 2020). The Sinaloa cartel reportedly has strong connections with Mexican political and economic elite, using bribery as a main means to influence officials (InSight, 2021). The cartels are also known to rob cargo shipments and siphon "billions of dollars of oil annually" from Pemex, Mexico's state oil company (CRS, 2022).

A Sophisticated Drone Framework

As modern technology has evolved, the cartels have embraced the digital age and weaponized the internet and other tools to increase their power. Both the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels use advanced technical drones to optimize their smuggling efforts and improve their reconnaissance, surveillance, and payload transportation. Their capabilities have been weaponized against U.S. law enforcement, mostly for the purpose of illegally smuggling drugs across the southern border. Cartels use drones to monitor U.S. Border Patrol agents so that drug mules can successfully move both illegal aliens and illicit narcotics across the southern border undetected. In 2016, they were even able to successfully hack DHS UAVs (unmanned air vehicles) in an effort to cross the border illegally (WAQAS, 2016).

The cartels have also equipped drones with drugs to transport them across the border via a "drag-and-drop" technique that evades U.S. law enforcement by relying on technology rather than people for drug transportation. In February 2023, Congressional testimony by Border Patrol Chief Agent Gloria Chavez confirmed that the cartels have "17 times the number of drones, twice the amount of flight hours, and unlimited funding to grow their operations." In the Rio Grande Valley sector of Texas, Chief Chavez testified, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) faced more than 10,000 drone incursions and 25,000 drone sightings in one year (News Nation, 2023). President of the National Border Patrol Council Brandon Judd stated that the cartels "use drones to scout our positions, where our border patrol agents are, [and] how can they facilitate the drug trade" (Handy, 2023). The Texas Department of Public

Safety has repeatedly reported on their encounters with cartel "dark ship drones," which are flown clandestinely amidst their own airmen (Texas.gov, 2022).

Evidence indicates that the cartels have also equipped their drones with weapons to attack rival groups and other enemies. The CJNG has been linked to drone attacks against the police and other civilians in Mexico (BBC, 2021). In January 2022, the CJNG used drones to bomb a camp of people in Michoacan, Mexico – part of a greater attempt to take over the region. Local police reports indicated that some of their weaponized drones were shot down by rival armed groups, causing an uptick in violence in the region and a mass exodus of residents from nearby towns (Graziosi, 2022).

Weaponization of Social Media & Recruitment of American Citizens

The cartels have weaponized social media in several major ways to increase their influence, including the recruitment of American citizens for drug smuggling, selling drugs, human smuggling, and special operations. The DEA acknowledges that American social media platforms are the means by which cartels "run their operations and reach out to victims, and when their product kills Americans, they simply move on to try to victimize the millions of other Americans who are social media users" (DoJ, 2023). More recently, the cartels have ramped up their recruitment of ordinary American citizens using social media platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Facebook by offering large sums of money for drug and human smuggling across the southern border (Ruthven, 2023). A Tik Tok video posted in October 2022 stated "Need someone who can drive an 18 wheeler right now mcallen to houston already ready $70k." (Shaw; Best; Jenkins, 2022). The Texas Department of Public Safety confirmed that the post was from a cartel member, following a pattern of soliciting online using various social media platforms.

Last year, a Tucson Sector Border Patrol agent stated that almost 90% of drivers in post-arrest interviews admit they were recruited through social media (WSJ, 2022). Cochise County Sheriff Mark Dannels told the media that recruitment for human smuggling is "a daily occurrence," where "the cartels recruit young people, kids, juveniles, all the way to adults through social media platforms and apps" (Refuerzo, 2022). Some willingly assist in smuggling drugs or illegal aliens across the border, but others are blackmailed into this line of work and are unable to find a way out of it without compromising their safety. Republicans on the House Committee on Homeland Security, for instance, have called for these social media companies to address their complicity in these actions, but no publicly announced changes have been made. Some social media platforms have insisted they remove illicit content, but even a few seconds of a post online can generate enough response for the cartels to recruit an American smuggler.

Besides recruiting ordinary American citizens for smuggling, the cartels have enlisted U.S. soldiers to take part in violent special missions. Enticing these men with promises of money, drugs, and power within their ranks, the cartels have been successful in recruiting U.S. servicemen for their professional skillsets. As a result,

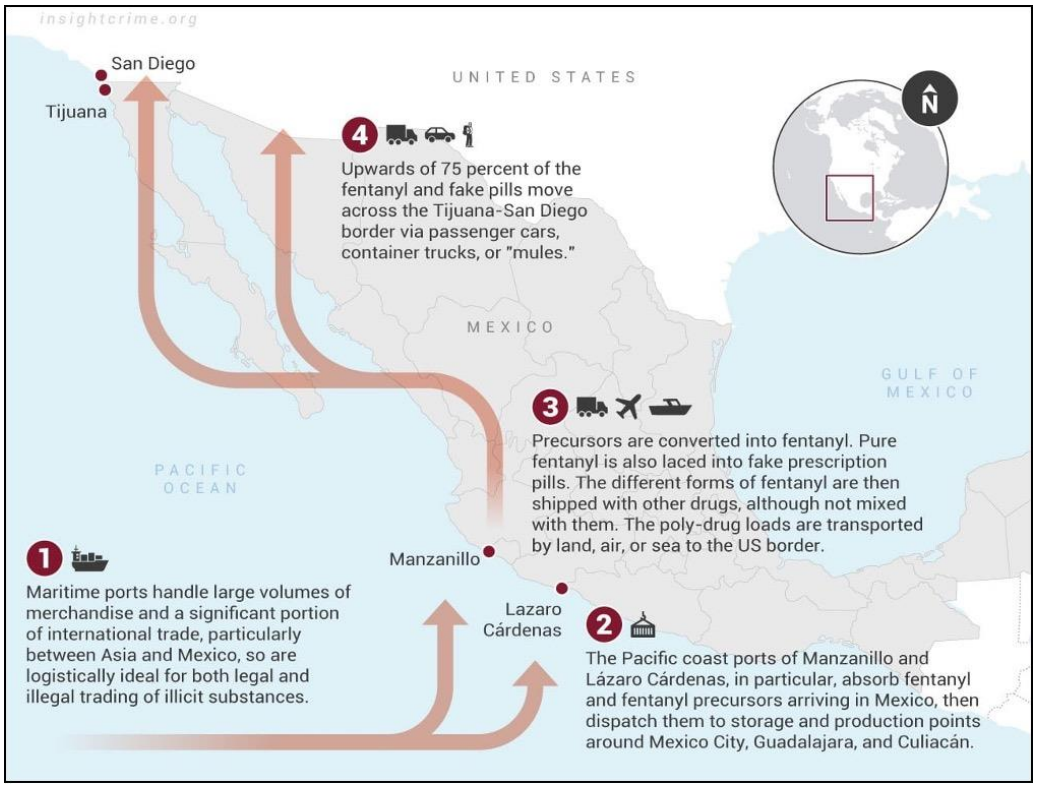
active-duty members of the U.S. military have been convicted for deserting and joining the Mexican cartels, being paid as hit men, and carrying out special operations. In 2019, witnesses from CNJG training camps reported that Navy Seal and Delta Force deserters were operating as 'sicarios,' or hit men, for the cartel. In 2015, a pair of two former military men were convicted for conspiracy and murder-for-hire for the Los Zetas cartel gang (Ruthven, 2023). Two similar cases in 2014 and 2012 featured former Army Sgt. Samuel Walker and former Army first lieutenant Kevin Corley both convicted for committing a murder-for-hire for the Los Zetas cartel. Corley had specifically been recruited for his ability to provide tactical training for cartel members, purchase weapons, and steal weapons from military posts (Fox News, 2015). Adding trained military men to their gang makes the cartels a more lethal force, posing a greater threat to the American people.

III. Successful Smuggling of Illicit Fentanyl

The Mexican drug cartels are responsible for facilitating the movement of illicit fentanyl across the border and into American communities. Fentanyl has already claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent Americans, most of whom unsuspectingly took something that was laced with fentanyl. The drug is an attractive pick for the cartels because it is entirely synthetic and more potent than most other illicit narcotics, making it easy and cheaper to produce. The cartels obtain nearly all fentanyl precursors (substances used to make fentanyl) from China through maritime ports in Western Mexico, over which they battle for control (Myers, 2019). The cartels have their "cooks" convert these substances into fentanyl, also lacing it into fake prescription and other illicit drugs (See Figure 2). The DEA sums up the process as:

"Traffickers could typically purchase a kilogram of fentanyl powder for a few thousand dollars from a Chinese supplier, transform it into hundreds of thousands of pills, and sell the counterfeit pills for millions of dollars in profit. If a particular batch has 2 milligrams of fentanyl per pill, approximately 500,000 counterfeit pills can be manufactured from 1 kilogram of pure fentanyl" (Standaert, 2021).

Figure 2: Path of Fentanyl from China into American Communities



Source: Insightcrime.org

Recent indictments from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) implicate a faction of the Sinaloa cartel specifically for a "sophisticated pipeline of fentanyl precursor chemicals from China" and extensive "guns-for-fentanyl deals that involve the smuggling of military-grade weapons from the U.S." (Mann, 2023). A *Wall Street Journal* investigation revealed how the Sinaloa cooks reportedly make enough fentanyl for "hundreds of thousands of doses" every six days and report profits in the thousands every week – more than the average Mexican makes in a year (Kamp, et. Al., 2022). A fentanyl cook for the Sinaloa cartel told PBS that an eleven pound package of fentanyl would sell for $15,000 in Culiacan, Mexico, but would increase steeply in price to $100,000 by the time it reached the United States (Villamizar, 2021).

The cartels have drug mules to transport fentanyl to the border, but some migrants also volunteer to smuggle drugs to reduce their debt from the tax required to move through their territory. This tax, known as the 'piso,' ranges from $4,000 to as much as $20,000 per person, depending on where they are from and the extent of the territory across which they are traveling (Jordan, 2022). There are also reports that cartels force illegal aliens to smuggle drugs across the border, threatening those who refuse with death (Burnett, 2011). Though it is nearly impossible to determine exactly how *much* illicit fentanyl is successfully smuggled across the border, several main indicators point to a spike in successful attempts.

First, the surge in illicit fentanyl discovered in the interior of the Nation points to obvious successful smuggling operations. During the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) *Operation Last Mile*, which comprised nearly 1,500 investigations from May 2022-2023, agents seized 43 million pounds of fentanyl pills and 6,500 pounds of fentanyl powder from Mexican drug cartels. Their seizures amounted to 193 million deadly doses found nationwide (See Figure 2).

Figure 3: The Reach of the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels into the U.S. Interior

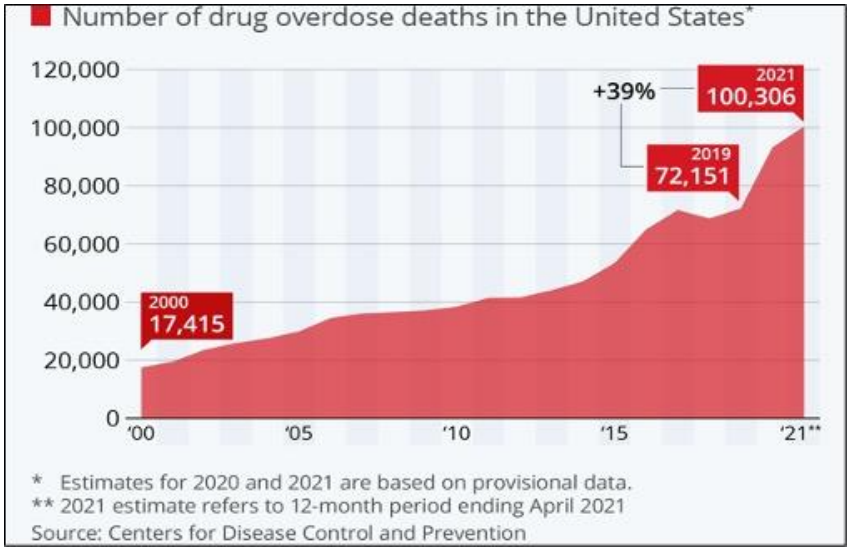
Source: Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)

Second, an increase in illicit drugs interdicted at the southern border represents a likely correlation of a higher number of drugs *not* interdicted at the southern border. In FY13, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seized just 2 lbs. of fentanyl at the southern border; in FY17, they seized more than 530 lbs. By FY22, that number reached a total of 14,700 lbs. in just one year – enough to kill every American 10 times over (CBP, n.d.). The most significant spike in CBP's illicit fentanyl seizures occurred between FY20 and FY21, where they rose 133 percent from 4,800 lbs. to 11,200 lbs. In seven months of FY23, total seizures of illicit fentanyl at the southern border have amounted to 17,200 lbs., far surpassing last year's total. Contrary to the Left's claim that "more fentanyl seizures are a sign of success," greater seizures are a sign that the cartels are more emboldened than ever, as photo and video evidence of cartels and drug mules camouflaged walking across the border proves (C-Span, 2023).

Third, an increase in the number of 'gotaways' crossing the Southern border – those who successfully crossed over and evaded capture – is a likely indicator of additional fentanyl smuggled into the country. It is well known that cartels employ drug mules to sneak fentanyl across the border. They are particularly strategic in using large caravans of illegal aliens as a diversion to occupy Border Patrol while they smuggle drugs into unguarded areas along the border (Jones, 2021)(Giaritelli, 2022). The number of gotaways has increased from 389,000 in FY21, 600,000 in FY22, and 530,000 in just eight months of FY23, totaling at least 1.5 million known gotaways under the Biden Administration. This is more than three times the number of gotaways in the Trump Administration's final three years (Hauf, 2023).

Fourth, the number of synthetic opioid deaths points to an increase of smuggled fentanyl entering the country and successfully infiltrating American communities. Fentanyl is now the primary cause of death for Americans aged 18-45 and has become known as the "silent killer" because of how it is cut or laced with other drugs and sold to an unaware buyer. In 2021, synthetic opioid deaths (largely driven by fentanyl) surged by more than 20%, killing more than 71,000 Americans. Total drug overdose deaths in the U.S. reached an all-time high of 109,000 in both 2021 and 2022 (McPhillips, 2023).

Figure 4: Number of Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States



Additionally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that 9.5 million Americans abused opioids in 2020—the latest data available from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA, n.d.). This data counters the Biden Administration and the claim of those on the Left that "90 percent of fentanyl is seized at ports of entry" (House Judiciary Committee, 2023). The staggering pace of rising opioid deaths indicates that much more fentanyl is coming across the border

than the 10% figure. Firsthand sources at the border recently testified before Congress that 48% of fentanyl is being intercepted at ports of entry, and 52% of fentanyl is being intercepted *between* ports (House Judiciary Committee, 2023).

IV. The America First Approach to Defeat the Cartels

The America First approach to defeat the cartels properly recognizes them as public enemy number one for all Americans and proposes policy solutions that reflect the severity of their threat. An "all of the above" approach should be implemented to protect all Americans. The historical approach of combatting the cartels through a law enforcement lens (meaning solely through the FBI, DEA, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives, and other law enforcement partners) is wholly insufficient to combat the magnitude of the threat and has resulted in little success in the past. The current approach employed by the Biden Administration has only emboldened the cartels in their attack on Americans (Wolf; Law, 2023).

The first step in the America First approach is to secure the border. Specifically, the federal government should:

- Resume construction of the border wall system, which is a needed barrier to stop the flow of fentanyl across the border and prevent cartels from smuggling drugs and illegal aliens.
- Reinstate immigration deterrence policies like 'Remain in Mexico,' which requires asylum seekers to await their court dates in Mexico, thereby deterring economic migrants from paying the cartels for passage along the dangerous journey north. During the Trump Administration, this policy was extremely successful in disrupting the cartels' pipeline of human and drug trafficking.
- Get Border Patrol agents back on the line patrolling the border instead of processing illegal aliens for release into the country, which will prevent the cartels from evading them in their attempts to sneak into the U.S.

Second, the U.S. must come to terms with the technological advancement of the cartels and directly counter their actions with proactive measures to stop their criminal enterprises. This includes the following steps:

- Re-prioritize intelligence gathering in Mexico, where current operations fall far short of the threat level. Conducting investigations in the region will better inform the military and law enforcement about cartel activity in order to effectively combat them.
- Invest in technology that can disrupt the cartels' drone operations.
- Conduct operations that compromise the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the cartels' financial and strategic operations, including but not limited to more severe sanctions on banks and wire transfer fees.

Third, the U.S. must get tougher on Mexico and China for emboldening the cartels. Through a strategic policy, the federal government needs to put pressure on Mexico

to stop the manufacture of illicit drugs in their country and the transit of it across the southern border. This includes the following steps:

- Negotiating with the Mexican government using the U.S.'s authorization of the use of military force against the cartels as leverage and the possibility of severe tariffs. These tactics were successful in the past because the Trump Administration understood the Mexican government's transactional nature (Wolf; Law, 2023).
- Inspecting a larger array of the vehicles and commerce that cross the border, when possible, to force Mexico to address black market activities originating from within their borders.
- Suspending the Department of Homeland Security's Free and Secure Trade and Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection systems, which facilitate streamlined entry and exit at our ports of entry.
- Build on the Trump Administration's successful attempt to negotiate with China to ban fentanyl by working with them to ban fentanyl *precursors* in their country and shut down clandestine fentanyl labs.

Fourth, target the cartel's weaponization of social media and use of payment companies for human trafficking and smuggling. Current safeguards do not go far enough to prevent these platforms from being used for nefarious purposes. Policymakers should take the following steps:

- Compel social media and fintech companies whose platforms the cartels use as a means of receiving payment from illegal aliens (payment companies) to develop more robust protocols to stop illicit activities on their platforms.
- Increase criminal penalties for both Americans and aliens partaking in human smuggling operations, including for recruitment on social media. Both state governments and the federal governments can participate in this solution.

Conclusion

The human toll that the Mexican drug cartels have inflicted across the world is staggering, and the statistics are trending further in the wrong direction. Under the Biden Administration's failed border policies, the cartels are succeeding, and Americans are losing. The number of innocent individuals who suffer at the hands of the cartels will continue unless the U.S. adopts a new strategy. Defeating the cartels, who have waged war on the American people and their way of life, is a crucial part of the America First agenda and a battle that is essential to win.

Works Cited

Associated Press (2022, March 10). Mexican cartels turn to bitcoin, internet, e-commerce. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/business-caribbean-mexico-crime-drug-cartels-1bb5ebf84fbf71baf6a845648bad4990

Bradley, Ali; Sherman, Robert (2023, February 9). Border Patrol Agent Describes how Cartels are Using Drones. NewsNation. Retrieved form https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/mexico-losing-control/mexico-violence-drug-cartels-zacatecas/

British Broadcasting Corporation. (2021, April 21). Mexico cartel used explosive drones to attack police. *British Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56814501

Burtnett, John (2011, December 4). Migrants Say They're Unwilling Mules For Cartels. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2011/12/04/143025654/migrants-say-theyre-unwilling-mules-for-cartels

Caldwell, Alicia (2022, October 19). Smugglers Use Snapchat, Tiktok to Recruit Americans to Drive Migrants From the Border Into the U.S. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/migrant-smugglers-use-snapchat-tiktok-to-recruit-drivers-11666142614

Chaparro, Luis (2022, February 28). Mexico's cartels are finding new ways to get their hands on a new kind of gun. Business Insider. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/mexican-cartels-getting-more-weapons-from-new-source-2022-2

Congressional Research Service (2022, June 7). Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations. *Congressional Research Service Reports*. Retrieved from https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R41576

Council on Foreign Relations Editors (2022, September 7). Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels

Families Against Fentanyl (2022, December 15). Fentanyl by Age: Report. *Families Against Fentanyl*. Retrieved from https://www.familiesagainstfentanyl.org/research/byage

Fox News (2015, November 29). Mexican cartels hiring US soldiers as hit men. Fox News. Retrieved from https://www.foxnews.com/us/mexican-cartels-hiring-us-soldiers-as-hit-men

Giaritelli, Anna (2022, June 20). Cartels smuggle migrants left behind from largest-ever caravan. *The Washington Examiner*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/cartels-smuggle-migrants-left-behind-from-largest-ever-caravan

Global Guardian (2022, October 10). Risk Map 2023 Analysis: Mexico Cartel War. *Global Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.globalguardian.com/newsroom/risk-map-mexico

Graziosi, Graig (2022, January 13). Mexico's deadliest cartel is dropping bombs from a drone onto rival camps in new turf war. *The Independent*. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/mexico-cartel-bomb-turf-war-b1992745.html

Handy, Tom (2023, February 21). Mexican Cartels Leverage Technology to Outwit Arizona Border Patrol in the Drug War. *Newsbreak*. Retrieved from https://original.newsbreak.com/@tom-handy-561269/2932358659779-mexican-cartels-leverage-technology-to-outwit-arizona-border-patrol-in-the-drug-war

Hauf, Patrick (2023, May 16). 1.5 million 'gotaways' at the border under the Biden administration: report. *Fox News*. Retrieved from https://www.foxnews.com/politics/million-gotaways-border-biden-administration-report

InSight Crime (2021, May 4). Sinaloa Cartel. *InSight Crime*. Retrieved from https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/sinaloa-cartel-profile/

Jones, Josh (2021, March 15). Cartels and Their Cruelty Are the Crisis at the Border. *Texas Public Policy Foundation*. Retrieved from https://www.texaspolicy.com/cartels-and-their-cruelty-are-the-crisis-at-the-border/

Jordan, Miriam (2022, July 25). Smuggling Migrants at the Border Now a Billion-Dollar Business. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/25/us/migrant-smuggling-evolution.html

Justice in Mexico (2018, April 10). 2018 Drug Violence in Mexico Report. *Justice in Mexico.* Retrieved from https://justiceinmexico.org/2018-drug-violence-mexico-report/

Kamp, Jon., de Cordoba, Jose., Wernau, Julie (2022, August 30). How Two Mexican Drug Cartels Came to Dominate America's Fentanyl Supply. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/story/inside-the-mexican-cartels-that-rule-fentanyl-smuggling-48b5c665

La Jeunesse, William (2021, March 22). US-Mexico border traffickers earned as much as $14M a day last month: sources. *Fox News*. Retrieved from https://www.foxnews.com/politics/us-mexico-border-traffickers-million-february

Mann, Brian (2023, April 21). U.S. says it 'infiltrated' the Sinaloa drug cartel in the fight against fentanyl. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2023/04/21/1170326191/fentanyl-mexico-drug-cartel-sinaloa-chapitos-el-chapo

McPhillips, Deidre (2023, May 18). US drug overdose deaths, fueled by synthetic opioids, hit a new high in 2022. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/18/health/drug-overdose-deaths-2022/index.html#:~:text=Monthly%20updates%20to%20the%20provisional,compared%20with%20109%2C179%20in%202021.

Montes, Juan (2020, July 8). Brutal Gang Rises as Mexico's Top Security Threat. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/brutal-gang-rises-as-mexicos-top-security-threat-11594209600

Myers, Steven Lee (2019, December 1). China Cracks Down on Fentanyl. But Is It Enough to End the U.S. Epidemic? The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/01/world/asia/china-fentanyl-crackdown.html#:~:text=China%E2%80%99s%20new%20focus%20on%20shutting%20down%20the%20trade,The%20American%20agency%20did%20not%20dispute%20that%20drop.

Office of Public Affairs (2023, May 5). DEA Operation Last Mile Disrupts Fentanyl Trafficking Fueled by the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/dea-operation-last-mile-disrupts-fentanyl-trafficking-fueled-sinaloa-and-jalisco-cartels#:~:text=Operation%20Last%20Mile%20comprised%201%2C436%20investigations%20conducted%20from,methamphetamine%2C%208%2C497%20firearms%2C%20and%20more%20than%20%24100%20million.

Office of the Texas Governor (2022, October 14). Operation Lone Star Thwarts Transnational Criminal Activity At Border. *Office of the Texas Governor*. Retrieved from https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/operation-lone-star-thwarts-transnational-criminal-activity-at-border

Refuerzo, Nick (2022, December 23). Teens promised quick cash through social media for human smuggling. Denver 7. Retrieved from https://www.denver7.com/news/national/teens-promised-quick-cash-through-social-media-for-human-smuggling

Reina, Elena (2022, May 11). Drug cartels in Mexico: How rampant violence is taking hold of the country. *El Pais.* Retrieved from https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-05-11/drug-cartels-in-mexico-how-rampant-violence-is-taking-hold-of-the-country.html

Ruthven, Sara (2023, March 22). Mexican cartels recruiting US soldiers and other Americans for their dirty work. *The National News*. Retrieved from https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2023/03/23/how-mexican-cartels-recruit-us-soldiers-and-other-americans-to-do-their-dirty-work/

Shaw, Adam; Best, Paul; Jenkins, Griff (2022, October 7). Mexican cartels using social media to recruit smugglers amid historic border surge. *Fox News*. Retrieved from https://www.foxnews.com/politics/mexican-cartels-using-social-media-recruit-smugglers-historic-border-surge

Sheridan, Mary Beth (2020, October 29). A police officer in Mexico's Zacatecas city holds up caution tape at the scene of a shooting. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/mexico-losing-control/mexico-violence-drug-cartels-zacatecas/

Standaert, Michael (2021, February 28). China's fentanyl connection: the suppliers fuelling America's opioid epidemic. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3123109/chinas-fentanyl-connection-suppliers-fuelling

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (n.d.). Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs. *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. Retrieved June 20, 2023 from https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/atod

The Washington Post (2018, May 18). Nielsen: Cartels make $500 million a year from smuggling migrants into the U.S. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/nielsen-cartels-make-500-million-a-year-from-smuggling-migrants-into-the-us/2018/05/18/3bed176a-5aac-11e8-9889-07bcc1327f4b_video.html

The Washington Times (2009, March 3). EXCLUSIVE: 100,000 foot soldiers in Mexican cartels. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/03/100000-foot-soldiers-in-cartels/

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (March 2019). CBP Strategy to Combat Opioids. *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*. Retrieved from https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/CBP-Opioid-Strategy-508.pdf

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (n.d.). Southwest Land Border Encounters. *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*. Retrieved from https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters

Villamizar, Monica (2021, September 14). A secret look at a Mexican cartel's low-tech, multimillion-dollar fentanyl operation. *PBS News Hour*. Retrieved from

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/a-secret-look-at-a-mexican-cartels-low-tech-multimillion-dollar-fentanyl-operation

WAQAS (2016, January 3). US Border Patrol Drones Hacked by Drug Cartels. HackRead. Retrieved from https://www.hackread.com/us-border-patrol-drones-hacked-by-drug-cartels/

Wolf, Chad; Law, Rob (2023, March 22). 'All of the above' approach needed to defeat Mexican drug cartels. America First Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://americafirstpolicy.com/latest/all-of-the-above-approach-needed-to-defeat-mexican-drug-cartels