

**STATEMENT OF
JOSE PEREZ
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE DIVISION
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“The Thin Blue Line Protecting America from the Cartels”**

**PRESENTED
June 24, 2025**



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Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and other members on the committee, thank you for having me here today.

My name is Jose Perez, and I am the Assistant Director of the Criminal Investigative Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the FBI’s efforts to combat Mexican cartels.

Overview:

The FBI Criminal Division is laser focused on the cartels’ trafficking of dangerous narcotics, like illicit fentanyl, across our borders. As of today, the FBI has over 6,000 cases targeting Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) with over 850 linked to cartel leadership.

Tackling the cartel drug trafficking networks means addressing every link in the chain—including the gangs that help move their product, launder money, and enforce violence here at home. This isn’t just a border problem—it’s a nationwide public safety crisis fueled by a web of criminal alliances stretching from cartel leadership in Mexico reaching other countries in Central America such as Costa Rica to neighborhood crews in cities across the U.S.

Currently, the FBI has more than 6,200 active gang investigations into local neighborhood gangs, many of which are subsets of national gangs like 18th Street, Mexican Mafia, Bloods, and Crips. These domestic gangs are not only drivers of violence on their own—they often act as vital partners to the cartels, helping them expand their reach and evade law enforcement.

To effectively dismantle these interconnected networks, the FBI and DHS are spearheading the creation of Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTF). This collaborative effort is in support of and in alignment with the Executive Order on *Protecting the American People Against Invasion*. This allows us to extend our reach, share intelligence in real time, and target these threats at every level. The HSTF concept reinforces our collective missions and opens up new avenues for collaboration across federal, state, and local partners. The mission of the HSTF



network is to end the presence of criminal cartels, foreign gangs, and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) globally, dismantle cross-border human smuggling and trafficking networks, with a particular focus on such offenses involving children, and ensure the use of all available law enforcement tools to faithfully execute the immigration laws of the United States. The HSTFs will focus on investigating drug trafficking, money laundering, weapons trafficking, human trafficking, homicide, extortion, kidnapping, and other TCO-related activity where there is, or may be, a federal investigative interest. The HSTFs will leverage a whole of government approach to defeat these TCOs, to include the removal of criminal aliens who have exploited the immigration process to facilitate illicit activity in the United States. The United States Attorneys' offices, in turn, will support the work of the FBI and the HSTFs through federal prosecutions of criminal perpetrators and the forfeiture of their ill-gotten gains, thereby ensuring the dismantlement of these criminal enterprises.

While it is in the final stages of implementation, the FBI is already directly providing logistical, intelligence, and operational support to the HSTFs. This is done through the development of the National Coordination Center, which allows us to synchronize the activities of HSTFs and provide support and oversight of their activities.

This level of coordination is backed by significant resources. More than 2,200 special agents and over 3,900 task force officers across the Bureau are dedicated full time to targeting violent gangs and TCOs.

In addition to the HSTFs, the FBI has Assistant Legal Attaché (ALAT) agents assigned in countries across Central America, South America, and the Caribbean who principally focus on cartels and transnational gangs—specifically, the leadership, command and control structure, other key facilitators. Our overseas ALATs focus on international drug trafficking, money laundering, public corruption, human trafficking, kidnappings, extortion, and related violent criminal activity. The ALATs work closely with our Vetted Teams (VTs), which are comprised of the host nation's top law enforcement and government officials who are trained and resourced by the FBI to conduct criminal enterprise investigations in coordination with our ALATs. The collaboration between our ALATs, host-nation VTs, and U.S.-based case agents maximizes the FBI footprint abroad, amplifying our ability to safeguard American citizens and U.S. interests in the homeland. Earlier this year our Vetted Team in Mexico captured MS-13 gang leader Francisco Javier Roman-Bardales, one of the FBI's Top 10 Most Wanted fugitives, who faces multiple criminal charges in the U.S., including narco-terrorism and racketeering.

To further combat this threat, the FBI's Border Liaison Officers (BLOs) program focuses on strengthening the coordination between the FBI and our law enforcement counterparts in Canada and Mexico. The BLO program's primary focus is centered on the development of professional domestic and international liaison relationships with both the Canadian and



Mexican governments and our law enforcement partners. Our BLOs serve as the primary point of contact for border related issues and investigations, ensuring the FBI maintains open lines of communication with our foreign law enforcement partners. These BLO relationships enhance the FBI's investigative assistance internationally, through increased information sharing, participation in working groups, and training along the border regions.

Those are just some pieces of the broader FBI strategy we are using to tackle this complex threat. We are taking a multi-prong approach to countering the cartels and illicit drug distribution networks by working the threat from all levels. At the gang and street level, the FBI investigates gang and criminal networks through our Safe Streets Task Forces and our Safe Trails Task Forces across the country. With more than 2,500 arrests this year already, the FBI is focused on using the enterprise theory of investigation with our local, Tribal, state, and other federal law enforcement partners to investigate and eradicate violent street gangs. As a result, the task forces are reactive when necessary and proactive, when possible, in targeting the hierarchy of the entire gang. Additionally, this allows for the federal prosecution of gangs and their membership which can result in more severe sentences and penalties for the entire gang. It also enables the entire criminal enterprise to be disrupted or dismantled, instead of prosecution of a few low-level members.

Our Joint Criminal Opioid Darknet Enforcement or JCODE Team is pursuing and disrupting the Darknet marketplace sale of prescription opioids and other illicit narcotics. Just last month we announced Operation RapTor, with the arrest of 270 dark web vendors, buyers, and administrators in 10 countries including the U.S. This operation also resulted in the highest number of seizures of any JCODE operation to date, including more than \$200 million in currency and digital assets; over two metric tons of drugs, including 144 kilograms of fentanyl or fentanyl-laced narcotics; and over 180 firearms. Additionally, we are also using our expert team of financial forfeiture investigators to act as a force multiplier in our cartel investigations—leveraging all our tools with a heightened focus on attacking the financials of these gangs and cartels and seizing their ill-gotten gains.

Overview of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations:

To date in 2025, the Administration has designated ten transnational organizations based in the Western Hemisphere as foreign terrorist organizations, including the Sinaloa Cartel, Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion or CJNG, Tren de Aragua (TdA), and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). These groups are sophisticated and well-organized. They use violence to control neighborhoods, and they finance themselves by conducting illegal money-making activities, which include robbery, drug and gun trafficking, prostitution and human trafficking, and fraud. Even after being incarcerated, many members of these FTOs still continue to commit crimes. The FBI has dedicated tremendous resources to combat the threats posed by these FTOs.



FBI Intelligence Efforts

To help curb the growth of FTOs and related criminal activity, the FBI, at the direction of Congress, established the National Gang Intelligence Center, or NGIC, in 2005.

The NGIC integrates intelligence from across federal, state, and local law enforcement on the growth, migration, criminal activity, and association of FTOs that pose a significant threat to the U.S. It supports law enforcement by sharing timely and accurate information and by providing intelligence analysis.

In addition to the investigative and operational efforts, NGIC has focused on outreach to Law Enforcement and intelligence community (IC) partners to increase both intelligence collection opportunities and awareness of gangs, cartels, and foreign terrorist organizations.

The NGIC continuously provides threat briefings to intelligence community partners, state/local/foreign law enforcement, corrections, and executive audiences; and is leading the interagency working group in collaboration with the Threat Screening Center. The FBI/NGIC maintains strong working relationships with United States Border Patrol and Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Investigations on collection, analysis, and mitigation.

The FBI also works closely with our partners across the U.S. Intelligence Community to leverage classified intelligence information in support of our criminal investigations targeting the Mexican Cartels. USIC-derived intelligence allows us to identify key cartel leaders, map their global trafficking networks and uncover the financial infrastructure that supports their operations. This intelligence is often the catalyst for targeted arrests and financial sanctions that not only disrupt but dismantle cartel activities both here and abroad. This information has led to the seizure of multi-ton drug shipments and the arrest of cartel enablers operating in the U.S.

Effects of the FTO Designation EO

The FTO designation has proven to be a valuable tool for the FBI in advancing our mission as it expands our intelligence collection capability and collaboration with the Intelligence Community and U.S. military. Additionally, it allows FBI to work with DOJ to bring additional charges in the fight against cartels, to include Providing Material Support to Terrorism. Since the Executive Order was signed, we've made over 500 gang-related arrests. We have also expanded our watchlisting capabilities to now include cartel and gang members from newly designated FTOs.

Just this month, an investigation out of FBI Atlanta and DEA Atlanta Field Division led to the largest fentanyl seizure in Georgia's history—valued at nine million dollars—with the arrest of Bartholomew Keeton Harralson—a convicted felon. Enough fentanyl was seized to kill



four times the state's population. In Newark, 30 people are facing federal charges for narcotics and firearms violations connected to trafficking fentanyl and crack cocaine.

The FBI also developed the Counter Cartel Coordination Center (C4) fusion cell to integrate the unique tools, resources, and skillsets across the FBI to most effectively combat the FTOs. C4's base of operations is located at the CBP Southern Border Intelligence Center (SBIC) in Tucson, AZ, where we are co-located with our interagency partners to enhance intelligence sharing and remain latched up with our partners in the DoD and IC to leverage all intelligence sources to enhance our existing investigations.

Closing:

In closing, I just want to reiterate the FBI's unwavering commitment to this mission is a top priority. We appreciate the committee's interest and for your support in our ongoing efforts to disrupt and dismantle these dangerous criminal networks. Thank you for inviting me here today. I am available to answer any questions you have.