



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on April 6, 2011

## U.S. Rep. from Texas Calls for Mexican Cartels to be Labeled Terrorists

Last Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas, picture at left), introduced legislation that would designate six Mexican drug cartels as “foreign terrorist organizations.” According to the Deseret News for March 30, McCaul spokesman Mike Rosen said that “It was the first time ... a member of Congress had proposed the designation for the powerful Mexican drug gangs that have waged war against Mexican security forces over the last five years.”



Mexican gangs are using violence and murder, the same tactics practiced by al-Qaeda and the Taliban to gain influence over the United States. The six groups named in McCaul’s bill are the Arellano Feliz Organization, Los Zetas, the Beltran Leyva Organization, LaFamilia Michoacana, the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Gulf Cartel.

McCaul, a former federal prosecutor and present Chairman of the [Homeland Security? Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Management](#), told the committee that the savagery of the drug cartels along the border

... has expanded to include more brutal forms of violence, deaths of civilians and political leaders. ... [I]n March, 2011 a law enforcement bulletin warned that cartels were overheard plotting to kill ICE agents and Texas Rangers guarding the border using AK-47’s by shooting at them from across the border. These are acts of terrorism as defined by federal law.

The shooting of Special Agents Zapata and Avila [[Jaime Zapata was killed and Victor Avila injured](#) in an attack on February 15 in Mexico by cartel members] is a game-changer. For the first time in 25 years cartels are now targeting American law enforcement.

In an interview with Avila, McCaul learned that after the two agents were ambushed in Mexico, Avila was afraid the cartel would come back and finish him off. McCaul requested that the Department of Justice (DOJ) allow Avila to testify at the committee meeting, but DOJ objected on the grounds that it might endanger his safety, as he is a witness in an ongoing investigation. McCaul pointed out the irony that the United States is spending billions half a world away, while there is an equal threat right at its own southern border, adding, “We need to step up to the plate.” He noted that only one-quarter of the amount of money allowed under the [Merida Initiative](#) has been spent, and that Mexico is losing the drug war. Cartels have gone from battling with each other to disrupting basic services and expanding their criminal enterprises, he observed, warning, “Mexico, if allowed to become a failed state, could become a safe haven for terrorists.”



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On the basis of these arguments, McCaul introduced legislation requiring the State Department to classify the six Mexican cartels as "foreign terror organizations" as a means of limiting their financial, property, and travel interests. The bill would bring separate charges to anyone providing support to the cartels; authorize the deportation of cartel members even if they were in the United States legally; and allow banks to freeze funds belonging to terror organizations.

McCaul continued, "We must secure our borders and intensify southbound inspections to seize weapons and cash." It's time, he declared, for America to show serious commitment to "war in our own backyard."

[Greta Van Susteren](#) interviewed Rep. McCaul (video below), at one point asking if he could document the threats to kill American agents on U.S. soil. He responded,

Yes, several warnings and threats have come to border sheriffs that law enforcement and Texas Rangers are being targeted. Four hundred and fifty cartel associates were picked up in the U.S. after Zapata's killing, and it's only a matter of time before the spillover crime becomes spillover violence. We're seeing a lot of it in border states.

I asked what was the plan or strategy to help stop this in Mexico and there was no answer!

The [Obama] administration says that [the border has] never been more secure [and] that we're doing enough and there's no spillover violence. I don't know what kind of world they're living in. This administration doesn't have the political will to combat it. And we also need to let our guys be armed down there.

McCaul was referring to the fact that American agents — as was the case with Zapata and Avila — are not allowed to be armed, even while they are on duty in Mexico. His proposed bill would enable prosecutors to seek the death penalty in cases of murder of U.S. agents by a cartel member in the course of drug trafficking, such as happened with Zapata. It would also permit prosecutors to seek up to 15 additional years in prison for each conviction of providing "material support or resources" to the six cartels designated as foreign terrorist organizations.

The State Department states that in order to qualify for the designation, an organization must have carried out terrorist attacks or "engaged in planning and preparations for possible future acts of terrorism." But according to the *Deseret News*, the designation is not without criticism. The State Department, sensitive to the pressure on Mexican President Felipe Calderon, downplayed terrorist activities in Mexico in its latest evaluation of terrorism country-by-country across the globe, made public last August:

No known international terrorist organizations had an operational presence in Mexico and no terrorist incidents targeting U.S. interests and personnel occurred on or originated from Mexican territory. Cartels increasingly used military-style terrorist tactics to attack security forces. There was no evidence of ties between Mexican organized crime syndicates and domestic or international terrorist groups.

Even McCaul's fellow Texan and colleague in Washington, Senator John Cornyn, was cautious about designating these cartels as terrorist organizations. "Cartels are in it for one thing — money," he declared. "To me, we need to be clear about what is happening in Mexico. We have got to be careful about the label because sometime those labels can create misleading impressions."

But McCaul thinks otherwise. He emphasized his sentiments to Van Susteren at the close of the



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interview: "We can't afford a failed state in Mexico, and we must secure our borders."

*Photo: Rep. McCaul was interviewed by Greta Van Susteren on Fox News.*



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