



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 18, 2011

State Dept Says Mexican Drug Cartels Akin to Terrorists

There has been a growing push from Americans, particularly those along the Mexican border, for the federal government to label the Mexican drug cartels as terrorists. On Thursday, the State Department indicated that the actions of the cartels are consistent with those considered to be “terrorism or insurgency.”



I do acknowledge that many of the facts on the ground, the things that are being done by those organizations, are consistent with what we would call either terrorism or insurgency in other countries, William Brownfield told a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing. The statement by Brownfield, who serves as the Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, came in response to the following question posed by Rep. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) of the Foreign Affairs Western Hemisphere subcommittee:

If the cartels in Mexico are offering health care, if theyre trying to displace the government, isnt that a political isnt that politically motivated? [G]oing into these communities and putting on barbecues or picnics and trying to win the support of the public so the public will listen to the cartels and not the government, isnt that a political motivation?

When Brownfield made his statement regarding the Mexican drug cartels, Mack responded, It is clear that an insurgency is happening in Mexico.

Whether Americans can expect to see the Mexican drug cartels designated as terrorists, however, remains to be seen, in particular because the State Department has said that the drug cartels differ from terrorist organizations in that they lack political motivations.

Brownfield echoed this idea when he was asked by Mack how he would compare the Mexican drug cartels to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He pointed out that FARC claims to have a political, philosophical and ideological philosophy, while the Mexican cartels do not.

The movement to consider the Mexican drug cartels as terrorist groups seems to have begun last March when Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), Chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, introduced legislation which would direct the State Department to designate the cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). This designation would place them in the same category as groups such as FARC, al Qaeda, and Hezbollah, allowing the U.S. government to freeze the cartels money and prosecute anyone who provides them with financial backing.



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While the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act allows prosecutors to freeze U.S. bank accounts belonging to cartel members, an FTO designation would permit law enforcement agencies to go a step further. *The Daily Caller* [reports](#):

If the cartels are designated as terrorist groups the government can seize an entire organizations assets, not just accounts belonging to the kingpin, McCaul said. It would also add 15 years to the sentence of anyone supplying guns to the cartels.

When McCaul introduced the bill, he said, In my view, [we've] got to call them what they are. Their tactics are certainly like a terrorist.

Steve McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, voiced similar sentiments:

Cartels such as Los Zetas and Sinaloa use terror to ensure [that] their business drugs and money move[s] freely throughout Mexico and across the U.S. border. The barbarism al Qaeda has nothing on these Mexican cartels.

Earlier this week, McCraw indicated that his investigators have discovered that the Mexican drug cartels are [recruiting](#) young Texan children for their operations. He reported that the cartels have used the children whom they label expendables to move vehicles from one position to another, allowing the cartels to keep their actions under the radar.

We made an arrest of a 12-year-old boy who was in a stolen pickup truck with 800 pounds of marijuana, noted McCraw. So they do recruit our kids.

McCauls legislation seemed to have some legal backing. *The Daily Caller* wrote in May, Organizations that use violence to intimidate government or civilians in pursuit of a political goal are considered terrorists by federal definitions."

But according to Matthew Levitt, director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute, the drug cartels in Mexico do not meet this definition. If theyre not seeking political change, then theyre something else, he declared, adding, Theyre in this for the money, which in some ways makes them more dangerous.

Though McCauls legislation never made it out of the subcommittee, Obama administration officials contended that the bill was unnecessary, as there are already enough laws on the books to address the illegal activities of the cartels. We have very, very powerful penalties here in the United States. Having another crime wont make a difference, commented Amy Pope, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice.

Two weeks ago, during a joint hearing of the Foreign Affairs and Homeland Security subcommittees, Brownfield made similar claims:

We have to look through just the FTO label and think through what the implications of the label would be. What is the implication of us making this determination? What does it give us that is more than what we already have?

Some scoff at the notion of designating the Mexican drug cartels as terrorists. Changing the designation from cartel to terrorist is a slippery slope, claimed Rep. Yvette Clarke, a New York Democrat. Echoing similar concerns, Grayling Williams, Director of Homeland Securitys Counternarcotic Enforcement, asked, Do we call gangs on the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant terrorists because they engage in rival gun battles?



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Some believe, however, that the recent revelation of a so-called Iranian government-sponsored plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States which was said to involve a member of a Mexican drug cartel may impact how the federal government views the cartels.

Fox News, for example, in an effort to prove the validity of the alleged plot following fierce skepticism that erupted after the first news reports, [wrote](#):

Now let us examine the Iranian networks in Central and South America and their involvement with drug cartel units.

The alleged details of the assassination plot, specifically pointing to the involvement of a Mexican drug cartel, may be a new revelation to American media and government officials, but Iran has been fortifying its networks in Central and South America for quite some time.

What may have been more surprising is the regime's entanglement with dangerous and influential drug cartels. Yet, we know about a large network of Iranian intelligence and IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] forces in [Mexico](#) close to the border with the U.S.

Cynics note that it may be difficult for the United States to label the Mexican drug cartels as terrorists while the Obama administration is in the midst of the Operation Fast and Furious [scandal](#), which revealed that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives in fact armed those cartels.

It is worth noting that GOP presidential contender Ron Paul [believes](#) that the best way to disarm the Mexican drug cartels is not by labeling them as terrorists, but by simply ending the unending war on drugs, a move that would make fiascos such as Operation Fast and Furious redundant.

Photo: [Juan Jos Esparragoza Moreno](#) is a Sinaloa Cartel drug lord.



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