



THE (NEW) MEXICAN TERRORISM

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Donald Trump has finally been sworn in as the 47th President of the United States of America. In his inaugural address, he reiterated his promise to classify criminal organizations, the cartels, as terrorist organizations and signed the executive order to initiate the process. Unlike its counterparts in other locations, the Mexican government did not celebrate the measure. All indications are that it will have ten days to convince the State Department's Counterterrorism Unit that what is happening in Mexico is not terrorism.

Mexican criminality, one of the most violent, dangerous, and internationally expansive, seems poised to be classified as terrorism. Regardless of whether this constitutes a theoretical/academic error and legally poses a greater challenge, the term "terrorism" is an inherently political concept that assigns qualities and establishes priorities and actions that, in both narrative and operational practice, can be carried out with fewer obstacles. Classifying an activity as terrorism, whether in the U.S. or the European Union, is neither a panacea nor trivial—it all depends on the political will to pursue it. The list includes everything from high-priority, internationally recognized actors like Al-Qaeda, the IRA, or ETA, to lesser-known organizations like the Islamic Jihad Union.

If Mexican organizations such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel were classified as such, according to Donald Trump's campaign narrative, they would become a priority for the U.S. government. This would entail a substantial shift in Mexican security policy. Supported by U.S. counterterrorism tools, efforts could identify and neutralize violent and non-violent targets; disrupt financial and business flows; dissuade associations with actors, organizations, and activities; and prosecute those involved, their partners, and facilitators. This approach could weaken not just violence but also disrupt the cartels' businesses and activities.

The Mexican government might be eager to work with the U.S. on such a scheme, long sought by various nations with similar violence issues. However, the situation seems to point in the opposite direction: Mexican nationalism, ideological differences between Mexico's left-wing government and the U.S. right, and the political, economic, and social benefits that criminal activity has brought to Mexico could serve



as the basis for opposing such classification.

Fortunately for the Mexican government, Donald Trump's executive order leaves room for negotiation by not explicitly naming Mexican organizations in the document. Additionally, the designation process is lengthy, with nearly two weeks remaining before its initiation. This could be an opportunity for Mexico to persuade the State Department to halt the process and begin laying the groundwork for an intergovernmental scheme to combat crime jointly, with similar scope to counterterrorism efforts, benefiting both nations.

If the process of inclusion is not suspended, Mexican organizations would be placed in a category commensurate with the challenge and threat they pose to global security. The complex operations of Mexican organizations make them difficult to target, as they encompass a range of illegal activities linked to legal ones, involving hidden actors in the political, economic, and social spheres of at least 50 nations. In this sense, they are more complex than Al-Qaeda or ISIS, which, due to their religious/political nature, are more visible because of the publicity they give to their actions and ideas.

The reclassification of Mexican organizations and the creation of a Mexico-U.S. counterterrorism intergovernmental scheme would enhance prosecution capabilities. Treating current criminal activity as terrorism would mean extensive use of governmental tools by Mexico, the U.S., and allied nations to detain or eliminate criminal operators, as well as those benefiting, supporting, or facilitating activities within Mexico or abroad.

At this time, we know little about the operational characteristics being considered by U.S. security and justice institutions. Therefore, scenarios could range from limiting the fight to Mexican

Strategic recommendation

The Mexican government should take advantage of this opportunity. Aligning with the U.S. and leveraging counterterrorism tools to dismantle criminal organizations could be beneficial, given the magnitude of the binational challenge and Mexico's institutional weaknesses. Moreover, this could be an opportunity to propose the creation of an intergovernmental instrument for joint and coordinated efforts between the two nations, advancing the institutionalization of formal binational tools. The resulting framework for addressing criminal or terrorist organizations will depend on the skill of Mexican politicians and administrators.



territory and focusing on illegal fentanyl trafficking—leaving management in the hands of national authorities—to the extensive global use of the controversial Patriot Act and the complex international counterterrorism framework to eradicate Mexican terrorist organizations.

Mexico and the U.S. are at a critical juncture that could be used to attempt, with maximum legal and operational resources, to control the organizations and criminal activities that have slowly taken over a significant portion of Mexican territory and its economic, social, and political activities. An enemy that, in size and capability, surpasses terrorist organizations but, being motivated by money rather than ideology, has a higher likelihood of being weakened in a shorter period.

Last call

While we focus on Donald Trump's initial executive orders, the World Economic Forum is meeting in Davos, Switzerland, where major global challenges are being analyzed. The five risks identified in their annual report are: interstate conflicts, extreme weather events, geoeconomic confrontation, misinformation, and social polarization—issues we must not lose sight of amid the current situation.

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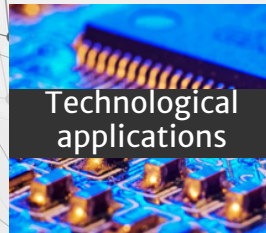
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