



By: TA | AP Brief

Eliminating drug cartels—the top priority of the new US counterterrorism strategy



President Donald Trump has signed off on a new U.S. counterterrorism strategy that sets eliminating drug cartels in the Western Hemisphere as the administration's highest priority, the White House announced Wednesday.

The document was released months after his administration published an updated **national security strategy** that called for the hemisphere to be the top U.S. focus.

“We will not let cartels, Jihadists, or the governments who support them plot against our citizens with impunity. Terrorists of any kind will not be allowed to find safe harbor here at home or attack us from abroad,” Trump wrote in the **16-page document**.

Trump's administration has moved aggressively to reshape the region with the ouster of **Nicolás Maduro** as Venezuela's president, dozens of U.S. military strikes on alleged drug boats operated by cartels and new pressure on the communist government of **Cuba**.

Sebastian Gorka, the White House counterterrorism czar who spearheaded the new strategy, said the shift in priorities acknowledges some simple math: Far more Americans have been killed by cartels pushing illicit drugs into U.S. communities than American service members lost in conflicts around the globe since World War II, he said.

“Whether it is strangling their illicit funds, whether it is tracking their drug boats, we will not permit them to kill Americans on a massive scale,” Gorka said in a telephone call with reporters to announce the strategy.

Neutralizing violent political groups

It is the latest example of the **administration's efforts** to demonstrate it remains committed to sharpening U.S. foreign policy focus on the Western Hemisphere even while dealing with worldwide crises.

The Republican administration's campaign of blowing up alleged drug-trafficking vessels in Latin American waters has persisted since early September and killed at least 191 people in total.

At the same time, Trump has sought to **press regional leaders** to work more closely with the U.S. to target cartels and take military action themselves against drug traffickers and transnational gangs that he says pose an “unacceptable threat” to the hemisphere's national security.

Administration officials would meet with allies later this week to discuss how they can bolster their counterterrorism strategies - Sebastian Gorka

According to Gorka and the report, the administration's other counterterrorism priorities include targeting and destroying Islamic military groups that have capabilities to execute operations against the United States; identifying and neutralizing violent **secular political groups** with ideology that is anti-American, radically pro-transgender or anarchist; and boosting efforts to prevent nonstate actors from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

Gorka said administration officials would meet with allies later this week to discuss how they can bolster their counterterrorism strategies.

“As the president made very clear, we will measure your seriousness as a partner and ally by how much you bring to the table,” he said. “So we expect more – from our partners in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere.”