Texas Public Policy Foundation

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 659

By: **Ammon Blair**, Texas Public Policy Foundation
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Chairman Flores and members of the committee,

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Ammon Blair, I am a Senior Fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 659. I bring with me 22 years of military service and extensive border security experience from my time in the U.S. Army and as a U.S. Border Patrol agent.

Throughout my career defending the United States from transnational threats, I have witnessed firsthand the grim reality of cartel infiltration. This is not speculation. It is not exaggeration. It is a cold and brutal truth: some of my colleagues—fellow agents and soldiers—were actively working for the enemy.

Imagine conducting counterterrorism operations overseas—clearing buildings, maneuvering through hostile terrain, securing objectives—with a battle buddy you trust with your life, only to discover he's been feeding intelligence to the enemy. He's told them where to strike, how to evade your unit, and when to attack. That is not a hypothetical. That is the reality we face right now, here at home in Texas.

Mexican cartels are foreign terrorist organizations, and they are waging a war against us from within.

When I wore the uniform of the U.S. Border Patrol, I swore an oath to protect this country. I stood shoulder to shoulder with men and women who I believed shared that mission. But I came to realize that the enemy wasn't always across the river; sometimes, he was standing right beside me. Some agents—sworn to uphold the law—were taking bribes, leaking operational intelligence, and facilitating the very crimes we were tasked with stopping. This wasn't just corruption. It was betrayal.

Later, while deployed under Operation Lone Star, I saw this same betrayal spread beyond law enforcement. I served with soldiers—men and women in uniform, entrusted with our national defense—who were actively aiding the cartels. These weren't petty criminals looking for easy cash. These were service members with access to military-grade equipment, operational intelligence, and secure communications—resources they leveraged to smuggle people and narcotics for the highest bidder.

What happens when a soldier realizes that his battle buddy, the one who's supposed to guard his life, is actually working for the enemy? It shatters morale. It breeds suspicion. It sabotages missions. And it puts every honest agent and soldier in mortal danger. We weren't just fighting cartel operatives—we were fighting a war with enemies embedded in our own ranks.

Cartels operate like foreign intelligence services. This isn't just corruption; it's counterintelligence. They identify, target, and compromise public officials exactly as a hostile nation-state would. They don't merely offer bribes—they use blackmail, coercion, and threats. Once an agent or soldier takes their money, they are owned. And if they try to walk away, their families become the target.

We cannot afford to be naïve. Every compromised official is a force multiplier for the enemy. One corrupted agent can greenlight thousands of pounds of narcotics. One compromised National Guard soldier can enable entire human smuggling networks. One sheriff with cartel ties can paralyze law enforcement efforts across an entire jurisdiction.

That is why SB 659 is not just important—it is essential. For too long, Texas has lacked the legal tools to prosecute those who use their authority to serve cartel interests. This bill makes it unmistakably clear: if you use your badge, your uniform, or your access to government resources to aid a foreign terrorist organization, you are committing an act of treason. You should not just lose your job—you should face severe, mandatory prison time.

I did not dedicate my life to public service only to stand by while others betray it. I am speaking out today because the American people deserve to know the truth. This is no longer just a matter of border security.

This is a matter of national security. It is about restoring integrity to our ranks, defending our sovereignty, and holding accountable those who betray their oath.

We are at war. And it's time to start treating it that way.

To fully understand the gravity of internal betrayal and domestic cartel infiltration, one must look beyond our borders to the external threat that fuels and sustains it. This is not simply a border management failure—it is a national security failure rooted in strategic denial.

Since before Texas joined the Union, it has faced persistent and often violent threats emanating from the southern frontier—including illegal immigration, human and drug smuggling, insurgent activity, and foreign terrorist infiltration— often with minimal federal support (McCaffrey & Scales, 2011). What has changed is the scale, organization, and political sophistication of that threat. Mexico is no longer merely a source of instability; it is the epicenter of a hybrid warfare campaign against the United States.

Mexico is the most strategically consequential nation to U.S. homeland security, and yet it remains one of the most underestimated and politically ignored threats in the American national security apparatus. While our defense establishment focused on the borders and sovereignty of foreign nations across the globe, Mexico devolved into a narco-insurgent state on our doorstep, exporting violence, criminal governance, and destabilization directly into U.S. territory.

Yet despite the clear and expanding threat, in the past, the federal government has ignored Mexico as a national security priority, treating the crisis as a humanitarian management challenge rather than the gray zone conflict it has become. This deliberate misframing paralyzed the federal response and allowed Mexico to become a sanctuary state for enemies of the United States (Fernández, 2024).

Mexico today is more accurately described as a state where federal, state, and local governance has collapsed in key regions and foreign terrorist organizations dominate political and economic life, much like Afghanistan (Kaminski, 2024). These cartels function as hybrid threats, closely resembling their Middle Eastern counterparts, where they employ terror as a political weapon, control territory, corrupt or co-opt institutions, and use violence strategically to shape governance outcomes (Maya, 2021). Their war is not against a rival state—it is against the very concept of law, sovereignty, and national borders.

Therefore, the security environment along the U.S.–Mexico border cannot be understood through the outdated framework of immigration alone. What exists is an intolerable strategic alliance between the Mexican state, at the national and sub-national level, and the cartels—a relationship that has evolved into a coordinated, ideologically aligned partnership with direct consequences for U.S. national security (Treviño, 2025a).

As President Trump declared on February 1, 2025, "The Mexican DTOs have an intolerable alliance with the government of Mexico. This alliance endangers the national security of the United States, and we must eradicate the influence of these dangerous cartels from the bilateral environment" (The White House, 2025b).

This was not political rhetoric—it was a necessary recognition of a hostile, coordinated, and ideologically aligned threat. Mexican cartel organizations, including the Sinaloa Cartel and CJNG, now operate in at least 65 countries, rivaling foreign terrorist organizations in reach, capability, and lethality (Fitzgerald, 2025). These networks are not merely trafficking narcotics—they are engaged in narcoterrorism, human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, and political subversion. In many areas, they out-govern the Mexican state, exercising de facto control and offering services the government no longer can or will (Georgetown Americas Institute, 2024).

As Texas Public Policy Foundation's Joshua Treviño warns, "The Mexican state is now essentially a single-party, left-populist regime, aligned ideologically and operationally with comparable regimes in Cuba and Venezuela. Like those regimes, it regards its nation's trafficking cartels as vehicles for profit and control and also agents of national policy abroad — especially but not only in the United States" (Treviño, 2025b).

The alliance between the Mexican government and the Mexican cartels is no longer speculative—it is openly acknowledged by leading policy experts and institutions (Golden, 2024). The Conservative U.S.-Mexico Policy Coalition declares unequivocally that "the Mexican government is not an ally to the United States, and can no longer properly be described as a partner" (Conservative U.S.-Mexico Policy Coalition, 2023, p. 1).

The Coalition further warns that "the Mexican government and Mexican criminal cartels exist in conscious and willing symbiosis, at multiple levels, up to and including the Mexican presidency," and that Mexico is now "a willing partner in a regional authoritarian leftist alliance that is fundamentally anti-American, actively interventionist, and increasingly an arena and base for hostile powers from outside the Western Hemisphere" (Conservative U.S.-Mexico Policy Coalition, 2023, p. 1).

The federal government's previous failure to acknowledge or confront Mexico's authoritarian backsliding has effectively greenlit a regime that tolerates narco-terrorism as a cost of doing business. By continuing to treat Mexico as a diplomatic peer rather than a strategic liability, the federal government insulated a failing state from accountability while exposing American communities to escalating violence.

In national security terms, democratic collapse in a neighboring state is not a foreign policy concern—it is a homeland security emergency. The United States cannot afford to ignore the consequences of political decay when it fuels the operational capabilities of cartels that already control swaths of American territory along the southern border.

U.S.-Mexico Border

In May 2019, the Mexican investigative journal Contralínea published a leaked map from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration showing that over 80% of Mexico's population centers prioritized for enforcement were either controlled (57.5%) or contested (23.3%) by Mexican cartels. Only 19.9% of those areas were under undisputed government control. The report, citing internal Mexican government data, exposed the ground truth: the Mexican state had effectively lost governance over nearly all key urban corridors, particularly those along the U.S. border (Horowitz, 2019).

This loss of territorial control does not stop at Mexico's border. The same cartel networks that dominate key Mexican population centers have projected their power into Texas and other U.S. states, exploiting the permissive environment created by both federal inaction and fragmented state-level coordination. What began as cross-border trafficking has evolved into a full-spectrum, multi-domain campaign, establishing operational control over critical areas within the United States itself.

While Mexico is engaged in a non-international armed conflict—where cartels openly battle the state for control of territory and population—the spillover into the United States has taken a far more insidious form (ACLED, 2024). Cartels do not seek to provoke a direct armed response from the U.S. military or federal government, nor does the Mexican state want to risk exposure as a complicit or tacitly cooperative actor. Instead, Mexican cartels have adapted their methods to achieve the same objective—territorial control—through covert, gray zone tactics that replicate their domination of Mexican society within U.S. border communities.

In this model, operational control does not require military confrontation. It is secured through the systematic erosion of institutional integrity and the strategic compromise of U.S. governance at every level. Cartels act as de facto foreign intelligence services, targeting federal, state, and local law enforcement, National Guard elements, and the legal system itself. Corruption, bribery, coercion, and espionage are tools of influence—not just within enforcement ranks but among prosecutors, judges, and elected officials (Goldstein, 2024; Kolssak, 2015).

Cartel influence is also deeply embedded within the civilian population (Bunker et al., 2010). Just as in Mexico, they exert a socio-economic grip by employing Americans across their logistical supply chains. From scouts and stash house caretakers to drone operators, drivers, and financial facilitators, cartels provide economic incentives and coercive pressure, drawing ordinary citizens into roles that sustain cartel infrastructure and operations (Burnett & Peñaloza, 2015).

A recent study found that Mexican cartels are now the fifth-largest employer in Mexico (Irwin, 2023). That same model of parallel governance and economic capture is being exported across the border. In rural Texas border counties, cartel activity is so deeply woven into daily life that the state is rapidly losing functional sovereignty in these zones—without a single shot being fired. This is the evolution of warfare: armed conflict in Mexico, institutional subversion in the United States.

Mexican cartels have systematically established operational control along the U.S. side of the border, employing sophisticated gray zone activities that remain below the threshold of conventional armed conflict (Luna, 2024; House Committee on Homeland Security, 2023). Their operations now extend across multiple domains—land, air, maritime, subterranean, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum—enabling them to conduct surveillance, communication disruption, and logistical coordination with precision and impunity (Sanchez, 2025; Hackers Arise, 2025; Paz, 2024).

This multi-domain approach has enabled cartels to seize, command, and control territory in Texas, while building a comprehensive infrastructure for unrestricted movement from Mexico deep into Texas communities (McCaffrey & Scales, 2011, pp. 8-9, 17; Allen, 2023). This established framework of access has become the cartels' most valuable commodity, creating a sophisticated "silk road" that hostile state and non-state actors exploit to directly reach U.S. populations (Warren, 2019).

These cartels no longer need to rely on their own operatives to penetrate U.S. borders—they simply recruit and compromise Americans already in positions of power and trust. With the same strategic sophistication as a foreign intelligence agency, they deploy bribes, blackmail, intimidation, and deception to subvert law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, and military personnel. Some are coerced. Others volunteer. But the outcome is the same: our own public servants become tools of a transnational criminal enterprise.

The consequences of this infiltration are catastrophic. Corrupt officials exploit government vehicles, access secure databases, and leak operational intelligence —all to facilitate the movement of drugs, weapons, and human beings with near-total impunity. This is not merely misconduct or dereliction of duty, it is treason. When a sworn officer of the law aids a foreign terrorist organization, they cease to serve the American people. They become an enemy asset.

Cartels conduct proxy warfare on U.S. soil by turning Americans into facilitators. Their strategy is not ad hoc or opportunistic; it is methodical and deliberate. The objective is not just to bypass border defenses, but to hollow them out from within. They aim to neutralize our enforcement systems by compromising those sworn to uphold them. And they are succeeding.

Case Studies: The Corruption Crisis in Action

CBP Officer Manuel Perez, Jr.: In February 2025, Officer Manuel Perez, Jr., stationed in El Paso, was arrested for allegedly collaborating with a cartel to smuggle illegal migrants and narcotics into the United States. Utilizing his official position, Perez is accused of personally escorting individuals across the border, effectively bypassing established security protocols. His actions not only compromised border security but also facilitated the expansion of criminal activities within the country (U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Texas, 2025).

Texas National Guard Members Involved in Smuggling: Several Texas National Guard soldiers have been apprehended for allegedly using government vehicles to transport illegal migrants on behalf of cartels. In one notable incident, a soldier was caught after smuggling an illegal alien to the border and leading law enforcement on a high-speed chase in a government-issued vehicle (Steinbuch & Pollina 2024). Such exploitation of military resources and authority undermines public trust and poses significant risks to national security.

Starr County Sheriff Reymundo Guerra: Sheriff Reymundo Guerra was convicted for assisting the Los Zetas cartel in drug smuggling operations. He provided the cartel with confidential law enforcement information, including attempts to identify informants, thereby jeopardizing investigations and endangering lives. His sentencing underscored the severe impact of corruption within law enforcement ranks (U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas, 2009).

Former Texas DPS Trooper Pablo Talavera, Jr.: In December 2023, former Texas Department of Public Safety Trooper Pablo Talavera, Jr., was sentenced for lying to federal authorities during a drug investigation. Talavera was implicated in a scheme involving the transportation of large quantities of narcotics from the Rio Grande Valley to Tennessee, with his father identified as the operation's leader. His deceit obstructed justice and highlighted vulnerabilities within state law enforcement agencies (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2023).

Starr County District Attorney's Office Vehicle Misuse: Investigations revealed that a vehicle assigned to the Starr County District Attorney's Office was utilized in nearly 50 separate human smuggling incidents. This blatant misuse of government property facilitated illegal activities and exemplified the depth of institutional corruption (Gonzalez, 2022).

Fort Cavazos Soldiers Arrested for Smuggling: In November 2024, three active-duty soldiers from Fort Cavazos were arrested for participating in a human smuggling conspiracy. The soldiers allegedly traveled from Fort Cavazos to Presidio, Texas, to transport undocumented noncitizens. During the operation, their vehicle fled from a U.S. Border Patrol agent, resulting in a collision that injured an agent. The soldiers' actions represent a profound betrayal of their oaths and compromise national security (U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Texas, 2024).

Former Prosecutor Victor Canales, Jr.: In October 2024, Victor Canales, Jr., the former elected Starr County Attorney, was sentenced to 37 months in federal prison for extortion under color of law. Canales accepted bribes totaling $44,000 in exchange for favorable legal outcomes. His actions eroded public trust and exemplified how prosecutorial corruption can impede justice (De Leon, 2024).

Border Patrol Agent Héctor Hernández: In 2023, Border Patrol Agent Héctor Hernández was implicated in a scheme where he provided guided tours to human traffickers, showing them optimal locations along the U.S.-Mexico border to smuggle migrants. Hernández also supplied information on the placement of surveillance devices and cameras, leveraging his position to aid illegal operations. His actions exposed critical vulnerabilities in border security and highlighted the risks of insider corruption (DEA, 2024).

A New Era of Federal Engagement—But Texas Will Bear the Brunt

In recognition that the threats operating on our side of the border now far exceed the capabilities and capacity of federal, state, and local law enforcement, the current response under the Trump administration represents the most robust and strategically aligned border security effort since 1916, when nearly 110,000 National Guard soldiers were mobilized to counter cross-border insurgencies during the Mexican Revolution (Barnes, 2016). For the first time in over a century, the federal government is meeting threats with matching capabilities. The Trump administration has signaled an unprecedented commitment to countering the multifaceted, transnational threats emanating from the collapsed Mexican state (The White House, 2025a).

That commitment was solidified on April 11, 2025, when President Trump issued a National Security Presidential Memorandum titled Military Mission for Sealing the Southern Border of the United States and Repelling Invasions (The White House, 2025c). The directive authorized the Department of Defense to accept jurisdiction over select federal lands along the southern border and explicitly acknowledged the scale and complexity of the threat environment (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2025). "Our southern border is under attack from a variety of threats," the memorandum states. "The complexity of the current situation requires that our military take a more direct role in securing our southern border than in the recent past" (The White House, 2025c).

This shift will significantly enhance security postures in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, where vast stretches of the border are federally managed. However, it will have the unintended consequence of displacing cartel operations into Texas. Unlike its western neighbors, Texas is overwhelmingly composed of private land—approximately 95%—which lies outside federal jurisdiction (Vanetta & Satija, 2014). This reality limits federal presence, restricts surveillance and interdiction capabilities, and makes Texas the inevitable focal point for rerouted smuggling, trafficking, and insurgent activity. In effect, as federal forces harden the rest of the southern border, Texas will become the epicenter of cartel operations in North America.

How SB 659 Can Help Turn the Tide

At present, Texas law fails to confront the full national security consequences of cartel infiltration and corruption within our institutions. We are prosecuting treasonous acts as if they were routine misconduct. SB 659 changes that.

By removing prosecutorial leniency, enforcing mandatory sentencing, and elevating the penalties for those who betray their oath of service, SB 659 establishes a clear, uncompromising standard: Texas will no longer tolerate the subversion of law enforcement, military, or public office by foreign terrorist organizations.

This Legislature faces a defining choice. The question is not whether cartel corruption exists within our ranks—it does. The question is whether we will act decisively to root it out. SB 659 gives Texas the legal tools to purge compromised officials, restore institutional integrity, and protect innocent men, women, and children from the horrors of modern-day slavery.

If we fail to act, the cartels will continue to expand their influence—corrupting more officials, eroding public trust, and neutralizing the very agencies meant to protect our communities. But if we pass SB 659, Texas will send a message that cannot be ignored: If you betray your oath, if you serve a cartel, if you facilitate human smuggling and the enslavement of others, you will be prosecuted as an enemy within.

This is not a policy debate. It is a moral imperative. This is a battle for the soul of Texas—and there is no room for compromise.

Scan the QR code below for our research:
"Texas Homeland Defense: Statewide Threat Assessment and Multi-Jurisdictional Plan to Protect and Defend Texas"

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Scan the link below for all of TPPF's Border/Immigration research for the 89th Legislature