



## Trump wants Mexico to ‘take out the cartels.’ Here’s why that’s so hard

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Just hours after the US overthrow of Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan leader accused of “narco-terrorism,” US President Donald Trump suggested he could expand his military campaign to Mexican drug-trafficking groups.

“We have to do something” about America’s southern neighbor, Trump told the TV show “Fox and Friends” at the weekend, noting the Mexican government had repeatedly rejected his offer to “take out the cartels.”



On Thursday, Trump [reiterated his stance](#), saying he would soon target cartels on land. “We’ve knocked out 97% of the drugs coming in by water, and we are gonna start now hitting land, with regard to the cartels,” Trump told Fox News.

Mexico might seem a logical target for what Trump has framed as a war on drugs. It’s the [main producer of US-bound fentanyl](#), and the principal corridor for cocaine from Colombia. That makes it a far more significant player in the global drug trade than Venezuela.

But Trump’s description of the Mexican trafficking world – one dominated by a few cartels that can be swiftly defeated – is at odds with how the crime organizations actually operate, experts say.

### ‘They’re practically everywhere’

For years, books, movies and Netflix series have portrayed Mexican cartels as top-down organizations led by colorful drug lords like Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán, whose Houdini-like escapes from prison turned him into a celebrity. In the 1980s and 1990s, a half-dozen such cartels dominated Mexico’s trafficking industry, several based near the US border.



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