



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 23, 2026

# Jalisco Cartel Hits Targets Nationwide After Leader Killed in Shootout, American Tourists Endangered

The Jalisco New Generation Cartel [mounted major attacks](#) and left hundreds of places across the country in flames after the Mexican Army killed its leader on Sunday.

Dead in a shootout with the army is [Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes](#), also known as “El Mencho.” As head of The JNGC cartel, he managed one of the most powerful in the narcostate. JNGC controls the fentanyl and methamphetamine trades.

More than 70 people died in the shootout that killed Cervantes. Viral video on X shows myriad locations, including a Costco in Puerto Vallarta, underneath clouds of billowing, black smoke. One American tourist there reported that he was forced to flee cartel gunmen.



AP Images

A burned-out truck in Mexico after a JNGC attack

In August, a Mexican senator begged for U.S. help in combatting the cartels. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the United States helped in the operation that killed the 59-year-old cartel kingpin. Though Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has previously rejected U.S. help in battling the cartels, she has apparently changed her mind, at least in this one case.

BREAKING: 25 Mexican National Guard troops were killed in Jalisco after cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes was killed by army. <https://t.co/dkISzOM2YC>

— The Associated Press (@AP) [February 23, 2026](#)

## Shootout Aftermath

Cervantes died, The Associated Press reported, on the way to a hospital.

“The drug lord was the Mexican government’s biggest prize yet to show the Trump administration in its efforts to crack down on the cartels, and his death was met with a forceful reaction from the cartel, known by its Spanish initials CJNG,” the [news agency reported](#):

Cars burned out by cartel members blocked roads at more than 250 points in 20 Mexican states, authorities said, and left smoke billowing into the air. Jalisco’s capital, Guadalajara, was turned into a ghost town Sunday night as civilians hunkered down. School was canceled Monday in several states. Authorities in Jalisco, Michoacan and Guanajuato reported at least 14 dead, including seven National Guard troops.

Oseguera Cervantes was wounded in an operation to capture him Sunday in Tapalpa, Jalisco, about a two-hour drive southwest of Guadalajara and he died while being flown to



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Mexico City, the Defense Department said in a statement. The state is the base of the cartel known for trafficking huge quantities of fentanyl and other drugs to the United States.

Jalisco was Cervantes' home state.

A [later AP report](#) put the death toll at 73, including "25 members of the Mexican National Guard who were killed in six separate attacks, Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch said." Mexican forces killed 30 criminals in Jalisco and four more in Michoacan.

After "El Mencho" went to his reward, JNGC attacked across the nation.

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Mexican cartels are now attacking civilian buildings after the Mexican Army took out a cartel leader.

That cartel flooded the U.S. with massive fentanyl shipments fueling an epidemic that killed hundreds of thousands of Americans.

This is the fallout you're watching. [pic.twitter.com/mwa2KIdYuK](https://pic.twitter.com/mwa2KIdYuK)

— Sarah Sizzle (@sizzle\_sarah) [February 22, 2026](#)

In Puerto Vallarta, American tourists fled from JNGC cartel terrorists. "Marcus Brady, a Chicago resident currently in Puerto Vallarta, shared videos of the violence with NBC News," [NBC News reported](#):

He said he thought the cartel's intent was to send a message to the Mexican government and American and Canadian tourists that, "If we want to, we will take complete control of everything and everyone here, no one can stop us."

He said the violence happened in two waves starting early Sunday morning. First, a few cars were set on fire on the main road and bridges in and out of the Zona Romántica area of Puerto Vallarta, he said, with much of that taking place in an area behind foothills.

"When those fires were going out everyone thought it was over. I know I did. So many of us thought it OK to venture out and I decided to walk down to the boardwalk, through the zone," Brady said.

But the second wave was the worst, targeted inside the zone, he said. Brady said he mistook buses and taxis positioned at intersections as barricades to prevent violence, but they had been put there by the cartel during the night. "And when the second wave started, they coordinated setting them on fire, so it would last all day. The intention was to terrify," he said.

Another Chicagoan said "gunmen were following us and they were shooting. And they were attacking



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cars and pulling out drivers. At that point, we just ran as fast as we could."

## **Trump Administration Helped Target El Mencho**

Last night on X, White House Press Secretary Leavitt said the United States "provided intelligence support" for the operation.

"President Trump has been very clear — the United States will ensure narcoterrorists sending deadly drugs to our homeland are forced to face the wrath of justice they have long deserved," she wrote.

[Trump declared](#) JNGC a terrorist outfit on Inauguration Day last year. In August, [he ordered](#) the military to begin operations against the drug cartels.

Along with JNGC, the State Department later published a list of the cartels so designated:

- [Tren de Aragua](#) (TdA);
- [Mara Salvatrucha](#) (MS-13);
- [Cartel de Sinaloa](#) (the Sinaloa Cartel);
- [Carteles Unidos](#);
- [Cartel del Noreste](#);
- [Cartel del Golfo](#); and
- [La Nueva Familia Michoacana](#).

In 2020, [The Wall Street Journal explained](#) that the cartel "dominates the trade in fentanyl and methamphetamines" and "has become Mexico's most powerful criminal organization, eclipsing the more famous Sinaloa Cartel, which used to be run by jailed drug lord Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman and is now being managed by his sons."

But "more than any rival gang, the Jalisco cartel has made it a hallmark to attack Mexican security forces and public servants directly, making it the biggest danger to the country's at times fragile stability, former and current security officials say," the newspaper reported.

## **Mexican Senator: We Need U.S. Help**

Speaking on *Fox & Friends* in January after [U.S. forces captured](#) Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro, Trump said that he has offered to help Mexico fight the cartels, but that President Claudia Sheinbaum has refused.

"The cartels are running Mexico," Trump said:

She's not running Mexico, the cartels are running Mexico.... She's very frightened of the cartels..... I've asked her numerous times, "would you like us to take out the cartels?" No, no, no Mr. President, no, no, no, please. So we have to do something."

□ PRESIDENT TRUMP CALLED IT: President Sheinbaum "is NOT running Mexico, the CARTELS are running Mexico."

"It's the cartels...I've asked her NUMEROUS times, would you like us to take our the cartels? 'No, no, no, president, please.'"

CALL IN TRUMP, SHEINBAUM! Finish this! □□□□ [pic.twitter.com/bcN4WOeFGh](https://pic.twitter.com/bcN4WOeFGh)



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— Eric Daugherty (@EricLDaugh) [February 22, 2026](#)

Cartel violence is being allowed in Mexico because President Claudia Sheinbaum works for the Cartel

A Senator from Mexico went on Fox News and exposed it all

- The President of Mexico works for the Cartels
- She was funded by money from the cartels
- It's not just the... [pic.twitter.com/SMtpEhsHda](https://pic.twitter.com/SMtpEhsHda)

— Wall Street Apes (@WallStreetApes) [February 23, 2026](#)

Mexican Senator Lilly Tellez told Fox Noticias in August that the nation needs U.S. intervention to stop the cartels — that “help is absolutely welcome.” Tellez told the network that the only politicians who oppose U.S. help are those the cartels own, and that includes — or at least, included, before yesterday — Sheinbaum. The president wasn’t happy.

Later, asked whether Mexico is a narcostate, Tellez said yes, “and “Mexicans know about it.” The cartels subsidize politicians, she said.

Continued Tellez, a conservative [National Action Party](#) member who represents Sonora:

The Mexican government protects the cartels. That is why President Sheinbaum doesn’t want the strong American leadership to help Mexico defeat the cartels. And also Sheinbaum doesn’t want the rest of the world to know what is happening here in Mexico. We are on the steps to be the next Venezuela.... We are losing our country. They have destroyed our republican institutions.... We all Mexicans want and welcome the support of the United States to assist [the] Mexican people against the cartels.

Thus, Tellez said, rank-and-file Mexicans want U.S. help to destroy the cartels.

Tellez, formerly a prominent journalist, told the network that she is afraid for her life but will not back down.

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[Is the Cartel Uprising in Mexico a Pretext for a U.S. Resource Grab?](#)



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