

August 15, 2025

Dear Chairmen Risch and Mast, and Ranking Members Shaheen and Meeks:

We, the undersigned good governance, veterans, immigration, human rights, protection of civilians, and faith-based organizations,<sup>1</sup> write to express our deep concern over [reports](#) that President Trump has [directed](#) the Department of Defense to use military force against criminal organizations in Latin America, including [news](#) that U.S. air and naval forces are now deploying to the Southern Caribbean Sea. U.S. airstrikes and military raids in Latin America would put people at risk of violence and destabilize hemispheric relations while hindering, not helping, efforts to protect communities from drug trafficking and other crime. We urge Congress to use the full slate of its powers to prevent the administration from launching unlawful hostilities in Latin America without democratic debate or public accountability.

Congress, not the president, has the constitutional role and responsibility to decide when, where, and against whom the nation uses force. Congress has not authorized the use of military force against criminal groups. As administration officials [have acknowledged](#), Secretary of State Rubio's designation of criminal groups in Latin America as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) [does not](#) unlock exceptional wartime authorities. Nor is there an international legal basis for using military force in Mexico, Venezuela, or any other hemispheric country that [refuses](#) to allow the U.S. military to operate in its territory. Unilateral military action would blatantly violate the prohibition on the use of force under the UN and OAS Charters, and open the United States to international condemnation and isolation.

Violating Latin American countries' sovereignty would damage vital regional partnerships. The United States maintains robust relations with the region's governments that are integral to hemispheric stability and cooperation, including on trade, security, and migration – especially with Mexico, the United States' [largest trading partner](#). Ill-conceived and unlawful military operations would needlessly jeopardize these relations, as Latin American governments, already mindful of a long history of U.S. intervention in their countries, could [limit](#) or [withdraw](#) entirely from shared initiatives.

Unilateral and hastily conceived military action could contribute to the considerable human rights abuses, criminal violence, and forced displacement already harming communities in Latin America. Militarized approaches to countering narcotics trafficking have often backfired. They have inadvertently [incentivized](#) criminal groups to traffic smaller and more potent drugs to evade interdiction, acquire deadlier weapons, and expand their networks of corruption to protect their profits. In Mexico, decades of domestic military deployment against drug trafficking organizations, supported with differing levels of U.S. [cooperation](#), have witnessed dramatic increases in [homicides](#) and [disappearances](#), as well as the forced displacement of [hundreds of thousands](#) of people by organized crime-related violence. Meanwhile, Mexico's criminal groups have [fragmented](#) from fewer than 20 to more than 200. These

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<sup>1</sup> While not all signatories take a position on every matter covered in this letter, all are aligned in expressing concern over news of the administration's directive.

militarized policies have all too often contributed to poverty, violence, and displacement across Latin America – issues that have led so many to seek refuge in the United States.

U.S. citizens and residents will not be able to avoid these and other human costs. Most immediately, over [one million](#) U.S. citizens live and work in Mexico and could be suddenly exposed to [blowback](#) of unilateral military action, including potential retaliatory violence. And U.S. servicemembers would, yet again, be asked to risk their lives to fight a problem that cannot be defeated through military means. Beyond this, Mexican, Venezuelan, and other Latin American immigrants living in the United States could find themselves pulled even further into an unlawful deportation dragnet. The current administration has already invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 against the Venezuela-based Tren de Aragua gang to wrongly deport hundreds of immigrants, many of whom had [no criminal record](#) and were [lawfully present](#). Military action against criminal groups abroad would only embolden efforts to abuse that archaic law.

Meanwhile, U.S. communities deeply harmed by the fentanyl crisis would watch their government pursue a false solution to a painful challenge. Although deaths from fentanyl use remain distressingly high, they have [fallen](#) significantly in recent years, [due](#) in part to greater public education and readier access to life-saving interventions, especially naloxone. As Deputy Secretary of State and former Ambassador to Mexico Christopher Landau has [written](#), targeting drug kingpins instead of addressing domestic demand through education and prevention programs is “a losing strategy.” Criminal groups can adapt to meet the high level of illicit drug demand within the United States. An entrenched and expensive military conflict would still leave users and their families vulnerable to harm, particularly as so many reel from recent cuts to Medicaid and public health.

Congress has the power to check this directive before it is implemented. We implore you and your colleagues to immediately organize hearings to assess the scope of the administration’s envisioned use-of-force policy and its likely diplomatic, economic, and human impacts. We call on you to withhold funding for unauthorized, undebated, and unaccountable military action. And as you exercise your constitutional responsibilities, we urge you to recognize that criminal violence abroad and overdose deaths at home cannot be addressed through military action.

Signed,

Alianza Americas  
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)  
Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)  
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
Center for International Policy Advocacy  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Church World Service  
Common Defense  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Demand Progress  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Free Speech For People  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Illinois Workers in Action  
Institute for Policy Studies, Drug Policy Project  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Military Families Speak Out  
Muslims for Just Futures  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Immigration Law Center  
Oregonizers  
Pax Christi USA  
Peace Action  
Public Citizen  
Quixote Center  
RootsAction  
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows  
SHARE Foundation  
The Chamberlain Network  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
Veterans for Peace  
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
Win Without War  
World BEYOND War

CC:

Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Reed, Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, House Armed Services Committee  
Chairman Cotton and Ranking Member Warner, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence  
Chairman Crawford and Ranking Member Himes, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence  
Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Durbin, Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Chairman Jordan and Ranking Member Raskin, House Committee on the Judiciary