

US NEWS

Trump Notifies Congress of 'Armed Conflict' With Drug Cartels

Pentagon officials informed members of Congress of the development after strikes were carried out on boats in the Caribbean.



President Donald Trump in Washington on Sept. 30, 2025. Win McNamee/Getty Images



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10/2/2025 | Updated: 10/3/2025

President Donald Trump declared drug cartels to be “unlawful combatants” and said that the United States is now in a “non-international armed conflict.” according to an administration

report sent to Congress and obtained by The Epoch Times.

The report is a notification mandated by federal law following any incident in which U.S. forces are involved in an attack or hostilities. A White House official told The Epoch Times that the report was sent to Congress following the second U.S. strike on a drug smuggling vessel and “does not convey any new information.”

The Trump administration has carried out three strikes in recent weeks on boats it said were smuggling drugs in the Caribbean, starting with a Sept. 2 strike that administration officials said killed 11 members of Tren de Aragua, a criminal group that originated in Venezuela and was designated as a terrorist organization by the United States earlier this year.

“Although friendly foreign nations have made significant efforts to combat these organizations, suffering significant losses of life, these groups are now transnational and conduct ongoing attacks throughout the Western Hemisphere as organized cartels,” the report, obtained by The Epoch Times on Oct. 2, [states](#).

“Therefore, the President determined these cartels are non-state armed groups, designated them as terrorist organizations, and determined that their actions constitute an armed attack against the United States.”

Trump issued an [executive order](#) directing the designation of cartels as terrorist groups on his first day in office. The State Department issued a [formal designation](#) on Feb. 20. Those records didn't refer to cartel members as “unlawful combatants” or describe their activity as “an armed attack against the United States.”

A Pentagon spokesperson referred a request for comment to the White House.

“We’re not going to sit back anymore and watch these people sail up and down the Caribbean like a cruise ship,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in September. “It’s not going to happen.”

Emel Akan contributed to this report.

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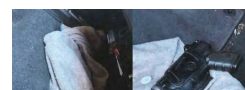
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