

United Cartels (CU)

OVERVIEW

AS OF JANUARY 2026

United Cartels (CU) is a coalition of drug trafficking and criminal organizations that work together to traffic narcotics from Michoacán, Mexico, to the United States. CU formed in 2019 to prevent larger cartels, such as the New Generation Jalisco Cartel (CJNG), from entering Michoacán. As of late 2025, CU was composed of the Cartel del Abuelo, Cartel Deal, Cartel Tepalcatepec, Cartel de los Reyes, the Knights Templar, Los Blancos de Troya, and La Nueva Familia Michoacána. However, the coalition is fragile, and cartels within the CU sometimes break away or work with rival cartels when it serves their interests.

Operating Area

Michoacán, Mexico

Members

Probably in the thousands

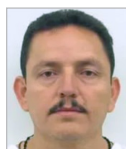
Tactics And Targets

CU protects its operations through threats and violence, often resulting in civilian and Mexican military and law enforcement casualties. Its members primarily use small arms, IEDs, and weaponized UAS to attack CJNG members and Mexican security forces. CU smuggles cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine into the United States. It is also involved in other illicit and violent criminal activities, including extorting avocado and lemon producers in Michoacan's Tierra Caliente region.

Terrorist Group Designation

In February 2025, the US State Department designated CU as a foreign terrorist organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity.

KEY LEADERS



Juan Jose Farias Alvarez

a.k.a. El Abuelo

CU leader

[The US State Department offers up to a \\$10 million reward for information leading to his arrest](#)



United Cartels (CU) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS *(continued)*



Alfonso Fernández Magallon

a.k.a. Poncho

Leader of the CU's Cartel de los Reyes faction

[The US State Department offers up to a \\$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest](#)



Luis Enrique Barragan Chavez

a.k.a. Wicho, R5, Guicho

Chief sicario (assassin) for the Cartel de los Reyes faction

[The US State Department offers up to a \\$3 million reward for information leading to his arrest.](#)



Edgar Orozco Cabadas

a.k.a. El Kamoni

CU chief enforcer

[The US State Department offers up to a \\$3 million reward for information leading to his arrest.](#)

NOTABLE ATTACKS

May 2025

Michoacán, Mexico

A roadside IED planted by the CU's Cartel de los Reyes faction kills eight Mexican soldiers.

