

Treasury Targets Cartel-Enabled Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Operations



November 26, 2024

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is sanctioning five Mexican individuals associated with the Gulf Cartel, one of Mexico's most dangerous criminal organizations. Those designated today are tied to the Gulf Cartel's involvement in criminal activities associated with illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, human smuggling, and narcotics trafficking in the Gulf of Mexico. IUU fishing often involves criminal activity, forced labor, and human rights abuses, and is often a revenue stream for criminal organizations. IUU fishing is also a threat to U.S. maritime security, as criminal organizations may use the same vessels for smuggling narcotics and humans across borders.

"Today's action highlights how transnational criminal organizations like the Gulf Cartel rely on a variety of illicit schemes like IUU fishing to fund their operations, along with narcotics trafficking and human smuggling," said Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Bradley T. Smith. "Treasury, as part of a whole-of-government approach to combatting transnational criminal organizations, remains committed to disrupting these networks and restricting these groups' ability to profit from these activities."

Today's sanctions are the result of strong collaboration with the U.S. Coast Guard, Homeland Security Investigations, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. This action was also coordinated closely with La Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (UIF), Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit.

HARMFUL IMPACTS OF IUU FISHING

The U.S. Department of the Treasury is a member of the U.S. Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing, which was established by the Maritime Securities and Fisheries Enforcement (SAFE) Act and is the primary mechanism for coordination of counter-IUU fishing actions across the U.S. government. On June 27, 2022, President Biden issued the [National Security](#)

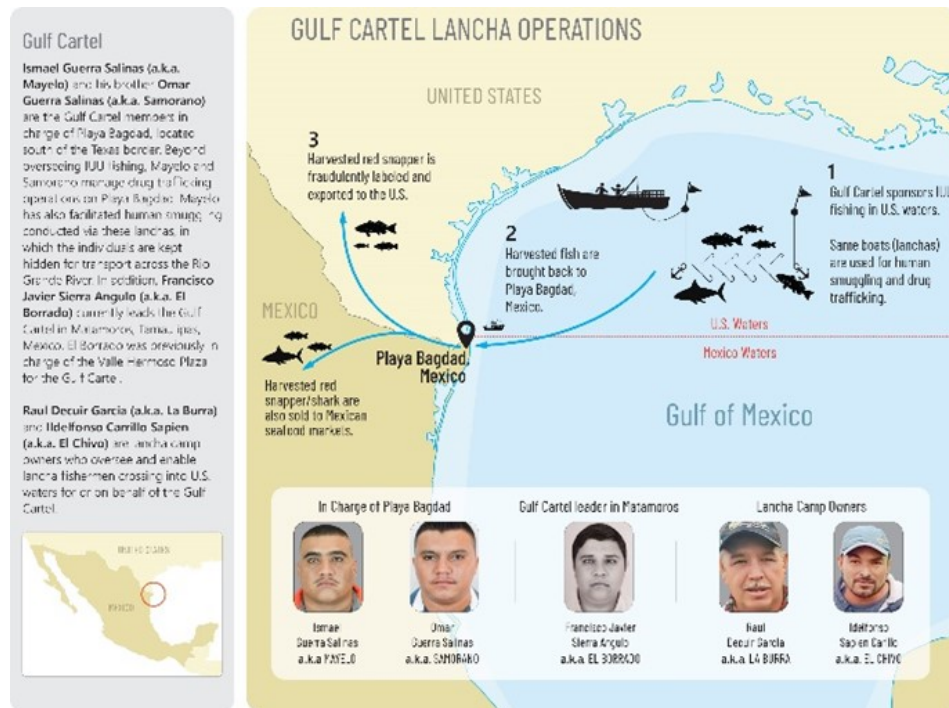
[Memorandum on Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Labor Abuses](#), which notes that IUU fishing and related harmful fishing practices are among the greatest threats to ocean health and are significant causes of global overfishing, contributing to the collapse or decline of fisheries that are critical to the economic growth, food systems, and ecosystems of numerous countries around the world.

CRIMINAL OPERATIONS OF MEXICO'S GULF CARTEL

The Gulf Cartel is a long-standing, powerful drug trafficking organization that operates throughout Tamaulipas State, Mexico. The Gulf Cartel has moved arms, drugs, and migrants into the United States, and was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of American citizens in March 2023.

On December 15, 2021, OFAC designated the Gulf Cartel pursuant to Executive Order 14059 (E.O. 14059) for having engaged in, or attempted to engage in, activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a significant risk of materially contributing to, the international proliferation of illicit drugs or their means of production. OFAC had previously sanctioned the Gulf Cartel as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker pursuant to the Kingpin Act in 2007.

EXPOSING THE GULF CARTEL'S ILLICIT LANCHA OPERATIONS



The Gulf Cartel engages in the illicit trade of red snapper and shark species through “lancha” operations based out of Playa Bagdad, also known as Playa Costa Azul, a beach located several miles south of the U.S. border. Lanchas are light, fast-moving boats utilized by Mexican fishermen that are generally between 20 to 30 feet long. Apart from their use for IUU fishing in U.S. waters, lanchas are also used to move illicit drugs and migrants into the United States.

As the fishing of red snapper and shark species is under strict limits in the United States, and therefore those species are more abundant in U.S. waters, Mexican fishermen cross into U.S. waters to fish via these lanchas. They then bring their catch back to lancha camps into Mexico, where the product is ultimately sold and, oftentimes, exported into the United States. This activity earns millions a year for lancha camps. In addition, it also leads to the death of other marine species that are inadvertently caught.

Ismael Guerra Salinas (a.k.a. Mayelo) and his brother **Omar Guerra Salinas** (a.k.a. Samorano) are the Gulf Cartel members in charge of Playa Bagdad. Beyond overseeing IUU fishing, Mayelo and Samorano manage drug trafficking operations on Playa Bagdad. Mayelo has also facilitated human smuggling conducted via these lanchas, in which the individuals are kept hidden for transport across the Rio Grande River. In addition, **Francisco Javier Sierra Angulo** (a.k.a. El Borrado) currently leads the Gulf Cartel in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. El Borrado was previously in charge of the Valle Hermoso Plaza for the Gulf Cartel.

Raul Decuir Garcia (a.k.a. La Burra) and **Ildelfonso Carrillo Sapien** (a.k.a. El Chivo) are lancha camp owners who oversee and enable lancha fishermen crossing into U.S. waters for or on behalf of the Gulf Cartel.

Mayelo, Samorano, El Borrado, La Burra, and El Chivo are being sanctioned pursuant to E.O. 14059 for being owned, controlled, or directed by, or for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the Gulf Cartel, a person sanctioned pursuant to E.O. 14059.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of the designated persons described above that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or exempt, OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons. U.S. persons may face civil or criminal penalties for violations of E.O. 14059 and the Kingpin Act. Non-U.S. persons are also prohibited from causing or conspiring to cause U.S. persons to wittingly or unwittingly violate U.S. sanctions, as well as engaging in conduct that evades U.S. sanctions. OFAC's [Economic Sanctions Enforcement Guidelines](#) provide more information regarding OFAC's enforcement of U.S. sanctions, including the factors that OFAC generally considers when determining an appropriate response to an apparent violation.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (SDN) List, but also from its willingness to remove persons from the SDN List consistent with the law. The ultimate goal of sanctions is not to punish, but to bring about a positive change in behavior. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from an OFAC list, including the SDN List, please refer to [OFAC's Frequently Asked Question 897 here](#). For detailed information on the process to submit a request for [removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please click here](#).

[For more information on the individuals designated today, click here.](#)

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