

Weekly Intelligence Brief

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Russian-Backed Politician Assassinated in Car Bombing

Lex Martin
Analyst
Europe Desk

On 08 NOV, Ukrainian and Russian authorities reported that a Russia-backed politician named Mikhail Filipenko was killed in a car bombing. Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense (GUR) claimed responsibility for the car bombing. Filipenko was a lawmaker in the Kremlin-installed assembly, was a former head of the Luhansk People's Republic, and had been active in the pro-Russian separatist movement in the region since 2014.

Luhansk People's Republic is an unrecognized republic of Russia in the occupied parts of eastern Ukraine's city of Luhansk. According to the GUR, Filipenko had been involved in the organization of torture chambers in the occupied territories in that region. In August 2023, the Mobile Justice Court, a group of international lawyers and investigators, released a report that nearly half of Ukrainians held in Russian detention centers in Kherson were subjected to widespread torture, including sexual violence. Separately, in September 2023, Ukrainian prosecutors opened more than 3,000 criminal cases over Russia's alleged crimes against children. The GUR posted Filipenko's address, stating

that the addresses of traitors are known and that all war criminals and collaborators will receive fair retribution.

We can assess with high confidence that assassination attempts will continue to happen and that this could lead to Russian-backed officials going into hiding.



US Sanctions Mexican Sinaloa Cartel Members and Firms Over Fentanyl Trafficking

Brenden Stell

Senior Analyst
Americas Desk

On 07 NOV, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on 13 members of Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and four Mexico-based firms that are accused of trafficking fentanyl and other drugs into the United States. One of the individuals subject to sanctions is a manager responsible for overseeing drug trafficking operations in Nogales, involving the transportation of multi-ton quantities of illicit substances. Additionally, the sanctions also target a restaurant, stone and mining

enterprises, as well as an import-export company.

The U.S. sanctions will sever their access to the U.S. financial system, diminish their ability to work with American entities and block their assets in the United States. Brian Nelson, the Treasury Department's Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, said the Treasury "will continue to use its authorities to expose and isolate those who profit from deadly fentanyl sales in the United States."

We can assess with high confidence that it is likely the Sinaloa Cartel will continue to conceal and deny their involvement in drug operations as U.S. intelligence agencies continue to impose strict consequences for those who have been caught.



Prevention of gun trade and straw purchasing across the US-Mexico Border

Jeremy Kerr

Analyst
Americas Desk

On 07 NOV, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) announced it will launch an anti-gun trafficking campaign in Texas that will help to prevent the continuing illicit gun trade across the US-Mexico border. This is mainly targeted at straw purchasing as it is found that roughly 70% of the guns found in Mexico come

from the United States. Straw purchasing is someone in the US who buys a gun legally and then gives it to someone else for them to possess.

Lawmakers in the US have been allowed to pursue these straw purchasers through stronger legal action than before because it was previously seen as just a paperwork crime. This form of gun trafficking is important for cartels as it makes the process of retaining guns easier, due to receiving them from legal buyers in the

US. Now, people prosecuted for straw purchasing will be sent to prison for up to 15 years, but if their weapon is used in drug trafficking or terrorism they will face up to 25 years.

With this new anti-gun trafficking campaign and aggressive prosecuting, we can assess with moderate confidence it is likely that the amount of US guns found in Mexico will slightly decrease.

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Editor-in-Chief
Tessa Bentley

Associate Editors
Sierra Mason
Aubrey Belanger

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