

JALISCO RED ALERT: THE KILLING OF EL MENCHO

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Jalisco Red Alert: The Killing of El Mencho

Introduction and context

The Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) emerged around 2010 following the fragmentation of older trafficking structures, particularly after the weakening of the Milenio Cartel. From its base in western Mexico, primarily in Jalisco state, the group expanded rapidly through extreme violence, disciplined internal organization, and aggressive territorial incursions. Within a few years, CJNG evolved from a regional actor into one of Mexico's most powerful criminal organizations, rivaling the Sinaloa Cartel in territorial reach, paramilitary capability, and international narcotics distribution.

CJNG's operating model combines militarized tactics, rapid mobilization of armed cells, propaganda operations, and systematic economic control through extortion and coercion. Beyond drug trafficking, the organization has diversified into fuel theft, port infiltration, cargo theft, forced taxation of businesses, and fraud schemes targeting both Mexican citizens and foreign nationals.

Profile of El Mencho

Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, known as El Mencho, was the founding leader and principal strategist behind CJNG's consolidation and expansion. A former police officer who transitioned into organized crime networks, he built CJNG into a centralized yet flexible structure capable of coordinating national-level operations. The United States offered up to $15 million for information leading to his capture.

In February 2026, Mexican security forces reportedly killed Oseguera during a major military operation in rural Jalisco. The operation was publicly described as having received intelligence support from the United States. The immediate aftermath triggered coordinated retaliatory violence attributed to CJNG elements.

CJNG retaliatory attacks

Within hours of the reported killing of Oseguera, CJNG cells launched coordinated retaliatory actions across western and central Mexico. Authorities later reported that more than 250 roadblocks were established nationwide and subsequently cleared, with disruption reported in at least 20 states. The operational pattern reflected CJNG's established narcobloqueo doctrine, involving the forced hijacking and burning of commercial trucks, buses, and private vehicles to block highways, urban arteries, and strategic transport corridors.

In Jalisco, the impact was concentrated in the Guadalajara metropolitan area, where vehicles were set on fire along major roads linking the city to surrounding municipalities. Blockades were also reported on highways connecting industrial corridors and port access routes. In Puerto Vallarta, visible smoke from burning vehicles and businesses led to panic among residents and tourists. Flights were disrupted as carriers suspended or delayed service amid road

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insecurity and uncertainty around airport access routes.

Parallel disruptions were reported in Colima, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and parts of Michoacán, reflecting CJNG's capacity to activate cells beyond its Jalisco core. Reports indicated that airports, bus stations, and commercial districts were affected in multiple municipalities, creating temporary paralysis in transport and retail activity. The objective appeared focused on mobility denial and psychological impact rather than territorial occupation.

Casualty reporting evolved over the first 48 hours, with Mexican authorities confirming that at least 25 National Guard members were killed in six retaliatory attacks in Jalisco, along with a prison guard, a state prosecutor's agent, and an unidentified woman, bringing confirmed non-cartel deaths to 28. Security officials stated that approximately 30 suspected criminals were killed in Jalisco and four in Michoacán. In Tapalpa, four individuals were killed at the scene of the initial military operation, and three wounded, including Oseguera, later died. Authorities in Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato also reported at least 14 additional deaths, including seven National Guard members. Combined fatalities linked to the violence exceed 70, pending final official confirmation.

Financially, the impact was immediate. Freight movement slowed or halted along affected corridors, disrupting supply chains serving manufacturing and export sectors in western Mexico. Temporary airport service reductions compounded commercial losses. Retail activity declined sharply during the unrest period, and tourism operators in Jalisco reported cancellations linked to global media coverage of the violence. Insurance liabilities increased due to burned vehicles and damaged property. Emergency deployment, clearance operations, and cleanup costs added fiscal strain to state and municipal authorities. Short-term economic losses likely reached tens of millions of dollars when factoring in destroyed cargo, lost commercial hours, and security mobilization costs. Reputational damage amplified indirect losses.

National security implications

Leadership decapitation in cartel structures typically generates two stages of instability. The first stage involves demonstrative retaliation designed to project resilience and deter rival encroachment. The second stage involves internal recalibration and succession dynamics. CJNG's rapid nationwide response demonstrated continued operational cohesion despite the loss of its founding leader.

The medium-term trajectory depends on whether CJNG consolidates under a unified successor or fragments into competing factions. Consolidation would likely preserve strategic and episodic violence calibrated to protect revenue streams. Fragmentation could produce localized turf conflicts, increased extortion pressure, opportunistic kidnappings, and unpredictable violence as commanders compete for legitimacy and financial control. Rival cartels may seek to test CJNG's hold over key corridors during this transition period.

Impact of Foreign Terrorist Organization designation

The designation of Mexican drug cartels, including CJNG, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the United States elevates the geopolitical context. The classification expands U.S. authorities related to financial sanctions, material support prosecutions, and intelligence coordination. It reframes cartel activity within a counterterrorism paradigm, increasing strategic pressure on leadership networks and facilitators.

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CJNG RETALIATORY VIOLENCE – AFFECTED STATES (HIGH RESOLUTION)



Mexico: States with reported CJNG-related roadblocks/violence after 'El Mencho' operation (Feb 2026). Red = Jalisco (epicenter); Orange = other affected states; Grey = not listed in official report

Public acknowledgment of U.S. intelligence involvement in the operation that killed Oseguera may increase short-term retaliatory signaling risk. The perception of external intervention can intensify propaganda narratives and motivate visible demonstrations of continued capability.

Implications for U.S. nationals

The combination of leadership decapitation, elevated international visibility, and FTO designation increases indirect exposure risk for U.S. nationals in affected regions. CJNG historically prioritizes profit

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over ideological targeting, but high-visibility retaliation near tourist or expatriate corridors can generate global attention.

Primary risk vectors include exposure to highway blockades, arson incidents, armed confrontations near transit routes, and opportunistic crimes during periods of security force redeployment. Resort areas and airport-to-hotel corridors may face temporary disruption rather than systematic targeting, but volatility increases during retaliatory phases. If internal fragmentation develops, localized kidnapping risk and coercive extortion schemes could rise in specific municipalities.

Impact on FIFA 2026 decision-making

Guadalajara is designated as one of the Mexican host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The scale and geographic spread of CJNG retaliation following the killing of El Mencho introduce an additional layer of scrutiny into tournament security planning.

The attacks demonstrated CJNG's ability to generate rapid, multi-site mobility disruption across western Mexico, including within the Guadalajara metropolitan area. For FIFA, the primary concern is not symbolic violence but continuity of secure movement. Tournament operations depend on reliable airport access, controlled transport corridors, protected team transit routes, and predictable public order conditions around stadiums and fan zones.

The use of widespread roadblocks and arson directly targets these mobility networks. Even short-duration paralysis can create cascading operational effects on match scheduling, team logistics, and spectator management. International media amplification of violence in a designated host city increases reputational sensitivity for global sponsors and broadcasters.

At present, the evidence suggests increased security mitigation rather than relocation risk. Mexican federal authorities are likely to reinforce security guarantees, expand federal force presence in host cities, and formalize rapid-clearance protocols for road obstructions. FIFA's risk calculus will focus on whether retaliatory violence remains episodic and contained or evolves into sustained instability over the coming months.

Outlook

The removal of Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes represents a strategic inflection point for CJNG and for western Mexico's security environment. In the near term, elevated retaliatory violence and economic disruption are likely. Over the next three to six months, the decisive variable will be succession cohesion. Consolidation would preserve structured violence tied to economic objectives. Fragmentation would likely produce more diffuse and unpredictable insecurity, with broader implications for civilian safety, business continuity, and high-visibility international events hosted in Jalisco.

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