

No Tempest in a Teacup: Fentanyl Trafficking as a Threat to United States' Security and Its Geopolitical Implications

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Abstract

Drug trafficking is one of globalization's rotten fruits that the United States (US) has struggled against as it has witnessed 4 waves of opioid epidemic. Chief among the trafficked drugs is fentanyl that caused more than 100.000 in the last two years. Its crossboundary nature, how they originate from outside the US, makes it intricate to solve as it would require a holistic approach. Against that backdrop, this study seeks to provide a security understanding of the issue and its geopolitical repercussions for the US. The writers employ the qualitative research method that entails the use of both primary and secondary data procured from the internet. The article begins with an elaboration of how fentanyl trafficking poses a threat to the security of the US. Here, fentanyl trafficking falls under the non-traditional threat with a far-reaching security implication, especially in the national and human sense. Following that, the geopolitical repercussions of this transnational threat is discussed. Among them is how the issue has riled up the US relations with Mexico and China. Finally, an overview of the existing means to deal with the problem is provided along with some suggestions as to the path ahead.

1. Introduction

Drug trafficking has significantly evolved as a direct consequence of globalization. In today's rapidly transforming and interconnected world, the flow of information and goods has become more accessible than ever before. This shift has facilitated the rise of the illicit drug trade, recognized as a major transnational organized crime (Politi, 2017). The "borderless" nature of globalization has exacerbated drug-related issues worldwide, including in the United States (US), where it has profoundly shaped government policies and responses. Globalization has not only accelerated the cross-border spread of illicit drugs but also introduced new challenges, making it increasingly difficult for governments to combat this growing and multifaceted issue effectively.

The US's opioid crisis has been heavily impacted by the proliferation of illegal opioids trafficked into the country, leading to widespread addiction and overdose deaths. This issue can be traced back to when opium became a significant problem in China in the early 20th century. Opioids and other traditional drugs, such as coca, have been recognized as major concerns since the late 19th century, when they were declared an epidemic in China. This appears to have impacted the drug problem in the US, as the US's trade involvement with China at that time served as the catalyst for the initial widespread use of opium. During

this period, there was a lack of medical oversight and regulation, allowing for the widespread sale of these substances and contributing to the first opioid epidemic in the US (Das, 1993).

America's drug crisis started in the 19th century, when opium was widely used as a remedy for diseases such as cholera and dysentery. Though celebrated for its therapeutic benefits, the overuse of opium led to widespread addiction, particularly among women and Civil War veterans seeking pain relief (Kandall & Chavskin, 1991). By 1914, the US government sought to address the issue through the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, which imposed strict regulations on narcotics distribution. However, instead of solving the problem, these measures created unintended consequences, including the establishment of a black market for narcotics.

Following that, heroin became the predominant substance of abuse in the mid-20th century, particularly in urban communities struggling with poverty and systemic neglect (Kandall & Chavskin, 1991). During the post-World War II era, addiction rates rose sharply, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as urban youth and returning veterans. In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Narcotics Control Act of 1956, which imposed severe penalties for drug offenses and further entrenched the criminalization of addiction. By the 1960s, the counterculture movement reshaped the perceptions of drug use, as substances like marijuana and Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) became symbols of rebellion and personal freedom, particularly within the hippie subculture (UNODC, 2009). However, this cultural shift did little to address the growing addiction crisis. By the late 1960s, federal policy pivoted toward enforcement, with President Richard Nixon declaring drugs "Public Enemy Number One".

The opioid epidemic of the 1990s and 2000s marked a shift from traditional substances to synthetic opioids. Aggressive pharmaceutical marketing and the overprescription of painkillers like OxyContin drove a surge in opioid misuse, particularly in rural and working-class communities (Jalali et. al., 2020). Synthetic opioids like fentanyl, far more potent and lethal than traditional opioids, soon became a dominant factor, intensifying the crisis (Compton & Jones, 2019). Efforts under President George W. Bush to monitor prescriptions failed to anticipate the rise of fentanyl, often trafficked illegally and mixed with other drugs. By the 2010s, synthetic opioids were the leading cause of overdose deaths (Rudd et. al., 2016). President Barack Obama emphasized addiction as a public health issue, but unequal access to care slowed progress (White House, 2016). In 2017, President Donald Trump declared the epidemic a public health emergency, focusing on fentanyl trafficking and awareness campaigns (US Congress, 2023). Under President Joe Biden, harm reduction strategies such as naloxone access and community programs have become central to addressing the crisis, yet it continues to evolve.

When we talk about fentanyl, we might see it as a new rising trend in drug related overdose cases. As per 2014 up until 2022, there has been a significant rise in overdose cases related to fentanyl. There are over 80 thousand overdose deaths involving opioids that most of them are illicit fentanyl (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2024). As a new synthetic opioid, fentanyl has a similar effect as morphine but more effective. Due to its low cost and potential, it said that most of the drug dealers are using fentanyl and mixing it with other drugs such as heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine. But as far as its low cost and efficiency, fentanyl has a lethal effect even though the dosage is low. With only two milligrams, fentanyl can be lethal. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) found that illicitly manufactured pills contained 0.02 to 5.1 milligrams fentanyl (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 2021). With such a dose, illicitly manufactured drugs that contain fentanyl can be lethal, that might be the main reason why fentanyl caused the rising death related to opioid overdose cases. Looking further, as a new trend fentanyl actually brings a new opioid epidemic into The US.

Most illicitly manufactured fentanyl is produced in foreign countries and smuggled through Mexico into the US. But where are the sources? According to the DEA intelligence report, in 2019, the flow of fentanyl into the US is more diverse compared to the 2014 first fentanyl crisis. In their report, the DEA stated that there are three countries that supply fentanyl. Those countries are China, Mexico, and India. It also states that China and Mexico are the two main sources for anything that is related to the illicit fentanyl (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 2021).

As stated before, China, Mexico, and India are the main sources of fentanyl or fentanyl related substances. China, as a main source of fentanyl or fentanyl related substances, trafficked it internationally into many countries including the US and Mexico. But the Chinese and Hong Kong Government took action

by placing restrictions on fentanyl precursor chemicals. That action made Mexican transnational criminal organizations (TCO) diversify their supply sources. It also states that from May 2019, China officially controlled every form of fentanyl as a drug. Mexico is related to producing and smuggling fentanyl and illicit tablets containing fentanyl. But the actual perpetrators are Mexican TCO. They are responsible for producing and supplying fentanyl into the US. As for this matters, the DEA and Mexican officials are working together to fight fentanyl production and smuggling by seizing and dismantling many fentanyl synthesis laboratories and fentanyl pill pressing operations. As for India, this country has an illicit fentanyl laboratory. Looking into that matter, the DEA informed Indian Intelligence and resulted in the takedown of that laboratory. It also states that an Indian national is associated with the Sinaloa Cartel.

In regard to the present academic landscape of the topic, there have been numerous overtures that can be taken into account. In a paper written by Friedman et al. (2022), a discussion over the presence of fentanyl in the US-Mexico is presented. The paper concludes its findings by underlining the importance of an effective systemic response and improved surveillance on the field to reduce the harm inflicted by its circulation. Apart from that, there is also the work of Pardo and Reuter (2020) with a focus on curtailing the fentanyl supply and circulation amidst a globalized landscape. In its research, the writers take notes from prior successes in dealing with the opioid crisis and wind up with the need to regulate the market to minimize harm. However, there are still some gaps that can be filled, especially ones pertaining to the security perspective and its regional repercussions for the US.

Against that backdrop, the article seeks to posit an examination of the threat that fentanyl smuggling poses towards the multifaceted security of the US that runs the gamut of its national, human, and regional security. The coverage of said areas of security are set given its interconnected nature in the face of a transnational threat of fentanyl smuggling. To accommodate said areas, the discussion segment consists of three parts that would cater to each security area along with a discussion on how the US should navigate through the storm.

2. Methodology & Theory

In carrying out the research, the writers employ the descriptive qualitative research method. The descriptive qualitative research method can be understood as a method that seeks to describe and elaborate the research problem during the research process itself (Sugiyono, 2017). Through the use of said method, the writers can interpret the data at hand to better understand the pertinent matters it seeks to address. To ground its analysis, the writers make use of both primary and secondary data which are procured from the internet. The former is present in the form of official reports and publications from relevant governments and international organizations whereas the latter is in the form of prior studies and news articles. It is those data that the writers would interpret and eventually wind up as the findings or analysis of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Additionally, to accommodate its analysis, the article uses some conceptual frameworks from the security study, those being national security, human security, regional security, and threat intensity framework from Buzan. The aforementioned frameworks would then assist the writers to interpret and build its understanding of the problem at hand, that being the security implications of fentanyl trafficking in the US.

Before diving deeper into the variegated areas of security studies, one can start by examining some of its key elements. The aforementioned elements lie in the form of threat and vulnerability. The former refers to something, either an event or an actor in the international system, that can pose a threat. As for the latter, it can be understood as how vulnerable or exposed a state or other actors is in the face of any threat. Given the vast difference between one state and the other, the perception of threat may also vary among them. Additionally, the efforts of one state to reduce its vulnerability can be deemed as a threat to other states as well.

The subjective nature of threats make it difficult to discern what does and what does not constitute a threat to a state's national security. For that, one may refer to the threat intensity framework by Buzan (2007). The framework posits many concepts or guiding features surrounding a particular problem a state is being faced with. A state may deem a problem as a threat with high intensity towards its security should it be close in both temporal and spatial senses. Moreover, the probability of its occurrence along with the consequences it could bring about could also lead states to deem it as such. In addition, the same intensity can be regarded should the problem be historically amplified, i.e. it previously occurred to that particular

state in the past. With that in mind, it can be noted how the perception of threats and its following responses could vary greatly among states given the sheer differences of their characteristics.

Returning to the signpost of the variegated security studies, there are numerous security fields or dimensions in international relations. Traditionally, states would take the spotlight as the key referent object in the study (Sussex et. al., 2017). Despite the focus on state actors, it is important to remember the many facets that a state's national security could encompass. Hence, the focus on national security could entail the coverage of other albeit more specific dimensions like maritime security and energy security. A similar focus is also present when one takes regional security into account. While the focus may be placed on the region, it can not be overlooked that the regions are composed of state actors. Furthermore, the dynamics of regional security is also influenced by the relations of the states within or beyond it. According to Buzan, regional security is governed by two super structures with them being the pattern of amity and enmity between the states as well as the distribution of power within the region. The aforementioned matters further underline the relevance of state actors at the regional level.

The rise of non-traditional perspectives have paved the way to a plethora of new fields, such as human security and its many pertaining elements (health security, food security, community security, etc.) (Srinivas, 2019). As the name suggests, human security can be discerned as the preservation and protection of the life and dignity of individual human beings. Dating back to the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, this change of focus on people as the referent object represents an expansion of the limited focus of the traditional or state-centric security understanding. Such a view could bring to light threats that strongly jeopardize the people as opposed to the grand idea of a state's sovereignty. This changing security landscape does not only occur over what counts as the referent object, but it also occurs on what exemplifies the threats.

In the past, threats were often exemplified by the military threats from other states against the sovereignty of the others. In present days, non-traditional or non-state threats have come to become a prominent feature of the present security architecture. Such is the case given the changes that globalization has unleashed (Forest, 2020). It can be exemplified by the many transnational crimes, including but not limited to terrorism, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and many more (Harkrisnowo, 2021). A cursory look into said activities can provide an understanding of its implication towards the non-security fields, notably human security. Such is the case given the limited scope of non-state threats in comparison to its traditional counterpart. All in all, given the growing interconnectedness that imbues the international system, it is important to note both perspectives to get a comprehensive look of the kind of threats as well as the referent object at hand.

3. Analysis

3.1. The Floodgate of Insecurity: The Fentanyl Crisis in the US

The happening fentanyl crisis in the US has reached critical levels over the past few years. Data from the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) showed that in 2020, CBP has seized a total of 4,800 pounds of fentanyl at the southern border. By 2021, the number had significantly increased by 133%, reaching 11,200 pounds, and continued to climb to 14,700 pounds seized in 2022. Surprisingly, in just seven months of 2023, the number has reached 17,200 pounds, surpassing the total from the previous year (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2021). This really demonstrates the growing sophistication of transnational organized crimes (TOCs) and the scale of trafficking operations happening in the US. This evolving crisis has also possessed a serious challenge at curbing the illicit drug trade.

Another law enforcer like the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) has also faced the same crisis from within the borders. Through their initiatives in their "Operation Last Mile", the DEA has exposed the extensive reach of fentanyl trafficking within the US. During the operation, the DEA has seized 43 million fentanyl laced pills and around 6,500 pounds of fentanyl powder, which is almost equal to approximately 193 million potentially lethal doses (Wolf et. al., 2023). These seizures occurred across various regions, and really showed the widespread influence of drug cartels activities, especially those originating in Mexico. While these efforts have disrupted the supply chains of drug trafficking, the sheer volume of fentanyl that is still circulating in the country is still quite a problem that needs to be solved. The findings also reported that the cartels' ability to infiltrate even small communities, which this surely makes

the issue difficult to resolve. Despite the law enforcement's achievements in eliminating the fentanyl crisis, this issue really reflects the complexity of the crisis and the resilience of criminal organizations.

The human cost of the fentanyl crisis is really devastating, where overdose deaths have reached record levels. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), around 9.5 million Americans have reported misusing opioids in 2020 (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2024). By 2021, deaths related to synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, had risen by more than 20%, which resulted in over 71,000 fatalities. This trend continued to rise in 2021 and 2022, with drug overdose deaths averaging 109,000 annually, and the majority are linked to fentanyl type opioids (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2024). These numbers are more than statistics, they surely represent the lives lost, and society shattered by addiction. The crisis really affects rural and underserved communities, where they faced limited access to healthcare, and addiction treatment. Those socioeconomic situations explained above, further worsen the issue, leaving many people without the resources needed to break the cycle of addiction and recover.

In his book, *People, States, and Fear*, Barry Buzan conceptualizes national security as the ability of a state to maintain its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and institutional stability against external and internal threats (Buzan, 2007). His views regarding security primarily through the lens of the state, emphasized its role in ensuring order, enforcing laws, and protecting itself from destabilizing forces, including transnational crime, and economic disruptions. However, Buzan also broadens the security frameworks, which in his book, he also included human security, where he shifts the focus from the state to the individual. He argued that security should not only be about protecting borders, but also safeguarding human lives, well being, and societal stability. Buzan argued that human security encompassed threats such as poverty, health crises, organized crime, and social instability, which can erode a society's overall resilience. This critical situation happening in the US has exemplified how these two dimensions of security are deeply connected, as it simultaneously undermined the state authority, and threatened the lives of its individuals. If we analyze the crisis through Buzan's perspective, it becomes clear that fentanyl trafficking and the widespread use of opioid abuse has created a security threat that weakens both the institutional capacity of the state, and the social fabric that fundamentally supports individual well being.

Beside its impact on national security, the fentanyl epidemic has evidently constitutes a severe human security crisis, as it directly threatens the lives, and well being of millions of Americans, the fact that over 109,000 annual drug overdose deaths, majority linked to fentanyl, have persisted since 2021, as it highlights the systemic failure to eliminate the crisis. Unlike traditional security threats that stem from external aggression, this crisis emerges from within society, where it surely shows how non-traditional threats could have the same effects as destabilizing as military conflicts. Vulnerable populations, which in this case are particularly in rural, and economically disadvantaged areas, face disproportionate risks due to their limited access to healthcare, and addiction treatment. The potency of fentanyl, which is up to 50 times stronger than heroin, further intensifies human insecurity, as even minute quantities can result in immediate and fatal overdoses (CDC, 2024). Moreover, the prevalence of fentanyl laced substances, often unknowingly consumed by users. This introduces an uncontrollable element of risk, turning drug use into an unpredictable and life threatening gamble. Additionally, the economic burden of fentanyl that is also related to healthcare costs is immense with billions spent annually on emergency interventions, rehabilitation programs, and law enforcement operations (Florence et. al., 2020). The inability to control the crisis not only destabilizes public health infrastructure, but also erodes the public trust in government institutions. This leads to public perceptions of the state failure. As addiction rates continue to rise, social cohesion weakens. This leads to the increasing crime rates and worsen the socio-economic disparities. This long-term instability creates a feedback loop, where human insecurity fuels further national security vulnerability.

Again, from a broader security perspective, the fentanyl epidemic aligns with Buzan's perspective regarding security. Security threats are not limited to military or political dimensions but also further extend into economic, societal, and environmental domains. The crisis contributes to an overall decline in national resilience (Sim et. al., 2024). The presence of heavily armed cartels, combined with the growing influence of illicit drug markets, shows how non-state actors can also challenge the authority of the state, as it creates the parallel power structures that undermine governance (DEA, 2023). Furthermore, the US crisis also has transnational implications, as fentanyl production and trafficking networks extend beyond national borders, and also involve actors from Mexico, China, and other countries (DEA, 2024). This crisis requires a multifaceted approach to security, combining domestic enforcement efforts with international

cooperation to disrupt supply chains and target key figures in illicit trade. Without a comprehensive strategy that addresses both supply and demand, the crisis would still continue to escalate, and further weakens the security framework at both state and individual levels.

3.2. Here be Dragons: The Regional Security Implication for the US

The transnational nature of fentanyl smuggling makes it inevitable for the US to eventually face other countries involved in it. As previously noted, two notable states that are involved in the scheme of the problem are Mexico and China. The awareness of the two states' roles have led the US to engage with them on numerous occasions. However, oftentimes, the US resorted to an approach that is not imbued with a cooperative spirit, but rather one that contains scolds or punitive measures alone. It is no surprise that some of its strides were not welcomed by the other parties and in turn brought up tension on their respective bilateral ties.

For the case of Mexico, it can be noted how the fentanyl issue has been one that aggravates the relations between the two states. Here, it is important to remember that fentanyl smuggling is an example of transnational crime or illicit trade which is not carried out by the state but rather by illegitimate non-state actors. In this case, one can shift their gander to the many cartels operating within Mexico's borders. Fentanyl or drug smuggling in general is only one among many other illicit activities the cartels there do. Given the close ties the US shares with Mexico as its direct neighbor, it is not surprising to note how the US also takes the brunt of those cartels' activities. This is apparent in the fentanyl crisis as a good majority of the drugs stem from the Mexican cartels, notably the Sinaloa and CJNG. In the past, the US has demanded Mexico to deal with its cartel problem, for example during the avocado import ban in 2022. However, the power and control the cartels have within Mexico have made it difficult for the government to hold its reins. With that in mind, it can be seen how the cartels pose a non-state threat to the security of the US (Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 2019).

The fentanyl problem is often intertwined with the bigger cartel problem in Mexico and such a mix has attracted bizarre notions within the US. In the past few years, numerous bizarre overtures were brought to the table, from declaring war against the Mexican cartels to launching a missile strike to key targets in Mexico. The aforementioned ideas may be set aside as mere rethorics. However, given the sheer power the US holds, it is no surprise that stern responses were made by Mexico. For example, in 2023, Mexico's then president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, stated how such an intervention would be a violation of Mexico's sovereignty (O'Boyle, 2023). Aside from the risky rethorics, there have been some strides within the US to label some Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. In line with this, some US politicians, like Niki Haley, have gone as far as saying how the US should deal with the cartels the same way it dealt with ISIS (Correa-Cabrera, 2024). To top it all off, the recent change of administration in the US has also brought about a different approach to Mexico. Chief among them is the use of tariff as a threat to compel Mexico to take care of its issues, including the cartels' fentanyl production.

A similar condition is also present for the case of China. In regard to Mexico, China plays a role as the supplier of the materials needed for the Mexican cartels' fentanyl production and distribution. Additionally, it is important to note China's status as the world's emerging global power which has led the US, being a global power itself, to deem it as a competitor or, at times, a threat. As previously mentioned, China is one of the key sources of fentanyl materials that would eventually be circulating throughout the US. China does not receive the US punitive strike with open arms. The government deemed the unilateral sanctions the US imposed as a counterproductive measure and how it would only hinder proper cooperation on the issue. It is also important to note how China deems its economic activity involving the materials as one of its legitimate interests (Camhaji, 2023). Taken together, the stance China took in response to the accusations and sanctions the US brought to the table does not alleviate the suspicion from the US.

It is not unexpected therefore that many in the US believe that they can not count on any goodwill from China (Freking, 2024). Prior investigations, like the one carried out by the House of Represented Committee, uncovered how the government does not only allow the production and shipment of fentanyl precursors in China, but also subsidize its operations. Fortunately, the two countries, in January 2024, have created a joint counternarcotics working group that have made some progress in regulating fentanyl precursors (US Embassy & Consulates in China, 2024). While it is true that the two countries have begun talks over the issue, one can not count out all the prior hiccups and the tension surrounding the two states' relations. Moreover, it is important to note that the aforementioned progress on cooperating with China may suffer

from a policy shift given the change from the Biden administration to that of Trump. Against that backdrop, for the case of the US and China, the fentanyl crisis has been another weight added to the somewhat strained line connecting the two.

Prior strides that have riled up the aforementioned countries would not fit the bill as a solution to the problem. Such is the case as focussing on the blame game would only shift the attention from the issue at hand, that being the fentanyl smuggling into the US. Moreover, too much attention to this tempest in a teacup, could also bring up repercussions on the security landscape of North America, especially with how deep both the US and Mexico are in this particular issue.

Issues stemming from the fentanyl smuggling would not only jeopardize the domestic security of the US, i.e. its national and human security. Rather, it would go beyond that and affect its regional security. In understanding the regional security implication for the US, one needs to take into account the essential structure of a regional security complex that consists of the distribution of power among principle states and pattern of amity and enmity. For the case stemming from fentanyl, the repercussion it engenders is one felt by the latter.

The pattern of amity and enmity can be seen to suffer from the crisis as a result of the tensions it sparked in how the US engaged with both Mexico and China. For Mexico, the ongoing fentanyl crisis has been leveraged by the US as a means to impose more tariffs on its products, risking their competitiveness in the US market. This, added with how the US has used numerous risky rethorics, i.e. the use of its military into Mexico's sovereignty, could potentially further cloud the ties between the two. A look into the present can also enrich this particular notion given how Donald Trump has made waves with its tariff threat on Mexico. Beyond Mexico, the similar stride also affects the regional landscape given its repercussion to its other state, that being Canada. Akin to Mexico, Canada also received the 25% tariff threat from the Trump administration as it demands Canada to strengthen its border security. Some in the country have gone as far as deeming the US move to use the tariff threat as an insult as border issues, involving drug trafficking, are more prevalent in the US-Mexico border (Murphy & Yousif, 2024). Such a response would lead Mexico to call Canada out on its own fentanyl consumption issue (The Guardian, 2024). Here, it can also be seen how the changing pattern of amity and enmity affect the North American regional security complex as a whole.

Furthermore, the changing pattern of amity and enmity between the US and Mexico as the regional states of North America regional security complex could pave the way for the entry or a stronger external actor presence. In this case, China fits the bill as that particular external actor given its already established ties with both North American states. In relations with Mexico, there is a growing trend of Chinese investment into the country's strategic sectors, i.e. electric vehicles, ports, mining industries, etc (Pfeiffer & Berg, 2024). It can be noted that further aggravation between the US and Mexico, being a token of changing pattern of amity and enmity, could open the floodgate of China's growing presence which may go against other US national interests, especially ones on its own home region.

With that in mind, for the case of the North America region, growing tension between the US and Mexico over the issue could change the pattern of amity and enmity between them. This changing pattern of amity and enmity could potentially exacerbate the fentanyl issue in the US. Such a feat can manifest given the lack of attention that would be given as a result of the move to blame or demand Mexico and China to take action as opposed to working on it with them. The latter holds an important role given how transnational crimes, notably fentanyl or the general drug smuggling, require a multilateral approach as opposed a unilateral one. In addition, the worsening of relations with Mexico could bring it closer to an external actor to the region's regional security complex, that being China which already has developed a growing presence in the country. Such a mix would certainly be an undesirable development for the US's interests, including its regional security, in the region.

3.2. The Means to Face the Problem and Beyond

In order to combat these overdose cases, the Biden-Harris administration through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) took action with its Overdose Prevention Strategy. The HHS in 2024, announced new actions for this strategy by finalizing a rule in order to expand access for life-saving medications for opioid use disorder. Since this strategy was launched in 2021, there has been a significant increase in the nation's treatment and harm reduction capacity for opioid use related cases. Also, as per

2024 the number of people who received treatment reached about 862,000 each month (SAMHSA, 2024). It can be said that this action actually took a part for combating overdose cases and making good progress. We can see this action or strategy as one of a way from the Biden-Harris administration for maintaining the US Human Security by securing the US citizens from the death threat from the overdose cases.

The US not only took this matter on a domestic level, but also took it into international level. In 2024, US requested two fentanyl precursors to be placed under international control under the 1988 Convention to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) at the 67th Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics Drugs (CND) (US Embassy in Chile, 2024). By taking this matter into the international community, the US has tried to take this matter seriously and wanted to end it all by suppressing the root cause of these overdose cases related to fentanyl. This action also can be one of many tools for the law enforcement agencies from around the world in order to prevent the opioid crisis, especially fentanyl related drugs. Thus, this matter could be taken seriously and could be prevented before it became an international crisis.

Looking further, as this matter has been taken into international level, the US should lessen its hostility towards China and Mexico. It is better for the US to strengthen its bilateral cooperation or international cooperation in order to combat this fentanyl crisis. It is better to strengthen cooperation rather than heighten the tension between the US and China or Mexico. This is also proven in the success of seizing and dismantling of illicit fentanyl production in Mexico by the DEA and Mexican Officials (US Embassy in Chile, 2024). Therefore, the US should maintain and strengthen its cooperation with the international community, especially with China and Mexico.

4. Conclusion

The bleak record the US has had when it comes to issues related to drugs, notably the opioid crisis, is further aggravated by the far reaching security implications that drug trafficking can inflict. In present days, fentanyl is the bane of insecurity that the US must address so as it could safeguard its security. To better understand the severity of fentanyl smuggling as a threat, the paper has laid out how it affects the US both internally and externally. In the US, fentanyl and its smuggling pose a threat to US security, specifically its human security. Such a focus on said security dimension can be understood upon noting how it is the people that ultimately suffer from the drugs. As a result of the problem's transnational nature, it is difficult to deal with it alone as it involves states beyond its borders. In regard to its implications beyond the borders, fentanyl smuggling has affected the regional security of North America, the home region of the US, through changing the pattern of amity and enmity between the US and Mexico which in the long run could pave the way for a stronger China presence in the region. Moving forward, the US needs to adjust its approach in facing the threat. Domestically, the US has taken strides to address the issue through rehabilitation initiatives. The same change has also been demonstrated on the international stage as the US has utilized international organizations or fora to multilaterally approach the issue given its transnational trait. In the future, it is important for the US to remain in that trajectory, specifically through engaging constructively with both Mexico and China as the two involved states as opposed to merely chiding or threatening them with tariffs.

Future endeavors on the topic can be done to further explore the non-traditional security threat that the fentanyl crisis represents. Specifically, an effort can be made to better map out the way the crisis jeopardizes the variegated security dimensions of the US by using a systemic approach. In doing so, not only that a comprehensive map of the issue can be procured but it could also assist in figuring out the intervention points through which the crises can be dealt with. Such a finding would not only benefit the academic landscape over the topic but also the policy makers and other practitioners in the US.

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