



# Quarterly CTIP Newsletter

## Agency Highlights

### **Seal and Repel: Preventing Human Trafficking in the U.S. by Securing Our Southern Border**

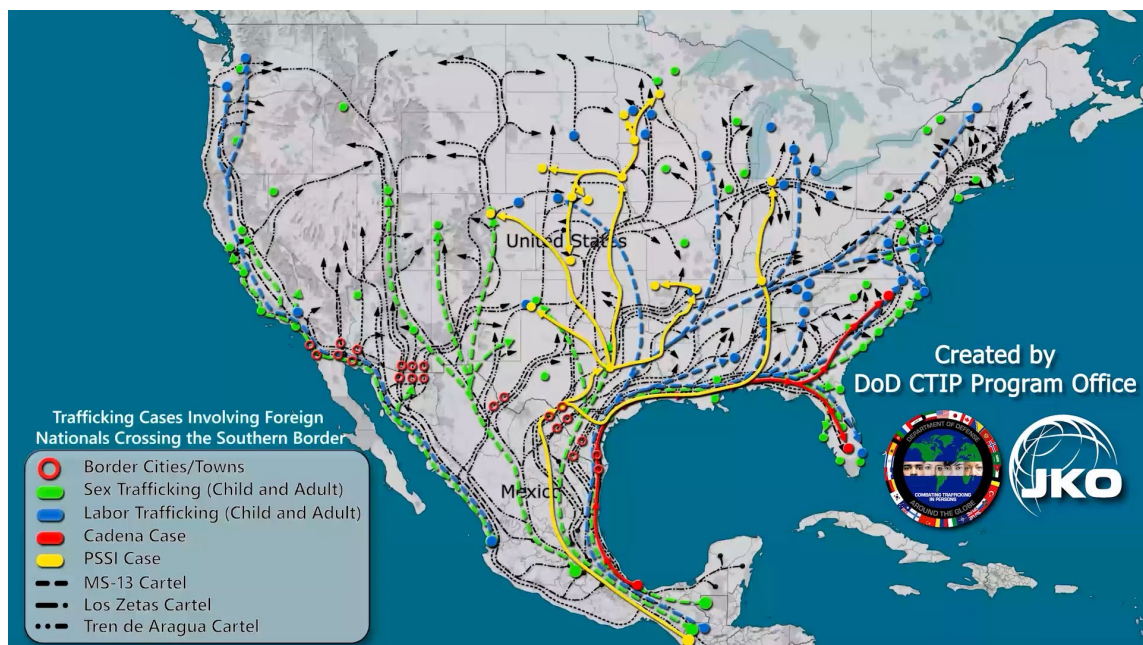
*Contributed by: Combating Trafficking in Persons Office*

Through a series of Executive Orders, Proclamations, and National Security Presidential Memoranda, the U.S. Department of Defense was tasked to work with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to seal the border and repel forms of invasion, including human trafficking.

In response to this call to action, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Office created a new specialized training entitled, “Seal and Repel: Border Security to Prevent Human Trafficking.” CAC holders can access it on [Joint Knowledge Online](#).

The training equips U.S. Service members being deployed to our Southern Border to:

1. Describe the nature and scope of border breaches at the Southern border
2. Know the four kinds of illegal aliens (criminal alien, illegal alien, human trafficking victim, and unaccompanied alien child)
3. Define human trafficking according to U.S. law
4. Identify signs and indicators of victims of human trafficking
5. Know how and where to report a trafficking victim or unaccompanied minor



The training includes an animated map of the routes and patterns of human trafficking based on federal case law and federal intelligence reports. Click here to see [animated map](#).

The training also documents 30 of the largest cases of sex trafficking and labor trafficking involving foreign national victims and foreign national perpetrators.

Utilizing information from the Federal case law, the training documents the many kinds of border breaches that our armed forces may encounter including, breaches by land, sea, air, and on foot, and in vehicles such as cars, trucks, trains, planes, and boats.



The training emphasizes that DoD's role, in conjunction with the DHS, is to **take lawful and appropriate actions to deploy sufficient personnel to construct temporary and permanent physical barriers to ensure complete operational control of the Southern border of the United States.**

In short, the mission and mandate of the DoD is to Seal and Repel: seal the border to deter and prevent the entry of illegal aliens and repel those who enter or have entered illegally. The mission is summarized by 3 D's:

1. Detection –Using High Tech Surveillance, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Human Intel
2. Deterrence – On Federal lands in cooperation with Department of Homeland Security
3. Detention – Service members may temporarily detain trespassers in the National Defense Areas until they are transferred to the appropriate law enforcement authorities, which is usually the U.S. Border Patrol.

**Executive Actions**

- [Proclamation 10886](#), “Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border of the United States”
- [Executive Order 14157](#), “Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists”
- [Executive Order 13773](#), “Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking”
- [Executive Order 14165](#), “Securing our Borders”
- [Executive Order 14167](#), “Clarifying the Military’s Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States”
- [National Security Presidential Memorandum/NSPM-4](#), “Military Mission for Sealing the Southern Border of the United States and Repelling Invasions”



The specialized training instructs our military members on the difference between human smuggling and human trafficking, provides a preliminary list of signs and indicators of human trafficking victims, and further provides a clear method to report suspected and confirmed human trafficking victims and incidents.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 created a 3P framework for combating trafficking in persons: Prevention of Trafficking, Prosecution of Traffickers, and Protection and Assistance to Victims. We see this training as first and foremost a prevention

project. By sealing the border and repelling illegal aliens we are preventing foreign national human traffickers from gaining access to the U.S., and from forming and strengthening criminal networks that exploit vulnerable human beings.

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## **Transnational Organized Crime Groups Involved in Human Trafficking** ***Contributed by: Combating Trafficking in Persons Office***

Transnational organized crime groups are involved in human trafficking and human smuggling in the United States. The twelve groups below exploit people and pose a national security threat to America. Troops deployed to the border may face these groups trying to breach the Southern border. This is why specialized training has been developed and deployed to combat trafficking in persons at U.S. borders.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, “transnational organized crime (TOC) groups are associations of individuals who operate, wholly or in part, by illegal means. There is no single structure under which TOC groups function—they vary from hierarchies to clans, networks, and cells, and may evolve into other structures. These groups are typically insular and protect their activities through corruption, violence, international commerce, complex communication mechanisms, and an organizational structure that spans national boundaries.” It poses a threat to our national security, with, “dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability across the globe.”

Transnational organized crime generates vast sums of money through a variety of illicit activities, including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, counterfeiting, and money laundering. The scale of these illicit markets is enormous, with estimates suggesting that global illicit funds total trillions of dollars annually, impacting legitimate economies and undermining global security.<sup>1</sup> These criminal enterprises operate across borders, exploiting vulnerable populations and undermining global security and economies. They are also thought to be involved in terrorist activities, sometimes indirectly through weapons trafficking, and sometimes directly by funding terrorists and terrorism. Many transnational crime organizations (TCOs) are also involved in human trafficking as a means of making money.

**Executive Order 14167, “Clarifying the Military's Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States,”** directs the Secretary of Defense to implement a plan that, “assigns United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) the mission to seal the borders and maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the United States by repelling forms of invasion including unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities.”

The synopses below describe some of the best known and most powerful TCOs involved in human trafficking and human smuggling. These crimes involve the repeated exploitation of human beings for profit. The TCOs mentioned below have operations in the U.S.

## 1. MS-13



Mara Salvatrucha, commonly known as MS-13, originated in the barrios of Los Angeles during the 1980s and has since grown into one of the most violent criminal organizations in the U.S. Over the years it evolved into a highly organized syndicate operating in the U.S., El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and even in Europe. Drug trafficking is a main source of income, but they are also involved in **human trafficking and human smuggling**, arms smuggling, extortion schemes targeting local businesses, contract killings, robbery rings specializing in high-value goods.

## 2. Chinese Snakeheads

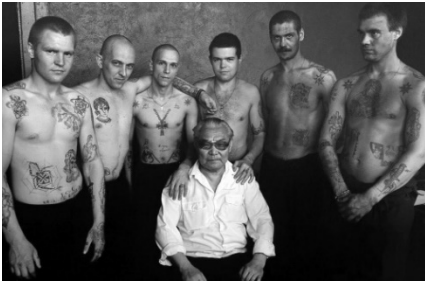


Chinese Snakeheads are gangs found in the Fujian region of China. They smuggle people into resource rich countries such as the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Australia. One of the biggest Snakehead gangs operating in the U.S. is the Fuk Ching. They ran cargo ships that trafficked thousands of Chinese into the U.S. For years, they were the most powerful Chinese gang in New York, using murder, torture, and extortion as methods of control. A main business is **human smuggling and human trafficking**. They charge as much as \$70,000 per person. Today Snakehead routes include flights from China to Mexico, Central, or South America, then north into the U.S.

<sup>1</sup> Nasdaq 2024 Global Financial Crime Report, <https://verafin.com/nasdaq-verafin-global-financial-crime-report/>



### 3. Russian Bratva



The Russian Bratva, also known as the Russian Mafia, is a vast network of criminal organizations operating globally. The organization's strength lies in its adaptability; members often infiltrate legitimate businesses to mask their illicit operations including extortion, protection rackets, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, **prostitution, and human trafficking**. More recently, they began running international cybercrime operations including phishing attacks, ransomware deployment, and financial frauds targeting both individuals and institutions.

### 4. Sinaloa Cartel



The Sinaloa Cartel, headquartered in Culiacan Sinaloa, Mexico is one of the key drug trafficking organizations in the world. It uses violence and strategic alliances. They use tunnels as well as land and water routes, along the U.S.-Mexico border which facilitate drug trafficking, arms trafficking, **human smuggling, and human trafficking**. They form alliances with other criminal organizations both domestically and internationally that allow them to maintain control over supply chains of drugs and people.

### 5. The Yakuza



The Yakuza, also known as the Japanese mafia, dates to the Edo period (1603-1868) in Japan, embedding itself into Japanese society. They have a strict code of conduct and operate under a hierarchical structure similar to that found in traditional samurai culture. They are involved in illegal activities including drug trafficking, extortion rackets, **human trafficking and human smuggling**, arms smuggling, gambling pachinko parlors, and real estate scams. They also are involved in legitimate businesses such as construction and entertainment that they use as fronts for illegal activities.

### 6. Chinese Triads



The term "Triad" is a reference to "Three United Society," the original three Chinese secret societies. They have evolved into highly organized set of international crime networks involved in many illegal activities including drug trafficking, **human trafficking and human smuggling**, money laundering, counterfeit goods, extortion schemes, protection rackets, and cybercrime. They are based in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and mainland China but now operate in Chinese communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and parts of Europe.

### 7. Hells Angels



The Hells Angels Motorcycle Club is one of the best-known outlaw motorcycle gangs in the world. Founded in 1948 in California, it is now a global organization with chapters in at least 65 countries. The gang is a multimillion-dollar enterprise from its involvement in drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, extortion, murder, money laundering, **prostitution, human trafficking, and human smuggling**. They are mainly involved in manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine across North America and Europe through alliances with other organized crime groups.

## 8. 'Ndrangheta



The 'Ndrangheta is a transnational crime organization from the Calabria region of southern Italy. Unlike its more well-known counterpart, the Sicilian Mafia, they operate out of familial loyalty making it difficult for law enforcement agencies to infiltrate. According to Interpol, they control an estimated 80% of Europe's cocaine market, making billions annually. They work with South American drug cartels and have routes into Europe, and recently, North America. They infiltrate local communities through hospitality and construction industries and use them as fronts. Recently, they have become involved in **migrant smuggling and human trafficking**.

## 9. Los Zetas



Los Zetas, originally part of the Mexican Army's elite special forces, have grown to become one of Mexico's most dangerous and ruthless drug cartels. First formed to guard the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas broke away and established themselves as an independent criminal organization. They use threats and intimidation including mass killings, beheadings, and torture videos on social media to serve as warnings to anyone who might think about crossing them. They control large parts northeastern Mexico and are involved in drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, **migrant smuggling, human trafficking**, oil theft, and arms smuggling.

## 10. Black Axe



Highly organized Nigerian confraternities and gangs, the Black Axe claims to be a registered non-partisan, non-religious and non-tribal but over the years they have become feared for their brutal violence and involvement in smuggling drugs, fraud, passport falsification, credit card cloning, and various forms of cybercrime, extortion, murder. More recently they have begun running **prostitution rings, human trafficking and migrant smuggling operations**. They operate in Europe, America, and Asia. For example, in 2015 a sophisticated car theft ring run by the Black Axe organized crime ring was apprehended in [Toronto](#), Canada. It

is thought that many of the 63,000 online scams and sextortion rings operated from Nigeria in the U.S. and Canada involve The Black Axe. According to Interpol, they are forging alliances with the [Sicilian Mafia](#), and other TCOs in Europe to solidify a move into prostitution, drugs, migrant smuggling, human trafficking business.

## 11. Sicilian Mafia (La Cosa Nostra)



The Sicilian Mafia, also known as La Cosa Nostra, is one of the largest and most well-known criminal organizations in the world. Originating in Italy, it is a secret society bound by codes of loyalty and silence. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mafia came to America, establishing strongholds in New York where they began collaborating with other ethnic crime groups. Their power comes from involvement in protection rackets, drug trafficking, extortion, fraud, vote buying, bid rigging, and more recently **migrant smuggling, prostitution, and human trafficking**. They use brute force to compel people to do their will, but they also gain power

through strategic alliances with corrupt politicians and law enforcement officials.



## 12. Gulf Cartel



Gulf Cartel, a dolphin, and the word “entregas,” or “deliveries.” One human smuggler who spoke on conditions of anonymity, confirmed the bracelets were a system to designate who has paid for the right to transit through Gulf Cartel territory.

The Gulf Cartel is one of the oldest organized crime groups in Mexico. Based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, directly across the border from Brownsville, Texas, it controls vast areas of the border. Traditionally known for drug trafficking, in the past ten years it has emerged as a key cartel involved in **migrant smuggling and human trafficking**. Central Americans who crossed the Rio Grande recently into La Joya, Texas, wore blue bracelets with the logo of the



*Blue bracelet of Gulf Cartel indicating the wearer had paid to be taken across Gulf Cartel territory into the U.S.*

## DoD CTIP Program Office Updates



The CTIP Office chaired the CTIP Task Force meeting on July 9, 2025 attended by 86 people. The CTIP PMO invited guest speakers for the meeting: representatives from the Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons discussed the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the three Protocols (the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their parts and Components and Ammunition.) A representative from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) discussed the UNODC’s Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section efforts to prevent human trafficking.

On July 29, 2025, the CTIP PMO gave a presentation to the Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). The presentation focused on the DoD’s policies and program centered on combating human trafficking. The IVLPs objective for the briefing included a review of the U.S. government strategies to combat international trafficking in persons, including crimes against women and children, by examining the formulation, administration, and enforcement of U.S. policy on the national, state, and local levels.

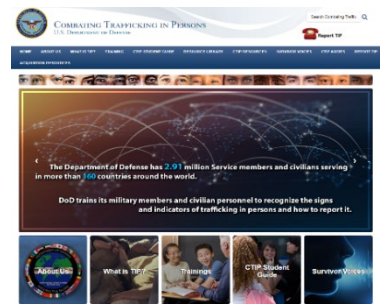
On July 30, 2025, the CTIP Director participated in a virtual panel discussion for the SAFE Coalition for Human Rights, United Nations World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (TIP) event. The CTIP Director provided an overview on current, ongoing, and recently completed DoD CTIP initiatives and projects during the panel. The event highlighted the awareness and mobilization efforts to combat human trafficking of community-based organizations, universities, and the Federal government.

For more information,  
visit :  
[ctip.defense.gov](http://ctip.defense.gov)

The CTIP Office added two new survivors to the [Survivor Voices page](#) on the CTIP Website: Dr. Nissi Hamilton and Jazmyn Brown. [Read/watch their stories.](#)

**NEW Training:** The CTIP Office developed and released the [“Seal and Repel: Border Security to Prevent Human Trafficking.”](#) The training includes the following learning objectives: Describe how human traffickers exploit the Southern border, understand the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling, identify signs and indicators of human trafficking victims, know the four kinds of illegal aliens (criminal, illegal, trafficking victim, unaccompanied minor) you may encounter, and know how and where to report suspected trafficking incidents or victims.

**Check out the CTIP Website!** The [website](#) includes tabs for CTIP Trainings, the Student Guide, and Reporting TIP.



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## Upcoming Events

- CTIP Self-Assessment will be tasked via CATMS and email to DoD Components at the end of August
- CTIP Task Force Meeting, October 8, 2025