

News story: Government agrees joint work on international crime

The Prime Minister Theresa May and President Donald Trump today committed to tackle the global threat posed by transnational criminal organisations – including illegal opioid traffickers.

A high-level group chaired by Home Secretary Sajid Javid and US Attorney General Jeff Sessions will work to reduce the significant harm caused by these organisations, such as by improving our ability to pursue ‘high-value’ targets and their interests.

Understanding the threats

The group will also find opportunities for partnerships with industry to improve our understanding of threats and work with other countries on the socio-economic factors which perpetuate transnational organised crime.

Other measures include:

- A joint UK-US ministerial taskforce on synthetic opioids, led by a Home Office minister, focused on sharing expertise in detection and tracking, specialist law enforcement intelligence capabilities and prevention and treatment.
- A joint UK-US Strategic Dialogue on illicit finance, led by senior officials to tackle shared threats and work with other countries to maintain and strengthen implementation of global standards, scheduled to meet for the first time in September 2018.
- An informal, ad-hoc dialogue between law enforcement officials which will assess the work of current initiatives and groups, such as the Five Eyes Law Enforcement Group.

The joint taskforce on synthetic opioids will build on major pieces of work carried out by the UK government in recent years. The Forensic Early Warning System identifies harmful drugs before they gain a foothold and the landmark Psychoactive Substances Act put a blanket ban on harmful substances.

During his first visit to the US in May, the Home Secretary met US Attorney General Jeff Sessions and US Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen. During both meetings, the opioids threat was raised and both parties agreed to continue cooperation.

International challenge

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Synthetic opioids like fentanyl pose a huge threat. Suppliers attempt to develop new formulations of similar drugs to try and

keep a step ahead of law enforcement and legislation.

The UK government has changed the law to stay on the front foot against criminals and invested in cutting-edge technology to detect drugs and other illegal goods at the border.

But tackling synthetic drugs is an international challenge, with suppliers able to produce and ship their drugs around the world. That is why we agree with the US government that it is vital that all countries should implement tougher domestic controls on drug production.

Fentanyl and its analogues – substances with similar but slightly altered chemical structures – are a group of powerful synthetic opioids. They have similar effects to other opioids such as morphine and heroin but are significantly more potent.

Although to date fentanyl seizures in the UK can be measured in small quantities, this equates to many millions of lethal doses.