

## Interview: US hails UN plan to monitor fentanyl market

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In this March 6, 2017 file photo William Brownfield, assistant secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, speaks during a joint press conference with Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales at the inauguration of a women's jail in Fraijanes, Guatemala. The United Nations is about to clamp down on fentanyl, a prescription painkiller up to 50 times stronger than heroin by adding it to its list of controlled opioids. (AP Photo/Moises Castillo,file )

The chief U.S. State Department counter-narcotics official on Tuesday

hailed a pending United Nations move to control substances used to make a deadly synthetic drug, but acknowledged it will not put an immediate dent in illegal trafficking of the chemicals.

Assistant Secretary of State William Brownfield said the U.N.'s proposal to globally track the legal movement of prescription fentanyl and materials used to make the powerful opiate illegally is important as an overall step to reduce drug abuse and overdoses.

Brownfield told The Associated Press that it is only one stage in reducing dependency or addiction on the drug that may have contributed to 33,000 U.S. deaths in 2015 and over 300,000 in the past 16 years.

He spoke outside a meeting of the U.N.'s Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The organization is expected to put fentanyl and its precursors on a list of globally controlled substances, allowing for better trans-border monitoring.

A prescription painkiller, fentanyl is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and is often mixed with heroin or made to look like other painkillers that fetch a higher street price, with fatal results for users unaware that it has been added.

Both the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy point to China as North America's main source of fentanyl, related drugs and the chemicals used to make them, and say the main entry point is from Mexico

China says there is no statistical evidence to support the assertion. But it put four fentanyl-related compounds under monitoring last month, apparently in part because of U.S. concerns.

While acknowledging that U.S.-Mexican relations are strained over

President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, Brownfield dismissed suggestions that bilateral cooperation against fentanyl and other drug traffickers would suffer as a result.

Mexico's Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo has recently warned that further strains could affect cooperation on drug smuggling and on immigration.

Brownfield agreed that "complicated problems" exist between the two countries. He said the imperative remained to cooperate because "the government of Mexico is no more pleased or enthusiastic about this drug situation than the United States government."

He said that more oversight of legal global [drug](#) traffic "will not stop those who are producing the product illegally," but argued the pending U.N. move would have a trickle-down effect on the illegal market.

"As the supply becomes more restricted, the price will go up, driving those who are dependent but not yet addicted to seek treatment," he said.

He described the U.N. plan as "an additional tool in your tool chest ... to control the flow of the product," allowing law enforcement to concentrate more of its efforts on illicit producers.

The White House's 2018 budget proposal is expected to include major cuts in U.N. financial support. Brownfield said that as a government official he will support any U.S. administration decisions.

At the same time, he described the Commission on Narcotic Drugs as delivering "quantifiable, visible ... value for the American people" in the U.S. fight against drugs and crime.

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