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Identifying High-Risk Mexican Importers of Essential Chemicals Used in Illicit Synthetic Drug Production

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Executive Summary

The U.S. illicit drug market has experienced a monumental shift in recent years from being dominated by plant-based substances like cocaine and heroin, to increasingly being saturated with synthetic substances like fentanyl, fentalogs, and high-purity methamphetamine.

Mexican transnational criminal organizations—the main producers and distributors of synthetic drugs in the United States—rely on networks of chemical brokers, logistics firms, and, for the most part, Chinese chemical companies to procure precursors and other essential chemicals to manufacture synthetic drugs. However, many of these chemicals have a variety of licit applications, including in the agricultural, food processing, and pharmaceutical industries, among others.

As such, it is challenging to parse out shipments of chemicals that are at high risk of being diverted for illicit drug production from those that are more likely used for legitimate purposes. Identifying companies that are importing chemicals known to be used in illicit synthetic drug production is a good start. But we propose going a step further by **analyzing those shipments as a function of an entity's overall recent import history to identify the highest risk entities for diversion**.

We assess that Mexican companies whose majority of imports comprise essential chemicals—especially those companies that **import certain combinations of chemicals publicly known to be employed in either fentanyl and/or methamphetamine production**—may signal an increased risk of diversion.

Methodology

We started with a list of 70 known precursors and essential chemicals with applications in fentanyl and/or methamphetamine production.[1] Next, we identified relevant synonyms for those chemicals and translated the chemical names into Spanish. We then queried all chemical name variants against our Mexico import data to generate a list of shipments imported into Mexico that included at least one of the chemical name variants.[2] Each shipment record—which is derived from bills of lading—generally provides the name of the exporter, importer, HS code, product description, and port or location of unlading, among other data fields describing the origins, destination, and commodities of the shipment.

For each Mexican importer uncovered using the methodology, we then analyzed their imports of known precursors/essential chemicals to identify companies whose imports of known precursors/essential chemicals made up more than 50 percent of all imports. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to narrow the aperture from all possible entities importing essential chemicals to those that appear to only be

[1] By "essential chemicals" we are referring to reagents, binding agents, catalysts, solvents, etc. commonly used in synthetic drug production.
[2] Sayari's Mexico import/export data generally spans 2022-2024, with updates occurring regularly.

dealing in one or more essential chemicals, which, in some cases, may indicate an increased risk of diversion.

Caveats and limitations

Illicit networks dealing in precursors and essential chemicals are known to obfuscate the contents of their shipments, often by mislabeling the goods descriptions included in bills of lading. Evidence from recent U.S. criminal indictments and public reporting suggest that relatively low volume shipments of the most strictly controlled fentanyl precursors or preprecursors, such as 4-ANPP, are often mislabeled as everyday consumer items.[3] As such, our analysis does not generally capture imports of precursor shipments that have been mislabeled.

However, we hypothesize that because many supporting chemicals are uncontrolled or minimally controlled and have broad uses across industry, illicit actors are less incentivized to obfuscate these substances. Therefore, **by analyzing trade patterns in supporting chemicals and not solely focusing on direct or indirect precursors**, investigators can identify certain abnormal trade activity in uncontrolled or minimally controlled essential chemicals that may indicate a higher risk of diversion.

Depending on the industry, some companies may have legitimate reasons for certain essential chemicals to comprise a majority of their imports. As such, an entity's trade history should form part of a more comprehensive analysis of other potential risk factors such as the industry the entity operates in, its public-facing profile (i.e. does it have a website?), and the entity's chemical suppliers.

Moreover, we recognize that many entities whose essential chemical imports may make up less than 50 percent of total imports—such as companies operating in the pharmaceutical, agricultural, and food industries, among others—are also vulnerable to diversion for illicit purposes. We also recognize, however, that any chemical diversion that does occur from these entities would be the hardest to detect.

Our list of key terms is not comprehensive of all possible precursors and essential chemicals that can be used to manufacture fentanyl or methamphetamine. Investigators are encouraged to apply the methodology outlined in this paper to replicate searches with additional chemicals or non-chemical commodities (i.e. pill presses, dyes, etc.). Finally, certain chemical key terms in our list form part of the names of other unrelated chemicals that may or may not have applications in illicit synthetic drug production. These chemicals are included in our master shipment dataset but are excluded in our final analysis to identify entities whose essential chemical imports comprise 50 percent or more of all imports.

[3] Chung, Daisy; Gottesdiener, Laura; Jorgic, Drazen, "Fentanyl's deadly chemistry: How rogue labs make opioids," *Reuters,* 25 Jul 2024, accessed on 19 Mar 2025, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/drugs-fentanyl-supply-chain-process/

Results

As a result of the above-described analysis, we identified 31 Mexico-based entities whose recent imports of essential chemicals comprise over 50 percent of their total imports. While many of these entities likely imported dual-use chemicals for licit purposes, we assess at least a portion of these entities—especially those that have imported various known essential chemicals—may provide leads for analysts and investigators looking to disrupt the chemical supply chains of Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). A list of the 31 identified entities, along with a dataset capturing all imports into Mexico sourced from Sayari's Mexico import/export data for the 70 chemicals included in our analysis can be made available upon request.

Case Study - Importaciones & Insumos Nortpacif HG, S.A. de C.V.

One of the entities identified in our analysis was IMPORTACIONES & INSUMOS NORTPACIF HG, S.A. DE C.V. ("NORTPACIF"), a Culiacan, Sinaloa-based general trading company incorporated in April 2019. Mexican import records list an address for NORTPACIF at Avenida Pulsar 6205 in the Quazar Industrial Park located along federal highway 15 in the southwest corner of Culiacan.

A closer analysis of NORTPACIF's recent import history suggests the company deals almost exclusively in known essential chemicals used in methamphetamine and fentanyl production, raising serious questions as to the ultimate end use of these chemicals.

Between 11 Jan and 26 Dec 2024, NORTPACIF imported 52 shipments comprising approximately 2.3 million kilograms of chemicals valued at roughly $3.6 million, according to Mexican import data available in Sayari Graph. **All but one[4] of those shipments were for essential chemicals commonly used in methamphetamine and/or fentanyl synthesis**.[5] Additionally, essential chemical imports represented all but five of the company's 56 total shipments imported during the same time period.[6]

[4] NORTPACIF imported one shipment of ethyl methacrylate on December 6, 2024. It is unclear whether ethyl methacrylate can be used to synthesize synthetic drugs.
[5] For common chemicals used in fentanyl and methamphetamine production, see "CY 2022 Methamphetamine Profiling Program Report," *Drug Enforcement Administration,* https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/CY%202022%20MPP_LS%20Report%20PRB%202024-02.pdf and "Supply Chain Conference, May 3, 2023, Houston, Texas," *Drug Enforcement Administration,* *https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/mtgs/supply_chain/conf_2023/Kolb.pdf*.
[6] Beyond essential chemicals, NORTPACIF imported one shipment of aluminum foil, one shipment described as "small bags," one shipment described as "large bags," one shipment described as "titanium dioxide-based pigments," and one shipment of ethyl methacrylate.

Below are all of the essential chemicals in terms of weight and value imported by NORTPACIF between 11 Jan and 26 Dec 2024:

Chemical	Weight (kg)	Value (USD)	Drug
Tartaric Acid	686,722	$1,287,427	Methamphetamine
Glacial Acetic Acid	672,000	$425,040	Fentanyl and Methamphetamine
N-methylformamide	576,000	$978,240	Methamphetamine
Benzyl Alcohol	282,240	$502,387	Methamphetamine
Thioglycolic Acid	20,000	$82,000	Methamphetamine
Methyl Thioglycolate	18,400	$149,960	Methamphetamine

Fig. 1: Essential chemicals used in methamphetamine and fentanyl production imported by NORTPACIF between 11 Jan and 26 Dec 2024.

All of the above chemicals are considered dual-use, meaning they have a variety of licit uses in industry. But the **specific combination of chemicals that make up almost all of NORTPACIF's imports** over the given time period, and their known application in synthetic drug production, suggest that at **least a portion of these chemicals may have been diverted for illicit purposes**.

NORTPACIF's suppliers

NORTPACIF received all essential chemical shipments from only two suppliers—South Carolina-incorporated NEW STAR HOLDING LLC ("NEW STAR") and Hong Kong-incorporated PANGS CHEM HK LTD ("PANGS CHEM HK").

NEW STAR sent a total of 38 shipments comprising all six of the previously mentioned dual-use chemicals to NORTPACIF. The shipments entered Mexico via the port of Manzanillo, in the southwestern state of Colima. Moreover, for all of NEW STAR's chemical exports, Mexican import data list the port of lading country as the United States and country of manufacture as China, suggesting the chemical shipments from NEW STAR to NORTPACIF may have originated in China and transited the United States before onward shipment to Mexico.

PANGS CHEM HK, for its part, sent a total of 13 shipments comprising tartaric acid, glacial acetic acid, and n-methylformamide. All of PANGS CHEM HK's exports to NORTPACIF were sent from Hong Kong and entered Mexico via the port of Manzanillo.

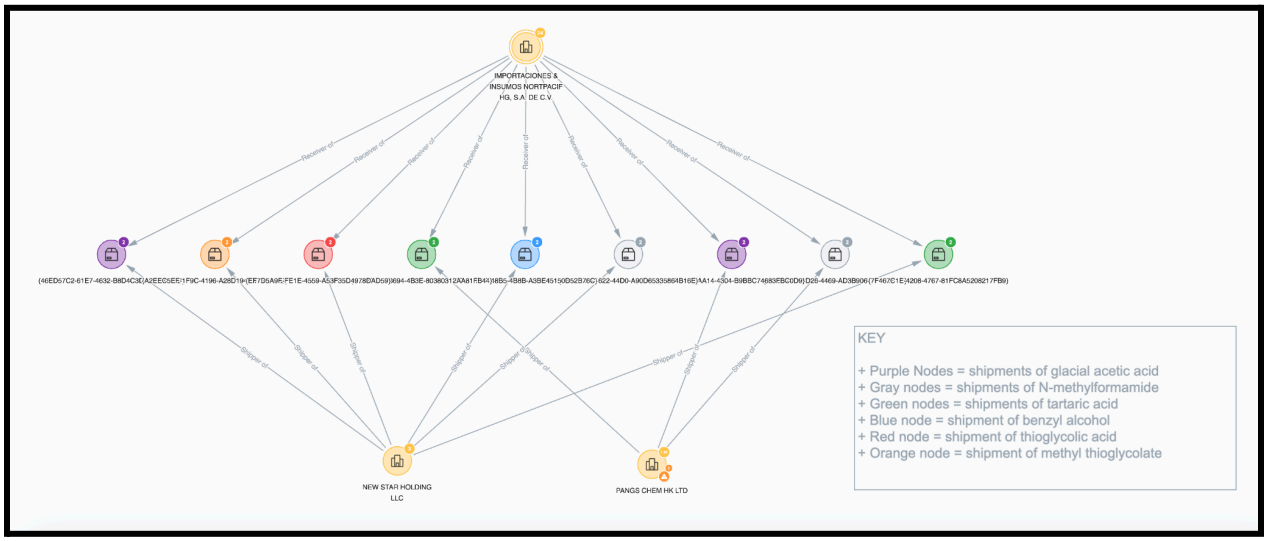

Fig. 2: Sayari Graph network chart depicting some of the shipments of essential chemicals sent from PANGS CHEM HK and NEW STAR HOLDING to NORTPACIF.

NEW STAR HOLDING LLC

NEW STAR was incorporated in August 2023 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and lists an individual named RUIQI ZENG[7] as the registered agent, according to corporate records from the South Carolina Secretary of State.

NEW STAR's website lists an address at 2411 North Oak Street, Suite 301N, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577. While the suite is located inside an office building, it is unclear based on public data alone whether NEW STAR owns or leases warehouse space in the U.S. where China-origin chemicals could be moved to and stored before onward shipment to Mexico. Regardless, NEW STAR's self-reported address raises additional questions as to how a chemical trading firm located at an office suite is moving multi-ton shipments of known methamphetamine and fentanyl essential chemicals to Mexico.

NEW STAR's website also suggests the company is affiliated with a Hong Kong-registered chemical trading firm called SUNDIA (HONG KONG) CHEMICAL CO., LTD. ("SUNDIA").[8] However, it is unclear if NEW STAR is formally owned by SUNDIA; the South Carolina Secretary of State does not provide publicly available ownership information for the company.

[7] ZENG self-reports the address of a residential property at 9039 Fort Hill Way, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29579.
[8] See website for SUNDIA (HONG KONG) CHEMICAL CO., LTD. https://www.sundiachemical.com/. While SUNDIA was incorporated in Hong Kong in 2006, its website was not registered until November 2023, roughly three months after NEW STAR's incorporation in South Carolina.

SUNDIA, itself, listed an individual named ZENG RUIQI (曾睿琪) as the 100 percent shareholder in an April 2024 annual report filed with the Hong Kong Companies Registry. The name match across both companies strongly suggests that ZENG RUIQI, the 100 percent shareholder of SUNDIA, is also the registered agent of NEW STAR. A ZENG RUIQI also appears as the majority shareholder of a SUNDIA-affiliated, People's Republic of China (PRC)-based chemical trading company—SICHUAN SUNDIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE CO., LTD.[9]

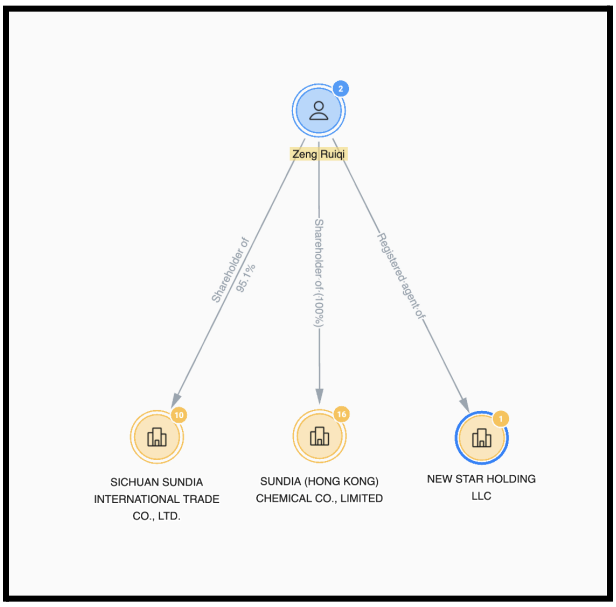

Fig. 3: Sayari Graph network chart depicting ownership and control relationships between ZENG RUIQI and chemical companies in the PRC, Hong Kong, and South Carolina.

PANGS CHEM HK LTD.

PANGS CHEM HK, NORTPACIF's other essential chemical supplier, appears to form part of a PRC-based chemical conglomerate called PANGS GROUP. PANGS GROUP comprises at least 18 companies, all of which appear to be located in either the PRC or Hong Kong, according to PANGS GROUP's website.[10] The ultimate beneficial owner of the PANGS GROUP is a Chinese national by the name of PANG BIN (庞斌), according to Chinese corporate records.

[9] SICHUAN SUNDIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE CO., LTD. also goes by the names SICHUAN SUNDIA CHEMICAL CO., LTD. and 四川圣地亚国际贸易有限公司. See website for SICHUAN SUNDIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE CO., LTD. at http://www.sundiachem.com/.
[10] PANGS GROUP website: https://www.pangs.com.cn/EN/cms/lid/44.html, accessed on 14 Mar 2025.

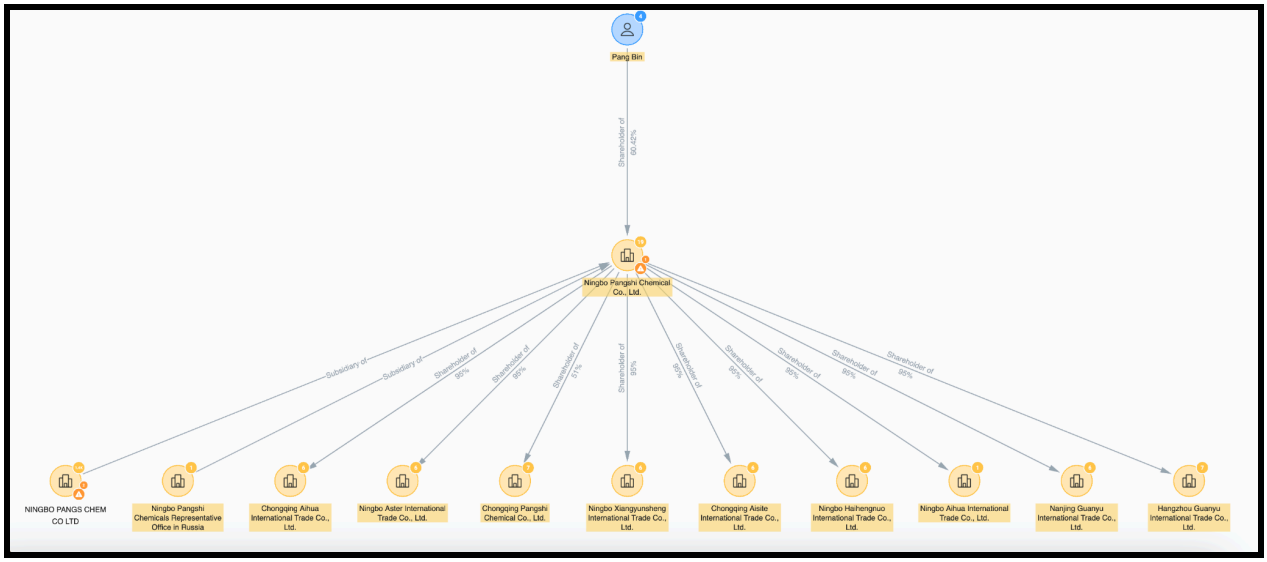

Fig. 4: A partial snapshot of the PANGS GROUP corporate structure, identifying PANG BIN as the ultimate beneficial owner.

NORTPACIF's extended corporate network

Mexican corporate records available in Sayari Graph demonstrate that NORTPACIF is owned by five individuals, all of which likely form part of the same family given shared paternal and maternal surnames.

Beyond NORTPACIF, the family also owns a second chemical trading company based in Culiacan—BELKEL DISTRIBUIDORA, S.A. DE C.V. ("BELKEL").[11] Between 6 Apr and 1 Nov 2023, BELKEL imported 11 shipments comprising over 900,000 kg of tartaric acid valued at approximately $465,000, according to Mexico import data in Sayari Graph.[12] All 11 shipments were sent from PRC-based NORBRIGHT INDUSTRY CO., LTD., and at least 7 of the shipments entered Mexico via the port of Manzanillo.

Apart from BELKEL, the family owns a general transport business and construction business in Culiacan—TRANSPORTES REFRIGERADOS NEISAD, S.A. DE C.V. and OLA CONSTRUCCIONES PINTURA Y ACABADOS, S.A. DE C.V. Two family members are listed as the legal representatives of FLETQUIM, S. de R.L. de C.V. ("FLETQUIM"), a transport business specializing in chemicals and hazardous materials based in Hermosillo, Sonora.[13] A combination of chemical trading and transportation companies owned and/or

[11] Belkel website: https://belkel.mx/, accessed on 8 Jan 2025.
[12] The bills of lading for all 11 shipments did not list BELKEL by name as the consignee, rather, they only listed BELKEL's RFC (BDI130409E31). Sayari verified BELKEL's RFC using Mexico's Registered Importers list (*Padrón de importadores*) managed by Mexico's Tax Administration Service (*Servicio de Administración Tributaria*–SAT). See "127, 953 Registros Activos en el Padrón de Importadores con fecha de corte al 28 de febrero del 2025," *Servicio de Administración Tributaria,* 28 Feb 2025, http://omawww.sat.gob.mx/padronimportadoresexportadores/paginas/documentos/Pad_Imp.pdf
[13] Fletquim website, https://fletquim.com/, accessed on 8 Jan 2025.

controlled by NORTPACIF's shareholders suggests the family may facilitate both the importation of chemicals and transport of those chemicals from port to their final destination in Mexico.

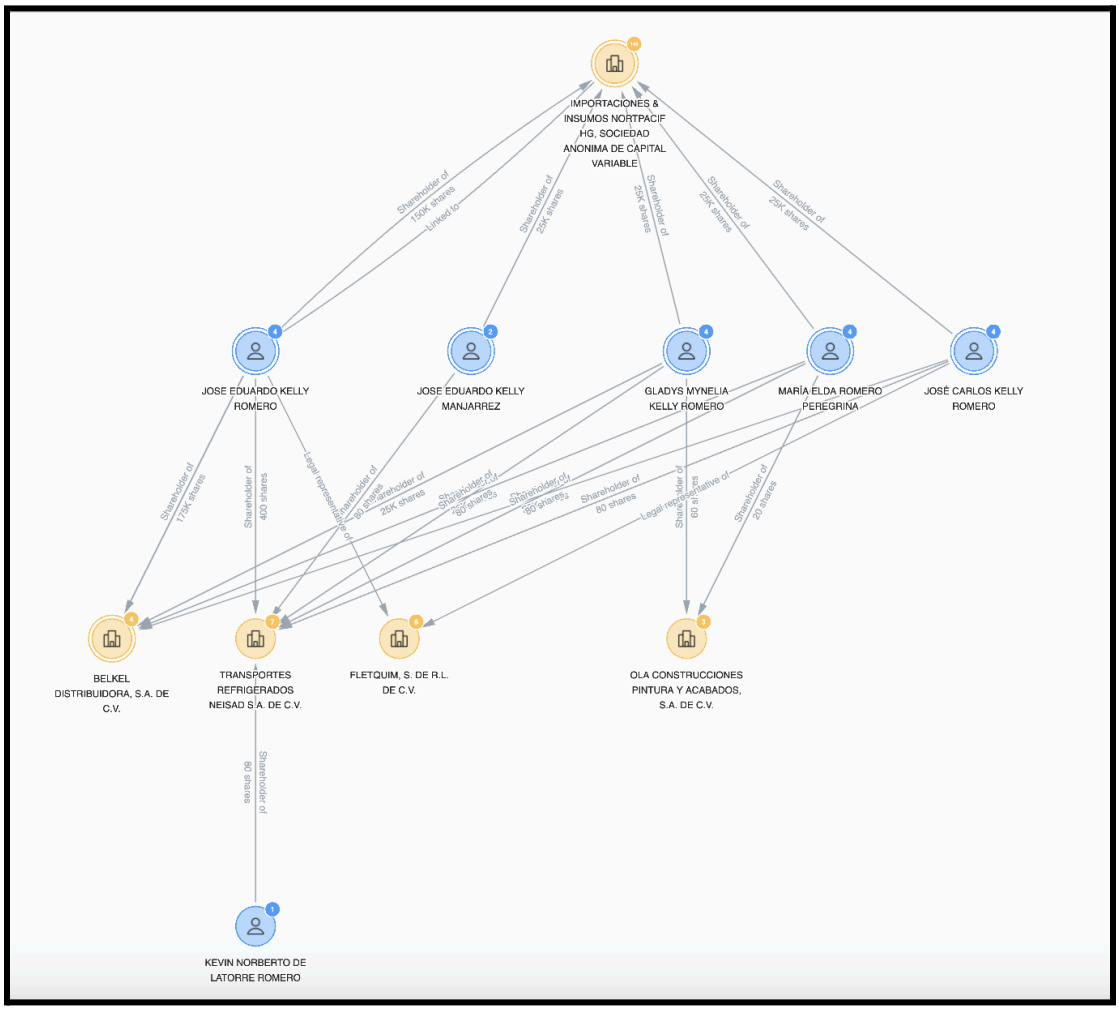

Fig. 5:. Sayari Graph network chart depicting additional entities owned and controlled by the direct shareholders of NORTPACIF.

Any one of the identified entities may warrant further investigation to determine the extent, if any, they may be facilitating the diversion of chemicals to Mexican DTOs.

Critical nodes in chemical supply chains

General trading firms like NORTPACIF, along with freight forwarders and customs specialists, provide critical services to importers and exporters in Mexico. They navigate the often cumbersome and complex bureaucratic process of importing goods into the country, providing shipping services, completing required customs forms, and ensuring goods are imported or exported legally. In other words, they provide legitimacy to imports and exports that can be exploited by Mexican DTOs and are therefore essential to chemical procurement for illicit purposes.

These types of entities—and the dual-use chemicals they import—are particularly challenging for analysts and investigators for two reasons:

1) It is often difficult to distinguish licit from potentially illicit trade, as many of the chemicals used in illicit drug production have numerous applications across industry. Broader contextual analysis of import/export data—like in the case of NORTPACIF, and across our entire dataset of Mexican import records—allows investigators to identify importers of dual-use chemicals at higher risk of diversion. For example, instead of importing a wide range of chemicals, NORTPACIF's imports are almost exclusively restricted to large volumes of six chemicals knowingly employed in methamphetamine production; one of those chemicals—glacial acetic acid—is also used to produce fentanyl. A concentration of a small number of known essential chemicals making up the vast majority of an entity's imports may signal heightened risk for chemical diversion to Mexican DTOs.

2) Trading companies and logistics firms are akin to shell companies registered in secrecy jurisdictions—they allow Mexican DTOs to import licit goods for illicit purposes anonymously. In some cases, Mexican DTOs will set up their own front or shell companies to procure chemicals and lab equipment to manufacture illicit drugs. Increasingly, however, Mexican DTOs subcontract the procurement of chemicals and other equipment to specialized brokers[14], who themselves may subcontract the logistics of chemical procurement to complicit or unknowing trading companies and customs specialists.

Creative analysis of import/export data can uncover entities of concern dealing in dual-use chemicals. Corporate records with robust identifying information allow investigators to pierce the corporate veil and identify the real people behind these networks.

[14] "Brokers: Lynchpins of the Precursor Chemical Chemical Flow to Mexico," *InSight Crime,* 2 Feb 2024, https://insightcrime.org/investigations/brokers-lynchpins-precursor-chemical-flow-mexico/

About Sayari

Sayari is the transparency company providing the public and private sectors with immediate visibility into complex commercial relationships. Drawing on a decade of innovation and support from industry-leading investors, Sayari delivers the largest commercially available collection of corporate and trade data as a dynamic, living model of global ownership and trade activity. Sayari's solutions harness this model to enable risk resilience, complex investigations, and clear-eyed business decisions.

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