

THE CLOSEST ALLIGATOR TO THE BOAT: MEXICO'S DRUG-FUELED VIOLENCE

BY

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THE CLOSEST ALLIGATOR TO THE BOAT: MEXICO'S DRUG-FUELED VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

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Mexico's drug-fueled and undeclared war is spiraling out of control, and has a real and growing ability to threaten the Mexican government and affect the American southwest. There have been many Americans killed as a result of this heated conflict, yet the policies that should protect American interests are not doing enough to either minimize the effects of this war on the United States or stop the fight altogether. The drug cartels involved are starting to resemble a paramilitary insurgency, using beheadings, Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) and Special Forces type raids. The Mexican government seems underequipped to do anything about this fight and it routinely gives the appearance that it is out gunned and out maneuvered. These new tactics, coupled with the cartels' transnational ties to the Columbian FARC, Venezuela, and other U.S. adversaries, pose a credible and strategic threat to the United States. The latest developments in this fight, along with convincing intelligence that our enemies have the ability to open an irregular warfare front on our southern border, demand the United States' full attention in changing the war to our south.

THE CLOSEST ALLIGATOR TO THE BOAT: MEXICO'S DRUG-FUELED VIOLENCE

The Marine company commander has just finished briefing his attack plans. After breaking away from the company brief, the platoon leaders mill about, conferring with each other about their role in the upcoming attack as described by the company commander. The platoon leaders are sure and steady as they brief their squad leader on their roles in the assault. Following the platoon brief, the squad leaders walk through the nuances of the plan and go over weapons and final gear checks with their Marines. Waiting is the hardest part in combat, and this attack will take place in two hours. The company commander has time to reflect upon what is about to take place; an attack against a fortified, highly determined foe in an urban area. The Captain reflects upon his years of fighting and knows that it never gets any easier to take your Marines into harm's way. Any officer would be apprehensive in this situation, and this Captain is no different, contemplating the possible casualties. He mulls over all the details--is his plan solid, how will his men perform? The company's senior enlisted Marine calls out to his boss, letting him know that it is "go time," as the company starts to walk out to their vehicle beginning the movement to contact with an enemy that is determined to win, armed for battle, and trained to kill.

This scene could be playing out in many parts of Helmand or other providences in Afghanistan, but it is not. This battlefield is different. These are not United States Marines, and this is not Afghanistan. Instead, these are Mexican Marines and this is five miles south of the Texas border. The enemy and the war they faces them is just as deadly and this conflict is just as important for the security of that nation and those around it.

This situation has become so uncontrollable that Mexican President Felipe Calderon has stated that he would consider a debate on legalizing drugs in order to stem the violence that has overtaken the country. According to the Mexican government, more than 30,100 people have been killed in drug violence since President Calderon launched a crackdown against cartels in 2006.¹ Unfortunately, the violence and its after effects continue to escalate, with more than 12,000 deaths reported in 2010.² Then number killed in this war against the cartels in 2010 is twice the number of troops lost in both combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. This war is close, it is growing worse, and it is affecting our nation already. It is the nearest and most consequential conflict our nation faces, yet it continues to rage almost unabated.

This paper seeks to address the conditions in Mexico that have led to its current situation and the implications of these conditions that feeds the cartels. I will also discuss two of the most dangerous cartels: La Familia Michoacana and Los Zetas. While addressing these two groups, I will explore their ties and other cartels ties to organizations such as Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), Venezuela and other enemies abroad. The reason for exploring these ties is to show that, as a result of their activities, these cartels pose a credible strategic threat to the United States for two main reasons:

1. Their ability to gain huge numbers of new recruits due to their different and unique methods of recruitment.
2. Their collaboration with international groups proven to be hostile to the U.S.

I intend to broach the hard decisions that America faces as we prepare our response to these terrorist-backed cartels. Finally, I will propose an 'out of the box' idea to help cut down demand, thus secure our border with our drug-dealing neighbor to the south.

Any discussion related to Mexico and the Latin American culture must start with an understanding of how the minds of Latin men think and react to outside stimulus. This plays into why cartels are able to so freely recruit new members into their ranks. Machismo, a learned response and a real part of Hispanic culture, is one of the overriding forces driving the Latin American male psyche. Machismo, directly translated from Spanish, simply means, "masculinity" or "male chauvinist," but the functional meaning of the word is "virility" or someone to be envied or looked up to.³ The closest English word to machismo is macho which seems to be an out of vogue word in 2010 America. In America, it is acceptable to be in touch with one's feminine side, but in Latin American culture, the need to be macho is a need to prove one's worth to one's family and one's society. Few Americans are able to grasp machismo's full potential to drive Latin American men to extraordinary feats of heroism or to save face at any cost. In terms of this paper, the drive to be macho exceeds the need to follow the rules of society or the rules of law. I firmly believe that this drive to become the strongest, most manly man, through whatever means possible, has aided in strengthening the current Mexican cartel system, along with several other factors.

Another significant force driving cartel growth and strength is unemployment. Mexico is the 11th most populous country with over 100 million people. Nearly fifty percent are males under 25 years old, the median age in the country⁴. With

unemployment currently at near historic levels and over 5.5% in Mexico (Figure 1), roughly 2.5 million individuals are without work at any one time.

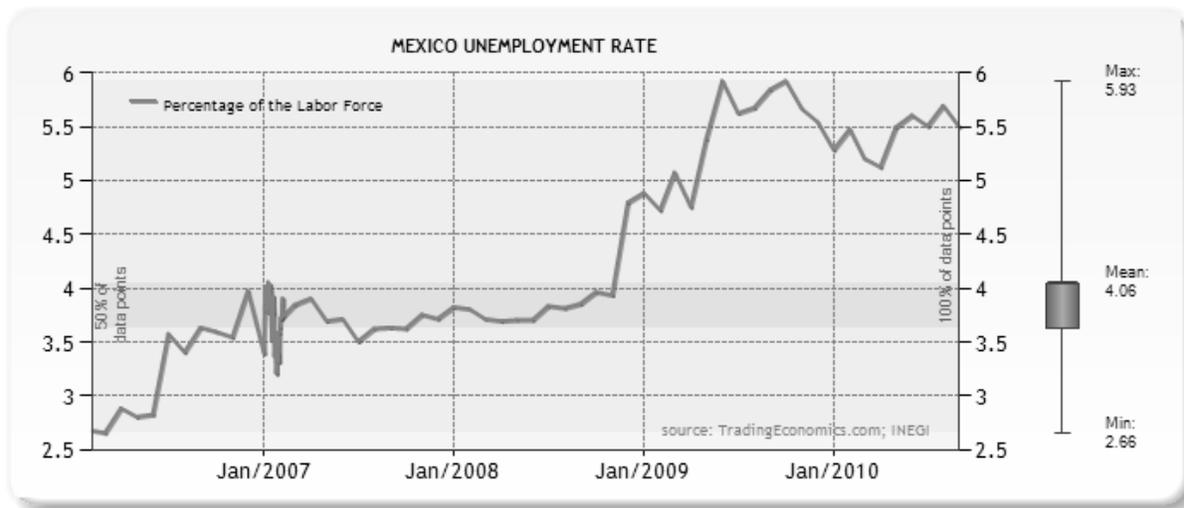


Figure 1: Month by Month Chart of Mexican Unemployment since Jan 07⁵

Many of the unemployed are young men below the age of 25.⁶ Working again with rough numbers, if only half of that demographic is inclined toward a life of crime, the potential pool of recruits for the cartels is 1.25 million machismo-driven, unemployed young men. These young males in Mexico live with very little hope of increasing their standard of living. Many choose to illegally immigrate to the United States and are then forced into a world where their whole lives are built around the illegal nature of their immigration status and remaining a shadowy member of society or face deportation. The Mexican cartels have many times become the hope for these disenfranchised individuals in their home country. The cartel life offers the potential for making more money in a week than can be made in a year working a normal job. It also raises the potential for an early, violent death.

Along with the worldwide economic slowdown, the increasing unemployment rate since 2006 may be due to increased drug-related violence in Mexico, which is having an

effect on companies that have used the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to outsource their factories to Mexico for cheaper labor. Based on recent guidance from the State Department, Caterpillar has informed expatriot employees in some regions of Mexico that they and their families should repatriate as soon as possible⁷

Companies can only accept so much risk for their executives and their factories prior to closing them. One young Mexican executive at cement giant Cemex SAB, which has headquarters in Monterrey, said he can count at least 20 different families from his circle of friends who have left—nearly all of them for nearby Texas⁸. This vicious cycle of violence has helped drive unemployment rates to record highs. As businesses flee the drug-fueled violence, tax revenues decrease, and the Mexican government weakens. All of this is not only bad for Mexicans, but America as well.

In times of trouble and despair like the ones that the people of Mexico are now encountering, humans often turn toward the basics and their religious beliefs. Religion is always a major factor in any discussion of the structure and fiber of any society. Mexico is no different, and Catholicism is the dominant religion in the country. This Catholic tradition goes back to the Spanish conquest which began in the early 16th century.

After the Spanish conquered the Aztec Indians, they demanded the Indians recognize the authority of the church, pope and king; refusal meant coercive subjugations, loss of property and punishment befitting traitors.⁹

Since those early draconian measures, Catholicism has become ingrained in the very fiber of the Mexican society, no matter the class of the individual. Mexico ranks as one of the top five most populous Catholic countries every year, with 89% of the population

professing their allegiance to the Pope and the Catholic church.¹⁰ Mexico is a country of over 100 million people, which equates to almost 90 million professed Catholics. It follows that the numbers of unemployed “religious” people in Mexico are likewise a large percentage of the overall number of jobless. With the number of unemployed young males at 1.25 million, then this puts the number of unemployed young Catholic males at 1 million. Because religion is able to reach the despairing and disenfranchised, at least one cartel is capitalizing on that fact by appealing to the religious base to threaten the Mexican government and, ultimately, the United States.

Another factor influencing the violence in Mexico is the number of conflicts in nearby countries to its south. This has never been truer than in Central American over the last forty years in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. War has raged in at least one of these countries in some form or another during the past four decades. The weapons of war, and the techniques that go along with them, supplied by a variety of external agencies have continued to find their way into the hands of the cartels through the porous borders to Mexico’s south. America has a porous border and problems with illegal immigration, but Mexico’s troubles in these areas are far greater. Mexico’s 625-mile border with Guatemala is the south-to-north access point for an estimated 400,000 Central Americans crossing illegally into Mexico each year.¹¹ This illegal immigration includes many people who received military training provided by the United States and Soviet Union and their proxy states. This military training for these proxy warriors is also passed down from generation to generation and has elevated the level of militaristic and violent tendencies in those family’s lineages that include a history

of war. This legacy of illegal immigration and violence history continues to plague Central America, Mexico, and now, the United States.

All of the Mexican cartels have capitalized on the easy transmission of military training across porous borders in one way or another. This factor not only helps both of the cartels that pose the most threat to Mexico and the US, but it specifically favors Los Zetas, which has taken training and weapons to the extreme through their focus on maintaining the more effective aspects of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) background of many of their personnel. These well armed “warriors” of the cartels are members of a complete and well thought-out criminal system that aims to extract money and power from the drug trade.

The Mexican drug cartel system is a complex criminal system with many players who are very dangerous in their own right, SOF background or not. There is no shortage of manpower, weapons, or training in Mexico, and those who exploit these facts are destabilizing the country and have made war their business. Groups like the Beltrán Leyva cartel, the Gulf cartel, Los Negros, the Juarez cartel, and the Sinaloa cartel are some of the major cartel players. This abbreviated list could go on for a page and still not capture all of the cartels who are bit players and are currently fighting for territorial control at any given time. Mexico is a breeder and incubator for cartels; many groups go without being named, due to their “pick-up game” makings and evolving nature. A comprehensive list could be made today, but next month it would be obsolete. However, there are two very dangerous groups that endure and have strategic effects on the US.

Mostly the major cartels mentioned so far are based around families and the core individuals of the family.¹² The fact that cartels are “inbred” in their membership provides great internal security, but limits their potential strategic threat as individual organizations simply due to “family geography.” Since most cartels do not accept outsiders strategically, they cannot acquire the numbers required to be a threat to the Mexican government or the United States individually. This “family only” requirement is not the case for La Familia Michoacana and Los Zetas, and it is a key reason for their longevity and reach.

La Familia Michoacana (LFM) is a unique cartel which was headed by Nazario Moreno González, known as *El Más Loco*, which in English translates to “The Craziest One.”¹³ LFM’s leader had many dangerous Lines of Operation (LOO), using religion, strategic leadership, and great business operations to pose a real and credible threat to the Mexican government and, ultimately, the United States.

The beginnings of the organization are not well known, but they first became a name in the United States in 2006 with brutal beheadings that more resemble Al Qaeda tactics than those of drug cartels. There is no question that LFM understands terror as well as business, and it has profited by intermingling the two. One of their early and representative incidents is shown in Figure 2. In that case, after rolling the heads of those who stood in the way of the cartel onto a dance floor, LFM left behind a message written on cardboard in an attempt to both advertise their strength and intimidate others into support. Their definition of innocent was someone who did not stand in the way of the cartel’s work.



Figure 2: Picture of Sept 2006 Disco Beheadings with a piece of cardboard that states the following: "The family doesn't kill for money. It doesn't kill women. It doesn't kill innocent people, only those who deserve to die. Know that this is divine justice".¹⁴

The home territory of the LFM organization is Michoacán, as their name implies. The name Michoacán is from Nahuatl and means "place of the fishermen," referring to those who fish on Lake Pátzcuaro.¹⁵ This state in southwest Mexico has 135 miles of coast line, great natural harbors and two of the country's largest rivers that run into the forest-covered highlands in the eastern part of the state. This geography makes this area a natural staging ground for drug trafficking of all types. The state is also strategically located, being only 178 miles from Mexico City and its population of 23,400,000 people.¹⁶ Mexico City is larger than any city in the United States, surpassing the population of the Greater New York City area by over one and a half million people.¹⁷ This close proximity to so many disenfranchised young males helps feed LFM's requirement for manpower and provide for an endless labor base.

Not only does LFM have the ideal location for criminal operations and proximity to almost unlimited manpower, LFM's leader Moreno González was able to reach out to recruits with its own twisted form of Christianity that preaches a dangerous and radical message. Because religion plays such a large role in the Mexican society, it is an avenue that LFM can exploit in order to intimidate and recruit from the population. González took Catholicism and perverted its foundation of peace through the example of Jesus Christ. By taking Bible passages he liked and morphing them, including added his own contrived verses, he was able to meet his needs and to influence his "flock." González's self made "bible" is a book that portrays an extremely muscular, cult-like Christian-based program that serves the cartel leader's purposes.¹⁸ Using his Christian based manifesto, González has sufficient Biblical messages to be familiar to Catholics who traditionally understand it and have the Bible read to them only by their priests during mass.

LFM's perverted form of radical "Christianity" is tailor made for the use of soft power in an attempt to co-opt local authorities throughout Mexico. A typical tactic used by LFM is to take over rural towns with overwhelming force, brandishing weapons of all types to intimidate the mayor and police into submission to their rule. Objectives are often accomplished without having to resort to any type of violence visible to the public. LFM then proceeds to set up operations in its pseudo-Christian way, promising that "there will be no trouble, no crime, and no drunkenness." The mayor is then paid for his hospitality, helping further ingrain themselves into the town's blood.¹⁹ The cartel will then set up schools, hospitals and even feed the locals if necessary. This message speaks to the downtrodden people of Mexico who have seen their per capita income

decline significantly in the last three years, currently at \$13,200 USD per year as estimated in 2009.²⁰ To those who are out of work, under employed or just can't make enough money to feed their family, LFM's message sounds like a divine gift straight from heaven, with strings.

Moreno González had vision and the traits of a businessman and a terrorist, and easily met the definition of a strategic leader. He was effectively the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a billion-plus dollar corporation. He was intelligent and open-minded and actively worked to stay one step ahead of the government in his illegal business operations. LFM's leader's was first and foremost, a visionary. For his role, vision could be the most important part of strategic leadership, as being able to project what needs to be changed or adapted to in the future define success or failure in the cartels. Gonzalez was able to project future needs of the organization because he had been successful in keeping an open mind, building his team, and aligning it for success. The most important part of LFM's leadership vision is the ability to "examine the external environment, project the likely future and develop a desired end state."²¹ LFM's leader capitalized on vision by successfully using tactical deception when dealing with the Mexican government in the past, as in cases where they have asked for a truce with government forces and then repeatedly broken them when it suited their needs.

González shows flexibility and adaptability to many possibilities and outcomes in order to accurately make timely business decisions inside of the drug trade and in other business opportunities. He considers possibilities and then explores options within the environment and his criminal empire. Aristotle said that "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it,"²² meaning that an open

mind will not miss opportunities or the possibility of other, equally important ones. González clearly had an open mind and he exhibits the trait as Aristotle would have defined it. He also understood that what worked yesterday may not work today, and he has branched out globally; in one recent government operation against the cartels that led to the arrest of LFM's money manager, it was discovered that that organization sold 1.1 million tons of illegally extracted iron ore in China for \$42 million.²³ The CEO of LFM diversified the cartel's portfolio and keeping an open mind to possible business dealings around the world in many areas outside of the drug trade.

Another of González' strategic competencies was his ability to build a team. He was a master of indoctrinating not only his own organization, but portions of the local population of southern Mexico. The Mexican Justice Department stated in a report that González Moreno has made Eldredge's book *Salvaje de Corazón (Wild at Heart)* required reading for La Familia gang members and has paid rural teachers and National Development Education (CONAFE) to circulate Eldredge's writings throughout the Michoacán countryside.²⁴ LFM knows that its current members will not live forever and he is trying to build a workable team for the future by training the next generation of cartel members.

He further built his team with his expert strategic communications, using fiery speeches and quoting from *Wild at Heart*. In one of his latest strategic communications, he said the following about the Eldredge book when he quotes from Isaiah 63.

This passage describes God wearing blood-stained clothes, spattered as though he had been treading a wine press. Then he writes: 'Talk about Braveheart. This is one fierce, wild, and passionate guy. I have never heard Mister Rogers talk like that. Come to think of it, I never heard anyone in church talk like that, either. But this is the God of heaven and earth.'²⁵

By his use of the bible, though twisted, he was able to fire up the masses with his speeches and, without a doubt, was an expert strategic communicator. González also used several other strategic communication techniques that work very well. His message was always the same and he takes every opportunity to reinforce a simple message, the same message left behind at the disco beheadings in 2006.

In the book *Leading Change*, the author, John P Kotter, reinforces this idea when he states that repetition is the key and that things only sink in when they are heard many times.²⁶ LFM understands the importance of repetition and understanding. Finally, LFM knows that you must indoctrinate your people and that the man on the street is the one making the money. As Dr. George Labovitz said, “strategies are executed from the bottom up.”²⁷ LFM communicates the strategy all the way down to the most junior member of the cartel. Using simple terms, González created an easy to remember phrase that has become the organization’s rules of engagement with a divine sounding twist.

The LFM leader was also a master of strategic deception. He stated in a communication to President Calderón, “What we want is peace and tranquility and to achieve a national pact.”²⁸ He continued his dialogue with the President in the following statement; “We want the President, Mr. Felipe Calderón, to know that we are not his enemies, that we value him, that we are conscientious people.”²⁹ This was a typical tactic for González, who repeatedly called for a truce with the government, only to break them and attack the government forces in a different location. On December 10, 2010, after a two-day gun battle in the Michoacán city of Apatzingan, “The Craziest One” was

killed. The body of the leader was not recovered because the cartel members allegedly carried off their dead.³⁰ LFM put out the following statement to President Calderon:

Beware Felipe Calderón, pray to your holy saint because we come with the blessing of our God. Our God Nazario, may God rest his soul. This will not stop until Familia Michoacana dies. We will never die. *This is not "narco terrorism," it's a guerrilla, it's war for peace and against the federal troops in Michoacan, Don Juan de Arantepacua has his people and we will give our lives for everything.*"³¹

It appears LFM naming the unknown individual Don Juan de Arantepacua as a successor and it is highly probable that González may have in fact been killed. The question remains, is this another ruse by "The Craziest One" or is he actually dead? The LFM's leaders' death would be a major blow to the cartel, which is largely based on his force of personality. Assuming even moderate competency of Don Juan de Arantepacua and his former senior lieutenants Servando Gomez Martinez, Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas, and Dionicio Loya Plancarte, each of whom have a two million dollar reward for their death or capture, LFM remains dangerous.³² Like an animal that has been wounded, the cartels sometimes become more dangerous and irrational after taking blows. More than likely, we have not heard the last from LFM.

The second group that has strategic implications for the US is the cartel known as Los Zetas. This group, though different than La Familia Michoacana, is equally as dangerous because of its combat lethality, training, and location in relation to the United States. The cartel has also shown its willingness to execute cross-border operations into the United States without hesitation. The group's name, Los Zetas, came from its founder, Lieutenant Arturo Guzmán Decena, the leader of the 31 original members of the Cartel and who's Federal Judicial Police radio code was "Z1."³³ This cartel was formed by Ex-Mexican Special Forces members and deserters from the Mexican Army's

elite Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE) who were organized as an enforcement arm of the Gulf Cartel.³⁴ Since that time, and after a break from the Gulf Cartel, they have become one of the most formidable cartels in Mexico and in the world. Though most of the original 31 members have either been killed or captured, the militaristic system they instituted is still thriving and becoming more dangerous.

The Los Zetas cartel does not have the ability to add individuals through the cult-like religious means used by LFM, but their strategic threat to the US is the cartel's ability to project combat power and the training of the individual cartel members. What it lacks in raw recruitment, it makes up for in training, tactics, procedures and firepower.

The Zetas were the first Mexican DTO to employ a military-grade arsenal, making the jump from the standard AK-47 to shoulder-fired missiles, armor-piercing ammunition, fragmentation grenades, heavy machine guns, and even improvised explosive devices. Some of these weapons are stolen from the Mexican military or purchased on the black market. Most are bought legally in the United States and smuggled across the border.³⁵

The cartel's military similarities are not only because of their proficiency with powerful weapons. Special Forces backgrounds ensure their tactics mirror their martial upbringing in the GAFE and other SF organizations. Arguably more important than the weapons that they possess, the Zetas were the first to combine their expertise in infantry squad tactics, complex assaults, and other military techniques with their massive firepower.³⁶ Los Zetas, trained in counter-insurgency and in locating and apprehending drug cartel members, may have been partially trained by the 7th Special Forces group out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina during cross training exercises, and also at the School of the Americas. This Counter Terror (CT) background that Los Zetas acquired during their SF time in the Mexican army makes the inner circle and the rest of the organization a hard target to take down by conventional means. Their

understanding of CT tactics ensures that Mexican law enforcement and even the military are many times outgunned and out maneuvered when confronting the cartel.

In keeping with their martial training Los Zetas have taken on the hierarchy and structure of a military force with specific arms of the Zetas providing specific and capable efforts as shown below:

Los Halcones (The Hawks) keep watch over distribution zones and use 2 meter radio band.

Las Ventanas (The Windows) comprise bike-riding youngsters in their mid-teens who whistle to warn of the presence of police and other suspicious individuals near small stores that sell drugs.

Los Mañosos (The Tricky Ones) acquire arms.

Los Leopardos (Leopards) are prostitutes who slyly extract information from their clients.

Dirección (Command) are approximately 20 communications experts who intercept phone calls, follow and identify suspicious automobiles, and even accomplish kidnappings and executions.³⁷

This organization shows Los Zetas' adaptability to their transnational drug/terror environment. The cartel's training and its philosophy of extreme discipline instilled in each unit allowed multiple seamless transition of leadership, after Arturo Guzmán Decena was killed in a shootout with the Mexican army in 2002.³⁸ Leading Los Zetas is often a short lived tour, as Decena's second-in-command, Rogelio González Pizaña was captured in October 2004.³⁹ Currently Heriberto "The Executioner" Lazcano is the Commander of Los Zetas backed by his number-one man, Jaime "The Hummer" González Durán.⁴⁰ They are just as, if not more, dangerous as Z1 due their same Special Forces upbringing. Some would argue their inexperience make the latest leaders of Los Zetas even more dangerous.

Los Zetas share a core competency with Special Forces around the world known to US-SF as Foreign Internal Defense (FID), or utilizing local civilians to provide security and manpower for and from the local area. Young recruits trained via the FID methods help fill the ranks of Los Zetas at the lower levels in the same way that armies around the world do at the basic foot soldier level. Another way of recruiting mid-level trained members of the cartel is to recruit from within local, state and national law enforcement agencies and the Mexican Army. Los Zetas does not seem to suffer from a shortage of potential Army recruits; the Mexican Army has had over 100,000 soldiers desert between 2000 and 2009, and these deserters represent a pool of trained manpower that, as deserters, does not necessarily conform to the will of law in the first place.⁴¹ The SF-like operators within Los Zetas have honed these recruited deserters' original military training, turning them into highly formidable warriors. This is done through brutal, yet effective, training camps that have been set up by Los Zetas.

New members receive instruction in assassination, kidnapping, torture, and intelligence techniques and are sometimes near the border of the US. These courses last three months, and are reportedly so rigorous that a number of recruits have lost their lives.⁴²

The most dangerous operators recruited to Los Zetas already have vast amounts of experience. It takes years to grow seasoned SF operators, typically at least 8 to 10 years of basic military experience prior to starting their SF training. Recognizing this, Los Zetas has recruited forces in Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries in Central America where SF are trained. The operators in these SF organizations train together and often have personal relationships with operators from other countries. These relationships are fostered and strengthened through bi-lateral and multi-lateral training

they have conducted in the past. The GAFE is no different, making this recruitment of their colleagues and friends a natural “union of killers.”

Some of Los Zetas’ most dangerous associates are the Kaibiles, who are renowned for their martial skill and ruthlessness, some of whom were the subject of investigations for human rights violations in the wars in Guatemala in the 1980s.⁴³ The motto of the Kaibiles is "If I advance, follow me. If I stop, urge me on. If I retreat, kill me."⁴⁴ These individuals are some of the best trained SF operators in the Americas.⁴⁵ These units are on par with the National level SF operators from other nations around the world. As a result, the situation is like having British SAS and American Delta Forces teaming up in a cartel just across the border from Texas.

Organized very similar to an army with basic foot soldiers, more well trained troops and commandos backed their unique supporting establishments; when they go into action they are formidable.

Their arsenal includes AR-15 and AK-47 assault rifles, MP5s submachine guns, 50 cal machine guns, grenade launchers, ground-to-air missiles, dynamite, bazookas, and helicopters. When conducting operations, they wear dark clothing, blacken their faces, drive new stolen SUVs, and delight in torturing victims before administering the coup de grace. Some criminals carry images of bandit Jesús Malverde, the “Narco Saint” known also as the “Generous One” and “The Angel of the Poor” because of his fight for the downtrodden against a nineteenth-century dictatorship.⁴⁶

The Mexican government and the United States face a drug-funded army that has a grass-root movement that once again has a link to the disenfranchised "religious" youth. The location of their home territory has made them even more perilous.

The third reason Los Zetas is a strategic threat to America is their location in relation to the United States. These home territories in the north are located across the border from the American south-west in the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon

and Tamaulipas. Los Zetas also continue to attack the Gulf cartel to the east and Sinaloa cartel to the west to expand their holdings.

The Mexican states across the border from Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona have been home to some of the worst violence of any parts of Mexico. Recently, members of the Mexican military discovered 72 bodies of men and women 15 miles outside of San Fernando, Tamaulipas state.⁴⁷



Figure 3: A photo of 72 people from Central and South America who were massacred by Los Zetas near the Texas border.⁴⁸

This location puts the massacre less than 40 miles from Brownsville, TX. These immigrants from Central and South America were taken to the farm and executed, apparently for violating the Los Zetas' territory. Another incident took place within a stone's throw from the New Mexico border where the Mexican Army discovered several clandestine graves holding at least 20 bodies. These discoveries were near a ranch in the northern border state of Chihuahua, in the town of Puerto Palomas, just across from Columbus, New Mexico.⁴⁹ The atrocities that have been committed near the US border seem to mirror some of the exploits of the Kaibiles during the Guatemalan civil war.

Los Zetas' home territory also makes it easy to strike into the United States, similar to Poncho Villa in the early 20th century. Los Zetas are bandits much like Poncho, and some people are starting to compare the two as equals, as Howard Campbell, professor of anthropology at the University of Texas at El Paso explains. The Zetas have become something of a myth like Poncho Villa, and "their origins are obscure, and no one knows how many there are."⁵⁰

Also it appears that, like Poncho, Los Zetas have the means and intent to strike deep into the United States when needed. There is speculation across law enforcement that highly trained members of Los Zetas members are crossing the US border to hunt down and kill civilian targets that are hampering Los Zetas in any way. For example, a group of men dressed in the uniforms of the Phoenix Police SWAT Team entered a house and killed a Jamaican drug trafficker in June 2008.⁵¹ In Birmingham, Alabama, several Mexican men had their throats cut while drugs and money in the building were left untouched to send a message that the killing was not about profit, but to settle a score. Further east, in Atlanta, Georgia, police suspect Los Zetas of the torture and killing of man found bound in a basement.⁵² Also, Los Zetas are suspected of the recent killing of David Michael Hartley, the man shot in the head while jet skiing with his wife on Falcon lake. Geographically, this lake shares its banks with Mexico and the United States and is the home territory of the cartel. All of these cross or near border attacks plainly show that the transnational narco-terrorist army Los Zetas is attacking, and will continue to attack, US citizens both in Mexico and in our own country when they deem it necessary.

These cartels are criminals, murderer and drug traffickers, but they are also an army of transnational narco-terrorists with proven ties to Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, better known as the Columbian (FARC). Additionally, they have ties through the FARC to Venezuela and, ultimately, Iran.

The FARC, established in 1964 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, is Colombia's oldest, largest, most capable, and best-equipped Marxist insurgency.⁵³ The first truly organized narco-terrorists in modern times, the FARC have funded their activities for years with drug money. Lately, they have been seeking to streamline their operations, bypassing the "middle man" in Central America and dealing directly with the cartels in Mexico. The FARC leader, Raul Reyes, told his leadership that "he made an agreement with Mexican drug dealers" seven months before his death in a letter originally obtained by Bloomberg News Service.⁵⁴ The FARC is cross pollinating ideas and strengthening their ties to the Mexican drug cartels General Cesar Pinson of Columbia saying, about the cartels link to the FARC. "Ties between Mexican drug traffickers and the FARC are very strong and old. There have been multiple leadership meetings between the FARC and Mexican drug cartels".⁵⁵

The FARC's increased ties to Mexico have not helped them in their fight with the Columbian army. The FARC has battled the Columbian government and military for years and has lost ground in the last decade due to several government initiatives including "Plan Columbia." During an interview with Col Francisco Cruz Ricci of the Columbian Army Col Ricci stated "Plan Columbia has made great strides at driving the FARC to the eastern-most ungoverned parts of Columbia."⁵⁶ While this is a significant advancement for Columbia as a country, it may very well aggravate Mexico's and the

United States' security problems. The FARC being forced into eastern Columbia near Venezuela makes the exchange of ideas and cross training between the two organizations much easier. The FARC, through its ideology, has a natural attraction to President Chavez of Venezuela due to its Marxist similarities. Unofficially, members of the FARC have been hosted inside Venezuela and have been captured by Colombian military raids there.⁵⁷ Military alliances and the exchange of ideas are occurring between the FARC and Venezuela, creating the first link in a chain that hooks them to our potential enemies.

Venezuela is widely known to have large ties to the Middle East, and it is considered by many as an "advanced outpost for Iran on the Latin American continent."⁵⁸ The Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, Danny Ayalon, made the following statement.

The two countries have joined together to create an axis of conventional and nuclear terror [that threatens] not only the Middle East, but also the continent of America, and the United States in particular⁵⁹

To further confirm the connection between Venezuela and the Mexican cartels via the FARC, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated "SA-24 MANPADS, Russia's most advanced and considered one of the most lethal portable air defense systems ever made--could make their way into the hands of Mexican drug cartels, according to the released cable".⁶⁰ Despite the vagueness of the open source information about the links from the Mexican drug cartels to the FARC, Venezuela and the rest of our enemies, our own Secretary of State knows and has spoken to the link to transport Russia's most advanced shoulder launched surface to air missiles into Mexico.

We know that Venezuela has extensive and widely publicized ties to state and non-state actors that are hostile to the U.S. Understanding the FARC's ties to Mexican drug cartels like Los Zetas and others, what are the ramifications for the US?

There are many scenarios that significantly impact the US through the drug cartels' links to our enemies. There have been many papers written on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) originating from Iran or being stolen from Pakistan and then being passed through the aforementioned networks and smuggled into the US by cartels. While on the surface, this WMD smuggling plan seems feasible, it appears to be out of reach at this time for the following reasons:

1. The present nuclear technology available to Pakistan, and possible in the near future to Iran, is too large to make it feasible to be smuggled easily into the US through our southern border.
2. The investment required to plan, conceive and execute a WMD attack would be enormous.
3. The actors that would attempt this type of attack do not trust the chain of custody required. This distrust of the different groups that would be required to transport a WMD into the southwestern US would, ultimately, cause it to fail.⁶¹

If not a WMD, then what is the strategic threat posed by the Mexican drug cartels to the US via their ties to Iran? Beheadings, IED's, and VBIED's are currently being used by the cartels and I believe they have been exported to Mexico by terrorist groups and Iran through their South American ties. Just as in Iraq and Afghanistan, both

combat zones were relatively free of these types IED and VBIED attack in the beginning of the conflicts until Iranian intervention.

I pose two devastating possibilities. The first is that violence reaches such extremes that we receive a mass migration into the southwest US. Secondly, extreme violence pours across the border in the form of IEDs or VBIEDs. Just as dangerous would be small teams of Special Forces or snipers from Los Zetas opening an irregular front somewhere in the US at the urging (and funding) by groups hostile to the U.S. via the previously mentioned network. In effect, cartels such as Los Zetas can become proxy armies for hire if the conditions are right and their price is met.

The current number of individuals illegally crossing the southern border of the US from Mexico ranges from 50,000 to 200,000, but the number is hard to confirm for obvious reasons. The total estimated number of illegal immigrants in the US is between 7 and 20 million people.⁶² Over nine million Mexicans live along the 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border, mostly in the fifteen “sister city” pairs.⁶³ What would happen if cartel violence caused a mass migration or a humanitarian disaster in which just a quarter of those individuals deemed it necessary to cross the border illegally into Arizona, New Mexico and Texas for safety? That would be a tenfold increase of Mexicans illegally crossing the borders and would quickly overwhelm services in the southwest. We saw complications of the disaster during hurricane Katrina where the numbers of residents of New Orleans who needed to be rescued was only 50,000.⁶⁴ This mass migration scenario is beyond the scope of this paper other than to bring it to light as a possible catastrophic problem and a possible consequence of the cartel violence. This may

seem farfetched but it is already happening in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico as residents flee the violence to El Paso, TX.

No one knows how many residents have left the city of 1.4 million since a turf battle unleashed an unprecedented wave of cartel murders and mayhem. Business leaders, citing government tax information, say the exodus could number 110,000, while a municipal group and local university say its closer to 230,000 and estimates by social organizations are even higher.⁶⁵

This is a possible time bomb waiting to explode in the American southwest.

The terror and impact of an IED going off in the South West U.S. would also be devastating. Los Zetas are the most capable of executing this Course of Action (COA), though they would more than likely steer away from VBIEDs due to their suicide nature. A more likely COA would be placing snipers in areas where their impact had strategic consequences. The “DC sniper” caused terror and, at times, almost paralyzed the Washington DC area for three weeks in 2002. The attacks were accomplished by one sniper team, a former soldier named John Allen Muhammad and John Lee Malvo, who was a 17 year old minor at the time.⁶⁶ A possible scenario is that Los Zetas or FARC sniper teams infiltrate the porous U.S. border in the southwest and, at a predetermined time, start shooting random individuals around the country to disrupt commerce and spread terror. These acts would be accomplished at the urging and payment of our many state and non-state enemies around the world as a means of “punishing” the U.S.

The questions that need to be understood are:

1. Is this an invasion by military forces?
2. Who addresses the problem? The military, with title 10 restrictions, or civilian law enforcement?
3. When and if they are captured, are they tried as combatants or as criminals?

These two scenarios, mass migration and mass violence are just a few of the many potential problems in Mexico that are able to be exported to the Southwest U.S.

If President Calderon of Mexico is entertaining legalizing drugs in Mexico, is it time to take the money out of the drug trade north of the border? If money is taken away from the cartels, it also seems that the incentive for violence will also be taken away. The amount of money that US consumers spend on the consumption of all types of illegal drugs per year is staggering, with estimates reaching approximately \$60 billion per year, according to U.S. government.⁶⁷ Also, over \$42 billion has been spent since 2003 to combat the drug trade at the national level.⁶⁸ This astronomical sum does not take into account funds spent by state and local governments. When amounts spent on prison and the social costs are considered, the price becomes almost inconceivable.

The U.S. faces the same challenges with drug cartels today that Hoovers “G-Men” had with bootleggers in the early 20th century, similar to when the 18th amendment was ratified in 1919, outlawing the manufacture, sale or consumption of liquor. There are obviously more dangerous ramifications to the health of the American public with legal drug use than with alcohol. However, it was proven that forcing people to “dry out” through legislation was all for naught when the 21st amendment was passed in 1933, opening the spigots and allowing alcohol to flow again. Drugs have many similarities to alcohol in their effects. By making marijuana legal money is taken from the cartels. This approach to drug legalization has been partially tested in Holland’s legal system, one which allows the use of “soft drugs,” such as cannabis and its derivatives. Would it be a great leap to legalize marijuana in America and allow people

to police themselves? If the U.S. could cut off the drug funds we might mitigate the continuing and escalating violence.

The risks and mitigating them, along with benefits to executing this unorthodox plan need to be examined. The risk would be increased Driving Under the Influence (DUI) cases. The rewards are twofold, decreased funding for the cartels and less strain on the legal system for "minor" drug offences.

To address the risks of increased DUIs, I propose the following solution. DUI cases could be handled by significantly increasing the penalty for this particular offense to automatic five-year suspension of the individual's driver's license for the first DUI offense and lifetime suspension for a second offense. To combat "hard drugs" and to cut off the rest of the drug money to the Mexican cartels you could institute federally mandated drug testing for anyone who received welfare, food stamps, unemployment or any form of government subsidy. Likewise, drug tests could be mandatory for all federal, state and local jobs much as like the military now. Also, passing mandatory drug testing laws for employees of any company that received federal money through contracts or payment for services would decrease demand for drugs by taking jobs away from people who continue to use them. There may be 4th Amendment legal questions that would have to be answered, but are beyond the scope of this paper with regards to the above mentioned drug testing. Such drug testing would put personal responsibility back onto the individual and take the war on drugs off the backs of America and Mexico.

Drugs are funding the war south of our border and if we can take funding away from the cartels we should. The figures vary from 2 billion to 60 billion dollars of profit

the Mexican cartels make each year from marijuana sales.⁶⁹ The exact number is hard to determine because the cartels will not exactly open their books for an audit.⁷⁰

Whether the figure is \$2 billion or \$60 billion in profit from marijuana, any amount we can take away by legalization the substance, is a dollar that is not funding trans-national crime. Drug arrests are a large part of the burden on the federal and state legal systems. The total number of drug arrests for 2009 was 1,663,582 with 51.6% being marijuana related; 45.6% were for simple possession alone.⁷¹ 45.6% of all arrests could be mitigated by allowing a “small” amount of marijuana could be grown and possessed by individuals from their own private use. Standing laws prohibiting commercial trafficking and promotion would remain in place. Promotion and commercialization of marijuana could cause increased usage, like cigarette usage increased when they were commercialized in the late 19th to early 20th centuries.⁷²

Lowering the number of arrests, prosecution and incarcerations related to simple marijuana possession would decrease the burden on our over worked, underfunded law-enforcement, legal and prison systems.

In conclusion, there is a war on our southern border with multiple cartels able to inflict damage to the south-west U.S. There are multiple conditions currently in Mexico that feed the demand for willing manpower. Strategically La Familia Michoacana and Los Zetas are some of the cartels best poised to capitalize on the conditions to threaten the Mexican government and the U.S. These conditions and the cartels' direct ties to the FARC, Venezuela and indirectly to all of Venezuela's allies are dangerous. These ties give our enemies the ability to transmit terror cross border into the south west U.S. via these alliances. Even worse, our enemies could start a new war within our own

borders at urging our enemies for the right price. The current violence is also causing increased migration to the U.S. and has the ability to spawn as mass illegal migration of epic proportion.

We are at a tipping point so; a radical solution to the drug war in Mexico would be the legalization of marijuana. This legalization of marijuana will take significant funding away from the cartels. Federally mandated testing for illegal drugs should be required for anyone receiving federal funding of any type. We will never win this fight without taking away the money and starving the demand; I believe my solution does both. Tough times call for tough decisions, if left unchecked, this ongoing war on our southern borders is having effect on the U.S. now and they could be devastating U.S. in the very near future.

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⁶⁹ Rand Corp paper "Reducing drug trafficking revenues and violence in Mexico" 2010 http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2010/RAND_OP325.pdf, pg 3 (accessed January 2, 2011)

⁷⁰ Dr. Paul Rexton Kan, interview by author, Carlisle PA, January 06, 2010

⁷¹ Drug war facts, Marijuana, <http://drugwarfacts.org/cms/?q=node/53> (accessed 28 December, 2010)

⁷² Dr. Paul Rexton Kan, interview by author, Carlisle PA, January 6, 2010