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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 12

By [Robert Bunker](#)

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Via: Geoffrey Ramsey, "Mexico Official Admits Some Areas Out of Govt Control: Organized Crime in the Americas" 10 February 2012 [1]:

At a military ceremony yesterday, Mexican Defense Minister Guillermo Galvan Galva described the national security situation in stark terms. "Clearly, in some sectors of the country public security has been completely overrun," said Galvan, adding that "it should be recognized that national security is seriously threatened." He went on to say that organized crime in the country has managed to penetrate not only society, but also the country's state institutions.

Galvan also endorsed the military's role in combating insecurity, asserting that although they have a responsibility to acknowledge that "there have been mistakes," the armed forces have an "unrestricted" respect for human rights...

Via U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, Bureau of Consular Affairs, "Travel Warning: Mexico." 8 February 2012 [2].

The Department of State has issued this Travel Warning to inform U.S. citizens about the security situation in Mexico. General information on the overall security situation is provided immediately below. For information on security conditions in specific regions of Mexico, which can vary, travelers should reference the state-by-state assessments further below.

This Travel Warning supersedes the Travel Warning for Mexico dated April 22, 2011 to consolidate and update information about the security situation and to advise the public of additional restrictions on the travel of U.S. government (USG) personnel...

General Conditions:

...Gun battles between rival TCOs or with Mexican authorities have taken place in towns and cities in many parts of Mexico, especially in the border region. Gun battles have occurred in broad daylight on streets and in other public venues, such as restaurants and clubs. During some of these incidents, U.S. citizens have been trapped and temporarily prevented from leaving the area. TCOs

use stolen cars and trucks to create roadblocks on major thoroughfares, preventing the military and police from responding to criminal activity. The location and timing of future armed engagements is unpredictable. We recommend that you defer travel to the areas indicated in this Travel Warning and to exercise extreme caution when traveling throughout the northern border region...

State-by-State Assessment:

Below is a state-by-state assessment of security conditions throughout Mexico divided into northern and southern regions. The accompanying map will help in identifying individual locations. Travelers should be mindful that even if no advisories are in effect for a given state, crime and violence can occur anywhere. For general information about travel conditions in Mexico, see our Country Specific Information.

Northern Mexico

Baja California (north) : Tijuana is a major city/travel destination in the Northern portion of Baja California...You should exercise caution in the northern state of Baja California, particularly at night...

Chihuahua: Juarez and Chihuahua are the major cities/travel destinations in Chihuahua...You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Chihuahua...

Coahuila: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Coahuila. The State of Coahuila continues to experience high rates of violent crimes and narcotics-related murders...

Durango: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Durango. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of narcotics-related murders in the State of Durango increased dramatically...

Nuevo Leon Monterrey is a major city/travel destination in Nuevo Leon...You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Nuevo Leon, except the metropolitan area of Monterrey where you should exercise caution...

San Luis Potosi You should defer non-essential travel to the state of San Luis Potosi, except the city of San Luis Potosi where you should exercise caution. The entire stretch of highway 57D in San Luis Potosi and portions of the state east of highway 57D towards Tamaulipas are particularly dangerous...

Sinaloa Mazatlan is a major city/travel destination in Sinaloa...You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Sinaloa except the city of Mazatlan where you should exercise caution particularly late at night and in the early morning. One of Mexico's most powerful TCOs is based in the state of Sinaloa. With the exception of Ciudad Juarez, since 2006 more homicides have occurred in the state's capital city of Culiacan than in any other city in Mexico...

Sonora Nogales and Puerto Peñasco are the major cities/travel destinations in Sonora...You should defer non-essential travel between the city of Nogales and the cities of Sonoyta and Caborca (which area also includes the smaller cities of Saric, Tubutama, and Altar), defer non-essential travel to the eastern edge of the State of Sonora which borders the State of Chihuahua (all points along that border east of the northern city of Agua Prieta and the southern town of Alamos), defer non-essential travel within the state south of the city of Ciudad Obregon with the exception of travel to Alamos (traveling only during daylight hours and using only the Highway 15 toll road,

aka cuota, and Sonora State Road 162), and exercise caution when visiting the coastal town of Puerto Peñasco...

Tamaulipas: Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Tampico are the major cities/travel destinations in Tamaulipas... You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Tamaulipas. All USG employees are: prohibited from personal travel on Tamaulipas highways outside of Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo due to the risks posed by armed robbery and carjacking; may not frequent casinos and adult entertainment establishments within these cities; and in Matamoros are subject to a midnight to 6 a.m. curfew. Be aware of the risks posed by armed robbery and carjacking on state highways throughout Tamaulipas...

Zacatecas You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Zacatecas except the city of Zacatecas where you should exercise caution. The regions of the state bordering Durango and Coahuila as well as the cities of Fresnillo and Fresnillo-Sombrete and surrounding area are particularly dangerous. The northwestern portion of the state of Zacatecas has become notably dangerous and insecure. Robberies and carjackings are occurring with increased frequency and both local authorities and residents have reported a surge in observed TCO activity. This area is remote, and local authorities are unable to regularly patrol it or quickly respond to incidents that occur there. Gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur in the area of the state bordering the state of Jalisco. There have also been reports of roadblocks and false checkpoints on highways between the states of Zacatecas and Jalisco...

Southern Mexico

Aguascalientes You should defer non-essential travel to the areas of the state that border the state of Zacatecas. The security situation along the Zacatecas border continues to be unstable and gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur. Concerns include roadblocks placed by individuals posing as police or military personnel and recent gun battles between rival TCOs involving automatic weapons.

Colima: Manzanillo is a major city/travel destination in Colima... You should exercise extreme caution when traveling through the areas of the state of Colima that border the state of Michoacán. You should also exercise caution when traveling at night outside of cities in the remaining portions of the state. The security situation along the Michoacán border continues to be unstable and gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur. Concerns include roadblocks placed by individuals posing as police or military personnel and recent gun battles between rival TCOs involving automatic weapons.

Guerrero: Acapulco, Ixtapa, Zihuatanejo and Taxco are the major cities/travel destinations in Guerrero... You should defer non-essential travel to the northwestern and southern portions of the state (the area west and south of the town of Arcelia on the border with Estado de Mexico in the north and the town of Tlapa near the border with Oaxaca), except for the cities of Acapulco, Zihuatanejo, and Ixtapa. In those cities, you should exercise caution and stay within tourist areas...

Jalisco Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta are the major cities/travel destinations in Jalisco... You should defer non-essential travel to areas of the state that border the states of Michoacán and Zacatecas. You should also exercise caution when traveling at night outside of cities in the remaining portions of this state...

Michoacán: Morelia is a major city/travel destination in Michoacán... You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Michoacán except the cities of Morelia and Lázaro Cardenas where you should exercise caution. Flying into Morelia and Lázaro Cardenas, or driving to Lázaro Cardenas via highway 200 from Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa, are the recommended methods of travel. Attacks on Mexican government officials, law enforcement and military personnel, and other incidents of TCO-related violence, have occurred throughout Michoacán.

Morelos: Cuernavaca is a major city/travel destination in Morelos... You should exercise caution in the state of Morelos due to the unpredictable nature of TCO violence. Numerous incidents of narcotics-related violence have occurred in the city of Cuernavaca, a popular destination for U.S. students.

Nayarit: You should defer non-essential travel to all areas of the state of Nayarit north of the city of Tepic as well as to the cities of Tepic and Xalisco. The security situation north of Tepic and in these cities is unstable and travelers could encounter roadblocks or shootouts between rival criminals...

Veracruz: You should exercise caution when traveling in the state of Veracruz. In recent months, the state of Veracruz has seen an increase in violence among rival criminal organizations. In response, the Government of Mexico has sent additional military and federal police to the state to assist State security forces in implementing operation "Veracruz Seguro" (Secure Veracruz) that focuses on combating organized crime.

Analysis: Mexican Defense Minister Guillermo Galvan Galva's statement that some sectors of the country's public security have been completely overrun represents a rare and honest appraisal of what is becoming an increasingly threatening situation to Mexican state sovereignty [3]. To place this threat in perspective, the new U.S. Department of State travel advisory for Mexico suggests that the entire Northern half of Mexico is now witnessing criminal insurgencies of such intensity that all of the states within it (except for Baja California Sur) have travel warnings for U.S. citizens. Southern Mexico is faring marginally better with travel advisories for Aguascalientes, Colima, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, and Veracruz while no travel advisories exist for Campeche, Chiapas, Estado de Mexico, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Mexico City (also known as the Federal District), Oaxaca, Puebla, Queretaro, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and Yucatan.

To place the U.S. Department of State advisory in geographic context, see the following map of Mexican states with advisories labeled in red:

Mexico City was once considered one of the most dangerous places in the country but increasingly is considered a bastion of stability in an otherwise troubled nation— with over 50,000 deaths attributed to the criminal insurgencies since December 2006. This is to be expected as the political elites and centralized government have expended resources to increase security of the capitol city and surrounding territories.

Of interest are the contradictory trends mentioned in the State Department document. These were picked up by the *Washington Post* and other major newspapers [4]:

The advisory does note that “millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year for study, tourism, and business, including more than 150,000 who cross the border every day.” Still, it says, U.S. travelers should be aware of Mexico’s efforts against “TCOs [transnational crime organizations] which engage in narcotics trafficking and other lawful activities” throughout the country.

Mexico is a country of 110 million people, so the odds of running into trouble are low. *Walter*

of U.S. citizens reported to the State Department as murdered in Mexico increased from 35 in 2007 to 120 in 2011.

Even the Mexican economy as defined by GDP, while only expected to grow at 3.2% in 2012 (and to 3.8% in 2011), is seemingly doing well with business sentiments appearing optimistic in January 2012 [5].

What these contradictory trends suggest is that the spreading criminal insurgencies taking place in Mexico, while threatening to the legitimate federal government, are not necessarily bad for the overall functioning of the Mexican economy [6]. Similar trends, on a micro level, were noted in Miami, Florida during the Cocaine Wars of the 1970s and 1980s when much of the Miami skyline was built. Ultimately, the illicit economy injected hundreds of millions of dollars, if not more, into the formal economy. The same process is occurring in Mexico except that is taking place yearly at the tens of billions of dollars level and, as an aggregate over time, amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars.

Still, this brings us back to Defense Minister Guillermo Galvan Galva's statement— Mexican national security is seriously threatened. Or, more accurately, the sovereign state is seriously threatened and is increasingly being decoupled from the globalized economy to which Mexico has structurally reformed itself and acceded to NAFTA and other international trade agreements. Terms used to identify such a scenario—depending on where it exists on a continuum of who is in charge—are Phillip Bobbitt's 'market state', John Robb's 'hollow state', and my own 'criminal state' construct.

End Note(s):

1. <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2204> For the original Spanish article pertaining to the Defense Minister's remarks see Jorge Ramos Pérez, "Amenazada, seguridad del país: Galván." El Universal Viernes 10 de febrero de 2012. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/829239.html>

2. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_5665.html

3. For additional analysis see Geoffrey Ramsey, "Mexico Official Admits Some Areas Out of Govt Control." In Sight: Organized Crime in the Americas 9 February 2012. <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2204>

4. William Booth, "U.S. updates travel warning for Mexico." The Washington Post 9 February 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/us-updates-travel-warning-for-mexico/2012/02/09/gIQAwdGR2Q_story.html

5. "Mexico Economic Indicators – February 2012." EB Views February 2012. <http://cebviews.com/2012/02/15/mexico-economic-indicators-%E2%80%93-february-2012/>

6. The GDP projections themselves may be called into question because they were mentioned alongside an unemployment figure of 4.5% in December 2011 which is totally unrealistic.

About the Author

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Dr. Robert J. Bunker holds degrees in political science, government, behavioral science, social science, anthropology-geography, and history. Training taken includes that provided by DHS, FLETC, DIA, Cal DOJ, Cal POST, LA JRIC, NTOA, and private security entities in counter-terrorism, counter-surveillance, incident-response, force protection, and intelligence. Dr. Bunker has been involved in red teaming and counter-terrorism exercises and has provided operations support within Los Angeles County.

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