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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 6: 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment: 40% Increase in Active Gang Members from 2009 to 1.4 Million

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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 6

2011 National Gang Threat Assessment: 40% Increase in Active Gang Members from 2009 to 1.4 Million

By [Robert Bunker](#)

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Key Information:

Via 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment – Emerging Trends National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC): Washington DC, October 2011 <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-assessment>

Gangs are expanding, evolving and posing an increasing threat to US communities nationwide. Many gangs are sophisticated criminal networks with members who are violent, distribute wholesale quantities of drugs, and develop and maintain close working relationships with members and associates of transnational criminal/drug trafficking organizations. Gangs are becoming more violent while engaging in less typical and lower-risk crime, such as prostitution and white-collar crime. Gangs are more adaptable, organized, sophisticated, and opportunistic, exploiting new and advanced technology as a means to recruit, communicate discretely, target their rivals, and perpetuate their criminal activity...

Gang Membership and Expansion

Approximately 1.4 million active street, OMG [outlaw motorcycle gang], and prison gang members, comprising more than 33,000 gangs, are criminally active within all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (see Appendix A). This represents a 40 percent increase from an estimated 1 million gang members in 2009. The NGIC attributes this increase in gang membership primarily to improved reporting, more aggressive recruitment efforts by gangs, the formation of new gangs, new opportunities for drug trafficking, and collaboration with rival gangs and drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). Law enforcement in several jurisdictions also attribute the increase in gang membership in their region to the gangster rap culture, the facilitation of communication and recruitment through the Internet and social media, the proliferation of generational gang members, and a shortage of resources to combat gangs.

Source: NGIC and NDIC 2010 National Drug Survey Data (Public Release)

Analysis: The recently released 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment – Emerging Trends is published as a 104 page document in PDF and HTML forms. This sobering document represents an update to the 2009 assessment. Of specific concern is the increase in active gang membership from 1 million to 1.4 million over a two-year period. This increase is primarily attributed to better reporting procedures, increased gang recruitment and acceptance in some sectors of society, and the illicit economic benefits of gang membership. While not all the gangs profiled in the assessment have links to the Mexican cartels, identified as Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations [MDTOs], six of these cartels have linkages to the following gangs on both sides of the US-Mexican border [pp. 84-85]:

- Arizona Mexican Mafia (Old & New)
- Barrio Azteca
- Border Brothers (California)
- Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos
- Latin Kings
- Los Carnales
- Los Negros
- Mexican Mafia (California)
- Mexikanemi
- MS-13
- New Mexico Syndicate
- Partido Revolutionary Mexicano
- Raza Unida
- Sureños

- Texas Chicano Brotherhood
- Texas Syndicate
- West Texas Tangos
- Wet Back Power

These linkages are even more inclusive on a local level according to the 2010 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) open source report [See p. 26]. The dominant areas of gang presence in the US, by county, also have some correlation with the South Western region per the attached map, though much of the information for the State of Texas was not included in the assessment.

Further trends (selected) were identified in the key findings section of the assessment and should be These are:

- An average of 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions can be attributed to gang members.
- Some gang members have gone beyond simple involvement with illicit trafficking and are working for the Mexican cartel as enforcers.
- Gang members, relatives, and associates, are encouraged to join law enforcement and other public agencies for information gathering purposes
- The members of over 50 gangs have been identified in domestic and foreign US military bases. Concern exists regarding such members "...learning advance weaponry and combat techniques."
- Gang members are acquiring high-powered military weaponry and equipment including bullet proof vests and various forms of police and official identification.

While gangs are recognized as an increasing threat to US communities, they are viewed as solely a law enforcement problem within the assessment. The growing military-like capabilities of gangs, however, has been noted in the outlook section of the document:

Gang members armed with high-powered weapons and knowledge and expertise acquired from employment in law enforcement, corrections, or the military may pose an increasing nationwide threat, as they employ these tactics and weapons against law enforcement officials, rival gang members, and civilians (p. 45).

This concern appears to be active-aggressor and tactical-unit focused. It is also projected that either gang expansion or displacement into new areas will take place as criminal opportunities are identified.

Further analytical development of this assessment is warranted in two particular areas of concern. The first is the use of the term 'gang evolution'. While the term is utilized, it is not grounded to any form of modal analysis—such as gang generational studies (3GEN Gangs) [1]. The evolution of the gangs stated to be taking place in the assessment is thus left open ended—something is happening but what it is is unknown. Gangs are simply said to be becoming more collaborative with rivals and criminal organizations, sophisticated, profit focused, and technologically savvy. Attempts to provide early warning and trends and threats analysis is therefore very basic in its execution. The second area of concern is the publication of this assessment and the publication of the 2016 National Drug Threat Assessment document (www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs44/44849/44849p.pdf). These documents are becoming increasingly intertwined, even blurred, yet the illicit drug market and the Mexican cartels discussed in one document

and the various forms of gangs (street, prison, and OMG) discussed in the other are separated by an artificial 'institutional firebreak' within US law enforcement response. With 1.4 million active street, OMG, and prison gang members in the United States, and Mexican cartel operations now taking place in over 1,000 US cities [2], this information and response seam is unacceptable. It represents a dysfunctional bureaucratic barrier— the old Federal stovepipes and rice bowls approach— to an evolving and increasingly networked national security threat. Serious consideration should be given to blending these two documents together into a future strategic assessment in order to present a more comprehensive picture of the larger threat we as a nation are facing.

Notes:

1. The original document concerning this area of studies is John P. Sullivan, "Third Generation Street Gangs; Turf, Cartels, and Net Warriors" *Transnational Organized Crime* Vol. 3. No. 3. Autumn 1997: 95-108. Numerous documents have since been published on this area of gang studies. For an initial primer, see John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker, "Third Generation Gang Studies: An Introduction." *Journal of Gang Research* Vol. 14. No. 4. Summer 2007: 1-10.

2. See Robert Bunker, "Mexican Cartel Strategic Note: Mexican Cartels (Transnational Criminal Organizations) Now Operating in Over 1,000 US Cities; Up From 195 US Cities" *Small Wars Journal* 25 September 2011 <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/mexican-cartel-strategic-note>

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.

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/mexican-cartel-strategic-note-no-6>

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{1} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/robert-bunker>

{2} <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-assessment>

{3} <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs44/44849/44849p.pdf>

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