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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note: Mexican Cartels (Transnational Criminal Organizations) Now Operating in Over 1,000 US Cities; Up From 195 US Cities

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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note

By [Robert Bunker](#)

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Mexican Cartels (Transnational Criminal Organizations) Now Operating in Over 1,000 US Cities; Up From 195 US Cities

The recent publication of the US Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), National Drug Threat Assessment 2011 (<http://www.justice.gov/ndic/topics/ndtas.htm#y2011>) (August 2011) provides an important strategic insight into Mexican cartel penetration into the United States. On p. 8 of the document, a single sentence states:

Mexican-based TCOs were operating in more than a thousand U.S. cities during 2009-2010, spanning all nine OCDETF regions.

The corresponding note (g) is as follows:

Included are traffickers who purchase illicit drugs from TCO associates and distribute them on their own, cells that function as an extension of the TCO to traffic illicit drugs in the United States, and cells that provide warehousing, security, and/or transportation services for the TCO.

Prior publicly released National Drug Intelligence Center data on Mexican TCOs (Transnational Criminal Organizations) operating in the United States dates back to a situation report and a series of maps from April 2008. The Situation Report: Cities in Which Mexican DTOs Operate Within the United States (<http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs27/27986/index.htm>). This sentence from the Discussion section provides a baseline concerning Mexican cartel penetration into the United States:

Federal, state, and local law enforcement reporting reveals that Mexican DTOs operate in at least 195 cities throughout the United States.

The acronym “DTO” stands for Drug Trafficking Organization which has since been replaced by the acronym “TCO”— Transnational Criminal Organization— used in the 2011 document— to convey that the Mexican cartels are now viewed as more threatening and capable (with transnational reach) entities. This data comes from

“Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Reporting January 1, 2006 through April 8, 2008”. No corresponding note exists concerning the metrics of the data pertaining to this report, though it assumed,

that the same data collection methodology was utilized by the US Department of Justice analysts. If this assumption is accurate:

This would mean that Mexican cartel operational penetration into US cities is now thought to be 500% higher than previously estimated in the time frame of roughly three years. The baseline of “at least 195 cities throughout the United States” has increased to “more than a thousand U.S. cities”.

While the April 2008 document was supported by a map showing the locations of the Mexican cartels in the United States, the new August 2011 National Drug Threat Assessment does not provide such a map. A query and public request for information to NDIC public affairs concerning the release of such a map was made. The response was that such a map would now be considered a law enforcement restricted document. While this might be understandable from an operational security (OPSEC) and counter-intelligence perspective, it is in variance with an open public debate on the Mexican cartel (and gang) threat to the United States and the more encompassing threat to Mexico, Central America, and other regions of the Western Hemisphere.

If US Congressional and Senate committees—such as the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee (<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/subcommittees.asp?committee=8>)— and those focusing on homeland security are to continue their public hearings on this broadening threat, some consideration should be made as to US strategic requirements and open public debate. Ten years after the 9/11 attack by Al Qaeda, the United States has reached a pivotal strategic decision point in our national policies. Are we to continue with our national security policy of focusing on that terrorist entity (and its group of networks) as the dominant threat to the US and the homeland or will the Mexican cartels (and their supporting gang networks) now be recognized as replacing Al Qaeda as the number one threat to our government and safety of our citizens? While the violence potentials of Al Qaeda are universally recognized— we will never forget the thousands of our dead mourned after 9/11— the violence associated with the criminal insurgent potentials of the Mexican cartels and their ability to corrupt and undermine governments in the Western Hemisphere must now be considered far more threatening to our nation.

Notes

1. Two issues should be further clarified. First, any type of Al Qaeda inspired attack taking place domestically— even a botched suicide bombing attempt against the DC metro system— would result in heightened media sensationalism and a continued US Governmental focus on Al Qaeda as the primary threat to this nation. The fallout from such an incident would likely serve to downgrade our perceptions related to the greater threat stemming from the more corruptive and subtle insurgent activities of the Mexican cartels combined with their use of symbolic violence. Second, I want to reiterate that the cause of global jihad promoted by Al Qaeda and other elements of radical Islam are still a significant threat to US interests and our global security posture. In the case of our allies in Europe, for example, Al Qaeda and radical Islam continue to be the number one external and internal strategic threat to many of these nations. When our own domestic security scales weigh the threats, however, Al Qaeda and radical Islam, has to now be considered less of a threat to the security of the United States than the Mexican cartels and their associates. Ultimately, while we can live with governmental failure and internal strife in Afghanistan and/or Iraq—we cannot say the same concerning Mexico, given the cross border cartel infiltration we have now identified per the National Drug Threat Assessment 2011

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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