

# **The Reality of a Mexican Mega Cartel**

**How Mexican organized crime could become a  
U.S. National Security threat on the border**



**By Sam Logan**

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## **Summary**

Mexican organized crime has become known around the world as the source of smuggling into the United States. The various factions that battle over control of the busiest border crossings into the United States are extremely adept at smuggling drugs, chemicals, humans, or just about anything across the border to the north. They smuggle weapons and bulk money back south. From the Tijuana-San Diego crossing to the Matamoros-Brownsville crossing, the Mexico-U.S. border is more porous now than ever before. As Mexico's organized criminal factions fight over control of the border, it is inevitable that one gang will rise to the top. When this happens, the US-Mexico border, already a soft-under belly will be controlled by one Mega Cartel with the potential to earn over 50 billion dollars a year. It is a reality that is not far off in Mexico's future and very well could emerge during the term of Mexico's next president, Felipe Calderon the hand-picked successor of out-going president Vicente Fox.

## The Lost Year

On 11 September, when Mexico's northern neighbor held moments of silence to remember the terrorist bombings in the United States, Mexican president-elect Felipe Calderon<sup>1</sup> told the representatives of Mexico's 31 states that he will work "shoulder to shoulder" with them to build federalism to combat crime.

Organized crime in Mexico is a growing surge of power within Mexico's underworld that by the end of Calderon's presidency may be something more threatening and worrisome in the United States than small terrorist cells of extremists.

Calderon asked state leaders to work harder to share information and improve intelligence gathering systems. He called for the creation of a nation-wide criminal information system, one that will work within a comprehensive public security policy.

Calderon wants to see the cleansing of Mexico's police forces. He wants to put an end to impunity, and fight corruption by increasing police salaries and improve training programs.

Calderon's transfer to power will likely be smooth, and the change of guard from Fox's administration to his will be supported by the close political ties between the outgoing president and his hand-picked successor. But within this climate of political good will, there stands an elephant in the room.

Fox largely failed to make Mexico a safer place to live, do business, and travel. And his failures, highlighted by an extremely violent year in 2005 and increased violence so far in 2006, will rest squarely on Calderon's shoulders.

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<sup>1</sup> See the following link for an interview with Calderon:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/17/AR2006061700569.html>

Even as the new president gave a speech to the leaders of Mexico's various states, many in the audience knew the grisly fact that by the middle of September 2006, the unofficial number of deaths related to Mexican organized crime had passed 1,000, largely due to violence along the U.S.-Mexico border and in the country's southwestern towns along the Pacific coast. At this rate, organized crime will have dealt more death in 2006 than in 2005.

The unofficial number of organized crime-related deaths in Mexico last year passed 1,500. The states with the most amount of organized crime-related killings were: Sinaloa with 517, Tamaulipas with 356, Michoacan with 295, Baja California with 122, Sonora with 70, and Chihuahua with 64, according to Mexican daily El Universal.<sup>2</sup>

During the same time, Mexican authorities arrested only 38 members of Mexico's more powerful drug smuggling organizations.

On 10 June 2005, days after Nuevo Laredo police chief Alejandro Dominguez was killed following his inauguration ceremony, the Fox administration launched "Operation Safe Mexico". It was a security policy designed as top-down approach to take the fight to Mexico's organized criminal factions.

But the policy, by the end of 2005, had delivered poor results. Violence along the border and throughout Mexico did not decrease.

Mexican security analyst, Ricardo Ravelo, who recently published a book on drug trafficking in Mexico, considers 2005 a "lost year" for the fight against Mexican drug smuggling organizations. He points out that under the leadership of outgoing president, Vicente Fox, the Mexican government allowed the Army to carry out much of the intelligence gathering, searching and arrests. Ravelo told

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<sup>2</sup> Tamaulipas state has two border crossings, at Matamoros, and Nuevo Laredo. Chihuahua state has one main border crossing at Ciudad Juarez. Baja California state has one major border crossing at Tijuana, and Sonora state has one at Nogales.

news service EFE on 2 January that at times the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR) "appeared to be without power or control to control investigations" of drug trafficking.

Ravelo claimed in early January that the policy represented too little too late. He argues that the killings continued and no prominent organized crime leaders were arrested.

His position was refuted weeks later by Mexico's Interior Minister, Carlos Abascal, who oversees the country's federal law enforcement organizations.

Abascal stated on 1 February that the Mexican state has the capacity to deal with the country's drug smuggling organizations. He stated that country's ability to govern is not threatened and that the government is working "intensively on the matter" to make "more efficient...the fight against organized crime."

Yet another member of Fox's administration undercut those statements less than a month after Abascal made a public attempt to reassure Mexican's that they were safe.

The president of Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights, Jose Luis Soberanes, told Vicente Fox on 23 February while presenting the commission's year-2005 findings that Mexico is a "society under threat."

"We feel intimidated in the streets, in the parks, in our houses," Soberanes told the audience.

Soberanes accused Mexican authorities at federal, state, and municipal levels of failing to ensure public security. "In reference to some crimes, the law-enforcement entities, far from being a solution, are part of the crime," Soberanes said during his presentation.

Given the numbers released by the Mexican government and other sources, 2005 was a year during which Mexican authorities did very little to stop Mexican organized crime relative to the violence associated with turf battles, score settling, and control of the all-important border-crossings, referred to as "plazas".

Ravelo, meanwhile, predicted that 2006 would be a year defined by more killing as drug smuggling organizations fight to consolidate control. Thus far, his predictions have come true.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Most Powerful Factions of Mexican Organized Crime <sup>4</sup>**

On 2 January, 2006 Mexico's Office of the Attorney General considered the Sinaloa Cartel, run by Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, and the Juarez Cartel, run by the Carrillo Fuentes family, as the country's two most powerful drug organizations.<sup>5</sup> These two organizations have climbed to the top of a group that may include up to nine separate organizations that grew from one organization in the 1980s, according to Mexican security analysts.

At the beginning of 2006, the Juarez Cartel operated in 21 of Mexico's 31 states, while the Sinaloa Cartel operated in 17.

The Juarez Cartel controlled some 14 percent of the cocaine trade between Mexico and the US until Mexican authorities captured in November 2005 the financial wizard of the operation, Ricardo Garcia Urquiza, also known as "El

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<sup>3</sup> See this report for a summary of the US position on violent crime in Mexico: [http://www.securitycornermexico.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=90&Itemid=66](http://www.securitycornermexico.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=90&Itemid=66)

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough history of Mexican organized crime, see: "Organized Crime and Terrorist Activity in Mexico, 1999-2002," Library of Congress, February, 2003. Accessed here: [http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/OrgCrime\\_Mexico.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/OrgCrime_Mexico.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The term "cartel" is defined as a group of independent organizations that collude to control production, pricing, and the marketing of goods by its members. Given this definition the use of the word cartel when describing factions of Mexican organized crime is inaccurate. For the purposes of this piece, the term cartel will be used only in the case of referring to the proper name of drug smuggling organizations as they have become known by Mexican and international media.

Doctor". Soon after, the Juarez Cartel fell into a flux, opening an opportunity for other Mexican cartels to take a larger share of the US-Mexico black market profit.

Many believe that the Juarez Cartel merged with the Sinaloa Cartel under the leadership of Joaquin Guzman Loera, known as "El Chapo". Since the merger, the Sinaloa Cartel is argued to be the most powerful criminal organization in Mexico.

Since escaping from prison in 2001, El Chapo has worked hard to increase the Sinaloa organization's control of the Mexican cocaine market. His lust for power and control of drug smuggling in Mexico directly tied to the 517 organized crime-related deaths that occurred in Sinaloa state in 2005. He is currently Mexico's most wanted criminal.

Perhaps the most historic of all Mexican organized criminal factions is known as the Tijuana Cartel, run by the Arellano-Felix family. This organization was Mexico's most powerful organized criminal family until early 2002. Benjamin Arellano-Felix the organization's undisputed leader and mastermind was arrested on 3 March 2002 in Puebla, Mexico and sent to a maximum security prison in La Palma.

Benjamin's arrest shook the foundation of the cartel, but it managed to survive despite the best efforts of rival criminal organizations and law enforcement to undo the Arellano-Felix family's hold on the drug trafficking routes that pass through Tijuana into San Diego.

In 2004, two years after entering prison, Benjamin Arellano-Felix formed a strategic alliance with the leader of the so-called Gulf Cartel, Osiel Cardenas

Guillen. For a number of months, the Tijuana Cartel used the help of the Gulf Cartel to defend its turf from rivals, notably Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada.<sup>6</sup>

Mexican prison authorities place the end of the Tijuana-Gulf Cartel alliance in January 2005. Cardenas ordered a severe beating of Benjamin Arellano-Felix after the two had a personal disagreement. Without the alliance, the Tijuana Cartel was again on its own. By February 2005, the Arellano-Felix family, once considered Mexico's most powerful drug trafficking organization, was under attack from two separate criminal organizations – The Juarez Cartel and the Gulf Cartel.

The Gulf Cartel has undergone a process of leadership struggles through the years, but it appears that Osiel Cardenas Guillen has become the undisputed leader. His organization has traditionally been based in the northeastern Mexican states of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, and it currently seeks to expand control west of Nuevo Laredo and into Mexico's southwestern state of Guerrero, which has become an important reception point for drug shipments arriving from Colombia.

As of September 2006, the geographical breakdown of Mexican organized crime places the Sinaloa Cartel with the most territory in Mexico, but control over the smallest border crossings into the United States. The Gulf Cartel controls less territory, but seems to maintain control over Nuevo Laredo, the largest border crossing into the United States. The Tijuana Cartel, while apparently on its last days, still controls Tijuana, the second-busiest border crossing.

### **A Cascading Event**

The US Coast Guard apprehended Javier Arellano-Felix on 14 August, 2006 in international waters off the Pacific coast of Mexico. He is one more brother in a

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<sup>6</sup> Zambada, a member of the Juarez Cartel, was considered the one man who worked hard to expand his organization's influence in Baja California, combating the Tijuana Cartel in the late 1990's.



long line of Arellano-Felix siblings to lose the freedom to smuggle, kill and live the high life. It remains unclear, however, if Javier's arrest will be the cascading event that unravels his family's organization, the Tijuana Cartel. Some analysts argue that Javier was a playboy and not an important leader. Others, including the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), claim that Javier's arrest has toppled a dynasty, a cascading event that may lead to the eventual dissolution of the Tijuana Cartel.

From 2004 until 14 August, 2006, the Tijuana Cartel had maintained a low profile, suggesting that the organization's current leaders prize quiet efficiency over headline-grabbing violence. One of the Arellano-Felix siblings, Enedina, is a trained accountant, and her brother, Eduardo, a surgeon. Both are considered to have taken over the organization after their older brother, Benjamin, was imprisoned in 2002. Javier, known as the "Little Tiger," may have simply served as an enforcer, someone who oversaw the killing required in the criminal underworld to maintain his family's business.

Many analysts argue that Enedina and Eduardo streamlined the family business, which included a reorganization of front companies along the border, and the implication of advanced smuggling tactics and sophisticated money laundering systems.

A 2,400-foot-long tunnel<sup>7</sup>, extending from a warehouse near the Tijuana airport to a large warehouse in the industrial zone of southern San Diego, was discovered in late January 2006. The tunnel revealed a level of sophistication and planning only a well-organized criminal outfit would possess. While no arrests have been made, authorities continue to believe the Arellano-Felix organization dug and operated the tunnel. The existence of this tunnel suggests that the

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<sup>7</sup> This discovery prompted some legislators to make digging a tunnel across US borders a crime. <http://www.house.gov/susandavis/press/pr030106bordertunnel.html>

current leaders of the Arellano-Felix organization are astute planners, not simple-minded thugs.

Additionally, Javier had to be sent outside of Mexico for a "cooling-off" period in 2004 because his violent public antics attracted too much attention, suggesting Javier was not the organization's leader. It is also an indication of a new style of leadership that controls the Tijuana Cartel.

Despite this apparent change of style and the seemingly little impact Javier's arrest has had on his family's organization, the Tijuana Cartel has seen better days. Relative to the power-hungry and ruthless leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel and Gulf Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel has become weakened by a constant string of arrests, deaths and capture of high-level leaders.

Benjamin Arellano-Felix's arrest in March 2002 followed the death of his brother Ramon<sup>8</sup>, who, when killed by Mexican police in Mazatlan in February 2002, was considered to be the organization's other high-level commander. A year before the removal of Benjamin and Ramon, a key lieutenant, Ismael "El Mayal" Higuera Guerrero, was arrested on charges of having personally ordered or carried out over 40 homicides, including the death of Tijuana police chief Alfredo De la Torre.

Only days after Javier was arrested, Mexican authorities arrested two more alleged lieutenants in the Arellano-Felix organization. Eleazar "El Viejo" Garcia Simentel and Jorge Juan Mohendan Quinones are both in custody. Mexican authorities are expected to put these men through interrogation that some believe may lead to the arrest of more mid-level leaders in the Tijuana Cartel.

No doubt US authorities will do their best to break Javier. Unlike his older brother, who is imprisoned in Mexico, Javier has been arraigned within the US

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<sup>8</sup> While Mexican police are believed to be the trigger men, many consider that Zambada (of the Juarez Cartel) may have ordered the death of Ramon Arellano-Felix.

court system. He currently awaits his trial and has a court-appointed defense lawyer, not a high-powered Mexican lawyer on the family payroll. The US Department of Justice has a long history of putting away men like Javier for consecutive life sentences. As a member of the Arellano-Felix organization, Javier is just as dead to them as his other brother Ramon.

Finally, on 16 September, another member of the Felix-Arellano organization was extradited to the United States. Mexican authorities released Francisco Rafael Arellano Felix to US authorities in Brownsville, Texas after he served his 10-year jail term in Mexico. Like his brother, Javier, Francisco has been lost to his family's organization.

While the Tijuana cartel is not yet eliminated, it seems this organization's days are numbered.

### **Future Scenarios**

There are a number of possible scenarios that could play out during the six-year term of Mexican president-elect Felipe Calderon. Two are considered here and focus on the future of Mexico's top three drug trafficking organizations.

The first scenario is, predictably, that nothing changes. The current war between the Tijuana Cartel, Sinaloa Cartel, and Gulf Cartel ensures continued violence in Mexico, while smaller organizations remain largely ignored by Mexican authorities more focused on the big fish. Ineffective and compromised Mexican security officials are unable to dismantled any one of the three. And each criminal organization is unable to destroy its rivals.

The formation of an alliance between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Tijuana Cartel or between the Gulf Cartel and the Tijuana Cartel, or the complete destruction of the Tijuana Cartel, characterizes the second scenario.

An alliance between the Sinaloa and Tijuana Cartel will give Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman control over the Tijuana smuggling route, extending his organization's influence from Tijuana east to Nuevo Laredo, and from Nuevo Laredo south to Acapulco. This expansive territory would give the Sinaloa considerable access to resources, man power, and influence within the Mexican government and security systems at the municipal, state, and federal levels.

Under this scenario, a Sinaloa-Tijuana Cartel alliance could then focus on taking control of Nuevo Laredo, and move on to take control of Matamoros, consolidating its control over the entire width of the US-Mexico border.

Alternatively, if the Sinaloa Cartel dismantles the Tijuana Cartel, it will take control of the Tijuana border crossing, an event that would be tantamount to an alliance with the Tijuana Cartel.

If the Tijuana Cartel chooses to align itself with the Gulf Cartel, something it has done in the past, it will create a two-front war for the Sinaloa Cartel, which will find itself squeezed between the Arellano-Felix organization on its western flank and the Cardenas organization on its eastern flank. A Gulf-Tijuana Cartel alliance would have control over the two busiest border crossings as well as a considerable amount of territory in western Mexico, and the country's gulf zone, including the Yucatan peninsula. This alliance may eventually have enough resources to dismantle the powerful Sinaloa Cartel.

if the Gulf Cartel takes control of the Tijuana border crossing by force, it would be the equivalent of an alliance with the Tijuana Cartel.

Given the high level of fighting, it is unlikely that all three organizations will maintain current levels of control over Mexico's smuggling routes. Something has to give.

The Tijuana Cartel is currently managed by business-oriented members of the Arellano-Felix family. They are not likely to use brute force to keep their rivals at bay. An alliance is the intelligent choice for survival. It is likely the Arellano-Felix family will form an alliance with either the Gulf Cartel or the Sinaloa Cartel.

Such a prudent decision reflects the organization's current leadership, which would choose to align itself with a former rival over using brute force to maintain its existence.

If the second scenario plays out, it will lead to the eventual consolidation of one Mega Cartel that will have control over the entirety of the US-Mexico border. It is a reality that opens the southern border of the United States to a myriad of national security threats, against which policies for border protection are currently in various stages of discussion and implementation.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Powerless State**

Mexican analysts are not convinced that Mexican politicians have a truly effective plan for curbing violence and smuggling in their country. One of Mexico's top security analysts, Luis Astorga<sup>10</sup>, argued during a March 2006 academic conference on violence in Mexico that the military solution embedded in "Operation Northern Border", the current title for "Operation Safe Mexico", was not going to work.

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<sup>9</sup> See the Wikipedia entry on the US-Mx border for more information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S.-Mexico\\_border](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S.-Mexico_border)

See also the Bush-Fox agreement for a smart border, as yet to be realized:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/bordersecurity.html>

See also this information on the much talked about security wall:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/systems/mexico-wall.htm>

<sup>10</sup> See a 2001 speech made by Astorga about Drug Trafficking in Mexico:

<http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/504/504%20luis%20astorga.htm>

Astorga also noted that there were no new ideas for security in Mexico coming out of the current presidential campaign, suggesting that Mexico's next president would likely not be able to deal with the current security challenge.

"I hope there is a plan B," Astorga said. "Because the military will fail, no doubt."

Astorga's conclusions resound with that of Ricardo Ravelo, who called 2005 the "lost year" and predicted that 2006 would be more violent. So far, both analyses of the Mexican security system seem to be accurate.

The future under Calderon may be one that looks much like the past of his political ally, outgoing president Vicente Fox.

Under the Fox administration, the Mexican government proved itself to be mostly powerless to stop drug smuggling and related violence throughout the country.<sup>11</sup>

If this trend continues into the Calderon administration, the US government will not be able to completely count on its Mexican counterpart to help secure the southern side of the US-Mexico border.

The combination of one Mega Cartel that controls the whole border and a government that is unable to deal with its own security problems is a potential reality that may develop in the near future.

The reality of one, consolidated drug smuggling organization in Mexico is a scenario in which less time is spent on fighting rival groups and more time is focused on the business of drug trafficking.

An accurate observation is that US and Mexican authorities would be able to focus on one organization, leading to a rapid breakdown of the Mega Cartel's operations. However, the leader of such an organization, whether it be Cardenas

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<sup>11</sup> To be fair, I have included in the appendices information about some of the larger drug busts made by Mexican authorities in recent history.

or Guzman, has a long history of dealing with law enforcement on both sides of the border. As analysts have pointed out, it could take many years for a Mega Cartel to be completely deconstructed by US and Mexican authorities.

During that time the revenue earned by illicit trafficking of drugs would continue to support the survival of an organization that directly undermines the power of the Mexican government as an effective security force.

There have been no known links between Mexican organized crime and extremist terrorist organizations, nor is it clear if these links will arise if the border falls under the control of one Mexican organized criminal faction.

If such links do arise, analysts will surely alarm policy makers to the likelihood of Mexicans assisting with the illicit transfer of dirty bombs or other tools of massive destruction from Mexico to the United States.

From the moment a Mega Cartel takes shape in Mexico to the moment when it falls apart is a cycle of time during which sustained high levels of drug trafficking into the United States will severely affect public health. The number of hard core and recreational users of cocaine, heroine and methamphetamines could rise to record levels. It is a public health threat that while not as violent as a nuclear – or dirty - bomb could do as much damage to dozens of US cities as the September 11 terrorist attack did to New York and Washington.

## **Appendix A: Evidence of a Colombia-Mexico Connection**

As U.S. and Colombian authorities began closing smuggling routes through the eastern Caribbean in the late 1980s and 1990s, Colombian criminals began smuggling cocaine and heroin through the Central American isthmus, and through the eastern Pacific and western Caribbean. Both smuggling routes invariably led them to Mexico.

The Colombians began heavily relying on Mexican smuggling prowess in the mid-to late-1990s as Colombia's larger criminal factions dissolved into smaller groups. Smaller factions did not have the resources required to operate the length of a supply chain that ran from the farm gate producer in the mountains of Colombia to the end user on the streets of the US - so they focused on the Colombian end of that chain.

At the same time, leftist rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) became more involved in the drug trade, picking up control over various parts of the procurement chain - especially the link between Colombia and various smuggling rings in Brazil, Venezuela, Central America, and Mexico.

More firepower and soldiers dictated that the AUC and FARC would come to control many of Colombia's cocaine smuggling routes out of the country, which naturally brought them into contact with Mexican organized crime. By allowing the Mexicans in on the cocaine trade, the Colombians took a hit on profit, but opened up their market by gaining greater access to the Mexican-U.S. border. Working with the Colombians gave the Mexicans new lucrative products to smuggle into the US.

According to the United Nations Office of Drug Control's 2005 World Drug Report, US retail prices averaged at US\$71 a gram, or US\$34,050 a pound, in



2003. While this price has most likely gone down since 2003, it is still possible to conclude that smugglers stand to earn tens of millions of dollars as long as they are able to get that cocaine into the US.

In the late 1990s, the FARC worked with Mexico's Tijuana Cartel, which controlled access to Southern California. When their middle man, Carlos Ariel Cherry, was captured in 2000, the FARC moved on to the Gulf Cartel. In 2004, the FARC stopped working with the Gulf Cartel when it again lost connections with trusted middle men. Now, it appears the FARC is working with El Chapo and the Sinaloa Cartel.

Many in law enforcement in both Mexico and Colombia, however, still point out that Colombian suppliers do not work exclusively with one Mexican group or another.

In the second week of April 2006, Mexican authorities seized over five tons of high-quality cocaine when it arrived onboard a DC-9 that had flown from Venezuela's Maiquetia airport (some 48 kilometers outside the capital, Caracas) to the Mexican airport of Ciudad del Carmen, some 880 kilometers east of Mexico City. The Mexican Attorney General's Office said it had reason to believe the FARC had shipped the cocaine to El Chapo's Sinaloa Cartel.

Meanwhile, Peruvian authorities on 15 June seized a one-ton shipment of cocaine en route to the Mexican Pacific coast. Authorities in Peru and Mexico agree the shipment was the property of the Sinaloa Cartel. This seizure, and the seizure of over five tons of cocaine flown from the international airport in Caracas, Venezuela, were both destined for the Sinaloa Cartel.

Undoubtedly the Gulf Cartel also has ties with criminal elements beyond Mexico that supply cocaine.

## **Appendix B: The Northern Border**

Nuevo Laredo, the region's largest inland border is the top prize for Mexican organized crime.

Nuevo Laredo has fallen into a cycle of violence, adding it to a long list of areas affected by the regional trade of drugs and guns.

Over 10,000 cargo trucks pass through Nuevo Laredo on their way to Interstate 35 and cities throughout the U.S.. Another 10,000 vehicles cross the border daily, totaling over 20,000 vehicle-crossings a day. At such high volumes, it is impossible for US customs to stop, search, and process every vehicle.

It is inevitable that drugs, humans, guns, and other contraband cross the border daily. At the same time, it is economically destructive to close the border crossing even for a day.

These numbers are repeated, although to a lesser extent at all the border crossings between the United States and Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

The Tijuana-San Diego border crossing is the second only to Nuevo Laredo-Laredo border crossing, in terms of volume of traffic.

Other border towns used by Mexican organized crime are: Mexicali-Calexico, Juarez-El Paso, Reynosa-McCallen, Matamoros-Brownsville.

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<sup>12</sup> See the Bureau of Transportation Statistics for accurate border crossing statistics: <http://www.bts.gov/>

## **Appendix C: Outsourcing Muscle**

Elements from Central America's criminal underground have made de facto connections with at least one of Mexico's most notorious drug trafficking organizations, the Gulf Cartel.

Mexico's Deputy Attorney General for Organized Crime, José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, announced on 24 June, 2006 that as many as 30 former members of the Guatemalan Special Forces, called "Kaibiles", had begun working with the Gulf Cartel.

Kaibiles are considered the most ruthless of all soldiers who were trained to fight insurgencies during the civil wars that ravaged Central America in the 1980s. Since the end of the war in Guatemala, Kaibiles have been used to train members of the Mexican special forces. Mexican authorities consider this connection to be the principle reason why rogue Kaibiles have sought out their former students, now members of the Zetas, the Gulf Cartel enforcers.

Two Mexican reporters, Jorge Fernandez Menendez and Victor Ronquillo, have published a book entitled, "From the Gangs to Los Zetas: The Secrets of Drug Trafficking from Colombia to Chicago," in which they point out that both the Kaibiles and Central American street gangs, known as Maras, are employed as enforcers by Mexican organized crime.

They claim that the Kaibiles work for the Gulf Cartel and the Maras work for the Sinaloa Cartel.

On 24 May, Mexican authorities investigated the role of Kaibiles in the death of two beheaded victims in Acapulco. At the time, they claimed the Kaibiles to be working with Los Zetas of the Gulf Cartel. As many as 30 Kaibiles were thought to be training a new generation of Zetas for the Gulf Cartel.

On 23 June, authorities found the bodies of three police officers and one civilian wrapped in blankets with their heads stuffed into bags. Mexican authorities believe the killings to be drug related and point out that the beheadings are evidence of the presence of foreign elements in Mexican organized crime. Similar investigations into the deaths of beheaded victims were underway in Guerrero state when the bodies in Tijuana were found.

## **Appendix D: Some Noteworthy Drug Busts in 2006**

On 11 January, the Mexican Navy seized a shipment of five tons of cocaine and arrested nine individuals. Three go-fast boats were seized along with the drugs.

On 11 April, Mexican authorities interdicted 5.5 tons of cocaine on board a DC-9 aircraft that had landed in Carmen City after taking off from Venezuela's Maiquetia-Caracas international airport.

On 15 August, US and Mexican authorities dismantled a heroine smuggling ring. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, 131 suspects were arrested in 15 US cities. Most shipments were brought into the United States across the Arizona-Mexico border.

On 14 September, Mexican police seized 374 kilograms of cocaine hidden in a truck stopped in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas. The cocaine had a street value of US2.9 million dollars, according to reports.