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Drug Cartels Threaten To Take-Over Mexico...Is The U.S. Next?

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Recently, Villa Ahumada Police Chief Jesus Blanco Cano was shot to death after only one day on the job. The town is located in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua which is the territory of the very violent and powerful Juarez drug cartel.

The town had been without a police chief since this past May, when a band of 70 gunmen raided the town and murdered the previous chief, along with two of his officers as well as several civilians. After the attack, out of fear, the rest of the town's 20-officer police force resigned.

While the murder of a police chief by the hands of organized crime would be front-page news and cause for great alarm in the United States, high-profile murders of police officers and citizens alike by the powerful Mexican drug cartels have become commonplace.

On August 13, 2008, paramilitary gunmen wearing body armor, burst into a drug rehab center in Juarez. The attackers dragged several patients outside and executed them. At the time, a religious ceremony was taking place. Eight people, including a pastor were killed and six more were seriously wounded.

Those murders were among 43 which took place in Juarez over a three day period.

On June 4, 2008, husband and wife police officers Gabriel Padilla Perez and Claudia Tovar Carreon were shot to death in front of their Juarez home, as they left for work. The couple left behind two small children. A day earlier, a 25-year-old pregnant woman was killed outside a shopping mall a few miles away, as a shootout broke-out between rival gang members.

In May of this year, the chief of Mexico's federal police force was assassinated entering his home in Mexico City. Commander Edgar Millan Gomez and his bodyguards were gunned down by several men in an ambush-style attack. He was shot nine times and died a short time later, after being taken to a hospital.

Commander Gomez was to date, the highest-ranking law enforcement official to fall victim to the current drug war. Many believe that his murder was in retaliation for the January arrest of Sinaloa Cartel leader Alfredo Beltran Leyva.

On April 26, 2008, 14 gang members were killed in a bloody shootout among rival cartel elements in the streets of Tijuana. The long-fought battle which took place in the middle of the night, was fought with high-powered rifles and machine guns.

There are four major drug cartels currently operating inside Mexico. The groups are extremely violent and have become very bold, regularly murdering police officers and various government officials. These cartels account for more than 80 percent of the illegal drugs sold in the United States, including marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin.

A list of the Mexican drug cartels follows:

Tijuana Cartel...Run by the Arrelano Felix family. The cartel nearly collapsed in 2002, after Ramon Arrelano Felix was killed by the police, and brother Benjamin was taken into custody. However, the cartel has since seen a resurgence in strength and violence of late, and continues to be a major player in the smuggling of marijuana and cocaine into the U.S.

Sinaloa Cartel...Infamous for the smuggling of cocaine from Columbia, and heroin from Southeast Asia. They also produce their own brand of heroin. U.S. law enforcement has identified Sinaloa Cartel distribution centers in Arizona, California, Texas, New York, and Chicago.

The Sinaloa Cartel uses the gangs known as MS-13 and the Mexican Mafia to distribute drugs inside the U.S.

Gulf Cartel...Utilizes an elite paramilitary group known as the Zetas as enforcers. Many of the Zetas were actually trained at U.S. military bases, in an effort by this country to aid the Mexican government in their fight against the cartels. Upon their return to Mexico, they were recruited by the Gulf Cartel, who offered them a much higher salary than did the government.

The Zetas have proven to be ruthless fighters in the cartel's ongoing war with the Sinaloa Cartel.

The Gulf Cartel boasts of relationships with corrupt officials and is based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, they also have major operations in the city of Nuevo Laredo and account for the increased violence now being seen there.

Juarez Cartel...Perhaps, the wealthiest of the cartels. According to the U.S. State Department, the Juarez Cartel "controls one of the primary transportation routes for billions of dollars worth of drug shipments entering the United States from Mexico annually."

The Juarez Cartel has been publicly posting hit lists containing the names of Juarez police officers. Many of those officers have been murdered, and still more have fled the city.

Kidnappings, torture, and shootouts have become a way of life in violence-plagued Juarez. That Mexican city which shares a border with El Paso, TX, has already seen an astounding 800 murders since January 2008.

In addition to the sale of narcotics, the cartels profit heavily by collecting so-called 'protection money' from legitimate businesses, street-level drug dealers, and those known as 'coyotes' who smuggle people illegally into the U.S. the cartels also regularly kidnap Mexicans as well as U.S. citizens for ransom, usually seeking a sum of about \$300,000. Mexico's office of Public Security recently announced that since 2001, authorities have arrested 897 kidnapers. Incredibly, 56 of those arrested were actually public officials.

On August 25, 2008, a kidnapping ring was broken-up and the members taken into custody in the state of Nuevo Leon. The leader of the group was Commandante Sonia Virginia Bastida Morales. She is an agent in Mexico's AFI (that country's version of the FBI). At the time of her arrest, her and her two accomplices were holding two men for ransom.

The influence which the cartels are having on the people of Mexico is far-reaching and threatens every law-abiding person in that country. An example of this comes from a recent survey which reported that 120 of the 200 taxi drivers in the city of Chetumal, report to have been threatened with violence against their families, if they refused to deliver drugs on behalf of the local drug cartel.

An incredible example of how deeply corruption runs in Mexico came in 1997, when Mexican authorities seized a decommissioned U.S. Air Force C-130A which had been sold to the Mexican airline Aero Postal de Mexico. The plane was in fact being used to transport drugs from Central and South America. It was discovered that the owner of the airline had connections to the Tijuana Cartel.

A few facts on the violence being perpetrated by Mexico's drug cartels:

Since 2006, nearly 500 police officers, soldiers, and prosecutors have been killed by cartel gunmen.

According to the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers, there have been 4,867 executions performed by Mexican drug cartels since December 1, 2006.

Narco-violence is responsible for 2,712 murders so far in 2008.

Cartels often behead their victims, and even release videos of taped executions on the internet.

The Zetas have been linked to several murders as far north as Dallas, TX.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, over 3,000 families have fled the city of Juarez this year, seeking refuge in the U.S.

In May, Homeland Security officials announced to the press that there were at the time. three Mexican police chiefs

seeking asylum in the U.S. apparently, police officials have been seeking safety in the U.S. for several months.

Deputy Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection Jayson Ahern told the associated press: "They're basically abandoned by their police officers or police departments in many cases."

Ahern went on to say: "It's like a military fight. I don't think that generally the American public has any sense of the level of violence that occurs on the border."

On August 25, 2008, federal and local law enforcement officials told the Associated Press that Mexican drug cartels are now sending hit men into the U.S.

Officer Chris Mears of the El Paso Police Department told reporters: "We received credible information that drug cartels in Mexico have given permission to hit targets on the U.S. side of the border. One of the first things we did was to notify all officers in our department of the situation."

Two months ago, police in New Mexico and Texas received a cartel hit list, uncovered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The list contained the name of at least one New Mexico police officer.

Luna County Sheriff's Capt. Arturo Baeza told the press: "We have been concerned for quite some time that this thing will spill over here."

Of course, threats to U.S. law enforcement from drug smugglers is nothing new. Assaults on Border Patrol agents began rising at unprecedented rates a few years ago. Since 2001, assaults (which include shootings) have tripled, with 987 in 2007.

Snipers stay on the Mexican side of the border and move about freely. They fire a few shots at agents, then move to cover--only to fire again from another location. The tactics are typical of military sniper training. More than likely, the snipers are creating a diversion so that the smugglers can cross in another location. They know that the U.S. agents cannot pursue them into Mexico, and their own government is seemingly powerless to stop their activities.

In 2005, Border Patrol spokesman Andy Adame said: "We believe the vast majority of these assaults are directly tied to alien and drug smugglers based in Mexico."

Of course, Mexico's drug cartels are now beginning to operate within the interior of the U.S. According to the U.S. department of Justice, the cartels now control the distribution of methamphetamine in Atlanta, GA.

So far, Mexican President Felipe Calderon has deployed 36,000 troops nationwide to combat the cartels. However, the efforts by the Mexican government have done very little to stop the violence and the cartels appear to be winning.

With a largely unprotected border, it is very easy for cartel hit men to cross into the U.S, and only if our elected representatives get serious about border enforcement, can Americans hope to be protected from this violence.

Unfortunately, it appears that we can expect to see the kind of narco-violence now destroying Mexico in our own cities very soon.

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