



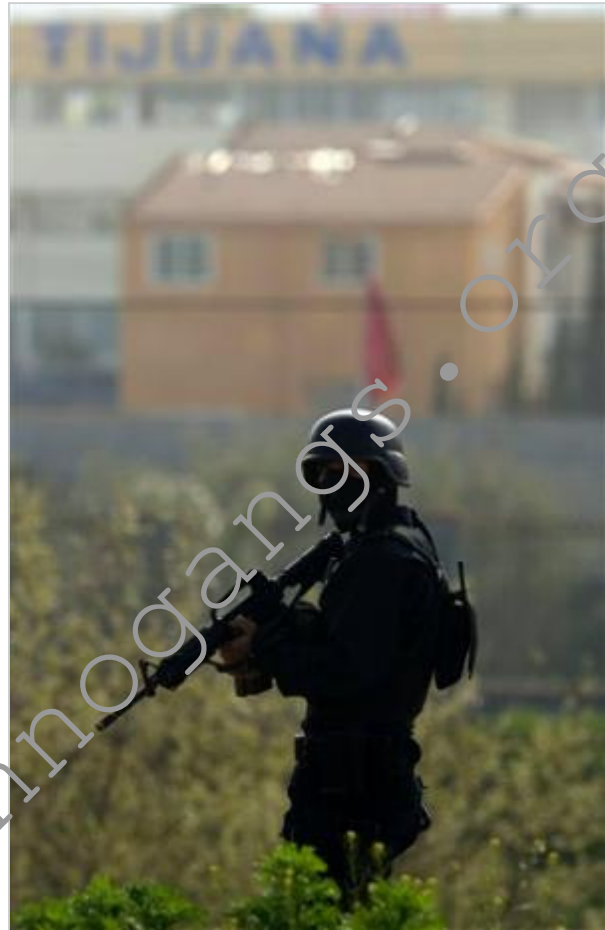
Threat of drug cartels reaching 'crisis proportions'

Courtesy of Fox News

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Federal police prepare to patrol the streets as they arrive to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Monday, March 2, 2009. The deployment is part of a five thousand man troop increase planned for this city which has been hit hard by organized crime related violence. (AP Photo/Miguel Tovar)



A police officer patrols the area where three bodies were found lying in an empty lot in Tijuana, Mexico, Tuesday, March 3, 2009. At least two of the victims were decapitated, authorities said. Mexico is experiencing a wave of violence tied to drug gangs, especially in border states and other areas known as hotbeds of narco trafficking. The government says more than 1,000 people were killed during the first eight weeks of the year. (AP Photo/Guillermo Arias)

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Two of Mexico's deadliest drug cartels have reached a combined force of 100,000 foot soldiers, wreaking havoc across the country and threatening U.S. border states, The Washington Times quotes the U.S. Defense Department.

The cartels rival the Mexican army in size and have both Mexico and the U.S. in crisis mode to deal with what they fear is a coming insurgency along the border.

"It's moving to crisis proportions," an unidentified defense official told The Times. The official also said the cartels have reached a size where they are on par with Mexico's army of 130,000.

About 7,000 people have died in the last year - more than 1,000 in January alone - at the hands of Mexico's increasingly violent drug cartels. Murders often involve beheadings or bodies dissolved in vats of acid.

The two most dangerous cartels are the Sinaloa cartel, nicknamed the "Federation" or "Golden Triangle" by law enforcement agencies, and "Los Zetas" (the Gulf Cartel). They have been growing and are reportedly discussing a truce or merger to better withstand government forces, The Times reported.

Mexico is now only behind Pakistan and Iran as a U.S. national security concern, coming in ahead of Afghanistan and Iraq, The Times quotes the U.S. defense official.

The country's attorney general, Eduardo Medina

Mora, called last week for more U.S. prosecutions of people who sell weapons illegally to the cartels, as well as more efforts to stop drug profits from flowing south.

Mexico has spent \$6.5 billion over the last two years, on top of its normal public security budget, on the fight against drugs, but that falls short of the \$10 billion Mexican drug gangs bring in annually, he said.

While violence in Tijuana is down sharply from last year, killings have spiked in the largest border city, Ciudad Juarez. The city of 1.3 million across from El Paso, Texas, is now the most worrisome of a number of hotspots, Medina Mora said.



Two bodies, one decapitated, are seen in Ciudad Juarez, northern Mexico, Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009. Still, violence continued in Ciudad Juarez, where police found several bodies apparently killed in separate incidents. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)

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Forensic police officers work at the scene where a body was found inside a car trunk in Ciudad Juarez, northern Mexico, Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009. Still, violence continued in Ciudad Juarez, where police found several bodies apparently killed in separate incidents. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verduqo)

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