

**Border Crossings:
A Look at the Very Real Threat of
Cross Border Gangs to the U.S.**

By

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INTRODUCTION

For several years those who keep current with both national and international events will know that there is what many U.S. citizens feel an ongoing invasion of our country. While, for the bulk of those years, the invasion was not normally violent, it appears to be becoming more violent every day. At the time of this writing, it also appears that, as a group, our federal legislators do not have the political will to take any true constructive action regarding this matter.

As with every group of immigrants coming into this country, whether legal or illegal, those from Central America brought with a relatively small number of criminals. Until recently, the crimes committed by these criminals, who had formed into gangs here in the United States, or who brought their gangs with them when they came to the U.S., stood beneath the radar. Why? Because the people who were victimized were other immigrants, most often illegal immigrants afraid to go to law enforcement.

Now, however, we hear and read about drug cartels hiring gangs to smuggle large quantities of Mexican heroin, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine and other drugs across the border; we hear of half-mile long tunnels being dug under the border to facilitate this very activity. We hear that peaceful Indian farmers in Central Mexico are being forced by drug cartels to grow poppies so morphine base can be produced.

We also read and hear about possible terrorist groups hiring these same and other cross border gangs to smuggle into the United States illegal

aliens from other places than Mexico, such as from Iran, Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The gangs which are going to be examined in this article are the same ones which are read about several times a week in your local newspaper—gangs like the Border Brothers, the Sinaloan Cowboys and other Central American gangs—a patchwork of organizations that smuggle marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin for distribution throughout the U.S. Most important, now, is the gang known as Mara Salvatrucha X3.

BACKGROUND

To many who have been born in other countries, the United States still looks like the Land of Opportunity, a land where the streets are paved with gold. While we who live here know that the golden streets are really only a rumor, and are more often than not really “mean streets,” the U.S. is still the place where a person can make their fortune, especially when that person comes from a country, like Mexico, where the per capita income in 2005 was estimated to be \$10,000, ranked 86 in the world; or El Salvador with a per capita income of \$5,100, ranked at 131; or Guatemala, ranked at 143 with a per capita income of \$4,300. Compare this to the U.S., ranked number 4 with a \$41,800 per capita income for 2005.

Therefore, emigration is, and has been for many decades, a natural outgrowth of seeing the riches of the North through the prism of poverty in the South. When it is considered that money sent back to the families, still in Mexico, of those migrants, whether legal or not is the greatest single source of foreign exchange for the Mexican government after the oil industry, we see just how important those jobs in the U.S. are to everybody—even to the governments in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and elsewhere. In 1994, the Mexican peso was devalued, lowering the hourly wage to the lowest point since 1980, and throwing Mexico into the worst recession in the last half century. The nation is making, however, a notable resurgence.²

The financial problems in Mexico have only exacerbated the illegal migration between Mexico and the U.S.

In addition, in El Salvador a civil war that lasted about 12-years was brought to a close in 1992 when the government and leftist rebels signed a treaty that provided for military and political reforms. During the course of that war at least 75,000 people were killed, and about 550,000, were displaced from their homes at one time or another.³ Hundreds of thousands more fled the country because of the conflict. Many of those people made their way to the U.S., mostly settling in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., since both areas

already had large Salvadoran populations.

Origins

Some of those who settled in Los Angeles did what many other young people did in LA—they started a gang, mostly for protection since many of the other Hispanics, mostly Mexicans, living in LA did not want them or like them in the area. They stylized the gang after a 1950's San Salvadoran street gang known as La Mara. San Salvador is the capital city of El Salvador, with a population of about 402,000 people.

They called this new gang Mara Salvatrucha Stoners. This gang was created as a response to the societal milieu they encountered upon their arrival in LA, where the entrenched gangs did not accept these first generation immigrants. They did not fit the favored mold (since they were not born in the US, could not communicate properly with the other gangsters, and they were less sophisticated, and so on) as well as the social response taught them in their country of origin—if you find someone is your enemy, kill them.

Mara translates to Gang. Salvatrucha is a linguistic morphing of two words—Salvador and trucha, which translates to “forever vigilant, alert or ready.”

Shortly after the gang was started, the Stoners part of the name was dropped and the Mara Salvatrucha adopted a 13 or an X3, signifying the thirteenth letter of the alphabet and their recognition of “La eMe,” the Mexican Mafia and their ties to the Southern tier of California gangs—the Sureños.

Over the years, the MS X3 presence has grown and it has expanded from Los Angeles. A MS X3 presence has been spotted in at least 33 U.S. states as well as the District of Columbia. The U.S. Department of Justice believes that there are an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 MS-13 members in the U.S.⁴

Ernesto “Smokey” Miranda, a cofounder of the Mara Salvatrucha, quit the gang, moved back to El Salvador, and now is devoted to helping keep kids out of gangs.⁵

During the time of the Civil War, it seems that by the time a youngster in El Salvador reached 14 years of age, they were taken into either the national Army or the guerillas, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Because of this relationship with the factions of the war, most of the new gang's members had military training and experience.

Miranda is quoted in a news story as having said, “In this country (El Salvador), we were taught to kill our own people, no matter if they were from your own blood. If your father was the enemy, you had to kill him. So the

training we got during the war in our country served to make us one of the most violent gangs in the United States.”⁶

The gang has maintained strong ties with their homeland. Many of the gang members have frequently traveled back to El Salvador, where they purchased, at a cheap cost, military arms, and munitions. It is said that in the 1990’s a hand grenade could be bought there for \$1, and an M-16 rifle cost \$225 U.S. It is also believed that many of the cars in San Salvador were stolen in the U.S., and transported to that city by MS X3 members traveling the Pan Am Highway, which runs through the city. They in turn sold the cars and bought weapons to bring back to the States, where they generally sold them to other groups, preferring to use either shotguns or 9mm automatics at the time.

Their biggest rival at that time, and in many senses continuing today, was the 18 Street Gang (Note: while it may be more typical to write 18th. Street, the gang uses 18 Street.). This group began in 1965, in the Pico-Union area of Los Angeles, CA. This gang was begun when other, more established, Hispanic gangs refused them entry into their ranks because they were not purely Mexican in their ancestry. Nevertheless, they continued on their criminal route, and wound up in youth detention. One of those in the kiddy jail was Mark “Rocky” Glover, who lived on 18th Street. Thus, when the gang was formally begun, they adopted the name of the street where Glover lived—18th Street.

The 18 Street Gang has become the largest single gang in Southern California, with somewhere around 25,000 members (depending on which estimates are used), and up to 50,000 members nationwide. Overall, it is estimated that there are 600,000 gang members in El Salvador and another 60,000 in Honduras, although these are probably inflated numbers.⁷

Since racism was integral in beginning 18 Street, and because, when newly arrived immigrants from regions of South and Central America arrived in the Pico Union area they were less than welcomed by the already entrenched Mexican-American gangsters, 18th Street greeted those disaffected youths with open arms.

The next twenty years saw a significant growth in the numbers of this gang. It has been attributed that a leader of the gang said, “If you think 10 or 15 years from now...it ain’t gonna be no brown this or black that, it’ll be about who’s got the numbers.”⁸

Because of that thinking, the gang has opened rosters to people of all races and ethnicities. Not only does it welcome mixed race Hispanics, but also newly arrived Mexican and other Central American immigrants (another

group frowned upon by the second and third generation Mexican-American gangsters of the area) and others, including Blacks, Whites, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, such as Samoans, and Middle Easterners. Although still primarily Latino, this policy of taking anyone regardless of race or origin has helped make the gang the largest in LA, and one of the greatest challenges to law enforcement. It was reported that the 18 Street was responsible for more than 100 homicides in LA in the 1990s, and on average, a member of the gang has assaulted one Los Angelino every day.⁹

The gang has been tied to La eMe, the Mexican Mafia, the pre-eminent of all prison gangs. Through La eMe, this gang established direct ties to drug cartels in both Mexico and South America—cutting out the need for middleman drug smugglers. However, there has been a bit of a falling out between the two groups in recent years over the street tax charged by the Mexican Mafia of the street gangs on the crimes and drug dealing they do—something that the MS X3 also contends is too much too often. In fact, both 18 Street and the MS X3 are known to collect taxes in their areas of control from other criminal actors, as well as protection money from legitimate businesses.

For various reasons, including the deportation of criminal illegal aliens back to their country of origin, the domain of both MS X3 and the 18 Street gangs has expanded to international scope. El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Nicaragua have all seen a steady increase in gang activity and membership. Even Canada and Peru have seen a significant rise in gang related activity involving these and other Central American originating gangs. Both groups, and other Hispanic gangs, are known to participate in automobile thefts, drive-by shootings, murders, contract murders, extortions, drug and firearms trafficking, pandering, immigration and other document counterfeiting and fraud, fraudulent check cashing schemes, and pretty much anything a criminal mind can conceive of to make money or to attempt to gain control of an area.

The Response

As previously mentioned, the U.S. began, in earnest, to deport back to the country origin many criminally prosecuted illegal aliens. While the U.S. looked upon this action as sending the bad guys back to where they came from, the countries receiving the gangsters did not look at the situation within the same light. Those countries, most conspicuously El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, saw the situation as the U.S. sending our criminal gang problem to them. This was not a completely inaccurate view—while these countries had

criminal problems of their own, and much of the criminal activity perpetrated by these gangs had origins in these countries, they never had the criminal gang problem like the one sent back to them; in fact, many of the subjects returned to these countries were immigrants who left their homeland when they were too young to have a say in the matter, and really did not have an inkling about their “homeland,” did not really have familial connections with the country they returned to, and often did not even speak proper Central American Spanish.

Additionally, the gangsters who were returned brought the gangs with them, along with their gang rivalries. These small, mostly impoverished countries found that they did not have the resources available to them to respond appropriately.

One response, whether official or not, was the creation, in El Salvador, of “La Sombra Negra,” or “the Black Shadow.” This was a group of off duty cops who were alleged to have met airplanes bringing the deported gang members back to El Salvador. The off-duty cops met the planes, collected the gang-bangers, brought them to a secluded area outside the city, and shot them dead. No more gang problem—at least with those gang bangers. The only problem with that solution was the number of gang bangers being returned—they all could not be killed—there is an average of 50 gangsters on each ICE jet.

“It seems to me that this country is losing, in great measure, the democratic advances that have cost us so much,” said Bertha Oliva, director of the Committee for the Relatives of the Disappeared, a group formed at the height of the cold war. In the 80’s, this country said it was O.K. to kill off its political enemies because they were antisocial. We say the same today about gang members.’’¹⁰

The response of the Central American governments was to take a zero-tolerance approach. This approach included targeting persons displaying gang related tattoos (albeit unofficially), loitering on specified street corners, or associating with known gang members. Many of the arrests made by police in these jurisdictions are voided within a day because of lack of evidence of a crime having been committed.¹¹

It has been reported that some gang members have been imprisoned simply for displaying gang related tattoos. Programs have been instituted whereby such gang members can be given the chance for a fresh start by having the offending tattoos removed. However, giving up your tattoo can amount to a death sentence at the hands of your former companions.

One result of these draconian measures is that an undeclared war was waged on the part of the various gangs against the governments. In 1996, 5 years after the end of the civil war in El Salvador, that country had the highest death per capita in the world, with 150 deaths per 100,000 population.¹²

“El Salvador still holds the regions number one spot for per capita homicides,” Ricardo Montoya of the Research Foundation for the Application of Law, an El Salvadorian research organization.¹³ He added that crime, especially homicide, had increased since the inception in Honduras and El Salvador of a policy known as “Mano Duro,” or “Firm Hand,” which bypasses basic rules of due process and allowed those jurisdictions to send young men to prison for nothing more than a gang tattoo.¹⁴ One result is prisons full of gangsters—gangsters that will kill one another if they can. The solution has been to make the prisons segregated by gang. There also has to be one prison for those who no longer wish to be a part of their gang.

The presidents of Honduras and El Salvador have called the gangs as big a threat to national security as terrorism is to the United States.¹⁵

Civil rights organizations such as Libertad con Dignidad and Amnesty International have declared the plan known as Mano Dura as opposed to human rights and repressive in nature.

In response to these complaints, President Elias Antonio “Tony” Saca, elected on June 1, 2004, enacted a new plan, Super Mano Dura (Super Firm Hand), which has several facets, including attempts to move the gangsters out of the gang life. Under this new plan, at least 4,000 alleged gang members have been arrested.

“And yet the country’s homicide rate is soaring. There were 295 killings in this country of 6 million in January alone, a rate of nine to ten a day,” said Violeta Polanco, spokeswoman for the National Civil Police. That figure is up 55% from the previous January, before the Super Hard Hand effort was launched.¹⁶ In Guatemala, the authorities believe violence will kill 1,000 more people this year than were killed only two years ago; gangsters are considered responsible for about 80 percent of those killings.¹⁷ In comparison, New York City, with a population of 8,168,338, considerably larger than El Salvador’s 6,704,932, had a murder rate of 537 for the year 2005.

The violence continues as one moves north. There have been numerous murders of emigrants traveling on Mexican freight trains to the U.S. While a serial killer was found to be responsible for some of these crimes, it is considered likely that many others were the acts of gangs stealing from and killing these victims, since the predators knew the victims would be traveling

with funds to the U.S. There have been, and continues to be, numerous, violent clashes in some of the bigger border towns, and even in such a tourist Mecca as Cancun. In these circumstances, graft has played a large part, with local police and Federal Judicial Police pointing accusatory fingers at one another, as well as trading shots.

One police chief was murdered only hours after he had been sworn into his new position.

For many weeks, the job of Police Chief in Nuevo Laredo, directly across the Rio Grande from Laredo, Texas, went unfilled—no one was brave enough, or perhaps foolhardy enough, to take the post. One brave man, however, Alejandro Dominguez proudly stepped forward, on Wednesday, June 8, 2005, to take the position. Upon taking the job, he is quoted as stating, “I don’t owe anybody anything. My duty is to the citizenry. I think that those who should be scared are those who have been compromised.”¹⁸

A former federal attorney general’s prosecutor, and businessman, Dominguez was sworn in on Wednesday afternoon. About nine hours later, as he was climbing into his Ford Lobo, he was shot and killed by unknown assailants. In the immediate area of the killing between 35 and 40 shell casings, of the same type as used in the assault rifles used by the federal drug agents were found.¹⁹

“We are defenseless,” attorney Zorina Medrano said at City Hall. “It’s obvious that the criminals are better organized (than the authorities). They sent the national army and even they weren’t respected. (Mexican President Vicente Fox had previously sent in 700 federal troops to help quell the drug cartel controlled violence, apparently with little lasting success.) Who else can we ask for help?”²⁰

Previously, on May 21, 2005, a Saturday, municipal Police Chief Carlos Bowser of Playas de Rosarito, located in Baja California State, was shot approximately 50 times, outside his home while he was also getting into his Chevy Impala, on his way to work. He had been on the job for about six months. The Chief’s assassination was the twelfth such killing up to that point in several Mexican states, and was believed to have been retaliation for the government’s attempts to control both the drug trade and official corruption. Chief Bowser’s murder came only hours after a shootout between police and drug smugglers occurred in Reynosa, a northeastern city bordering on the U.S.²¹

There are many other examples of the gang violence in and around the cross border country between the U.S. and Mexico.

The situation has gotten so bad that, in August 2005, the governors of Arizona and New Mexico, Janet Napolitano, Republican of Arizona, and Bill Richardson, Democrat of New Mexico, declared states of emergency in their respective states, which share a very porous 350 mile border with Mexico, providing a total of more than \$3 million to those counties which share that border with Mexico.²² Those statements were given the support of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

On February 9, 2006, the Reuters news agency said Homeland Security officials, including Secretary Michael Chertoff, reported that attacks on U.S. Border Patrol agents had jumped more than 100% in the past year. The violence ranged from gunshots to thrown rocks; sometimes the rocks were set aflame.²³ It was previously reported that rocks thrown by illegal immigrants coming across the border brought down a Border Patrol helicopter.

On August 10, 2007 it was reported in the El Paso Times that three men and a woman were attempting to gain illegal entry into the U.S. when a Border Patrol agent intercepted them. When one of the men picked up a rock and attempted to assault the officer, that man was shot and killed. That man was reported to be a known people and drug smuggler across the Mexico-U.S. border, as well as a suspected gang member, previously arrested twenty-eight times between 1999 and 2002 for illegal entries into the States.

As reported in the El Paso Times, also, the number of assaults on Border Patrol officers standing at 585 by September, 2007. Of that number 364 involved rock throwing

While the level of transactional crime has increased to new levels, there are many reasons for the increase. One can be said to be NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, because the increase in trade made it that much harder to find that one needle in the haystack of trucks crossing the border, and the presidency of Vicente Fox, who swore to rid his country of these criminal through a “war without mercy.”²⁴ Because of this strategy, dozens of gang and cartel leaders were either killed or imprisoned over a period of two years, beginning in 2000.²⁵

THE ZETAS GANG THREAT

In January 2006, reports were received from a Texas county bordering on Mexico that several of its Sheriff’s deputies were confronted by what they believed to be a Mexican military Humvee as they chased three luxury SUVs suspected of carrying drug smugglers. When the men in the Humvee, dressed in Mexican military garb, set up a .50 caliber machine gun, the deputies decided that retreat was the better part of valor.

Zapata County Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez said that his deputies were chasing the suspected drug smugglers when one of the suspect vehicles blew a tire. That vehicle was found to have been carrying 1,400 pounds of marijuana. A second SUV became stuck in the Rio Grande mud, and it was then that the deputies saw, on the Mexican side of the river, what appeared to be a Mexican military Humvee, carrying people dressed in Mexican military uniforms, sitting there, giving cover, with the .50 caliber machine gun, to the escaping narco-gangsters.

The FBI later photographed 10 men wearing camouflage and unloading drugs from the vehicle that had become stuck in the river; a Humvee military style vehicle stood by on the Mexican side of the river.

The Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez said that the suspected military vehicle and occupants could not have been Mexican military, because all of their units were in barracks, and, besides, no Humvees armed with .50 caliber machine guns are assigned to the area where the incident took place.²⁶

While there is little doubt the Mexican government would not wish to admit that such action actually involved members of their military, there is also the possibility that the rouge military force known as the Zetas may have been involved.

A band of Mexican Army Special Forces soldiers who jumped the ranch and joined up with the drug cartels they were created to fight, this gang of murderous enforcers and intimidators have wreaked their terror on both sides of the Mexican U.S. border. Believed to have operated as far north as Dallas, Texas and Tennessee, they have created their own violent urban legend. Their crimes are often brutal, and often very much out of the ordinary—such as the time they murdered a major Tijuana publisher while he sat in his car, with his two children sitting terrified in the back seat, in broad daylight.²⁷

Arrested on October 29, 2004, after a Matamoros, Mexico shootout with law enforcement, were 14 men suspected of being Zeta members, including a reputed leader, Rogelio Gonzalez Pizana, A.K.A. “El Kelin.” They were charged and ordered to stand trial in Mexico City on organized crime, money laundering and weapons-possession charges. They were arrested as part of an investigation by the Mexico Attorney General’s Office known as “Operation Corsorio.” Mexican authorities have increased their presence significantly in this law-enforcement showdown aimed at the Zetas gang²⁸ and because of the increase in border gang violence in Tamaulipas

State, where the Zetas had been assigned when they were a part of the military.

It was reported in November 2004 that the Zetas had placed a bounty of \$50,000 on the heads of U.S. Border Patrol Agents and state and local law enforcement, as well as honest Mexican law enforcement. At that time it was reported that these former members of the Mexican Special Air Mobile Group, at one time assigned to Tamaulipas State, along the Texas border, use their training, along with stolen arms and equipment, to wage gang war on their rivals. They were suspected then of being responsible for 90 murders at that time.²⁹

In January 2005 the Zetas made a raid on a federal prison, holding some of their members, in Matamoros, Mexico—directly across the border from Brownsville, Texas. The Zetas are believed to have handcuffed, blindfolded, and murdered six prison employees by shooting them in the head.

Heriberto Lazcano's, a Zeta leader 28 years old at the time, known as "El Verdugo"—the Executioner—had his men launch rocket propelled grenades at the Mexican law enforcement during the assault.

Lazcano is reputed to keep lions and tigers on his ranches—to which he is believed to have fed his enemies.³⁰

It was reported in June 2005 that the Zetas were responsible for hundreds of murders along the border the previous year, and that they have expanded their enforcement efforts on behalf of a drug cartel by setting up trafficking routes in six U.S. states. It is unclear whether the Gulf Cartel or the Juarez Cartel employs them.

The U.S. Justice Department is reported as saying that the U.S.-trained units have recently moved operations into Houston, San Antonio and the states of California, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida. They have been operating in Dallas for at least two years, according to this report.³¹

It has also been reported by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement that the Zetas operate special training camps in the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Michoacán, where newly recruited Zetas are trained during a grueling six-week training course in weapons, tactics and intelligence gathering.³²

It has been estimated that the Zetas gang killed at least 600 people on both sides of the border just in 2005 in an effort to take control of the routes used in both humans and drugs.³³

This gang of murderers abandoned the military to which they swore allegiance in 1991. At first they went to work protecting the Gulf drug cartel they had been assigned to destroy, and acted as security for Osiel Cardenas Guillen, head of the Gulf Cartel. They eventually formed their own drug

smuggling routes into the U.S. Small in number, they are thought to consist of only 30 core members. Mexican authorities accuse the Zetas of dozens of drive-by shootings on the streets of Nuevo Laredo.

The Zetas are not alone in perpetrating this violence or committing crime; it has been suggested that they have been joined by renegade members of the special forces branch of the Guatemalan Army known as Kaibiles. Suspected of conducting training for new Zetas at a ranch in Mexico, south of McAllen, Texas, their motto is,

**“If I advance, follow me;
If I stop, urge me on;
If I retreat, kill me.”**

In 2005, it is believed that individual Kaibiles were paid \$700 per week to work with Los Zetas, and to carry out drug smuggling operations in Mexico.

Violence is also the child of MS X3, 18 Street, the Sinaloan Cowboys, and a number of other gangs operating on the border, and it is not only directed against the “good guys.” With the destruction of many of the largest drug cartels in Mexico over the past 15 years, their turf has been taken up by numbers of micro-narco groups—like the Zetas. Before the Zetas and their ilk, the level of violence now seen in a city like Nuevo Laredo, where Police Chief Bowser was assassinated only hours after taking office, was almost unheard of—it is now commonplace in many areas of the borderland.

The Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Office has seen an upswing in the number of Mexico’s drug cartel gangs, such as the Sinaloan Cowboys, also known as the Sinaloan Cartel, and the Juarez Cartel. It was reported that as much as 70 to 80% of that jurisdiction’s street level narcotics have been smuggled from or through Mexico. The smuggled and distributed drugs include cocaine, Mexican tar heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine.³⁴

Sinaloa State has a long history as a smuggling point of entrance into the U.S.— even from before prohibition encouraged the Sinaloan smugglers to transport illegal alcohol across the desert into the U.S. by mule and horseback. The very idea of smuggling has evolved into making those Sinaloans who smuggle into legends. There has developed an almost cult-like following of Sinaloans who track the exploits of these criminals through popular ballads.

The range of the Sinaloan Cowboys, and their sometime partners in the 18th Street Gang, went so far as to target 18,000 Ogallala Lakota Sioux living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, beginning in 1999. That

enterprise soon extended to the Wind River Reservation, which is the home of about 6,400 Eastern Shoshone and Arapahoe, 57% of whom live in poverty.

The Mexican gangsters had read an article in the *Denver Post* that detailed how a few liquor stores, located in the small Nebraska town of Whiteclay, were selling upwards of \$4 million of mostly beer and malt liquor to the Ogallala Lakota. They also saw that the sales peaked at the time of month that the Indians received their government checks.

It seemed reasonable to the Cowboys that if the Sioux were so terribly addicted to alcohol, then it should not be difficult to get them hooked on Methamphetamine—just hand out free samples, and it should be a quick change over. The Mexican gangsters also reasoned that they could hide in plain sight among the Indians. The gangsters set up headquarters in Ogden, Utah, and then went to work. Sinaloan Cowboy controlled labs in Mexico and in California supplied the Meth. Federal law enforcement traced a link from the Sinaloan Cowboys, based in Sinaloa State, Mexico, to the 18th Street Gang in LA, who were used to help transport the CDS, to the Methamphetamine cell in Ogden.

The first thing the Ogden cell did was move members into communities surrounding the reservation, then developing a romantic relationship with Ogallala Lakota Sioux women, even having children with some of these women. The gang members got the women hooked on the Meth, and then turned the women into low-level distributors of the drugs. These women were told to use the ploy of giving out free samples.

The whole scheme grew expansively, with low-level dealers becoming recruiters of new dealers themselves; therefore, those original low-level dealers now became new distributors. A number of arrests were made in 2004, and at least 17 members of the Ogden cell wound up in U.S. Bureau of Prisons custody. One of the leaders of the plot, Jesus Martin Sagaste-Cruz, was convicted of conspiracy and distribution of Methamphetamine; he was sentenced to life in federal prison in July 2005. Sagaste-Cruz was believed to have directed the sale of 98 pounds of methamphetamine in and around the reservations.³⁵ The value of the drugs sold was in excess of \$6.5 million.³⁶

Gang Involvement in Human Smuggling

There is also the question of smugglers possibly smuggling illegal aliens across the border from nations other than Central America into the U.S. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the heightened border security on the U.S. side of the border caused those who facilitate the smuggling of humans and drugs to increase the sophistication of their smuggling methods. Recently,

there was a half-mile long tunnel found under the border between Tijuana and San Diego. This is one example of the extent undertaken by the smuggling gangs, which include multiple repacking of drug shipments, containerization, rail transportation, and smuggling both people and drugs inside of box trucks and tractor trailer containers, a method that has been known to result in tragedy when the container is abandoned, with the smuggled people locked inside.

It's estimated that human smuggling from Mexico to the U.S. is a \$300 million a year business, second only to the illicit drug trade. It is also estimated that there are between 100 and 300 human smuggling organizations in Mexico.³⁷

It is known that these smugglers have made efforts to transport persons from the Middle East into the U.S. from Mexico. Whether those smuggled are connected with Al Qaida or not is problematic, and not proven one way or the other. Nevertheless, people from the Middle East have been snared trying to get into the U.S. through Mexico.

When I have interviewed members of various Central American gangs, I have found men who most often travelled to the U.S. because it is a land of opportunity—but not the opportunity you read about in school books. Rather, most I have spoken with see the U.S. as a place to make money—a place where they can prey upon others, most often those people who come from the same places they came from. They don't see themselves as making a life in the U.S.. They see the States as the place where they can make their fortune, and then get back to their home, whether that is Puebla, Mexico or San Salvador, El Salvador.

Of course, this is the way they feel up until they are caught, for the most part. Once caught, they often offer to help the authorities out, in an effort to avoid deportation. If they can work for law enforcement, with a promise about their future, they often swear to do what they can. Often, however, they will play two ends against the middle, and so they must be handled firmly.

Most often, the victims of their crimes are afraid to come forward to tell the police what happened to them. They fear being sent back to their country of origin—because they are illegal, and they fear being victims of revenge.

These gangsters have been known to follow the local fiestas, parties held in halls and other places parties are held. They will often break into the party, and call out their roll call, and the name of the gang. In response, other gangs in the hall will respond with their own shout out—and if they are not aligned a fight starts.

In one particular case, a Central American immigrant family was having a party to celebrate the Baptism of their newest addition. The party, held at a local association meeting hall, was interrupted by a group of La Mugre (the Bathtub Scum) members who broke in. After the gang had done their shout outs and roll call, one of the invited guests went into the mens' room. While in there, he was overheard by a few La Mugre members complaining how the party had been crashed. 'When the party goer left the restroom, he was confronted by several members of the gang, who began to beat him up. While he was lying on the floor of the dance hall, one of the La Mugre members shot him in the stomach, killing him.

It is known that prostitution rings are run by some of the gangs; knowing that the men, illegal alien men, working in the U.S. and sending their money back home—to their families, their wives and children—are going to be looking for some feminine company. The gangs are known to run strings of girls, keeping a single group of girls in one particular area for a few weeks, until the men in that area get tired of them. Those girls are then brought to a new location, and new girls are brought into the brothel they left.

One way the money is collected is like this: the man wanting to partake of the services provided will negotiate with the pimp or the madam. They will pay for the service they decide they want performed. They will receive a playing card. Each playing card represents a different sex act, which they in turn will turn over to the prostitute at the time the service is performed. The girls are not allowed to have any money on them—they are searched when they are done for the day. That way, the girls can't steal anything from the house. At the end of their day, they turn all of the playing cards they collected.

A few years back. I and a few other members of an interdiction team were going to locations of interest in one of the local towns. This particular location, a rooming house behind a pizza parlor, was also a brothel. When we went in, we saw that there was a huge wall graffiti proclaiming MS X3—Honduras. It was later learned that the local leader of the MS clique in this town, an El Salvadoran, had been hearing a lot of complains from his gang because he was spending too much time with the girls and not enough time making money. Tired of the grumblings, he flew to LA, and brought back a whole new gang of men, newly crossed illegal aliens from Honduras. That's why the Honduras shout out on the wall, in the brothel where this new group of gangsters was living.

Drugs, murders, assaults, document fraud and counterfeiting, pandering for prostitution, and just about any other criminal activity the mind

can think of has been tried by these groups, and they will keep on trying to make money where they can.

Conclusion

Is there a specific threat from these groups, these gangs, these drug dealers, people smugglers and murders, to the United States? Yes. Will the problem be solved any time soon?

No sooner than this country decides whether it is actually going to take concrete action regarding securing our borders as well as what to do about the illegal immigrants already here. Are we going to allow “guest workers,” are we going to give “amnesty” to those illegal immigrants who are already here, or are we going to sweep the problem under the rug, again, by giving lip service and not taking action which not only protects our borders, but action that would also protect the migrant workers who are demanding workers rights that they do not have, since they are here illegally. What would this nation’s minimum wage really be, if industries that rely on low paid illegal aliens did not have access to them as employees?

The United States does not seem able to decide if we want to secure our borders or not. We have Mexico, and the other Central American countries demanding that we allow their people into the U.S. Mexico has even provided, recently, guidebooks for illegal aliens to use while they cross the border, ostensibly to keep them from dying in the deserts of the American Southwest.

Reported on in 2007 was a amusement park, outside of Mexico City, that was designed to present the park goers with the experience of crossing the border—illegally. Park personnel were dressed as CBP agents, and all of the rest of the experience was included.

The United States Congress, at the time of this writing, cannot decide whether it wants to pander to the millions of illegal aliens or those US citizens demanding that something be done. The suggestions made, such as any illegal alien in the US less than two years must be deported would be a fine suggestion, if anyone knew whom and where those illegal aliens were. It seems highly unlikely that those who are in such a situation would turn themselves in, and this country does not even have an idea of the exact number of illegal alien, from all quarters, in the US.

You have some senators, like New York’s Hilary Clinton, who, when being interviewed on a conservative media outlet, states that she favors a national ID card, tightening the borders and prosecuting those who employ illegal aliens; on the other hand, when speaking to a rally demanding pro-

illegal alien reforms, the Senator says that she backs them all the way in their demands. You have senators, like Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, comparing the plight of illegal immigrants to the struggle of African-Americans, citizens of this country, for the Civil Rights guaranteed but denied them. How can legislation be formulated to correct the problem when those who must pass it cannot decide what their position is?

Mauricio Farah, a commissioner for the Mexican Human Rights Commission said, "Migration is a human right," and the United States should be "grateful" that the commission was doing something to prevent some of the approximately 500 deaths that occur each year during border crossings by illegal immigrants.³⁸ It is unfortunate, however, that the Mexican Constitution denies the same rights demanded by the illegal aliens in the United States to "foreigners" living in Mexico. The 1917 Mexican Constitution, in Chapter III, "Foreigners," states: "*Foreigners may not in any way participate in the political affairs of the country.*"³⁹ It also states, "*...the Federal Executive shall have the exclusive power to compel any foreigner whose remaining he may deem inexpedient to abandon the national territory immediately and without the necessity of previous legal action.*"⁴⁰

Additionally, in Chapter II of that Constitution, it is stated, "*...Mexicans shall have priority over foreigners under equality of circumstances for all classes of concessions and for all employment, positions, or commissions of the Government in which the status of citizenship is not indispensable. In time of peace no foreigner can serve in the Army nor in the police or public security forces.*"⁴¹

Mexico and several other Central American countries are threatening to sue the U.S. in international courts to prevent this country from closing our borders, and erecting a fence to separate the U.S. from Mexico.

Mexicans working in the United States are a huge source of revenue for Mexico, sending home more than \$16 billion in remittances in 2004; this is Mexico's second largest source of foreign currency after oil exports, according to that country's central bank.⁴²

Until the U.S. decides how it wants to act—or react—to illegal aliens coming into this country, we are never going to be able to control the criminal groups who accompany those people who are just trying to make a living, and send something back home. Until the time when the federal government does more than talk the task is up to the Customs Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who are basically sweeping water, and state and local law enforcement, who can only try to fight the crime these

groups bring to us.

Our national political leaders pontificate about controlling “our borders,” and then sponsor legislation to allow the millions of illegal aliens, already in this country, various forms of protection from being returned to their nations of origin. Some call these attempts at amnesty, others say that they are merely attempts at accepting reality. Nevertheless, by all accounts, the U.S. population, for the most part, is not against immigration to this country, as long as the immigrants are doing so legally.

Additionally, such action would be wholly unfair to the people who have waited years to enter this country legally. It would be like rewarding the thief, while punishing the honest person. Why would anyone want to follow the law?

And, the violence continues. On February 14, 2006 news reports showed that two more Mexican border police chiefs were assassinated—the most recent victims of the war to control the drug and human trafficking routes—and crime—from Central America into the US.

As reported by **Stratfor.com**, in an article entitled “**Mexico: Dynamics of the Gun Trade**,” by Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, appearing on October 24, 2007, the number murders in Mexico by the end of October, 2007 had already surpassed 2,000, an increase of 300 percent for the same period of 2006. It was also suggested that some Mexican police officials are, in fact, under reporting drug-related homicides.

Additionally, it was reported that the drug cartels continue to routinely engage in torture and killings, including beheadings, at an ever increasing rate. The number of kidnappings have gone to such a level that Stratfor also reported that some have taken to calling Mexico the “kidnapping capital of the world,” and creating a boon for security companies and armored car manufacturers.

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