Los Zetas Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization

Major Jim Anderson

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Overview of Los Zetas Strategic Plan

• Operational Plan
• Command and Control Structure
• Defense Economics
  – Logistics that Identifies Principal Transportation Modalities and ability to project power
• Geographic Locality Importance
• Personnel/Demographics
• Training
• Weapons Types
• Operational Strategy: Conventional and/or Asymmetric Warfare
  – Medical Support
Operational Plan

• Los Zetas operational activity comes from their diverse background of former military personnel, law enforcement agents and impressionable youth

• Primary missions still fall in line primarily with drug trafficking, human/weapons smuggling and money laundering

• Special operations/Mexican military background make them adept in aerial assaults, marksmanship, sophisticated communications, and intimidation

• Proficient at conducting complex, coordinated military-style operations

• Recently turned to “insurgent –like” TTPs
Command and Control Structure
Defense Logistics/Economics

• A hierarchical structure exists that facilitates logistical movement and the flow of drug trafficking
  – This allows them to maintain their lifeline of drug trafficking activity, which also allows for continued logistical freedom of movement and economic expenditures

• Human trafficking from Cuba and other Latin America countries has also been a primary source of revenue for Los Zetas
Geography/Locality Importance

- Most of Los Zetas recruitment and organization structure is local
  - There also exists a global recruitment effort which takes people of different ethnic and cultural background into consideration
- Reach goes to places like Philippines (SE Asia) and Central/South American countries as well
- Much power and influence still comes from local populace
  - Re-enforces ability to blend in with the civilian population (popular COIN technique)
Personnel/Demographics

- Public relations and information operations campaign directed towards a young, poor, easily influenced base
- The socio-economic nature of the campaign evident in physical banners, advertisements and audio messages
- Demographics also extremely important in near and far term timeframe
  - Affect certain alliances that this organization currently has and potentially will have
    - Political, cultural, socio-economic or gender-specific
Training

• Military style training is hallmark of Los Zetas
  - Great emphasis on properly training their new recruits and ensuring that their more seasoned members undergo reinforcement training

• Los Zetas military-style “training camps” spread out in the area of northeastern Mexico (just south of the Texas border)

• One disadvantage lies in the manner in which their training camps operate
  - Covert style of training camps leaves little publicity for enhanced recruiting efforts
  - Secretive nature in which they operate strikes at the question of their legitimacy
Weapons Types

• Los Zetas has an incredibly large and diverse amount of different types of weapons at their disposal
  - Outdated weapons previously associated with most Mexican DTOs have been replaced with an arsenal that includes AR-15 and AK-47 assault rifles, MP5 machine guns, .50mm machine guns, grenade launchers, ground-to-air missiles, dynamite, bazookas, and helicopters

• A large portion of these weapons were actually acquired in the United States and then smuggled across the border into Mexico
  – Significance lies in the ease with which these weapons have been smuggled across the border
Operational Strategy: Conventional and/or Asymmetric Warfare

• Los Zetas and other similar Mexican DTOs will seek to conduct insurgent-style warfare with the local civilian population while also conducting some semblance of military attacks directed towards the Mexican Army
  – COIN style TTPs will facilitate the Los Zetas members living with the population and attempting to blend in with this population
  – Therefore, they will receive medical attention as well as logistics and sustenance through these civilian channels
  – Regular kinetic attacks will continue on both sides of the border, facilitating the resemblance of conventional type warfare
Questions?