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BRIEF

(U//FOUO) Los Guerreros Unidos Capitalizes on the U.S. Heroin Epidemic to Develop into a Transnational Criminal Organization of Growing Concern

DEA-DCT-DIB-006-17

JANUARY 2017



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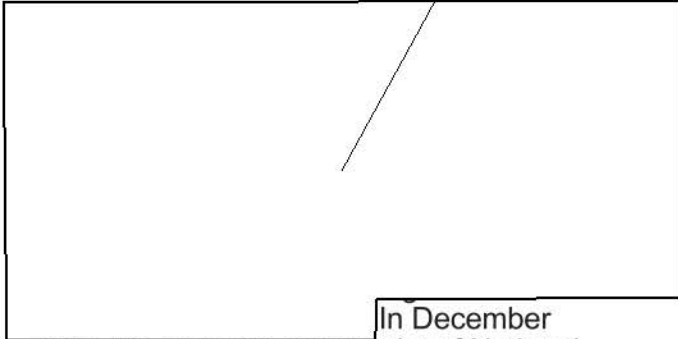
(U) Executive Summary

(U//DSEN) Despite its short history, Los Guerreros Unidos^a (LGU) has evolved into a Mexican transnational criminal organization (TCO) of growing concern, with a drug distribution network spanning several major cities in the United States. Although it continues to be regarded as a sub-group of the Beltran-Leyva Organization (BLO), LGU operates independently of BLO factions and has progressively functioned as an autonomous TCO. While drug cartel dynamics have been fluid over the past six years in Mexico, with new criminal groups emerging and fading, LGU has persevered thanks in large part to its role in the heroin trade. According to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reporting, LGU is currently one of Mexico's leading exporters of heroin to U.S. drug markets in the South, Midwest, and on the East Coast. The rising demand for heroin in the United States has likely contributed to LGU's growth over the years and resilience in the face of pressure from the Mexican Government. Sustained alliances with other TCOs in Mexico and expansion into new drug markets in the United States will be critical for LGU's progression over the long term.

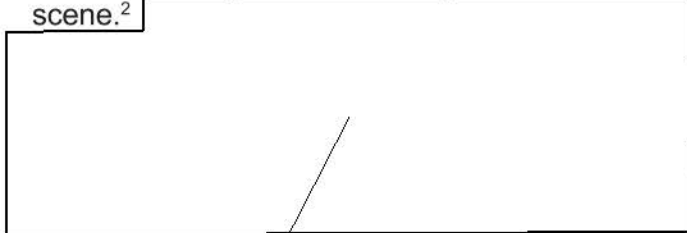
(U) Details

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(U) Los Guerreros Unidos Emerges as an Offshoot of Beltran-Leyva Organization

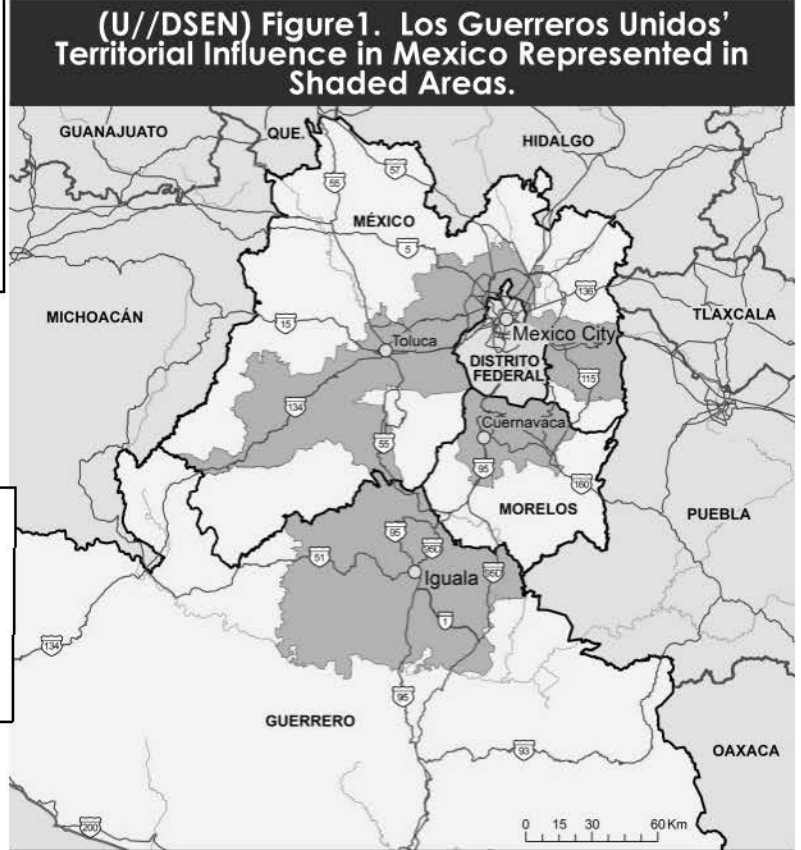


In December 2011, the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense confirmed a new group known as Los Guerreros Unidos claimed responsibility for the murder of three people in Cuernavaca, Morelos, through narco-messages left at the scene.²



(U) Areas of Influence in Mexico

(U//DSEN) LGU's territorial influence currently encompasses several municipalities within the Mexican tristate area of Guerrero, Mexico, and Morelos. Initially, LGU control was centered in the north-central part of Guerrero and the upper-half of Morelos. However, due to a 2011 rupture within the La Familia Michoacana (LFM) cartel, several LFM dissident groups—primarily based in the state of Mexico—joined sides with LGU, expanding the



Source: DEA

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

^a (U) Los Guerreros Unidos is a Spanish term meaning "The United Warriors" and is a generic name that is not identifiable with a specific region in Mexico. However, the term consists of a play on the word Guerrero, which literally means "warrior" in Spanish, but can also be understood to refer to the Mexican state of Guerrero, where Los Guerreros Unidos initially emerged and continues to operate.

^b (U) BLO leader Arturo Beltran-Leyva was killed during a Government of Mexico arrest operation in Cuernavaca, Morelos in December 2009.

organization's influence to three states.^{5,6} According to February 2013 DEA reporting, a rift in LFM led to the formation of two distinct groups—Los Caballeros Templarios (LCT) and LGU.⁷

(U) Drug Distribution Portfolio

(U//DSEN) Although not as expansive as other TCOs, the areas in Mexico under the control of LGU are strategically located along recognized heroin trafficking routes. LGU's dominance in north-central Guerrero affords the organization proximity to the mountainous regions in the central and southern parts of the state where the majority of poppy cultivation for the region occurs. In addition, north-central Guerrero serves as a common and convenient transit point for processed heroin coming from these regions. The city of Iguala, regarded as LGU's birthplace and central base in northern Guerrero, lies at a crossroads between several major highways that connect the interior of Guerrero with the states of Morelos, Mexico, and Michoacán. Due to these characteristics, Iguala has become an important trafficking hub for heroin bound for the United States.^{8,9,10}

[Redacted] (b)(7)(D)

(U//DSEN) Apart from its focus on heroin trafficking, LGU is also responsible for exporting cocaine, methamphetamine, and to a lesser extent marijuana, to various U.S. drug markets. LGU inherited its cocaine trafficking infrastructure from the BLO, which had previously established sources of supply in Colombia and routes to U.S. distribution cells. LGU supplemented its drug distribution portfolio with methamphetamine after the integration of former LFM cells in Mexico and the United States.

(U) Cross-Border Smuggling Corridors Facilitate the Flow of LGU Drug Shipments into South Texas

(U//DSEN) LGU introduces the majority of its poly-drug shipments into the United States through the Southwest Border (SWB), mainly using smuggling corridors in northeast Mexico. DEA reporting indicates LGU primarily utilizes several U.S.–Mexico border cities, to include Laredo, McAllen, and Brownsville, to transport illicit drug shipments into south Texas and smuggle bulk currency shipments back to Mexico.

[Redacted] (b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

[Redacted] (b)(7)(D)

- In January 2016, an LGU drug transportation cell reportedly exported cocaine and marijuana from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, to the United States through POEs in Laredo, McAllen, and Brownsville for ultimate distribution in Houston.¹⁷

(U) Drug Routes and U.S. Distribution Network

(U//DSEN) LGU maintains an extensive network in the United States to transport and distribute illicit drugs (primarily heroin) through southern, midwestern, and eastern states. LGU has designated several cities in these regions as strategic transit points and distribution hubs, to include Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Houston, and New York City. Illicit drugs passing through or reaching these hubs are ultimately routed to markets throughout the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The following DEA reporting highlights LGU's drug trafficking activity in each of these hubs.

(U//DSEN) Figure 2. Flow of Los Guerreros Unidos' Illicit Drug Shipments through Identified Distribution Hubs and End-User Markets in the United States.

(b)(7)(E)

Source: DEA

(U) AUSTIN, TEXAS

(b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

(U) HOUSTON, TEXAS

(b)(7)(D)

- (U//DSEN) DEA reporting reveals that LGU exports vast amounts of drugs (primarily heroin) to various cities in the United States to include Atlanta, Chicago, and Houston.^{22,23}

(b)(7)(D)

(U) CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

- (U//DSEN) In December 2014, eight defendants, including the head of an LGU cell in the Chicago area, were charged in the Northern District of Illinois. The investigation resulted in the seizure of approximately 68 kilograms of heroin, 9 kilograms of cocaine, and more than \$500,000 in U.S. currency (USC) since August 2013. This LGU cell imported wholesale amounts of heroin and cocaine from Mexico, often concealing the illicit drugs in commercial passenger buses travelling from Mexico to Chicago.²⁵



(U//DSEN) Figure 3. June 2014 seizure of 26 kilograms of heroin belonging to LGU from a vehicle in Chicago, Illinois.

Source: DEA

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

(U) ATLANTA, GEORGIA

(b)(7)(D)

(b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

(b)(7)(D)

(U) NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

(U) Interfacing with U.S.-based Criminal Groups

(U//DSEN) LGU focuses mainly on the wholesale supply of illicit drugs to the United States while relying on local DTOs and urban street gangs for retail distribution. The following DEA reporting highlights LGU's association with several distinct U.S.-based criminal groups.

^c (U) Mexican traffickers commonly refer to Mexico-produced white heroin as "China white" even though it is typically off-white, tan, or beige—rarely white in color. The term "China white" is also used by Mexican traffickers to distinguish between Mexico-produced black-tar heroin and white heroin.

(b)(7)(D)

(b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)

- According to DEA reporting, a Chicago-based LGU cell dismantled in 2014 was responsible for distributing more than 300 kilograms of heroin per month throughout the Midwest, with much of the supply destined for violent street gangs in Chicago.³⁴

(U) Alliances and Rivalries in Mexico Offer Opportunities for LGU's Further Growth or Potential Demise

(U//DSEN) LGU fortified its position in recent years through alliances and working relationships with other Mexican TCOs,

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Although unclear, LGU likely also maintains a working relationship with either the Gulf Cartel or Los Zetas, enabling the movement of its drug shipments through areas under the control of these cartels in northeast Mexico.

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(U//DSEN) Despite strengthening itself through alliances, LGU faces continual pressure from its adversaries, presenting challenges to growth. Since its inception, LGU has maintained a violent rivalry with Los Rojos that has resulted in elevated levels of cartel-related homicides in Morelos and Guerrero.^{37,38} LGU is also competing with LFM cells in northwest Guerrero and the states of Mexico and Morelos that split from LCT but never coalesced with LGU.³⁹ Moreover, LGU has experienced an intense crackdown by Mexican authorities due to its role in the September 2014 kidnapping and murder of 43 students in Iguala whom LGU members believed to be rivals.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of this widely publicized event, several of LGU's leaders and political contacts in Mexico were arrested, straining the organization's infrastructure in its areas of influence.^{41,42}

(U) Outlook

(b)(7)(E)

(U//DSEN) Heroin will remain a vital source of revenue for LGU and a key component to its continued evolution. As one of the beneficiaries of the current national opioid epidemic, LGU is well-positioned to continue benefitting from sustained heroin use in the United States. Although LGU's involvement in the heroin trade poses a troubling drug threat to the United States, it offers an opportunity for U.S. law enforcement agencies to target the command and control of one of the TCOs currently involved in contributing to the flow of heroin to the United States.

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- 1 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 2 (U) Open Source Center, LAP20111222022006, "New Criminal Group Claims Responsibility for Murder of Three Men in Cuernavaca," Source: *Animal Político in Spanish*, December 21, 2011.
 - 3 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 4 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 5 (U) DEA Mexico City Country Office Investigative Reporting, December 2013; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 6 (U) DEA Austin Resident Office Investigative Reporting, May 2015; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 7 (U) DEA Laredo District Office Investigative Reporting, February 2013; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 8 (U) Contralinea.com.mx, September 27, 2015, "Iguala: The route and Complicity of Heroin," <http://www.contralinea.com.mx/archivo-revista/index.php/2015/09/27/iguala-route-complicity-heroin>, Accessed on August 1, 2016.
 - 9 (U) *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 2015, "In search for Mexico's 43, killings of 6 others go ignored," <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-1t-mexico-missing-students-forgotten-dead-20150925-story.html>, Accessed on August 1, 2016.
 - 10 (U) *El Pais*, September 7, 2015, "Hidden heroin stash may have been behind Iguala student massacre," http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/09/07/inenglish/1441629149_767633.html, Accessed on August 1, 2016.
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 - 13 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Field Division Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN). (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A)
 - 14 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 15 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 16 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Resident Office Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 17 (U) DEA Houston Field Division Investigative Reporting, January 2016; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
 - 18 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Resident Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).

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- 19 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Resident Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 20 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Resident Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 21 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 22 (U) DEA Mexico City Country Office Investigative Reporting, December 2015; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 23 (U) DEA Houston Field Division Investigative Reporting, July 2015; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 24 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Resident Office Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 25 (U) Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois, "Eight Defendants Charged With Distributing Heroin In Chicago Area On Behalf Of Guerrero Unidos Mexican Drug Cartel," December 10, 2014.
- 26 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Field Division Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 27 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 28 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Office Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 29 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Resident Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 30 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 31 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Resident Office Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 32 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D) Field Division Investigative Reporting (b)(7)(D) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 33 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) District Office Investigative Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 34 (U//FOUO) DEA Intelligence Report, "The Drug Situation in the Chicago Field Division: July–December 2014," May 2015; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//LES).
- 35 (U) DEA (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) Resident Office Reporting, (b)(7)(D); (b)(7)(A) extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 36 (U) DEA Today, "Poly-Drug Trafficker Captured in Mexico," May 2016.
- 37 (U) DEA Chicago Field Division Investigative Reporting, November 2015; extracted information is (U//DSEN); overall document classification is (U//DSEN).
- 38 (U) Open Source Center, LAR2014052174391212, "Nine More Bodies Discovered in Clandestine Grave in Iguala," Source: *Mexico City Proceso in Spanish*, May 20, 2014.
- 39 (U) Latin American Regional Report, Mexico & NAFTA, ISSN 0968-2724, July 2012, RM-12-07.
- 40 (U) Open Source Center, LAR2014103154845202, "United Warriors Cartel Allegedly Kidnapped 43 Students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero," Source: *Veracruz E-Consulta in Spanish*, October 29, 2014.

- ⁴¹ (U) BBC News, October 18, 2014, "Mexico Students: Guerreros Unidos Gang Leader Arrested."
- ⁴² (U) *El Economista*, January 12, 2015, "Dictan Auto de Formal Prision a Esposa de Abarca," <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2015/01/12/dictan-auto-formal-prision-esposa-abarca>, Accessed on July 1, 2016.
- ⁴³ (U) FBI, Washington DC, December 2015, "Potential Establishment of Guerreros Unidos Plaza in Washington State, as of November 2015."



(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Strategic Intelligence Section. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief, Analysis and Production Section at dea.onsi@usdoj.gov.
