



# Assessment

## **(U//FOUO) Mexico: Sonora-Based Threats to U.S. Border Security**

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## (U//FOUO) Mexico: Sonora-Based Threats to U.S. Border Security

26 August 2010

*(U) Prepared by the DHS/I&A Border Security Division, Southwest Border Branch. Coordinated with DHS/Customs and Border Protection and DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement.*

### (U) Scope

(U//FOUO) This Homeland Security Assessment examines threats to U.S. border security emanating from the Mexican state of Sonora, which borders Arizona and a small section of New Mexico. It discusses drug and alien smuggling, border violence, and Mexican federal, state, and local government capabilities to confront organized crime. This is the fifth of six planned assessments on current threats to homeland security arising in Mexican states along the U.S. border. It is intended primarily for working-level analysts and operators engaging in homeland security-related activities and concerned with pertinent developments in Sonora and nearby U.S. territory.

(U//FOUO) This is one in a series of intelligence assessments published by the DHS/Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Border Security Division to facilitate a greater understanding of current threats to the United States. This information is provided in support of activities of the Department and to assist Federal, State, and Local government agencies and authorities in developing priorities for support measures relating to an existing or emerging threat to homeland security.

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**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) This assessment relies on reporting from DHS Components—particularly DHS/Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—as well as DoD, Department of State, and FBI reporting. In addition, it uses information reported in the Mexican and U.S. press and other open source materials. CBP and DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are especially useful sources on alien-smuggling organizations, methods, and routes.

**(U) Key Findings**

**(U//FOUO) Drug trafficking and associated violence represent the greatest threat to U.S. border security emanating from Sonora. Marijuana is the drug predominately trafficked, with Tucson and Yuma Sectors accounting for almost half of all marijuana seizures along the U.S. southwest border between 2004 and 2009. Traffickers also move large amounts of cocaine and methamphetamine into Arizona; judging by seizure data the quantities of heroin smuggled in this area are small.**

- **(U//FOUO) Traffickers move illicit drugs through ports of entry (POEs) concealed in vehicles, and also use tunnels, off-road vehicles between POEs, backpackers, and aircraft, including ultralights.**

**(U//FOUO) A growing conflict between the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels spawned an uptick in violence in Sonora beginning in 2007, and Arturo Beltran Leyva's break with Sinaloa kingpin Joaquin Guzman Loera the following year has taken the conflict to new levels.**

- **(U//FOUO) Drug-related murders in Sonora numbered 61 in 2006 but rose to more than 360 in 2009. Some 326 more took place in the first half of 2010, according to figures compiled by a leading Mexico City daily. Nogales has experienced an increase in violence with just over 100 drug-related murders in 2008 and more than 120 in 2009. Moreover, the U.S. press reports more than 100 deaths during the first quarter of 2010, presaging a record year for drug violence in Nogales.**
- **(U//FOUO) Despite the rising tide of murders in Sonora, analysis of FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) data indicates that no widespread violence has spilled into Arizona; indeed, overall violent crime is down in Arizona. Homicide statistics from 2006 through 2009 show that homicides trended downward in Glendale, Mesa, Phoenix, and Tucson; remained flat in Nogales; and increased slightly in Peoria and Yuma. While some of these deaths may be drug-related, available information does not attribute any of these murders to Mexican drug-trafficking organizations.**

**(U//FOUO) Even though apprehensions of aliens on the U.S. southwest border have declined markedly over the past several years, alien smuggling still represents a serious threat from Sonora, where various towns and cities serve as staging platforms.**

- (U//FOUO) Alien apprehensions in the Tucson Sector peaked at 492,000 in 2004, but by 2009 had fallen almost 50 percent to the lowest level in seven years. Apprehensions in Yuma Sector peaked at 138,000 in 2005 and by 2009 had fallen by 95 percent, thanks to improved fencing along the border.
- (U//FOUO) Because aliens must travel long distances over rugged desert terrain, this region accounts for a large proportion of the undocumented migrants who perish each year while attempting illicit entry into the United States. From 2005 to 2009 an average of 217 migrants died in Tucson and Yuma Sectors each year—accounting for 43 to 55 percent of total migrant deaths on the southwest border, according to CBP data.

(U//FOUO) Endemic official corruption at federal, state, and municipal levels hampers Mexican efforts to build effective institutions capable of combating cartel activities, including violence. Corruption among municipal police is particularly extensive, and many officers pass information to traffickers and even serve as cartel enforcers.

- (U//FOUO) The Mexican Government has boosted its military and law enforcement presence in Sonora since 2009, but so far has had little impact on smuggling and violence.

(U//FOUO) Drug and alien smuggling from Sonora, along with drug-related violence, almost certainly will continue at current or even higher levels over the next several years. Attempts to counter corruption and professionalize police forces may eventually pay dividends, but improvements will require years of sustained effort.

## **(U) Sonora: Gateway to Arizona**

(U//FOUO) Sonora—one of six Mexican states sharing a common border with the United States—is a principal theater for drug and alien smuggling. Violence has grown over the past two years as rival drug-trafficking organizations have disputed control of key *plazas*, or smuggling corridors, although the state lags far behind neighboring Chihuahua in drug-related murders. Sonora is the jumping-off point for aliens crossing into Arizona and part of the boot heel area of New Mexico; this region accounts for a large proportion of the undocumented migrants who perish in the rugged desert terrain while attempting illicit entry into the United States.

**(U) Sonora at a Glance**

(U) Sonora is the second largest Mexican state in geography but, with 2.2 million inhabitants, ranks only 19<sup>th</sup> in population. Its border with the United States extends for almost 375 miles and it has a 750-mile coastline on the Gulf of California. The Sonoran Desert dominates the northwestern part of the state, and the Sierra Madre Occidental range stretches along the eastern boundary with Chihuahua. Hermosillo, the capital, and Ciudad Obregon are the largest and economically most important cities.

(U) Export-oriented manufacturing drives the state's economy, with secondary contributions from mining, fishing, and agriculture. Tourism is an important industry, particularly in Nogales on the U.S. border and the beach resort Puerto Penasco on the Gulf of California.

## **(U) Drug Trafficking**

**(U//FOUO) Drug trafficking and associated violence represent the greatest threat to U.S. border security emanating from Sonora.** Local gatekeepers\* who maintain relationships with the larger cartels have long dominated the drug trade in the sparsely populated state. Rather than directly controlling trafficking operations, the regional cartels historically operated through in-state proxies and only recently have penetrated more directly into Sonora. As major cartels attempt to control Sonoran territory, they face the choice of co-opting local traffickers, sponsoring local proxies to move into new territory, or sending their own gunmen to remove competitors. Alliances generally are transitory, as the different drug-trafficking organizations frequently switch allegiances, and rivalries among the larger cartels exacerbate conflicts among local traffickers.

(U//FOUO) CBP seizure data suggest that marijuana is the drug most trafficked across the Sonora-Arizona border. Between 2004 and 2009, CBP seized 2,227 metric tons of marijuana in the Tucson and Yuma Sectors, amounting to 48 percent of total marijuana confiscations on the U.S. southwest border. Cocaine seizures during the same period amounted to 1,519 kilograms (5 percent of total cocaine confiscations on the U.S. southwest border) and methamphetamine seizures amounted to 114 kilograms (14 percent of total methamphetamine confiscations on the U.S. southwest border); heroin seizures were insignificant, according to CBP data. Marijuana seizures tripled from 2004 to 2009; however, cocaine seizures fell sharply in 2006-2008 and recovered somewhat in 2009.

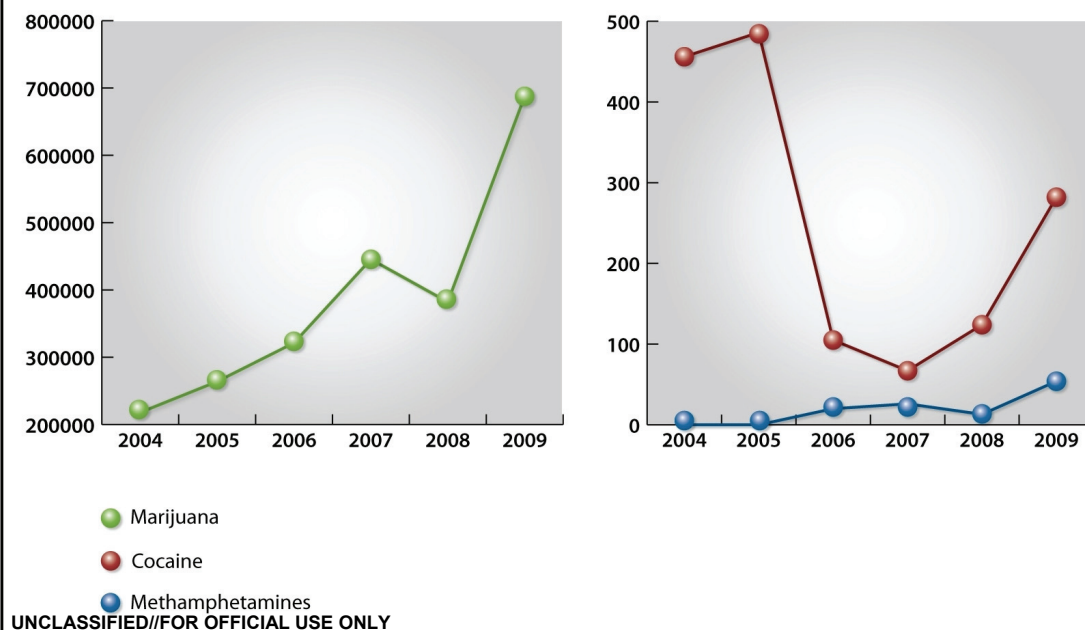
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\* (U) A gatekeeper organization is a group that controls illicit access to a specific geographic area, such as a border crossing. Gatekeepers may serve a variety of functions, including storing, transporting, smuggling, and protecting illegal drug shipments. In return, they collect fees for their services or keep a portion of the drug cargo. Gatekeepers may be independent, or they may be components of a larger drug-trafficking organization.



(U) Drug Seizures in Tucson and Yuma Sectors, 2004 - 2009  
(in Kilograms)

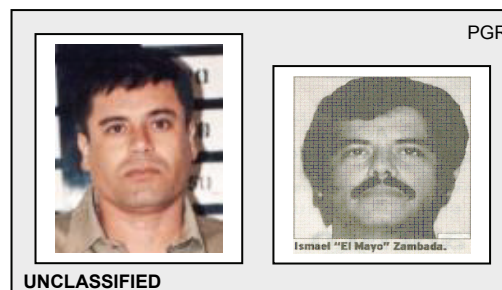
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(U) Although the traffickers' principal interest lies in penetrating the U.S. market, drugs increasingly are available to Sonora residents. A Mexican Government study concluded in 2008 that drug consumption in Sonora had increased by 30 percent in six years, according to the Mexican press.

## (U) The Sinaloa Cartel

(U//FOUO) The drug-trafficking organizations headed by Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia—both belonging to the loose confederation known as the Sinaloa cartel—have long had a large footprint in Sonora. Guzman Loera's group grows marijuana and produces methamphetamines in Sonora, according to FBI reporting. Smugglers then transport these products into the United States through POEs and hundreds of unofficial entry points in remote areas along the border.



(U) Joaquin Guzman Loera, left, and Ismael Zambada Garcia, Sinaloa cartel kingpins.

(U//LES) One of the Sinaloa cartel's most important allies in Sonora is the Paredes Machado organization, headquartered in Agua Prieta. This group smuggles marijuana using backpackers and ultralight aircraft, according to information provided by CBP and ICE sources.

(U//FOUO) *Las Jabalinas*, also known as *Los Javelinas*, an independent group headed by the Villagrana or Villagran family, has served as enforcer for several drug-trafficking organizations. By the end of 2009, *Las Jabalinas* dominated the smuggling corridor of Altar, Tubutama, and Saric, according to ICE reporting.

- (U) Federal Police in February 2010 arrested Jose "El Jabali" Vazquez Villagrana<sup>USPER</sup> on drug trafficking charges. Vazquez Villagrana reportedly had joined the U.S. military in 1990 and deserted a year after obtaining U.S. citizenship, according to the Mexican press. The presumed head of *Las Jabalinas*, Vazquez Villagrana claimed to have earned \$350,000 for each metric ton of cocaine that he moved from Oaxaca to the U.S. border.



(U) Jose "El Jabali" Vazquez Villagrana.

(U//LES) Other important Sinaloa cartel partners in Sonora include Felipe de Jesus “El Gigo” Sosa Canizales, Raul “El Negro” Sabori Cisneros, and Gilberto Palomeares Fierro, according to ICE and FBI reporting.

## **(U) The Beltran Leyva Organization**

(U//LES) In early 2008 the organization headed by Arturo “El Barbas” Beltran Leyva split from the Sinaloa cartel, aligned with Los Zetas—formerly the enforcement arm of the Gulf cartel but by now an independent organization—and began a bitter feud with Guzman Loera. As a result, violence between the two groups broke out in various states, including Sonora, where Beltran Leyva had a long history of influence.

- (U//FOUO) An October 2008 shootout between Sinaloa forces—captained by Jose Luis “El Quemado” Somosa Frasquillo—and Beltran Leyva elements left 10 gunmen dead, according to U.S. Consulate Hermosillo.

(U//FOUO) The Beltran Leyva organization got the worst of the battle with Guzman Loera in Sonora, and the death of Arturo Beltran Leyva in mid-December 2009 in a shootout with Mexican marines left a leadership vacuum—further complicating the organization’s ability to compete for control of the Sonora plazas.

## **(U) Routes and Methods**

(U//FOUO) Traffickers move drug shipments across the border both through and between Arizona POEs, using a variety of conveyances and adapting to changing practices by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement. The rugged, isolated landscape of the Arizona border facilitates smuggling, as do the open—and difficult to monitor—spaces of the Tohono O’odham Nation and federal lands such as the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.\* Because the region is sparsely populated, smugglers also can move contraband by air with little fear of being reported by inhabitants.

(U//FOUO) Traffickers move drugs into Sonora by various means. Marijuana and heroin grown in Sinaloa and Durango and South American cocaine arriving in Pacific ports are transported along Highway 15 to Nogales or split off on Highway 2 to San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora and to Mexicali and Tijuana, Baja California. In addition, traffickers use maritime routes to sparsely populated fishing villages on the Gulf of California or air routes to clandestine airstrips in Sonora.

- (U//LES) Local trafficker Sabori Cisneros receives drugs shipped by sea from Sinaloa to Puerto Penasco and transports them by truck to Sonoyta for onward movement to the United States, according to FBI reporting. Smugglers also use fast boats to deliver drugs to El Desemboque and Puerto Lobos on the Gulf of California, according to CBP reporting.

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\* (U//FOUO) For further information, see DHS Assessment, (U//FOUO) “Illicit Smuggling Activities from Mexico Threaten Tohono O’odham Nation,” 2 September 2009.

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(U//FOUO) Traffickers move their product into the United States from various staging areas. Although marijuana shipments typically pass between POEs, much of the other drugs transit POEs in vehicles, hidden in concealment devices. Two traffickers hire U.S. citizens to transport stolen vehicles from Phoenix to Mexico for \$500 or \$600 a trip. The vehicles are then loaded with drugs and driven back into the United States, according to FBI reporting.

- (U//FOUO) FBI reporting also indicates that trafficker Alfredo Valenzuela Martinez in March 2010 instructed his enforcers to steal sport utility vehicles and pickups with U.S. license plates for smuggling drugs into the United States and transporting gunmen in Sonora.
- (U//LES) Smugglers cut holes in the border fence or use ramps to allow vehicles to pass between POEs; they also move drugs—primarily marijuana—on horseback or with groups of backpackers, according to FBI and CBP reporting. Traffickers send radio-equipped scouts to monitor the movements of U.S. law enforcement and advise when the route is clear, according to CBP reporting.
- (U) A new highway from Puerto Penasco to El Golfo de Santa Clara that opened in December 2008 facilitates travel toward the border crossings at San Luis Rio Colorado and Mexicali. Mexican military personnel in April 2010 intercepted two tractor-trailers in Sonora en route to Mexicali containing almost 14 metric tons of marijuana, according to Army sources cited in the Mexican press.

(U//FOUO) Tunnels provide another means of access to the United States. As of March 2010, U.S. and Mexican authorities had uncovered 117 tunnels under the U.S. southwest border since 1990, according to CBP reporting. The Nogales area accounted for 66; Douglas and San Luis, two each; and Naco, one. Many were crude and short, connecting to a storm drain system shared by Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona; others were discovered before completion. Some had wooden shoring, ventilation systems, and lighting.

(U//FOUO) The cartels also deliver drugs by air. Reporting indicates aircraft fade out of radar coverage 25-50 miles from the U.S. border and apparently do not turn on their transponders. Often the aircraft reappear over Mexican territory within 30 minutes, suggesting that they drop their loads without landing.

- (U) Sonora has a highly developed infrastructure for smuggling by air, judging by the number of illicit airstrips the Mexican Government has identified. Between 2006 and May 2009, the military destroyed 641 airstrips in Sonora—the highest number for any Mexican state—according to information the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) provided to the Mexican press.

(U//LES) Traffickers increasingly use ultralight aircraft to land or drop drug loads in Arizona, according to CBP and ICE reporting. An ultralight can carry loads of 200-250 pounds of marijuana. According to FBI reporting, the Paredes Machado organization in mid-2009 was delivering 3,000 pounds a week to a drop zone near Douglas, Arizona.

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(U) Cartels often possess sophisticated technical equipment that gives them an advantage over government forces. In February 2007, for example, Mexican federal investigators discovered what they called an “espionage center” near Saric with computers, antennas, scanners, signal interceptors, and equipment for encrypting cell phone transmissions, according to the Mexican press.

- (U//LES) CBP officials sometimes confiscate night-vision goggles from smugglers.

## **(U) Violence Rising in Mexico, but Not in United States**

(U//FOUO) The conflict between the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels, exacerbated by the Beltran Leyva organization’s split from Guzman Loera and alliance with Los Zetas, has spawned growing violence in Sonora. U.S. Consulate Hermosillo and the Mexican press during the first half of 2007 reported a rise in drug-related homicides, deliberate targeting of police and judicial officials, and two grenade attacks on the offices of a leading newspaper.

### **(U) Counting Drug-Related Murders in Mexico**

(U//FOUO) The attribution of killings to drug traffickers is an inexact process, as evidenced by the varying totals reported by different Mexican Government agencies and newspapers. The reported data, however, are useful for providing an order of magnitude and identifying trends.

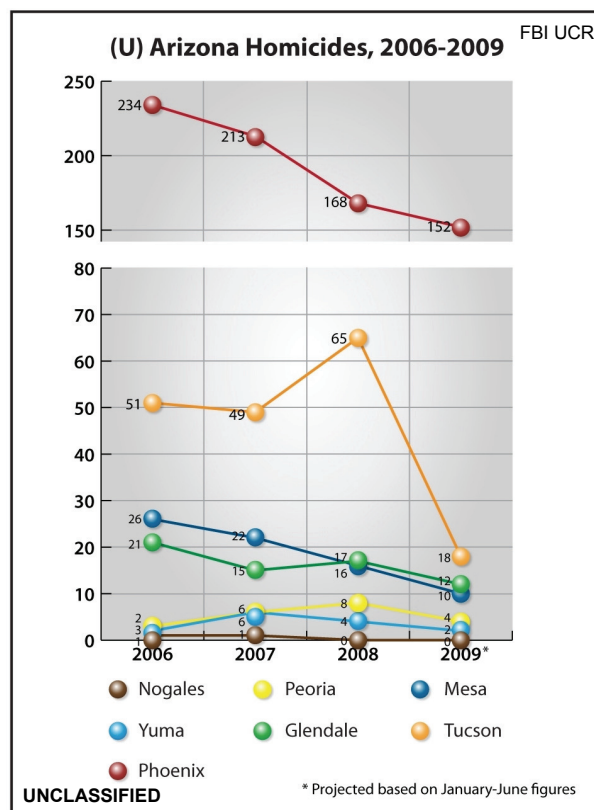
(U//FOUO) An upswing in violence in Sonora was attributed to competition between the Beltran Leyva organization and the Sinaloa cartel. Although top leaders of the two groups reportedly tried to limit the killings, local, less influential drug trade organizations competing for preeminence fueled the rising violence.

- (U) In early April 2010, an estimated 100 gunmen used tractor-trailers to block the highway between Hermosillo and Chihuahua and occupied the town of Maycoba, where they killed two persons and burned a state police facility, according to the Mexican press.
- (U) Gunmen in March 2010 killed the state police chief in Pesqueira and the deputy chief of the Nogales municipal police, according to the Mexican press.
- (U) Nearly simultaneous grenade attacks against police stations and commercial buildings took place in Hermosillo, Cananea, and Navojoa in early December 2009, according to the Mexican press, followed three weeks later with similar attacks against three public buildings in Ciudad Obregon.

(U//FOUO) Drug-related murders in Sonora numbered 61 in 2006 but rose to more than 360 in 2009. Some 326 more took place in the first half of 2010, according to figures compiled by a leading Mexico City daily. The border municipality of Nogales, roughly equivalent to a U.S. county, has experienced an increase in violence with just over 100 drug-related murders in 2008 and more than 120 in 2009. Moreover, the U.S. press reports more than 100 deaths during the first quarter of 2010, presaging a record year for drug violence in Nogales.

- (U) According to the U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council, Nogales during the last half of 2009 became the third most violent city along the U.S.-Mexico border—after Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana—and the seventh most violent city in Mexico.

(U//FOUO) Despite the increase in drug-related murders in Sonora, the DHS/Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) lacks information that indicates Mexican traffickers have directed any killings in Arizona. UCR data from 2006 through 2009 showed that homicides trended downward in four key cities—Glendale, Mesa, Phoenix, and Tucson; remained flat in Nogales; and increased only slightly in Peoria and Yuma. Available information does not link these murders directly to Mexican drug-trafficking organizations. Statistics compiled by the Arizona Department of Public Safety show statewide declines in all major crimes from 2008 to 2009—for example, murder (20 percent), aggravated assault (9 percent), burglary (8 percent), and motor vehicle theft (32 percent).



- (U) The March 2010 murder of an Arizona rancher by an unknown assailant whose tracks led back to Mexico—probably an alien or drug smuggler—is one of the few homicides that clearly have a cross-border connection. The case is still under investigation.
- (U//FOUO) Occasional reports of cartel plans to target U.S. law enforcement officers so far have come to naught. In May 2010, for example, the Sinaloa cartel sought information on a police officer in Sierra Vista, Arizona and an ICE agent. The same traffickers also discussed assassinating two DEA agents, according to FBI reporting.

(U) Beyond Arizona, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) examined UCR data on violent crimes—including murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault but not kidnapping—for 138 U.S. metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in which the National Drug Intelligence Center had identified the presence of Mexican traffickers. CRS analysis concluded that the violent crime rate has not significantly increased in any of those MSAs. Moreover, since 2001, the average

violent crime rate in eight selected border MSAs has generally declined, and has remained below the national violent crime rate since 2005.

(U//LES) ICE reporting indicates that a U.S.-based criminal organization has issued unspecified threats against ICE agents and other U.S. officials operating in Douglas and Sierra Vista, Arizona. Although ICE agents do not believe the threats emanate from Mexican drug traffickers, the U.S. criminal organization may be involved in trafficking.

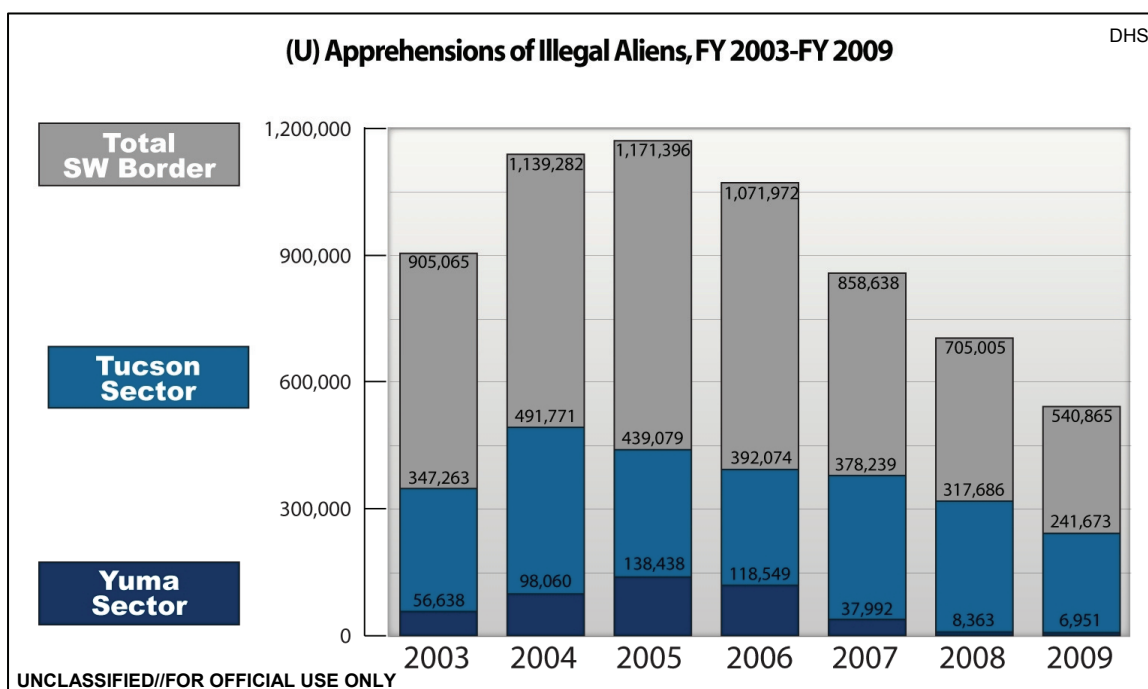
## **(U) Illegal Alien Flow Extensive**

**(U//FOUO) Although drug smuggling and associated violence are currently the most serious threats to the security of the U.S. southwest border, alien smuggling and illegal migration also are concerns.** Many undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants, and other foreigners who come to Mexico through international networks, transit Hermosillo en route to border towns where smugglers make contact and offer to guide them into the United States.

- (U) U.S. citizens and legal residents sometimes participate. In April 2010, for example, ICE and other U.S. law enforcement officers arrested individuals who operated shuttle van businesses in Tucson and Phoenix for moving undocumented migrants, according to an ICE news release.

(U//FOUO) Apprehensions provide one indication of the ebb and flow of illegal aliens across the U.S. southwest border. The Tucson Sector consistently has registered the most apprehensions among all southwest border sectors since at least FY 2003, according to CBP data. Apprehensions in Tucson Sector peaked at 492,000 in FY 2004 and by FY 2009 had ebbed by almost 50 percent to its lowest level in seven fiscal years. Apprehensions in the Yuma Sector peaked at 138,000 in FY 2005 and by FY 2009 had fallen by 95 percent, almost certainly reflecting improvements to the border fence.

- (U//FOUO) The decline in the Tucson and Yuma Sectors reflects the reduction in total southwest border apprehensions by more than 50 percent, the result of improved enforcement and the worsening employment climate in the United States.

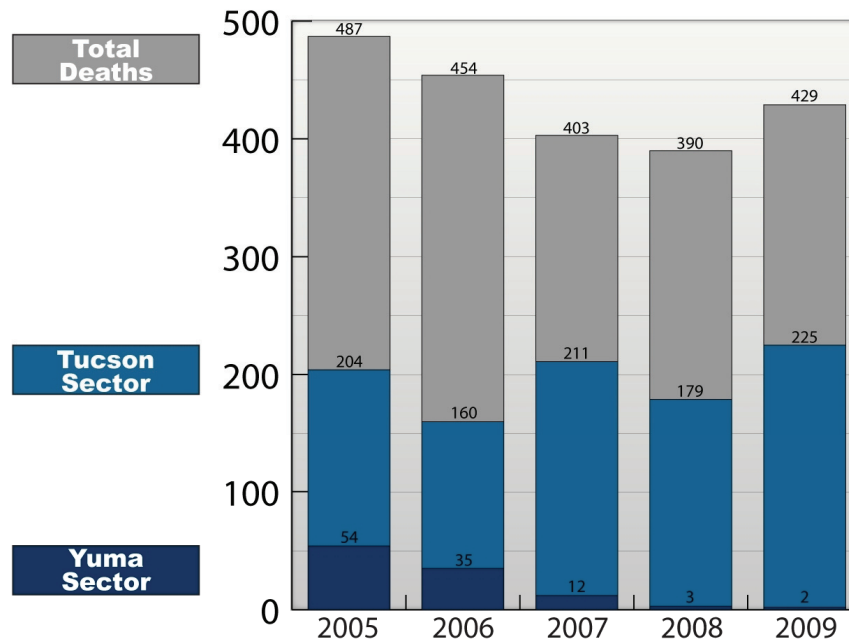


(U//FOUO) Although Mexicans constitute the overwhelming majority of illegal aliens transiting Sonora en route to the United States, the number of Chinese aliens apprehended on the Arizona border has spiked recently.

- (U//LES) During FY 2009 CBP apprehended 332 Chinese nationals in the Tucson Sector, compared to 38 in each of FY 2008 and FY 2007. The increase most likely resulted from both improved enforcement in the United States and the emergence of new smuggling routes inside Mexico.

(U//LES) Small organizations handle the movement of some undocumented aliens from Sonora into the United States, paying fees to drug traffickers for permission to cross their controlled territories, according to CBP reporting. When planning to move a drug load, the cartel that controls the plaza sometimes halts alien smuggling for several days in hopes of diminishing U.S. Border Patrol monitoring of the area, according to CBP reporting.

- (U//FOUO) Bandits and unscrupulous smugglers often prey on the migrants, many of whom perish during the hazardous crossing of the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. An average of 217 migrants died in the Tucson and Yuma Sectors each year from FY 2005 to FY 2009, accounting for 43 to 55 percent of total migrant deaths on the U.S. southwest border, according to CBP data.

**(U) Migrant Deaths on Southwest Border, 2005-2009**

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(U//FOUO) At least six Sonoran locales serve as major staging areas for smuggling aliens into the United States, according to a review of all-source reporting. Different alien-smuggling organizations—each with its own blend of tactics, techniques, and practices—use these locales. Some organizations provide fraudulent documents so migrants can pass through POEs, but most aliens probably try to cross at unguarded portions of the border.

### **(U) Nogales**

(U//LES) Nogales is one of the most active areas for alien smuggling, in large part because migrants can use storm drains shared by Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona. Some use ropes to scale the international boundary fence, according to CBP reporting.

(U//LES) Yadira “La Tia” Gutierrez Leyva, aka Yadira Ester Huitron, long controlled thousands of migrants as they arrived in Nogales, Sonora, and she assigned them to alien smugglers responsible for shepherding them across the border, according to CBP and FBI reporting. As of November 2008, Gutierrez Leyva worked for the Beltran Leyva drug-trafficking organization, collecting \$1,000-\$1,500 each week from alien smugglers and \$1,000 for each marijuana load.



(U) Eastern Arizona-Sonora border.

(U) Sonoran authorities in April 2008 arrested alien smuggler Rita Lugo Almada in Nogales, according to the Mexican press. She confessed that she used border crossing cards—possibly altered with substitute photographs—to transport children into the United States, charging as much as \$1,000 per child.

(U//LES) CBP agents in November 2009 obtained information on tactics used by an unidentified alien-smuggling organization that moves migrants through Nogales. Judging that a vehicle with only two passengers would attract less scrutiny, the smugglers hire a U.S. citizen to drive a single undocumented alien, bearing a border crossing card provided by the organization, through the POE and along U.S. highways. The organization runs surveillance on a U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint to determine whether vehicle inspections are being conducted. The smugglers send larger groups of migrants in vans and other vehicles during inclement weather, calculating that inspections will be more lax.

(U//LES) An undocumented Mexican national apprehended in October 2008 provided information on an alien-smuggling organization based in Dallas. Smugglers, aided by Mexican police officers, took groups of aliens across the border on the west side of Nogales and guided them during a six- to eight-hour walk to a safehouse in Rio Rico, Arizona and on to Phoenix by vehicle, according to CBP reporting.

## **(U) Naco**

(U//FOUO) Naco, Sonora serves as a staging area for infiltrating undocumented aliens into the area around Naco, Arizona.

- (U//LES) An unidentified individual known by the nickname “El Raspa” heads one of the most active alien-smuggling organizations in the Naco area, according to CBP reporting. One of his employees hides undocumented aliens in washes near the border and scouts the terrain before leading his charges into the United States, where drivers pick them up and transport them onward. As of mid-2009, El Raspa lived in Sinaloa and periodically visited Sonora to check on his business. According to CBP reporting, cartels restrict the activities of El Raspa and other alien smugglers to a certain area of the border to avoid interference with drug-trafficking operations.
- (U//LES) Other important smugglers are Barnabe “El Guero” Yanez Mora, based in Phoenix, and Jose Chacon Castellon, according to CBP reporting. The Arizona state government in February 2008 smashed another alien-smuggling organization led by two U.S. citizens. The smugglers infiltrated 12-40 undocumented migrants daily, charging \$2,500 for each, according to a press release from the Arizona Office of the Attorney General. They brought the aliens through the San Pedro River Riparian National Conservation Area west of Naco and Bisbee, Arizona.

(U//LES) An alien-smuggling organization with unidentified leadership as of mid-2007 guided migrants across the border west of Naco—often through the Coronado National Memorial—and through the Huachuca Mountains, using scouts to monitor the movements of U.S. enforcement teams. According to CBP reporting, this group seemingly had adjusted to the schedule of the U.S. Border Patrol unmanned aerial vehicle that operates in the vicinity of Sonoita, Arizona.

(U//LES) Improved enforcement and the U.S. economic downturn have had an impact on smuggling in the Naco area. One of Chacon Castellon’s employees in April 2008 told U.S. Border Patrol agents that the new border wall had delayed entry time into the United States, requiring that he use a longer route. As of September 2009, hotels in Naco, Sonora were empty and restaurants had closed for lack of customers, according to CBP reporting.

## **(U) Agua Prieta**

(U//LES) Agua Prieta receives two streams of migrants making their way across Sonora and Chihuahua. Smugglers move them into the United States on either side of Douglas, Arizona.

- (U//LES) Placido Ortiz and Jose Luis “El Cochi” Daniel head two of the leading alien-smuggling organizations. Key target cities include Willcox, Arizona and Animas, New Mexico, where migrants are kept until transportation to other U.S. cities is available, according to CBP and ICE reporting.

- (U//FOUO) A third smuggler—a woman known as Ajeda—uses fraudulent papers to move aliens through the Pan American POE in Douglas, according to FBI reporting.
- (U//LES) Jesus Carlos Guadarrama Greer also smuggles undocumented migrants in the Douglas area. Mexican authorities in 2002 shut down his hotel in Agua Prieta and fined him \$500,000, according to CBP reporting; after fleeing to the United States for some time, he returned to Agua Prieta and by 2008 had resumed operations.

(U//LES) Smugglers in Agua Prieta—like those operating at other locations along the U.S. southwest border—send scouts with binoculars and radios to track U.S. Border Patrol agents and direct movements accordingly. One group uses dogs to distract motion-activated cameras and shield the passage of aliens, according to a CBP debriefing of an apprehended migrant. Some migrants walk for up to 14 hours during the border crossing; often they remain in stash houses in Douglas until smugglers move them to Phoenix.

## **(U) Altar and Sasabe**

(U//FOUO) Altar, for more than a decade, has been a key staging area for illegal immigration to the United States; support for travelers is the town's primary business, according to U.S. Embassy Mexico City. Kiosks—selling clothing, hiking shoes, insect repellent, suntan lotion, backpacks, and energy bars—and inexpensive hotels and restaurants cater to undocumented migrants.

- (U//FOUO) A robust fleet of vans and buses transports migrants to Sasabe on the border, from where smugglers guide them across the desert, often passing through the Tohono O'odham Nation.

(U//LES) Jose Ramirez, known as the primary alien smuggler in Altar, worked in collaboration with a U.S. citizen as of March 2009 and specialized in bringing migrants from Chiapas in southern Mexico, according to CBP reporting. Ramirez smuggled undocumented aliens into the United States through properties owned by the U.S. citizen in San Miguel, Arizona, on Tohono O'odham Nation lands—a distance covered in less than three hours on foot.

(U//LES) A Brazilian national, Fabio Coelho Assuncao, formerly operated in Reynosa, Tamaulipas but had moved his smuggling business to Altar by the first half of 2008, according to CBP reporting. A detained Brazilian national told CBP officers that Assuncao had guided him across the Guatemala-Mexico border and turned him over to a confederate who drove him and other aliens to Sasabe. Assuncao charged \$8,000 for his services, which included providing counterfeit Texas identification and employment authorization cards. Migrants with clean immigration records used fraudulent documents to enter the United States through a POE; otherwise, they jumped the fence.

(U//LES) As of mid-2008, a smuggler known only as Beto ran another organization in Sonora. His employees approached migrants at the Hermosillo airport, guided them across the border west of San Miguel, and took them to Tucson, according to CBP reporting.

## (U) Sonoita

(U//LES) The Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument provides a largely deserted terrain that alien smugglers based in Sonoita, Sonora exploit.

- (U//LES) Guzman Loera reportedly controlled drug and alien smuggling through Sonoita as of May 2009, according to CBP reporting. Luis Paez Sanchez of the Paez Soto drug-trafficking organization, however, seemed to be taking over operations from Guzman Loera's subordinate, Leonardo "Compa Chuy" Garibaldi Lopez. Paez Sanchez reportedly is a ruthless enforcer who uses extreme violence against alien-smuggling organizations to prevent unwanted attention to the area.



(U) Western Arizona-Sonora border.

- (U//LES) The Cerro Negro organization, headed by a man known as Gavilan, in 2008 recruited two scouts who spent a month at a time on a hill west of the Tohono O'odham Nation. After their detention, they told U.S. Border Patrol agents they received \$250 for each vehicle or group that passed. Their equipment included cellular phones and solar panels for charging a two-way radio, and they had adequate supplies of food and water.
- (U//LES) A smuggler known as Luis recruited a Mexican woman to transport undocumented aliens to Ajo, Arizona; she had made five trips before her arrest in February 2008, receiving \$500 per trip, according to CBP reporting.

## **(U) San Luis Rio Colorado**

(U//LES) The area of San Luis Rio Colorado apparently sees less traffic than locales farther east. A street gang known as *Los Wonders* traffics in illegal aliens just west of the San Luis POE, according to CBP reporting.

## **(U) Bulk Cash and Weapons Smuggling**

(U//FOUO) A steady supply of cash—the proceeds of drug sales in the United States—and weapons is essential to the cartels' operations, leading to the southbound movement of both across the border into Mexico.

(U) Seizures of bulk currency in Arizona soared from \$1.1 million in FY 2008 to \$4.9 million in FY 2009, according to a CBP spokesman who attributed the increase to more rigorous screening of Mexico-bound traffic.

- (U//LES) In one notable case, CBP officers at the DiConcini POE in Nogales in March 2009 discovered \$1.45 million concealed in the roof of a vehicle. The driver said he had received \$4,000 to drive the vehicle from Phoenix to Sinaloa. In another incident in Nogales, CBP officers in May 2010 seized \$300,000 from a U.S. citizen traveling to Mexico.
- (U//FOUO) As of September 2009, the Marcos Paredes drug-trafficking organization reportedly smuggled \$1 million each week from New York to Agua Prieta, transiting the Douglas POE, according to an FBI collaborative source.

(U//FOUO) Although most illegal weapons probably originate in Texas and cross the border between Brownsville and El Paso, Arizona also has a significant arms trade. Sonora in late 2008 ranked fourth among Mexican states in the volume of weapons and ammunition seized, according to a Mexican Government report cited in the Mexican press. On the U.S. side, the Tucson and Yuma Sectors accounted for 34 percent of the weapons confiscated by U.S. Border Patrol and CBP/Office of Field Operations in FY 2007-FY 2009, according to CBP data.

## **(U) Inadequate Government Capabilities**

(U//FOUO) Organized crime poses an enormous challenge to Mexican federal, state, and local governments along the U.S. border, including those of Sonora. The vast resources of the cartels—estimated by U.S. authorities at \$18-38 billion a year—dwarf those of government entities, which are playing a catch-up game in improving technological tools and building effective institutions. Extensive official corruption further complicates government efforts.

## **(U) Corruption an Endemic Problem**

(U//FOUO) Sonora, like other Mexican states, suffers the effects of official corruption—particularly among police departments. The National Index of Corruption and Good Government for 2007, prepared by the Mexican chapter of Transparency International, ranked Sonora—in a tie with Nuevo Leon—as the eighth least corrupt among Mexico’s 31 states and the Federal District. Nonetheless, drug traffickers have suborned officials at every level in Sonora.

(U//FOUO) For years, accusations of corruption have followed former Governor Jose Eduardo Bours Castelo (2003-2009), a member of the opposition Institutional Revolutionary Party. According to a Mexican news magazine citing an Office of the Attorney General (PGR) report, the PGR in 2008 was investigating his family’s extensive business interests, which include hotels, fertilizer, mining, poultry, and seafood. Bours Castelo allegedly protected Sinaloa cartel operations in Sonora, and Mexican authorities seized two dozen of the family’s poultry delivery trucks carrying cocaine and marijuana in an 18-month period.

(U//FOUO) Guillermo Padres Elias of the government National Action Party won election to the governorship in July 2009 and assumed office on 13 September 2009. DHS/I&A has no reports indicating that he is corrupt.

(U) Corruption permeates Sonoran law enforcement. In July 2009, authorities arrested four state police officers on charges of organized crime and drug trafficking, according to an Hermosillo daily.

(U//FOUO) Corruption is most extensive at the municipal level. Mexican press accounts indicate that officers in several cities have been charged with murder, kidnapping, extortion, robbery, and alien smuggling.

## **(U) State Government Proceeding Slowly**

(U//FOUO) The Sonoran Government has done relatively little to stem drug trafficking—a federal offense—and associated violence. Soon after taking office in September 2009, Governor Guillermo Padres Elias convened a meeting of state employees, the Federal Police, and civil institutions to discuss a campaign against crime. From the conference emerged a series of promises to secure schools and other public spaces, diminish drug consumption, strengthen communities, and foster respect for the police, according to an Hermosillo daily. Pursuing these long-term goals is unlikely to yield rapid improvements in public security.

- (U) Despite concern among state and municipal police that Padres Elias would turn to the military for law enforcement tasks, the governor publicly stated in early December 2009 that military forces would merely patrol highways and rural secondary roads.

(U//FOUO) Sonora has two state-level police forces—the State Investigative Police, which principally investigates murder, extortion, and kidnapping; and the State Preventive Police (PEP), which patrols and arrests suspects. Neither deals with drug and weapons trafficking or organized crime, areas in which the federal government has jurisdiction.

- (U) Padres Elias proposed to add an additional 400 officers to the state police—apparently the PEP—and hiring began in January 2010, according to an Hermosillo daily.

## **(U) Federal Efforts**

(U//FOUO) The principal federal entities combating organized crime in Sonora are the military and the Federal Police. Military forces from elsewhere in Mexico—rather than troops stationed in Sonora—typically carry out counterdrug operations, sometimes in conjunction with Federal Police. Soldiers patrol highways and urban streets, set up checkpoints, conduct raids, and seize not only illicit drugs and weapons but also traffickers' aircraft, vehicles, and cash.

- (U//FOUO) The army inspects aircraft to verify documentation and search for drug traces. As a result of these inspections, in late 2008 the military confiscated 19 small planes in Ciudad Obregon and 11 near Novojoa, according to the Mexican press.
- (U//LES) Military officials in mid-2009 created a new border checkpoint near Querobabi, with gamma ray and X-ray machines, computer terminals in each of four traffic lanes, covered inspection areas, holding cells, and storage for evidence, according to CBP reporting. Army soldiers at this checkpoint in April 2010 intercepted 428 kilograms of cocaine, 128 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 16 kilograms of an opium-derived substance, hidden in a shipment of detergents and fabric softener, according to the Mexican press.

(U) As violence rose in Nogales, the mayor in February 2010 asked for additional Federal Police officers to reinforce the 100 already on site; he offered land for the construction of a barracks to shelter a total of 300, according to a local newspaper.

- (U) An additional 500 Federal Police officers began arriving in Sonora in early June 2010, according to the Mexican press. About half were destined for Nogales, and the remainder distributed among Agua Prieta, Naco, Altar, and Sasabe.

(U//FOUO) Military and Federal Police operations in Sonora have resulted in the arrest of cartel gunmen, the confiscation of illegal drugs, and the dismantling of several drug labs. Drug violence continues to climb, however, and the drug-smuggling infrastructure apparently remains intact.

## **(U) Outlook**

(U//FOUO) Drug and alien smuggling from Sonora almost certainly will continue at current or even higher levels over the next several years. The Calderon administration's failure to control violence in Ciudad Juarez after two years of heavy military and police deployment suggests that the Mexican Government lacks the capacity to dampen trafficking and related violence in Sonora. Attempts to counter corruption and professionalize police forces may eventually pay dividends, but improvements will require years of sustained effort.

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(U) DHS and the FBI encourage recipients of this document to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to the nearest State and Local Fusion Center and to the local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force. State and Local Fusion Center contact information can be found online at [http://www.dhs.gov/files/resources/editorial\\_0306.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/resources/editorial_0306.shtm). The FBI regional telephone numbers can be found online at <http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm> and the DHS National Operations Center (NOC) can be reached by telephone at 202-282-9685 or by e-mail at [NOC.Fusion@dhs.gov](mailto:NOC.Fusion@dhs.gov). For information affecting the private sector and critical infrastructure, contact the National Infrastructure Coordinating Center (NICC), a sub-element of the NOC. The NICC can be reached by telephone at 202-282-9201 or by e-mail at [NICC@dhs.gov](mailto:NICC@dhs.gov). When available, each report submitted should include the date, time, location, type of activity, number of people and type of equipment used for the activity, the name of the submitting company or organization, and a designated point of contact.

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