



**SAN DIEGO - LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATION CENTER
GANG TEAM**

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(U//LES//NOFORN) Tactics of the Tijuana Cartel: An Analysis of Ambush Attacks on Tijuana Law Enforcement

(U) Executive Summary

(U//FOUO) The intent of this bulletin is to provide Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) with a general knowledge of ambush tactics used by the Tijuana Cartel against Mexican LEOs in Tijuana, Mexico. The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) Officer Safety Bulletin dated October 3, 2010, outlining Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations' (DTOs) and San Diego street gangs' use of Tijuana Cartel tactics in San Diego County, identified a need for a more comprehensive review of cartel tactics used south of the U.S. border.¹ Information contained in this bulletin is not to be further disseminated without prior approval from the SD-LECC Gang Team, which can be reached at (858) 495-7298.

(U//LES//NOFORN) Tijuana DTOs and San Diego Street Gang Collaboration

(U//LES//NOFORN) Recent incidents in San Diego County involving Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and San Diego street gangs have highlighted a potential increased threat to law enforcement personnel. A SDPD investigation revealed credible information that Mexican DTOs in collaboration with San Diego street gangs are using sophisticated counter surveillance techniques and are willing to use armed ambush assaults to protect drug shipments.²

(U//LES//NOFORN) In one incident, a Mexican DTO enforcement cell comprised of Tijuana Cartel and San Diego street gang members was assigned to protect narcotics shipments north of the border. The enforcement cell misidentified a SDPD undercover unit as a competing DTO 'rip crew.' Rip crews attempt to confront or assault enforcement cells in an effort to steal the narcotics shipments of other DTOs. In this incident, the DTO enforcement cell demonstrated mobile counter-surveillance techniques, such as varying vehicle speeds, switching lanes, and rotating vehicles in the convoy, to identify the vehicles following the drug shipment.³

(U//LES//NOFORN) SDPD received credible information that the leadership of this DTO enforcement cell mistook the undercover law enforcement personnel for an opposing cartel ‘rip crew.’ Using push-to-talk communications, the enforcement cell called for additional San Diego street gang members to recover automatic weapons from a San Diego stash house and move to a preplanned location in Southeast San Diego. The cartel convoy then attempted to lead the suspected ‘rip crew,’ in this case undercover SDPD Officers, into an ambush at the preplanned location.⁴

(U//LES) Tijuana Cartel Tactics Used Against Mexican LEOs

(U//LES) During 2009, there were 43 documented cases of armed assaults against members of the Tijuana, Mexico law enforcement resulting in homicide. Of the 43 cases, less than 12 percent have been resolved.⁵ Tactics, techniques, and procedures used by the Tijuana Cartel and presented in this document are derived from open source reporting and Mexican law enforcement homicide cases from 2009. This bulletin attempts to identify commonalities across the large number of successful attacks to determine some base-line tactics used by the Mexican cartels.



A 2009 cartel arrest in Tijuana, Mexico. The layout shows many of the weapons commonly used to conduct attacks against Mexican law enforcement. Photo: Gente Actualidad

(U//FOUO) Preoperational Planning

(U//FOUO) In many of the 2009 case studies, the tactics, techniques, and procedures used by the Tijuana Cartel and other DTOs to attack Mexican law enforcement suggests a high level of training and preoperational planning. Although a small percentage of the attacks appear to be randomly targeted LEOs on patrol, the majority of investigations revealed that the attacks, especially complex attacks, were at preplanned locations often targeting specific members of the Tijuana law enforcement community.⁶ Mexican investigations and interviews of suspects related to these attacks have uncovered the cartel use of former Mexican LEOs and military personnel involved in planning, training, and participating in assaults against current law enforcement and opposition cartels.⁷

(U//FOUO) The Basics

(U//LES//NOFORN) The majority of attacks against LEOs were vehicle borne attacks, either shooting from the vehicle or deploying from multiple vehicles. During 2009, cartels operated in convoys of two to five vehicles and targeted as many as six



June 17, 2009 a Tijuana Municipal Police, Sub-Commander was killed in a vehicle ambush.

LEOs at a time. The convoys make use of point vehicles and, in several cases, have used a rear security vehicle during an attack. Push-to-talk cellular phones and/or walkie-talkies are used to facilitate communications between vehicles during an operation.⁸

(U//LES//NOFORN) Several of the attacks analyzed are located on wide streets with two lanes heading in each direction. The wider streets allow the attackers to separate vehicles in the convoy in a variety of roles, such as blocking the streets, restricting target movement, and clearing pre-planned escape routes. The use of blocking vehicles around the attack isolates the victim in the “kill zone.” The attacks employ multiple shooters armed with rifles, pistols, and submachine guns. The most common assault weapons are the AK-47 (7.62X39) and the M4/AR15 (.223) variants. Several cases reported the use of body armor and law enforcement uniforms during the attack. Shot patterns, attack methods, and ultimately the numerous successful attacks against LEOs in Tijuana suggest DTOs have been trained and continue to train in small unit tactics and use of firearms.

(U//LES//NOFORN) Types of Ambushes

(U//LES//NOFORN) The three recurring types of ambushes used during 2009 were the blind-spot, ‘laying in wait,’ and a complex mobile ambush. All three types of attacks are designed to take the victims by surprise, limit the victim’s mobility, and engage with overwhelming fire-power. These factors isolate victims or drive them into a “kill zone,” decreasing the victim’s ability to respond to the assault. In several cases, the attackers advanced on a downed or injured LEO to ensure the attack resulted in a fatality.

(U//LES//NOFORN) The Blind Spot is a vehicle-to-vehicle tactic used in seven attacks during 2009. Attackers attempt to approach the target vehicle from the driver’s side, moving into the drivers ‘blind spot.’ Once in position, multiple shooters from the assault vehicle fire into the target vehicle attempting to incapacitate the vehicle during the initial contact. In several case studies, the shooters left the assault vehicle to deliver a “coup de grace” or final series of shots to the wounded LEO.



Photos: Three successful ‘blind spot’ attacks against Mexican LEOs in 2009. The yellow lines depict the line of fire from the attacker’s vehicles.

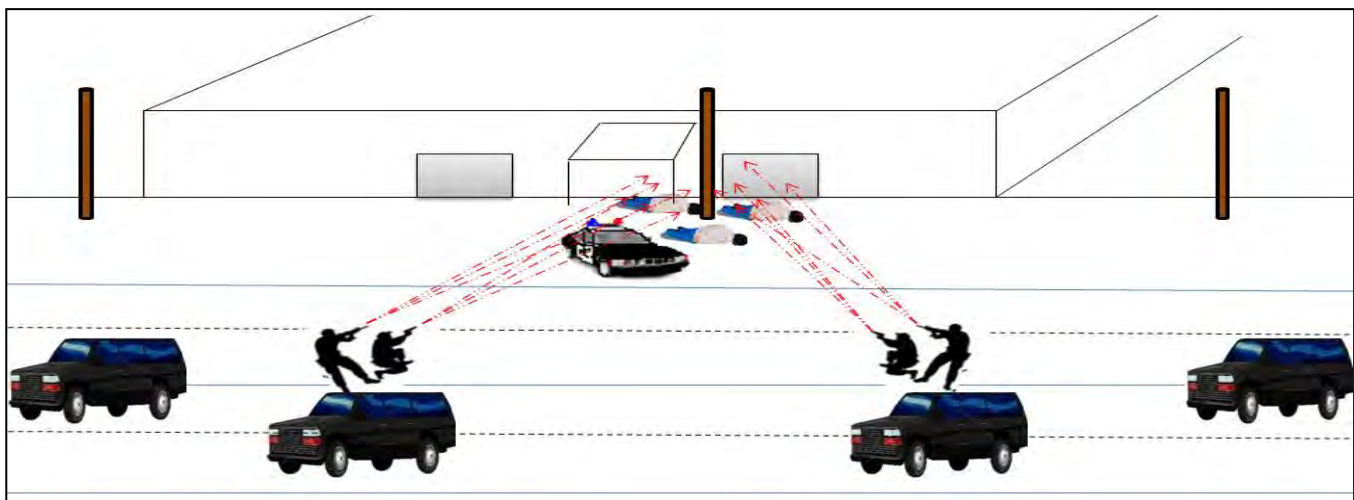
(U//LES//NOFORN) The ‘Laying in Wait’ ambush is a preplanned attack where cartel members are static in a designated location prior to the arrival of the intended victim or victims. This type of tactic requires moderate level pre-operational surveillance and intelligence collection in order to become familiar with routes, identify choke points, and escape routes. The attackers need to have knowledge of when and where law enforcement personnel will be at a specific time in order to organize the assault.



April 27, 2009 seven law enforcement officer in Tijuana, Mexico were killed in a single night.

(U//LES//NOFORN) The Tijuana law enforcement investigations and open source reporting identify three types of victims of a ‘laying in wait’ attack during 2009. The first are LEOs targeted based on regular patrol routes.⁹ The second are specific officers targeted for their involvement or their refusal to participate in cartel activities. In several cases, it is suspected that current or former members of Mexican law enforcement provided the information required to successfully target these individual officers.¹⁰ Lastly, at least two cases involved the use of the Tijuana emergency 066 telephone number (9-1-1 equivalent in the U.S.) to lure Municipal Police into a waiting ambush.¹¹ One such ambush in the San Antonio de los Buenos precinct of Tijuana resulted in injury to numerous LEOs and bystanders.¹²

(U//LES//NOFORN) The **Complex Mobile Ambush** is a small convoy tactic used to create a “kill zone” covered by automatic weapons fire from two interlocking directions. In addition, the cartel members often use point and trail vehicles to block the roads, further isolating the victim. In many cases, the vehicles used in the ambush were found abandoned, along with weapons and body armor, in a nearby neighborhood. Officers targeted with a complex ambush were often in static security positions or had stopped at a location such as a convenience store.¹³



Complex Mobile Ambush

(U//LES//NOFORN) Counter Ambush Techniques

(U//LES//NOFORN) This bulletin is not intended to provide guidance or training in counter ambush or counter surveillance techniques to U.S. law enforcement. However, certain overarching principals pertaining to officer safety in an ambush situation have been outlined below.

(U//LES//NOFORN) In the Field:

- Keep the vehicle moving, never stop in the “kill zone”
- Always turn into the vehicle in the direction of a **Blind Side** ambush
- Keep your front seat clear to lay down or exit either door if under fire
- Consider your vehicle an offensive weapon
- When possible, travel in the far left lane
- Have one car length between you and the car in front of you while stopped in traffic
- Check mirrors for surveillance vehicles (especially SUVs and Vans)
- Watch for more than one vehicle traveling in tandem
- Alternate daily routine and routes
- Appoint a ‘counter-surveillance officer’ as part of a team during operations
- Conduct random security checks of law enforcement stations
- When there is an overt threat, use ‘overwatch’ techniques on calls, stops, and operations

(U//LES//NOFORN) In Training and Off-Duty Hours:

- Periodically conduct counter-surveillance training
- Practice vehicle-based shooting scenarios
- Train to respond to multiple ambush scenarios
- Develop, implement, and update a security plan for both home and duty hours

(U) Conclusion

(U//FOUO) The use of cartel ambush tactics and techniques against San Diego law enforcement is currently assessed low. The potential for San Diego and Imperial county law enforcement being targeted as a case of mistaken identity as a competing cartel or ‘rip crew’ is assessed as moderate based on the recent events in the San Diego region. Considering recent reporting of Mexican DTO and San Diego street gang collaboration, law enforcement operating in an undercover or surveillance capacity should consider increased surveillance and counter-surveillance training.

(U) Intelligence Gaps

(U//LES) It is unknown if any other incidents have occurred involving San Diego law enforcement (while performing surveillance or undercover duties) being targeted by criminal organizations because of mistaken identity.

(U//LES) The extent of the Tijuana Cartel or other Mexican cartels collaborating with San Diego region street gangs is currently unknown.

(U//LES) It is unknown whether Mexican Cartels have been or will in the future provide training to San Diego street gangs on subjects such as weapons, ambush tactics, surveillance, and counter surveillance.

(U//FOUO) *For comments or questions on this product, or for approval to further disseminate any of the information contained in this bulletin, please contact the SD-LECC Gang Team at (858) 495-7298.*

To report suspected terrorism-related incidents or suspicious activity, please contact the San Diego Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) at (858) 565-1255.

¹ (U//LES//NOFORN) San Diego Police Department, Criminal Intelligence Unit, *Intelligence Briefing*, "Cartel Counter Assault Operations-tactics, Officer Safety Information," 03 August 2010.

² (U//LES//NOFORN) San Diego Police Department, Criminal Intelligence Unit, *Intelligence Briefing*, "Cartel Counter Assault Operations-tactics, Officer Safety Information," 03 August 2010.

³ (U//LES//NOFORN) San Diego Police Department, Criminal Intelligence Unit, *Intelligence Briefing*, "Cartel Counter Assault Operations-tactics, Officer Safety Information," 03 August 2010.

⁴ (U//LES//NOFORN) San Diego Police Department, Criminal Intelligence Unit, *Intelligence Briefing*, "Cartel Counter Assault Operations-tactics, Officer Safety Information," 03 August 2010.

⁵ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Only 12% of Attacks Against Law Enforcement in Tijuana Resolved," *Frontera*, 19 April 2009.

⁶ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Police Official Killed in Playas de Tijuana," *El Sol de Tijuana*, 06 April 2009.

⁷ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Police Officers Confess to Murdering Colleagues," *Frontera*, 30 August 2009.

⁸ (U//LES//NOFORN) San Diego Police Department, Criminal Intelligence Unit, *Intelligence Briefing*, "Cartel Counter Assault Operations-tactics, Officer Safety Information," 03 August 2010.

⁹ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Armed Attacks Claim the Lives of Two Police Officers," 2009-005.

¹⁰ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Police Officers Confess to Murdering Colleagues," 30 August 2009

¹¹ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Tijuana Police Official Killed," *Frontera*, 18 December 2009.

¹² SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Brazen Attack Provokes Anger and Outrage," *El Mexicano*, 25 October 2009

¹³ SD-LECC, *Articles of Interest in the Mexican Press*, "Seven Police Officers Murdered in Tijuana," 29 April 2009.