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Massive Methamphetamine Seizure

Three junior officers of the Mexican military and 10 enlisted men were arrested at a military checkpoint just south of Tijuana, Baja California state, March 3 after they were found in possession of 928 kilograms (more than 2,000 pounds) of methamphetamine and 30 kilograms of cocaine.

While corruption is rampant across Mexico's law enforcement sector, it is far less common for Mexican military personnel to be linked to the drug cartels. This is due in part to the military's being an arm of the Mexican federal government and not subject to frequent budgetary shortfalls that tend to make state and municipal police more susceptible to bribery. The Mexican army also was not heavily involved in counter-cartel operations until mid-2008, but as it has become more involved in the fight against the cartels, the cartels have responded by increasing their recruitment of military personnel.

Based on data provided by the U.S. Justice Department's National Drug Intelligence Center, the estimated street value of the methamphetamine seized March 3 is \$81,401,000. The estimated street value of the seized cocaine is \$2,212,500. The sheer value of the shipment would explain why the cartel that owned it chose to use active-duty soldiers to guard it instead of traditional cartel gunmen, even though it would cost the cartel more to use the soldiers for such a task. And the consequences of such a loss will likely be severe for whoever is deemed responsible. A thorough "mole hunt" is no doubt being conducted by the cartel to find and kill any individuals who may have provided the intelligence that made the seizure possible.

Given the high value of methamphetamine, heroin and cocaine, shipments are normally kept smaller than the one seized on March 3. That the shipment was so large indicates the organization moving it was either confident it would get through or very desperate. The cartel to which the drugs belonged has yet to be identified, but it could have been La Familia Michoacana (LFM), which has tended to specialize in synthetic-drug production. The organization has fragmented since leader Nazario "El Mas Loco" Moreno Gonzalez was killed Dec. 10 in a federal police operation. As a result, LFM labs may have slowed or ceased production since the beginning of 2011, in which case the 928 kilograms of methamphetamine could have been the

last of La Familia's inventory. If the shipment was a "Hail Mary pass" by LFM, its seizure is likely to severely impact the remnants of the organization.

The dominant cartel along the U.S.-Mexico border is the Sinaloa Federation, which has the wherewithal to put together a shipment of this size — and the confidence that its network could safely move the shipment into Tijuana. Sinaloa would be able to absorb a loss of this magnitude without being crippled, but the loss would hurt — and retribution for it would be swift.

Violence in Durango

Metropolitan Durango saw a significant uptick in violence between Feb. 28 and March 3. According to STRATFOR sources, the media in Durango state have been threatened into silence by the cartels and apparently will not report any violence not already revealed publicly by the state government. Notwithstanding this press blackout, several STRATFOR sources reported as many as a dozen gun battles or attacks in Durango last week that left 20 confirmed dead, including at least two police officers, and 12 wounded, one of whom was a bystander. Sources also reported approximately eight incidents that resulted in at least 10 people missing or kidnapped, including six Durango law enforcement officers from the Direccion de Investigacion de Delito department.

Two attacks March 3 seemed to specifically target members of the Mennonite community in the San Juan del Rio neighborhood of Durango city. The first two victims were shot as they drove into San Juan del Rio. Minutes later, gunmen attacked another group of Mennonites entering the same neighborhood. Five victims were hospitalized with gunshot wounds and no deaths were reported. Welders and craftsmen in northern Mexico's Mennonite communities are known to fabricate containers and means of concealment for contraband shipments for drug cartels. It is not known whether the Mennonites attacked in Durango had direct connections to Mennonite fabrication shops working for the cartels in the border zone or if there were any other variables in play.

Durango straddles the main route between the port of Mazatlan and the border plaza of Juarez, and whoever controls Durango can control the flow of contraband along the route. The Sinaloa Federation's battle with the rival Vicente Carrillo Fuentes organization for control of Juarez has extended into Durango, and this latest outbreak of violence may be Sinaloa attempting to solidify its control over the route. Another possibility is that the violence may be a push by Los Zetas to pressure Sinaloa to divert resources from its offensive against the Zetas' home territory in Tamaulipas.

Considered individually, the events in Durango last week were not overly unusual, but taken together, they could indicate another shift in the power structure. STRATFOR will be watching closely to see if there is a shift under way and what it might mean.



[\(click here to view interactive map\)](#)

Feb. 28

- Military authorities announced the arrest of Victor Manuel “El Papirrin” Torres Garcia, the suspected leader of an organized-crime group known as La Resistencia, in Uruapan, Michoacan state.
- Unidentified gunmen shot and killed two police officers in Hermosillo, Sonora state. The officers were responding to a report of a kidnapping attempt on a woman.
- Unidentified gunmen opened fire on a car in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, killing two men, a woman and a child.
- Unidentified gunmen shot and killed four ministerial police officers during an ambush in Zumpango del Rio, Guerrero state.

March 1

- Suspected cartel gunmen used stolen vehicles to set up five roadblocks in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon state, which security forces quickly cleared.
- Unidentified gunmen shot and killed Jose Gomez Basurto, the public security director for Tanhuato, Michoacan state, as he drove on the Tanhuato-Yurecuaro highway. One of the director’s bodyguards was injured in the attack.
- Soldiers and police officers in Tres Valles, Veracruz state, rescued a kidnap victim and arrested three suspected kidnappers.
- Military authorities announced the discovery of 18 bodies in a mass grave in San Miguel de Totolapan, Guerrero state. Initial reports indicated that up to 70 bodies could be in the grave and surrounding areas.

March 2

- Unidentified gunmen attacked a convoy carrying Gen. Carlos Bibiano Villa Castillo, the public security director of Torreon, Coahuila state. Two of Villa Castillo’s bodyguards were injured in the attack.
- Unidentified attackers threw several grenades at a police station in Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon state, destroying six police vehicles.

March 3

- Authorities discovered the dismembered body of an unidentified man in three plastic bags in Morelos, Tamaulipas state. The victim's head was found approximately 15 meters from the body next to a sign bearing an unspecified message.
- Soldiers in the La Risca neighborhood of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon state, arrested three suspected members of the Gulf Cartel who allegedly participated in attacks on police officers on March 2.
- The dismembered body of a man was found on a highway in Los Ramones, Nuevo Leon state. The victim was reportedly a resident of San Isidro.
- Unidentified gunmen opened fire on city hall in Cadereyta, Nuevo Leon state. No injuries were reported in the attack.
- Unidentified gunmen in several trucks shot and injured a police officer in a patrol car in the Contry Sol neighborhood of Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon state.
- Soldiers in Cozumel, Quintana Roo state, arrested Javier Tinoco Acua, the suspected head gunman and route operator for Edgar aka "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal.

March 4

- Unidentified gunmen shot and killed a regional police commander outside his home in the La Providencia neighborhood of Tlaquepaque, Jalisco state.
- Authorities in Saltillo, Coahuila state, reported the deaths of five suspected criminals, one police officer and a civilian in several firefights between authorities and suspected criminal groups. Seven police officers were injured in the incidents.
- Two dismembered bodies were found in the Emiliano Zapata neighborhood and Miguel Aleman Coast sector of Acapulco, Guerrero state. Two messages signed by the Gulf Cartel also were discovered near a burning vehicle.
- Federal police officers in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, arrested seven suspected members of La Linea. Several firearms and approximately 12.4 kilograms of marijuana were seized from the suspects.
- One suspected gunman was shot and killed by police during an attack by unidentified gunmen on a municipal police station in Taxco de Alarcon, Guerrero state.

March 5

- Unidentified gunmen attacked two police stations in Acapulco, Guerrero state, with small arms and Molotov cocktails. Three police vehicles were damaged in the attacks.
- Police arrested Julio Cesar Aguilar Garcia, a suspected associate of Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia, in San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora state. Five other people were arrested with Aguilar.
- Authorities in San Juan del Rio, Durango state, discovered the body of Narciso Ochoa Ibanez, the public security director of Coneto de Comonfort. Ochoa's body was found in the trunk of a bullet-riddled police car.
- Federal police officers arrested Gustavo Arteaga Zaleta, identified as one of the leaders of the Gulf Cartel in San Luis Potosi state. Arteaga was reportedly responsible for criminal activities in the municipality of El Ebano.

March 6

- The Coahuila state attorney general's office released Twitter messages warning of several roadblocks in Saltillo set up by unidentified gunmen.

- Police discovered the bodies of five people in a house in the El Porvenir neighborhood of Pinotepa Nacional municipality in Oaxaca state. Each victim had been shot in the head.

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