



An El Salvador army cadet captured for gang ties

Officials in El Salvador have reported gang members are attempting to infiltrate the country's security forces, indicating a growing level of sophistication that potentially supports the idea they have used the ongoing truce to bolster their power.

Twenty-six gang members have been caught trying to infiltrate the armed forces so far this year, according to

Security Minister Ricardo Perdomo. The minister suggested gangs sought to enter the police and military in order to steal weapons and uniforms, obtain military intelligence and receive training, reported La Prensa Grafica.

In one recent case, a cadet from El Salvador's military academy was arrested on May 2 for suspected gang ties and for his alleged involvement in a murder committed in December 2013.

Another suspected gang member and former soldier was arrested on April 21 after he attacked police officers. He had served in El Salvador's Special Forces for three years, during which time he was allegedly assigned to the president's security detail.

Gangs have also apparently used information about military and police operations to imitate these organizations while committing crimes. In one recent attack, gang members allegedly dressed as police officers to carry out a triple homicide.

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Perdomo has warned officials on numerous occasions that El Salvador's two main gangs -- the Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and Barrio 18 -- are using the ongoing truce to regroup and strengthen. While there is some evidence to

suggest Perdomo's comments are politically motivated, the reported infiltration of security services points to the development of a sophisticated and subversive form of criminality. There have been other indications the MS13, particularly, is evolving.

Gang infiltration in the military and national police is not a new phenomenon in El Salvador, but recent arrests suggest this tactic could be becoming increasingly common. Perdomo also claims El Salvador's gangs are using military training techniques, especially for handling weapons, and says authorities have identified at least five places where gangs receive training from former military personnel and guerrillas.

Corruption and organized crime ties among El Salvador's police are known to go to the highest levels.

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Although criminal organizations more often rely on bribery and corruption to obtain information from security forces, direct infiltration has also been well documented elsewhere. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has carried out a number of deadly attacks after infiltrating security services.

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