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Mexico: The presence and structure of Los Zetas and their activities
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to an article published by Cable News Network (CNN), Los Zetas have existed since the 1990s (6 Aug. 2009). More specifically, the group was founded by commandos (CNN 6 Aug. 2009; NPR 2 Oct. 2009) or members of the special forces who deserted from the Mexican army (Agencia EFE 30 Jan. 2010; ISN 11 Mar. 2009). According to the United States (US) Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Los Zetas have adopted a business-style structure, which includes holding regular meetings (CNN 6 Aug. 2009). According to a DEA official's statements that were published in an article by the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), "their willingness to engage in firefights" separates Los Zetas from all other criminal groups in Mexico (ISN 11 Mar. 2009).

According to an article published by CNN in August 2009, the US government has stated that Los Zetas is "the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and dangerous cartel operating in Mexico" (6 Aug. 2009). National Public Radio (NPR) of the US indicates that the DEA considers Los Zetas to be "the most dangerous drug-trafficking organization in Mexico" and that its members are "the most feared" criminals in the country (NPR 2 Oct. 2009). An article published in a daily newspaper of Quito (Ecuador), *El Comercio*, describes Los Zetas as [translation] "the most violent" organization because it executes and kidnaps its enemies (1 Feb. 2010). Cited in an article published by CNN, a DEA official stated that Los Zetas are "the No. 1 organization responsible for the majority of the homicides, the narcotic-related homicides, the beheadings, the kidnappings, the extortions that take place in Mexico" (CNN 6 Aug. 2009).

According to *El Comercio*, Los Zetas are present in 13 Mexican states and in 43 cities in the US (1 Feb. 2010). The ISN article also indicates that Los Zetas are active in Mexico and in part of the US (ISN 11 Mar. 2009). According to that same article, the Los Zetas organization is "a network comprised of isolated cells that all maintain control over a certain slice of turf" (*ibid.*). The area they cover extends from El Paso to the US/Mexico border, south through the state of Veracruz and east through the state of Tabasco, and into the Yucatan peninsula (*ibid.*). According to NPR, their territory crosses through the State of Chiapas and extends to Guatemala (2 Oct. 2009). Some sources note that Los Zetas have bases in the states of Tamaulipas (NPR 2 Oct. 2009; Agencia EFE 30 Jan. 2010), Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato (Mural 29 Jan. 2010).

According to the ISN, the Los Zetas network consists of thousands of members, including both men and women, who "operate a range of illicit

businesses,” such as charging other groups for passage through their territory, to gun and drug smuggling, and money laundering (ISN 11 Mar. 2009). They are also involved in human smuggling and kidnapping for ransom (ibid.; NPR 2 Oct. 2009). An article published by NPR indicates that oil siphoning is also part of their activities (ibid.).

According to an article published by Agence France-Presse (AFP), Los Zetas are known to attack, kidnap and kill illegal immigrants in Mexico’s southeastern states (30 Jan. 2010a). Also, Los Zetas and another criminal group called La Familia have been engaged in [translation] “a bloody war” for the control of drug-trafficking and other illegal activities in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero (AFP 30 Jan. 2010b).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: : Representatives of Mexico's Secretaría de la Seguridad Pública (SSP) and Secretaría de la Seguridad Pública de México (SSP-DF) could not provide any information with the time constraints for this Response.

Internet sources, including: Freedom House, Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad (ICESI), Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia (INSYDE), Mexico - Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH), Mexico - Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (SSP), United States (US) Department of State, US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), El Universal [Mexico].

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