International Crisis Group
WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Corridor of Violence: the Guatemala-Honduras Border

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Executive Summary

One of the most dangerous areas in Central America is located along the border of Guatemala with Honduras. The murder rate is among the highest in the world. The absence of effective law enforcement has allowed wealthy traffickers to become de facto authorities in some areas, dispensing jobs and humanitarian assistance but also intimidating and corrupting local officials. Increasing competition over routes and the arrest or killing of top traffickers has splintered some criminal groups, empowering new, often more violent figures. President Otto Pérez Molina has promised to bolster Guatemala's borders with joint police/military task forces, but the government must also take immediate, comprehensive efforts to bring rule of law and economic opportunity to its long neglected periphery.

Over the past decade, drug routes through Central America have become more viciously competitive. The Mexican government's offensive against the cartels forced traffickers to land drugs first in Central America. The entry point of choice is often Honduras, where the 2009 coup weakened already fragile institutions of law enforcement and justice. Its long Atlantic coastline and remote interior plains, with little population or infrastructure, offer the ideal environment for drug boats and small planes to operate undetected.

From Honduras, the drugs pass into Guatemala, where family trafficking networks working with Mexican cartels transport them overland toward U.S. markets. These networks have traditionally operated under the radar, corrupting government officials and co-opting popular support, but they have come under stress as a result of the struggle for routes and pressure from the government. An emboldened public prosecutors' office, under the leadership of former Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz and with the help of the UN-sponsored International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), arrested both Mexican operatives – especially members of the hyper-violent Zetas cartel – and top Guatemalan traffickers wanted on charges in the U.S. The capture of these local drug lords has shaken once powerful organisations, allowing a new generation of sometimes more violent criminals to emerge.

The arrest of suspected drug lords can be a mixed blessing for the residents of some border communities. One of the hardest hit networks is that of the Lorenzana family in the department of Zacapa. The family patriarch, Waldemar Lorenzana, was arrested in 2011 and extradited to the U.S. in March 2014. Authorities also arrested two of his sons on U.S. charges, while a third is a fugitive with a $200,000 reward on his head. The Lorenzanas deny that cocaine smuggling is the source of their wealth, citing their legitimate businesses such as fruit-exporting. Some Zacapa residents complain that the arrests of Waldemar and his sons have cost jobs and sparked a struggle among splinter groups for dominance.

These less well-known but still powerful groups continue not only to move drugs but also to create other illegal enterprises, such as loan sharking and local retail drug sales, thus fuelling further violence. Their wealth and firepower make them de facto authorities, admired by some and feared by many. Residents of Zacapa and Chiquimula departments often assume police and local politicians have been paid off or intimidated by powerful criminals. A climate of distrust taints politics and inhibits journalists and other civic actors from holding local leaders accountable.

The Pérez Molina government has created inter-institutional task forces for border areas that include military troops, civilian police, prosecutors and customs officials. This is a first step toward bringing security to the border, provided the units are under civilian control and respect human rights. Bringing security to these regions, however, also requires building credible, democratic institutions. Local police should be vetted and held accountable, while given the resources and training to arrest powerful criminals. Local politicians should be required to report campaign contributions and also given public resources so their constituents can rely on government – not criminal bosses – for vital services and humanitarian assistance.

An urgent shift in national policy is required: the government should send not just troops and police to border regions, but also educators, community organisers, social workers, doctors and public health officials. Guatemala and Honduras should learn from regional experiences, such as the border development programs in the process of being implemented in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Honduras, where overall levels of violence are higher and institutional capacity weaker, is in particularly dire need of assistance. Donors – especially the U.S. – should put their money, training and technical aid behind public security and violence prevention on the border rather than focusing primarily on controls and interdiction.

Recommendations

To prevent further violence in border regions and advance rule of law and social and economic development

To the national governments of Guatemala and Honduras:

1. Implement a long-term violence prevention strategy tailored to border communities, including measures to:
   a) strengthen and restore trust in local law enforcement, through community policing and anti-corruption measures;
   b) improve the accessibility and efficiency of justice in border areas by strengthening existing initiatives, such as integrated justice centres in departmental capitals and justices of the peace in more rural areas;
   c) promote educational, training and recreational opportunities for local youth;
   d) encourage public and private investments designed to promote growth and generate jobs; and
   e) fund public health programs and research, including surveys to determine the extent of drug abuse and addiction.
2. Consider setting up national and/or binational agencies to coordinate public investment and prioritise social and economic development of border communities, including measures to strengthen local capacities and make social services more comprehensive and efficient, learning from efforts that have spurred development in Andean countries.

To the government, Congress and political parties in Guatemala:

3. Enforce and strengthen the Law on Elections and Political Parties so that candidates face tough sanctions if they exceed spending limits and fail to account for donations.
4. Combat impunity at the national and local level, by working with the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) to pursue money laundering and corruption cases in border communities and train police and prosecutors to investigate financial crimes in these regions.

To municipal authorities in Guatemala and Honduras:

5. Work with community leaders to implement transparent budgeting processes (using existing laws guaranteeing transparency and access to information); and prioritise citizen participation in crime and violence prevention initiatives.

To donors, national governments in the region and multilateral institutions:

6. Focus assistance not only on border control but also on strengthening local capacity to prevent crime and violence, through projects that promote community policing and more effective and transparent municipal governance; and that provide education, training and jobs for disadvantaged youth.

7. Andean countries facing similar security issues – Colombia, Peru and Ecuador – should share best practices and lessons learned, specifically regarding efforts to prevent violence through regional development and by strengthening national and local institutions.
8. The Central American Integration System (SICA) should strengthen border security policy within the context of its broader security plan, marshalling regional and wider international support for long-term bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives aimed at communities particularly vulnerable to organised crime.

Guatemala City/Bogotá/Brussels, 4 June 2014

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Corridor of Violence: the Guatemala-Honduras Border

I. Introduction

Guatemala shares a 1,687km frontier with four countries: El Salvador, Honduras, Belize and Mexico.[1] Border-region climate and topography range from dry highlands in the south east, to jungle lowlands in the north, to the steep Sierra Madre in the west. Border populations reflect the country's ethnic diversity: Ladinos are the majority in the east; the Maya dominate the west; both have migrated in search of land in the sparsely populated northern department of Petén.[2]

What these regions share is a history of government neglect. Most of Guatemala's borders are unmonitored. Fifteen formal crossings are outnumbered by more than 100 informal ones, including roads large enough for small trucks.[3] For residents, political demarcations hardly exist: many cross daily to work, visit relatives or buy and sell foodstuffs and other essentials, such as gasoline, at cheaper prices.[4] Even at legal crossings there is little supervision of goods or people: the customs service lacks personnel and technology (such as scanners) to inspect much merchandise entering the country; citizens of Central American nations can cross borders simply by presenting national identity documents.[5]

The unofficial border crossings are aptly called "*puntos ciegos*" (blind spots) that the government has little or no capacity to control. A police officer at El Florido, on the border with Honduras, said his substation had only one working car that often lacked gasoline. An officer in Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras, voiced similar concerns, saying his small unit lacked personnel to go after smugglers: "If I send four or five men to intercept a truck heading toward a *punto ciego*, I have almost no one left here".[6] Local security is "tenuous at best" throughout Central America; "[i]n most border communities away from major highway crossing points, the formal rule of law does not exist".[7]

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[1] Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe (SELA), Estados miembros: Guatemala (www.sela.org).

[2] Ladinos are non-indigenous, Spanish-speaking Guatemalans. There are six distinct Maya linguistic groups along the Mexican border. "Mapa Lingüística de Guatemala", Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural, Ministerio de Educación.

[3] Ralph Espach and Daniel Haering, "Border Insecurity in Central America's Northern Triangle", Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Migration Policy Institute, November 2012. Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa and Chiquimula, Guatemala, 18-19 March, 1-4 December, 2013; Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras, 5-9 May 2013.

[4] Crisis Group interviews, ibid. Espach and Haering, "Border Insecurity", op. cit., p. 5.

[5] Travellers entering by bus or taxi often do not present documents to officials; the driver does so for them. Crisis Group Skype interview, Werner Ovalle, formerly with Central American Border Security Program (SEFRO), System for Central American Integration (SICA), 27 November 2013. "Centroamérica reforzará controles migratorios", Agencia EFE, 29 August 2013.

[6] Crisis Group interviews, El Florido, 9 May 2013; Santa Rosa de Copán, 7 May 2013.

[7] Espach and Haering, "Border Insecurity", op. cit., p. 5.

At the national level, there are tentative signs of progress, though Guatemala still faces daunting institutional challenges. Overall murder rates have dropped from 46 per 100,000 in 2009 to 34 per 100,000 in 2013.[8] The government of President Otto Pérez Molina has added thousands of new police officers and created officer training schools.[9] Trials and convictions are up under a dynamic attorney general, who with the help of the UN-sponsored International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG,) has stepped up investigations of high-level officials and powerful criminals, using new legal and investigative tools.

But national homicide rates remain about 30 per cent higher than in 2000 and twice the Latin American average.[10] Moreover, after declining for two years, they remained stable in 2012-2013. In some border regions, violence is as high or higher than ever: in 2013 Zacapa and Chiquimula departments had 84 and 80 homicides per 100,000, respectively, more than double the national average.

The government has responded to the lack of security along the borders by deploying task forces, combining the military, police, prosecutors and customs officials. But such efforts do not address the broader problem of citizen insecurity in regions where the state has long failed to provide effective law enforcement, justice or economic opportunity. There is no corresponding inter-institutional effort to coordinate public and private investment and basic government services.

This report attempts to fill some of the gaps in knowledge about a little studied region that has suffered disproportionately from the rise of organised crime, especially drug trafficking. It is based on meetings with government officials and experts in Guatemala City and San Pedro Sula and six trips over two years to the departments of Zacapa and Chiquimula in Guatemala, as well as a visit to Santa Rosa de Copán department in Honduras. It includes interviews with local officials, police, prosecutors, educators and business people in both countries, but provides more detailed information and analysis of Guatemala, where Crisis Group has been doing field research since 2010.

[8] Guatemalan homicide statistics in this report are based on National Civilian Police (PNC) data compiled by analyst Carlos Mendoza on his blog, "The Black Box", Central American Business Intelligence (CABI), ca-bi.com/blackbox.

[9] See the government's second annual report, "Informe del Segundo Año", Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia (SEGEPLAN), Tomo II, 2013-2014, p. 17.

[10] In 2000, Guatemala's homicide rate was 26 per 100,000; in 2000-2004, it averaged 31 per 100,000; in 2005-2009, 44 per 100,000. The 2013 average rate in the Americas was 16 per 100,000. "Global Study on Homicide", UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 22.

II. Corridor of Violence

"Some of the most dangerous places in Central America", the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) wrote in 2012, "lie in a swath between the north-western coast of Honduras and the south-western coast of Guatemala".[11] The most violent departments in Guatemala during 2012-2013 were along the Pacific coast (Escuintla) or the Atlantic and the Honduran border (Izabal, Zacapa and Chiquimula). Among the most violent in Honduras during these years were those found along the Atlantic coast (Cortés, Atlántida,) the border with Guatemala (Ocotepeque and Copán) and in the interior (Yoro and Olancho).[12]

Cortés in Honduras and Escuintla in Guatemala are industrialised regions with large ports, where street-gang rivalries are a major source of bloodshed. San Pedro Sula in Cortés, reputedly the world's most violent city, had 193 homicides per 100,000 in 2013.[13] But the corridor also includes largely rural areas with high murder rates but no gang violence or significant street crime. Zacapa and Chiquimula, neighbour departments, had 502 killings in 2013 – a combined rate of 81 per 100,000, nearly two and a half times that of Guatemala as a whole.[14]

On the Honduran side of the border, murder rates have been highly volatile. The neighbouring departments Copán and Ocotepeque together had 533 homicides in 2012, a combined rate of 102 per 100,000 well above the national 85 per 100,000. But they had 181 fewer killings in 2013, bringing their combined rate down to 71 per 100,000, slightly below the national rate of 79.

In the department of Gracias a Dios, along what is known as the Mosquito Coast, murders increased from only four in 2009 to sixteen in 2012 and 54 in 2013. A sparsely populated area with few roads (reachable mainly by plane or boat), it is home to a largely indigenous or mixed afro-indigenous population, known as *garífunas*. The municipality of Ahuas, Gracias a Dios, made the news in May 2012 when a U.S.-owned helicopter carrying U.S. and Honduran counternarcotics agents fired on a riverboat killing four passengers.[15]

Killings in these communities are rarely covered by the media or investigated by human rights groups, making it difficult to know whether organised criminal groups, individuals or security forces are responsible. The correlation with drug trafficking routes, however, is clear: the most violent regions (apart from major cities) in both Guatemala and Honduras lie along the coast or border.

Most cocaine headed for U.S. markets is ferried by boats to the Pacific coast of Guatemala and by boats or planes to the Caribbean coast of Honduras and Guate-

[11] "Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment", UNODC, September 2012, p. 37.

[12] See map in Appendix A below. Data on Honduras is from the Violence Observatory, University Institute of Democracy, Peace and Security at the National Autonomous University of Honduras. Averages and sums calculated by Crisis Group. Hereafter, Violence Observatory. For its monthly and yearly bulletins, see http://iudpas.org/observatorio.

[13] Ibid, February 2014, p. 5. While murders declined in Honduras overall in 2013, they rose in San Pedro Sula, whose 174 per 100,000 in 2012, made it the world's most violent city according to the Citizen Council for Public Security, Justice and Peace, a Mexico-based think tank. www.seguridad justiciaypaz.org.mx.

[14] Calculated using data from Carlos Mendoza, op. cit.

[15] See Mattathias Schwartz, "A Mission Gone Wrong", *The New Yorker*, 6 January 2014.

mala.[16] Honduras has also become the primary landing zone for drug flights from South America; the U.S. estimated in 2012 that "75 per cent of all cocaine smuggling flights departing South America first land in Honduras".[17] The sparsely inhabited savannas and jungles of eastern Honduras are ideal for hiding clandestine landing strips: some flights head for the Mosquito Coast, others for the plains of Olancho and Yoro.[18] Many originate in Venezuela, which is not an important cocaine producer but has become a major hub for drug flights.[19]

Although the region has been an important route for South American cocaine since the 1980s, the trade has not always been associated with extreme violence. The *transportistas* (drug shippers) who move illegal cargo through northern Central America toward Mexico have generally preferred to fly under the radar and protect themselves from undue attention by cultivating ties with local residents and corrupting local authorities.[20] "[Traffickers] generally have an interest in keeping violence down", said a political analyst at Francisco Marroquín University who has done research along the eastern border. "They need the support and protection of the population, which serves as their eyes and ears".[21]

The violence over the past decade has coincided with external shocks to the business that have disrupted routes and heightened competition. "Drug-related violence tends to correlate with contention over routes and territories (both in rural and urban areas), more than with trafficking itself".[22] On one hand, the market that is the destination for most cocaine shipped through Central America has been shrinking: U.S. cocaine consumption has declined dramatically since the late 1980s.[23] On the other, enforcement is up. The Mexican government's offensive against traffickers, especially after 2006, has made it difficult for drug cartels to import South American cocaine directly, forcing them to channel it through Central America[24]. This has turned the Northern Triangle of Central America into the bottleneck through which most of the South American cocaine heading for the U.S. via Mexico must pass.

[16] "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 32.
[17] "2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report", Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. State Department, vol. 1, p. 192 (hereafter INCSR). However, Assistant Secretary of State William R. Brownfield told a Honduran newspaper that drug flights had decreased 80 per cent over the past twelve or eighteen months. "'Llegada de narco avionetas a Honduras bajó 80%': William Brownfield", *La Prensa*, 12 February 2014. One reason may be Honduran policy allowing authorities to shoot down suspected drug flights. See James Bargent, "US Halts Honduras Cooperation over Narco-Plane Shoot Down Law", InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, 1 April 2014.
[18] "Detectan 200 narcopistas en La Mosquitia hondureña", *El Heraldo*, 9 August 2013.
[19] 2013 INCSR, vol. 1: Country Report, Venezuela, pp.313-314. See Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°39, *Guatemala: Drug Trafficking and Violence*, 11 October 2011, p. 7; and N°38, *Violence and Politics in Venezuela*, 17 August 2011.
[20] "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 11.
[21] Crisis Group interview, Miguel Castillo Girón, Guatemala City, 15 August 2012.
[22] Espach and Haering, "Border Insecurity", op. cit, p. 13.
[23] "Transnational Organized Crime," UNODC, op. cit., figure 10, p. 17. Established markets in North America and Europe seem to be declining while usage appears to be increasing in Latin America, Africa and Asia. North America in 2004-2005 accounted for 49 per cent of cocaine users; in 2011 it accounted for 27 per cent. The share of users in Latin America has risen from 15 per cent to 21 per cent. "World Drug Report 2013", UNODC, p. 38.
[24] World Drug Report 2013, op. cit., pp. 18-19. Crisis Group Report, *Guatemala: Drug Trafficking and Violence*, op. cit., p. 7.

Greater enforcement has also disrupted the trade within the region. Until a few years ago, Guatemala was a primary landing zone for narcotics-laden flights. A U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) official referred to northern Petén, conveniently bordered on two sides by Mexico, as a "graveyard" for drug planes treated as disposable by the traffickers and often destroyed after unloading.[25] Interdiction, Guatemalan and U.S. officials say, supported by six U.S.-supplied helicopters, largely halted this illegal air traffic.[26] It diverted many flights to Honduras, forcing traffickers to bring their goods into Guatemala by land, often in small amounts hidden in trucks, buses or cars. "Our aerial problem was turned into a terrestrial one", said Guatemala's counter-narcotics vice minister. "The traffickers were forced to change their flight plans".[27]

The Caribbean coast and tropical forests of Honduras offer the same advantages as Petén: little population, infrastructure or government presence. The coup that ousted President Zelaya in 2009 made the Honduran hinterland especially attractive, according to some analysts. The de facto government, beleaguered by protestors, concentrated troops in the capital. Local law enforcement, always weak, fell into disarray. The U.S., concerned about providing assistance to an unaccountable and illegitimate regime, suspended non-humanitarian aid, including counter-narcotics assistance.[28] The result was a "cocaine gold rush", as traffickers hurried to secure routes through the region.[29]

Trafficking alone does not explain the violence along the Guatemalan/Honduran border and coastal regions. The western border is also porous, with a long history of smuggling, not only of drugs but also of consumer goods from Mexico, such as contraband gasoline, sold openly along the highway in plastic containers. Both borders are also crossing points for Central American emigrants heading toward the U.S.[30] Yet, western Guatemala's largely indigenous departments have homicide rates below the national average: in 2013 San Marcos and Huehuetenango had rates of fourteen and ten per 100,000, respectively.

[25] Statement, Michael A. Braun, chief of operations, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration DEA, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 9 November 2005.

[26] Initially on loan, the twin-engine "Super Huey" helicopters were donated to Guatemala in October 2013 and are now flown and maintained by Guatemalans. Crisis Group interview, Elmer Sosa, deputy director, Guatemala's General Department of Counternarcotics Analysis and Information (SGAIA), 22 November 2013. "Helicópteros equipados apoyan lucha antinarcótica", Ministerio de Gobernación, 7 October 2013.

[27] Crisis Group interview, Eunice Mendizábal, Guatemala City, 21 March 2013. According to the 2013 INCSR, op. cit., the U.S. detected only seven suspected drug flights entering Guatemala in 2012, down from 60 in 2009. Most drugs smuggled into Central America arrive by sea, however, with Atlantic routes gaining in importance recently relative to Pacific routes. "World Drug Report 2013", UNODC, p. 42.

[28] According to the 2010 INCSR, vol. 1: Country Report, Honduras: "The lack of resources for Honduran law enforcement entities, whose attention is now focused more on internal security matters related to the political crisis and the suspension of U.S. assistance, contributed directly to an increase in the flow and transhipment of drugs by narcotics traffickers".

[29] "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 19.

[30] Crisis Group visit, San Marcos 17-21 May 2012. Ralph Espach, Javier Meléndez Quiñonez, Daniel Haering, Miguel Castillo Girón, "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking in Guatemala's Border Communities", Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), December 2011, pp. 58-60.

Only a few municipalities along the western border with Mexico have homicide rates that exceed the national average.[31] In contrast, all 21 municipalities in Chiquimula and Zacapa have high rates, including Esquipulas, on the border of both Honduras and El Salvador. Famous as a magnet for pilgrims, thousands of whom travel there each year to see a 400-year-old image carved in dark wood known as the "Black Christ", it also hosted negotiations among five Central American presidents in 1986 that resulted in accords for ending armed conflict and promoting democracy in the region. But it is among the most violent municipalities, with an average homicide rate in 2012-2013 of 128 per 100,000.

There is no clear explanation why communities on Guatemala's eastern border with Honduras suffer more lethally violent crime than those on the western border with Mexico.[32] Contraband flows across both frontiers. Both regions have largely youthful populations and high levels of underemployment, factors sometimes associated with violence[33]. Both are poor: Chiquimula and Zacapa are among the departments with the highest rates of extreme poverty[34]. Many residents have migrated to the U.S., leaving behind children to be raised by single parents or relatives. Neither region, however, is plagued by gang violence, still generally limited to Guatemala's larger cities.

The most obvious differences between the two areas are ethnic and cultural: the western highlands of the Sierra Madre are largely indigenous; the hotter, dryer eastern region around the Sierra de las Minas is not: more than 90 per cent of Zacapa and Chiquimula is Ladino or non-indigenous. In contrast to the communal/agricultural culture predominant in indigenous areas, some analysts point out, these eastern ladino regions are characterised by ranching and an individualistic "honour code" that condones vigilante justice.[35] The family networks that have allegedly dominated Guatemalan trafficking since the 1980s have been made up of Ladinos with European surnames, such as Vargas, Mendoza, Lorenzana, León or Ortiz.[36] Mayan commu-

[31] The most violent in 2013 were La Democracia in Huehuetenango, with 21 killings, a per 100,000 rate of 46.5; Ayutla, including the Tecún Umán border crossing, in San Marcos, with 23, a rate of 59, and Malacatán, with 37, a rate of 34. Many municipalities in this region had zero homicides. Huehuetenango had ten in 2012, San Marcos eleven.

[32] Not all types of homicides are more prevalent in the east: lynchings are more common in the west. Of 94 fatal lynchings in Guatemala in 2011-2013, 31 were in Huehuetenango. "Linchamientos en el 2013", Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, n.d. For earlier, see Carlos Mendoza's blog, "Linchamientos en Guatemala".

[33] According to 2011 figures, urban underemployment was 41 per cent in Chiquimula and 48 per cent in Zacapa; rural underemployment was 51 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. These rates are better than the national urban and rural underemployment rates of 50 and 55 per cent. "Pobreza y Desarrollo: Un Enfoque departamental, Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida (ENCOVI), Instituto Nacional de Estadística, November 2011, p. 17, at www.ine.gob.gt.

[34] According to the 2011 National Survey of Living Conditions (ENCOVI), Chiquimula had the second highest level of extreme poverty in the country (28 per cent) and Zacapa the third (25 per cent). Only Alta Verapaz, a largely indigenous northern department had more extreme poverty (38 per cent). The east is subject to droughts that exacerbate poverty and hunger.

[35] Crisis Group interview, government official, 9 December 2013. See also Carlos Mendoza and Claudia Méndez Arriaza, "7 Mitos Sobre la Violencia Homicida en Guatemala", *elPeriódico*, 27 January 2013; and Carlos Mendoza, "¿Cuál es la relación entre violencia homicida y narcoactividad en Guatemala? Parte I", Panóptico: un blog sobre violencia y seguridad. Plaza Pública, www.plazapublica.com.gt, 19 May 2014.

[36] Crisis Group Report, *Guatemala: Drug Trafficking and Violence*, op. cit., p. 12.

nities have not played a leading role. Though highland communities in the west cultivate opium poppies, their product is sold to Mexican or Ladino buyers.[37]

The east is also an area where owning and using firearms is common. "The stereotype of the easterner is someone wearing a sombrero with a pistol on his belt", said a prosecutor who has worked in the region. "They don't respect the law; they prefer to settle disputes themselves by force".[38] There are no reliable statistics on gun ownership by region[39], but mortality statistics suggest that guns are both widely owned and used: in both Zacapa and Chiquimula gunshots are a cause of death second only to heart attacks.[40]

[37] Crisis Group interview, prosecutors, San Marcos, 12 May 2011.
[38] Crisis Group interview, eastern Guatemala, 9 March 2013.
[39] Jorge A. Restrepo and Alonso Tobón Garcia (eds.), *Guatemala en la encrucijada: Panorama de una violencia transformada*, Small Arms Survey and Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC, 2011), p. 74.
[40] Nationally, firearms accounted for 10 per cent of all 2012 deaths, but in Zacapa 16 per cent and Chiquimula 19 per cent. "Caracterizaciones República de Guatemala"; "Caracterizaciones Departamentales, Zacapa and Chiquimula", Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2012. The departments with the highest percentage of gun deaths are Petén (22 per cent) and Escuintla (19 per cent).

III. The Wild East

A. *Arrival of the Zetas*

In March 2008 a gun battle broke out in Rio Hondo, Zacapa, along the highway that connects Guatemala's capital with the Caribbean coast. "It was like a war", a witness said. "The gunshots didn't stop; cars exploded". Eleven men died, and authorities afterwards confiscated a small arsenal of weapons, including ten assault rifles and two grenade launchers, as well as $325,000 in cash.[41] The target was Juan José "Juancho" León, who died along with his bodyguards. The assailants – fourteen of whom were eventually captured and convicted in a high-risk court – were reportedly members of the Mexican Zetas cartel.[42] Seven were Guatemalan, including an ex-member of the Kaibiles (Special Forces); seven were Mexican, including an army deserter from the Special Forces Airmobile Group who became one of the Zetas' 31 founding leaders.[43]

The killings in Rio Hondo marked one of the first known –and most dramatic – Zetas operations in Guatemala. Why they targeted León is not clear. One version says the group was invited or allowed by local traffickers to eliminate him because he was stealing drug shipments.[44] Another says that the Zetas were already operating in the northern department of Cobán and took the initiative to punish him for stealing one of their shipments, or simply in a bid to eliminate a rival for control of the crucial Zacapa area.[45] They may also have targeted León and his network because of their association with the Mexican Gulf cartel, archenemies of the Zetas and former cartel enforcers who broke away in 2007.[46]

Whatever the reason for León's assassination, the presence of Mexican cartels fighting on Guatemalan territory demonstrated how important and competitive the eastern region had become for the transnational cocaine trade. Even before the Zetas began operating in Guatemala, the family networks that had allegedly transported illegal drugs through the country since the 1980s– most notably the Lorenzanas and the Mendozas – were being challenged. By the 2000s, aggressive upstarts were emerging who eschewed the agreements that had divided territories somewhat peaceably in the past.[47]

One was Otto Herrera, who in 2003 made the U.S. Attorney General's Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) list of the world's most wanted traffickers

[41] A. Sas, J. Revolorio, R. Quinto, "Cae supuesto narco chapín durante balacera en Zacapa", *elPeriódico*, 26 March 2008.
[42] Gustavo Villagrán and Paola Herrera, "Dictan sentencia contra integrantes de Los Zetas por masacre en Zacapa", Noticias de Guatemala, noticias.com.gt, 10 September 2010.
[43] "Juzgan por matanza en Guatemala a 14 supuestos 'zetas'; 7 son mexicanos", Agencia EFE, 28 July 2010; "De militar a narcotraficante, la historia de Daniel Pérez Rojas 'el Cachetes'", Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticas (AGN), 8 July 2013. Guatemalan courts have approved Mexico's extradition request for Pérez, who faces charges in the state of Morelia. "CC autoriza la extradición a México del supuesto narco Daniel Pérez Rojas", Emisoras Unidas, 11 July 2012.
[44] Julie López, "Guatemala: The Changing Face of Drug Trafficking", InSight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas, www.insightcrime.org, 30 July 2013.
[45] Crisis Group interview, government official, 30 January 2014.
[46] See "Grupos de Poder en Petén: Territorio, política y negocios", p. 87, a study of organised crime and politics in Guatemala's northernmost department published anonymously in July 2011 and available on the issuu.com website.
[47] "Grupos de Poder", op. cit, p. 57; "Carteles se reacomodan tras captura de Herrera", *Prensa Libre*, 16 July 2007.

and money launderers.[48] The son of a banana worker who grew up in north-eastern Guatemala, he was a key link between Colombian and Mexican cartels until his 2007 arrest in Bogota and extradition to the U.S. Another was Juancho León, who reportedly aspired to dominate trafficking in the region. "He was an imitation of Chapo Guzmán", said a government source who worked in eastern Guatemala, referring to the head of Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel. "He wanted to manage the other cartels, control all the shipments".[49] Instead, his organisation disintegrated within a few years of his killing. A reported ally, Giovanni España, allegedly the top trafficker in Chiquimula, was ambushed and killed along with four bodyguards in 2010.[50] León's brother, Haroldo, and his bodyguards were shot to death in Petén in May 2011.[51]

The Zetas added more chaos to a criminal underworld already in upheaval. The Lorenzanas and other suspected family networks, most notably the Mendozas in the north-eastern departments of Izabal and Petén and the Ortiz López (Chamalé) group along the south-western Pacific coast and Mexican border, had survived since the 1980s by maintaining a low profile and cultivating community support. That operating mode was breaking down: the cocaine market became smaller, more competitive and more vulnerable to heists by other criminals, as shipments moved overland toward Mexico and the U.S.[52]

Adding to the stress of longstanding trafficking networks was increasing government pressure. For years authorities did little or nothing to investigate traffickers, including those wanted by the U.S. After the arrest and extradition of former Zacapa Mayor Arnoldo Vargas on drug charges in 1992, there were no arrests of major traffickers wanted in the U.S. for nearly two decades. The top Guatemalan traffickers detained during that time were captured abroad: Byron Berganza in El Salvador in 2003, Otto Herrera in Colombia in 2007, Jorge Mario "el Gordo" Paredes in Honduras 2008 and Ottoniel Turcios in Belize in 2010. All were convicted and are serving time in the U.S.[53]

But beginning in 2010, special task forces, vetted and supported by the U.S. DEA, made a series of arrests that decapitated what were reportedly the most important trafficking groups in Guatemala:[54] Mauro Salomón Ramírez ("Sea Wolf") and Juan López Ortiz (Chamalé), who allegedly operated along the Pacific coast and Mexican border, were taken in 2010 and 2011; Walther Overdick (the "Tiger"), a suspected trafficker based in the northern department of Alta Verapaz, was arrested in April 2012; Mario Ponce, based in the north-eastern department of Izabal was captured in

[48] Julie López, "Eight-year manhunt lands international drug traffickers in DC courts", Woodrow Wilson Latin American Program, n.d., p. 1 (online in Spanish at Plaza Pública, www.plazapublica.org, 17, 25 May, 1 June 2012.
[49] Crisis Group interview, Guatemala City, 30 January 2014.
[50] "Asesinan a supuesto narco y sus guardias", *Prensa Libre*, 26 June 2010.
[51] "Asesinan a hermano de Juancho León en Petén", *elPeriódico*, 14 May 2011.
[52] Crisis Group interview, government official, Guatemala City, 9 December 2013.
[53] These traffickers also have links to Zacapa. Frank Smyth, "Even Court-Approved Extraditions Have a Troubled, Bloody History in Guatemala", InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, 5 July 2012. On Herrera, see Julie López, "Eight year manhunt", op. cit. Paredes and Turcios were associated with Herrera but later linked to the Zetas cartel. Claudia Méndez Arriaza, "Cómo cayó Byron Berganza 'Si te equivocas, es tu problema'", *elPeriódico*, 8 October 2005; Karen Cardona, "Cae 'el Gordo' Paredes", *La Hora*, 3 May 2008; Luis Ángel Sas, "EE.UU. busca a Otoniel Turcios, vinculado con "El Gordo" Paredes", *elPeriódico*, 14 May 2008; R. González/K.Reyes, "Juez beliceño resuelve hoy situación jurídica de Turcios", *elPeriódico*, 28 October 2010.
[54] Edgar Gutiérrez, "Temporada de caza en Guatemala", El Faro, www.elfaro.net, 8 May 2011.

Honduras in 2011; and Walter Montejo Merida (the "Zope", vulture) in June 2012. All were said to work for or with Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, with the notable exceptions of Overdick and Ponce, both of whom allegedly worked with the Zetas.[55]

Nor were the arrests limited to the "*extraditables*" facing U.S. charges. Prosecutors by late 2012 said they had captured most of the top Zetas operating in Guatemala, leaving the group disorganised and leaderless.[56] The offensive began under President Álvaro Colom, who declared a state of siege in December 2010 to combat the Zetas in Alta Verapaz department and deployed hundreds of troops. Several dozen alleged Zetas were arrested, though apparently no top operatives.[57]

Colom declared a state of siege again in May 2011 in Petén department, after the massacre of 27 farm workers at Los Cocos farm by a group under the leadership of "Z-200".[58] Several weeks later the Zetas struck again, killing and dismembering an auxiliary prosecutor in Cobán. The authorities reacted quickly, and within a month, police had arrested more than a dozen suspects. In June 2012, a high-risk court convicted 36 members of the Zetas, all but one Guatemalan, for participating in that murder and other crimes.[59] In February 2014, the court sentenced nine Zetas – six Guatemalans and three Mexicans – to more than 100 years each for the massacre of the farm workers.[60]

In October 2013, authorities in Guatemala and Mexico struck another blow against the Zetas with the capture in Mexico of Gerardo Jaramillo, alias el Yankee. Jaramillo, allegedly one of the group's top operatives in Guatemala, is said to be linked to the

[55] These arrests were apparently assisted by the DEA's Foreign-deployed Advisory Support Teams (FAST) that work with vetted Guatemalan agents. Charlie Savage, "D.E.A. Squads Extend Reach of Drug War", *The New York Times*, 6 November 2011; Gladys Galeano, "Capturan a Mauro Salomón Ramírez Barrios en un pozo", *elPeriódico*, 3 October 2010; "Capturan a capo del narcotráfico Juan Ortiz, alias 'Chamalé' ", *Prensa Libre*, 30 March 2011. Mariela Castañón, "MP: Vinculan a supuesto narco como aliado de los 'Zetas'", *La Hora*, 3 April 2012; "Capturan a presunto narco Mario Ponce en Honduras", Noticias de Guatemala, 2 May 2011; "Guatemala extraditará a presunto capo a EU", *El Universal*, 11 June 2012. Ponce was convicted and sentenced in Miami. "Guatemalan Narcotics Trafficker Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison", The United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida, 22 August 2012. Overdick pleaded not guilty at arraignment in New York. "Suspected Guatemalan trafficker extradited to U.S.", Reuters, 12 December 2012. Ortiz López, extradited in May 2014, has stated he is innocent. See "Tribunal autorizó extraditar a EU a supuesto narcotraficante guatemalteco", Agencia EFE, 29 February 2012 and "DEA's Highest Ranking Guatemalan Drug Trafficker Extradited To Face Federal Drug Charges", U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida, 23 May 2014. Montejo was extradited in March 2013: "Wálter Montejo, alias 'el Zope', es extraditado hacia Estados Unidos", *Prensa Libre*, 7 March 2013.

[56] Crisis Group interview, Guatemala City, 18 September 2012.

[57] A presidential declaration of state of siege, which must be ratified by Congress, allows authorities to suspend certain civil liberties and make arrests without judicial order. See Asier Andrés, "Congreso ratifica el Estado de Sitio en Alta Verapaz", *elPeriódico*, 23 December 2010.

[58] Álvaro Montenegro, "Masacre fue coordinada por Z200 desde México", *elPeriódico*, 24 January 2014. Z200, who allegedly directed the killings from Mexico, was later arrested there. See also Crisis Group Report, *Drug Trafficking and Violence*, op. cit., p. 2.

[59] Byron Vásquez and Mynor Toc, "Tribunal condena a prisión a 36 integrantes de los zetas", *Prensa Libre*, 28 June 2012. Only one convicted Zeta in the case is Mexican. "Condenan a 36 'zetas' en Guatemala con penas de dos a 158 años de cárcel", *Proceso*, 28 June 2012. The high-risk courts, created in 2009 under legislative reforms proposed by CICIG, are given additional resources and security to hear sensitive cases against organised crime figures or powerful ex-officials. See Luis Ángel Sas, "Reforman ley de procesos penales de mayor riesgo", *elPeriódico*, 16 November 2009.

[60] "Sentencian a más de 100 años a zetas por masacre en Petén", *Siglo21*, 21 February 2014.

Petén massacre as well as crimes in Zacapa and Chiquimula.[61] His arrest provided information leading to discovery of an arsenal of weapons, including assault rifles, several grenade launchers, magazine clips, 2,000 rounds of ammunition of various calibres, bullet-proof vests and balaclavas.[62] Six years after the Zetas first made headlines in Guatemala with the killing of Juancho León, raising concerns that they were bringing Mexico's drug wars to Guatemala, government officials felt confident enough to declare victory. Foreign Minister Fernando Carrera declared: "The Zetas are not based in Guatemala. We caught them, and we threw them out".[63]

B. *From Zetas to Zetillas*

The aggressive style of the Zetas broke with the model that had allowed family-based networks to survive for decades. Instead of gradually cultivating community support and paying off local officials and police, they attempted to take control of drug routes by force. "This is a small country; everyone knows who the traffickers are", said a political analyst. "To operate, traffickers need mayors and police willing to look the other way; they need the community to provide intelligence. That wasn't the Zetas style, and they weren't welcomed".[64]

Their sensational violence also concentrated the attention of authorities, including prosecutors who under recent reforms have greater capacity to gather intelligence, through informants, wire taps and undercover agents. That capacity was focused on capturing the most violent groups, including Zetas, who became a priority because of the damage they inflicted on the general population.[65] Although prosecutors consider that small groups of Mexican-led Zetas may still operate in Petén, Huehuetenango and Alta Verapaz departments, their power is limited. Even from 2008 through 2011 (when concerns were highest), some analysts believe the group's numbers and influence were exaggerated: criminals identified as Zetas in the press, may have been wannabes, who adopted the cartel brand that would generate the most fear.[66]

"There was no displacement of Zetas from Mexico," said, a Mexican analyst working in Guatemala, who pointed out that the cartel's main preoccupation in recent years has been defending its territory in Mexico, not taking control of new routes. "They may have wanted to establish a franchise here, but they have usually worked through intermediaries", such as, allegedly, Walther Overdick in Alta Verapaz, whom

[61] Crisis Group interview, Public Ministry (the public prosecutors' office), 18 September 2012. Miriam Wells, "Zetas' Top Guatemala Operative Captured in Mexico", InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, 15 October 2013.
[62] Incautan más armas a grupo vinculado a zetas", *Prensa Libre*, 30 October 2013.
[63] Eva Saiz, "Entrevista, Canciller de Guatemala: Los Zetas no están en Guatemala, los capturamos y los echamos", *El País*, 10 February 2014. Some analysts disagree. See Julie López, "Zetas: ¿realidad o ficción en Guatemala?", *La Opinión*, 14 February 2014.
[64] Crisis Group interview, Miguel Castillo Girón, Guatemala City, 22 August 2011.
[65] Crisis Group interview, Public Ministry, Guatemala City, 16 October 2013. Prosecutors note they have also acted rapidly against other groups that threaten public order. After eight police agents were killed in June 2013 at a station in Salcajá, Quetzaltenango, more than a dozen members of the group allegedly responsible were arrested within six weeks. Wiretaps helped trace the group's leader, Eduardo Francisco Villatoro Cano, alias "el Guayo Cano", to Tuxtla Gutiérrez in the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas, where he was captured on 4 October 2013. His group, linked in press reports to the Gulf Cartel, was based in Huehuetenango, a department on the Mexican border, but transported drugs from Zacapa, prosecutors said.
[66] Crisis Group interview, government official, 6 March 2013.

U.S. officials accuse of transporting drugs for the Zetas.[67] Nor did the Zetas in Guatemala unleash the bloody inter-cartel turf wars that have killed thousands of Mexicans, such as the battle between the Zetas and the Gulf cartel for control of Nuevo Laredo, or between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels over Ciudad Juarez.[68] The elimination of leaders, through assassination or arrest, has generated internal competition for leadership or the fracturing of networks into smaller groups. Instead of massacres, the result has been numerous individual killings that often go unreported.[69]

"We are seeing the decadence of old groups", said, a professor and researcher. "The old networks were disrupted by the Zetas, and now the Zetas have disintegrated into Zetillas. They are splinter groups (*grupúsculos*), not big operators".[70] But, a government investigator said, "small groups can be worse". Bigger groups that have consolidated their power can control their members; weaker groups cannot. The jockeying for power among splinter groups explains much of the violence in the east, he said.[71]

Often it is the most ruthless – former bodyguards or hit men – who win these internecine struggles.[72] As a government official put it, the mentality of top *transportistas* has changed from that of "businessmen to hit men".[73] Among the suspected new criminal leaders in the east is Jairo Orellana Morales, captured after a firefight with security forces in May 2014.[74] A Zacapa native, he reportedly got his start as a gunman for the Lorenzana family.[75] The U.S. treasury department identified him in August 2013 as a narcotics trafficker who transported cocaine for the Zetas.[76] A newspaper investigation dubbed him "*el Rey del Tumbe*" – the king of the heist – for stealing drug shipments from his rivals. Taking another page from the Zetas, he reportedly diversified his operations into kidnapping and extortion.[77]

Orellana also allegedly operated in Honduras, stealing shipments from the two groups that reputedly dominate cocaine trafficking there: the Valles and the Cachiros.[78] This nearly cost him his life, when hit men, reportedly sent by Honduran traffickers, tried to kill him in November 2012 at a plastic surgery clinic in Guatemala's elite

[67] Crisis Group interviews, David Martínez-Amador, Guatemala City, 7 September 2012, 21 November 2013. On Overdick, see "Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Arrest of Guatemalan Drug Trafficker Linked to Los Zetas Cartel", U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York, 3 April 2012.
[68] For coverage of violence in these cities, see Steven Dudley, "Zetas Leader's First Task: Hold Nuevo Laredo", 7 August 2013, and Patrick Corcoran, "Is Violence Returning to Ciudad Juarez?" 23 August 2013, both InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org.
[69] Crisis Group interview, Miguel Castillo Girón, Guatemala City, 15 August 2013.
[70] Crisis Group interview, Daniel Haering, Guatemala City, 2 May 2013.
[71] Crisis Group interview, Guatemala City, 16 October 2013.
[72] Edgar Gutiérrez, "Temporada de Caza", op. cit.
[73] Crisis Group interview, government official, 9 December 2013.
[74] Óscar F. Herrera, "Jairo Orellana Morales fue detenido luego de enfrentamiento armado", *elPeriódico*, 16 May 2014.
[75] Crisis Group interview, government official, 30 January 2014.
[76] "Treasury Designates Guatemalan Trafficker Allied with Los Zetas", U.S. Department of the Treasury, press centre, 20 August 2013.
[77] José Rubén Zamora, "'El Rey del Tumbe' y las extorsiones", *elPeriódico*, 11 February 2013.
[78] Zamora, "El Rey del Tumbe", op. cit. See also InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, for background information on the "Valles", who allegedly operate Copán department, and the "Cachiros" based in Colón, but with territory extending into Gracias a Dios and Olancho. In its first extradition of a suspected drug trafficker to the U.S., Honduras in May 2014 sent Carlos Arnoldo Lobo to Miami, Florida. The U.S. designated the "Cachiros" as a trafficking organisation in 2013. "Treasury Targets "Los Cachiros" Drug Trafficking Organization in Honduras", U.S. Department of the Treasury, press centre, 19 September 2013.

zone 15, where he was being treated. He escaped through a window, according to news reports, but gunmen killed seven bodyguards, including a former police inspector and an ex-soldier wanted for desertion. Investigators found more than 100 spent shells at the clinic and its parking lot.[79]

C. *History of Violence*

Eastern Guatemala has long been known for weak central government control combined with a history of caudillo rule and rebellion. In the mid-nineteenth century, insurgent Ladinos based in the mountains of eastern Guatemala waged war on the national government, whether liberal or conservative.[80] In the mid-twentieth century, the eastern mountains again sheltered rebels, this time army officers turned leftist guerrillas following the CIA-sponsored coup against the reformist government of Colonel Jacobo Árbenz. Their 1960 rebellion marked the start of armed conflict that claimed tens of thousands of lives over 36 years.[81]

The most notorious human rights abuses – including massacres of indigenous peoples deemed "acts of genocide" by a U.N. truth commission – occurred in the western highlands during the 1980s, but the pacification campaigns in the east during the 1960s and 1970s were also brutal. The air force dropped incendiary bombs on remote villages believed to harbour guerrillas, while paramilitary death squads terrorised the towns, "disappearing" students, labour activists, journalists and other suspected leftist sympathisers.[82] Central to the counter-insurgency operations were military-appointed commissioners, often conservative landowners, politicians, industrialists, bodyguards or students, who received military weapons and training, plus ID cards giving them power to detain and interrogate suspects and recruit local youths for military service. Essentially they were, in the words of a defence minister at the time, the army's "eyes and ears".[83] "Armed civilians" also served, a U.S. State Department "Intelligence Note" said, as "a source of potential political power for ambitious rightists and military men".[84]

Some of these commissioners used their military and political connections to bring illegal drugs through Guatemala, beginning in the 1980s. Though most cocaine

[79] "Orellana habría robado droga", *Prensa Libre*, 24 November 2012.

[80] Rafael Carrera, the caudillo who dominated Guatemala for much of the nineteenth century, launched a rebellion against the liberals from the eastern mountains but later had to battle insurgents from the "restless and lawless" east himself. Ralph Lee Woodward, *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871* (Athens, 1993), p. 192; Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez, *Piety, power and politics: religion and nation formation in Guatemala, 1821-1871* (Pittsburgh, 1998).

[81] There is substantial literature on the armed conflict. On its historial origins and evolution, see Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala, *Guatemala: Nunca Más, vol. III: El entorno histórico*, 1998, pp. 26-68, which describes the 1960 officers' rebellion and the guerrilla movement in the east. On casualties, see Daniel Rothenberg (ed.), *Guatemala, Memory of Silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report* (New York, 2012), p. 179. The UN-sponsored truth commission presented a report in 1999 that registered 42,275 victims and estimated (based on its own work and other studies) that 200,000 were killed in the conflict.

[82] "Memory of Silence", op. cit., pp. 15, 72. Guatemala pioneered the "disappearance" of suspects, a tactic used later by militaries in countries such as Argentina and Chile.

[83] *Nunca Más*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 51.

[84] "Subject: Guatemala: A Counter-Insurgency Running Wild?", Assistant Secretary of State Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary of State, 23 October 1967, National Security Archive, George Washington University, document 4.

moved directly from South America to Florida until the late 1990s, traffickers already used Central America as a safer if less direct route. Military officers, intelligence officials and their commissioner partners provided a readymade and well-connected network. "Hundreds of small runways appeared across the countryside in the 1980s, often in close proximity to army bases".[85] Guatemala returned to elected, civilian rule in 1986, but the military – penetrated by criminal networks dedicated both to enriching themselves and eliminating political enemies – remained the dominant institution for many years.[86]

Former military-appointed commissioners are a "who's who" of Guatemalan drug traffickers:[87] Waldemar Lorenzana was reportedly one, as was Arnoldo ("Archie") Vargas, the former mayor of Zacapa extradited to the U.S. on cocaine charges.[88] Another from the east was Byron Berganza, arrested in El Salvador in 2004 and expelled directly to face trial in the U.S.[89] According to some reports, Juan Alberto Ortiz López, aka Chamalé, recently extradited and formerly considered the most powerful trafficker in the west, was also one.[90]

These traffickers often sought reputations as public benefactors and bulwarks against more violent criminals. A magazine profile described Vargas, arrested during his second mayoral term, as a "charismatic" politician with a reputation for "generosity toward the poor" and courted by national political parties for his ability to generate an "endless supply of votes".[91] Chamalé is an evangelical pastor, who built a number of churches while allegedly laundering money. After his arrest, a local microbus driver told researchers: "He could be a drug dealer and whatever, but at least with [him] the delinquency was under control".[92]

The alleged drug trafficking clan with the strongest local roots may be the Lorenzana family of Zacapa. Waldemar Lorenzana, 74, extradited to the U.S. in March 2014 three years after his arrest, is accused of transporting cocaine for the Sinaloa cartel. Two of his sons have been arrested and a third is a fugitive with a $200,000 price on his head.[93] Another son and daughter have been designated as traffickers by the U.S. treasury department, which means that doing business with them or the family's multiple enterprises could result in criminal penalties or fines. The Loren-

[85] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., pp. 11-12. For more on Guatemalan military involvement in drug trafficking, see Frank Smyth, "The Untouchable Narco-State: Guatemala's military defies the DEA", *The Texas Observer*, 18 November 2005.

[86] Susan C. Peacock and Adriana Beltrán, "Hidden Powers in Post-Conflict Guatemala, Illegal Armed Groups and the Forces behind them", Washington Office on Latin America, 2003. Criminal groups in the military and police were also linked to such crimes as kidnapping and car theft. Active and retired military officers continued to eliminate perceived political opponents through networks dubbed "Clandestine Security Apparatuses" (Cuerpos Ilegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad, CIACS). The UN created CICIG to dismantle these in 2007. Crisis Group Latin America Report N°36, *Learning to Walk without a Crutch: The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala*, 31 May 2011.

[87] "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 42.

[88] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., December 2011, p. 12. On Vargas, see Smyth, "The Untouchable Narco-State", op. cit.

[89] Berganza also served as a DEA informant in Guatemala, as revealed during his trial in the U.S. See "Cómo cayó Byron Berganza", op. cit.

[90] "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 42.

[91] "El largo recorrido de Arnoldo Vargas: desde Manzanote hasta las rejas", *Crónica*, 17 January 1992, p. 17.

[92] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., pp. 55, 58.

[93] Mike McDonald, "Suspected Guatemalan drug trafficker extradited to U.S", Reuters, 18 March 2014.

zana family denies the allegations, saying its wealth comes from ranching and farming.[94] In their hometown, La Reforma, many still view them as farmers who made good and helped their less fortunate neighbours.

[94] "Treasury Designates Lorenzana Family Members and Businesses Allied with the Sinaloa Cartel", U.S. Department of the Treasury, press centre, 14 November 2012. " 'Siempre hemos servido a Dios y a la gente': Ovaldino Lorenzana Cordón asegura que su padre es hombre de bien", Nuestro Diario, 30 April 2011.

IV. Benefactors and Bullies

A. *Autumn of the Patriarch*

The town of La Reforma lies in Huité, one of Zacapa's poorest municipalities.[95] It is a nondescript collection of one-story cement-block dwellings along a few paved streets surrounded by the irrigated cantaloupe, honey dew and watermelon fields that provide much of the area's employment. What makes it unusual is a high wall along one street punctuated by turrets from which security guards peer down at the street below. Behind this wall, with its ornate pseudo-colonial gates, lives the Lorenzana family, revered by some locals as public benefactors, reviled by others as traffickers who laundered cocaine profits in a consortium of construction and transport companies, gas stations and a fruit exporting business.[96]

What remains of the legal and illegal businesses amassed by La Reforma's most famous family is hard to say. Its provincial empire has been shaken in the past two years by the arrests of Waldemar Lorenzana and two sons and the threat of U.S. sanctions against those who do business with them.[97] Zacapa residents say the Lorenzanas have sold off the fruit-export business that generated local jobs and abandoned much of their charitable work, such as support for a health clinic that reportedly gave the poor free care.[98] Government analysts doubt the family has abandoned the drug trade, though its reach and influence seem to have diminished.[99]

Even those who condemn the Lorenzanas as traffickers say the family has helped their community. "They provided jobs", said a restaurant owner in the department capital, "and not just for field workers. They employed engineers and other professionals". "The old man is a gentleman who has been very generous", said a local politician in another town.[100] An official who works in crime prevention said his colleagues did an informal survey asking residents of Huité to name an admired local leader, and "98 per cent named Lorenzana. They still see him as the patriarch; without him they feel there is no one to help them".[101]

Some also said the decline of the Lorenzanas has brought chaos in its wake. Waldemar and his family maintained a certain order among traffickers in the region that restricted the violence to internal account settling, making it more predictable, they explained.[102] "Zacapa has always been violent", said a social worker. "But now ordi-

[95] "Cifras para el Desarrollo Humano: Zacapa", Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo – Guatemala, Colección estadística departamental, 2011, p. 6. Zacapa has ten municipalities. Huité is the second-poorest, according to the UNDP human development index based on income, health and education. See also "Zacapa: Plan de Desarrollo Departamental, 2011-2025", SEGEPLAN, p. 16. According to SEGEPLAN, the enrollment rate for secondary school in Huité is 25 per cent, well below the national and departmental average of 40 per cent, and more than a third of the population suffers from chronic malnutrition.

[96] Crisis Group visit, La Reforma, Zacapa, 8 December 2013. Julie López, "Narcotráfico: El ocaso de los Lorenzana", *Plaza Pública*, www.plazapublica.com.gt, 30 April 2011.

[97] Luis Castro, "Cae Elio Lorenzana tras un operativo en Zacapa", Siglo 21, 9 November 2011. Byron Vásquez and Jerson Ramos, "Detenido otro Lorenzana", *Prensa Libre*, 18 September 2013.

[98] Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa, 20 September 2012, 9 March 2013, 2, 8 December 2013.

[99] Crisis Group interview, government official, 16 October 2013.

[100] Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa, 20 September 2012. An anonymous video expresses gratitude to the capo, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHvJVZSnT3E.

[101] Crisis Group interview, Zacapa, 2 December 2013.

[102] The capture of the family patriarch and two sons does not mean the family has withdrawn from the business. Other members remain active, according to Julie López, who has written extensively

nary people are afraid. There are more young people who want to make money quickly and get killed doing it". "Before we used to know who the *narcos* were", said the restaurant owner. "Now you could be talking to a trafficker and not know it. Young people you'd never heard of are suddenly *capos*".[103]

Although their wealth comes from transnational crime, the power and influence of traffickers in the east harkens back to traditional relationships embedded in Guatemalan history: that of the landowner who serves not only as employer but also as the local political strongman.[104] Local landowners and business people with ties to criminal networks are known as "*los señores*", according to the 2011 study of border communities, and are seen by some residents as defenders of local interests. Though engaged in illegal activity in the eyes of the national government, locally these networks have "traditionally provided security against delinquents and common criminal activity".[105]

The Lorenzanas – along with the Mendoza, León and Ortiz (Chamalé) families – are considered among Guatemala's oldest and most important kinship-based criminal networks.[106] But how much territory they ever controlled or sought to control is a matter of dispute. Some analysts say that unlike Mexican cartels that have fought viciously to control their turf, Guatemalan groups are more fluid and likely to collaborate with or co-opt than to confront competitors. As *transportistas*, they are mainly concerned with moving their illegal cargo from one border to another, using routes and methods that vary according to need.[107] While the Lorenzanas in recent years have transported drugs mainly for Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, analysts say, they are independent contractors, not cartel operatives. "There are no big cartels in Guatemala", said a criminal investigator, explaining that *transportistas* need alliances and local support, not territorial dominance.[108]

B. *Laundering*

A 2011 study of border communities in Zacapa, San Marcos and Petén found that trafficking had brought tangible benefits, not just for those directly involved in criminal activity but also for the communities at large: "Growing economic diversity in these communities – investments in new types of crops and services –and increasing rates of school attendance suggest the growth of a small middle class, even within relatively isolated communities". While the authors acknowledged they could not determine how much of the growth was linked to money laundering, "local citizens openly assume that this is the case".[109]

about trafficking in Guatemala. See "Los Lorenzana se quedan sin Patriarca. ¿Quién tomará su lugar?", Soy 502, www.soy502.com, 18 March 2014.

[103] Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa, 20 September 2012.

[104] Crisis Group interview, Matilde González, Rafael Landívar University, Guatemala City, 8 October 2012.

[105] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., pp. 4, 52-54.

[106] Steven S. Dudley, "Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: *Transportistas*, Mexican Cartels and Maras", Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, working paper series on U.S.-Mexico Security Collaboration, May 2010, p. 8; "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 24.

[107] Crisis Group interview, Guatemala City, David Martínez Amador, 21 November 2013. "Transnational Organized Crime", UNODC, op. cit., p. 11.

[108] Crisis Group interview, Public Ministry, 16 October 2013.

[109] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., p. 5.

How much drug money actually contributes to local economies is largely unknown. Zacapa and Chiquimula residents point to the modern gas stations with convenience stores that have appeared along certain highways as an indicator of money laundering. Others say traffickers own discotheques, condominium communities and shopping centres.[110] Even the growth of tomato cultivation in the east is attributed, at least in part, to drug money. Construction companies, many of which compete for government contracts, are also cited.[111]

But trafficking also spawns less benign activities that can generate greater violence, especially as the groups splinter into more violent factions. A local official in Zacapa said loan sharking had become a common way to launder drug profits, with *sicarios* (hit men) used to enforce payment. In Zacapa and Chiquimula, residents and officials said *narcomenudeo* (retail drug sales) were rising. A homicide detective in the region, said that in most of the cases he handled both the victim and the perpetrator were involved in the drug business, increasingly at the local level.[112] Street dealers, often women, who absconded with the product or failed to turn over their take, were likely to turn up dead, said a local official.[113]

Using hard drugs such as cocaine, formerly frowned upon, was now "culturally accepted", said an educator in a small town. A former addict active in a local chapter of Narcotics Anonymous said illegal drugs were fashionable among middle-class students.[114] Such comments are echoed in Zacapa, where a local official said drugs were as easy to sell or buy as candy.[115] But information about drug consumption in Guatemala is largely anecdotal. The government office that handles drug abuse has funding only for educational programs, not research.[116]

The arrest of major drug lords has made traffickers more discreet, said a prosecutor, but they remain influential. "They used to drive in caravans of bodyguards with visible automatic weapons", he said. "That doesn't happen anymore, but everyone knows who they are".[117] A school director said traffickers were still local success stories, admired by youths with few other opportunities. "There are no good jobs here",

[110] Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa, 20 September 2012; Chiquimula, 18-19 March 2013.

[111] "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking", CNA, op. cit., p. 50. The government recently implemented an asset recovery law but still lacks investigative capacity and know-how to trace illegal funds, a challenge even in developed economies. "Siguiendo la Ruta del Dinero en Centroamérica: lavado de dinero y sus implicaciones en la seguridad regional", Fundación Konrad Adenauer and Red Centroamericana de Centros de Pensamiento e Incidencia (laRED), June 2012. This study examines new laws and policies to combat money laundering but notes the "enormous difficulties of obtaining credible and verifiable information" about money laundering in order to measure its economic impact (p. 6).

[112] Crisis Group interviews, Chiquimula, 9 September 2012, Zacapa, 2 December 2013.

[113] Crisis Group interview, Zacapa, 2 December 2013.

[114] Crisis Group interviews, Chiquimula, 18, 19 March 2013.

[115] Crisis Group interviews, Zacapa, 1-2 December 2013.

[116] The Secretariat for the Commission against Addictions and Drug Trafficking (SECCATID) has school-based surveys of drug use in urban areas in certain departments, but it has not conducted national or regional studies over time to measure trends. Crisis Group interview, SECCATID, 20 November 2013. Some officials maintain that cocaine consumption in the country as a whole is low compared to neighbours. See Marta Sandoval, "¿Qué drogas se consumen en Guatemala?", *elPeriódico*, 10 July 2011.

[117] Crisis Group interview, Zacapa, 9 March 2013. The prosecutor said the 2009 Law on Arms and Ammunition, which requires gun registration and prohibits the open display of firearms, had also forced traffickers and bodyguards to be more discreet.

he said. "Trafficking offers money, a better life".[118] Traffickers and their business associates also have wealth to pay off police and other officials in order to move drugs and launder the proceeds. Police collaboration with organised crime is widely assumed. "Police, narcos: they're the same thing" said an educator.[119] A journalist said few residents would call police about criminal activity because the National Civilian Police (PNC) was viewed as either impotent or on the take. "Why ask for more police?" asked a local official voicing what he said was a popular sentiment. "The police themselves just bring more insecurity."[120]

Funding campaigns is said to be a way both to launder money and buy political influence. A former elected official said he left politics because campaigning had become too expensive. Contributions are made by local traffickers and their business associates in both cash and kind: "They provide the posters, the transportation and the campaign workers". After leaving politics, the ex-official said, he tried to start a construction company, but that industry, too, is awash in drug money: "It is impossible to compete. You will always be underbid".[121]

The impact of organised crime – or other powerful interest groups – on local politics goes largely unreported. A 2007 electoral and political parties law imposes limits on spending, but enforcement by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is lax and potential penalties nominal.[122] Watch dog groups, such as Acción Ciudadana (Citizen Action) estimate national campaign spending based on television ads, but local spending, especially in violent border towns, is difficult and dangerous to monitor.[123] That drug traffickers finance campaigns, especially at local level, is widely assumed but rarely, if ever, denounced. Vice President Roxana Baldetti told reporters in December 2013: "There are mayors we know work for drug traffickers, and if we examine the map, they are mayors who are precisely in border areas. Who finances these campaigns? Drug trafficking. It's not magic".[124]

C. *Sicarios and Drug Dealers*

Assailants gunned down journalist Luis de Jesús Lima just before dawn as he was leaving the radio station in Zacapa where he hosted an early morning show.[125] Security cameras showed two men on a motorcycle at the scene, though the images were not clear enough to identify them or a license plate number. The attack had the hallmarks of a murder-for-hire: the killers acted with brutal efficiency, making no attempt to rob or confront their target. "They went directly for him; it was very quick, very accurate", said his widow, Rebeca Pérez.[126]

Though investigators say they have identified the probable hired assassins – one or both of whom were later killed – they have too little evidence to go after the mas-

[118] Crisis Group interview, Zacapa, 4 September 2012.
[119] Crisis Group interview, Chiquimula, 18 March 2013.
[120] Crisis Group interview, Esquipulas, 3 December 2013.
[121] Crisis Group interview, December 2013.
[122] See Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°24, *Guatemala's Elections: Clean Polls, Dirty Politics*, 16 June 2011, pp. 11-12.
[123] Crisis Group interview, Citizen Action, Guatemala City, 24 October 2013.
[124] Pavel Gerardo Vega, "Baldetti, la CICIG, los alcaldes y el narcotráfico", *elPeriódico*, 11 December 2013. Pressed, she would not name the mayors who had allegedly accepted drug money, though she said neither she nor her party had done so.
[125] Erick de la Cruz, "Asesinan a locutor Luis Lima," *Prensa Libre*, 6 August 2013.
[126] Crisis Group interview, Zacapa, 1 December 2013.

termind; rumours abound, but no one has come forward to provide evidence.[127] They have discarded personal or financial problems as a motive and suspect Lima was killed for something he knew or said. The station discouraged on air discussion of controversial topics, but off air the veteran 68-year-old journalist was outspokenly critical of corruption. "Half of Zacapa probably knows or suspects who [the mastermind] was", said a prosecutor, "but they can't or won't tell us anything, either because they can't prove it or they're afraid".[128]

Four journalists were killed in Guatemala in 2013. All were shot by assassins who quickly disappeared, without robbing the victim. Three of the four were killed in eastern border departments: two in Jutiapa, bordering El Salvador, and one (Lima) in Zacapa. As of April 2014, none of the cases had been solved.[129] The killing of four journalists in a country with more than 5,000 murders a year could just be attributed to high overall violence, but a Guatemalan watchdog group contends that aggression against journalists is on the rise: it registered 57 physical attacks or threats in 2013 and 26 in the first four months of 2014. The group blamed authorities for some of these acts, but it noted that the state was no longer the only or principal threat to freedom of expression: "The presence of organised crime and of drug trafficking groups has made journalists more insecure, especially those who work in the interior [resulting in] in censorship and self-censorship". It also noted that threats against journalists working outside major cities were rarely publicised for fear of reprisals.[130]

Journalists may also be reluctant to denounce threats or cooperate with investigations because they themselves receive pay-offs from local politicians linked to organised crime, making them vulnerable to blackmail.[131] Sources in Zacapa and Chiquimula said such payments were common knowledge. Failure to cooperate can be dangerous. A local journalist said that since refusing to work with a powerful local politician, he and his family had received threatening phone calls.[132]

The Lima case also highlights the difficulties police and prosecutors face, particularly in outlying regions. Because district offices are vulnerable to corruption and intimidation, units based in the capital handle certain sensitive investigations, such as drug trafficking and human rights cases, including crimes against journalists. Trips to Zacapa and other areas dominated by organised crime are kept secret, even within the Public Ministry (the office of the public prosecutors), for fear of infiltration. Prosecutors prefer not spend the night, so every visit requires a two-hour journey. Even with such precautions, investigators sometimes find their visits monitored. A prosecutor described arriving in Zacapa on a supposedly confidential trip only to meet the suspect's lawyers at both the crime scene and courts. When local PNC officers warned him he was at risk, he left, making sure to take an alternate route. Prosecutors who live in the region are even more at risk: "The criminals know them, their families and where they live".[133]

[127] Crisis Group interview, Public Ministry human rights unit, Guatemala City, 3 February 2014.
[128] Crisis Group interview, Guatemala City, 3 February 2014.
[129] "¡Silencio! Periodistas en Línea de Riesgo: Avances del estado de situación de la prensa en Guatemala", Journalism Observatory, Center for Informative Reporting (CERIGUA), January-April 2014, pp. 16-17; and "Estado de situación de la libertad de expresión en Guatemala durante el 2013", CERIGUA, p. 3.
[130] "¡Silencio!", op. cit., pp. 7, 9.
[131] Crisis Group interview, prosecutors, 4 February 2014.
[132] Crisis Group interview, 2 December 2013.
[133] Crisis Group interview, Public Ministry, Guatemala City, 4 February 2014.

Such fears are well founded: in 2005 gunmen shot and killed a prosecutor and a judge in Chiquimula in apparently separate cases. Prosecutors began eating at the office and varying their routes home. "Any vehicle with polarised glass and men inside seems suspect to us", one said.[134] More recently a prosecutor who worked in Chiquimula was among seven people killed by gunmen in Huehuetenango, a department bordering Mexico. The attack bore the hallmarks of an organised-crime hit: heavily armed gunmen apparently pursued two vehicles, then incinerated them with the victims inside.[135] The case is unsolved, and it is unclear whether the prosecutor was a target, though a local publication said that the previous year she had escaped an attack allegedly by the Zetas.[136] Asked in 2014 about the greatest challenge faced by the Public Ministry, former Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz replied: "Guaranteeing the necessary security for judges, prosecutors and other parties to the process, especially in border departments".[137]

Guaranteeing that prosecutors in border departments are not corrupted is also a challenge. Scandals have repeatedly rocked the Public Ministry's counter-narcotics office in Chiquimula. In January 2012, authorities arrested and charged an auxiliary prosecutor with authorising trucks carrying precursor chemicals – used in the manufacture of illicit drugs including cocaine – to leave Santo Tomas port without inspection; in February 2013 they arrested two more prosecutors from the same office on charges of facilitating the entry of precursor chemicals. In January 2013, a driver with the unit and a counter-narcotics police officer were arrested after wiretaps reportedly revealed they were passing information about counter-narcotics agents and their cases to local traffickers.[138]

[134] Eddy Castillo, "Operadores de justicia en Chiquimula temen por sus vidas", *elPeriódico*, 17 May 2005.

[135] News stories suggested the target was a businessman linked to money laundering. The president and minister of government blamed conflicts between trafficking groups in the border department of Huehuetenango, where the Zetas and Sinaloa cartel are said to operate. Authorities believe the killers may be from the same group that killed nine police in Salcajá (see above). It is unclear why the prosecutor, Yolanda Olivares, and an official from the first lady's social services secretariat were in one of the cars. "Los negocios de Palacios, quien murió carbonizado en Huehuetenango", *elPeriódico*, 28 December 2012; Steven Dudley, "Guatemala Massacre Opens Window into Elite's Ties to Organized Crime", InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, 14 February 2013; Gerson Ortiz, "Capturados podrían estar implicados en caso de fiscal", *elPeriódico*, 16 July 2013.

[136] See "Matan a Agente Fiscal del Ministerio Público de Chiquimula en Huehuetenango", Mi Chiquimula, michiquimula.com, 24 December 2012, which says Olivares had been the victim of a failed attack the previous year by hit men who allegedly belonged to the Zetas.

[137] Araceli Osorio, "Entrevista: Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey", Info Sur Hoy, www.infosurhoy.com, 12 February 2014.

[138] "Tres capturados por facilitar envío de precursores químicos", 29 February 2012; "Capturan a fiscales por colaborar en el ingreso de precursores químicos", 29 January 2013, both Public Ministry; Coralia Orantes, "Banda pasaba datos a narcos", Siglo21, 3 April 2013.

V. From Border Control to Development

In April 2014, President Molina announced creation of the Chortí Task Force (named after a Maya population in eastern Guatemala and Honduras) to reinforce security in six eastern and north-eastern departments: Zacapa, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Izabal, Alta Verapaz and Petén. Expected to be deployed by the end of 2014, it will include 200 police and 195 soldiers, plus prosecutors and customs officials, charged with carrying out "inter-institutional operations" to "prevent, combat, disband and eradicate criminal activity".[139] It will be based on property in Izabal confiscated under a 2010 asset recovery law from Mario Ponce, now serving a 25-year trafficking sentence in the U.S. Named "*El Triunfo*" ("The Triumph") the estate's columned mansion has a commanding view of the surrounding countryside.[140]

The effort is modelled on the Tecún Umán task force (honouring a Maya-Quiché king who fought the Spanish conquistadors) that began operations along the border with Mexico in July 2013.[141] The idea is to create a mobile, well-trained and vetted force that sets up checkpoints, monitors blind crossings and supports judicial authorities conducting criminal investigations. The government says the deployment of these joint military/police task forces in the capital and the neighbouring municipalities of Mixco and Villa Nueva has reduced homicides and other crimes.[142]

Insecurity in the violent east, however, will not be remedied by better border control alone. Other countries facing border-area lawlessness have launched more comprehensive efforts. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos initiated his "Borders for Prosperity" plan in 2011, managed by a special foreign ministry unit to promote social and economic development along the border, where there are sizeable indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities that suffer high poverty and violence from various illegal armed groups, including guerrillas, paramilitaries and recently established criminal gangs known as BACRIM.[143]

By April 2014, Colombia had appropriated $32 million for projects in some 77 municipalities, addressing a wide array of issues, including infrastructure, education, agricultural development and governance.[144] Though it is still very early, the plan appears to be having a positive impact, especially in marginalised communities with

[139] José Pablo Coyoy, "Oficializan Fuerza de Tarea para combatir delitos en frontera Guatemala-Honduras", AGN, 16 April 2014. The government is also considering a separate task force based in Petén. "Nueva Fuerza de Tarea podría implementarse en Petén", CERIGUA, 29 April 2014.

[140] Crisis Group visit, Morales, Izabal, 7 May 2011. Miriam Wells, "Guatemalan Authorities Seize Luxury Narco-Mansions", InSight Crime, www.insightcrime.org, 23 April 2013.

[141] Gerardo Rafael, "Fuerza de Tarea Tecún Umán, lista para combatir el crimen", *Diario de Centro América*, 17 June 2013. The U.S. supplies equipment and training for these units. "U.S. Army Supports New Guatemalan Inter-Agency Task Force", Stand To! The Official Focus of the Army, 5 July 2013.

[142] "Informe del Segundo Año", op. cit., p. 85.

[143] BACRIM is the Spanish acronym for "bandas criminales emergentes" (emerging criminal groups). See Crisis Group Latin America Report N°41, *Dismantling Colombia's New Illegal Armed Groups: Lessons from a Surrender*, 8 June 2012.

[144] "Plan de Fronteras para la Prosperidad", power point presentation, Plan de Fronteras para la Prosperidad, Presentación General, April 2014, email communication, 14 May 2014. $8 million came from sources appropriated directly by foreign ministry and $24 million from shared projects with other ministries, municipalities and governorships. International cooperation has been limited, but some foundations support specific initiatives. Crisis Group interview, consultant, Bogotá, 14 May 2014. "Gobierno lanzó salvavidas para zonas de frontera por $930.000 millones en 2014", *La República*, 10 May 2014.

little or no state presence. Over the long run, the projects are designed to be managed locally.[145] Still unaddressed is how to involve local authorities in security efforts that remain largely in military hands.

Ecuador and Peru are implementing a joint plan along a tense border that has been a source of conflict for more than 150 years, including a brief war n 1995.[146] Under a 1998 treaty, they created, with donor support, an international entity to implement a development plan focused on providing infrastructure, education and health care to communities within 40km of the border.[147] The two have invested more than $220 million in infrastructure – from roads to community centres – that has in turn spurred private investment. As in Colombia's initiative, security remains outside the plan. Instead, the militaries have launched their own collaborative efforts. The defence ministers of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia met in May 2014 to coordinate operations against the trafficking of drugs, weapons and fuel, among other contraband, plus illegal mining.[148] While the effort reportedly includes a community component, how local populations will benefit or participate remains unclear.

Central America has institutions that could potentially organise efforts to provide security and development in vulnerable border communities. The Central American Integration System (SICA) includes a border program funded largely by the European Union to promote security and efficiency along region borders.[149] In 2011, the seven SICA members agreed broadly on an ambitious program to focus regional efforts around four axes: law enforcement, crime prevention, rehabilitation and prisons and institutional strengthening. They also promised to harmonise security strategies, share information and experiences and identify financial needs and resources.[150] The initiative attracted pledges for new funding, though mostly as loans for country-specific projects.[151] But SICA lacks administrative capacity to manage regional efforts and appears to have insufficient political backing from national policymakers for major initiatives. Unable to marshal sufficient funds abroad or at home for its security program, its influence remains more rhetorical than real.[152]

The U.S. Congress has appropriated about $800 million since 2008 for security assistance across Central America through the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). That initiative funds programs for narcotics interdiction, strength-

[145] Crisis Group interview, consultant, Bogotá, 14 May 2014.

[146] James Brooke, "Peru and Ecuador Sign Truce in Effort to Halt Border War", *The New York Times*, 2 March 1995; "Así fue la última guerra", BBC, 3 March 2008.

[147] "Plan Binacional Perú-Ecuador", Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo de Ecuador, February 2014. An extension was added in August 2013 that focused on children and health conditions on the border. Julio Rojas Julca (Peru's vulnerable populations vice minister), "Avanza plan binacional Perú-Ecuador", El Peruano, 17 August 2013.

[148] "Ecuador, Colombia y Perú impulsan una inédita agenda de seguridad", Agencia EFE, 13 May 2014.

[149] This border security program, Seguridad Fronterizo (SEFRO), is mainly capacity-building and information-sharing. See "Resultados SEFRO 2012", Secretaría General del Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, San Salvador, 30- 31 May 2013, at www.sela.org.

[150] "Central American Security Strategy", Secretariat General of the Central American Integration System, June 2011.

[151] The World Bank and the International Development Bank (IDB) pledged more than $1 billion. Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress", U.S. Congressional Research Service, 6 May 2014, p. 22.

[152] Crisis Group Skype interview, Werner Ovalle, former SICA official, 27 November 2013. Kevin Casas-Zamora, "The Security Summit in Central America: On the Modest Meaning of Shared Responsibility", Brookings Institution, 30 June 2011; Espach and Haering, "Border Insecurity", op. cit., p. 11.

ening law enforcement and justice institutions and violence prevention through work with at-risk youth. The idea is to create pilot programs that regional governments can sustain and replicate, such as model police precincts in both Guatemala and Honduras.[153]

CARSI does not focus specifically on borders but does fund some programs in eastern Guatemala that seek to provide vocational and other opportunities for youth. It also trains and funds special units to investigate gang activities. One such unit is based in Jalapa, bordering El Salvador; another is planned in Chiquimula. Units vetted by the U.S. DEA in Guatemala and Honduras share intelligence and collaborate on operations, such as the May 2014 seizure of more than $2 million in cash hidden in a vehicle heading from eastern Guatemala to the capital. CARSI also promotes regional collaboration, such as helping bring Colombian police advisers and trainers to Guatemala and Honduras.[154]

Since the 1990s, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have cooperated along their common borders through "Plan Trifinio". Without a security component, however, it concentrates primarily on infrastructure and community development, especially environmental initiatives like reforestation and watershed preservation. The most visible crime prevention efforts in all three countries rely heavily on military force. Pérez Molina, a former general who campaigned promising to use an "iron fist" (*mano dura*) against crime, has the joint military/police task forces; Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez has the "Tigers", a hybrid military/police force; Former President Mauricio Funes increased troop numbers in El Salvador and sent soldiers into the streets to help fight crime, a policy his successor, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, has promised to continue.[155] Such programs are often popular among crime-plagued populations seeking immediate relief, but they do not address the institutional vacuum that has allowed criminal organisations to thrive.

[153] Meyer and Seelke, "Central American Regional Security Initiative", op. cit, pp. 26-30. These security programs were originally included in the Mérida Initiative, an assistance package designed to support Mexico's fight against organised crime. They were split off to CARSI in 2010. On the model precinct programs, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°43, *Police Reform in Guatemala: Obstacles and Opportunities*, 20 July 2012, pp. 17-19. This is being replicated in Honduras, where the U.S. has funded a model precinct in Tegucigalpa. "Assistant Secretary William R. Brownfield Announces New Programs to Improve Security", U.S. embassy, Honduras, press release, 26 March 2012.

[154] Crisis Group email, U.S. officials, 19 May 2014. The specially trained investigative units are known as National Action Units against the Criminal Development of Gangs (PANDA, for *pandilla*, gang). "Decomisan en Guatemala 2,26 millones de dólares en efectivo sin declarar", Agencia EFE, 5 May 2014.

[155] The "Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad" (TIGRES) were created in 2013 under legislation spearheaded by Hernandez when president of the National Congress. "TIGRES élite será un híbrido policial-militar", *La Tribuna*, 10 May 2013. On El Salvador, see Ronan Graham, "El Salvador's military has grown 50 per cent under Funes", *Insight Crime*, www.insightcrime.org, 8 December 2011; "Presidente electo de El Salvador sacará el Ejército a las calles", Telesur, www.telesurtv.net, 29 May 2014.

VI. Conclusion

The recent history of Guatemala and other countries facing transnational organised crime suggests that using elite forces to capture major *capos* is not enough to assure public security in the long run. Instead of reducing violent crime, it may exacerbate bloodshed by setting off a struggle within or between criminals to control trafficking and other illicit activities. Guatemalan security forces and prosecutors have made significant progress, capturing powerful local traffickers and extraditing them to the U.S. and also convicting violent traffickers in domestic courts, including leaders of the hyper-violent Zetas cartel. Such efforts, while necessary, are far from sufficient. The government has yet to address the void that allows criminals to operate with impunity. Traffickers and other powerful outlaws thrive in the absence of credible, legitimate actors, public and private, capable of providing security, jobs and hope for the future. Citizens living along the frontier, especially the one with Honduras, have for too long borne the brunt of the violence and corruption generated by international trafficking networks.

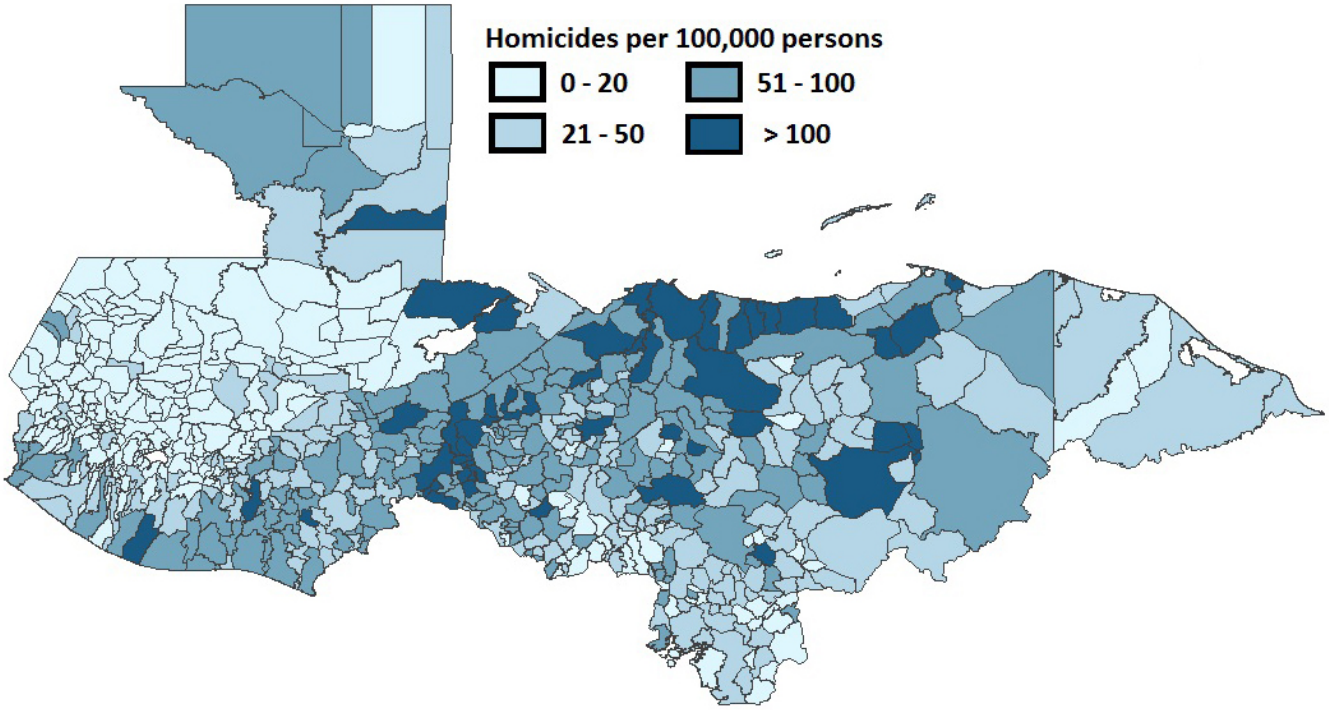
National leaders, business people and donors need urgently to launch initiatives aimed not only at securing the border, but also at creating a positive state presence capable of bringing long-suffering residents security plus vital services and economic opportunity. Guatemalan leaders should also place a high priority on strengthening the police and justice sector, in cooperation with CICIG, whose mandate may need to be extended. Such efforts require sustained political effort and are likely to benefit the country as a whole.

Guatemala and Honduras are not the only Latin American countries whose neglected borders are havens for traffickers and other outlaws. A joint development program has sparked economic growth along the Peru-Ecuador frontier, while Colombia has begun an ambitious development plan for regions harbouring a lethal combination of guerrillas, paramilitaries and newly emerging criminal networks. These nations should share experience and expertise with Central American leaders struggling to develop their own security strategies. The U.S. and others with interests in fighting international organised crime should give more aid to embattled border communities, including measures to strengthen local institutions and prevent violence via education and job training. Thus far most help has focused on border control and drug interdiction. Stopping bloodshed along the Guatemalan/Honduran border requires a more comprehensive approach to combine law enforcement with economic development.

Guatemala City/Bogotá/Brussels, 4 June 2014

Appendix A: Map of Guatemala

Appendix B: Map of Homicides by Municipality in Guatemala and Honduras



Sources
Guatemala: Policía Nacional Civil (PNC) and Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).
Honduras: Policía Nacional and rates by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras and its Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad (IUDPAS).

Map by Carlos A. Mendoza, CABI.

Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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June 2014

Appendix D: Reports and Briefings on Latin America and the Caribbean since 2011

Learning to Walk without a Crutch: The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, Latin America Report N°36, 31 May 2011 (also available in Spanish).

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