

“The Evolving Dynamics of Terrorism: The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus of Hezbollah and The Los Zetas Drug Cartel”

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Research Question: Has Hezbollah infiltrated the United States of America through an alliance with the Los Zetas cartel?

Introduction

“Transnational crime will be a defining issue of the 21st century for policymakers—as defining as the Cold War was for the 20th century and colonialism was for the 19th. Terrorists and transnational crime groups will proliferate because these crime groups are major beneficiaries of globalization. They take advantage of increased travel, trade, rapid money movements, telecommunications and computer links, and are well positioned for growth”

- Louise I. Shelley (Hesterman, 2013, p.7)

Transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups operate differently. Their goals are different and their methodologies contrast greatly. However, both entities are dangerous and highly volatile actors in the realm of global trade and global security. Terrorism remains the number one threat the world faces. Transnational criminal organizations or (TCOs) remain an emerging threat but not quite at the scale of certain terrorist groups. The evolving infrastructures of many countries have allowed these types of groups to engage in new opportunities and seek new sponsors and business affiliates.

Alliances and partnerships have existed between gangs and TCOs for quite some time now. Terrorist groups as well engage in partnerships to help benefit their cause if need be. Terrorist groups have been seeking partnerships not just with other terrorist groups and actors, now they have affiliated themselves with TCOs across the globe. This poses new risks for global security in many different domains such as: Economic, Military, International and Diplomatic domains. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, TCOs have spread internationally at an exponentially alarming rate. These groups are engaged in the illicit trafficking of weapons, drugs and humans, as well as money laundering and exerting political influence over politicians who are susceptible to corruption.

An alliance between terrorist groups and TCOs allows these types of illicit activities to maintain a level of consistency in our world today. Terrorist groups require a source of revenue to initiate their plans of action. Those that are not domiciled within a state that sponsors terrorism, seek out other forms of revenue. Transnational criminal organizations offer an enticing business venture. The illicit trafficking of arms and drugs alone generates millions of dollars for some of these groups. This allows terrorist groups to generate a profit for their desired plans. The TCOs on the other hand are able to learn and practice the fear inducing tactics that the terrorist groups force on the international community. This deadly alliance of sorts allows these types of groups to exchange business models for violent and illegal purposes.

There is one particular alliance between the Lebanon based Hezbollah and the Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization known as Los Zetas that is particularly prominent and hazardous to the United States. In order to demonstrate the dangers that this alliance possesses, I will give a brief background on Hezbollah and the Los Zetas drug cartel. I have examined many reports and articles written by professionals in the fields of counter-terrorism, intelligence analysis, foreign relations, and transnational organized crime. It is my belief that based on the evidence that exists through open source collection that Los Zetas are working with Hezbollah in a terrorist-criminal nexus.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah (“Party of God”) was formed in 1982 in Lebanon in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon during the fifteen year war. It is a Shia terrorist group that advocates Shia empowerment on a global scale. Their loyalty has always been to the cleric regime of Iran and the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini. They support various militant groups in their cause against western interests. On July 23, 2013, The European Union designated Hezbollah’s military wing a terrorist organization. Hezbollah’s existence is threatening to national security due to their involvement in numerous anti-U.S. terrorist attacks including suicide truck bombings of the U.S. embassy in Beirut in April 1983, the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983, and the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut in September 1984. These are just a few of the attacks that they have been involved with.

The declaration of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization “was a long overdue step making clear to Lebanon’s Party of God that it will pay a political price for continued acts of terrorism” (Levitt, 2013). Hezbollah are known for its armed activities, but it also runs one of the largest most complex and sophisticated criminal networks in the world. Hassam Yaccoub, a dual Swedish –Lebanese citizen and Hezbollah operative was sentenced to four years in prison. Hassam Yaccoub was convicted for his participation in an organized crime group and the preparation of criminal operations. The judiciary panel declared; “It has been proven that Hezbollah is an organization that operates under complete secrecy... There is no doubt that this group has multiple members and proceeds with various activities, including military training of its members. Therefore the court rules that Hezbollah acts as a criminal organization” (Levitt, 2013).

Hezbollah’s involvement with crime came to fruition due to its need for funding. They were facing financial insecurity from affiliates in Tehran and Damascus. Hezbollah was reportedly receiving upwards of \$100 and \$200 million annually from Iran and additional resources from Syria. However, in the past few years these allies have not been able to produce as much financial support. It is because of this lack of funding that Hezbollah has turned to criminal activities.

Hezbollah conducts criminal operations across the globe. They have formed alliances with multiple countries in Latin America. One alliance in particular that has received attention as

of late is with the “Los Zetas” drug cartel or drug trafficking organization (DTO) in Mexico. Hezbollah has created a criminal syndicate of drug trafficking through some of Mexico’s most well connected global drug dealers. This new partnership has assisted in laundering between \$850 and \$900 million.

Los Zetas

The “Los Zetas” drug cartel has been one of the most, if not the most, dangerous and powerful drug cartels in Mexico. Mexico has been the center for “narco-wars” for the past 7 years and has produced some of the most vicious cartels and drug trafficking organizations in the world. It is widely believed that they have now begun associating with terrorist groups and Islamic fundamentalist groups. Hezbollah is one of these affiliates. Hezbollah as well as certain elements of the Iranian Quds force are cooperating with cartels like Los Zetas, the most sophisticated drug cartel in Mexico. This unit does not fear or hide from any kind of law enforcement, rather they engage them.

Los Zetas are the fastest growing DTO in Mexico. They are the first of the DTOs to implement the internet in their strategies, to savagely behead many innocent civilians for the purpose of sending a message and to air drop propaganda leaflets (Hesterman, 2013, p.171). The Los Zetas cartel is a unique group of individuals. This groups has gone “rogue” and has utilized its specialized skills, equipment and training against the United States. The Zetas have an estimated 2,000 members and it is increasing. In its core, the members are comprised of former members of the Grupo Aeromovil de Fuerzas Especiales or the GAFE. The GAFE is known as the Special Forces arm of the Mexican military.

The former GAFE members have all received specialized training in fields such as jungle, amphibious and urban combat from some of the best counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency units in the globe. They have the ability to blend in and operate in foreign territories. Their role in the past was to protect security officials and important buildings to assisting the government in dismantling drug cartels. It is evident that this unit has one of the most distinguished resumes in all of Mexico. The Zetas were the execution arm of the Gulf Cartel. They initiated “hit squads” to kill the “enemy” which were mainly law enforcement officers and rival gang members. Hesterman writes, “Although other paramilitary groups or “enforcement groups” are present in those cartels, such as the CJNG (Knights Templar), the DEA labeled the Los Zetas as “the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent” (Hesterman, 2013, p.142).

In 2006, the Zetas broke away from the Gulf cartel and since have spread across 17 states in Mexico. Their rivals in practice the Sinaloa Cartel are believed to be in 16 states across Mexico. This is despite taking heavy blow to their leadership. The Zetas remain constant and vigilant in their drug trafficking activities and brutal tactics.

The Zetas have taken interest in international terrorist groups to model their businesses practices and tactics. One of these groups is Hezbollah. Hezbollah is a dangerous entity in Lebanon and Syria that has cemented itself in the country’s politics and military domains. They are a hostile but respected group in the Middle East. The Zetas have been influenced by their ideals and strategies. Hezbollah in turn has had a presence in central and south America for

nearly two decades now. The link between Hezbollah and Los Zetas has been relatively new but is being carefully analyzed and explored.

Terrorist-Criminal Nexus

This deadly alliance between a crime syndicate and a terrorist organization is extremely alarming due to the proximity of the operations and the resource capabilities of both entities. “The combination of power hungry cartels like Los Zetas and terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, who want a presence in North America, in or near the United States inhibit U.S. companies from wanting to conduct business in Mexico, and should not remain unnoticed” (Rosenthal, 2013). Hezbollah and Iran have been concentrating on developing a presence in Latin America for the past nine years. The focus was on forming relationships with Mexican drug cartels and establishing a residence with the aid of the cartels. The Mexican cartels have gained a dangerous ally by sympathizing with Hezbollah’s cause.

The drug trade generates millions of dollars every year and the United States is the largest consumer of illegal narcotics. It is appealing for many transnational criminal organizations to engage in drug trafficking through the drug cartels. Hezbollah is no exception. They have exerted their influence in their country. Their attempts to become assimilated speak great volumes about their resolve to infiltrate the United States. Islamic missionaries have been increasing in quantity over the last few years. The Islamist influence is evident in their adaptation to the Mexican culture and peaceful development co operations.

The threat of an attack by Hezbollah against the United States has always been present. It has only become much more realistic in these last ten years due to their spread of activity and influence in Latin America and Mexico. Their criminal activities and alliances with drug trafficking organizations such as “Los Zetas” illustrates a growing and dormant threat from south of the border. However, I believe that this threat is no longer dormant but real. Over the past decade Hezbollah has displayed a pattern of targeting U.S. interests and assets throughout Latin America.

A recent example of their resolve shows that Iran’s Qud forces attempted to recruit members of the “Los Zetas” cartel to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. Hezbollah’s drug trafficking and money laundering businesses have reached the U.S. in the form of Lebanese and U.S. businesses. These businesses have been involved in a Hezbollah controlled global network that launders millions of dollars in criminal proceeds from U.S. to West Africa.

The increasing presence of middle-eastern terrorist groups in Mexico presents an alarming scenario, where planted terrorists integrate and assimilate with the culture of the country and cross the border. This is a reality and it has only evolved in practice. When transnational criminal organizations work with terrorist groups, they exhibit a unique and amorphous ability to adapt and evolve to international laws. It is imperative for intelligence analysts to fully analyze and investigate all possibilities of this alliance.

Explanation and Relevance

The terrorist-criminal nexus of Hezbollah and Los Zetas implies that terrorists are now seeking new ways to generate money for terrorist operations. This specific relationship between these two groups must be investigated to identify the networks that apparently are operating already in the U.S.

The alliance between the Lebanese group Hezbollah and the Mexican drug cartel “Los Zetas” has serious implications for national security. Immigration and drug trafficking alone make up a large proportion of this problem. This represents another adaptation of transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations in their evolving business ventures. This partnership is significant because it illustrates the lengths that each entity is willing to go to in order to advance their goals.

One of the characteristics of the party known as Hezbollah is their anti-western philosophy. The “Party of God” grows closer to reaching the capability to attack the United States from within its own borders. This strategy is made possible because of their growing networks and business ventures with criminal organizations across Latin America. Hezbollah has grown more and more perilous under the radar of the intelligence analysts because of their involvement in past bombings of U.S. Embassies and support of militant groups in allying nations. Venezuela and Chile are hosts to Hezbollah bases already and several more countries have already been supporting their party.

Mexico makes these business ventures all the more deadly because of their proximity just south of the United States border. Hezbollah cooperating with a drug trafficking organization such as “Los Zetas” implies that there are and will be countless new risks involved if action is not taken immediately. Hezbollah has been involved with the drug trade for years and have sustained substantial profits from the illicit activity. This type of operation only seeks to contribute to Hezbollah’s cause to attack the United States and infiltrate its national security apparatus.

The Los Zetas cartel remains the most sophisticated and one of the most dangerous and powerful drug cartels in Mexico. Their reluctance to adhere to the Mexican authorities crackdowns on illegal narcotics makes them a high level threat from the south. Their involvement in illicit drug trafficking has caused bloodshed throughout their home country with no regard to human life. The law enforcement agencies in Mexico have struggled repeatedly with the drug cartels in the seven year-long drug war. Corruption in Mexico’s law enforcement agencies and government also aids the cartels and prolongs the drug war.

Los Zetas have already infiltrated the U.S. They have operated in several cities in Texas, Tennessee, Arizona and North Carolina. Their “businesses” help their criminal enterprise run smoothly across the border. Collaborations with other gangs such as MS-13 help extend their grasp on the illicit narcotics trade and weapons trade. Los Zetas pose a very dangerous threat to U.S. security because they undermine every law in place already. The “legitimate” businesses they create to launder their money disrupt the economic flow of our country. Their brutal tactics and savagery towards their enemies spills over and harms innocent civilians. While it is not their

direct intention to cause havoc and revealing their locations, they have no regard for civilian bystanders and legitimate businesses alike.

The Los Zetas drug trafficking organization has had an increasing presence here in the United States. They have had several run-ins with the authorities here while attempting to sustain their illicit operations. They employ multiple points of entry along the U.S. –Mexico border via tunnels, contact with other gangs in the U.S. and through recruitment. Author Jennifer L. Hesterman wrote, In 2008, DTOs were reportedly in 230 cities in the United States. The number rose to more than 1,000 U.S. cities by 2010, according to the U.S. Justice Department. Phoenix, Arizona has seen increasing activity from DTOs since 2006. Several attacks carried out on family homes all ended with bullets being sprayed into the houses. Kidnappings have risen in the Phoenix area as well.

The alliance of a drug trafficking organization or drug cartel such as “Los Zetas” and the terrorist group Hezbollah has brought a new wave of crime and terror to be dealt with; this is a terror-crime nexus at the core which has already penetrated the United States via drug trafficking. Their alliance has allowed Hezbollah to effectively smuggle cigarettes from one state to others while profiting from this trade. The said profits are then spent on supplies to aid Hezbollah back home in Lebanon. This is but one operation that has been conducted on American soil by Hezbollah and their criminal networks.

The narcotics industry remains one of the most lucrative sources of revenue for terrorist groups and criminal organizations leading to this criminal activity being legitimized. This emphasizes the financial needs of organizations and the role that the narcotics trade has had in undermining Western society. The United States consumes more illicit narcotics than any other nation. The threat and presence of Hezbollah is aided by the large illegal consumption of narcotics by the American people. Hezbollah is here.

Literature Review

Operational Dynamics

“Organized crime is greatly facilitated by the weakness of the state to many parts of the world. Weak financial regulatory systems, lax enforcement measures, and high levels of corruption are key factors that make certain countries particularly attractive to international criminals as safe havens” – UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel, 2004 (Patrick, 2011, p.135), this passage was included in Stewart Patrick’s chapter on transnational crime. His book *Weak Links: Fragile states, Global Threats, and International Security* examines the effects that crime, terrorism, infrastructure instability and international security has on weak states.

Fragile states or failing states are “inextricably linked to the increasing power of international criminal networks and ‘illegal’ economies.” According to Patrick, weak states lack the capacity to combat corruption and criminal networks due to poor law enforcement agencies and weak rule of law. Stewart Patrick writes from a non-partisan perspective and discusses the positions of the Council on Foreign relations in regards to weak states. His position with the

Center for Global Development assists him in his expertise when evaluating weak states and what constitutes a weak state.

Patrick's research on transnational criminal organizations and how their activities thrive in states with weak security measures is impressive. The evidence he includes goes to say "evidence suggests that drug traffickers value geographic convenience, exploitable infrastructure, and easy access to global markets at least as highly as they do the benefits of state weakness. Mexico while not at the same level of some of the nations in South America or Africa in terms of providing security for all citizens, severely lacks the capacity to stand competent on its own.

Joel Hernandez wrote about the collapse of the Lebanese Canadian bank in 2011 in an article titled, "Terrorism, Drug Trafficking, and The Globalization of Supply". The U.S. Department of Treasury was successful in foiling this money laundering financial institution that was tied to global drug trafficking, involving Los Zetas and Hezbollah. He gives a detailed account about Michele Leonhart, Preet Bharara, and Neil Macbride and how they were able to successfully bring down this illicit operation. Ayman Jouman and Maroun Saade were key figures in this operation that were involved with Hezbollah and their criminal activities.

The article describes Hezbollah as a terrorist group and why they are one of the most deadly of groups in the world. Hernandez writes "Hezbollah has shown a remarkable degree of adaptability in its three decades and counting of simultaneous terrorist, political, and charitable activity. As a traditional terrorist group, Hezbollah is nimble and boasts an impressive tactical reach, having staged attacks as far away from its home base as India and Argentina".

Several other facts to consider about Hezbollah included in Joel Hernandez's article include: The deployment of cells to strike at Israel—as well as Jewish non-Israeli—targets worldwide, the surfacing of cells in Thailand, Georgia, India and Bulgaria in 2012 and Hezbollah has a small minority of Parliamentary seats, yet they hold two Cabinet Ministries and they control through political alliances, eighteen out of the thirty Cabinet seats. Hezbollah's claim in politics makes them a unique threat compared to others.

Joel Hernandez also talks quite extensively about the Los Zetas drug cartel based in Mexico. Los Zetas are not a global terrorist group like Hezbollah or al-Qaeda but they display their deadliness through the brutal atrocities they have committed, and elite special operation corps training. Hernandez states that "Los Zetas arguably became the most powerful drug cartel in Mexico—at very least posing a worthy challenge to the Sinaloa Cartel for primacy in Mexico's criminal underworld. As if tasked with personifying Mexico's Faustian descent into generalized violence, Los Zetas made sadism their trademark" (Hernandez, 2013, p.1). The Los Zetas cartel engages in kidnapping, extortion, smuggling of humans and contraband, theft, and money laundering to create a wide portfolio of criminal activity.

The operational dynamics of Hezbollah have evolved to mirror a drug cartel or drug trafficking organization. Hezbollah turned to the drug trade in order to assist their funding. The extent of the funding can be traced to training of new recruits and supplies for the members to carry out their missions. Los Zetas on the other hand were naturally born into the drug trade according to Joel Hernandez He described the subtle escalation of Los Zetas into a terrorist

group, by their adoption of terrorist tactics in response to a military crackdown on drug cartels initiated by President Felipe Calderon.

The convergence of the Los Zetas cartel and Hezbollah imply that this is an evolution of business partnerships amongst criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. The Lebanese Canadian Bank foil in 2011 brought to light a dangerous allied effort between these two groups, “The success of Hezbollah’s commerce with Los Zetas makes it patently clear that, given the opportunity, it could have pulled off such an exchange” (Hernandez, 2013). Joel Hernandez writes this piece as a concerned individual who has seen what evidence there is that indicates this collaboration might be real. He is very informative in providing background information about the two groups. He also understands the implications of the partnership proposed here without making outlandish assertions about an attack occurring immediately.

Analysis Intelligence, a smart open source intelligence website reported in an article titled “Iron Triangle of Terror: Iran, Hezbollah, and Los Zetas?”, that On December 15th 2011, “it was revealed that Hezbollah has a substantial drug connection to the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas”. The history of the two groups is examined and illustrates the dangers that lay in an alliance between these two organizations. The article describes in detail the cell activity of Hezbollah in Latin America dating back to the mid 1980’s. Hezbollah is “primarily located in the tri-border area Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay” (AnalysisIntelligence, 2011, p.1).

Their functions in this region include money laundering and receiving profits from the drug trade. Over the past 25 years, Hezbollah has increased the number of operatives it has stationed in the TBA from 460 in the year 2000 The profits alone from this area are in the millions, and “Hezbollah has carefully trained its top operatives to form cells and set up shop in North and South America” (AnalysisIntelligence, 2011, p.1). The aid of the Los Zetas cartel only reinforces the rate at which Hezbollah may be ready to initiate some sort of attack within the United States. Hezbollah’s presence in South America and North America is detrimental to our national security. Unlike drug cartels and crime syndicates, Hezbollah is a state funded terrorist organization that serves as a proxy for Iran. Their escalating “presence in the Western hemisphere can be understood only in the context of its patron Iran’s pursuit of its strategic objectives, the fact that Iran is a state sponsor of Hezbollah means that the organization has the finances and the expertise to commit substantial acts of terrorism” (AnalysisIntelligence,2011, p.1).

The collaborative efforts between Los Zetas and Hezbollah in the drug trade are exponentially hazardous to national security. The drug trade alone caters to the United States as the largest consumer of narcotics but what makes this relationship between these two groups even more dangerous is escalation. The drug market offers tremendous profits but the escalation of weapons trafficking represents a new and more vital threat to national security and global security.

The writers for Analysis Intelligence and Recorded Future rely on factual evidence in making assertions and claims. This particular piece was well researched by their organization and it informs well. The extensive insight into Hezbollah reflects an understanding in international politics and security issues. The writer here appears mostly to be unbiased in his views on international security, perhaps middle-right at most.

Eldad Beck writes for YNET news, Israel's number 1 source for news. A report for Israel should not necessarily be believed immediately especially if there are allegations with no substantial evidence to support them. However, in this case, I believe that Beck writes very informatively using facts and actual data collected from the U.S. law enforcement agencies and the press releases from the Department of Homeland Security. The article titled, "Hezbollah's Cocaine Jihad", talks extensively about the Mexican town of Chiapas, and how it has grown to be a hub for Muslim radicals. The article highlights the business relationship between Los Zetas and Hezbollah and the tactics that they employ.

Beck stated that Mexico is home to more than 200,000 Lebanese and Syrian immigrants who were able to cross into the county with the aid of the cartels. He claims that Chiapas is moving towards being the first federal state to "turn its back on the church". This implies that the town has seen a very large increase in the Muslim community, some of which are reported to be members from Hezbollah and Hamas. While there is no proof provided of their affiliations to these particular groups, mass exodus of SIAs from the middle –east tells a very compelling story.

Infiltration

Author Hannah Stone, wrote an article for Insight Crime titled, "US alleges Zetas-Hezbollah funding link". Insight Crime is a foundation that dedicates itself to reporting on national security and individual security in Latin America and in the Caribbean region. The expertise in this report on transnational organized crime is reliable. In this report Ayman Joumaa was indicted for collaborating with his partners in having sold "85 tons of cocaine to the Zetas between 2005-2007, which was later trafficked into the U.S., and laundered some \$850 million in their profits for the group, some of it through the Lebanese Canadian bank" (Stone, 2011). Hannah stone stated that the presence of Hezbollah in South America was well known, but the increasing presence of the group in Central America has serious national security implications. These concerns were not ready to be addressed at the time.

Arthur Brice, contributor for CNN, asserts that Iran has infiltrated Latin America and now runs operations from a key group Hezbollah. The article titled, "Iran, Hezbollah mine Latin America for revenue, recruits, analysts say" goes on to report that Alberto Nisman, an Argentine special prosecutor has accused Iran of establishing terror networks throughout Latin America. These networks that are being set up, pose a huge threat to the United States and Latin America. Brice mentions the history of Hezbollah and how they have been able to expand into other markets for decades, he quotes Nisman, "the Iranians have been actively setting up intelligence and operational structures in Latin America since the 1980's" and that infiltration has progressed since then.

Hezbollah receives financial support from Iran, however as of 2006, Iran has not been able to provide the same amount of funding necessary to Hezbollah to conduct operations abroad. Furthermore, Iran has also had a say in how to spend the funds and how to conduct their operations. This was not received well by Hezbollah who then began to seek other avenues of profit. Their criminal activities began to grow significantly and transnationally. Latin America was the ideal setting for Hezbollah, seeing that they were already involved in the drug trade.

Hezbollah also recruits many people among the “diaspora” of Lebanese expatriates in the region, “much of that recruitment takes place in mosques or “Islamic centers” that Hezbollah operatives infiltrate or establish to serve the region’s burgeoning Muslim communities” (Brice, 2013). Brice goes on to say iterate that Hezbollah has mainly sought operations in Latin America as a source of financial gain, but Hezbollah has been targeting U.S. interests in Latin America as well as collaborating with al-Qaeda to focus on Jewish targets.

Hezbollah only stands to become more of a threat. Operation Titan is a clear example of this. In the article, Brice reports that in 2008, Operation Titan, “a bust by the U.S. and Columbian authorities of an international cocaine-smuggling and money laundering ring that funneled part of its profits to Hezbollah”. In 2010, U.S. authorities accused Ayman Joumaa, a Lebanese native, of selling Columbian cocaine to the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas. In addition he also laundered money for the drug trafficking organization and channeled the profits to Hezbollah. Hezbollah also made headlines in 2011, “when U.S. officials said Iranian operatives tried to recruit cartel members to assassinate a Saudi diplomat in Washington” (Brice, 2013, p.1).

The article titled “Los Zetas and Hezbollah, a Deadly Alliance of Terror and Vice” by Terence Rosenthal, examines the combination of power hungry cartels like Los Zetas, and terrorist organizations like Hezbollah who desire to have a presence in the United States. These groups “inhibit U.S companies from wanting to conduct business in Mexico and should not remain unnoticed” (Rosenthal, 2013, p.1). Rosenthal explains how the alliance came into existence by looking at the population of Lebanese in Mexico. The population has been growing steadily over the past decades. One type of joint operation between Hezbollah and groups in North and South America relied on fraud rings. Fraud rings as Rosenthal explains “use creative investment tactics that can pass as legal activity if not scrutinized. One such operation involved the selling of thoroughbred horses to cover up the trade of millions of dollars in fraudulent drug money”(Rosenthal,2013, p.1).

The article asks the question, why is it so dangerous for Los Zetas to be working with Hezbollah? Rosenthal states the answer to that is money laundering. A money laundering operation “that has the power to supersede local government, weaken communities, and make people subject to criminal tyranny” (Rosenthal, 2013). It is only a matter of time before Hezbollah becomes a major trafficker in weapons in addition narcotics and money laundering. This threat is highly possible to become a reality here in the United States because the Los Zetas drug cartel display great power in Mexico.

They are mostly comprised of former military members and are trained in techniques ranging from ambushes, defensive positions, and intelligence. Los Zetas have even “siphoned \$1billion dollars in fuels from state-run oil producer, Pemex through their pipelines” (Rosenthal, 2013). The Mexican government is reluctant to engage the Los Zetas cartel aggressively, because of their power and the bloodshed that is likely to ensue. This presents a growing threat that is just south to the United States.

Matthew Levitt author of Hizbullah narco-terrorism: A growing cross-border threat explains how Hizbullah or Hezbollah became involved in the drug trade to begin with. Their looming presence in South America and West Africa created substantial profits for the organization. Hezbollah has mimicked the same methods and strategies that the cartels have used

in Mexico, Brazil, and Columbia for some time now. A North Carolina representative sent a letter to the US department of Homeland Security, in that letter she went on to say ties between the Hizbullah and the drug cartels in Mexico are apparent. The US-Mexican border has seen an increase in gang related activity tied to Hizbullah. Myrick's letter quoted Michael Braun, "Hizbullah relies in the same criminal weapons smugglers, document traffickers, and transportation experts as the drug cartel....They work together, they rely on the same shadow facilitators. One way or another they are all connected" (Levitt, 2012, p.1). Matthew Levitt is a terrorism expert, having experience with the F.B.I. as a former counterterrorism intelligence analyst. He also served as the No. 2 Intelligence officer at the U.S. Treasury while working for the financial intelligence branch.

The Intelligence Overwatch website published an article by Victor Quinn called "Hezbollah using Mexican cartels to infiltrate USA", stressing the evidence of Hezbollah presence on the Mexican border as being very real. Quinn states that Hezbollah are more dangerous than al-Qaeda because of their training and long-term strategy planning, "Hezbollah has operated in South America for decades, moved north to Central America and now the group is blending into Shi'a Muslim communities in Mexico, including Tijuana" (Quinn, 2012, p.1).

Hezbollah, while establishing their presence in Mexico, are actively engaged in money laundering for the cartels and drug trafficking to which they reap great wealth from. The underlying threat hints at part of their long term strategy, which includes the focus on radicalizing Muslim communities, "they're focusing on developing and infiltrating communities within North America" (Quinn, 2012, p.1). Radicalism on the border presents a whole new chapter of national security concerns to be addressed.

Emerging Threat

Author Jennifer L. Hesterman wrote extensively about this alliance in her book, The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus: An Alliance of International Drug Cartels, Organized Crime and Terror Groups. Hesterman details the rise of the most sophisticated drug trafficking organization in Mexico. Since their disbanding from the Gulf Cartel, their ranks have increased as well as their presence in more than half the states in Mexico. "The members of the unit participate in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, gun running, and human smuggling. They also serve as hit squads, willing to murder innocent civilians in return for cash" (Hesterman, 2013, p.141). She talks in great depth about the brutal tactics they employ. They ambush law enforcement officers and take them by surprise before they can even react to anything. She argues because of their tactics and savage nature that they should not be viewed as a drug trafficking organization or transnational criminal organization. Instead, they should be viewed as a "lethal and complex army".

The tactics of the Zetas are sadistic and extreme to say the least. They execute their targets by saturation of bullets, decapitation and by setting them on fire. They use their military training to scout locations of law enforcement officers and border patrol agents who are stationed

on the border. They hold no remorse for innocent bystanders. Several massacres by the Zetas have included shooting into large crowds gathered at birthday parties, bars and casinos. One of the elements that they are known for is the use of *Sicarios* or assassins. Hesterman talks about one instance in which they kidnapped a 13 year old boy from Laredo, Texas named Rosalio Reta. They took him into Mexico, trained him and used him to kill numerous men and children throughout Texas.

The emerging presence of the Zetas has been identified in several states across the North America. Cells have been discovered in states such as Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina and Georgia. Hesterman states that the Zetas have been steadily spreading across the United States by establishing businesses that appear to be legitimate. Among the types of businesses owned by possible Zeta members are discotheques, car lots, restaurants and liquor stores according to a police detective in Laredo. The detective goes to say that the Zetas may even inject themselves into the political process of the towns they are in, "We could see them running for mayor, or even governor, in the future" (Hesterman, 2013, P.145).

Robert Mandel's *Dark Logic: Transnational Criminal Tactics and Global Security* elaborates on the complexities and evolution of transnational criminal organizations. In this book, Robert Mandel discusses the individual /human security vs. National/State security and the perils each domain faces in terms of transnational criminal organizations. Mandel writes "Considerable controversy also exists over whether "a deadly nexus" exists between organized crime terrorism in multiple regions of the world, with widespread and dangerous links between them" (Mandel, 2011, p.152). He asserts that these two groups are too different in their political agendas and tactics to be cooperative in highly advanced countries. However, working in developing countries is a more likely and fitting environment for these partnerships, "Because both criminals and terrorists thrive under a certain degree of political instability, ties between the two appear most commonly in developing countries rather than in the advanced industrial societies of Western Europe and North America" (Mandel, 2011, p.152).

Mandel states that an alliance is most likely to occur between criminals and terrorists in the illicit trafficking of arms and narcotics. In this chapter he talks about the emergence of transnational criminal organizations after the fall of the Soviet empire. After the Cold War, light arms became widely available and many criminal organizations became dependent on trafficking arms and narcotics. Transnational criminal organizations are willing to cooperate with terrorist groups who have something to offer. The nexus between these groups implies a trade of services of sorts, while many criminal groups have access to trafficking routes, terrorist groups typically have military training and combat techniques designed to strike fear in society.

The linkages between the two groups depend solely on conditions. What can both groups gain in cooperating with each other? Mandel references the Yakuza working with Aum Shinrikyo to illustrate the types of factors that create a partnership, "This collaboration appears to be most likely when there is a convergence between the economic interests of criminals and the political interests of terrorists" (Mandel, 2011, p.152). The chapter, *Links between Transnational criminals and terrorists*, examines one of the most dire security threats that these links pose, criminal facilitation of terrorism. There are five facilitation modes of affecting

terrorist success in achieving political objectives and in evading law enforcement surveillance and interdiction according to Mandel.

These five modes of facilitation are the Coordination Threat, the Invisibility Threat, the Social Threat, the Economic Threat, and the Political Military Threat. The Coordination Threat examines the functional networking linked to the adaptive and decentralized nature of transnational activities. Criminals provide border transportation, communication and logistics to transnational terrorists. The second mode, the Invisibility Threat entails the secrecy of the operations involved in transportation goods, movement of people, and shielding from law enforcement officers and governments. The third mode is the Social threat. This mode involves primarily the importation of criminals linked to illicit human transfers and smuggling, “transnational criminals facilitate the illegal entrance into Western states of unruly elements, including transnational terrorists” (Mandel, 2011, p. 155). The Economic Threat is the fourth mode. This involves financial support linked mainly to illicit drug transfers. The Economic threat can easily undermine any success that any state has in trapping or tracking funds or freezing funds. The fifth mode is the Political Military Threat. This threat involves coercive power linked specifically to the sale and transfer of illicit arms such as the sale and supply of weapons to insurgents and sub-national terrorists by criminals.

I feel it is important to mention this table of threats by Mandel because it relates directly to the alliance between Hezbollah and Los Zetas. The criminal facilitation of terrorism is evident in the news reports about suspected members of Hezbollah operating in Mexico with the Los Zetas organization. It is through Los Zetas that Hezbollah is allowed entry into the country and allowed to operate within.

Major Aspects of the Terrorist-Criminal Nexus

The Immigration Problem

The Federal authorities use the acronym OTMs for highly important immigrants that may cross into the U.S. border. OTMs means Other than Mexicans referring to special aliens from countries known to have high terrorist activity. Homeland security officials have received numerous reports about Muslims crossing into the United States border from Mexico. Pamela Geller wrote an article for The Washington Times back in 2010 about the illegal entry of hundreds of OTMs into the United States. She stated in a report from February, 2014 that a reporter found, “that 300 terrorists from the Somali Al Qaeda group Al-Shabaab—the group behind the terror attack at the Kenyan shopping mall last September—have entered the U.S. and are unaccounted for” (Geller, 2014, p.1). She asserts that the DHS has denied any reports about Muslim terrorists entering the U.S.

A memo from the Tucson Police Department was leaked by the hacker group known as Lulzsec. This memo alleged that “Islamist terrorist groups are setting up shop in Mexico and forming alarming ties with the country's brutal drug cartels”(Wyler, 2011, p.1). Pamela Geller

and Grace Wyler both write for conservative websites. Understandably, the articles expressed right leaning views on immigration and terrorism. However, it is important to take in consideration the numerous reports from these conservative sites and others like it, report the same incidents and reports from law enforcement officers.

The immigration of SIAs into the United States must not be allowed to go unnoticed or read about in denied reports from law enforcement agencies. Watchdog websites such as IntelligenceOverwatch, Recorded Future and Judicial Overwatch all report that Mexico is harboring suspected terrorist members from Hezbollah. These SIAs are dangerous and illegal. Their illegal entry in the country will only prolong our intelligence analysts in locating these individuals. Jennifer L. Hesterman, Robert Mandel and Matthew Levitt have all indicated in their respected works as well that Hezbollah has collaborated with Los Zetas as well as various other Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This nexus has conducted human trafficking operations, narcotics trafficking operations and weapons trafficking operations into our country as well as into South America.

Globalization / New Business Avenues

In the case of Los Zetas the lucrative market for narcotics and weapons provides many sources of income. This has no apparent end in sight. The legalization of marijuana in the United States might however push Los Zetas and other DTOs into Central America and South America. These areas do not need more intense DTOs pushing their products onto an already saturated market for narcotics.

Carlos Solar mentions an argument made by Alejandro Poire, he argues that the problem of drug related crime cannot be blamed solely on Mexico. He concludes that “this problem has resulted from and been transformed by globalization. In different countries it has many different expressions; in some countries certain drugs are produced , and in others illegal products are trafficked, in others still, organizations reap the benefits of their links to local gangs or corrupt local security institutions”(Solar, 2014, p.252).

Criminal activities have diversified and become global. Criminal enterprising has extended into the realm of terrorism, where both sides of gained expertise. Terrorism in the case of Hezbollah, have looked to new sources of funding for their operations. Los Zetas appears as suitable liaison for this venture into crime and narcotics trafficking. Hezbollah of course is no stranger to trafficking and operating as a criminal enterprise. Los Zetas and their trafficking business provide a new opportunity though, one that is in proximity of a superpower. The appealing sides to doing business with Los Zetas also come in the form of their sophisticated strategies and brutal tactics towards any opposition.

Analysis / National Security Concerns

Dark Networking

Hezbollah has infiltrated the tri-border area of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil, this has been long understood. Venezuela has also been a home to Hezbollah and is believed to still harbor members there. South America is a thriving continent that provides an abundant of lucrative illicit opportunities for Hezbollah to engage in. The amount of expertise between DTOs in South America and terror groups such as Hezbollah implies enormous consequences for National Security, the Wall Street Journal reported that Hezbollah is “forging ideologically promiscuous ties with Colombia’s right-wing paramilitary groups and communist guerillas and digging tunnels for drug cartels on the Mexican-American border—the same kinds of tunnel networks it has spent years perfecting along the geographically similar Lebanese-Israeli border” (Mauro, 2013, p.1).

A memo from the Tucson Police Department in 2010, indicated that the Hezbollah had established their presence in Mexico. This memo claimed that there possible stockpiles of arms forming and that operations had been underway between Hezbollah and Mexican Los Zetas “As evidence, it points to the 2010 Tijuana arrest of Hezbollah militant Jameel Nasr, who was allegedly tasked with establishing a Hezbollah network in Mexico and South America. The memo also recalls the April 2009 arrest of Jamal Yousef in New York, which exposed a huge cache of assault rifles, hand grenades, explosives and anti-tank munitions. According to Yousef, the weapons were stored in Mexico after being smuggled from Iraq by members of Hezbollah” (Wylar, 2011, p.1).

Jamal Yousef who was arrested in New York, “admitted stealing weapons from Iraq for Hezbollah and told authorities of a Hezbollah stockpile in Mexico that included 100 M-16 assault rifles, 100 AR-15 rifles, 2500 hand grenades, C4 explosives and anti-tank weapons. That same year a Hezbollah terrorist was captured in Tijuana and a senior Mexican military officer confirmed the group was conducting explosives training for members of Mexican drug cartels” (Judicial Watch, 2013, p.1). The report goes to include that U.S. law enforcement officers across the southwest region have seen an increase in imprisoned gang members that have Farsi tattoos. These tattoos are said to express loyalty to Hezbollah.

In Hezbollah’s case, a growing “business relationship” with cartels has allowed the Shia Islamist militant group to have a growing presence in the U.S. says Matthew Levitt, an esteemed terrorism expert (Judicial Watch, 2013, p.1). Judicial Watch has been reporting on the terrorist infiltration of Mexico since 2007 when they first reported a proposed connection between Hezbollah and Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations. According to Judicial Watch’s analysis of Matthew Levitt’s Book, “Hezbollah: The Global footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God”, “in 2009, a former Chief of Operations for the DEA said that Hezbollah uses “the same criminal weapons smugglers, document traffickers and transportation experts as the drug cartels”,

Amidst the reports and assertions that an attack is imminent from south of the border, evidence indicates that an alarming of SIAs or Special Interest Aliens have been identified and

detained crossing the border. Several of these special interest aliens have been confirmed as being from Iran, Yemen, Sudan and Afghanistan.

National Security Implications

Evolution in biological terms, refers to a descent with modification. This can be applied to virtually any social concept that has changed throughout time. In the case of terrorism, evolution is an adequate term to apply. The attacks of 9/11 displayed an evolution of terror and barbarity that has only continued to evolve in today's international arena. Terrorists that have switched to criminal enterprises have spurred in the last decade. Transnational criminal organizations, who for all intents and purposes are terrorists in their own right, have assisted terrorists in this evolution. Terrorism and Crime have evolved into a Terror-Criminal nexus.

Globalization has created new avenues and domains for social integration. Businesses, markets, social media, and politics have all benefitted from globalization but so has this Terror-criminal nexus, so much so that our country is being penetrated by these terrorist-criminal nexuses today. National security implications are very concerning to say the least. An imminent attack is the most feared of all implications. Disrupting businesses and federal institutions such as banks and immigration offices poses another threat.

The exploitation of issues facing the nation today can be detrimental to our national security. Immigration is a huge concern right now. Illegal entry is a vital political concern for the U.S. and Mexico. A nexus between Mexican DTO Los Zetas and Hezbollah only exacerbates the necessity for immigration reform and new security protocols. Roger Noriega, former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, could not be clearer in his urgent warnings: "If our government and responsible partners in Latin America fail to act, I believe there will be an attack on U.S. personnel, installations or interests in the Americas as soon as Hezbollah operatives believe that they are capable of such an operation without implicating their Iranian sponsors in the crime." (Mauro, 2013, p.1)

The indictment of Ayman Joumaa in December of 2011 mentioned that "Hezbollah is using Juma's cartel connections to minimize its dependency on Iranian funding. The international sanctions crippling Tehran's economy have taken a serious bite out of the \$200 million in annual aid given to Hezbollah, but the latter's appetite for cash has only grown. Los Zetas' Beirut-based money man has reportedly helped the Shiite terror group meet its financial needs" (Beck, 2012, p1.).

The memo warns that the consequences of a partnership between Hezbollah and Mexico in narcotics trafficking could be perilous. Mexico's drug war would only benefit from it, given Hezbollah's advanced weapons capabilities — specifically their expertise with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). It notes that some Mexican criminal organizations have started using small IEDs and car bombs, a marked change in tactics that indicates a relationship with Islamic militants (Wyler, 2011, p.1). A spill-over effect of the violence into American soil is primary concern for national security. It seems unlikely that a war would occur here in the United States,

however an evolution of criminal tactics such as guerilla warfare, and IEDs mentioned above are a much more realistic concern.

The partnerships between Mexican DTOs such as Los Zetas and Islamic militants like Hezbollah are mutually beneficial. The cartels are able to gain smuggling and weapons training, knowledge and strategic planning expertise. They also gain the opportunities to acquire cheap heroin from countries such as Afghanistan and Iran. Islamic militant groups take advantage of Mexico's drug war lawlessness and its open avenues on border with a potentially huge target at their doorstep, The United States of America.

Opposing Views

The possibility of an imminent attack always exists however, the likelihood of an attack occurring in the present remains low for some experts. Hezbollah and Los Zetas would gain no direct benefit from attacking via ground war, "Hezbollah also has the ability to strike at the U.S. homeland itself," Berman said. "Given the lucrative nature of the organization's illicit activities throughout the hemisphere, the likelihood of such a development remains low. Still, Hezbollah's strategic calculus could conceivably change if it or its chief sponsor, Iran, were imperiled in a substantial way"(Brice, 2013, p.1).

The media in more ways than one can be instrumental in creating panic and spreading fear. Terrorism has been the key focus for national security concerns over the last decade. The word terrorism itself is enough to turn heads and spark conversations. The media entertains the many possible scenarios that arise out of terrorism concerns. Such is the case of a terrorist-criminal nexus according to author Guadalupe-Correa Cabrera. She stated, "The media weds concepts such as 'narco-insurgency' and 'narco-terrorism', and has even brought in the possibility of an alliance of the U.S. deadliest enemy—Al Qaeda—and the brutal Zetas organized crime group" (Correa-Cabrera, 2012, p.43). The U.S.-Mexican border has been the focus of a lot of attention due to illegal immigration, the rampant corruption, and violence that thrives in Mexico. The media is partly to blame for such fears to be exploited, "the attention such a spectacle generates has intensified fear in the U.S., especially among U.S. border residents. In turn, this growing fear is used to justify extreme border security measures, including harsh legislation against undocumented immigrants (Correa-Cabrera, 2012, p.43),

Politicians utilize the media scare to help create and pass stricter laws and bills on the border issue, "Using their access to mass media, these politicians present a spectavular view of violence spiralling out of control in Mexico and threatening U.S. national security. The politicians see the violence the product of a so-called 'narco-insurgency' by Mexican TCOs whose habits of carrying out beheadings, mass kilings, and bombings 'are drawing comparisons to murders by Muslim extremists'(Correa-Cabrera, 2012, p.44)

Fear is a powerful motive, in this case, the authors agree that an imminent attack is unlikely due to existing operaitons that cannot afford to be disrupted or through sheer exploitation of the media. The inherehnt risks of a war spilling over onto the streets of the U.S. are a bi-product of media reports and politicians' agendas accoriding to Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera.

Conclusion

A nexus of terrorists and transnational criminal organizations does indeed exist between Hezbollah and Los Zetas. The partnership has allowed both groups to trade expertise and gain insight into new domains of operation. How far has this collaboration gone in succeeding infiltration of the United States? It has penetrated the United States National Security apparatus. This is made evident by the apprehension of numerous SIAs, thwarted attempts to launder money, illegitimate businesses discovered and testimonies from Hezbollah members. It is widely believed that Hezbollah has been operating in Mexico for some time now.

Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations have adopted deadly fear based tactics that terrorist groups employ in their operations such as car bombs and propaganda. Los Zetas have air dropped propaganda in the form of leaflets in the inner cities of Mexico to spread their influence. They have also used improvised explosive devices or (IEDs) in cars to create chaos and fear in the general public. These tactics are not normally the modus operandi of a drug cartel. Expertise has been shared in the form of tunnels and passages. The most suspicious and possibly dangerous concept that is being shared according to several reports is the increasing number of Muslims that are being illegally transported to Mexico.

The city of Chiapas as I have stated in research has seen a rapidly increasing rate of Muslim radicals making the small city their home. If an exodus has indeed occurred and has been operating and functioning south of the border, then there must be more resources aimed at identifying these special interest aliens. The flow of illegal immigrants from across the Mexican-U.S. border is a key issue today in American society. The amount of fear that it generates is alarming and even more so the amount of ignorance that can be generated by the public can lead to a paralysis of logical reasoning.

Relevance of the Issue

It is essential for the public to know of the connections made between Los Zetas and Hezbollah because we cannot afford to dismiss such a deadly nexus. In September of 2014, we saw reports from various law enforcement agencies stating that they believed the caliphate of ISIS was operational in Juarez, Mexico. This allegation stuck fear into many because of the possible implications for national security. If such an unpredictable and hostile threat can sneak up just south of the border, then how can we stop it at our doorstep?

I include this piece of news earlier for two reasons. The first is that I believe that transnational criminal organizations are terrorists. They may not have a political agenda or a religious fanaticism but they harm individuals and destabilize national security with their tactics. The second reason is that I experienced the fear that such reports create. The reasoning of individuals diminishes and logic seems to be absent from many conversations about terrorism and national security.

Hezbollah are not just a basic terrorist organization. They are a political party of the state that receives sponsorship. They are a driving force in Lebanon, Iran and Syria and have established connections in Venezuela, Yemen, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico to name a few countries. Hezbollah while not imminently planning an attack on U.S. soil, has many pieces in

place to conduct an act of terror on U.S. interests. The help of DTOs specifically, Los Zetas, creates a new level of fear and reality to national security.

Implications for Dismissal of Evidence

Los Zetas are the most sophisticated drug cartel in Mexico. Their collaboration with the terrorist militant group Hezbollah causes great concern for what both groups “bring to the table”. They have gained great power in their home countries because there is limited opposition that can engage them. Ideally in modern warfare, the United States is unrivaled, however this is not the case of this terrorist-criminal nexus. Guerilla warfare, ambush tactics, tunnel systems, all-terrain warfare training and stockpiles of arms aids this deadly alliance.

The attacks of September, 11, changed the entire face of Homeland Security. Terrorism is the focus of the Department of Homeland Security. Issues that the country faces in immigration, or transnational criminal organizations are just avenues for terrorists to advance in. This issue is made easier for them with the aid of those TCOs and DTOs that seek to benefit from terrorist groups. The national security apparatus of the United States of America must not wait for concrete evidence to surface of collaborations between these two types of groups. What evidence does exist must not be overlooked because of a possible “fluke” or “outlier” in intelligence collection. Every lead must be looked into, and every report or allegation must not be brushed aside.

Los Zetas and Hezbollah have indeed collaborated together in some fashion, whether or not this collaboration is still ongoing is hard to decipher yet the evidence of the past dictates that there may be future collaborations between these two entities. There is no concrete evidence to illustrate a picture of where this nexus is at the moment and to what depth their relationship exists. However, I believe that a nexus does indeed exist based on the facts I provided in my research.

Hezbollah and Los Zetas acting as a terrorist –criminal nexus represent the evolution of terrorism. Traditional frameworks of terrorist hierarchies are disbanded in favor of fluid networks that operate discreetly in major cities across the globe. Blurred lines exist in the modus operandi of terrorist networks who act more as businesses rather than soldiers. Transnational criminal organizations assist in the evolution of terrorism by contributing their expertise in functioning as a business organization. Consequently, at the same time these TCOs gain new deadly knowledge on how to combat the law enforcement agencies and government authorities.

In conclusion, there is nothing to benefit from by waiting for more evidence of the existence of this nexus. The implications of this partnership advancing to even greater depths are cause for great concern. Jennifer L. Hesterman placed Los Zetas as a special concern in her book *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*. They are a concern to national security as well as international security because of their technical sophistication and connections to criminal gangs, DTOs and other terrorist groups. Hezbollah are a concern internationally because of their power and support from Lebanon, Iran and “business partners”. Hezbollah and Los Zetas gain invaluable knowledge through their partnership and through their partnerships with other crime groups and terrorist groups. It is a time bomb waiting to explode in our homeland.

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