

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Mexican Criminal Organizations Consolidate Their Positions in South America

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OE Watch Commentary

Historically, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela had various homegrown criminal organizations all working with Mexican cartels. More recently, however, it appears that Mexican groups are moving to cut out middlemen and become major players further afield of their traditional regions of operation and influence. A series of recent events signal this shift in northern parts of South America. Ecuador suffered a series of deadly prison riots throughout 2021 and into 2022. These gruesome acts heralded the arrival of Mexico's powerful criminal organizations, jockeying for position in the country's drug trade, as well as territory for the export of narcotics via the Pacific Ocean. The excerpted article from one of Medellín's leading newspapers, *El Colombiano*, reports that emissaries of Mexican criminal organizations have been on the Colombia-Venezuela border trying to mediate disputes between local drug gangs. Purportedly, Mexican cartels would like to tamp down the violence and restore the steady supply of illicit drugs that existed prior to the Venezuelan government's operations in the border regions. The article goes on to say that representatives, mostly from the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels, arrive through Venezuelan territory, while



Violence breaks out in Ecuador during protests over the spiraling security situation.

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others pass through Colombia. The article from Colombian weekly magazine *Semana* reports that Colombian authorities arrested a top lieutenant of Mexican trafficker Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán in Cali.

“Mexican drug traffickers, especially from the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels, are sending emissaries that arrive at the border through Venezuelan territory and that, in a few cases, pass through Colombian airports in Bogotá and Medellín.”

Source: “Emisarios de narcos extranjeros aterrizan en frontera con Venezuela para mediar en la guerra (Emissaries of foreign drug traffickers land on the border with Venezuela to mediate in the war),” *El Colombiano* (one of Medellín's leading newspapers), 11 April 2022. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/narcos-mexicanos-llegan-a-colombia-para-frenar-guerra-criminal-en-frontera-con-venezuela-cocaina-y-armas-CH17239658>

...It is in this context that Mexican drug traffickers, especially from the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels, are sending emissaries that arrive at the border through Venezuelan territory and, in a few cases, pass through Colombian airports in Bogotá and Medellín... The message they are sending is there is money for everyone and they do not have to kill each other.

Source: “Cabecilla del cartel de Sinaloa y mano derecha del Chapo Guzmán fue capturado en Cali (Leader of the Sinaloa cartel and right-hand man of Chapo Guzmán was captured in Cali),” *Semana* (Colombia's leading weekly magazine), 8 April 2022. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/cali/articulo/cabecilla-del-cartel-de-sinaloa-y-mano-derecha-del-chapo-guzman-fue-capturado-en-cali/202248/>

In a condominium in the exclusive residential neighborhood Ciudad Jardín, in southern Cali, the authorities captured a Mexican citizen who arrived in Colombia as an emissary of the Mexican drug trafficker, alias Mayo Zambada, successor in the Sinaloa Cartel of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera... The whereabouts of the emissary was known thanks to the monitoring carried out by the authorities, with infiltrated agents.