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## RAPIDRECON

### Los Zetas and the Denial of Mexico's Failed State Status

The softening of words and the aversion to stating the obvious by the Administration simply obliterates the reality that President Felipe Calderón of Mexico "leads" a country dominated by the cartels and not governed by the federal government. The transparent denial of the recent Joint Operating Environment report is troubling at best.

To better understand just how close to the precipice he is, it might be worthwhile to take another look at the organization (and movement) of Los Zetas. As a reminder, Los Zetas are a paramilitary group tied to the Gulf Cartel. Their origins and their evolution from being deserters from the Mexican special forces to a criminal organization is chronicled in a report from [International Relations and Security Network](#)

From the original 31 members, the Mexican organized criminal faction Los Zetas has grown into an organization in its own right, operating separate from the Gulf Cartel and just as violent.

With each of the original members training at least another ten, they grew to over 300 strong by 2003. In just the first quarter of 2009, Los Zetas (the organization) has been linked to a death threat against the president of Guatemala, the hand grenade tossed in Pharr, Texas and various other criminal acts. The ranks of Los Zetas has grown, and strikingly, they have broken ranks with the Gulf Cartel. Over time however, and with the deaths of some of the original Zetas, they have morphed into an organization. This is a very important distinction to note.

"Most of the original Zetas are gone, but the legacy of the Zetas still lives on," Jose Wall, Senior Special Agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, told ISN Security Watch. He added that the current version of the Zetas carries a "more brutal mindset" and apart from military and police deserters relies on a force of regular guys who have very little training with no future and no job to speak of.

The brutality of the Los Zetas has been transformed into a willingness to engage in open gun battles by the Zetas Organization through which smaller groups have spread across the Mexican landscape. That their members are found throughout the towns along the Mexican border is not surprising, but it is no less distressing. Last week [Mexican federales](#) arrested Rolando "El Roli" de los Santos Guerra, a suspected Zeta on weapons smuggling and illegal monitoring of phone calls of government officials in Reynosa (located conveniently about 10 miles from Pharr and McAllen Texas).

Also last week, a [Zeta training camp](#) was discovered by Guatemalan security forces. Although two Zeta commanders and 37 recruits escaped, they left behind a cache of arms including 500 grenades, six rifles and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. There have been some reports that the Zetas have joined forces with Guatemalan special forces deserters known as [the Kaibiles](#).

Despite the denials of the Administration, the Zetas Organization continues to threaten not just the stability of Mexico, but the U.S. citizens in areas in which it operates. While admittedly sourced from a pro-gun website, [this article](#) argues against the recent flurry of accusations that the weaponry of the cartels is originating in the United States is belied by some of the photos found in [this video on the Zetas](#) showing grenades, land mines, RPG rockets, rocket launchers and fully automatic military weapons, which I understand cannot be purchased in the U.S., even with a federal weapons permit.

Considering the recent "revelation" that the [terrorist group Hezbollah is using drug trade routes to enter the U.S.](#), there is a fear that the flow of weapons is actually the reverse, from Mexico to the U.S. The reality is that the Rio Grande Valley along the Texas-Mexican border is a war zone, and it is going to be a battlezone for freedom if we are not careful. All of the denials to the contrary cannot change the fact that armed conflict is raging just south of our border and that the Mexican government has not been able to stem the tide of violence and its spread to U.S. cities.

By Jay Fraser on March 30, 2009 at 4:56 AM | [Permalink](#)