



# Executive Summary



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## CARTEL CAR BOMBINGS IN MEXICO

**Robert J. Bunker**

**John P. Sullivan**

Contemporary Mexican cartel use of car bombs began in mid-July 2010, and their use has since escalated. Not only was their significance downplayed by the administration of former Mexican president Felipe Calderón, but they were basically ignored in the September 2010 State of the Nation Report (*informe*). As one co-author has noted, the July 15, 2010, Ciudad Juárez car bombing represents a jumping of a firebreak in terms of “an apparently significant acceleration of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP). . .” for Mexican cartel violence. Given the escalatory nature of these bombings to the conflict taking place in Mexico, and indeed the close proximity of them to the United States—some literally within miles of the border—they should be of at least some interest to local, state, and federal U.S. law enforcement and, ultimately, to the U.S. Army and other governmental institutions, which are increasingly providing support to Mexican federal agencies.

With this in mind, this Paper first seeks to provide an historical overview and analysis of cartel car bomb use in Mexico. In doing so, it provides context, insights, and lessons learned stemming from the Medellín and Cali cartel car bombing campaigns that plagued Colombia, primarily between 1988 and 1993. It then discusses the initial cartel car bombings that took place in Mexico in the early 1990s—car bombings that most researchers have overlooked—before highlighting indications and warnings (I&W) events identified in the years prior to the

resumption of Mexican cartel car bombings in mid-2010. Contemporary car bombings in Mexico from mid-2010 through much of 2012 will then be discussed and analyzed. Second, this Paper capitalizes on the historical overview and analysis provided—from both the Mexican and earlier Colombian experiences—in order to generate insights into future cartel car bombing potentials in Mexico. The identification of such potentials, in one sense, offers us a glimpse into cartel “enemy intent”—a possible form of actionable strategic intelligence.

An analysis of car bombing incidents in Mexico, with about 20 incidents identified over the last 2 1/2 years, is then provided. Both primary and secondary use patterns are discussed, along with future car bombing potentials in Mexico and the United States. For Mexico, steady and both slowly increasing and quickly increasing car bomb use trajectories may exist. The prognosis for decreasing car bomb deployment currently appears unlikely. On the other hand, car cartel bomb use, at least on U.S. soil and directed at U.S. governmental personnel operating in Mexico, is presently far from a likely potential. If cartel car bombs were to be eventually deployed on U.S. soil or against U.S. personnel and facilities in Mexico, such as our consulates, we could expect that a pattern of I&W would be evident prior to such an attack or attacks. In that case, I&W would be drawn from precursor events such as grenade and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks (or attempted attacks) on our personnel and facilities and on evolving cartel car

bomb deployment patterns in Mexico, especially concerning increases in tactical lethality and a shift toward anti-infrastructure targeting.

The authors of this monograph conclude with initial recommendations for U.S. Army and defense community support to a) the military and the federal, state, and local police agencies of the Mexican state; and b) the various U.S. federal, state, and local police agencies operating near the U.S.-Mexican border. Four thematic areas—intelligence, organization, training, and equipment—are highlighted, and the extent of these forms of support that may be provided should be situationally derived to counter cartel vehicle-borne IEDs and overall cartel threats. Additionally, a reappraisal of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878—enacted in a far different domestic security environment bereft of armed and organized nonstate threat entities able to challenge states—is said to be required if we are to lift some legal restrictions on U.S. military support to U.S. law enforcement agencies.

Further, the authors see the challenges posed by cartel *sicarios* (gunman; essentially nonstate soldiers) to be a hemispheric security challenge. In addition to internal U.S. military efforts and U.S. support to Mexican military (both the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense [SEDENA] and the Mexican Secretariat of the Navy [SEMAR]) and law enforcement (at all levels: federal, state, and municipal), support should also be extended to Central American states facing cartel and gang challenges. Ultimately, they contend that a comprehensive U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) strategy should be developed

in coordination with the Mexican government that integrates all elements of national power to mitigate and counter Mexican cartel use of car bombs and other forms of violence and corruption, manifesting themselves in Mexico and increasingly in the United States. To best serve our national interests, however, this comprehensive strategy should also be integrated with the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) to create a Western Hemispheric strategy to combat gang, cartel, and other criminal insurgent threats to the Americas.

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