

## Organization Attributes Sheet: La Familia Michoacana/Caballeros Templarios

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### A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- La Familia Michoacana probably developed out of a faction of the Milenio Cartel based in the state of Jalisco.<sup>1</sup> In 2001, Carlos Rosales Mendoza (El Tisico) asked Osiel Cardenas Guillen for help fighting the Milenio Cartel.<sup>2</sup> Osiel Cardenas Guillen sent members of his paramilitary group Los Zetas.<sup>3</sup> According to Grayson, El Tisico formed a group called La Empresa with Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas (El Chango) and Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (El Mas Loco).<sup>4</sup> However, Grayson does not give a source for the existence of a group called La Empresa, and no information was found verifying the use of the name La Empresa. Regardless, El Tisico, El Chango, and El Mas Loco formed a faction that worked closely with the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas in Southwestern Mexico.<sup>5</sup> According to Grayson, the excessive violence used by Los Zetas to terrorize opponents in Michoacan during 2006 led to a break with the local faction headed by El Tisico, El Chango, and El Mas Loco, which began calling itself La Familia Michoacana.<sup>6</sup> From 2006 to December 2010, La Familia developed a reputation for extreme violence coupled with an idiosyncratic use of religious ideology, as it vied for control of the plazas of Southwest Mexico with Los Zetas (now independent from the Gulf Cartel), and the remnants of the Beltran Leyva Organization and the Milenio Cartel. In December of 2010, Mexican authorities killed El Mas Loco after a major gun battle in Apatzingan, Michoacan.<sup>7</sup> El Mas Loco had been the main religious ideologue for the group, and his death appears to have caused confusion in the ranks. In 2011, there was a declaration that La Familia was being dissolved, while a new organization called the Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templar) was announced later that year.<sup>8</sup> Recent reports suggest that the Caballeros Templarios is one of at least two factions of La Familia that are now fighting in the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacan.<sup>9</sup> The Caballeros Templarios is thought to be led by Servando Gomez Marinez (La Tuta).<sup>10</sup> Reports suggest that La Tuta may be in a succession battle with El Chango.<sup>11</sup>

### B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

#### a. In general

- Marijuana and poppy cultivation
- Amphetamine manufacturing
- Drug trafficking
- Money laundering
- Political corruption
- Murder/Assassination
- Possibly extortion and kidnapping<sup>12</sup>

#### b. Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in

- Marijuana and poppies are grown in the Tierra Caliente of Michoacan and Guerrero, and then trafficked to the United States.<sup>13</sup>
- Precursor chemicals are trafficked from Asia to the port of Lazaro Cardenas to be manufactured into Methamphetamine, which is then trafficked to the United States.<sup>14</sup>
- Cocaine is trafficked from the Pacific coast of Colombia to the port of Lazaro Cardenas to be trafficked to the United States.<sup>15</sup>

### C. Scope and Size

#### a. Estimated size of network and membership

- Estimates of the number of members in La Familia range from 4,000<sup>16</sup> to over 9,000.<sup>17</sup>

#### b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group's operating area)

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Mexico
- United States<sup>18</sup>

#### D. Leader Characteristics

##### a. Who is/are the leader(s)

- Carlos Rosales Mendoza (El Tisico) – In jail since October 24, 2004.
- Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas (El Chango) – Possibly leading a faction of La Familia against the Caballeros Templarios
- Servando Gomez Marinez (La Tuta) – Possibly leader of Caballeros Templarios faction
- Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (El Mas Loco) – Killed in December of 2010.

##### b. Leadership timeline

- 1985-2004 -> Carlos Rosales Mendoza (El Tisico)
- 2006-2010 -> Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (El Mas Loco), Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas (El Chango), Servando Gomez Marinez (La Tuta).
- 2011 -> Servando Gomez Marinez (La Tuta) and/or Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas (El Chango).

##### c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)

- The group uses strict rules and draconian punishment to control its members and to police the communities it controls.<sup>19</sup>

#### E. Organizational Structure

##### a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)

- The group appears to be organized in a hierarchical manner.<sup>20</sup> However, the main leaders probably have significant discretion over their areas of responsibility.
- It is also possible that a secretive body called the Twelve Apostles of Señor Nazario Moreno acts as a governing council.<sup>21</sup>

##### b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?

- Membership is formal, with new recruits going through rigorous ideological and physical training before joining.<sup>22</sup>

##### c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

- The group is/was heavily centralized. The evidence for this is in their actions, like ambushes against federal officials<sup>23</sup> and coordinated banner drops across several states.<sup>24</sup>

#### F. Resources

##### a. Financial

- It is estimated that La Familia earns hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>25</sup>

##### b. Human

- La Familia has members and associates throughout Michoacan society, with prominent politicians accused of involvement,<sup>26</sup> all the way down to its recruitment and rehabilitation of drug addicts at the street level.<sup>27</sup>
- Its original members are said to have received military training from Los Zetas.<sup>28</sup>

##### c. Logistical

###### i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- No information found.

###### ii. Key routes

- Supplies of cocaine and methamphetamine precursors come in through the Pacific ports of Lazaro Cardenas and Manzanillo.<sup>29</sup>
- Drugs are trafficked overland taking a route from Lazaro Cardenas to Morelia, and

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then through Guanajuato, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, Zacatecas, Durango, and Mazatlan on the way to Tijuana, Mexicali, and Juarez.<sup>30</sup>

- The organization uses Mexican immigrant networks and extended family relationships to organize in the United States. After crossing the border, drugs are sent to distribution hubs in Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago.<sup>31</sup>

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Trucks are used to transport drugs from Michoacan to the border with the United States.<sup>32</sup>
- Small vehicles are also used.<sup>33</sup>

ii. Sea

- Fast launches and semi-submersibles are used to ferry contraband from ships offshore to the port of Lazaro Cardenas.<sup>34</sup>

iii. Air

- Light aircraft carrying Colombian cocaine are received at clandestine landing strips in the Sierra Madre del Sur of Michoacan.<sup>35</sup>

iv. Intermodal container

- The port of Lazaro Cardenas is an important transport hub for intermodal containers, and is connected to Kansas City by a railroad corridor that enters the United States at Laredo, Texas.<sup>36</sup>

**G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities**

a. Corruption

- Cesar Godoy (the half brother of the PRD Governor of Michoacan) who was elected to the federal Congress has been tied to La Familia.<sup>37</sup>
- In 2009, the federal police arrested 30 PRD mayors of Michoacan municipalities, accusing them of working with La Familia. The suspects were released and no charges were ever brought.<sup>38</sup>
- Servando Gomez Martinez (La Tuta) was collecting a federal paycheck as a teacher as recently as December of 2010.<sup>39</sup>

b. Concealment

- Drugs are stored in hidden compartments of small vehicles or under fruit, vegetables, or electronic equipment.<sup>40</sup>

c. Deception

- No information found.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Small boats and submersibles are used to ship contraband from offshore boats to ports, in order to circumvent port authorities.<sup>41</sup>

**H. Prior / Existing Relationships**

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- Enemies of the Milenio Cartel and the Nuevo Milenio Cartel<sup>42</sup>
- Enemies of the Beltran Leyva Organization and its splinter groups<sup>43</sup>
- Allied with the Sinaloa Cartel<sup>44</sup>
- Allied with the Gulf Cartel<sup>45</sup>
- Passage rights through Tijuana with the Arellano Felix Organization<sup>46</sup>

b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement, political parties and other state entities, etc.

- La Familia is well connected with PRD officials in Michoacan, and is said to control as many as 87 out of 113 municipalities in the state.<sup>47</sup>

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

c. *Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.*

- No information found.

**I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)**

- The ideological focus of La Familia has been one of its main characteristics. The ideology is a mix of regional patriotism with an idiosyncratic Christianity based on the writings of John Eldredge, a religious/self-help author from Colorado.<sup>48</sup>
- The religious tenants of La Familia have been summarized into a text ostensibly written by Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (El Mas Loco) called “Pensamientos de La Familia.”<sup>49</sup> The content of the message is the glorification of masculinity, as expressed through acts of courage and violence.<sup>50</sup>
- La Familia has also made careful use of regional chauvinism and anti-federal sentiments byclaiming to protect Michoacan from outsiders,<sup>51</sup> while prominent politicians with possible connections to La Familia criticize the federal crackdown as having the ulterior purpose of protecting other cartels or removing political opponents of the ruling PAN.<sup>52</sup>
- The organization has also made use of symbols and rhetoric from Mexico’s revolutionary history.<sup>53</sup>
- There is little information about the Caballeros Templarios, but the name calls to mind the Knights Templar of Medieval Europe, which was a militant Christian organization involved in the Crusades.<sup>54</sup> The symbolism of this name change would fit with the larger themes of the organization’s religious ideology.

**J. Technical Sophistication**

- The organization manufactures methamphetamines on an industrial scale, which suggests some sophistication with chemistry and logistics.

**K. Penchant for Innovation**

- The innovation that is most often commented on is the use of religious ideology in the organization of the group.
- However, the wholesale takeover of municipalities and the level of influence over politics in Michoacan is unusual compared to other DTOs in Mexico, and can be called an innovation.
- La Familia has also innovated in the area of public relations, and has been more effective in its use of banner drops, pamphleting, newspaper interviews, radio interviews, and corpse messaging than other DTOs.<sup>55</sup> The changing of names may also be seen as a ploy to control public perceptions of the organization.
- The organization has been able to adapt to the recent attacks from the federal government, which were based on urban centers, by moving to rural bases.<sup>56</sup>

**L. Activities in United States**

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- La Familia traffics cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and methamphetamines to the United States, and then traffics the proceeds and weapons back to Mexico.<sup>57</sup>

b. *Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities*

- Operation Coronado arrested 1,186 people in 19 states, accusing them of trafficking drugs for La Familia in the United States.<sup>58</sup>
- In April 2010, it was reported that more members of La Familia had been arrested in Austin, Texas for shipping drugs to Florida in overnight packages.<sup>59</sup>
- Another indictment on November 20, 2009 accused Jorge Luis Torres Galvan and Jose Gonzalez Zavela of communicating closely with Servando Gomez Martinez (La Tuta) to sell cocaine out of Chicago.<sup>60</sup>

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

c. Linkages with US groups	
i. Market/transaction links	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All the reports indicate that the group has built its own independent network comprised mainly of immigrants and families originally from Michoacan. A recent report from <i>El Universal</i> gives a detailed list of the known agents of La Familia in the United States, and their main hubs of distribution.<sup>61</sup> The routes appear to concentrate in areas with sizable Mexican immigrant populations, i.e. Los Angeles, New Mexico, Austin, Houston, the Carolinas, Atlanta, Chicago, and Florida.<sup>62</sup></li> </ul>
ii. Stable supplier	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No information found</li> </ul>
iii. Franchise arrangement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No information found</li> </ul>
iv. HQ and Branch office	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports indicate that the network is closely controlled by the main leaders in Michoacan.<sup>63</sup></li> </ul>
<b>M. Evaluations</b>	
a. Strengths	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a large organization, with a militantly committed membership in the thousands.</li> <li>It has control of a strategic port for the acquisition of drugs and precursors.</li> <li>It has a great deal of political influence, if not outright political control, in the state of Michoacan.</li> <li>It has a great deal of public sympathy in the state of Michoacan.<sup>64</sup></li> <li>It has an independent distribution network in the United States, based on the estimated 3.5 million immigrants from Michoacan living there.<sup>65</sup></li> <li>The organization is highly adept at using propaganda and ideology to create sympathy for itself and resentment of other organizations and the federal government.</li> <li>The organization has access to high caliber weapons, and has been able to shoot down at least one government helicopter.<sup>66</sup></li> <li>The organization has a significant base of support in rural and mountainous areas of the Tierra Caliente, with an estimated 65,000 farmers producing illicit crops for it.<sup>67</sup></li> </ul>
b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>La Familia's heterodox religious values and its use of extreme violence has allowed the Mexican government and some media companies to portray it as being very bizarre. However, it is not clear that these sentiments are shared by those directly impacted by the group, and there is evidence of popular support in Michoacan.</li> </ul>
c. Additional insights	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<b>Other Notes</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Grayson, George. "La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security," *Strategic Studies Institute*, 2010: 14. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1033>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. at 14-16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. at 16.

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- <sup>7</sup> Rodriguez, Olga R. "Drug cartel confirms leader's death in recording," *Associated Press*, December 15, 2010.
- <sup>8</sup> Luhnnow, David and De Cordoba, Jose. "Drug-Gang Battles Leave Mexico Region in Unruly State," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304520804576346410044266434.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> Luhnnow, David and De Cordoba, Jose. "Drug-Gang Battles Leave Mexico Region in Unruly State," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304520804576346410044266434.html>; Morales, Alberto. "Caen 36 presuntos miembros de La Familia," *El Universal*, May 28, 2011. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/768745.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> Luhnnow, David and De Cordoba, Jose. "Drug-Gang Battles Leave Mexico Region in Unruly State," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304520804576346410044266434.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Grayson, 49-51; *But see* Finnegan, William. "Silver or Lead," *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2010: 41 (claiming that kidnapping and extortion in Apatzingan ended after La Familia took over).
- <sup>13</sup> Johnson, Tim. "Mexican cartel deals drugs, violence with religious fervor," *McClatchy Newspapers*, June 22, 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/06/22/96335/mexican-cartel-deals-drugs-violence.html>.
- <sup>14</sup> Grayson, 17.
- <sup>15</sup> "Familia Michoacana," *Insight Crime*, April 22, 2010. <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/familia/item/79-la-familia-michoacana>.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Grayson, 38.
- <sup>18</sup> "DEA Announces Largest Single U.S. Strike Against Mexican Drug Cartels," *Drug Enforcement Administration Public Affairs*, October 22, 2009. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr102209a.html>.
- <sup>19</sup> Grayson, 35-36.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* at 77.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* at 27.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* at 47.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* at 73.
- <sup>24</sup> "Mexico Unido contra los Zetas: La Familia," *El Economista*, February 02, 2010. <http://eleconomista.com.mx/seguridad-publica/2010/02/02/mexico-unido-contra-zetas--familia-mexicana>.
- <sup>25</sup> Grayson, 49.
- <sup>26</sup> Archibold, Randal C. "Politics Enables Mexican Fugitive to Defang a Law," *New York Times*, December 14, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/15/world/americas/15mexico.html>.
- <sup>27</sup> Grayson, 37.
- <sup>28</sup> "Familia Michoacana," *Insight Crime*, April 22, 2010. <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/familia/item/79-la-familia-michoacana>.
- <sup>29</sup> Grayson, 17-20.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* at 75-76.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* at 75-78.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* at 78.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* at 75.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* at 18.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* at 64.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* at 18.
- <sup>37</sup> Archibold, Randal C. "Politics Enables Mexican Fugitive to Defang a Law," *New York Times*, December 14, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/15/world/americas/15mexico.html>; Wilkinson, Tracy. "Mexico bars fugitive lawmaker-elect Julio Cesar Godoy," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2009/aug/20/world/fg-mexico-godoy20>.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> "Servando Gomez Martinez alias La Tuta," *Insight Crime*, no date given. <http://www.insightcrime.org/personalities/mexico/tuta/item/340-servando-gomez-martinez-alias-la-tuta>.
- <sup>40</sup> Grayson, 75.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* at 18.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* at 13, 20.

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- <sup>43</sup> Ibid. at 22-24.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid. at 58.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. at 13-17, 58.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. at 76.
- <sup>47</sup> Johnson, Tim. "Mexican cartel deals drugs, violence with religious fervor," *McClatchy Newspapers*, June 22, 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/06/22/96335/mexican-cartel-deals-drugs-violence.html>.
- <sup>48</sup> Grayson, 38.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid. at 39-40.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid. at 38-40.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid. at 44.
- <sup>52</sup> Silvacorresponsal, Azucena. "Godoy: la ocupación military viola soberanía de Michoacán," *El Universal*, July 18, 2009. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/33319.html>.
- <sup>53</sup> Johnson, Tim. "The strange rantings of La Familia," *Mexico Unmasked*, November 26, 2010. <http://blogs.mcclatchydc.com/mexico/2010/11/the-strange-rantings-of-la-familia.html>.
- <sup>54</sup> "Familia Michoacana," *Insight Crime*, April 22, 2010. <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/familia/item/79-la-familia-michoacana>.
- <sup>55</sup> Grayson, 43; Finnegan, 40; Marquez, Jaime. "Preocupacion en Michoacan por desplegado del narco," *El Universal*, November 23, 2006. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/63089.html>; Suverza, Alejandro. "El poder de 'La Familia Michoacana,'" *El Universal*, December 04, 2006. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/146203.html>; "Mexico Unido contra los Zetas: La Familia," *El Economista*, February 02, 2010. <http://eleconomista.com.mx/seguridad-publica/2010/02/02/mexico-unido-contra-zetas--familia-mexicana>.
- <sup>56</sup> Luhnnow, David and De Cordoba, Jose. "Drug-Gang Battles Leave Mexico Region in Unruly State," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304520804576346410044266434.html>.
- <sup>57</sup> "Alleged La Familia Cartel Members Hit Hard Throughout Southern California," *Drug Enforcement Administration*, October 22, 2009. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/la102209.html>.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Plohetski, Tony. "Cartels use Austin as a drug hub, officials say," *American-Statesman*, April 10 2010. <http://www.statesman.com/news/local/cartels-use-austin-as-a-drug-hub-officials-548569.html?printArticle=y>.
- <sup>60</sup> Grayson, 77.
- <sup>61</sup> Gomez, Francisco. "La Familia y su red de operacion en EU," *El Universal*, January 09, 2011. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/735950.html>.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Finnegan, 40.
- <sup>65</sup> Grayson, 76.
- <sup>66</sup> "Drug gunmen force down Mexican police helicopter," *Associated Press*, May 25, 2011. [http://www.salon.com/wires/world/2011/05/25/D9NEHMA00\\_lt\\_drug\\_war\\_mexico/](http://www.salon.com/wires/world/2011/05/25/D9NEHMA00_lt_drug_war_mexico/).
- <sup>67</sup> Johnson, Tim. "Mexican cartel deals drugs, violence with religious fervor," *McClatchy Newspapers*, June 22, 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/06/22/96335/mexican-cartel-deals-drugs-violence.html>.