

Organization Attributes Sheet: Los Pelones

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Los Pelones formed in the mid-1990s and was contracted as an enforcement and protection arm to the Sinaloa Cartel. Like Los Zetas with the Gulf, Los Pelones (New Recruits) used military tactics and strategy to provide tactical, intelligence, and military support to the cartels.¹• Recent accounts allege that Los Pelones has split from Sinaloa and has moved into small time trafficking and extortion on its own.
B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,
a. In general
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smuggling, trafficking, extortion, kidnapping
b. <i>Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trafficking of marijuana, cocaine, and psychotropic substances in the coastal resort towns and rural areas of the Pacific Coast of Mexico.² Recently, the group has operated in Puente de Ixtla, Morelos selling drugs, kidnapping, extorting local businesses, and stealing cars.³
C. Scope and Size
a. Estimated size of network and membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The exact size of the organization is unclear. Its numbers and power are nowhere near as large as Los Zetas, and Mexican newspaper accounts refer to it as “La banda” or the band/group known as Los Pelones, indicating that they are smaller than the cartels but large enough to be noticed or considered.⁴
b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Huixquilucan, Atizapan , Naucalpan, Tlalnepantla Ecatepec, Puente de Ixtla Mexico.
D. Leader Characteristics
a. Who is/are the leader(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In February 2011, Mexican Federal Police forces arrested Colonia Emiliano Zapata who was identified as the head of the Southwestern Area.⁵
b. Leadership timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The groups were originally formed and run by Edgar Valdez Villarreal (AKA: “La Barbie”) in the late 1990s as the enforcement branch of Sinaloa. Since the split it is unclear if there is just one head of the organization; Zapata was listed as the head of the Southwest Zone.
c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diffuse
E. Organizational Structure
a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cellular
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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal membership is required and is indicated by the shaved head.⁶
c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Under Sinaloa the group operated under a centralized command. Recently it appears to operate under a more decentralized command and control structure.

F. Resources

a. Financial

- Since the alleged split from Sinaloa, the group operates on a much smaller budget and operates financially through drug sales, kidnapping, extortion, drug sales, and car theft.⁷

b. Human

- Human resources are limited, but reports indicate a move by the Pelones to expand membership beyond former military and police forces.⁸

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- The group has been known to operate out of safe houses to sell drugs and avoid interdiction.⁹

ii. Key routes

- Most arrests and interdictions have taken place in Morelo, Mexico. However, reports indicate that this is only one “zona” or area in which the group operates.¹⁰

d. Transportation

i. Land

- The group has been known to operate by land in stolen vehicles.¹¹

ii. Sea

- Information not found

iii. Air

- Information not found

iv. Intermodal container

- Information not found

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- The group was originally made up of former military officers and police personnel; it is likely that it still maintains some ties to municipal police and military forces.

b. Concealment

- Like most groups operating in Mexico, members of Los Pelones often hide in plain sight, avoiding interdiction by hiding in suburban housing and keeping low profiles.

c. Deception

- Information not found

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- There are no reports of Los Pelones attempting to traffic drugs outside of Mexico.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- **Cooperative:** The Sinaloa and Beltran Leyva organizations have been known to supply the group with cocaine and marijuana.¹² As they are allegedly now independent, it is uncertain which side they are on.

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

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- The former employer of the Pelones, the Sinaloa Cartel, has close ties with the PAN party; it is possible that Los Pelones still enjoy some of those ties. The group is also made up of former police and military members and it is likely that they still maintain intelligence and contact with municipal police and military forces.

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

- There is no source indicating a link between terrorist or terrorist groups.

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

- Members are identified by their shaved or bald head.

J. Technical Sophistication

- The group operates using military and police tactics, high powered rifles, automatic weapons, and explosives.¹³ Despite its small size, the group is very sophisticated and capable of carrying out surveillance, intelligence gathering, and hits.

K. Penchant for Innovation

- The existence of Los Pelones itself is an innovation. Pelones was formed in response to the creation of the Zetas to be a military branch for cartels opposing the Gulf Cartel. Since the alleged split, the group has continued to adapt and use military tactics to avoid detection and interdiction.

L. Activities in United States

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- Activity by Los Pelones is centered primarily in Mexico, no sources link the group to activity in the U.S.

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

- Information not found

c. Linkages with US groups

i. Market/transaction links

- Information not found

ii. Stable supplier

- Information not found

iii. Franchise arrangement

- Information not found

iv. HQ and Branch office

- Information not found

M. Evaluations

a. Strengths

- The greatest strength of Los Pelones is their organizational structure. By operating in cells the group is incredibly flexible and capable of avoiding interdiction and will not be as threatened by arrests of leadership as there is no clear head to the organization.

b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities

- The group is still small and operating in limited territory. It has limited resources and operate less as traffickers and more as extortion and kidnap artists.

c. Additional insights

- Up until very recently, Los Pelones was considered to be the enforcement arm of another DTO, the Sinaloa Cartel, not an independent organization. Now that is has

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allegedly split, it is unclear what its role will be in the landscape of Mexican DTOs. However, it is nowhere near as large, or as formidable as Los Zetas, and does not appear to be attempting to access trafficking routes into the U.S.

- The members are professionally trained in many cases, and highly adaptive and capable of responding to changes. There is no indication that they have worked in the past with terrorists or terrorist groups, but should they come under stress from the state or other, larger organizations, there is no clear indication of how the group will respond.

Other Notes

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¹ *Petrified Truth* October 29, 2006. <http://www.petrifiedtruth.com/archives/003051.html> (May 18, 2011).

² Miranda, Hugo "24 Executed Belong to the Band, Los Pelones" *La Prensa* September 15, 2008.

<http://www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/notas/n853254.htm#> (May 18, 2011).

³ Rojas, Luis Jose "Capturan en Puente de Ixtla a 3 de la banda Los Pelones" *El Sol de Cuernavaca* February 14, 2011.

⁴ Rojas "Capturan en Puente"

⁵ Rojas "Caputuran en Puente"

⁶ *Petrified Truth* <http://www.petrifiedtruth.com/archives/003051.html> (May 18, 2011).

⁷ "News from Morelos, CPS still active Los Pelones Stealing Cars" *Borderland Beat* January 25, 2011

<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/01/news-from-morelos-cps-still-active-los.html> (May 18, 2011).

⁸ *Petrified Truth* <http://www.petrifiedtruth.com/archives/003051.html> (May 18, 2011).

⁹ Rojas "Capturan en Puente"

¹⁰ Rojas "Capturan en Puente"

¹¹ "News from Morelos, CPS still active Los Pelones Stealing Cars" *Borderland Beat* January 25, 2011

<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/01/news-from-morelos-cps-still-active-los.html> (May 18, 2011).

¹² ¹² Rojas "Capturan en Puente"

¹³ *Petrified Truth* <http://www.petrifiedtruth.com/archives/003051.html> (May 18, 2011).