

A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- After Osiel Cardenas Guillen (AKA: “El Mata Amigos”) took control over the Gulf organization in the late 1990s, he decided to create a personal security squad composed of former Airborne Mexican Army Special Forces. To do so he contacted Lieutenant Arturo Guzman Decena (AKA: Z-1) who, along with another 33 members of this highly specialized military force, defected from the army and became the personal bodyguards of the leader of the Gulf Cartel.¹
- Soon after, the Zetas proved valuable not only for providing personal security, but also in enforcing agreements, protecting shipments, and defending against organizations attempting to move into the Gulf’s territories. Because of this, Cardenas Guillen began assigning more responsibilities throughout territories controlled by the Gulf organization.
- Once Guzman Decena was killed (2002) and Cardenas Guillen was arrested in 2003, Heriberto Lazcano (AKA: “El Verdugo” or “El Lazca”) became the head of the Zetas and agreed to continue working with the leaders of the Gulf, Jorge Eduardo Costilla (AKA: “El Coss”) and Antonio Cárdenas Guillen (AKA: “El Tony Tormenta”) but slowly began to distance Zetas from this organization.²
- Although the Zetas Organization began as a small defector force, it quickly began to grow in strength by actively promoting military defections, bringing in former Kaibilies (Guatemalan Special Forces) to the organization and by creating a flexible and layered structured that enabled it to gain information about what was happening in its territories.
- The Zetas also began to adopt a more entrepreneurial approach and started to move into other illicit activities like kidnapping, extortion, piracy product sales, oil theft, and human trafficking. This approach was accompanied by brutal and savage tactics that soon became the brand name of “La Compañía” (The Company) as the members also often like to be called.
- The 2007 extradition of Cardenas Guillen to the United States speeded up the independence of the Zetas from the Gulf organization. This finally materialized in February 2010 after a dispute over territories with Gulf led to the killing of one of Los Zetas lieutenants Sergio Peña Mendoza (AKA: “El Concorde”).³
- The military skills and spirit, the brutal tactics they use to enforce agreements, their sophisticated layered network, and their rapid expansion throughout Mexico, Central and South America, some U.S cities and Europe, has led the Zetas to be labeled as one of the most dangerous criminal organizations in the world.

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- Drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, oil theft, piracy products sales, human trafficking and arms trafficking.

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

- Cocaine smuggling from Colombia through Nicaragua and Guatemala and Mexico into the United States.
- Mexican produced Marijuana
- Oil theft to be sold to Texan companies.⁴
- Human trafficking from Central America⁵ and Cuba⁶
- Kidnapping Migrants⁷
- Arms Trafficking from south United States cities into Mexico⁸

C. Scope and Size	
a.	Estimated size of network and membership
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although out of the original 34 zetas only 11 are still active and operating (9 are dead and 11 have been arrested), through proactive recruiting and training camps the organization has managed to increase its membership considerably. Estimates of membership range from 300 to 3000.⁹
b.	Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group's operating area)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 states in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, United States, Europe.¹⁰
D. Leader Characteristics	
a.	Who is/are the leader(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heriberto Lazcano (AKA: "El Verdugo" or "El Lazca")
b.	Leadership timeline
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Osiel Cárdenas Guillén (late 90s to 2003) Arturo Guzmán Decena (AKA: "Z-1") (late 90s-2002) Heriberto Lazcano (AKA: "El verdugo" or "El Lazca") (2003-present)¹¹
c.	Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autocratic style by Lazcano with the aid of the remaining 10 original members or Old Zetas (Zetas Viejos): Carlos Vera Calva (AKA: "El Vera"); Daniel Enrique Márquez Aguilar (AKA: "El Chocotorro"); Galdino Mellado Cruz (AKA: "El Mellado"); Gonzalo Geresano Escribano (AKA: "El Cuije"); Jesús Enrique Rejón (AKA: "El Mamito"); Lucio Hernández Lechuga (AKA: "El Lucky"); Rogelio Guerra Ramírez (AKA: "El Guerra"); Prisciliano Ibarra Yepis, Eduardo Estrada González y Jorge López (AKA: "El Chuta").¹²
E. Organizational Structure	
a.	Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cellular. Zetas keep a flexible three layered structure to adapt to situations and insulate the leadership from law enforcement prosecution. At the top level is Lazcano with the remaining 10 original members who coordinate major shipments and operations throughout their territories. A second layer falls below which is in charge of management, enforcement recruiting, and training. A third layer of operators oversees cells in territories and limits the information about each other.¹³
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 and specialized into several tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "New Zetas" Kaibilies that oversee "Ls" and are in charge of enforcement and security. "Ls" or "Cobras" serve as weapons porters to "Old Zetas". "Windows" (Las ventanas) youngsters to warn of presence of threats (police and suspicious individuals). "Hawks" (Alcones) youngsters that are eyes and ears of the Zetas in their territories. They provide information of what is happening in their territory. "The Cunning ones" (Los Mañosos) provide weapons. "Leopards" (Las Leopardas) prostitutes that extract information from their clients.

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

- “The Command” (La Direccion) are approximately twenty communications experts who intercept phone calls, follow and identify suspicious automobiles and even accomplish kidnappings and executions.
- “The Covered Ones” (Los Tapados) social base composed of poor people who are mobilized to demonstrate against military and federal police deployments.¹⁴

c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

- Centralized on Lazcano and his team of “Old Zetas”

F. Resources

a. Financial

- Zetas rely on a team of accountants to keep track of transactions done in every territory so Heriberto Lazcano can provide rewards or punish slackers.¹⁵

b. Human

- Training and specialization has been a fundamental part of this organization since Cardenas Guillen formed it.
- Old members have been providing incoming members with military training in rapid deployment, aerial assault, marksmanship, ambushes, intelligence collection, counter surveillance, sophisticated communications, and intimidation.¹⁶
- Another main characteristic of Zetas is their ability to use high caliber weapons that range from AK-47 and AR-15 assault rifles, to grenade launchers, .50 caliber machine guns and light artillery (M-72).¹⁷
- Several generations of recruits have graduated from Zeta training camps in Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon and they are sent to the field depending on their skills particular abilities.¹⁸

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- Zetas are known to have safe houses and ranches throughout their territories where they keep guns and ammunition, kidnaped people or products to be smuggled.

ii. Key routes

- From Colombia to Guatemala, and from there to Mexican Gulf ports of entry into the U.S

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Trailer Trucks

ii. Sea

- Fishing vessels and small boats
- Semisubmersibles.¹⁹

iii. Air

- Small aircrafts

iv. Intermodal container

- Some

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- Zetas rely heavily on corruption, especially of local and state officials, to protect their smuggling routes and storage facilities. Intimidation is used to get local officials to cooperate so they can move freely.²⁰
- The State of Tamaulipas²¹, the Zetas base of operations, is said to be largely controlled

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by the organization. The most recent evidence of this was the involvement in the murder of the runner up governor candidate, Rodolfo Torre Cantú, a couple of days before the election.²²

- The Zetas have also corrupted migration officials at Cancun’s airport to smuggle illegal aliens into Mexico,²³ and customs officials to smuggle oil into the U.S.²⁴
- This organization has also managed to corrupt CBP officials at the U.S – Mexico border by bribing them or offering sexual favors, in exchange of this officers looking the other way while Zetas smuggle drugs and illegal aliens. According to Charles K. Edwards, Deputy Inspector General of the DHS, since 2004, 127 CBP personnel have been arrested charged or convicted for corruption.²⁵

b. Concealment

- Information not found.

c. Deception

- Information not found.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Using the Falcon Dam at the Texas border, the Mexican Navy recently found a camp site on the Mexican side that was used both for training and to smuggle marijuana using small boats.²⁶

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- In Mexico, currently Zetas have an ongoing turf war with the Sinaloa Organization, Gulf and La Familia. They have created an ad hoc alliance with Arellano Felix Organization, South Pacific Cartel and Los Gueros organization.
- At the international level, Zetas have connections with Peten-Coban Cartel in Guatemala and the Calabrian Mafia and the N’drangheta in Italy.

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

- Zetas are known to use a mixture of corruption and intimidation of local and state officials. They have also made their way into corrupting migrations authorities in Mexico to facilitate human trafficking and U.S customs officials at some border points of entry.

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

- So far no indication has been found that this organization has had a connection with a terrorist organization.

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

- This organization has a mixture of both nationalistic and entrepreneurial orientation that is taught to any incoming member.
- Trainees are provided with Mexican history as well as basic behavior rules to respect and protect society²⁷
- They are also told that “La Compañia” aims to provide jobs for people in need so they can also have some things to buy and enjoy.²⁸
- The Zetas has shown also a clear corps spirit by paying benefits to family members when members die in combat and rescuing members from prison (in significant numbers).²⁹

J. Technical Sophistication

- Zetas are known to be one of the most sophisticated transnational criminal organizations due to their advanced military training, the use of heavy weaponry, they communications skills and their brutal use of violence both to enforce agreements and intimidate enemies and law enforcement officials.

K. Penchant for Innovation

- The brutal violent methods that this organization implements and its use of the “brand name” to intimidate has escalated the use of violence by other criminal organizations.
- The Zetas’ emergence as an enforcer group with highly specialized military training paved the way for other organizations to create similar groups to face them (Los Pelones or Los Negros created by the Sinaloa organization are the main example of this)
- “La Dirección” has used the electronic signatures of opponents’ cellular phones to coordinate kidnappings and assassinations, and electronic surveillance is key to many of the group’s operations. The Zetas have also penetrated the radio frequencies used by Mexican law enforcement, eavesdropping on police communications and announcing death threats against troublesome officials.³⁰
- The Zetas are now considered by DEA officials to be “the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent” of the drug-related organizations active in Mexico.³¹

L. Activities in United States

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- Drug trafficking, oil smuggling and human smuggling and trafficking

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

- Cocaine and Marijuana
- Oil smuggling to Texan companies.

c. Linkages with US groups

i. Market/transaction links

- Hermanos Pistoleros Latinos
- Mara Salvatrucha
- Mexican Mafia
- Mexikanemi
- Tango Blast
- Texas Syndicate³²

ii. Stable supplier

- Cocaine: Colombian
- Marijuana: Mexican producers

iii. Franchise arrangement

- Information not found.

iv. HQ and Branch office

- The U.S justice Department has warned law enforcement agencies in Texas, Arizona and Southern California to expect encounters with Zetas. The Zetas organization is known to have ordered killings in Dallas and Arizona using gangs and disguising its own members as American law enforcement officials.
- Zetas also consider Dallas as a key operations hub for transportation and distribution. The group also has a significant presence in Houston and San Antonio as well as in the border cities of Brownsville, Laredo, McAllen and Del Rio.³³

M. Evaluations

a. Strengths

- A background in military training, proactive use of violence, and an entrepreneurial approach to illicit business have been key elements for its expansion throughout Mexico, Central America, the southern United States and Europe.
- Although this organization is not known to corrupt high level officials in the federal law enforcement agencies, it has managed to create “safe havens” in certain states by

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bribing and intimidating local and state officials. The border state of Tamaulipas is probably the best example of how Zetas have managed to gain control of key elements in the state (law enforcement, main highways, and local media)

- Despite its relatively recent appearance in transnational criminal networks, the Zetas organization has achieved a quasi-legendary status by exploiting a mixture of fear and respect. Just by mentioning the group's name, images of extreme violence come to mind.
- By not being fearful to confront federal law enforcement agencies, and managing to undermine local and state government institutions, Zetas have managed to exploit one key feature of Mexican and Latin American governments, the lack of trust that citizens have in them.
- The Zetas has also managed to diversify risk by entering other illegal markets, but at the same time Lazcano and his group of "Old Zetas" have succeeded in controlling every aspect of the organization's activities.

b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities

- In contrast with more traditional organizations in Mexico (Sinaloa or Arellano Felix), Zetas are not afraid of attracting attention from media and law enforcement. This might lead to reckless behavior that could end up in a mistake.

c. Additional insights

- Zetas are a 3rd generation criminal organization whose nontraditional approach to criminal activities, has changed the way illegal activities are conducted. Not only have they have escalated violence, but they have also speeded up the hollowing of government institutions to facilitate their activities.
- The control of key territories (Tamaulipas), crucial law enforcement operatives (migration, customs, and local and state police), as well as the means to protect valuable cargo, enables this organization to further diversify its smuggling options.

Other Notes

- Although no indications could be found that the Zetas has had any link with terrorist groups, its reckless behavior, comparative advantage to offer other smuggling options, and its entrepreneurial approach to business might make the organization more likely to accept transactions with terrorist organizations.

¹ Zetas Cartel, Insightcrime, <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/zetas/item/77-zetas>

² Press Release, "DEA Announces Gulf Cartel/Los Zetas Most-Wanted List", Drug Enforcement Administration, July 23rd, 2009 <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/dallas072309.html>

³ El Universal, "Los Zetas" originales, diezmadados en una década", 30 de enero de 2011, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/183321.html>

⁴ Milenio Semanal, "Mexico: Los Zetas Increasingly Involved in Oil Theft" (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) July 10th 2010, OSC: LAP20100712202002

⁵ El Universal, "Zetas, Mara Salvatrucha Terrorize Central American Migrants in South", (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) March 3rd, 2008, OSC: LAP20080304470002

⁶ La Jornada, "Cuban-American Foundation Tied to Zetas in Cuban Smuggling Ring", (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) Jun 23rd, 2008, OSC: LAP20080623470001

⁷ NSSOaxaca Online, "Kidnapped Migrants Zetas' Major Resource, Says National Security Cabinet", (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish), October 23rd, 2010, OSC: LAP20101023470001

⁸ "The 'Ninth' Cartel", (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) May 19th 2010, OSC: LAP20100520202001 --

⁹ Brands, Hal, "Los Zetas: Inside Mexico's Most Dangerous Drug Gang" Air & Space Power Journal, October 1st 2009 <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2009/3tri09/brandseng.htm> and Grayson, George W. "Mexico: Narco Violence and Failed State?" (Ed. Transaction, 2011) 189

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- ¹⁰ Zetas Cartel, Insightcrime, Op. Cit
- ¹¹ “Narcotics Rewards Program: Heriberto Lazcano-Lazcano”, Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/123681.htm>
- ¹² “Los Zetas” originales, diezmos en una década”, Op Cit.
- ¹³ Grayson, George W. “Mexico: Narco Violence and Failed State?” (Ed. Transaction, 2011) 188-189
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. p. 191
- ¹⁶ Ibid. p. 184.
- ¹⁷ Brands, Hal, “Los Zetas: Inside Mexico’s Most Dangerous Drug Gang, Op Cit.
- ¹⁸ El Universal, “Los Zetas” originales, diezmos en una década”, Op. Cit.
- ¹⁹ Grayson, Op Cit, p. 183
- ²⁰ Grayson, Op Cit, p. 191
- ²¹ Proceso, “Criminals Block Delivery of Social Development Aid in Tamaulipas”, (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) December 15th , 2010 OSC: LAP20101215202002 Mexico
- ²² “ZETAS AUTORES DE LA EJECUCION DE TORRE CANTU”, July 2nd, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSUDXw8x7mw>
- ²³ La Jornada, “Mexican Article: Cuban-American Foundation Tied to Zetas in Cuban Smuggling Ring”, (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish) June 23rd, 2008, OSC: LAP20080623470001.
- ²⁴ “Mexico: Los Zetas Increasingly Involved in Oil Theft, Op Cit.
- ²⁵ *Senate Committee Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Border Protection Corruption and Drug Trafficking*, June 9, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/299954-1>
- ²⁶ El Universal, “Muestran Imagenes de operativo en Presa Falcon”, May 10th, 2011, <http://www.eluniversaltv.com.mx/detalle.php?d=23330>
- ²⁷ Excelsior, “El Alfil _Negro de los Zetas” ., September 28th, 2008 http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/el_alfil_negro_de_los_zetas-228526.html
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Grayson, Op Cit, p.p. 190-191
- ³⁰ Brands, Op. Cit
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² “National Drug Threat Assessment”, *National Drug Intelligence Center*, February 2010, pp. 64-65, <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs38/38661/index.htm>
- ³³ Grayson, Op Cit, p.p. 195-196