

Organization Attributes Sheet: Paredes Group

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- The Paredes group was formally established after its leader, Jorge Mario “El Gordo” Paredes-Cardova, inherited the remnants of Otto Roberto Herrera Garcia’s organization following Herrera’s initial arrest in 2004.¹ Paredes and his network are suspected of moving more than 45 tons of cocaine into the United States over a period of almost 5 years,² making Paredes one of Guatemala’s most notorious kingpins and earning him a spot on the U.S. CPOT list. El Gordo was arrested in 2008 and sentenced to 31 years in a U.S. jail in April 2010. Following his arrest, Otoniel “Loco” Turcios Marroquín gained power within the organization.³ In 2008 Turcios is alleged to have played an important role in the murder of Juan “Juancho” Leon, head of the Leon family and son-in-law of the Lorenzana patriarch, alongside Walter Overdick of Alta Verapaz.⁴ In October 2010, Turcios was arrested and extradited to the United States for the same crime that earned El Gordo his 31 year sentence.⁵ It is unclear who currently controls the Paredes drug trafficking network since Turcios’ arrest or even if the network still exists.

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- Drug trafficking, money laundering

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

- Drug trafficking: Paredes specializes in trafficking cocaine and the group is believed to have transported roughly 45 tons of cocaine into the U.S. under Paredes’ leadership.⁶

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- Drug trafficking: The organization spans Central America from Colombia to the United States.⁷
- Money laundering: Paredes had associates in Texas, Colorado, Illinois, New York and Georgia who distributed the cocaine, collected the proceeds from the drug sales, and smuggled bulk cash shipments in excess of \$1 million back to Guatemala
- Group members who owned large farms or ranches would also bury large quantities of cash on their property and subsequently either use it buy more cocaine or launder it within the country in which the farm was located.⁸

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

- Guatemala:⁹ the Paredes group is a Guatemalan based cartel, and it assisted other Guatemalan based trafficking operations including those by the Mexican organization, los Zetas, as well as the Lorenzana and Mendoza families. After El Gordo Paredes’ incarceration, the group’s new leader, Otto Turcios was a known ally of los Zetas and Walter “El Tigre” Overdick of Coban, a powerful figure in Coban at the time who might have taken over the leadership of the Petén-Coban group in 2007.¹⁰
- Colombia¹¹
- Panama¹²
- Nicaragua¹³
- Mexico¹⁴
- El Salvador:¹⁵ In September 2010 police unearthed over \$14.5 million in cash buried in several barrels on ranches belonging to Paredes’ affiliates in San Salvador, El Salvador.¹⁶

- The United States: Organization members have ranches and properties in the states of Texas, Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Georgia.¹⁷ Paredes himself has also been identified as having moved drugs from Pittsburgh, PA to New York.¹⁸
- Belize¹⁹
- Honduras: Jorge El Gordo Paredes was captured in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where he had been living and investing in real estate. Authorities believe that members of the Paredes group purchased large farms in the country as a front for drug trafficking activities.²⁰

D. Leader Characteristics

Leadership

- a. Jorge Mario “El Gordo” Paredes-Cordova
 - Otoniel “Loco” Turcios Marroquín
- b. Leadership timeline
 - Jorge Mario “El Gordo” Paredes (2004-May 1, 2008)
 - Otoniel “Loco” Turcios Marroquín (May 2008- October 2010)
 - Current identity of the Paredes group leader is unknown
- c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
 - Autocratic

E. Organizational Structure

- a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
 - Hierarchical
- 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?
 - Information not found.
- c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)
 - Centralized

F. Resources

- a. Financial
 - The group is well financed
- b. Human
 - Information not found.
- c. Logistical
 - i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.
 - The group operated a network of safe houses throughout the United States. Known locations include Peyton, Colorado²¹ and other states including Texas, Illinois New York, and Georgia.²²
 - El Gordo hid from law enforcement agents in San Pedro Sula, Honduras²³ where he owned several real estate ventures.
 - In September 2010 police unearthed over \$14.5 million in cash buried in several barrels on ranches belonging to Paredes’ affiliates in San Salvador, El Salvador.²⁴ Officials believe the money came from the Paredes group’s cocaine sales, and that the group intended to either launder the money in El Salvador or transport it to South America to pay for more cocaine.²⁵
 - ii. Key routes
 - The Paredes group transports large quantities of cocaine from Panama to Mexico via cargo ship, whereupon the drugs are unloaded and transported to the U.S.-Mexican border by land.²⁶ The cocaine is then imported into the United States by a Mexican drug cartel, usually the Sinaloa cartel.²⁷

d. Transportation
i. Land
• The group transported narcotics by vehicle in Mexico. When Paredes was a fugitive, he would travel typically circumventing border checkpoints by driving on back roads.
ii. Sea
• The group uses cargo ships that transport cocaine Panama to Mexico. The ships travel both Atlantic and Pacific routes. Jorge “El Gordo” Paredes testified that, in one instance, the group shipped a large amount of cocaine by ship inside a crane. ²⁸
iii. Air
• Information not found.
iv. Intermodal container
• Although it cannot be confirmed, the group probably used intermodal containers on cargo ships.
G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities
a. Corruption
• Paredes evaded capture and protected cocaine shipments from seizure by bribing law enforcement authorities in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. ²⁹
• Otto Turcios is alleged to have bribed Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom. ³⁰
b. Concealment
• At least once cocaine was hidden inside a crane.
c. Deception
• Information not found.
d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)
• Paredes group members drive on secondary roads, around checkpoints.
• The group also avoids border entry points by transporting the cocaine using cargo ships.
H. Prior / Existing Relationships
a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)
• The Paredes group trafficked drugs for the Gulf cartel and Los Zetas as well as for the Sinaloa cartel, the Lorenzana family, and the Mendozas family.
• Otto Turcios is suspected to have participated in a 30 minute shoot out in Zacapa during March 2007, which left 11 dead including Juan “Juancho” Leon Ardon, the head of the Leon family and son-in-law of the Lorenzana patriarch. ³¹ El Gordo Paredes was also implicated in the massacre. ³²
• After Paredes’ incarceration, the organization’s new leader, Turcios, had positive relations with Los Zetas. Fighting with other organizations such as the Sinaloa cartel, the Lorenzanas and the Mendozas increased.
b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.
• Los Zetas accused Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom of accepting bribes from Otto Turcios then reneging on their agreement after the election. ³³
• Otto Turcios is known to have worked with Walter Overdick, former mayor of Alta Verapaz, ³⁴ and a powerful figure in Coban at the time who might have taken over the leadership of the Petén-Coban group in 2007. ³⁵
c. <i>Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.</i>
• The Paredes group has had no known alliances or past dealings with any terrorist organization.

I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group leadership is predominantly Guatemalan
J. Technical Sophistication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no evidence to suggest this group is technologically advanced.
K. Penchant for Innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is nothing to suggest high levels of innovation
L. Activities in United States
<p>a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paredes had associates in Texas, Colorado, Illinois, New York and Georgia who distributed the cocaine, collected the proceeds from the drug sales, and smuggled bulk cash shipments in excess of \$1 million back to Guatemala.³⁶
<p>b. <i>Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
<p>c. Linkages with US groups</p> <p>i. Market/transaction links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
<p>ii. Stable supplier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
<p>iii. Franchise arrangement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
<p>iv. HQ and Branch office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information suggests that the organization itself had members in the United States and that these constituted branches of the main organization headquartered in Guatemala.
M. Evaluations
<p>a. Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Paredes organization was well run, well organized, and well financed. The group also had the flexibility to take either the Pacific or Atlantic routes from Panama to Mexico.
<p>b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group has no known submarines or airplanes by which to transport narcotics or smuggle cash.
<p>c. Additional insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No additional insights
Other Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> El Gordo Paredes is also implicated in the April 2008 assassination of Victor Rivera Azuaje, former security advisor to the Ministry of the Interior (MINGOB).³⁷ Rivera was a former negotiator in charge of high profile kidnapping cases. The motive for the murder is unknown, although it is suspected that Paredes held Rivera responsible for the death of his teenage son, whose was kidnapped and killed despite rescue attempts lead by Rivera. It is also possible, however, that Rivera was involved with the Paredes organization and their relationship deteriorated.³⁸

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- ² López, Julie. "A Key Player: Postcards from a Drug Trafficking Country," *ReVista Harvard Review of Latin America*, Fall 2010-Winter 2011. <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/fall-2010-winter-2011/key-player>
- ³ López, Julie. "Guatemala's Crossroads: Democratization of Violence and Second Chances," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Latin American Program*; December 2010; page 35. www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/Lopez.Guatemala.pdf
- ⁴ Brokaw, Jason W. "Mexico & Central America News Updates: March 31-April 11, 2011," April 11, 2011; p 52. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftyrgroup.info%2FMexico%2520%2520Central%2520America%2520News%2520Updates%2FMexico%2520and%2520Central%2520America%2520News%2520Updates%2520--%2520March%252030-April%252011%2C%25202011.pdf&rct=j&q=MARK%20STEVENSON%2C%20sinaloa%2C%20gulf%2C%20Turcios&ei=ALfTTZCGEYHZgAf2-PShCw&usg=AFQjCNECZ_Lv74iU-723jG1fewbws302A&cad=rja
- ⁵ Booth, William, and Nick Miroff. "Mexican Drug Cartels draw Guatemalan army to Jungles Where it Fought Civil War," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/a_new_fight_a_familiar_battlefield/2011/02/09/ABzbrmF_story.html
- ⁶ López, Julie. "A Key Player: Postcards from a Drug Trafficking Country," *ReVista Harvard Review of Latin America*, Fall 2010-Winter 2011. . <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/fall-2010-winter-2011/key-player>
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Corcoran, Katherine. "Mexican Drug Cartels Move into Central America." Associated Press, MSNBC, March 13, 2011. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42060262/42060203>
- ⁹ "Jorge Mario Paredes-Cordova," *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115398.htm>
- ¹⁰ "Guatemala: Leaders of Main Drug Cartel Identified," *Guatemala City Prensa Libre* (Internet Version-WWW) in Spanish, March 31, 2008, OSC: FEA2008040261030731.
- ¹¹ "Jorge Mario Paredes-Cordova," *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115398.htm>
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Corcoran, Katherine. "Mexican Drug Cartels Move into Central America." Associated Press, MSNBC, March 13, 2011. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42060262/42060203>
- ¹⁷ "Jorge Mario Paredes-Cordova," *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115398.htm>
- ¹⁸ Sas, Luis Angel. "The Secret of How he Stopped to "El Gordo" Paredes," *El Periodico*, May 12, 2008. <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20080512/pais/54691>
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- ²⁰ "Highlights," *Northern Central American Press*, November 9, 2010. Open Source LAP20101109026003
- ²¹ Acuna, C. and A. Sas. "Bride of the "Gordo" Paredes Extradited to U.S.," *El Periodico*, May 7, 2008. <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20080507/pais/54329>
- ²² "Jorge Mario Paredes-Cordova," *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115398.htm>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Corcoran, Katherine. "Mexican Drug Cartels Move into Central America." Associated Press, MSNBC, March 13, 2011. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42060262/42060203>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mulvey, Erin. "News Release: Guatemalan Drug Kingpin Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 31 Years for Leading Massive, Armed Cocaine Conspiracy," U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, April 16, 2010. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2010/nyc041610.html>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ López, Julie. "A Key Player: Postcards from a Drug Trafficking Country," *ReVista Harvard Review of Latin America*, Fall 2010-Winter 2011. <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/fall-2010-winter-2011/key-player>

²⁹ Mulvey, Erin. "News Release: Guatemalan Drug Kingpin Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 31 Years for Leading Massive, Armed Cocaine Conspiracy," *U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration*, April 16, 2010. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2010/nyc041610.html>

³⁰ "Message from Zetas to Guatemala's President," *InSight*, December 28, 2010.

<http://www.insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/385-message-from-zetas-to-guatemala>

³¹ Brokaw, Jason W. "Mexico & Central America News Updates: March 31-April 11, 2011," April 11, 2011; p 52.

³² "Jorge Mario "El Gordo" Paredes Connected to the Slaughter in Zacapa," *El Periodico*, May 6, 2008.

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³³ "Message from Zetas to Guatemala's President," *InSight*, December 28, 2010.

<http://www.insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/385-message-from-zetas-to-guatemala>

³⁴ Brokaw, Jason W. "Mexico & Central America News Updates: March 31-April 11, 2011," April 11, 2011; p 52.

³⁵ "Guatemala: Leaders of Main Drug Cartel Identified," *Guatemala City Prensa Libre* (Internet Version-WWW) in Spanish, March 31, 2008, OSC: FEA2008040261030731.

³⁶ "Jorge Mario Paredes-Cordova," U.S. Department of State.

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³⁷ Reynolds, Louisa. "CICIG Jorge Mario Paredes Attributed to the Murder of Victor Rivera," *El Periodico*, July 29, 2010. <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20100729/pais/166796>

³⁸ Bird, Annie and Grahame Russle. "Guatemalan Police Death Squad Connect today's Organized." *Eonix Papers*. August 15, 2010. <http://www.redfortyeight.com/2010/08/15/guatemalan-police-death-squad-connect-todays-organized/>