

Organization Attributes Sheet – Solntsevskaya Bratva (Solntsevo Brotherhood)

Author: McKenzie O'Brien

Review: Phil Williams

A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- Solntsevskaya Bratva was formed in the 1980s in Moscow, Russian Federation, by Sergei Mikhailov (AKA: "Mikhas"), a *vor v zakone* ("thief in law") and former sportsman, who spent time imprisoned in Russia's Gulag system. Despite being a *vor*, Mikhailov chose to direct the group away from traditional *vory v zakone* code (which professed a strict code and non-cooperation with authorities) and toward one more modern – namely one that would cooperate with authorities if in the group's best interests.
- The group was named for Solntsevo, a southern district of Moscow, from where many original members hailed.
- Solntsevskaya Bratva fostered a relationship with Semion Mogilevich, another rising entity in the world of Russian organized crime. In early 1993, Solntsevskaya reached an agreement with Mogilevich to invest huge sums of money in a joint venture: acquiring a jewelry business in Moscow and Budapest.¹ The two entities would continue to engage in joint arts and antiquities schemes until 1995, when there appears to have been a falling-out.²
- In the mid-1990s, the group was somewhat weakened by the arrest of Mikhailov (autumn 1996) in Switzerland and from infighting. However, due to lack of evidence and witnesses, Swiss prosecutors were unable to charge Mikhailov, and he was soon released. Moreover, the Swiss court was compelled to pay 450,000 USD to Mikhailov in compensation for his "unjustified imprisonment."³

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- **As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean:** Drug trafficking, arms trafficking, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, credit card fraud,⁴ and money laundering⁵
- **Globally:** Drug trafficking, arms trafficking, contract killing, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, fraud, auto theft and smuggling, cargo theft, cyber crimes, **possible RN material smuggling**

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

- **Drug Trafficking:** According to Interpol, Solntsevskaya Bratva is actively trafficking drugs in Mexico.⁶ Furthermore, sources have indicated that Russian criminal groups are the main "masterminds" or organizers, along with Italian criminal groups, for other external actors interested in moving drugs from Latin America.⁷
- **Arms Trafficking:** According to Interpol, Solntsevskaya Bratva is actively trafficking arms in Mexico.⁸
- **RN Smuggling:** Solntsevskaya Bratva may have a historical precedent in RN smuggling efforts. According to a report published by the Naval Postgraduate School, "There has long been speculation...that in 1994 members of one of Moscow's major criminal organizations, the Solntsevo group, were involved in efforts to sell 27 kilograms of uranium-238 for \$1.5 million."⁹

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- Latest estimates put the group's size at several thousands of members.¹⁰ Although exact numbers are unknown to recent open source information, the group's myriad activities and areas of operation would indicate that size remains significant.

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

	<p>b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean: Mexico,¹¹ Cuba;¹² Latin America and the Caribbean in general¹³ • Globally: Russian Federation, all of Eastern and Western Europe, Balkans, Central Asia, the United States, Israel, much of China, Japan, Malaysia, and Indonesia¹⁴
D. Leader Characteristics	
	<p>a. Who is/are the leader(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no information available from open sources as to who leads operations in Latin America. However, the group in general is still believed to be led by Sergei Mikhailov (AKA: “Mikhas”).
	<p>b. Leadership timeline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solntsevskaya has since its formation in the 1980s remained under the leadership of Mikhailov.
	<p>c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffuse – While some decisions are made by the “core” leadership of the group, in general, decisions tend to be spread among various levels of authority and various cells and nodes of the network.¹⁵
E. Organizational Structure	
	<p>a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured, but flexible, cellular network – There is a degree of hierarchy in that some decisions appear to be made by certain key authorities within the group, but Solntsevskaya Bratva as a whole functions generally as a flexible network, with members/components allocated to diffuse areas and tasks that will make the group both more effective in its endeavors, but also safer from law enforcement. Moreover, the group’s structure also includes cells, especially with regard to contingents operating farther from the former Soviet Union. These cells, while loosely affiliated with the core, generally make their own decisions and operate autonomously.¹⁶
	<p>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?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No information found on recent details, but there might be an informal support network in various neighborhoods where Solntsevskaya is active, as it has been reported that Mikhailov “instructed his associates to be friendly and helpful to people, like a real ‘Mafia.’”¹⁷
	<p>c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralized - Reports from Interpol and other law enforcement agencies indicate that Russian criminal organizations are operating in Mexico through multiple small cells.¹⁸
F. Resources	
	<p>a. Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant financial resources. Solntsevskaya Bratva has access to revenue from legitimate businesses,¹⁹ in addition to revenue obtained from its illicit activities. The group was believed to control over 120 businesses in the late 1990s.²⁰ As well, shortly before his arrest, Mikhailov “won the tender to modernize the Moscow water supply facilities and participated in the project of building a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Ukraine.”²¹ After that, Mikhailov’s career “involved an even greater range of international economic activities.”²²
	<p>b. Human</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant human resources. Solntsevskaya Bratva is a large group involved in Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

numerous illicit activities. The group, therefore, has members with various specializations that increase success in its ventures.

- c. Logistical
 - i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.
 - In order to maintain low profiles in Mexico, Russian groups often operate out of resorts [or hotels or houses] owned by their Mexican business partners.²³
 - ii. Key routes
 - Information not found.
- d. Transportation
 - i. Land
 - Information not found.
 - ii. Sea
 - According to a Balkan crime expert, Russians, for whom Serbian and Montenegrin criminal groups reportedly work beneath in Latin American drug trafficking, utilize “oceangoing vessels” in a “big system” to smuggle cocaine.²⁴
 - iii. Air
 - Information not found.
 - iv. Intermodal container
 - Information not found.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

- a. Corruption
 - No information on use of corruption in Central America and the Caribbean, but Solntsevskaya Bratva and Russian groups are known to make extensive use of corruption in the former Soviet Union, Central Asia, and elsewhere.
- b. Concealment
 - Information not found.
- c. Deception
 - Information not found.
- d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)
 - Information not found.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

- a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)
 - **Mexican criminal organizations (highly cooperative)** – According to Stratfor, “Links between Russian organized criminal groups and one or more of the principal Mexican criminal organizations have allowed the Russians to obtain and transport illicit narcotics at a low cost and under relatively secure circumstances for shipment to Europe and Russia. In order to maintain low profiles in Mexico, these groups often operate out of resorts [or hotels or houses] owned by their Mexican business partners.”²⁵
 - **Colombian criminal organizations (cooperative)** – cooperation in drug trafficking²⁶
 - **Italian criminal organizations (particularly La Cosa Nostra and the Camorra)** – degrees of cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or counterfeiting. With regard to the Camorra, The two groups appear to be cooperating in such ventures as gambling, prostitution, fraud and extortion.²⁷
 - **Japanese Yakuza** – degrees of cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or counterfeiting²⁸
 - **Chinese Triads** – degrees of cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or

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counterfeiting²⁹

- **Turkish criminal organizations** – cooperation in drug trafficking³⁰
- **Balkan criminal organizations (including the Saric Group)** – According to Balkan sources, this group might be the actual “masterminds” or organizers of cocaine smuggling from Latin America, dealing with Balkan and other external criminal groups wishing to smuggle cocaine from the region.³¹
- **Semion Mogilevich Group** - Mogilevich is reported to have been a member/associate of Solntsevskaya Bratva during the 1990s. However, it is likely this relationship has been severed or, at the least, has cooled after a 1995 meeting-turned-law enforcement raid between the two groups in a Prague restaurant owned by Mogilevich. This meeting was reported to have been a setup for the Solntsevskaya Bratva to kill Mogilevich, who never showed.³²

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

- **Russian political and security structures (at all levels)** – One of the most significant sources of power for Russian organized crime is its connections within the government. In fact, criminal organizations and their leadership often have direct ties to oligarchs and others in positions of power.³³

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

- There is no indication in open sources of past or present dealings and/or relationships with any known terrorist groups.

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

- It is significant to note that Russian criminal organizations such as Solntsevskaya Bratva do not always have ethnic orientations, unlike some other criminal groups from the former Soviet Union.

J. Technical Sophistication

- **In general, assessed as technically sophisticated.** It is unknown from open sources the degree of technical sophistication the Solntsevskaya Bratva displays in terms of its operations in Central America and the Caribbean. However, it is known that the group utilizes excellent information technology (IT) resources and personnel of the highest technical sophistication to aid in traditional operations, but also, increasingly, to engage in manipulation and exploitation of cyberspace and information within the cyber realm.³⁴

K. Pentchant for Innovation

- **Assessed as highly innovative.** This judgment is based upon the notion that Russian criminal organizations, including the Solntsevskaya Bratva, have grown in terms of the number of illicit – and licit – activities they have engaged in over the past two decades, despite increased attention from various government, law enforcement, and academic entities. As well, Russian criminal organizations have expanded into the cyber realm, using cyberspace to facilitate where possible even traditional illicit ventures.

L. Activities in United States

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- Solntsevskaya Bratva engages in some of the same illicit and legitimate activities within the United States as it does in the former Soviet Union, although perhaps to a lesser degree in certain cases. These include: drug trafficking, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, money laundering, and various types of fraud.

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

- *Human Trafficking/Prostitution:* The Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition (BSCC) has noted that criminal gangs from Russia have been discovered attempting to traffic victims across the U.S.-Mexico border.³⁵ They have succeeded in some cases: Using Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

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Mexico as a transit point, Russian groups have moved East European/Russian victims to New York.³⁶

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

- Within the United States, Russian groups are known to operate extensively in New York, particularly in Brighton Beach and Brooklyn, and in the “tri-state” area in general (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York).³⁷

M. Evaluations

a. Strengths

- **Financial Resources** – Extensive financial resources, generated from numerous illicit and legitimate sources, bring the group enormous financial power.
- **International criminal and political connections** – The group has strong cooperative ties to Mexican and Colombian criminal organizations, among others, enhancing its power and capabilities in the region. A presence in numerous countries and ties to many criminal organizations across the world, give the group a degree of global power and capabilities. Connections to federal and local Russian government officials and institutions also give the group vast additional resources as well as protection.
- **Operational security (OPSEC) and denial, deception, and evasion measures** – Russian criminal groups, including Solntsevskaya Bratva, are exceptional at evading detection by hostile and inquisitive entities, likely through a combination of good operational security and measures taken to deny information to, deceive, and evade such authorities.

b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities

- Extent of operations, while a strength in many respects, also give the group a vulnerability in that it adds to the burden of OPSEC.

c. Additional insights

- **Relative to other large and powerful transnational criminal organizations, it is extremely difficult to find information, even dated, about this Russian group and others.** This problem is exacerbated the farther one moves from the former Soviet Union, where investigators and journalists are more familiar with Russian organized crime.

Other Notes

- **Historical RN Precedent.** Solntsevskaya Bratva may have a historical precedent in RN smuggling efforts. According to a report published by the Naval Postgraduate School, “There has long been speculation, for example, that in 1994 members of one of Moscow’s major criminal organizations, the Solntsevo group, were involved in efforts to sell 27 kilograms of uranium-238 for \$1.5 million.”³⁸

¹ Friedman, Robert I. “The Most Dangerous Mobster in the World,” *The Village Voice*, May 26, 1998. <http://www.villagevoice.com/1998-05-26/news/the-most-dangerous-mobster-in-the-world>.

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- ³ Volkov, Vadim. *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (New York: Cornell University, 2002), 124.
- ⁴ La Jeunesse, William and Maxim Lott. "The Myth of 90 Percent: Only a Small Fraction of Guns in Mexico Come From U.S.," *Fox News*, April 2, 2009.; and Burton, Fred and Dan Burges. "Russian Organized Crime," *Stratfor*, November 14, 2007.
- ⁵ Galeotti, Mark. "Organized Crime Gangs Pose Threat to Cuban Development," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 2006.
- ⁶ La Jeunesse and Lott.
- ⁷ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," *Podgorica Analitika*, November 18, 2010, OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," *Podgorica Revija D Online*, February 16-23, 2011, OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Williams, Phil. "Intelligence and Nuclear Proliferation: Understanding and Probing Complexity," *Strategic Insights*, July 2006.
- ¹⁰ Finckenauer, James O., and Elin J. Waring. *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998).; and "Russian Mafia Leads Among Top 10 Criminal Organizations," *Mafia News*, September 17, 2008. <http://www.mafia-news.com/russian-mafia-leads-among-top-10-criminal-organizations>.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Galeotti.
- ¹³ Burton and Burges.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Volkov, 33.
- ¹⁸ Burton and Burges.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ "Russian Mafia Leads Among Top 10 Criminal Organizations."
- ²¹ Volkov, 124.
- ²² Ibid., 124.
- ²³ Burton and Burges.
- ²⁴ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," OSC: EUP20101129023003.
- ²⁵ Burton and Burges.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," OSC: EUP20110225023001.
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- ³⁷ Finckenauer and Waring.

³⁸ Williams.