

Mexican Cartels in Africa.

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In the second half of the decade of the 1990's the operatives of the Mexican cartels involved with the jump of the Colombian and Venezuelan drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) from the Caribbean basin to West Africa were guided by a different strategy than that of the Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs. The Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs were intent on opening new trafficking routes to Europe to flood Europe with cocaine. More importantly additional routes to place product directly into Italy were being sought given the hegemony over the access points to Europe by Italian organised crime especially the Ndrangheta. This strategic move by the Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs impacted not only Europe but also West and North Africa and the nature of and the volume of illicit trafficking on the Mediterranean Sea. As the Sahel and Maghreb regions of Africa became linked to West Africa so did Italy as cocaine moved from the Caribbean Basin was landed in West Africa and some moved through the Sahel and Maghreb to Italy, Spain and France. The operatives of the Mexican cartels were active players in the creation of these new trafficking routes to Europe but the long term strategy of the Mexican cartels was driven by an entirely different and contradictory worldview to that of the Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs.

The worldview of the Mexican cartels placed methamphetamine as their primary illicit drug product as it was superior to cocaine. Methamphetamine can be manufactured in clandestine laboratories as it's a synthetic drug whilst cocaine hydrochloride production is tied to the coca bush. The market for methamphetamine is large and growing in Asia as it is the illicit drug of choice for the Asian masses. In the largest African economy, South Africa, methamphetamine is also the illicit drug of choice and a thriving, growing market exists especially in the Cape Province. Africa affords the Mexican cartels easy access to the raw materials to manufacture methamphetamine, export it and flood African illicit drug markets creating new demand. The next stage of the Mexican strategy is the creation of methamphetamine laboratories in Asia. Cocaine trafficking to Europe and Asia by the Mexican cartels is then a distinct and separate operation from the production, trafficking, exportation and retailing of methamphetamine in Africa. There are then three trafficking operations/enterprises by the Mexican cartels that are distinct, separate and apart from each other with each one driven by its strategic imperative. The Mexican cartels traffick cocaine to Europe via a number of routes which don't run through Africa likewise cocaine is moved to Asia via routes that don't run through Africa. The volume of cocaine moved by Mexican cartels to Europe and Asia through Africa is then a strategic choice made in response to various realities produced by the power relations of specific routes used throughout the world. The production, trafficking and sale of methamphetamine in Africa are much more flexible and profitable and it affords the Mexican cartels the freedom to create production capacity throughout Africa as the best sites are fully exploited. From Guinea to Mozambique, South Africa and Nigeria the production of methamphetamine is now endemically common as the raw materials flow in from China and India. The retail drug bazaars of South Africa and Nigeria now attest to the availability of methamphetamine and the affordable prices it is sold for as supply drives demand in the drug world the affordable retail price is deliberate. Cocaine moved from the Caribbean basin to West Africa is then moved from West Africa to Europe via a range of routes via air or sea utilising various means to conceal the illicit drug. The original intent was to create a circuitous route via Africa to Europe for cocaine which meant creating capacity in West Africa to receive the cocaine, store the shipment and place it on trafficking routes out of West Africa to Europe. The states of West Africa with the more developed transport infrastructure links to Europe and with economies of the requisite scale that mask the trafficking of product were the states targeted to dominate the trafficking of cocaine to Europe. From the outset Ghana and Nigeria became the export hubs for cocaine leaving West Africa for Europe whilst various states were/are utilised as the import points the most infamous of these being Guinea-Bissau. The chronic underdevelopment of the transport

infrastructure of Guinea-Bissau excluded its choice to be a major export point of cocaine destined for Europe which impacted the volume of product landed in this state with the rise to dominance of the Mexican cartels over cocaine trafficking in West Africa in the first decade of the 21st century. Logistically product needed to be landed in Ghana and Nigeria or much closer to both export hubs which reduced the volume of Mexican cartel cocaine entering Guinea-Bissau with graphic consequences, that were publicly expressed, on the state structure of Guinea-Bissau as factions in the armed forces and the political elite battled amongst themselves for dominance of the reduced size of the Mexican cartels' pie. Ghana today is the prime export hub of West Africa for cocaine to Europe with Nigeria following but given the willingness of the Mexican cartels to reduce the volume of cocaine moved through West Africa the Nigerian organised crime groups have now learnt that in their dealings with the Mexican cartels in West Africa methamphetamine is the future and they have infested heavily in this future. The volume of cocaine moved through West Africa to Europe by the Mexican cartels is constantly under review and so are the hubs of trafficking operations. The move now is to create the premier trafficking hub in South Africa as air and sea transport links create near perfect conditions for Mexican cartels' trafficking operations in Africa. South Africa is the operational link between South America and Asia whilst affording an operational presence in the largest African economy. The Nigerian organised crime groups are dominant in the illicit markets of South Africa and are traffickers of note in Asia. The operational alliance of the Mexican cartels and Nigerian organised crime groups therefore ensured the entry of the Mexican cartels into South Africa. The original reason for the jump to West Africa is now no longer strategically important to the Mexican cartels today making West Africa a subservient, secondary trafficking pipeline at present. The trafficking structures are intact in West Africa and product continues to be moved but in smaller volumes compared to the first decade of the 21st century. What is much more relevant is the operation of a full fledged illicit drug market in West Africa and the Sahel region of Africa which is the creation of the opening of the trafficking pipeline from the Caribbean basin to West Africa. In this illicit drug market South American cocaine, methamphetamine produced in Africa and Afghan heroin are readily available on wholesale markets. The illicit drug market exists with the illicit small arms market and human smuggling all three enterprises under the control of organised crime groups creating a nexus that did not exist before the arrival of cocaine from the Caribbean basin. This new nexus has unleashed social forces in West Africa and the Sahel region which now challenge the hegemony of the post-colonial/neo-colonial order in these regions. The indicators are already present which point to the reality that the Islamic Maghreb of North Africa is also impacted by this nexus.

The impetus to create a trafficking pipeline via the Sahel region and the Islamic Maghreb from West Africa to Europe especially to Italy came from the desire of Italian organised crime to move cocaine to Italy bypassing the traditional trafficking routes as the Spanish Galician coast. This trans-Sahel/Maghreb route was never designed to be a major pipeline to Italy given its limitations but it was necessary towards satisfying the demand to create direct supply pipelines to Italy. Italian organised crime was from the outset instrumental in creating the trans-Sahel/Maghreb route into Italy and Libyan state officials and crime groups from Gaddafi's Libya were core elements in the creation of this pipeline. The fall of Gaddafi's regime in Libya has lowered the cost of moving product through this pipeline whilst the pipeline has grown in potency and expanse. A mix of illicit drugs, small arms and humans now move along this pipeline entering Italy thence the EU all under the hegemony of Italian organised crime especially the Ndrangheta. The growing operational presence of Nigerian crime groups in Italy at the ground level of the illicit markets is indicative of their links to Italian organised crime and the Mexican cartels via the operation of the trans-Sahel/Maghreb pipeline. The branch of the pipeline that moves product to the

Mediterranean coastlines of Spain and France and islands of the Mediterranean Sea as Corsica and Sardinia utilise the trafficking skills of Moroccan organised crime groups which has increased the power and presence of these groups today in the illicit drug markets of Western Europe with the resultant violent engagements for dominance as seen in the French city of Marseille. But what is most noteworthy is the growing presence and power of the Nigerian organised crime groups in the illicit markets of Western Europe as they reap the benefits of an operational alliance with the Mexican cartels. The most potent geo-political product of the trans-Sahel/Maghreb pipeline is the involvement of Islamic extremist groups whether affiliated to Al-Qaeda or not in the trafficking of the product mix of this pipeline to Europe.

Italian organised crime groups entered into a business relationship with the most effective and proficient trafficking groups that moved goods and humans through the Sahel region to the Islamic Maghreb. That some of the most proficient groups were involved in the illicit trades in order to fund an ongoing war with apostate regimes of the Islamic Maghreb towards replacing them with a Salafi Jihadi dominated social order rooted in the Wahabi worldview was simply for Italian organised crime groups collateral damage in their quest to tighten their dominance of the cocaine market of Europe. A decision to not deal with Salafi Jihadi trafficking organisations of the Sahel and the Islamic Maghreb leaves Italian organised crime groups open to consistent attacks rooted in internecine warfare waged on the trafficking organisations in their employ. The only viable choice afforded by the power relations of the Sahel was then to embrace the Salafi Jihadi organisations. The trafficking groups remain volatile with hostility manifested between Arab and non-Arab trafficking groups, between Salafi Jihadi and non-Salafi groups but what is now apparent is that the wealth amassed by those involved in illicit drug trafficking is now forging an alliance across traditional barriers for the pursuit of personal wealth. The potent dichotomy is now between those accused of walking away from the Salafi Jihadi agenda or the agenda of race and ethnic self-determination for the wealth afforded by the illicit drug trade. In this reality those with the amassed wealth are under grave pressure to fund the ongoing war against the apostate regimes of the Islamic Maghreb or fund insurgencies towards creating free and liberated ethnic and race based spaces by dint of arms. There are then repeated intersections of these three agendas in the Sahel and Islamic Maghreb producing complex power relations that are constantly in flux. This reality is now even more complex and unstable with the intervention of the French military into Mali in 2013 with the blow-back of this intervention favouring those who call for Jihad against the Crusaders of the West. Funding is now flowing to the Islamic extremist groups of Northern Nigeria as these groups are now frontline Jihadi organisations intent on dismantling the neo-colonial order in Africa south of the Sahel. French military intervention in Mali in 2013 did not damage nor disrupt the illicit trades across the Sahel to the Islamic Maghreb. In fact it highlighted the dominance of Libya in this pipeline to Italy as various jump-off points in West African nations are fed into the pipeline to Libya. The south of Libya is the welcoming entry point into Libya that is yet to be placed under state control in the post-Gaddafi era. The wealth of the illicit pipeline into the south of Libya is feeding the struggle for dominance over the region between a non-Arab militia and Arab militias with the non-Arab militia indicating its willingness to embrace the Salafi Jihadi agenda. Hence the attack on the In Amenas gas processing facility in Algeria that originated from the south of Libya. The south of Libya is now the major staging area for the pipeline to Italy and the wealth derived from the illicit trades is changing the power relations of the south of Libya with a propensity for instability and social violence driven by a discourse of self-determination which masks the struggle to dominate the illicit trades of the region. The pipeline to Morocco is also changing the terrain of power relations in Morocco and Tunisia in two fundamental ways. The wealth generated by the illicit trades to Europe is now funding

cells of Islamic extremists bent on waging war on the governments of Morocco and Tunisia. This is a long term insurgency that plans on attaining critical mass with the means afforded by sustainable funding from the illicit trades. The strategy calls for the collapse of Morocco and Tunisia and control of Libya which encircles Algeria for the final push on the apostate regime. An enterprise in part funded by the illicit trades under the hegemony of European organised crime. The Morocco pipeline as is the Libya pipeline have resulted in for the first time since the start of the trafficking of cocaine to Europe persons and groups of the Sahel and Islamic Maghreb now owning cocaine offered for sale of the wholesale and retail illicit drug markets of Europe. This cocaine is payment for services delivered to Mexican cartels and European organised crime and product sold to these groups by the Mexican cartels as a result of the working relationship with Mexican cartels. The products moved via the trans-Sahel/Maghreb pipeline are then moved to Europe by trafficking groups of the Maghreb and the Sahel and placed in the hands of persons and groups rooted in the communities of peoples of the Sahel and the Islamic Maghreb in Europe. Illicit drugs, small arms and smuggled humans moved into minority communities in Europe are now creating a new illicit order with its power relations. The ethnic minority communities of the suburbs of Paris and of Marseille are already showing the changes to the social order of these communities brought about by the trans-Sahel/Maghreb pipeline to Europe. Islamic extremism flows with the illicit products of this pipeline as it moves to tap into the wealth of the illicit trades and the arms supply as they all flow into European cities. This is then an empowering flow into a crucible of social isolation, deprivation, racism and public expressions of violence against the state and the hegemonic social order. A scenario in which desire and its temporary satiation breeds a monster that threatens the sustainability of the hegemonic social order.

The illicit drug markets of Nigeria, Ghana and other West African states are now showing the impact of the strategy of the Mexican cartels to expand the local illicit drug markets at the street level by expanding consumption with the availability of affordable product and the product of choice is African produced methamphetamine. The street level price of cocaine has dropped to stimulate street demand indicating the flood of product that continues to wash over selected African markets but it remains the drug that is unable to compete with African produced methamphetamine on the mass market. The African organised crime groups that have formed partnerships with the Mexican cartels are thriving as the access to a range of illicit products under terms and conditions that favour indigenous enterprise and their expansion to African and international markets have resulted in rapid growth and expansion of presence on African and international illicit drug markets. Nigerian organised crime groups have exploded in scale and expanse of operations as a result of the working relationship with the Mexican cartels. Some international agencies have misread this development in Africa as a rise to dominance of African organised crime groups on the continent failing to discern that the explosion of activity could only have resulted from a source of supply of product that was outside of the capacity and logistical capability of African organised crime groups in Africa. Ghanaian organised crime groups are challenging the dominance of Nigerian organised crime groups as is those of South Africa. The Nigerian organised crime groups were the pioneers of small scale illicit drug trafficking in Africa using the human body as the means of transport. Today the pioneers are under increasing challenge in Africa as nation state based organised crime groups are now challenging the hegemony of the Nigerian organised crime groups over their national illicit drug markets. This is clearly apparent in the case of Ghana and South Africa as organised crime groups of both these states move to maximise the profits of their working relationship with the Mexican cartels. This challenge to Nigerian organised crime group hegemony is now manifested internationally as Ghanaian organised crime groups have followed the Nigerian groups into the Caribbean basin replicating structures to facilitate trafficking from the Caribbean basin.

South African organised crime groups are also involved with the process of creating a presence in specific states of the Indian Ocean. The pipeline from the Caribbean basin to Africa has then deeply impacted the social orders of Africa where its operators have chosen to establish operational bases. African organised crime as a result became globalised and a dynamic was unleashed which drives an expansion of the scale of illicit activity of a specific type i.e. the nexus of illicit drugs, illicit small arms and human smuggling which gives birth to a new social order premised upon the hegemony of those that command this nexus. In the Caribbean basin the political compromise constructed between the political elites and those that command the nexus is the narco-democracy of the Caribbean basin. In Africa the political compromise to be created between the political elites and the social order of the illicit nexus is still a work in progress but there is little hope for the defeat of the social order of the illicit nexus as it's already hegemonic in specific states of Africa.

The centrality of the operations of the Mexican cartels in South Africa is as a result of the strategy to ensure Mexican hegemony over the illicit drug markets of Asia. Already Brazil and South Africa are linked via the pipeline that moves cocaine from South America to South Africa. From South Africa cocaine is moved to Asia and Europe using a multiplicity of trafficking methodologies. Much more strategically important to the Mexican cartels is the thriving methamphetamine retail and wholesale markets of South Africa coupled with the operation of laboratories in South Africa that produce this synthetic drug. Methamphetamine produced in states of East Africa and South Africa that is then trafficked through the Indian Ocean to various consumer markets is the strategic aim of the Mexican cartels. Mozambique and Kenya are prime production locations in addition to South Africa. Each production location will be flooded with affordable product towards the creation of thriving local illicit drug markets. The product mix of the Mexican cartels for Asia is then hinged on cocaine and methamphetamine marketed to different segments of the consumer market with different price structures. The drive to exploit the potential of the illicit drug markets of Asia as a sunrise/developing market by the Mexican cartels has then moved the investments of Mexican cartels in Africa towards erect new trafficking structures and operationalised new pipelines to/in/out from South Africa and states of East Africa that border with the Indian Ocean. This emphasis has then relegated the trafficking of cocaine to Europe via West Africa to the status of being a mature trafficking operation that does not serve the prime directive of the Mexican cartels to dominate the Asian illicit drug markets. The Mexican cartels have then radically altered the structure of trafficking in Africa from that established in the second half of the decade of the 1990's. Today unlike the first decade of the 21st century there is now a variety of trafficking enterprises that operate throughout the continent of Africa creating the conditions in which Africa will become a front-line player in the illicit drug enterprise of a globalised world.

A central issue that is not addressed in the public domain at present is the movement of Afghan heroin to the Western Hemisphere along the Caribbean basin/African trafficking pipeline. Afghan heroin is dropped off at entry points in East Africa and is now trafficked and offered for sale on the illicit drug markets of West Africa in quantities that can constitute a flood of product from West Africa to the Western Hemisphere. The Mexican cartels have the capacity and capability to purchase product from Afghan brokers and move this product to the Western Hemisphere if it is strategic to the agenda for hegemony over the illicit drug markets of the Western Hemisphere. The existence of brokers of Afghan heroin in West Africa facilitates the movement of small quantities at a time by couriers to the Caribbean basin then to North America or directly to North America or both. The same reality also obtains for Europe with heroin trafficked from Africa. The beacon for heroin traffickers moving product to the Western Hemisphere from Africa is the illicit drug market of Puerto Rico where the level of demand for heroin has now created a public health crisis. Puerto Rico

then affords a booming market for heroin and open access to the USA with the evasion of local state agencies. It is then the expectation that before the Mexican cartels indicate their decision to now traffick heroin to the Western Hemisphere the organised crime groups affiliated to the Mexican cartels such as the Nigerian and Ghanaian organised crime groups already move heroin to the Western Hemisphere from Africa and Asia.

Any analysis of the worldview of the Mexican cartels in the 21st century must deal with the violence that erupted and escalated in Mexico during the rule of two successive presidents from the P A N political party from 2005 to the present. The Mexican state has always being a partner with the illicit drug trafficking groupings of Mexico policing an order that kept the peace relatively speaking. The largest and most powerful trafficking organisation is the Sinaloa Federation which before 2005 was a federation in its classic interpretation as groups within the federation dominated key border crossings and the state policed this order to ensure mutual enrichment without internecine warfare which was bad for business both the business of state and the illicit drug business. Under the first P A N presidency of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) the cracks in the old state accord started to appear as El Chapo Guzman made a bid for hegemonic power over the Sinaloa Federation by attacking the Juarez cartel a fellow member of the Sinaloa Federation. The P A N presidency and the state bureaucracy failed to police the accord and responded to Guzman's aggression by unleashing the military on Guzman's enemies within the Sinaloa Federation. The second P A N president Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) escalated the war on Guzman's enemies both within and without of the Sinaloa Federation. Guzman's war and the response of the P A N managed state structures in support of Guzman de-stabilised the Mexican trafficking groups to the point where factions split off from traditional groups as Los Zetas from the Gulf cartel and new groups appeared. In the pursuit of the Guzman agenda and the war against the Guzman agenda the state structures of repression operated clothed in impunity. Long after the war between the traffickers ground to a halt the state agencies continued the agenda of social cleansing. In the midst of a war for dominance in Mexico the Mexican cartels were erecting their dominance of the illicit trades of the Caribbean basin and implementing their strategies for Africa and Asia. The Mexican cartels were working to attain these ends without the internecine warfare that was ongoing in Mexico. The international trafficking arms of the Mexican cartels are distinct arms under its distinct and separate leadership who remain faceless and that is deliberate. They were present and active within the Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs creating the strategy and the means to eclipse these organisations as a result they set and dominate the agenda for the globalisation of the Mexican cartels. Guzman's war and the response of the state under P A N control eclipsed the leaders of these groups whose faces are in the public domain. Guzman et al are now in fact wanted men internationally holding on to control of the Mexican operations as the leaders of the international, globalised operations set the pace and agenda for the future. These leaders of the globalised arms move freely the world over managing their illicit enterprises whilst the reputed leaders live in Mexico now at the mercy of the political class of Mexico. Leadership that is now expendable. There was then a war in the Mexican arm of its operations which today is yet to be replicated in the operations of the international arms of the Mexican organisations.