

“The Reality Further Revealed 2012-2015”

An analysis of the operational strategies of the Mexican Transnational Trafficking Organisations (MTTOs) in the Caribbean today

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November 2015

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My book: “Cocaine Trafficking in the Caribbean and West Africa in the Era of the Mexican cartels” was published in 2012 thereby creating the need to up-date its content to 2015 as the illicit drug trade in the Caribbean constantly evolves, a work in progress. What follows is then an up-date to the said book which focuses on the operational strategies of the Mexican Transnational Trafficking Organisations operating in the Caribbean Basin.

In the period 2012-2015 the following operational realities became apparent: the primary objective driving the illicit drug trafficking of the Mexican transnational trafficking organisations (MTTOs) in the Caribbean is to move illicit product into the north-eastern US primarily heroin and secondly cocaine. To achieve this strategic objective a multiplicity of trafficking methodologies have been unleashed in the Caribbean island chain. The market value of heroin and cocaine in the north-east US is the highest in the drug markets of the US as this area is the most valuable of the US today. This is so as there is an imbalance between supply and demand caused by the traditional means used by Mexico based traffickers to move illicit product into the US via the Mexico/US border crossings which results in a huge distance product has to traverse to supply the drug markets of the north-east US. The MTTOs have now invested in moving product directly from the Caribbean to the eastern seaboard of the US and via the US territories in the Caribbean of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands to the US mainland. This pipeline is then the means devised to attain the prime objective of the MTTOs in the Caribbean.

This strategic imperative of the MTTOs in the Caribbean drives the formulation and operationalisation of a series of trafficking methodologies and operational strategies to flood the eastern seaboard of the US with high quality, affordable product. The major trafficking arms are said to be those of the Sinaloa Federation and Los Zetas but the Juarez cartel was a pioneer of the Mexican cartel presence in the Caribbean. More importantly the discourse of cartels at war in Mexico in a battle for dominance does not explain the failure to export this war to the transnational operations. Why is there no turf war between the so-called cartels in the Caribbean, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Europe, Africa and Asia? A question that remains unanswered as it is never accepted as a valid question by those who propagate the discourse of cartels. The reality is the fact that the MTTOs now run the Mexican transnational illicit enterprises whilst the public faces of cartel land Mexico are simply that public faces to take the fall in Mexico thereby ensuring that the partners of the MTTOs in the Mexican state look good as they prosecute their “war on drugs”. To define the Mexican illicit enterprises today via the myth of cartels and their heads is to attempt to explain MTTOs with a myth devised by MTTOs and the Mexican state.

The primary operational trafficking strategy of the MTTOs to move product is the use of containerised cargo to move product out of the Caribbean, into the Caribbean and within the Caribbean. To realise this operational strategy alliances were necessary with employees of container ports, both state and non-state employees, targeted in the Caribbean such as the Caucedo port of the Dominican Republic (DR) and the Kingston port of Jamaica. This process of the MTTOs was facilitated in ports where trafficking organisations were already operating and more importantly in ports where Caribbean gangland affiliates of MTTOs wielded power. Both realities apply to the ports of the DR, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and The Bahamas to name the

most strategically important ports for the MTTOs at present. There are a range of trafficking methodologies utilised with containerised cargo. These are: the mixing of illicit with licit products, cocaine is molded in the form and shape of a licit product, the nature and appearance of the product is changed to avoid detection and it is placed in a licit product and the illicit product is reduced to a liquid form and licit products are saturated with the liquid or placed in licit products as a licit liquid. There is now a new favoured method by the MTTOs and their allies and affiliates. Containers are opened at ports of departure/transshipment and comparatively small amounts of product placed in the container and the breached container is re-sealed with a legal seal or none at all. At the receiving port the container is opened and the product removed before the container is inspected. This trafficking method calls for state officials in the employ of the traffickers and the traffickers must wield power and influence over the daily running of the port. Huge container ports are the ideal target where the volume of containers that enter and leave the port on a daily basis affords the traffickers the space in which to operate and coupled with corrupt officials create traffickers heaven.

The proximity of specific islands of the Caribbean to the US mainland enables those who are intent on making trafficking runs to the US mainland utilising various sea vessel types. At present The Bahamas island chain is the dominant point of departure where illicit product and illegal migrants leave heading for the coast of Florida, USA. Already the signs of the wave of illicit product flooding Florida are apparent such as the rise in heroin overdoses, the washing up of product on beaches and the reports from law enforcement indicating the volume of trafficking increasing over time.

Today investment by MTTOs in expanding trafficking structures in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands is made primarily because being US territories in the Caribbean whenever the borders of these territories are breached in fact the border of mainland USA has been breached. MTTOs are then investing in compromising the security of the cargo moved via air and sea transport and the means of human travel between both territories and mainland USA. In this flow the MTTOs move illicit product and smuggled humans to the mainland US from both Caribbean territories and cash and small arms from the US to both territories. The US Federal government has responded to the threat in the expected manner: police reform, the intervention of the DEA and ICE and by increasing the number of Coast Guard assets in both territories. In both Caribbean territories the US is learning what it is to police a Caribbean narco-trafficking state as it's an entirely different species from an illicit drug consuming nation of the North. One potent indicator of the power of the MTTOs is the present reality that drug boats no longer only leave the Venezuelan and Colombian coasts headed to the DR where they are offloaded and the product stored and eventually moved to Puerto Rico. Drug boats are now heading directly to Puerto Rico and they are going to Puerto Rico from multiple directions. The strategy employed calls for swamping Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands with a tsunami of illicit product and smuggled illicit migrants.

Throughout the Caribbean island chain air carriers airports are compromised to facilitate trafficking via air cargo, the body of the aircraft and human transporters ie mules and swallows. To enable this illicit enterprise the security of airports must and have been compromised throughout the Caribbean in fact for quite some time now given the decades of illicit drug trafficking in the Caribbean. An added dimension today is intra Caribbean trafficking via air travel primarily utilising swallows and mules. Drug importation nodes as the DR, Guyana and Jamaica have spawned intra Caribbean trafficking where illicit product is

moved and sold on both the wholesale and retail drug markets in islands of the Caribbean where demand merits the investment especially for the tourist market. Jamaican grown marijuana/ganja has such a high premium attached to it that it is moved along these routes. Given the abundance of affordable recruits for the swallowing/mule trafficking industry in the Caribbean this industry has now exploded in depth and expanse in the Caribbean and has taken on an extra Caribbean transnational character as the West Africans have moved in and set up operations.

The alliance between the Ndrangheta transnational organised crime group of Italy and MTTOs to traffick cocaine to Europe has now resulted in the aftermath of MTTOs hegemony over illicit trafficking in the Caribbean Basin in the active operational presence of the Ndrangheta in the Caribbean island chain and Guyana for the express purpose of moving product to the US and Canada. An Ndrangheta operation in Jamaica and Guyana moving product to Canada was uncovered by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) whilst a US federal sting operation revealed Ndrangheta operations in Guyana. In addition the hegemony of the Ndrangheta over Italian-American organised crime in New York and Italian-Canadian organised crime in Toronto was revealed. The reality in 2015 is that the Ndrangheta dominates the cocaine trade in Europe and has now developed trafficking enterprises in North America utilising the Caribbean as trafficking nodes.

The alliance between MTTOs and Colombian transnational traffickers (CTT) was highlighted with the US federal government's strategy to dismantle Clan Usuga which is part of the Colombian group Los Rastrojos. The operational presence of Clan Usuga in the DR was confirmed as a result as well as the involvement of Clan Usuga in trafficking cocaine and heroin to the US via the Caribbean. Developments in the DR revealed the depth of the operational presence of Clan Usuga in the DR including the money laundering pipeline between the DR and Colombia. Clan Usuga is the most powerful known component part of Los Rastrojos and their pedigree is traced to the Valle Norte cartel of Colombia hence their operational knowledge of trafficking in the Caribbean island chain. The Valle Norte cartel was the hegemonic Colombian trafficking organisation in the Caribbean in the decade of the 1990s and the early 21st century. This operational knowledge is the legacy bestowed on Clan Usuga and Los Rastrojos hence their alliance with MTTOs in the Caribbean and the world. Los Rastrojos also commands large tracts of Zulia state, Venezuela that border with Colombia. These areas challenge the authority of the Venezuelan state over them and they are illicit trafficking enclaves in Venezuela where a huge illicit economy has supplanted the licit economy. Venezuelan energy products: gasoline, diesel fuel and LPG which are heavily subsidised by the Venezuelan state along with other state subsidised commodities as food are sent to Colombia in exchange for illicit drugs and small arms. In addition Los Rastrojos commands their own cocaine manufacturing facilities assuring their source of supply. Los Rastrojos utilises their operational base in Zulia state to traffick product to the Caribbean hence their operational base in the DR and the rest of the world.

The most important aspect of the operation of illicit drug trafficking in the Caribbean is the logistics of moving product from the production zones to the Caribbean island chain. Drug, trafficking organisations (DTOs) in the Caribbean must ensure the security of the product being moved to the Caribbean trafficking nodes as well as that of the product leaving the Caribbean trafficking nodes for consumer markets. There is also the imperative to secure the product in transition. DTOs therefore impact the Caribbean social order to attain the security of their illicit

enterprises in these three spheres of activity as their needs are specific and in many instances not interrelated and complementary. The MTTOs have switched on a variety of supply routes, have switched on new outward bound trafficking nodes and created a range of supply nodes in a bid to diversify supply source and maximise the volume of product exported from the Caribbean. The main mode of supply is maritime transport but in areas of the Caribbean lacking the military assets to secure their airspace there is an increase in supply via dedicated product transporting aircraft which will expand in the future especially in Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean. The go-fast boat laden with product moving from the coast of Venezuela and Colombia to the Caribbean island chain remains dominant but increasingly trawlers, freighters, smaller fishing vessels and pleasure craft are added to the mix. On the newly expanded route from the coast of Venezuela and Colombia via the Eastern Caribbean island chain to Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands and the DR the mix of vessels is utilised with an emphasis on fishing vessels and pleasure craft. There are no fixed methodologies to transport product to outward trafficking nodes as methodologies are mixed in order to maximise the rate of successful landings. For example transport vessels (both maritime vessels and aircraft) will hand over product shipments to other modes of transport for the run to the island's coastline. Loads are dropped off on an island or islands and a variety of methods are used to transport the load/s to trafficking nodes whilst, if the logistics allow, the island/s is/are switched on as a trafficking node. This strategy is commonly applied across the board by the MTTOs as seen in the case of Guatemala, Honduras, specific islands of the Eastern Caribbean and Guyana.

The major noted developments on the product supply side of the illicit drug trade of the Caribbean are: the linking of Jamaica to the Central American supply pipeline with a counter supply of Jamaican produced marijuana/ganja to Central and South America and the integration of Guyana into the supply pipeline to Brazil and the consequent frenetic development of Guyana as an international trafficking node.

Jamaica is now linked to Honduras from where vessels move product and arms to Jamaica and there is a counter flow of premium Jamaican ganja, white ice, to Honduras. Drug vessels have been interdicted manned by Jamaicans or having a member of the crew of Jamaican nationality in latitudes pointing to a Central American origin. Jamaican nationals have been arrested on the ground in Central America involved in drug trafficking organisations. Whilst Central Americans have been arrested in Jamaica for being involved in Jamaican ganja trafficking. The volume of product entering Jamaica via the Honduras/Jamaica pipeline has created a new dynamic within the drug trade in Jamaica as product is leaving Jamaica for The Bahamas for entry to the mainland US. Product is also being moved to Hispaniola especially Haiti for final entry to the US and Puerto Rico. The primary departure point for traffickers operating in Jamaica is St James parish with its capital Montego Bay and this reality has impacted the social order of St James parish seen in the fact that the murder rate per capita in the parish is the highest in Jamaica. The flood of product has also impacted the social orders of the parishes of Hanover and Westmoreland which both border St James and share the coastline.

The MTTOs in their bid to move product from the Caribbean to the north-east US saw the profits to be made in trafficking Jamaican organic, high potency, premium ganja to north-east USA. Demand in the north-east US sucks in supply from the US and Canada but given the supply logistics of moving US produced ganja from states where ganja production has been legalised, across states where trafficking/possession laws are rigidly enforced in an attempt to stem the flow of US produced ganja across their borders, to the north-east where

possession/trafficking of ganja is illegal presents an opportunity. The opportunity is to supply premium ganja to a market that is under-supplied given the level of demand. The MTTOs have then moved to supply especially the urban markets of the north-east US with premium Jamaican ganja through its Jamaican affiliates. In New York city premium ganja wholesales for USD 6,000 per lb at time higher or lower depending on supply. Given the vastly different sentencing guidelines for ganja trafficking compared to cocaine and heroin trafficking ganja trafficking from the Caribbean to the north-east is then a viable illicit enterprise. The value of premium Jamaican ganja has now resulted in swallows carrying ganja in their stomachs to the US and the rest of the Caribbean. The multi-tonne shipments of ganja interdicted to and from The Bahamas and on islands of The Bahamas indicate the profitability of the trade to the US.

Jamaican premium ganja is now being moved to Guyana for transportation to Brazil. Multi-tonne shipments have been interdicted in Guyanese origin and manned vehicles on their way from Jamaica to Guyana. The Brazilian ganja markets dwarf the markets of the north-east US and this has given rise to ganja cultivation in Guyana on an industrial scale especially along the banks of the Essequibo river utilising Jamaican expertise. But confirmation of the replication of a successful growth process for premium ganja in Guyana as in Jamaica is not yet available at the time of writing.

The decision of the MTTOs to switch Brazil on in the 21st century as a major international trafficking node whilst being a major consumer has resulted in the strategy to move product into Brazil via Guyana with the resultant counterflow of Brazilian criminal organisations to Guyana in order to participate in illicit trafficking enterprises. As a result of this dual flow Guyana today is flooded with Brazilian made and sourced small arms. The importation of Jamaican premium ganja has ensured a Jamaican presence also in Guyana as a transnational body of illicit traffickers live and operate in Guyana. The flood of cocaine on the Guyanese drug market supplied by the MTTOs and their affiliates and the transnational body of illicit traffickers present in Guyana have resulted in a frenetic attempt to turn Guyana into the premier trafficking node of the English speaking Caribbean despite the logistic deficiencies of Guyana. A Guyanese origin trawler was interdicted by the Ghanaian coast guard with a load of cocaine moved from Guyana bound for Ghana. This event indicates the operational presence of MTTOs and their affiliates in Guyana and the position of Guyana in the drug trafficking order of the Caribbean. Trawlers interdicted loaded with multi-tonne loads of Jamaican ganja bound for Guyana also indicate the presence of affiliates of the MTTOs and MTTOs in both Guyana and Jamaica. The volume of illicit activity in Guyana generated by the illicit drug trade is now threatening to place the Guyanese state in rigor mortis and replaced by a full fledged, full blown narco-trafficking state in the image and likeness of Mexico today. The US in recognition of the threats posed is openly the new government voted into power into 2015 but the relationship is yet to evolve at the time of writing into a full embrace as what obtains between the US and Jamaican governments at present. The US positions on Guyana and Jamaica indicate the nature of the threat posed to the US by developments in the illicit trades to the US emanating from both states. What must be noted is the reality that the state that has the necessary economic development, infrastructure, international logistics and geographic location to be the premier trafficking node of the English speaking Caribbean is Trinidad and Tobago with its energy driven economy. As a result the MTTOs and their affiliates are operationally present in Trinidad and Tobago.

The supply side of the cocaine trafficking enterprise under the hegemony of MTTOs is

now restructured in that powdered cocaine is now produced in sites which don't grow the coca leaf hence don't produce coca paste. The coca paste produced in the areas growing and harvesting the coca leaf is exported to a series of cocaine laboratories situated close to or in countries that are trafficking nodes or both trafficking and consuming nodes. Coca paste is transported to Honduras and Guatemala and the cocaine produced is moved to various locations including the Caribbean. This process is operating in Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador and one expects it is also present in Chile, Venezuela and Guyana. The question therefore arises: when will this process be applied to Caribbean islands with the production of cocaine and synthetic drugs as methamphetamine? The export of coca paste to external production sites has impacted the volume of coca leaf produced in the coca growing areas as coca paste has a much lower market value than powdered cocaine. The shortfall in cash flow has then to be boosted with increased coca paste production which demands increased coca leaf production. The stranglehold of the MTTOs over the cocaine trade has forced the acceptance of the dramatic change in the traditional structure of cocaine production. The MTTOs have been able to implement this new production order because of various production realities namely: their alliance with the Ndrangheta has denied entry to the EU cocaine market to traffickers who refuse to comply with the new order, their dominance of the trafficking structures to Asia and Australia enhances their dominance and their control of the coca leaf producing areas in Colombia under the control of the FARC and the VRAE valley of Peru. The strategy of the MTTMOs is then to hand to the cocalers a greater share of the cocaine value pie.

The final reality on the supply side of the illicit drug market of Latin America and the Caribbean is the issue of trafficking Afghan heroin via Latin America and the Caribbean to North America by MTTOs. Given the demand for heroin in the US and the market value of his drug the question arises of MTTOs choosing to continue to depend upon heroin produced in Mexico and Guatemala when Afghan heroin, high quality and competitively priced, is now being moved to West Africa. MTTOs dominate the trans-Atlantic cocaine trade to West Africa hence the structures exist for heroin to move in a counter pipeline across the Atlantic from West Africa to the Caribbean and Brazil. This supply side reality is then the opportunity that exists and its operational presence is yet to be revealed in public.

Fuel is a major concern in the Caribbean for traffickers primarily the reliability of supply and the quality of the fuel. In the Caribbean Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago with their energy based economies are the primary sources of supply via the illicit fuel trade. The key issue is quality of the illicit fuel as poor quality fuel is a threat to the trafficking enterprise. Networks are operating that source quality fuel from both supply countries for trafficking enterprises and these supply networks supply fuel throughout the island chain and to Guyana. Illicit fuel from both countries fuel the sea vessels and aircraft of trafficking organisations in the Caribbean island chain. In both supply countries the fuel production facilities are state owned and the fuel is state subsidised which means through corrupt state employees the Caribbean trafficking enterprises are fueled. The most important strategic input to Caribbean sourced from Trinidad and Tobago is illicit fuel.

The primary illicit drug mix of the MTTOs varies with the demand nature of the consumer market targeted. For the US heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine is the order of priority of the product mix. For the EU cocaine is the prime product especially in the UK. For China and India it's cocaine then methamphetamine whilst in Australia as in South-East Asia it's methamphetamine then cocaine. The trafficking systems utilised are then heavily influenced

by the product mix. The nature of the illicit drug also impacts the strategies employed to traffick these products. Synthetic drugs offer MTTOs the greatest flexibility as laboratories can operate within the demand market hence the drive of the MTTOs to tap into the demand for methamphetamine in Asia and South Africa. Illicit drugs based on a plant product that is grown in a specific geographic region is very limiting as is the case of the coca leaf hence the drive since the 1990's to create multiple growth areas for the coca plant independent of the Andes. The success of this venture is yet to be placed in the public domain. This is not the case with the opium poppy hence the diverse supply that exists in the world for heroin.

The imperative by the MTTOs to maximise the export of cocaine from South and Central America to international markets has changed the geography of trafficking out of Central and South America especially South America. Argentina, Chile and Brazil are now the major export nodes to international destinations with Brazil being the new growth drug market. Argentina and Chile are presently the major export trafficking nodes to Asia with product leaving these nodes for other drug markets as Europe and the US. Brazil with its huge commodities export base is now the growth node for cocaine exports to Asia, Europe and the US. Brazil has now linked West Africa, South Africa and South-West Africa to South America via a trafficking pipeline. South Africa is the target to become a trafficking node and a consumer market by the MTTOs and as a result methamphetamine laboratories under the control of Mexican traffickers are now operating in South Africa as is the case in West Africa. The full gamut of trafficking methodologies are utilised via the Brazil/Africa pipeline. The volume of interdictions of air passengers with illicit drugs originating from Brazil made in African airports speaks to the wave of product flowing from Brazil to Africa today. Then there is the illicit traffic along the 10th parallel highway both air and sea and the flow of product within licit cargo. This Brazil/Africa pipeline is then the prime trafficking point for moving Afghan heroin to the Western Hemisphere. In keeping with the strategy of the MTTOs Brazil is a multiple market trafficking node as all opportunities that present themselves to move product from Brazil are exploited by the MTTOs present in Brazil.

In the Caribbean human smuggling and small arms trafficking is dominated by the hegemonic trafficking organisations with operations in the region. The hegemony of the MTTOs has resulted in marked changes in the nature of human smuggling inter and intra the Caribbean. The volume of persons smuggled has exploded as Mexican coyotes have expanded the points of entry for smuggled migrants seeking access to the US. The US Caribbean territories of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are now US entry points for smuggled migrants. Clients of the Mexican coyotes are moved to and collected on Caribbean islands then moved via sea vessels mainly to be smuggled into the US territories with the next jump being to the mainland US. Islands of the Eastern Caribbean are now important parts of the smuggling structure to the US Virgin Islands such as Saint Martin, St Lucia and Antigua and what is noted is the volume of Cubans being moved through these islands for entry to the US Virgin Islands. Antigua has also raised the concern of the US with the illicit movement of Syrian refugees from Antigua to the US Virgin Islands. Persons are also seeking to enter the US from the launch point of The Bahamas whilst migrants are placed in Central America from the Caribbean especially in Belize for the journey to the US/Mexico border. The range of entry points now available cater to the range of cash resources migrants command in their quest to enter the US. Persons of Caribbean origin deported from the US and intent on returning to the US utilise this expanded service provided by the Mexican coyotes. The people smuggling networks of the

MTTOs are now so pervasive throughout the Caribbean that today Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean now form a people smuggling continuum. As a result the level of inter Caribbean smuggling has exploded and intra Caribbean smuggling is growing in volume and intensity.

The impact of the MTTOs on small arms trafficking in the Caribbean is indicated by the availability of the US made AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle throughout the Caribbean today. The MTTOs placed the US sourced AR-15 in the hands of their Caribbean gangland affiliates which started an arms race within Caribbean gangland as the AR-15 soon became the desired instrument of the new wave gangbanger/shotta of Caribbean gangland. Today the AR-15 is in the hands of the vassals of the MTTOs Caribbean gangland affiliates forcing their gangland opponents to frantically search for sources of supply of the AR-15 as the arms race evolves. The gangland weapon of distinction is now not only available in its ex-factory designation in Caribbean gangland as customised versions of the weapon produced by gunsmiths are available and in the hands of Caribbean gangland thereby creating an elite group of Caribbean sicarios.

The threat posed by the MTTOs in the Caribbean to Caribbean states is now real and the gravity of the threat is seen in the US move to invest in military assets placed in its Caribbean territories with the accompanying institutional action never seen before in the 20th century history of these territories. Whilst the rest of the Caribbean refuse to embrace joint action and choose to play a dangerous game of denial driven by complicity with the hegemonic illicit order.

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