



# West Texas

## High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Drug Market Analysis

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### Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), highlighting significant trends and law enforcement concerns related to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The report was prepared through detailed analysis of recent law enforcement

reporting, information obtained through interviews with law enforcement and public health officials, and available statistical data. The report is designed to provide policymakers, resource planners, and law enforcement officials with a focused discussion of key drug issues and developments facing the West Texas HIDTA.



Figure 1. West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been vetted with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- Several Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are struggling for control over the El Paso/Juárez plaza;<sup>1</sup> however, a controlling organization has not yet been established. They use the region as a national-level distribution center and transshipment point for illicit drugs destined for major markets throughout the United States and as a staging and transit area for illicit drug proceeds smuggled to Mexico from these markets.
- Violent crime associated with the struggle among Mexican DTOs for control of the El Paso/Juárez plaza has spread to the U.S. side of the border, endangering law enforcement personnel and citizens in the West Texas HIDTA region.
- The potential for *La Entrada al Pacífico*, a proposed trade route expected to be completed in 2010, to become a significant smuggling corridor for illicit drugs and precursor chemicals originating in or transiting Mexico remains a concern of U.S. and Mexican law enforcement officials; however, the infrastructure of this trade route has not yet been developed to the extent that would support the volume of cargo shipments and truck traffic necessary for traffickers to conduct large-scale smuggling operations. (See Figure 2 on page 6.)
- Increasingly, illicit drugs transported through the West Texas HIDTA by Mexican DTOs are destined for markets in the eastern United States, primarily Atlanta.

## HIDTA Overview

The West Texas HIDTA region, which encompasses 10 counties in West Texas that lie along a 520-mile section of the U.S.–Mexico border, is used by Mexican DTOs as a principal smuggling corridor and staging area for drug transportation to markets throughout the United States, including Atlanta,

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### Drug Trafficking Organizations, Criminal Groups, and Gangs

**Drug trafficking organizations** are complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.

**Criminal groups** operating in the United States are numerous and range from small to moderately sized, loosely knit groups that distribute one or more drugs at the retail and midlevels.

**Gangs** are defined by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations as groups or associations of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, the members of which individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

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Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Houston, Miami, New York, and San Francisco. The ongoing violent struggle among Mexican DTOs for control of drug smuggling through the area substantiates its strategic importance to Mexican traffickers. Moreover, the West Texas HIDTA region's location along the U.S.–Mexico border poses an array of other national security and law enforcement issues for the HIDTA region, including alien smuggling, weapons transportation, and terrorist entry into the United States through and between ports of entry (POEs).

Most drugs smuggled into and through the region pass through the El Paso/Juárez plaza, a major drug smuggling corridor extending from the “boot heel” of New Mexico to the eastern boundary of Big Bend National Park. Mexican DTOs use El Paso, the most populous metropolitan area in West Texas, as a principal staging area, transshipment point, and distribution center for illicit drugs destined for drug markets throughout the nation. El Paso is located on Interstate 10, a major drug trafficking route that links the HIDTA region to many national-level drug markets using I-20 and I-25.

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1. A plaza is a geographic area in which drug smuggling is controlled by a drug trafficking organization (DTO).

**Table 1. Drug Seizures in the West Texas HIDTA  
in Kilograms, 2004–2006**

Year	Drug			
	Marijuana	Cocaine	Methamphetamine	Heroin
2004	224,937	4,644	78	48
2005	169,402	1,892	105	20
2006	172,028	2,860	150	78

Source: West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

Mexican DTOs exploit the robust, legitimate cross-border economic activity and social interaction between El Paso and its sister city, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and, on a smaller scale, between Presidio and Ciudad Ojinaga, Mexico, to conduct their smuggling activities. The thriving *maquiladora* industry<sup>2</sup> is a major contributor to increased cross-border pedestrian, passenger vehicle, and commercial truck traffic—more than 200,000 U.S. and Mexican citizens traverse the border daily between these sister cities—creating ideal conditions for smuggling illicit drugs into the United States and returning drug proceeds to Mexico. Moreover, DTOs frequently arrange their smuggling activities to coincide with periods of high traffic volume, reducing the likelihood that their vehicles will be inspected. Mexican DTOs also use the sparsely populated arid desert and semiarid mountains and canyons of the West Texas HIDTA region as well as the numerous low-level water crossings along the Rio Grande River to conceal their smuggling activities. Big Bend National Park, which encompasses more than 800,000 acres along the U.S.–Mexico border in West Texas, is exploited by these traffickers, who take advantage of the remote areas and limited law enforcement presence in the park to smuggle drugs into the HIDTA region.

## Drug Overview

The smuggling and transshipment of large quantities of marijuana and powder cocaine remain the principal drug problem in the West Texas HIDTA region; however, the amount seized decreased from 2004 to 2006. This decrease could be attributed to three factors: an increase in law enforcement presence in the HIDTA region, which may have displaced smuggling activities to other areas of the Southwest Border, where law enforcement activity is lower; the struggle for control of the El Paso/Juárez plaza, which could have forced DTOs to shift smuggling routes to less volatile areas of the border; or changes in smuggling methods that may have enabled DTOs to better conceal smuggling activities from law enforcement. Cocaine and marijuana smuggled through the HIDTA region are distributed in drug markets throughout the country, and the quantity of these drugs smuggled from the area to market areas in the eastern United States is increasing, particularly in Atlanta.<sup>3</sup>

Heroin, methamphetamine, other dangerous drugs (ODDs), diverted pharmaceuticals, and precursor chemicals are also smuggled into and transshipped from the West Texas HIDTA region; however, the quantities are well below those seized in other areas along the Southwest Border. Methamphetamine smuggling and transshipment, in particular, are increasing but have not risen to

2. *Maquiladoras* are factories that obtain duty-free materials and components from foreign suppliers, including U.S. suppliers, and use them to manufacture finished products, such as textiles, in Mexico and return the products to the foreign suppliers.

3. Atlanta, which has recently emerged as a national distribution center for cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine, is a distribution hub for illicit drugs destined primarily for the eastern and central United States.

levels found in Arizona, California, and South Texas. A large portion of methamphetamine seized in West Texas is transported from Arizona, California, and New Mexico through the HIDTA region by Mexican DTOs rather than across the U.S.–Mexico border in West Texas. Furthermore, drug production in the West Texas HIDTA region is limited because of the ready supply of drugs smuggled from Mexico.

## **Drug Trafficking Organizations**

Mexican DTOs, which maintain sophisticated command and control centers in Mexico, are the primary organizational threat to the region. They exert nearly total control over drug trafficking operations through the El Paso/Juárez plaza. The West Texas HIDTA has identified 6 Mexican DTOs as well as 157 multistate and 526 local DTOs that conduct drug trafficking activities in the area.<sup>4</sup> Contributing to the magnitude of this threat is the ease with which Mexican DTOs adapt to law enforcement efforts to detect and dismantle their operations. Mexican DTOs manage sophisticated smuggling, transportation, and distribution networks that compartmentalize duties, employ advanced security and communications techniques, and use violence and intimidation to deter law enforcement authorities, control organization members, and secure smuggling territories. These DTOs use their own financial resources as well as those of corrupt Mexican businessmen and government officials to conduct their trafficking activities; law enforcement reporting reveals that Mexican DTOs have also enlisted corrupt U.S. officials to assist in their drug trafficking operations, but to a much lesser extent.

Over the past few years, the structure of Mexican DTOs operating in the El Paso/Juárez plaza has changed from traditional hierarchical organizations

to much more efficient organizations composed of decentralized networks of interdependent, task-oriented cells. For example, one cell may be responsible for transporting drug shipments across the U.S.–Mexico border, another for transporting drugs to U.S. markets, and another for laundering drug funds. The variety of relationships that these individual cells can have with one another as well as their insular nature, particularly for organizational heads, renders these DTOs more difficult for law enforcement to dismantle than DTOs with a traditional hierarchical structure. In addition, if the head of the DTO or cell leaders are identified and arrested, the decentralized, interdependent nature of these DTOs ensures that they can continue to operate unimpeded.

A number of Mexican DTOs are struggling for control over the El Paso/Juárez plaza. Because this struggle is ongoing, a dominant DTO has not yet been established. However, several DTOs are at the forefront, including the Vicente Carrillo-Fuentes Organization, also known as the Juárez Cartel, which previously dominated the plaza; Armando Corral-Herrera Organization; Ismael Zambada-García Organization; Juan José Esparragosa-Moreno Organization; Joaquín Guzmán-Loera Organization; and Arellano-Félix Organization, commonly referred to as the Tijuana Cartel.

Mexican DTOs have strengthened their control over drug trafficking operations in the region by forming working alliances with various prison gangs, street gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) to transport, stash, and package illicit drugs and to assist in money laundering activities. Mexican DTOs take advantage of the organizational networks that these gangs have established to distribute drugs in the area. For example, Barrio Azteca, the most dominant and violent prison gang in El Paso, has a historic working relationship with the Juárez Cartel.

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4. Multistate DTOs are organizations or groups of 5 to 15 individuals who operate in the United States and Mexico. These DTOs typically operate outside the Southwest Border area and assist other DTOs in drug trafficking and money laundering activities; however, they usually specialize in one type of activity, such as transportation of drugs through checkpoints. Local DTOs are organizations of 5 to 12 individuals who operate in the United States and Mexico. They generally operate within the Southwest Border area and assist larger DTOs in various drug trafficking and money laundering activities.

## Production

The ready supply of drugs smuggled into the area from Mexico renders significant drug production unnecessary. Methamphetamine production is limited to nonexistent in West Texas as a result of the lack of demand in most areas of the HIDTA. No laboratories have been seized recently, whereas some mom-and-pop laboratories have been seized in the past in the El Paso area. Only small amounts of methamphetamine had been produced at the seized laboratories; most of the drug was intended for personal use by the laboratory operators or distribution to small networks. Cannabis cultivation, both indoor and outdoor, is limited in West Texas because of the wide availability of Mexican marijuana. Indoor cannabis grows are virtually nonexistent in the region. The terrain in West Texas is not conducive to outdoor cannabis cultivation, except along the Rio Grande River in Big Bend National Park. Large outdoor cannabis grows have been seized in the past in Big Bend National Park; however, no large grows have been seized in recent years in the park—only small grows located in the canyons on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River.

## Transportation

Mexican DTOs smuggle multiton shipments of marijuana and multihundred-pound quantities of cocaine into the West Texas HIDTA region for transshipment to drug markets throughout the United States. Heroin and methamphetamine are also smuggled through the area, but to a much lesser extent. Marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin are transported from production sites in Mexico to warehouses and stash houses near the border for staging prior to being smuggled into the United States. Cocaine, which is obtained by Mexican DTOs from Colombian DTOs in South America, is transported through Mexico to these same staging areas. Mexican DTOs contract with other Mexican organizations to transport the drugs from these staging areas into the West Texas

HIDTA region, where the drugs typically are consolidated and stored in stash houses for later transportation to drug markets throughout the United States. Mexican DTOs commonly employ independent transportation brokers to facilitate the movement of drug shipments across the U.S.–Mexico border as well as into and through the West Texas HIDTA region. These brokers help to further insulate DTOs from law enforcement.

All illicit drug shipments smuggled from Mexico through the El Paso/Juárez plaza are controlled by a gatekeeper<sup>5</sup> that regulates the drug flow from Mexico across the U.S.–Mexico border into the United States. Gatekeepers collect “taxes” on all illicit shipments, including drugs and illegal aliens, moved through the plaza. These taxes are then sent to associated cartel accounts. Gatekeepers use any means necessary to ensure that taxes are collected from smugglers, including extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence. Gatekeepers also bribe corrupt Mexican police and military personnel so that smuggling activities can proceed without interruption.

The high volume of vehicle, pedestrian, and rail traffic that passes through official POEs in the West Texas HIDTA region provides Mexican DTOs with cover under which to smuggle illicit drugs into the United States. Most drugs are smuggled through the three official international POEs located in the HIDTA—El Paso, Fabens, and Presidio—which consist of a total of seven crossings located along the West Texas–Mexico border. Most of these crossings are located within 50 miles of the El Paso POE, which processes most of the cross-border traffic. In 2005 the El Paso POE was the second-largest gateway for both truck and railcar crossings, with more than 740,000 trucks and 143,000 freight railcars crossing the border into West Texas, most of which were not inspected.<sup>6</sup> In addition, almost 16 million private vehicles and more than 7.5 million pedestrians passed through the POE in the same year.

5. Gatekeepers are smuggling organizations that oversee the transportation of drugs into the United States from Mexico. Gatekeepers generally operate at the behest of a Mexican DTO and enforce the will of the organization through bribery, intimidation, extortion, beatings, and murder.

6. Data are current as of September 2006.

*La Entrada al Pacifico*, a new trade route expected to be completed in 2010, will most likely increase the flow of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals into the West Texas HIDTA region from Mexico, including cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine from Mexico and cocaine and heroin from South America. The trade route could also facilitate bulk ephedrine

and pseudoephedrine smuggling into Mexico and the United States as a result of the increase in Asian cargo that will be transported along this route.<sup>7</sup> This four-lane highway will extend from Port Topolobampo in Sinaloa on the Pacific Coast of Mexico through Ojinaga, Chihuahua, to the Presidio POE, serving as a major trade route for



Figure 2. *La Entrada al Pacifico*.

7. Law enforcement and intelligence reporting indicates that ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are smuggled from Asia, particularly China, to Mexico for use in methamphetamine production in that country or for smuggling overland into the United States for domestic production.

the movement of cargo from the Eastern Pacific Ocean to the Southwest Border. A large portion of Asian cargo is expected to be redirected from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to Mexico when this trade route is completed. During construction of this route, the level of rail and vehicular traffic has increased at the Presidio POE; however, truck traffic has not increased substantially. This increased level of activity has not impacted drug flow through the POE. Significantly more infrastructure development is required before the route can support an appreciable increase in traffic, particularly international shipments. For instance, in order for Port Topolobampo to be able to process an increased amount of container traffic, upgrades need to be made, including dredging the seaport to make it deeper for larger ships. Additionally, extensive road construction must be completed in Sinaloa and Chihuahua in the area of Copper Canyon<sup>8</sup> before goods can be transported from Port Topolobampo by truck. Currently, railways are used to transport cargo from the seaport through Mexico to the Southwest Border.

Mexican DTOs also transport illicit drugs between POEs, particularly in the eastern portion of the West Texas HIDTA region. Drug traffickers take advantage of the sparse population, relatively open border, and rugged terrain to conceal their drug smuggling activities. Couriers smuggle significant quantities of illicit drugs into the area at numerous low-water crossings, using vehicles, horses, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) as well as on foot. The number and remoteness of these crossings make it difficult for law enforcement agencies to effectively monitor this activity. For instance, Big Bend National Park is exploited by a number of DTOs that smuggle drugs across the border into the park; once in the park, the smugglers typically disappear into the rugged terrain undetected. As with other areas between POEs

along the West Texas border, smugglers use this area because law enforcement presence is limited. Drug smuggling activities in this area are also a potential threat to park visitors, particularly those who inadvertently encounter a smuggling operation in progress.

In addition to overland smuggling, Mexican DTOs use private aircraft to smuggle illicit drugs into the area, but to a much lesser extent. The financial resources of Mexican DTOs as well as their ability to adapt their trafficking operations to avoid law enforcement detection renders this mode of transportation a potentially significant vulnerability to the West Texas HIDTA region. Geographic conditions on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border, such as dirt roads, dry lakebeds, and other flat terrain, could be particularly useful to traffickers as makeshift landing strips. Traffickers use makeshift strips in northern Mexico to offload and store illicit drugs near the border pending transportation into the region; they could also use strips on the U.S. side of the border to fly directly into the area, using low-level flights to avoid radar detection.<sup>9</sup>

## **Distribution**

Illicit drugs smuggled from Mexico into the West Texas HIDTA region are typically transported to stash houses in El Paso or Midland/Odessa, where the drugs are consolidated, repackaged, and transshipped to drug markets nationwide. The primary transshipment point for drugs smuggled into the western half of the HIDTA is El Paso, while Midland/Odessa is the principal transshipment point for drugs smuggled into the eastern half of the HIDTA. These transshipment points are used by Mexican DTOs to supply significant market areas, including Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, and Kansas City; most drugs are transported from the HIDTA region to distribution centers over interstate and secondary highways. Mexican DTOs generally use stash houses located

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8. Copper Canyon is a mountainous area three times the size of the Grand Canyon located in the Mexican states of Sinaloa and Chihuahua. This area has approximately 120 miles of rough terrain that is a challenge to road construction efforts.

9. The Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center (AMICC), which uses radar to track aircraft approaching the U.S.–Mexico border, reports that aircraft often fade from radar near the border and appear to land at airports, airfields, and remote locations in Mexico. Many fades are indicative of traffickers moving drugs to locations near the border and offloading the shipments overland into the United States.

throughout the area to store illicit drugs prior to shipment. Because of the large number of stash houses in the HIDTA region, the investigation and dismantlement of such locations are a major focus of law enforcement in the area. Successful law enforcement operations involving stash houses often result in large seizures of drugs, which can be a much greater loss for DTOs than seizures of smaller quantities. The West Texas HIDTA Stash House Initiative, which targets stash houses in the El Paso area, has been very successful since its inception in 1999. In 2006 the Stash House Initiative resulted in the seizure of 37,963 pounds of marijuana, 215 pounds of cocaine, and \$69,892 in U.S. currency.<sup>10</sup>

Mexican DTOs have expanded their distribution networks to strengthen their hold over drug markets in the eastern United States. Historically, Chicago was the principal destination for illicit drug shipments originating in the West Texas HIDTA region. However, while Chicago still remains a major destination for drug shipments from the HIDTA region, increasing amounts of illicit drugs are being transported to the eastern United States. Atlanta, which has recently emerged as a national distribution center for cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine, is the primary destination in the eastern United States for illicit drugs transported by Mexican DTOs through the West Texas HIDTA region.<sup>11</sup> Mexican DTOs have taken control of drug distribution in Atlanta, thereby strengthening their drug distribution networks throughout the east. Mexican DTOs operating in West Texas also are increasingly transporting drug shipments to other eastern states, including North Carolina and South Carolina.

Retail drug distribution in the area is greatly overshadowed by wholesale drug transshipment;

however, retail distribution does occur and is often associated with violent and property crimes. Most retail distribution in the HIDTA region occurs in El Paso, the largest population center. The level of drug consumption in El Paso, however, is lower as a result of low per capita earnings and the lack of an inner city, where retail distribution in open-air markets typically occurs. Powder cocaine, marijuana, and heroin are the primary drugs distributed at the retail level in El Paso; methamphetamine is available in limited quantities. Local independent distributors, street gangs, and prison gangs are involved to varying extents in retail drug distribution throughout the HIDTA region. According to the West Texas HIDTA, 506 street gangs and 20 prison gangs are involved to varying extents in retail drug distribution. Barrio Azteca controls cocaine, heroin, and marijuana distribution in El Paso; however, the gang's activities have been limited as a result of a "safe zone" injunction that prohibits its members from being on the street after dark.<sup>12</sup> Barrio Azteca has connections to Mexican DTOs operating in the El Paso/Juárez plaza, providing them with a direct source of supply for heroin and other illicit drugs.

## **Drug-Related Crime**

High levels of violent crime plague the HIDTA region, largely as a result of the struggle between Mexican DTOs for control of the El Paso/Juárez plaza. Mexican DTOs operating in the West Texas HIDTA region are violent, powerful, well-financed organizations. These DTOs have intelligence, weaponry, and communication capabilities that they use against each other in their battle for supremacy. The capabilities and violent tendencies of these sophisticated organizations are a significant challenge to law enforcement officials at the West Texas–Mexico Border, particularly since the resources of Mexican

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10. The drug seizures resulting from the West Texas Stash House Initiative are also included in the drug seizure totals for 2006 as depicted in Table 1 on page 3.

11. Interstates 10 and 20 link Atlanta directly to the two primary transshipment areas in the West Texas HIDTA, making the Atlanta market area easily accessible to DTOs operating from the HIDTA.

12. The "safe zone" injunction mandates that certain members of Barrio Azteca abide by restrictions while in the designated "safe zone" area. Gang members listed in the injunction must follow a 10:00 p.m. curfew, are prohibited from using cell phones and pagers while in public, and are not allowed inside area restaurants and bars that are frequented by gang members and used to facilitate the distribution of narcotics, among other restrictions.



DTOs often surpass those of law enforcement. A number of armed encounters between Mexican traffickers and U.S. law enforcement personnel occurred on the U.S. side of the border in 2006. For instance, on two separate occasions heavily armed units of traffickers appeared on the banks of the Rio Grande River east of El Paso during smuggling attempts, preventing law enforcement officers from pursuing couriers who fled back across the border into Mexico. Although these confrontations did not escalate into violent shootouts, U.S. law enforcement officers were prevented from apprehending drug couriers because of the manpower and cache of weapons possessed by Mexican traffickers. These incidents are reportedly connected to the Escajeda Organization, one of the gatekeepers operating in the El Paso/Juárez plaza.

## Abuse

Illicit drug abuse in the West Texas HIDTA region appears to take place primarily in El Paso. Most drug-related treatment admissions in the area occur in El Paso County and are for cocaine and heroin abuse. The scattered and sparse population in areas outside El Paso precludes collection of accurate information pertaining to drug abuse in other regions of the HIDTA. Therefore, reported abuse levels in the West Texas HIDTA region could be higher than current reporting indicates. However, reported treatment costs are significant and are taxing already-limited local resources.

## Illicit Finance

Bulk cash smuggling is the primary method used by traffickers to move drug proceeds from the West Texas HIDTA region to Mexico on account of the area's proximity to the border, limited inspections of southbound traffic by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement officials, and the relative ease with which cash can be placed into Mexican financial systems. When bulk cash is transported through the West Texas HIDTA region and is smuggled across the Southwest

Border, it is further processed in a number of ways, including the following: individuals deposit the cash into Mexican banks and *casas de cambio* and wire it back to the United States, or complicit Mexican financial institutions repatriate the cash to the United States using cash couriers, armored cars, or deposits into correspondent accounts. Smugglers then transport the money to Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, or other Latin American countries, where it can be used to pay for goods—both legitimate and illicit—on the black market in Colombia, or individuals may move the funds to offshore jurisdictions with heightened bank secrecy regulations.<sup>13</sup>

Mexican DTOs operating in the West Texas HIDTA region also use traditional depository financial institutions (DFIs) and money services businesses (MSBs) such as money transmitters and *casas de cambio* located in the area to launder drug proceeds within the HIDTA region, but to a much lesser extent. DFIs and MSBs are used to a much greater degree in Mexico, where bulk currency smuggled through West Texas into Mexico is processed and often sent back to the United States.

## Outlook

As Mexican DTOs continue to establish a stronger presence in central and eastern U.S. drug markets, they will quite likely increase the amount of illicit drugs that they smuggle into and transship from the West Texas HIDTA region in order to supply wholesale distributors operating in central and eastern regions of the country. Although Atlanta is the primary destination for illicit drugs transported from West Texas to the east and is a distribution hub for drug shipments in the eastern United States, increasing amounts of drug shipments from West Texas may be sent directly to other eastern states where Mexican DTOs are establishing a stronger presence, such as North Carolina and South Carolina.

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13. A foreign bank establishes a correspondent account at a financial institution in the United States in order to conduct business in the United States without maintaining a physical presence. This account is used to receive deposits from, make payments or other disbursements on behalf of, or handle other financial transactions related to the foreign bank.

The importance of the El Paso/Juárez plaza as a principal drug smuggling area will fuel the struggle for control among DTOs over this trafficking corridor. Struggles over the El Paso/Juárez plaza have led to increased violence in Ciudad Juárez, which could increasingly spill over to the U.S. side of the border. Although violence in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez has not risen to levels found in other areas along the U.S.–Mexico border, such as Nuevo Laredo and Tijuana, Mexico, the same organizations that have caused intense conflicts over smuggling in these border areas also operate in the El Paso/Juárez plaza.

As the United States increases security measures along the Southwest Border to curb drug and alien smuggling, more violence may occur in the region.<sup>14</sup> DTOs have become more violent and aggressive in recent years toward law enforcement personnel who could compromise their smuggling operations. As more manpower is placed along the Southwest Border, law enforcement personnel will increasingly be confronted by smugglers who will use violent means to get their drug shipments into the United States. It is likely that border incursions reported over the past year in West Texas, as well as other violent acts toward law enforcement personnel, could increase as security measures are implemented and expanded.

*La Entrada al Pacifico* has the potential to become a primary smuggling route for the flow of illicit drugs from Mexico into the United States in the long term. Planned upgrades to Port Topolobampo and scheduled road construction in Copper Canyon will most likely result in increased trafficking through the Presidio POE, including the smuggling of cocaine and heroin from South America as well as bulk ephedrine and pseudoephedrine from Asia that enters and transits Mexico.

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14. Federal and state governments have recently begun numerous initiatives to secure the U.S.–Mexico border. The federal government has launched the Secure Border Initiative, a comprehensive multiyear plan to secure the borders of the United States, which includes plans for more agents to patrol the border, secure ports of entry (POEs), and enforce immigration laws. The federal government has also placed National Guard troops at the Southwest Border under Operation Jump Start. Under this operation, National Guard troops are assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with logistical and administrative support, operation of detection systems, augmentation of border-related intelligence analysis, and installation of a border security infrastructure. Additionally, the state of Texas, in partnership with the federal government, recently launched Operation Rio Grande to increase border security. Under Operation Rio Grande, Texas has conducted targeted, short-duration, high-intensity regional operations that integrate local, state, and federal agencies.

## Sources

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### Local, State, and Regional

Ector County Sheriff's Office  
El Paso County Sheriff's Office  
El Paso Metro Task Force  
El Paso Police Department  
Midland Police Department  
Odessa Police Department  
State of Texas  
    Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse  
    Texas Department of Public Safety  
Union Pacific Railroad Police Department  
University of Texas at Austin  
    Center for Social Work Research  
    School of Social Work  
    Gulf Coast Addiction Technology Transfer Center  
West Texas Narcotics Enforcement Task Force

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
    Office of National Drug Control Policy  
        High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas  
        West Texas  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
    U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
        U.S. Border Patrol  
        El Paso Sector  
        Marfa Sector  
U.S. Department of Justice  
    Drug Enforcement Administration  
        El Paso Field Division  
        Alpine Resident Office  
        Midland Resident Office  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
    El Paso Division

U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Big Bend National Park  
Law Enforcement Office

**Other**

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