

ARE THE MARA SALVATRUCHA AND 18TH STREET GANGS
A THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the two predominantly Latino gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (aka MS-13), and the 18th Street Gang, operating on the streets of communities across America. This study is significant because it will provide information about how these violent gangs operate in ways that can inform and alert both civilian society and government agencies concerning optimal responses to the problems created by these gangs. Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of documentary evidence and governmental statistics about the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang, this study developed several conclusive findings on the negative effects of these groups in the United States. The Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang are becoming transnational criminal organizations, given the fact that they originated in Central America and Mexico and have since expanded their operations abroad. Despite efforts by national and international law enforcement to curtail these gangs' criminal behaviors, they maintain their ties with their gang associates in these countries. Moreover, gang members engage in criminal activities that were highly organized. They also moved through networks that continued to gain sophistication. Drug trafficking, gun running, violence, robbery, extortion are some of the heinous crimes committed by these groups. These gangs disturb peace and order in the community, destroy personal property and endanger the lives of citizens. These two gangs may establish an organized criminal enterprise capable of coordinating illegal activities across national borders. Nonetheless, with complete disregard to the laws of this land, including immigration laws, these groups are considered a threat to the security of the country, but this

level is considered comparable to any highly organized street gang that supports its activities with criminal enterprises. In sum, the dangers posed by Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang, as well as other comparable criminal organizations should not be underestimated.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gangs represent a clear and present threat to the national security of many countries. The transnational gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), the 18th Street Gang, and other drug trafficking organizations represent a challenge to a number of Central and Latin American governments (Reveron, 2010). In fact, in many countries in the world, transnational actors wage “wars of globalization,” defined as “the illegal trafficking of drugs, small arms, humans, violations of intellectual property, and money laundering” (Reveron, 2010, p. 18). Among transnational criminal activities, illegal drug production and trafficking pose a full spectrum of threats to state sovereignty and human security (Reveron, 2010; Franco, 2008). By means of tens (some say hundreds) of thousands of members worldwide, MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang are among the most threatening of these transnational criminal organizations. In fact, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported in 2008 that MS-13 was labeled America's most dangerous gang and was active in at least 42 states and had about 6,000 to 10,000 members nationwide. At present, the FBI estimates that there are more than 60,000 MS-13 members worldwide (Lineberger & Padgett, 2011). The Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang pose a growing threat not only to society, but also to the national security of the United States of America. With their growing level of organization, sophistication, and activities in our communities, these gangs threaten to undermine the fabric of society by their actions that represent a menace to the social order.

The MS-13 Gang has about 3,500 members in Los Angeles County; however, the 18th Street Gang also numbers around 10,000 in this county alone (Vásquez & Marquardt, 2003).

According to Vásquez and Marquardt (2003):

The Eighteenth Street Gang is considered the largest gang in Los Angeles, with more than ten thousand members. In contrast to the MS-13, the Eighteenth has a reputation for being panethnic. It has moved from its Chicano origins in the Pico Union District of Los Angeles and is now dominated by Salvadorans. (p. 126)

Membership in both the 18th Street Gang and MS-13 has engorged in recent years, as well as in their organizational sophistication in recent years. The bloodthirsty nature of their criminal activities have intimidated and even overwhelmed the security forces of many of the emerging democracies in Central America (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). According to Boraz and Bruneau (2006), “Altogether, these Maras represent a significant threat to the security of the countries in the region. Numerous national, binational, multinational, regional, and hemispheric conferences have sought to address the problem” (p. 37). It is clear that the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street are two dangerous gangs that are highly organized and tend to have a higher level of criminal involvement than any other gangs established in the United States. They change the way they operate and deviate from the norm, depending on strategies implemented by the police. They adapt to all the police methods and tactics that have been used against them. Furthermore, their increased number of connections beyond the borders of the United States is very alarming. Clearly, these gangs pose a growing national security threat as they increase in number and resources. Understanding these social actors is crucial to instituting public policies and building social movements that can both reduce violence and erode the deep-seated inequalities that all too often are reinforced by present economic, social, and military policies (Hagedorn, 2005).

The national responses to these growing threats to security have differed, but all have been based on toughening existing laws or enacting new legislation that carries stiffer penalties for gang-related activities. For instance, McFarland (2008) reports that:

Repressive legislation and police policies have been used. Examples are the proliferation of gang databases in police departments and a 1997 court order that placed a curfew on [members] of the Eighteenth Street Gang in Los Angeles and made it illegal for more than two identified gang members to congregate. (p. 122)

Unilateral, bilateral and multinational initiatives have largely failed to address the problem, it is apparent that alternative approaches must be considered, which is an issue that relates to the purpose of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is three-fold:

1. To deliver a critical analysis of the relevant quantitative data concerning gang membership, incarceration, and deportation levels for MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang.
2. To provide a qualitative review of the relevant peer-reviewed and scholarly literature concerning transnational gangs such as MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang.
3. To provide a series of recommendations based on the findings that emerged from the foregoing quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question: “Do the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang represent a threat to U.S. national security?”

Significance of the Study

The study of gangs is significant because of unprecedented globalization where states are under the pressure of neoliberal policies, strengthening of cultural resistance identities including fundamentalist religion, nationalism, hip-hop culture, and marginalization of many sectors of society. In addition, studies how gangs effect and challenge the authority of law and state.

This study hypothesized a significant contribution to the following:

Society

All of society is affected by the presence of these gangs. They also play an important role in the maintenance of peace and order in their community. In order for them to address the problem caused by these gangs, it is necessary for them to identify members and to determine the extent of danger gangs pose to their community. They need to understand that these gang members do not commit simple street crimes, but are more organized and can endanger not only their tranquility, but their lives as well.

Police Officers

This study provides an overview to police officers on the extent of presence of these gangs in the community. It will help them become aware of the movements and activities of these groups. Police can prosecute criminals based on evidence gathered after the crime and, at the same time, they can warn citizens of the pending activities of these gangs. This study will open the eyes of police officers about the need to perform diligently and to adapt their tactics to the ever-evolving manner of operations of these gangs.

Government

Since gang-related crimes fall within the jurisdiction of the state, this research will give an insight on the need to find solutions that increasingly include all levels of government.

Congress needs to pass legislation that will change immigration enforcement laws and make more illegal aliens deportable. In addition, the federal government should take a more proactive role in helping local and state jurisdictions develop anti-gang responses. The local, state, and federal governments must take a stand, and combine forces to combat the immigration problem that continue to plague this country into the next generation.

Importance of the Study

The die has been cast; there is no turning the clock back now as the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang have established themselves in the United States and far beyond. The origins of the current situation with MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang date back to the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Salvadoran civil war produced a mass exodus to the United States. Thousands of children of Salvadoran refugees who had fled for their lives frequently found themselves joining the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Eighteenth Street gangs as a matter of survival. For instance, Lineberger and Padgett (2011) advise that, “Of the estimated 701,000 Salvadoran immigrants, a substantial number sought sanctuary in southern California. Characterized by illegal status in the United States, a majority of the Salvadoran newcomers remained in poverty, constantly fearing arrest and deportation” (p. 9). During the early 1990s, the mass deportation policies that were followed for gang members who were convicted of crimes in the United States resulted in El Salvador receiving seasoned gang members and the American-style gang culture (Kontos, et al., 2003). According to the Salvadoran authorities, “Within just a few years, veteran gang members were making names for themselves on the west coast of El Salvador and a short time later, on the country’s east coast as well” (Kontos, et al., 2003).

The results of an analysis of the security threat represented by these criminal gangs conducted by Boraz and Bruneau (2006) support these findings and add that the Maras emerged

from conflicts in El Salvador, as well as Guatemala and Nicaragua during the 1980s. According to the Salvadoran authorities, “Thousands of people fled north, including a large number of young men who had fought on the governments' side or with the insurgents. Many of these young men went to Los Angeles, but because they were poorly educated, few were able to find work” (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006, p. 63).

With their origins in a troubled land, and with few or no marketable skills, these young Latin Americans found themselves in an environment where they could only survive if they used what they knew. In this regard, Boraz and Bruneau (2006) emphasize that, “In a city already structured in terms of gangs, their familiarity with guns and armed combat was their one advantage. Some were incorporated into such neighborhood gangs as the African-American Crips and Bloods; the Mexican-American, illegal-immigrant gang EME; and the Mexican Mafia” (p. 63). It is significant that even if these young people do manage to make it to the United States and evade detection by law enforcement and resist the powerful inducements to join MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang by one of their numerous cliques; they do not receive any special treatment from the United States Citizenship and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service’s). Such rejection places them at potential risk from gang members and law enforcement authorities alike. In this regard, the United States Department of Justice’s Board of Immigration Appeals specifically held that (Granados-Gaitan v. Holder, Jr. 2011):

Neither Salvadoran youth who have been subjected to recruitment efforts by the MS-13 gang and who have rejected or resisted membership in the gang based on their own personal, moral, and religious opposition to the gang’s values and activities nor the

family members of such Salvadoran youth constitute a ‘particular social group’ asylum and therefore [does not afford] protection under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. (pg.12)

This policy means that young Salvadorans have few options available to them but to join up with some of the most vicious street gangs in the world just to survive: “Indeed, the Mara Salvatrucha are often compared to their notorious northern counterparts in Los Angeles—the Crips and the Bloods” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 102). A survey conducted of more than one thousand gang members from the 18th Street Gang and Mara Salvatrucha in San Salvador provides some indication that the majority of these gang members are seeking respect and friendship, as well as a personal identity and some type of replacement for the families they have lost (Kontos et al., 2003). According to researchers, “Twice as many respondents considered drug addiction their biggest problem as compared with the next-highest-ranked problem, unemployment. When asked about their future dreams, jobs topped the list, followed by a stable family” (Kontos et al., 2003). More than 80 percent of the youths interviewed reported that violence was a negative factor of gang life that they would like to see ended. Also, almost 7 in 10 gang members said they had lost a family member or close friend as a result of gang activity (Kontos et al., 2003). Moreover, more than 50 percent of the respondents indicated they had been injured seriously enough to require hospitalization as result of their involvement and almost all of the gang members participating in the survey were “fatalistic about change and skeptical of politics” (Kontos et al., 2003, p. 290).

Notwithstanding the initial pattern of dissemination within the United States, more and more of these Salvadoran immigrants were drawn together through national and cultural ties and

these disenfranchised youths gravitated toward their own gang affiliation in the MS-13 or 18th Street Gang. As with many adversarial gangs, there was little love lost between the two organizations. According to Boraz and Bruneau (2006), “Some of the men, especially those from El Salvador, joined the multi-ethnic 18th Street Gang. Other Salvadorans founded the Mara Salvatrucha (Group of Smart, or savvy, Salvadorans) 13, or MS-13, to compete with the 18th Street Gang because they believed the Salvadorans in that gang were traitors” (p. 64). The name of the MS-13 gang was also taken from the street where many of them originally lived, just as the 18th Street Gang did (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). Given their propensity for violent crime and illegal activities, it was not long before these gang members ran afoul of the American criminal justice system and many were sentenced to prison in the United States., where most of them simply learned new criminal skills and techniques or honed their existing ones (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006).

After the federal government tightened immigration laws in the 1990s and the civil conflicts in Guatemala and El Salvador subsided, law enforcement authorities opted to deport many of these gang members to their countries of origin when they had completed serving their prison sentences (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). Following their return to their respective countries and cities of origin, including San Salvador, Guatemala City and San Pedro Sula, the now-hardened and street-smart Maras were able to exploit the war-ravaged societies to their advantage. According to Boraz and Bruneau (2006), “Clicas (cliques, cells, or groups) deported from the United States established MS-13 in San Salvador in 1992, replacing less violent and less sophisticated gangs. The 18th Street Gang became M-18 and was established in El Salvador in 1996 with three clicas” (p. 64). Capitalizing on these initial footholds, membership in both MS-13 and the 18th Street Gangs rapidly increased as they drove out less experienced, less

violent and less organized gangs.

Although precise figures are difficult to come by, current estimates by El Salvador's National Police (PNC) indicate that there are around 36,000 MS-13 and 18th Street Gang members in Honduras, 14,000 in Guatemala, 11,000 in El Salvador, 4,500 in Nicaragua, 2,700 in Costa Rica, 1,400 in Panamá, and 100 in Belize (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). The figures total approximately 70,000 members from these two gangs in these Central American countries. Besides the 18th Street Gang and MS-13, there are other active gangs in Central American countries, including La Máquina (The Machine) in El Salvador; La Mau Mau, Los Vatos Locos (The Crazy Boys), and Los Rockeros (The Rockers) in Honduras; the Gerber Boys and Los Charly (The Charlies) in Nicaragua; in addition, there are the Los Cholos (The Half Breeds), Los Nicas (The Nicaraguans), and Los Vatos Locos (The Crazy Boys) in Guatemala, La Mau Mau (this name was taken from the name of rebels in Kenya and a notorious New York gang in the 1950s) in Honduras, (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006).

It is important to note, though, that the MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang are not restricted to these Central American countries and have expanded their transnational operations to a global level in recent years. In fact, although total membership numbers are difficult to gauge, current estimates indicate these organizations are assuming near-army levels in many countries. Taken together, the 18th Street Gang and the Mara Salvatrucha constitute a clear and present security threat to the countries in which they operate. In this regard, Kowalski (2010) estimates that there are at least 10,000 active MS-13 gang members in the United States alone, operating in virtually all 50 states. In addition, Canada and Mexico have large contingents of MS-13 members (Kowalski, 2010). Furthermore, MS-13 is believed to be active throughout Asia, Oceania, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, including the Congo, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria,

Libya, South Africa, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Cameroon, and Nigeria (Kowalski, 2010).

Although their membership levels fluctuate, these ultra-violent gangs are clearly growing across the board on a global basis. In terms of the threat to national security represented by this growth, Frank Salvato (2007) cautions that, “Mara Salvatruchas (MS or MS-13) . . . also interacts with the South American drug gangs and terrorist organizations. They have grown from being an effective street gang to a full-fledged paramilitary organization, complete with training, resources and international relationships with some of the world's most dangerous organizations” (The Washington Times, 2010).

Given that the world is already replete with countless “dangerous organizations,” being ranked among the most dangerous should give pause to anyone who questions the national security threat represented by these gangs. Moreover, the danger represented by the Maras extends far beyond the national borders in the countries in which they currently operate. For example, Salvato (2007) emphasizes that, “The Maras can function as networks, with extensive transnational linkages. They have internal functional branches specializing in recruiting; logistics; attacks; intelligence collection and propaganda; and murder, drug trafficking, and extortion” (2010). In this environment, identifying opportunities to address the growing threat represented by the 18th Street Gang and Mara Salvatrucha is a timely and valuable enterprise. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Mara Salvatrucha 13

Origin and Locations

Mara Salvatrucha 13, or more commonly known as the MS-13 gang, is one of the most, if not the most, violent, dangerous and highly organized criminal organizations in the United States today. The members of the gang originated from several different Latin and Central American countries such as Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. These gang members have either escaped from the law or accompanied their parents seeking work along the immigrant trail to America. Initially established in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., Mara Salvatrucha members expanded their presence throughout the United States due to increased law enforcement pressure in Los Angeles in the 1990s. They also spread out into Central America challenging established gangs such as 18th Street and Mexican Mafia (La Eme) (Castro, 2005). By 1992, Mara Salvatrucha had established cliques in Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Maryland, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, Canada, and Mexico (Castro, 2005, p. 3). Mara Salvatrucha members deported from the United States also established cliques in El Salvador. Unlike traditional United States street gangs, MS-13 maintains active ties with MS members in El Salvador making it a truly international gang (Castro, 2005, p. 2).

Mara Salvatrucha cliques also gained valuable turf as a result of the gang's rivalry with the 18th Street Gang during the early 1990s. Since its inception in California and Washington, D.C., the two gangs have relentlessly engaged in a series of violent confrontations that eventually involved other Hispanic street gangs in the Los Angeles area. Although there was no

clear winner, Mara Salvatrucha succeeded in gaining control of some drug distribution locations in the “Rampart” section of Los Angeles. Mara Salvatrucha members and 18th Street members continue their rivalry in cities throughout the United States and in El Salvador (Castro, 2005).

The majority of these youths are illegal immigrants in the United States that have managed to elude law enforcement and immigration authorities. In order to distinguish themselves, MS-13 gang members typically sport blue and white colors taken from the flag of El Salvador. In addition, gang members frequently place numerous tattoos on their faces and bodies and graffiti that are replete with arcane numbers and esoteric references concerning their history and culture.

The Mara Salvatrucha 13 gang has cliques or factions throughout the United States with close ties to their El Salvadoran counterparts MS-13 members can now be found in virtually every state of the union, with the possible exception of Hawaii (although their presence is more pronounced in some states than others). There are an estimated 10,000 members in the United States and between 40,000 to 100,000 in Latin and Central America. MS-13 gangs consist of numerous sets called “cliques.” Some cliques are highly structured and organized; however, most have little formal structure. This unique characteristic makes it particularly challenging for law enforcement to respond in effective ways. The FBI (2009), stated that MS-13 is the fastest growing and most violent of the nation's street gangs. The MS-13 gang is truly "international" and is close to becoming the first gang to be officially categorized as an "organized crime" entity (Romano, 2005). It is difficult to estimate the number of cliques or the number of members. Since there are no precise statistics, the MS-13 has an estimated membership of over 10,000 and associates in at least 115 different cliques and these numbers are continually increasing. The areas with the greatest concentration are Southern California, with 20 different cliques and over

4,400 members and associates; New York City, with 24 cliques and over 1,700 members and associates; and the Northern Virginia/Metropolitan D.C. area, with 21 cliques and a total of more than 5,000 members and associates (Ryan, 2004).

Members in MS-13 typically range in ages as young as 11 to old as 40 years. Besides distinguishing themselves with body markings, MS-13 also use “gang signs” to identify themselves. The most common hand sign used by MS-13 members is the letter “M” formed by using three fingers and pointing the hand downward; in addition, the symbols used for gang tattoos are also used in the gang’s graffiti and personal writings (Valdez, 2000).

An indication of the gang’s growing influence can be discerned from their ability to form alliances with other criminal organizations. For instance, as noted above, the Mara Salvatrucha has forged alliances with other organized organizations such as the Mexican Mafia (La Eme) for their mutual financial and security benefit. For example, in 1994, the MS-13 in Los Angeles contracted to supply the Mexican Mafia with cocaine and marijuana and enforcers and extortionists for the Mexican Mafia. In return, the Mara Salvatrucha received an exemption from the traditional drug tax assessed by the Mexican Mafia. Consequently, MS-13 enjoyed open season for their drug trafficking activities thereafter (Castro, 2005). This contractual arrangement also helped seal a close relationship with MS-13’s former rivals, earning them the designation as a Sureño13 gang, a Southern California Hispanic street gang that has affiliations with the Mexican Mafia prison gang (Castro, 2005).

Assuming current trends continue, Mara Salvatrucha will represent a serious criminal threat to a growing number of communities throughout the United States and abroad. Their rapid spread and aggressive recruitment in the United States and their relentless drug trafficking activities make them a very dangerous gang indeed. These nefarious attributes, combined with

the well-known extreme violence demonstrated by their gang members, indicate that Mara Salvatrucha will remain among the most threatening street gangs in the country unless action can be taken to stop them.

The expansion to other countries also clearly demonstrates that the MS-13 has no national boundaries that can stop them from furthering their goals. Current indications reflect that previously independent cliques are forming alliances with other Mara Salvatrucha cliques, as well as with other gangs to facilitate their criminal activity. This mutual cooperation and alliance with other criminal organizations could result in increasing danger to national security (Castro, 2005).

Membership/Hierarchy

Originally, only Salvadorans could become members of Mara Salvatrucha. However, MS-13 now includes members from many countries such as Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Mara Salvatrucha also has a small number of African-American members in their cliques. MS-13 has broken the race barrier for membership and recruitment, but most new members are still selected because of their ethnic Central American background (Valdez, 2000).

Mara Salvatrucha is a loosely structured street gang. There are no known international or national leaders or single governing authority. Traditionally, the gang consisted of loosely affiliated groups known as cliques. However, law enforcement officials have reported increased coordination of criminal activity among Mara Salvatrucha cliques in the Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York metropolitan areas (USODJ, 2008). MS-13 is attempting to become a unified criminal enterprise operating under one leadership. Prominent MS-13 members travel the country and abroad to provide leadership or facilitate organization to other MS-13 groups.

Gang Markings and Identifiers

Mara Salvatrucha is also known as Mara Salvatrucha 13, MS-13, and MS XIII. Mara Salvatrucha members identify themselves with tattoos such as the number “13,” or “trece” in Spanish. They consider the number “13” to be lucky and it is also a nod to their allegiance to the Mexican Mafia, which maintains a dominant presence in southern California prisons. The number “13” also refers to the thirteenth letter of the alphabet which is “M.” The letter “M” is also synonymous with La Eme. MS-13 gang members will also use the Spanish word *sureño*, meaning "southerner" to identify themselves. Sometimes *sureño* is abbreviated to SUR. These terms make reference to the fact that MS-13 gang members like to claim they are from southern California as opposed to northern California, and are rivals with northern California gangs. Often, this rivalry is taken outside the state of California. Additionally, Mara Salvatrucha gang members have several ongoing rivalries with large southern California gangs, including the 18th Street Gang. The MS-13 gang members commonly attack 18th Street Gang members on sight. There are many Hispanic gangs, including Mara Salvatrucha, which use the number 13," and the terms *sureno* and SUR as identifiers, including street/prison gangs outside of California (Valdez, 2000).

MS-13 members have been known to tattoo Mara Salvatrucha related symbols on much of their body, head to toe. It is important to identify specific tattoos used by the Mara Salvatrucha gang, which include M or MS, in addition to the 13 or SUR identification. Another common tattoo seen is Salvadoran Pride. There is also a good chance that the member will also have the name of his particular clique tattooed on his/her body. Other tattoos encountered with MS-13 members have included pentagrams and other occult symbols, which sometimes cause misconceptions of satanic involvement by the gang.

The most common hand sign used by MS-13 members is the letter “M” formed by using three fingers and pointing the hand downward. This hand sign can resemble the pitchfork sign used by Folk/People Nation gangs from the Midwest, and can be made with the fingers pointing up or down. The symbols, used as tattoos, are also used in graffiti and personal writings (Valdez, 2000).

Culture

The simple gang clique structure essentially comprises the entirety of the formal Mara Salvatrucha 13 organization. In other states like Virginia, MS-13 members hold monthly gang meetings, and then once a month they also attend a separate clique meeting. Ranging from a dozen to eighty members, these smaller “cliques” each will feature its own distinct name. The actual nickname given to a member is usually based on his clique membership (Walker, 2012).

The simple nature of the organization lends itself well to flexibility. The wide distribution of the cliques in different areas of the United States has also provided an extensive range of options available from the collective talent pool. Many cliques “specialize” in a field or “occupation,” from the street-level professions of carjacking and narcotics sales, to computer hacking, wire fraud and other similar “white collar” crimes. Members can adeptly use computers and other technology, much like any other large enterprise. Since they have virtual communications, which give them unlimited access, it is possible for MS-13 to use these for paramilitary endeavors.

Targets for recruitments are usually Hispanic children who are somehow isolated from the group in school, either with family problems, social difficulties, or a newcomer in the area. They can start recruitment as early as elementary school. Typically, MS-13 has often filled a void in the lives of their members and has answered some unfulfilled need for attention,

acceptance, or love. Oftentimes a recruit will be “built up,” told how great he/she is and what an asset he/she would be. This is a classic “good cop” approach. Everything changes in the moment of initiation. Members and ex-members alike have described variations of a crude initiation ritual that consists of beating up the new recruit, sometimes for 13 seconds, after which he is accepted as a new member of the gang. Women in the gang do not function as members, but are frequently attached in an arrangement of relationships that can be servitude or accessory. They provide services to the gang members such as acting as decoys, carrying weapons, and providing sex to members. Women are also a source of revenue through the “tax” on prostitutes operating in MS-13 territory (Lewis, 2008).

One of the defining characteristics of MS-13 is their absolute intolerance for anyone who informs the police of their activities. Once a member is brought in to the gang, they are in for life. They cannot act without the boss's consent; they cannot kill without reason; cannot talk to the police; cannot skip gang meetings; nor can they leave the gang. MS-13 has no tolerance for gang members who drop out. Death is almost always the only means of escaping the clutches of MS-13. In general, Mara Salvatrucha gang members show no fear of law enforcement. They are not easily intimidated and frequently are defiant. Mara Salvatrucha gang members have been responsible for the execution of three federal agents and numerous shootings of law enforcement officers across the country. Moreover, some MS-13 gang members have been known to booby-trap their drug stash houses using antipersonnel grenades on the assumption that these structures will be searched by law enforcement. MS-13 members frequently boast about their assaults on law enforcement authorities as a way of demonstrating their loyalty and commitment to the gang. However, these claims have never been confirmed. Today, assaults on law enforcement officers are not required for membership, but are always an alternative. Consequently, law enforcement

authorities who come into contact with MS-13 members should always exercise extreme caution (Valdez, 2000). The National Police (PNC) in El Salvador report that MS-13 is involved in selling drugs; extortion; prostitution; homicide; and illegal movement of drugs, people, and arms across borders (Quintero, 2007).

Gang members increasingly equip their members with heavier weapons, including M-16s, AK-47s, and grenades, which the Mara are reportedly improving their skills at using. Furthermore, there is a great deal more that is troubling about the MS-13 gang. According to Boraz and Bruneau (2006), “They define themselves in contrast to the rest of society and to other gangs by wearing unique tattoos, using their own symbols and graffiti, and communicating through a special language and unique hand signals” (p.65). Each Mara has its own elaborate internal rules as to when a gang member can fight, what the punishment will be for certain behaviors, and what is required if a fellow clica member is killed. The use of violence is probably the most defining characteristic of the Maras. Indeed, their unique vocabularies emphasize brutality and criminal activity. Initiation, ascension into leadership positions, and discipline are all based on violence. To enter the MS-13, a prospective gang member must agree to be beaten by 4 gang members for 13 seconds; the aspiring candidate is not allowed to put up any resistance (except for protecting the face and genitals). Consistently as part of the initiation rites, aspirants to the gang must murder someone to demonstrate their capacity to kill in cold blood in a process known as “sangre afuera, sangre adentro” (blood outside, blood inside) (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). In those cases where female aspirants are physically capable, they are subjected to the same initiation rites as males. If they are not physically capable, female candidates are forced to engage in sexual acts with the all of the male members of the gang (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). A clear indication of their ruthlessness can be discerned from Boraz

and Bruneau's (2006) observations that, "The Maras fight continuously, not only against the authorities, but against each other for turf, markets, and especially for drugs. As part of their aggressiveness, some gangs mutilate and decapitate their victims" (p. 65).

Structure

A simple gang clique structure essentially comprises the entirety of the formal Mara Salvatrucha 13 organization. There are some cliques of MS-13 members who attend monthly gang meetings, and then once a month (generally on a Saturday), also attend a separate clique meeting. These smaller "cliques" can range in size from a dozen to 80 members, and each will feature its own distinct name. The actual nickname given to a member is usually based on his clique membership. Steven C. Boraz and Thomas C. Bruneau (2006), (*Are the Maras overwhelming the Governments of Central America*) termed La Mara organizational structures as "elaborate, flexible, and redundant. A leadership cadre often has another cadre to back it up. The Maras can function as networks, with extensive transnational linkages. They have internal functional branches specializing in recruiting; logistics; attacks; intelligence collection and propaganda; and murder, drug trafficking, and extortion."

Criminal Activity

The Washington Post (2011), called MS-13 the most violent gangs in America. The Post (2011) reported that MS-13 members have been involved in burglaries, auto theft, narcotics, extortion, murder, rape, illegal firearms sales, car theft, aggravated assaults and witness intimidation.

In general, Mara Salvatrucha gang members show no fear of law enforcement. They are defiant and not easily daunted. Use of force and violence are used on anyone that obstructs their path. Mara Salvatrucha gang members have been responsible for the execution of federal agents

and numerous shootings of law enforcement officers across the country. In addition to the typical drug-related crimes, Mara Salvatrucha members are involved in many other types of criminal activity including murder, auto theft, and weapons trafficking. MS-13 has gained a reputation for using extreme violence, and many members have military and combat experience and skills, which they use to further their criminal activities. Mara Salvatrucha members also are engaged in laundering illicit drug proceeds through seemingly legitimate businesses (Valdez, 2000).

The Mara Salvatrucha also has an alliance with other organized syndicates like the Mexican Mafia (La Eme) for financial and security benefits. In 1994, there was an agreement in which Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles agreed to supply the Mexican Mafia with cocaine and marijuana in exchange for serving as enforcers and extortionists for Mexican Mafia. In exchange for exemption from a drug "tax" the MS-13 had free reign. This settlement forged a close relationship between the former rivals, and Mara Salvatrucha was designated a Sureño 13 gang, a Southern California Hispanic street gang affiliated with the Mexican Mafia prison gang (Castro, 2005).

Mara Salvatrucha will continue to pose a serious criminal threat to communities throughout the United States. Their rapid spread and aggressive recruitment here in the United States and other countries makes them a very dangerous gang. Coupled with the extreme violence demonstrated by their gang members, it is suggested that Mara Salvatrucha will remain among the most threatening street gangs in the country (Wenner, 2004). Their expansion across countries seems to demonstrate that the MS-13 has no boundaries that can stop its members from furthering their cause to increase turmoil in vulnerable cities. Indicators have shown that previously independent cliques are forming alliances with other Mara Salvatrucha cliques, as

well as with other gangs to facilitate criminal activity. This mutual cooperation and alliance with other criminal entities will further heighten the threat of jeopardizing United States national security (Castro, 2005, p. 41). Unlike traditional United States street gangs, M-13 maintains active ties with MS-13 members and factions in El Salvador. These organizations; however, cannot be compared to the loose organizational structure of the 18th Street gangs.

MS-13 ties with El Salvador are maintained for several reasons. The communication and alliance provides a mechanism for MS-13 gang members to access military style munitions and also establishes a network to traffic illegal firearms. There is a demand for small arms by MS members in the United States and El Salvador. This demand is so high that MS members will often take handguns as payment for drug transactions. The guns are then sent back to El Salvador.

Mara Salvatrucha appear to be in control of much of the southern Mexican border, and in addition to its smuggling and contraband rackets, collects money from illegal immigrants that it helps clandestinely to cross the border into the United States. A staging point of illegal immigrants (is operated by MS-13 out of Chiapas. It is known for moving people and contraband into the United States before it is diverted to its final destination. For all practical purposes, MS-13 has control of the railways to the north along the border, and is able to collect a tax-like fee from the precarious roof riders who risk their lives atop the trains to reach the United States. At present, one of Mara Salvatrucha's main rivals is the 18th Street Gang which is discussed at length in the following chapters.

The 18th Street Gang

Origins and Location

The 18th Street Gang, also known as Eighteen Street, or Mara 18, is a Los Angeles-based street gang comprised primarily of Hispanic members (Franco, 2008). The origins of the 18th Street Gang can be traced to the 1960s to a location near 18th Street and Union Avenue in the Rampart district of Los Angeles (Franco, 2008). Today, the 18th Street Gang is one of the largest Hispanic street gangs and Mara Salvatrucha is their most common rival (18th Street Gang, 2012). In fact, it is estimated that there are between 8,000 and 20,000 members of the 18th Street gang in Los Angeles County alone. The latest figures from the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), 2008, estimate 18th Street Gang membership at between 30,000 and 50,000 nationwide (NDIC, 2008). Consequently, the 18th Street Gang is one of the biggest street gangs in the country, and the Department of Justice estimates that the 18th Street Gang membership to more than 100,000 in the Americas, making it one of the largest criminal organizations in the world. Like the Mara Salvatrucha, 18th Street Gang members also distinguish themselves by tattoos and gang signs (Pollack, 2005).

Gang members in the 18th Street Gang also use cryptic, (at least to the uninitiated), number references to reflect their affiliation, including the number 18 in Arabic or Roman numerals. Members of the 18th Street Gang also engage in graffiti to mark their territory (Pollack, 2005). Most of them are Mexicans and Chicanos with some Salvadoran members and a few blacks. About 80 percent of the members of this particular gang are illegal immigrants in the United States and are most predominantly located in the state of California. Composed of several small gangs, members of the individual factions can number from 50 to several hundred each. Factions of the 18th Street Gang are diffused throughout the state in areas that include: San

Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, South Bay, South Los Angeles, and downtown Los Angeles. Their stronghold and oldest barrio are located east of the Staples center between the Harbor 110 Freeway (east) and Hoover Avenue (west). However, this gang also now operates in numerous states throughout the country (National Gang Threat Assessment 2009).

The 18th Street Gang members are also known for huge tattoos on their bodies. They are involved in various crimes such as murder, grand larceny, and drug trafficking. In terms of frequency of rampant violence, the Mara 18 is found to be the most violent of all the gangs that have been established in America. Like the MS-13, the 18th Street gang practices complete disobedience to law enforcement officers and the laws of this country.

The 18th Street is known to be a well-established gang that is involved in all types of criminal activity and the list continues to grow. This gang is involved in many types of criminal activities, including and not limited to auto theft, carjacking, drive-by shootings, drug sales, arms trafficking, extortion, rape, murder for hire, and murder. National and international drug trafficking seems to be 18th Street's main criminal activity today. Intelligence gathered by the FBI (2012) indicates that 18th street has established ties with the Mexican and Columbian drug cartels, which has impacted the Southwest border states in particular. Because of the large amount of drugs, which 18th Street distributes and sells, the gang also has ties to the Mexican Mafia prison gang and many black street gangs. (Mara Salvatrucha, 2012).

The majority of 18th Street cliques operating throughout the United States and abroad are the result of Los Angeles members' migrating to other areas and establishing cliques under their leadership. Members originally from Los Angeles tend to be more respected than those from other areas, because these particular gang members hold a different status in the hierarchy of the membership. The 18th Street cliques have been identified in 37 states and the District of

Columbia in the United States, as well as a number of other foreign countries, including many in Central America such as El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Membership/Hierarchy

Membership in the 18th Street Gang was originally restricted to Mexican nationals only. While most members in this gang tend to be of Mexican descent, membership has been opened to other backgrounds in recent years, including Central American, African American, Middle Eastern, Asian, Caucasian, and Native American. Currently, 18th Street has a loose hierarchical structure. Although the gang is well networked throughout the United States, Mexico, and Central America, there is no known central leadership nationally or internationally that fully controls this gang. Cliques generally function independently, but will join forces when combating rival gang members or law enforcement officers. In contrast to the structured hierarchy that characterizes the Mara Salvatrucha, the 18th Street Gang has a less organized command structure (Mara Salvatrucha, 2012).

Gang Markings

As with many street gangs, 18th Street Gang members can be easily identified by their tattoos. A common identifier is the number 18, which is usually represented in the Roman Numeral (XVIII) (XV3) and sometimes they also use 666 or 99 ($6+6+6=18$ / $9+9=18$). Some use the number 5 meaning the fifth letter of the Alphabet. They also tattoo themselves with the word BEST, which stands for Barrio Eighteen Street. Members engage in graffiti to mark their territory as is common with gangs.

Culture

Members of the 18th Street Gang are expected to conform to a strict set of rules. For instance, gang members are forbidden from using crack cocaine and other hard drugs even

though they may deal in these substances. Failure to obey the word of a gang leader, or to demonstrate appropriate respect to a fellow gang member, can have serious repercussions, including an 18-second beating, or even death for more serious offenses. According to Al Valdez (2000), some factions of the 18th Street gang have developed a high level of sophistication and organization. This is attributed to the gang's connections with Mexican and Colombian drug cartels. The 18th Street gang is occasionally referred to as the "Children's Army" because of its recruitment of elementary and middle-school aged youth. In addition, 18th Street gang members typically wear brown or black pants with a white shirt. In the alternative, members of the 18th Street Gang occasionally wear jerseys from professional sports teams. Irrespective of their attire, 18th Street Gang members are considered heavily armed and dangerous in America (Walker, 2012).

Criminal Activity

The 18th Street Gang is a well-established organization that is involved in all areas of criminal activity. They are involved in many types of criminal activities, including and limited to auto theft, carjacking, drive-by shootings, drug sales, arms trafficking, extortion, rape, murder for hire, and murder. National and international drug trafficking seems to be 18th Street's main criminal activity. Intelligence indicates that 18th street has established ties with the Mexican and Columbian drug cartels, which has impacted the Southwestern border states (National Gang Threat Assessment, 2011). Due to the large amount of drugs which 18th Street distributes and sells, the gang also has ties to the Mexican Mafia prison gang and many black street gangs. The 18th Street Gang has an arrangement of connections between gangs in operation along the Southwest border and Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization (MDTO). Hence, as a result they have developed strong familial ties that most many American based Hispanic gang members

retain with family and friends in Columbia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua (Kerlikowske,2009).

Eighteenth Street Gang *Barrio Dicsciocho (Mara 18)*, Pico-Union, is a district located in Los Angeles, California. Its name originates from the intersection of Pico Boulevard and Union Avenue. Pico-Union was populated by Salvadoran Immigrants and as one of the many turfs of the 18th Street gang; it allowed these Salvadoran immigrants to join due to their knowledge of warfare. At a point later on, some Salvadorans did not like the idea of being under the 18th Street gang's control. Sufficient in quantity, the Salvadorans easily formed the Mara Salvatrucha. The 18th Street gang did not want to allow them to take over that area so, like other rivals, they fought for that area and for respect. What followed was the dreadful war for control. The turf war was so vicious that other Salvadoran and Central American immigrants had to join one gang for protection from the other gang. When many of the gang members got deported, they took the pride and the grudge of the 18th Street Gang to those countries. This led their rivalry to expand and engage in the notorious gang war of Central America between the 18th Street Gang and the Mara Salvatrucha. Both of these gangs have been rivals since their inception and remain that way to the present day. The foregoing trend suggests that MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang are not only threats to national security in many of the Central American countries where they have a massive presence, but also create a threat to the United States. Their numbers continue to grow and they are expanding into ever-larger geographical regions around the world.

Interview of Law Enforcement

On October 28, 2012 an interview was conducted with Detective Daniel Gadoy, a police officer, who is currently assigned to a gang unit with the Montgomery County Police Department

in Maryland. A veteran with 10 years on the police force he has often seen stabbings, shootings, and beatings linked to MS-13 and 18th Street Gang turf wars. Besides its brutality, MS-13 is distinguished by its more sophisticated organization than 18th Street Gang. Gadoy said MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang have also kept a low profile, eschewing much of the flashy self-promotion of other gangs. In recent years, Godoy has seen Salvatruchas blend in perfectly with the civilian population, foregoing the gang's trademark tattoos and blue-and-white clothing. "If you see one of them you most likely wouldn't know," he said. "They look like everyday people blending in with the population."

Detective Gadoy is unsure how far the rivalry between these gangs, MS-13 and 18th Street has stretched, but one thing is for sure, that they hate each other until "la muerte" (meaning until death). Gadoy tells the story of a Salvadorian man who was drinking at a local bar in Silver Springs, Maryland and befriended an 18th Street Gang member unbeknownst to him. The Salvadoran told that gang member when he once lived in El Salvador; he had killed an 18th Street Gang member. The Salvadoran went outside the bar to smoke a cigarette and the gang member followed him outside, asking for a cigarette. When the Salvadoran let his guard down to retrieve the cigarette, the 18th Street Gang member stabbed the Salvadoran to death. According to Detective Gadoy, this is one of many strong indicators that these gang members take their organization very seriously and will take revenge on anyone who causes harm to any of their members regardless of their location or affiliation.

Prince George County, Maryland is the main hub for the MS-13 and outnumbers the 18th Street Gang two to one said Detective Gadoy. While, there is a populace of MS-13 gang members in Montgomery County where he works, the majority of them are located in Prince George County. An interesting aspect of the MS-13 that he discovered is that most of the high

ranking leaders of MS-13 live in Montgomery County while the remainder of the gang is located in Prince George County. These leaders hide in attempt to evade law enforcement officers by holding regular jobs and blending in with the rest of society.

The MS-13 and 18th Street Gang member's main objective now is obtaining money through extortion because victims are usually so scared of them that they would rather pay than risk retribution. The victims are usually Spanish-speaking owners of small shops such as grocery stores, beauty salons, small taverns, and brothels (called puterias). These gang members also charge rent for others who are selling drugs in their "turf" in order to maintain control of their areas.

In regard to the MS-13 and the 18th Street gangs being a threat to national security, Detective Gadoy believes that Al Qaeda could use these gangs where they have heavy control in areas near the borders with Mexico and the United States. He believes when gang members are used as "coyotes" (smugglers of people) by terrorist organizations, they become a threat to our country. However, for the most part, Detective Gadoy strongly believes that MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs are more of a threat to society because they are very violent and extort from anyone. Detective Gadoy stated, "I believe that MS-13 is the most dangerous gang in the nation because they are increasingly larger and organized."

Reports from the Field

Case 1: Five MS-13 gang members who wreaked havoc throughout San Francisco by fatally slashing and shooting real and imagined rivals were sentenced to life in prison. Federal Judge William Alsup repeatedly condemned the gang's vicious behavior which resulted in the murders of several bystanders merely suspected of being enemies. "The violent and deadly nature of these offenses committed by this enterprise ... all of these warrant a life sentence,"

Alsup stated. Moris “Slow Pain” Flores, 22, (who is also involved in numerous criminal cases with the FBI such as Case 2) and one of the gang’s leaders and a sixth defendant, Guillermo “Sparky” Herrera, 22, had been sentenced in December 2011 (Burack, 2012).

Prosecutors in this case claimed that the gang committed dozens of shootings and stabbings as it sought to expand its reach in San Francisco, attacking rivals and extorting low-level criminals in their territory. The judge acknowledged that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents mismanaged their informants, one of whom lied about his role in eight murders in Honduras, which scuttled his planned testimony. Another informant admitted to committing crimes even while aiding federal investigators (Burack, 2012).

Case 2: There have been three consecutive federal trials of members of the 20th Street clique of MS-13. Six MS-13 gang members were convicted in August 2011 after a five-month trial that involved more than 150 witnesses. The six gang members – Marvin Carcamo, aka “Psycho”; Angel Noel Guevara, aka “Peloncito”; Erick Lopez, aka “Spooky”; Moris Flores, aka “Slow Pain”; Jonathan Cruz-Ramirez, aka “Soldado”; and Luis Herrera’s brother Guillermo Herrera, aka “Sparky” – were each sentenced to life in prison in December 2011. A federal jury also convicted the sole defendant in the third trial, Manuel Franco, aka “Dreamer,” on one count of violent crime in aid of racketeering (VICAR) conspiracy (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

The cases were prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Wilson Leung, Wil Frentzen, Derek Owens, Andrew Scoble and David Hall of the Organized Crime Strike Force of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of California, and Trial Attorney Theryn G. Gibbons of the Criminal Division’s Organized Crime and Gang Section. These cases were investigated by Daly City Police Department, San Francisco Police Department, and ICE Homeland Security Investigations (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

Case 3: Four high-ranking members of an entrenched criminal street gang were found guilty of participating in a racketeering enterprise responsible for the September 2007 shooting of a street vendor near MacArthur Park that resulted in the murder of a 3-week-old infant. Following an eight-week trial, a federal jury convicted the four defendants, three of whom are members of the Columbia Lil' Cynos (CLCS), which is a "clique" of the 18th Street gang. After being found guilty of a host of federal offenses, all four defendants now face potential sentences of life without parole in federal prison (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). The offenses included the fatal shooting of a 3-week-old infant. The four defendants found guilty were: Eduardo Hernandez, 35; Vladimir Iraheta, 31; Leonidas Iraheta, 31 and Javier Perez, 35 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study Approach

This study used a qualitative review of the relevant peer-reviewed and scholarly literature together with a quantitative content analysis of these sources. As a study approach, it will be integrated together with various governmental and media resources. This approach is consistent with the guidance provided by Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) that, “Researchers usually dig into the literature to find out what has already been written about the topic they are interested in investigating. Both the opinions of experts in the field and other research studies are of interest. Such reading is referred to as a review of the literature” (p. 52). There are a number of valuable outcomes that can be achieved through a well-conducted literature review, including the following:

1. It helps describe a topic of interest and refine either research questions or directions in which to look;
2. It presents a clear description and evaluation of the theories and concepts that have informed research into the topic of interest;
3. It clarifies the relationship to previous research and highlights where new research may contribute by identifying research possibilities which have been overlooked so far in the literature;
4. It provides insights into the topic of interest that are both methodological and substantive;
5. It demonstrates powers of critical analysis by, for instance, exposing taken for granted assumptions underpinning previous research and identifying the possibilities of replacing

them with alternative assumptions;

6. It justifies any new research through a coherent critique of what has gone before and demonstrates why new research is both timely and important (Wood & Ellis, 2003).

Likewise, the use of both qualitative and quantitative information is consistent with Neuman's (2003) advice that, "Both qualitative and quantitative research use several specific research techniques (e.g., survey, interview, and historical analysis), yet there is much overlap between the type of data and the style of research. Most qualitative-style researchers examine qualitative data and vice versa" (p. 51).

Therefore, a qualitative analysis can help provide new insights concerning these gangs that might go otherwise undiscerned, and a quantitative analysis of their respective memberships can provide support for these conclusions. The resources consulted for the qualitative literature review component and quantitative analysis were found in public and university libraries, as well as reliable online research sources such as EBSCO and Questia. Additional sources included governmental websites, personal interviews with expert in gang activity, and relevant media sources.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

As noted throughout, hard figures are difficult to come by in estimating gang membership levels in the United States and abroad, but some indication of their numbers can be discerned from recent estimates as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Current Estimates of MS-13 and 18th Street Gang Membership

Country	MS-13	18th Street Gang	Source
Honduras	18,000	18,000	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
Guatemala	7,000	7,000	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
Belize	50	50	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
Nicaragua	2,250	2,250	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
Costa Rica	1,350	1,350	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
El Salvador		11,000	Boraz & Bruneau, 2006*
Central America		250,000	Walker 2012

Note: The authors did not break down membership in these countries by gang; totals represent half of their total estimate for each gang

Current estimates of MS-13 and 18th Street Gang membership in the United States are provided in Table 2 below.

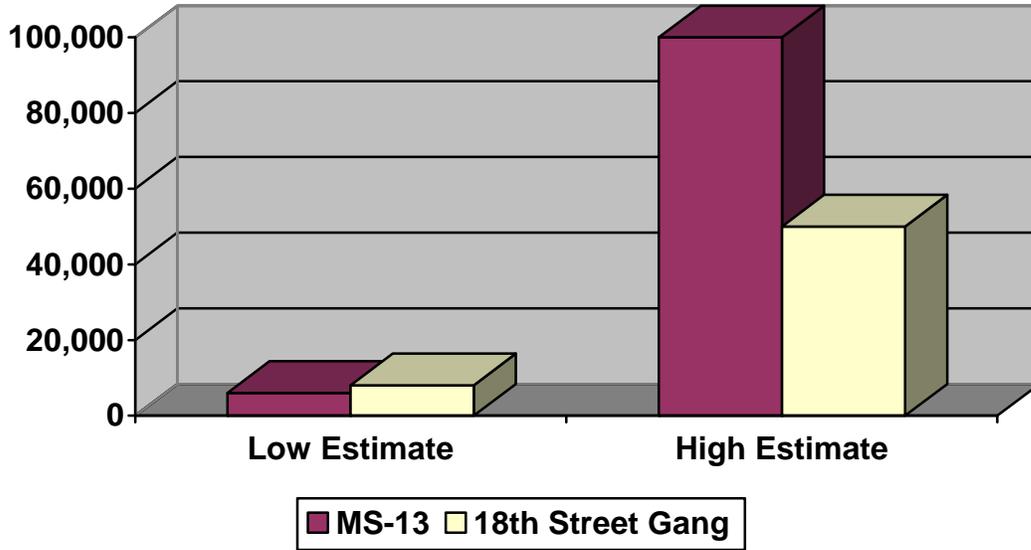
Table 2

Current Estimates of MS-13 and 18th Street Gang Membership in the United States

Source	Date	MS-13		18 th Street Gang	
		Low Estimate	High Estimate	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Franco	2008		30,000	8,000	10,000
Vásquez & Marquardt	2003				10,000
Boraz & Bruneau	2008		20,000		
Kowalski	2010		100,000		
NDIC	2010			30,000	50,000
Lineberger & Padgett	2011	6,000	10,000		
Walker	2012				15,000
Mara Salvatrucha 13	2012		10,000		
FBI	2012	6,000	10,000		
Gangland: 18 th Street Gang	2012				30,000

These low and high estimates for the MS-13 and 18th Street Gang are depicted graphically in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Low and High Estimates of MS-13 and 18th Street Gang Membership in the U.S.



CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION CONCERNING THREATS AGAINST NATIONAL SECURITY

According to Chase-Dunn, Jonas, and Amaro (2008), “The term “national security” refers to the safeguarding of the state’s sovereignty over the territory and population within its borders, and implies that the state should have policies to confront any threat to that sovereignty” (p. 102).

By contrast, the term “public security” is defined by these authors as “the maintenance of civil order necessary for the execution of basic societal functions (e.g., transactions, transportation, or communication); as well as, the upholding of the rule of law”. The term “citizen security” refers to “the capacity of individuals and groups to enjoy or exercise the political, economic and civil rights that correspond to the status of a citizen in a given society” (Chase-Dunn, Jonas & Amaro, 2008).

At present, Mara Salvatrucha is widely regarded as a significant threat to both public security and citizen security, but their activities have not yet risen to the level of a direct threat to the sovereignty of the United States (except perhaps in the areas of Los Angeles where they are deeply entrenched). Nevertheless, public security and citizen security are essential components of national security and, because both are threatened by the existence of the Maras, it could be claimed that the Maras represent a clear and present threat to the population within the borders of the United States, and as such a threat to national security. The 2007 WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America) report does not provide any evidence of a specific connection between

both MS-13 and the 18th Street Gangs and attempts to smuggle terrorists into the United States (Franco, 2008). Nevertheless, there is no debate on the threat of the Maras to many Central American countries because these gangs represent a threat against all three types of security levels:

1. Citizens cannot go about their business without the fear of being robbed or killed in their neighborhoods.
2. Businesses, such as commerce and transport, are prevented from operating unless they pay off the Maras. In fact, entire sections of some cities, such as Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa, are under the control of Maras.
3. Entire sections of countries, such as the Peten in Guatemala, slip from the state's sovereign control (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006, p. 63).

Furthermore, while the Maras are still considered to be a major source of criminal activities in cities across the United States, the situation in most of Central America is far more serious because of the state of their economic development, as well as the political institutions that are trying to carve democratic societies from the legacies of the past (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). In most countries where they are active, law enforcement authorities continue to struggle to keep track of these gangs through intelligence gathering activities that are thwarted by their inviolable secrecy.

Citizen security is police work, where law enforcement protects and serves the citizens. Public security, depending on the situation, is essentially police work and could be in cooperation with the military. To reach the highest level of national security, a joint function of the federal government and the military, with support from local and state police, is a defensive task, confined to the boundaries of the United States.

In recent times; however, that was not the case. Moreover, anything that pose danger to the supremacy of the United States and anything that pose a challenge to its role as the world's only superpower may be perceived as a threat to our national security. The United States presently assumes the role of the world's policeman and, to further that role, anything that is perceived as a threat to the world peace and anything that challenges the authority of world hegemony, is a threat to our national security.

The overriding concern now facing law enforcement is how rapidly the threats from terrorists and criminals are changing. Particularly, in terms of technology, it has resulted in a challenge to law enforcement's ability to keep pace with those who wish to do harm to our nation and our citizens. There is a continued and ever increasing predictability that allows drug lords, terrorists, and even violent gangs to communicate about their criminal intentions. They use impunity and maintain concealed electronically-stored evidence of their crimes that are impervious to lawful search and seizure.

Technological Advancement

Today, national security issues go beyond the passage of classified military information. In several instances, many individuals have infiltrated the intelligence service apparatus. They might not be foreign sponsored, but may be home grown terrorists networks. They engage in clandestine activity that is inimical to the security and economic well-being of the United States. As current trends continue, our security and intelligence forces must keep a step ahead of potential threats.

The change in the intelligence environment includes the growing importance of maintaining the integrity of our country's information infrastructure that all Americans depend on. Our vast growing dependence on computer networks and telecommunications has made the

United States increasingly vulnerable to possible cyber attacks against its infrastructures, allowing terrorists and criminals to target our military war rooms, power plants, telephone networks, air traffic control centers, and banks.

International Terrorism

Gang activity has been closely associated with acts of terrorism. Therefore, another major threat these gangs present is international terrorism directed at Americans and United States national interests. Like, the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang, international terrorism could be an avenue implemented by employing these organizations, given the relative lawlessness of large swaths of Latin America and the ease in which criminals can cross the United States border. Although the number of international terrorist attacks directed at American interests remains comparatively low, they trend toward more large-scale incidents designed for maximum destruction, and terror. Media impact actually places more Americans at risk today. As recent tragedies demonstrate, this threat confronts Americans both at home and abroad. America's democratic tradition and global presence make Americans a fast, and often all-too-easy, target for opportunists who are willing to kill innocent victims to further their extremist and ideological causes.

State-sponsored terrorism which includes countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Cuba, and North Korea violate every convention of international law (Perl, 2007). Although terrorist activities of Cuba and North Korea have declined as their economies have deteriorated, the activities of other states, especially of the Middle East countries have intensified during the past several years.

Another international terrorist group consists of Middle Eastern fundamentalists and extremist groups. These formalized terrorist groups are autonomous. They are generally

transnational organizations that have their own infrastructures, personnel, financial arrangements, and training facilities. They are able to plan and mount terrorist campaigns on an international basis, and actively support terrorist activities in the United States. They have followers and sympathizers in the United States who could be used as an instrument to support acts of terrorism on American soil. The FBI (2002) believes there is a threat posed by international terrorists in each of these three categories: the radical international jihad movement formalized terrorist organizations, and state sponsors of international terrorism. Terrorists will continue for the foreseeable future due to the increase of Islamic radicals who seek to strike a blow to the United States and Israel.

The threat of international terrorism, though, demands ongoing vigilance. The terrorists of today have learned from the successes and mistakes of terrorists of the past. The terrorists of tomorrow will have an even more dangerous arsenal of weapons and technologies available to further their destructive ambitions. As new technologies emerge throughout the world, the more sophisticated the terrorists become. This compounds the enhanced capabilities of contemporary terrorists, which poses another disturbing aspect of modern terrorism in the world today. As recent events have shown, this “web of terrorism” perpetuates violence upon violence and poses a particular challenge to nations that take a strong stand against terrorism.

Drug Trafficking

On October 21, 1995, President Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 42 (PPD-42) which identified that international organized crime and drug trafficking are a threat to the national security of the United States. Unlike traditional threats to national security, the drug threat is not the result of the political agenda of a terrorist group or foreign government. Instead, it is perpetuated by criminal enterprises that conduct a myriad of egregious acts of violence,

corruption, fraud, murder, and extortion, all generated by personal greed and a quest for power. Unlike other threats, the illicit drug trade is in every street of our urban cities, supporting the same radical terrorists that want to impose fear and destruction of our way of life.

The effects of the economic and political destabilization of other countries indirectly affect our national security. Drug trafficking and international organized crime groups often attempt to thwart enforcement action by bribing or threatening foreign government officials. The United States is not immune to the political, moral, and societal debilitation that has occurred in other countries due to the distribution of criminally obtained assets to buy assistance or ensure ignorance from corrupt government officials.

International Organized Crimes

The FBI (2012) defines organized crime as any group having some method of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to attain money through illegal activities. Such groups sustain their position through the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupt public officials, graft, or extortion, and commonly have a major impact on the people in their locales, region, or the country as a whole.

Not only is the United States law enforcement concerned in the presence of international organized crimes, but also the worldwide law enforcement community. They are engaged in different criminal activities like murder, extortion, corruption of public officials, arms smuggling, bribery, money laundering, drug trafficking, financial fraud, kidnapping, prostitution, and human trafficking. The rapid changes of globalization and technical advances have made these groups become increasingly active worldwide and more dangerous. They have adapted to changes of the modern world and this hinders law enforcement efforts against them. Law

enforcement must establish new innovations and opportunities to combat the new rise of globalization of the criminal collective, or they will undermine our freedoms.

One of the ways to accomplish this is through cooperative activities, such as overseas law enforcement presence that powers our resources and adopts the establishment of actual working relationships with foreign law enforcement agencies. United States investigators and prosecutors seek to enlist the cooperation of foreign law enforcement officials, keeping crime away from American shores, facilitating the arrest of many United States fugitives, and solving serious crimes. This manifestation generates networks of law enforcement professionals committed to precluding crime and bringing international criminals to justice.

Immigration

Immigration can pose a national security problem by providing new opportunities and advantages for alien terrorists currently operating on American soil. The revelation of the terrorist plot to bomb JFK Airport serves as a timely reminder that terrorists are operating in the United States (Kobach, 2007). Another terrorist plotted to attack a military base named Fort Dix in New Jersey (Kobach, 2007). Terrorists are busy thinking of new ways to kill innocent Americans while the Senate thinks of new ways to grant massive amnesty to twelve to twenty million “illegal aliens”. However, this increased pool of talents and skills, longer hours of work for lower salaries, and steady market for American products are the drawbacks weighed against these immigrants. America needs to find solutions to solve the immigration conundrum that has caused a major conflict of enforcing immigration law against too many illegal aliens living in this country.

The “Re-conquest Theory” soused by so many and was detailed in the book “State of Emergency – The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America” (Buchanan, 2006), may be

farfetched, or even some would call paranoia. Although in reality it has become a threat to our national security. Our history shows that we Americans did conquer the territory from the Mexicans. Perhaps they are trying to re-conquer in a different avenue. Our thoughts are reasonable and we are not being paranoid if we thought that we could lose our culture that set Americans unique from the world. An argument made by Pat Buchanan, is that “immigration (whether legal or illegal) is a threat not only to American jobs, but to America as a country and its overall culture”; that “immigration is the source of failed civilizations throughout history and if not regulated and controlled, America as we know it will become just another dead society” (Buchanan, 2006).

On both sides of the Atlantic many immigrants are now becoming part of the nations in which they are settling. However, rather than assimilating into loyal Americans, they take advantage of economic and social welfare opportunities, while maintaining loyalties and allegiances to their native lands or cultures (Kobach, 2007).

Organized Street Gangs

Gangs that occupy the streets of America today are not the same street thugs who used to commit petty crimes. These groups have become more violent, aggressive, and defiant of all kinds of authorities. They engage themselves in criminal activities in a matter in which they mirror far more organized business enterprises, than street gangs of the past.

Gangs which move to a global context often persist despite changes in the organizational structure. Not only do these groups disturb the peace and order in their own communities, but are also able to reach globally. The most alarming fact to authorities is the connection or network they have established throughout the world (Barahona-Fuentes, 2012).

Organized street gangs are becoming easy instruments for any terrorist group that plans to harm our country. Since they deal in the same criminal activities and they are motivated solely by greed, power, and hatred, it is not implausible that they might form an alliance against the United States of America. In particular, the 18th Street Gang and Mara Salvatrucha are now a very serious problem of the United States. They do not merely pose a problem to the community or society alone. They threaten the United States in a grander scale. The gang members fight and kill in broad daylight in America's cities and towns. These young men do not have an issue with stealing, killing, beating, and dismembering. They are trained survivors and care only for efficiency and expediency. If they need something, they take it. If they are disturbed or threatened, they kill. This is all they know and this is what they excel in. Civil societies are incredibly soft, slow moving targets for them (Walker 2012).

These gangs now function as criminal enterprises designed to maximize money and power derived from drug trafficking. Due to diminishing rivalries, gangs mostly cooperate with different gangs. In some locations, former rival gangs work in "shifts" to sell cocaine and other narcotics. MS-13 members are also known to be involved in all aspects of criminal activity (Gingrich, 2005). Some law enforcement sources have reported that because of their ties to their former homeland, MS-13 members have access to sophisticated weapons thus making firearms trafficking one of their many criminal enterprises.

These vicious gangs are the perfect instruments for the organized crime organizations that operate in the country. MS-13 and M-18 are ready-made armies of gunmen, thieves, smugglers, and drug dealers. In addition, they are ready instruments for cartels, mafias, and similarly organized crime syndicates. They are mercenaries ready for hire anywhere. Equally these two particular gangs maintain their own territories and move only in their own world. Without most

of them being technically employed, international terrorists can exploit these gangs who already work in an internal criminal network for the right price. The drug trade finances these gangs and they are present in every major city in the United States. They have a solid infrastructure in place that allows them to move and distribute drugs from across the border. The danger currently exists that they will use their network for trafficking terrorists and weapons into this country.

The concept of transnationalization, which includes the free movement of people, the sharing of culture, and improved communications across national borders has assumed another role for criminal entities. In the context of crime policy, particularly after 9/11, this concept of globalization has shown that gangs in the United States have become transnational.

This regional problem could very well stretch into a world phenomenon that may have future repercussions for the national security of this country and other countries. Conversely, Colombian and Mexican organized crime elements outsource the work to Central America's street gangs who have their members in the streets of the United States of America. While there is no confirmed documentation of a direct connection between MS-13 and terrorists, the threat has been large enough to draw the attention of both law enforcement and the Pentagon. From the previous administration President George W. Bush and former Secretary Rumsfeld visited Latin American countries to discuss security issues. On February 16, 2005 during the Senate Intelligence Committee testimony, Deputy Homeland Security Secretary Admiral James Loy cited intelligence that "strongly suggests" Al Qaeda operatives have considered using the Mexican border as an entry point, believing they can "pay their way" into this country illegally (Jehl, 2005). "The Maras present a serious threat to the democracies, economies, and security of

Latin America. They overwhelm the governments, the police, and the legal systems with their sheer audacity, violence, and numbers (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006, p. 38).”

The problems associated with stemming the spread and sophistication of MS-13 and 18th Street gang activities may reflect current limitations to addressing what is now generally considered to be a multinational and regional problem. The problems associated with these two gangs cannot be solved by arrests, prosecution, imprisonment, and immigration enforcement alone. The fact that these gangs exist and operate outside of the United States and beyond the reach of domestic law enforcement agencies indicates that domestic responses may not fully address the broader problems presented by the gangs. A possible and more viable solution could be establishing a multilateral and multinational approach in combination with domestic efforts to combat this national threat (Franco, 2008, p. 24). Recent efforts of various federal agencies working together with the governments of other countries, particularly El Salvador, on their problems with MS-13 and 18th Street gangs indicate that the federal response is moving toward a bilateral approach to addressing the problem. Whether the problem of these two gangs continues to be approached as a domestic social issue, a domestic security issue, a multinational/regional issue, or a combination of these concerns has yet to be determined. Congress may consider these and other issues, in shaping a legislative response to this complex policy concern.

The phenomenon of gangs is multifaceted and constantly evolving. The magnetism of gangs has traditionally been thought to be a response to issues associated with poverty and disparities in social opportunities. Although gangs have always been in existence, gangs today are more violent, more organized, and more widespread. Like gangs, international terrorists derive much of their money from the drug trade. There is a growing danger that international terrorist groups will target gangs as potential allies as a source for protection, transportation,

money, and weapons. When one is working on greed and the other on hatred, collaboration to further their goals is quite impossible.

Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street gangs are two very dangerous gangs who are highly organized and set up around a network model (Martin, 2005, p. 23). They use high degrees of violence to achieve an economic goal. Both gangs have access to firearms and some to military weaponry. They both deal drugs in large amounts and are involved in human trafficking. They both have a transnational geographic scope. Their political awareness of most might be low, but some can display signs of growth in political activities. Moreover, both MS-13 and 18th Street have a considerably large number of gang members in the United States.

MS-13 and 18th Street are the most organized, largest, and the strongest groups that operate within the borders of the United States. The immigration problem and drug crises make these gangs a de facto insurgency (Martin, 2005). These groups operate across borders and pose a growing national security threat to the nation. Many law enforcement authorities agree that two of the street gangs that constitute the majority of the gang-related problems in American society are the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street gangs. The MS-13 and 18th Street gangs are rivals fighting for territories. Nevertheless, this friction contributes to the tremendous problem of the communities affected. They have vigorously disrupted the peace and order of the American society. The MS-13 and 18th Street acts of violence are not restricted to civilians, rival gang members and clique traitors. They also turn against police officers. Those officers have been cautioned to be wary of MS-13 and M-18 members (Domash, 2004). According to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), some factions of the 18th Street gang have developed a high level of sophistication and organization (How Gangs Are Identified, 2012). This increased

sophisticated and organizational capacity has been attributed to the gang's close connections with Mexican and Colombian drug cartels.

The issue of gang violence, though, has taken a lower priority than the threats posed by Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists. Too many of the violent acts of Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street gang members and other street gangs are more of an everyday threat, though, that is being largely overlooked by the nation's law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Clearly, America must take caution because if terrorism does not occur today, it will happen when the gangs become involved in the future. According to Kontos et al. (2003), "In 1997, nearly fifteen hundred Salvadorans with criminal records were deported from United States' streets and prisons, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement statistics. In 1998 and 1999, the numbers have increased" (p. 284). These relatively model figures, though, fail to take into account the numerous additional deportations that take place in the form of "voluntary departures" rather than formal deportations (Kontos et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the Maras represent a far more insidious threat to national security than a conventional military force because they are clandestine, use asymmetrical warfare methods, and are enormously difficult to track and investigate. For example, Reveron (2010) emphasizes that, "Whether state-supported, local, transnational, narcoterrorist, Islamist, or neocommunist, these groups have access to a variety of underground economies, religious charities, and illicit government sponsorship" (p. 19). An additional, and perhaps inevitable, consequence of the scale of the MS-13 phenomenon is the extent to which they adeptly use computers and other technology, much like any other large organization. Dealers, carjackers, and lookouts carry wireless phones, pagers, radios, and police scanners. Virtual communications suites are publicly

available and it is possible that MS-13 has access to the type of electronics and communications advice for which they may have received training in the past for paramilitary endeavors.

With these criminal organizations functioning at a subnational level, police forces are under-equipped to effectively confront these groups and are too frequently co-opted through corruption. To fill the security void, law enforcement authorities around the world are seeking new ways to address the challenges of transnational threats from gangs such as MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang (Reveron, 2010). In this regard, Reveron (2010) emphasizes that, “These nonstate actors have an inherent advantage over governments. Small private groups can more readily harness off-the-shelf technology such as satellite phones, encryption, and transportation technology” (p. 19). There are indications that Mara Salvatrucha is not merely a street gang. There are indications that beneath the cover of a clique-divided street gang. There is a core of a highly organized guerilla group more like the FMLN, with a solid purpose of continuing and extending the class struggle in El Salvador deep into the soils of the United States.

The act of immigration combined with the ethnic concentration in Los Angeles implies that a self-selecting group has ascended to power to form the “protection” for the whole. Various people arrived in the United States having had connections to La Mara, a fierce street gang located in the country of El Salvador. These Salvadorans were essentially involved in armed combat in El Salvador’s civil war. Amongst the early founders of Mara Salvatrucha were ex-members of the paramilitary Farabundo Marti Para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) [Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front]. Many of these “veteran” Salvadorans arrived in Los Angeles already skilled in the use of booby traps, explosives, and firearms. They were former FMLN members who fought an insurgency against the Salvadoran government. The FMLN experience and training provided by the Cuban Director General de Inteligencia (DGI)

[Main Directorate of Intelligence] conveyed its roots from those experiences, showing a forthright and fundamental approach that provided many advantages to organizing a gang (Walker, 2012).

There should not be a perception of false conclusions regarding a lack of sophistication of MS-13, which is apparently straightforward with almost unrivalled brutality. On the other hand, an extensive range of options available from the collective talent pool is the result of a wide geographic distribution of cliques, which lends itself well to flexibility of the simple nature of the organization. By some interpretations, many factions “specialize” in a field or “occupation,” from the street-level professions of carjacking and narcotics sales, to computer hacking, wire fraud, and other similar “white collar” crimes. Truck hijacking has become prevalent with MS-13 lately. For example, a truck loaded with nationally advertised toilet articles or paper products can be hijacked by a clique and redistributed to a network of corner stores owned and operated by Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants. Peddled at heavily discounted prices, the MS-13 thieves have hastily received the Robin Hood label of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. Carjackers, dealers, and lookouts carry wireless phones, pagers, radios, and police scanners. It is conceivable that past paramilitary undertakings of MS-13 gave them access to the type of electronics and communications training that benefits them in virtual communication suites which are publicly available.

The MS-13 is not hard to find on the internet. Provoking rivals or simply speaking in tough language to communicate with one another, hailing their achievements against the police or posting photographs on their websites are illustrations of MS-13 bolstering unabashed contempt for most law enforcement authorities. It is common to this generation of gang

members who email, instant message, and use online chat room interactions which makes them hi-tech gangs today. As with all technologies, it can be used for the bad and good of mankind. Consequently, it is said the unexpected significance of the Rodney King Riots of 1990 in Los Angeles was the result of expansion of the MS-13 in El Salvador and Central America. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service formed a task force in the wake of these riots that deported at least one thousand MS-13 members back to El Salvador (Walker, 2012).

Mara Salvatrucha cliques in El Salvador were formed mainly by El Salvadoran MS-13 members deported back home and that the formation of such cliques in El Salvador (and in other Central American countries) was an indirect result of the said wave of deportation may not be entirely correct. This conclusion is perhaps the result of treating MS-13 and 18th Street Gang as similar and akin in all aspects, but a characteristic that can never be overlooked by law enforcement. It is also worth noting that in addition to those deported due to the Rodney King Riots; there were many other unnumbered “voluntary departures” back to El Salvador.

Recently, Nicaragua's National Police Chief Edwin Cordero warned that MS and other Central American gangs have organized procedures for moving new recruits from Nicaragua to El Salvador and Honduras (Walker, 2012). The new recruits are trained in Mara organizations and then sent home to establish new branches. Cordero also stated that the Maras are combining organizational skills used by United States street gangs, such as the Crips and Latin Kings, with indoctrination and training skills taken from former Central American Marxist groups, which includes the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [FSLN]) in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador used during the 1980s (Perla, 2012).

In San Salvador, the MS-13 cadre had two ambitions: first, to become involved in a criminal enterprise and become financially secure; second, to return to the United States. In El Salvador, the Maras have established small businesses. Needless to say, they compete unfairly. They use violence against competitors; and they rent themselves out to other businesses, such as bus companies, to intimidate their competition. The Maras' behavior corrupts other businesses because it perpetuates itself and can result in a spiral of violence. Some who monitor Maras wonder what they do with the money they make. They do not pay taxes and their facilities and equipment are inexpensive. Will they buy up legitimate businesses and pay off government officials, including the police?

Those who remained or returned to the United States wanted financial security, respect based on fear from their immediate community, and power with Maras. At the beginning of this thesis the question that has been asked is whether the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street gang are a threat to our national security. The innovation, technology, knowledge, capability and intimidation do exist. There may not be substantial facts and proof of terrorist activities. However, they are attempting to dominate regions across various countries with ruthless and violent tactics. If law enforcement doesn't aggressively and tactfully combat the Maras' they will eventually spread like an infestation and the threat to our national security will surely be a reality that Americans will face tomorrow. It is foreseeable that if the law enforcement authorities can't curtail the expansions of these gangs then it is inevitable that the use of some type of law enforcement combined with military force may be the only final option to stop this destructive force. The security of the greatest nation on this earth is the responsibility of our government.

In many cases, the law enforcement authorities in many lower- to middle-income nations

such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are simply overwhelmed and outgunned by the Maras, indicating these gangs are actually winning an undeclared war in many regions of the world. In response to the growing threat, a number of bilateral and multilateral initiatives have been launched in an effort to promote information sharing and enhance law enforcement training in the United States and Central America (Lineberger & Padgett, 2011). Although these transnational initiatives have been valuable tools in the fight against the Mara, Lineberger and Padgett suggest that, “The outdated and restrictive extradition treaty currently in effect between the United States and El Salvador threatens their success” (2011, p. 9).

Based on their propensity for violence and extensive international networks, the Maras represent serious challenges to law enforcement authorities around the world, but especially in Central America and the United States (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). According to these authorities:

This will be the case if Maras continue to build on their current ability to intimidate political parties and support radical groups. There are signs of this happening now, and if it works, given the Maras’ ability to communicate and learn, more such outrages can be expected. The fear is that Central America will go the way of Colombia, with the loss of state control over great territory of the country and the expansion of organized crime based on narcotics and terrorism. (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006, p. 65)

Indeed, threats to national security can assume a number of forms, including thermonuclear war or the use of other weapons of mass destruction, but such threats can also assume less visible and conventional forms and many of the activities that fund the Maras represent this type of security threat. In this regard, Reveron (2010) emphasizes that, “Drug

trafficking affects societies through addiction, crime, and disease. Narcotics production also undermines or weakens effective governance by fostering corruption and providing financial support to terrorism and insurgency” (2010, p. 18).

As a prime example, Reveron (2010) cites the funding of the Taliban in Afghanistan through illicit opium trafficking as well as the cocaine trade that funds the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. In many cases, the Maras have gravitated towards free societies where their brand of violence and funding are less easily disrupted and more easily perpetuated. As Reveron (2010) points out, “Democratic societies tend to be more vulnerable to drug traffickers because they can bribe, corrupt, and influence politics in regular ways. In general, transnational groups or networks are the sources of these threats” (2010, p. 19). Similarly, Armstrong (2009) emphasizes that so-called “sanctuary cities,” especially in California where they number more than 30, offer a relatively safe haven for the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang, a situation he terms “a threat to our national security” (p. 8).

The Maras and other Central American gangs have well-thought-out techniques for moving new recruits from Nicaragua to El Salvador and Honduras, cautions Chief Edwin Cordero of the Nicaragua’s National Police to United States law enforcement officers (Domash, 2004). Recruits are sent home to establish new branches after they have received training of the Maras’ organization and tactics. The Maras are merging organizational skills used by American street gangs such as the Crips and Latin Kings to indoctrinate new members with training and skills of the former Central American Marxist group, according to Cordero. It was the same indoctrination used in the 1980’s by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador and the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua.

The MS-13 factions located in San Salvador are motivated by a criminal organization that produces financial security and returning to the United States (Walker, 2012). The Maras have established small business in El Salvador that operates in an unfair competition. They intimidate their competition by use of violence against competitors and lease themselves to other companies to do the same to other rivalries. Furthermore, the actions imposed by the Maras corrupt other business leaving vulnerable to spiral of violence. The cycle continues as the Maras impose their power through fear and violence in El Salvador and when they return to the United States (Walker, 2012).

In addition to these national efforts, many bilateral, multilateral, and regional efforts aim to combat the Maras. For example, Berger and Vicente Fox, Mexico's president, agreed to establish mechanisms to fight Mara drug trafficking along their border (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). Similarly, Berger and El Salvador's Saca agreed to set up a joint security force to patrol gang activity along their border. In January 2004, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and Dominican Republic officials created a database on crimes to better track movements of criminal organizations. Saca proposed a "Plan Centroamerica Segura" (Central American Security Plan) to the Central American Integration System (in Spanish, SICA), in June 2004 at the Summit of Central American presidents. SICA held an "Anti-Mara Summit" in April 2005 where the presidents of all the Central American nations were joined by representatives from Mexico and the United States. More recently, the Spanish Ministry of Interior, with the participation of seven Central and ten South American countries, plus Mexico and the Dominican Republic, met to discuss the issue in March 2006. In April 2006, the government of El Salvador met with the FBI for a very large anti-gang regional conference (Boraz & Bruneau, 2006). As a result, the Maras challenged all levels of security in Central America and have the

potential to frustrate economic development. Their political and economic systems have become very fragile following decades of authoritarianism and internal conflict. It would not take much to destabilize them. Clearly, there is work to be accomplished at many levels of government to implement best practices and policies into place to fight this growing threat. In Central America, unlike Colombia, the threat is located in the urban areas, and is not due so much to government neglect as to a lack of resources.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, is perhaps the most notorious street gang in the Western Hemisphere. While it has its origins in the poor, refugee-laden neighborhoods of 1980s Los Angeles, the gang's reach now extends from Central American nations like El Salvador, through Mexico, the United States, Africa and Canada. Gang members rob, extort, and intimidate their way into communities and have gradually turned to transnational crimes such as human smuggling and drug trafficking. Today, low estimates for MS-13 gang membership range from a low of 6,000 in the United States to more than 100,000 actively operating in at least 43 states (some say all of the United States) and a growing number of foreign countries as well, making them a transnational criminal enterprise that represents a growing threat to national security. Likewise, membership estimates for the 18th Street Gang ranged from a low of 8,000 to a high of 50,000 in the United States alone. Moreover, both of these gangs have a massive presence in Central and Latin America, as well as a growing number of other foreign countries in Asia, Oceania and Africa.

Even using the low estimates, these are truly troubling trends. Indeed, it is not a stretch to suggest that a massively armed 10,000-man force is equivalent to a division-sized military unit and few observers would argue that an invasion by a division of highly trained North Koreans (as parodied in the second "Red Dawn" movie) or Cubans armed with high-powered weapons and fast vehicles (as depicted in the first "Red Dawn" movie) would represent a threat to national security. More troubling still, this potential threat to national security has virtually been

smuggled into the United States under the very noses of those who are tasked with preventing this, and now other law enforcement authorities across the country are struggling to respond. Although the research showed that there is no credible evidence linking the Maras to terrorism in the United States, the research also showed that they do represent threats to citizen and public security in America, and pose a grave threat to the national security of many Central American countries already.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this thesis a question was asked as to whether the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang has become a threat to national security. The literature review and personal interviews have shown that innovation, technology, knowledge, capability and intimidation do exist for a natural security threat by these gangs to be a reality. There may not be substantial facts and proofs of terrorist activities. However, they are attempting to control regions across various countries with ruthless and violent tactics.

If law enforcement fails to aggressively and tactfully combat the Maras, they will eventually spread like an infestation and the threat to national security will surely be a reality that Americans will soon face. It is foreseeable that if the law enforcement authorities cannot restrain the expansions of these gangs then it is inevitable that the use of some type of law enforcement combined with military force may be the only option to stop this disparaging force. The security of the greatest nation on this earth is the responsibility of the government. The freedom that Americans enjoy will not wither away as long as Americans have the strength and willingness to fight this new form of terrorism that has jeopardized the nation's security in profound ways.

Recommendations

Due initially to a civil war in the early 1990s, the research showed that tens of thousands of Salvadoran youths have made their way to the United States where they joined street gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang for mutual protection and security. These gangs in particular, have become highly organized transnational actors that are capable of extending their power, influence, and violence throughout their own country, the United States and other countries. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to these threats and it would be disingenuous at this point to recommend alternatives such as amnesty and job training and educational opportunities as viable paths to citizenship and the legitimate world of business for these young people.

In reality, the United States would have been better served by opening its borders to these young people and providing them with asylum, given their refugee situation and desperate status. After all, the nation needs young people who want to be here to the extent that they make it here on their own all the way from El Salvador at the tender age of 8 and 9 years. The United States should have thrown its doors open to these young people rather than slamming the door in their faces, but hindsight is always 20-20 and it is too late to do anything for the Salvadorans and other Hispanics who are now gang members. The same applies what this country has historically done for similarly-situated populations such as the Irish, Cubans, Vietnamese, Czechoslovakians, and others. These previous waves of immigrants have largely become completely assimilated in American society and have made enormous contributions. In contrast, by denying the MS-13 and 18th Street Gang members these legitimate alternatives to citizenship and virtually ensuring that they would end up as part of the problem rather than the solution, no one was served.

Despite these considerations, it may not be too late to lure some members of these gangs away from their peers by offering them a path to citizenship through military service, community service, or other programs, for those who remain; there are few alternatives but to fight fire with fire. If these gangs were shown to be clear and present threats to national security then they must be treated as such. If resolving these problems requires potentially new similar “Patriot Laws, “ comparable to those used during World War II for the Japanese on the American West Coast or after the September 11 Attacks – so be it. In summation, these gangs are powerful, insidious, and ubiquitous in our society. Applying half-measures simply will not work with the 18th Street Gang and Mara Salvatrucha.

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