



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**NET-WARLORDS: AN INFORMATION ANALYSIS OF  
THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS IN MEXICO**

by

Cabel N. Whorton  
Daniel E. Welsh

December 2014

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Marcos Berger  
Michael E. Freeman

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**NET-WARLORDS: AN INFORMATION ANALYSIS OF THE CABALLEROS  
TEMPLARIOS IN MEXICO**

Cabel N. Whorton  
Major, United States Army  
B.A., University of Arizona, 1999

Daniel E. Welsh  
Major, United States Army  
B.A., East Tennessee State University, 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
December 2014**

Authors: Cabel N. Whorton

Daniel E. Welsh

Approved by: Marcos Berger  
Thesis Advisor

Michael E. Freeman  
Second Reader

John Arquilla  
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

From late 2010 until spring 2014, the Caballeros Templarios drug cartel was the de-facto ruler of the Mexican state of Michoacán. This thesis will show how, through the use of a powerful narrative, the Caballeros Templarios were able to supplant both rival cartels and legitimate government authorities. They successfully evolved from a small criminal group into Mexico's first true net-warlords. Using netwar and organizational design theory, this thesis will describe the structure of the Templarios, their doctrinal and ideological characteristics, and the implications these have for Mexico and the drug war writ large. The primary conclusion of this thesis is that the Caballeros Templarios applied principles characteristic of netwar to create a criminal parallel state, directly threatening the sovereignty of the Mexican state of Michoacán. Ultimately, recognizing the causes and nature of this kind of threat will guide development of effective security strategies for both the United States and Mexico.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

From late 2010 until spring 2014, the Caballeros Templarios drug cartel was the de-facto ruler of the Mexican state of Michoacán.<sup>1</sup> This thesis will show how, through the use of a powerful narrative, the Caballeros Templarios were able to supplant both rival cartels and legitimate government authorities. They successfully evolved from a small criminal group into Mexico's first true net-warlords. The primary conclusion of this thesis is that the Caballeros Templarios applied principles characteristic of netwar to create a criminal parallel state, directly threatening the sovereignty of the state of Michoacán. Ultimately, recognizing the causes and nature of this kind of threat will guide development of effective security strategies for both the United States and Mexico.

### A. BACKGROUND

Extreme violence related to the war on drugs is now commonplace in many parts of Mexico with authorities at the local and national level frequently either powerless to stop it, or proactive participants in the crimes.<sup>2</sup> Despite similarities to the counter-cartel fights occurring in other parts of the country, the conflict in the Mexican state of Michoacán is distinct. In contrast to the more traditional law enforcement struggle against other drug cartels, the battle in Michoacán resembles a criminal insurgency. By this, we mean that no other part of Mexico has seen such a strong push by a criminal group to control so many aspects of civil society.<sup>3</sup>

In this region, there is one dominant criminal organization: Los Caballeros Templarios.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of numerous attempts by the government and criminal rivals to

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine E. Shoichet, "Notorious Mexican Cartel Leader Nazario Moreno Dead—Again," *CNN*, March 11, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/09/world/americas/mexico-drug-lord-nazario-moreno-killed/>

<sup>2</sup> Dudley Althaus and Steven Dudley, "Mexico's Security Dilemma: The Rise of Michoacán's Militias," In *Sight Crime-Organized Crime in the Americas*, April 30 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/mexico-security-rise-militias-michoacan>

<sup>3</sup> Tracy Wilkinson, "In the Hot Land, Mexicans Just Say No to Drug Cartels" *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jun/11/world/la-fg-mexico-hotland-20130611>

<sup>4</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Cartels at War: Mexico's Drug Fueled Violence and the Threat to U.S. National Security* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2012), Kindle edition, 44–45.

limit its influence, this group gradually extended its control over the state and surrounding regions.<sup>5</sup>

## **B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The purpose of this thesis is to address how the narrative of the Caballeros Templarios, and its subsequent effect on the group's behavior and organization, enabled them to evolve into a cohesive netwar actor. Using netwar theory and organizational modeling, this thesis will describe the structure of the Templarios, their doctrinal and ideological characteristics and the implications these have for Mexico, as well as how to address similar struggles in the future.

The period examined in this study is from fall 2010 until spring 2014. This will limit the analysis to the period from when the group first emerged as a distinct entity, through the rise of a regional counter-movement, resulting in the cartel's defeat.<sup>6</sup> Within this time frame it is possible to show from start to finish how advanced netwar techniques, specifically a powerful narrative, can transform a normal criminal group into a powerful regional warlord.

## **C. KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS**

The key concepts used in this thesis are the netwar theories by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, the organizational design models of Henry Mintzberg and William Evan, and Jay Galbraith's star model technique for addressing organizational capabilities. These methods allow the Caballeros Templarios's behavior and strategy to be explained, visualized, and understood in detail. In addition, building on the work of Robert Bunker and John Sullivan, we will show how this group evolved into a sophisticated and highly networked warlord-like entity.

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<sup>5</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), Kindle edition, loc 175–209.

<sup>6</sup> Tristan Reed, "Mexico's Drug War: Substantial Changes Seen in Michoacán," *Forbes*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2014/04/17/mexicos-drug-war-substantial-changes-seen-in-michoacan/>



## 1. Netwar and Organizational Models

In their 1996 work, *The Advent of Netwar*, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt define netwar as “an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, involving measures short of war, in which protagonist use—indeed, depend on using—network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and communication.”<sup>7</sup> These four vital factors (organization, doctrine, strategy, and communication) allow individuals and groups shaped by the modern information age to achieve a synergy, which was heretofore difficult to achieve. Netwar actors leverage modern communication strategies and technology along with unique organizational design elements in an effort to outperform adversaries and competitors alike.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the three basic network topologies described in netwar are “chain,” “hub,” and “all-channel” models.<sup>8</sup> Each network is comprised of a set of nodes that are linked together through a communication structure that transmits not only information, but shared ideas and values. This communication structure may leverage old and new technology or personal and familial relationships as transmission channels. Robust netwar actors are apt to be hybrids of each of these models with simple portions of the network consisting of chains while other more advanced elements may resemble hub or all-channel networks.<sup>9</sup> The strength of the netwar actor is its ability to adapt to an ever changing environment while enhancing operational effectiveness and ensuring its survival.<sup>10</sup> Hence, netwar actors by nature are evolutionary, with impressive abilities to simultaneously “blend” defensive and offensive actions. A key characteristic of the all-channel network type is the lack of a central hierarchy, which means that there is no true head and thus, the network is not only extremely difficult to destroy but able to conduct decentralized operations along with a capability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>9</sup> John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, eds., “The Advent of Netwar (Revisited),” in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9.

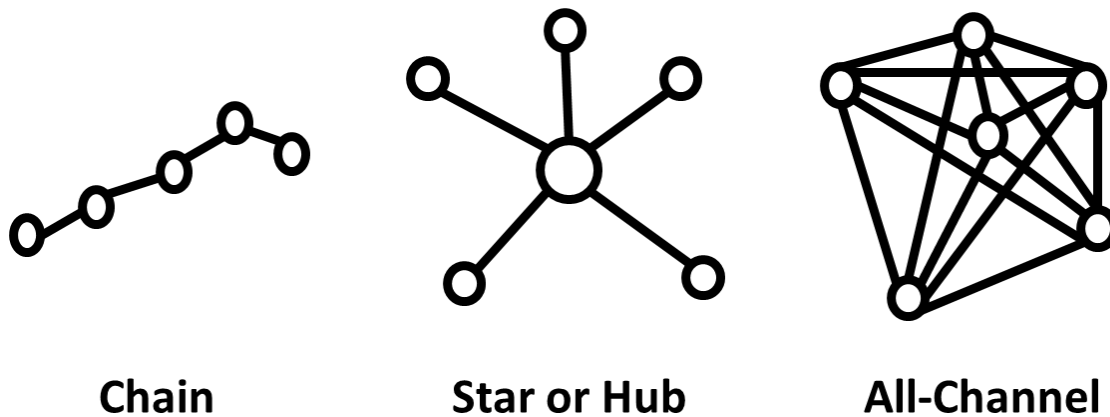


Figure 1. The three basic types of network organizations include the chain, hub and all-channel models.<sup>12</sup>

Describing the Caballeros Templarios cartel as a netwar actor requires a combination of several related lines of work. Its internal structure, workflow, and relationships are best presented using a hybridization of the models of Mintzberg and Evan.<sup>13</sup> The two modeling techniques together allow the critical interconnectivity of the Templarios to be clearly explained.

Showing the specific internal effects of the Templarios narrative is best done through Jay Galbraith's star model.<sup>14</sup> This framework simplifies group characteristics into the five key core elements of: strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people. As will be discussed in Chapters IV and V, this method clarifies the dynamic and often confusing nature of the drug trade by focusing on critical common elements.

## 2. Net-Warlords

Our term "net-warlord" is used in this study to describe a criminal group that adopts netwar practices and has evolved into an organization that resembles what Robert

<sup>12</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979), 399; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 7–9.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Kates and Jay R. Galbraith, *Designing Your Organization: Using the Star Model to Solve 5 Critical Design Challenges*, (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2007), 3.

J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan describe as a “third generation cartel.”<sup>15</sup> The evolutionary path described by Bunker and Sullivan sees cartels initially seeking to maximize profits through violent aggression, then gradually co-opting state institutions via corruption, and ultimately establishing themselves as a “parallel state.”<sup>16</sup> This gradual process of change is organized into three phases, which cartels progress through as they expand their collective reach and gain power.<sup>17</sup> Bunker and Sullivan present the third-phase cartel as fully developed netwarriors, who “... rule parallel polities, or criminal enclaves, acting much like warlords.”<sup>18</sup>

#### **D. THESIS ORGANIZATION**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. This chapter introduced the topic, purpose, and key concepts discussed in the thesis. Chapter II reviews the history and background details pertinent to the Caballeros Templarios’ transformation from standard cartel to fully functional net-warlord. In Chapter III, we examine the Templarios narrative and information operations. In particular, we focus on the characteristics that enable this narrative and identity to motivate Templarios members towards a common cause, making them capable of surviving as a coherent entity even when under attack by powerful enemies. In Chapter IV, we apply several modeling methods to typical Mexican cartels, explaining their organizational elements. Chapter V contrasts Templarios organizational characteristics with those common to more traditional drug cartels, with particular focus on the effect of a narrative. The final chapter of this thesis analyzes the Templarios overall success as a net-warlord operation and will address implications for future counter-cartel strategies.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, “Cartel Evolution Revisited,” in *Narcos over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, ed. Robert J. Bunker, 145–178 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 34.

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## **II. HISTORY OF THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The cartel known as the Caballeros Templarios can trace its lineage as far back as the mid-1980s. The roots of the Templarios stretch back to a period when vigilante groups in Michoacán began to oppose the movement of drugs through their state by outside criminal groups.<sup>19</sup> For a short period, these local vigilante groups successfully opposed the influx of drugs into the area and the extortion of local citizens. Perhaps not surprisingly, over time these same groups eventually became involved in the drug trade themselves, facilitating the movement of drugs through the state and eventually expanding their operations to include numerous other criminal enterprises.<sup>20</sup> This chapter focuses on the history of the modern drug trade within Michoacán and the conditions that led to the rise and fall of the Caballeros Templarios drug cartel.

### **B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO**

Mexico has long served as a conduit through which illegal goods are shipped from Central and South America (as well as from Mexico itself) into the United States. In the first half of the twentieth century, contraband, especially marijuana and heroin were smuggled utilizing a simple, effective system consisting of stealth and bribery to move small batches of product into the United States.<sup>21</sup> At this point in the early 1960s, seizure of five pounds of marijuana was considered front page news.<sup>22</sup> Today, seizure of drugs measured in *tonnage* barely rates a mention in the media.

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Logan and John P. Sullivan, "Mexico's Divine Justice," International and Security Relations Network, August 17, 2009, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lng=en&id=104677>

<sup>20</sup> George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan, *The Executioner's Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State they Created* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 93.

<sup>21</sup> Terrence E. Poppa, *Drug Lord: A True Story. The Life and Death of a Mexican Kingpin* (El Paso: Cinco Punto Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Earlier generations of smugglers were content to augment their meager incomes as farmers and ranchers by moving these small amounts of legal and illicit products across the border. This nascent smuggling culture was heavily dependent on close familial relationships and driven more by a need to survive financially than the pursuit of a significant profit margin. The profits generated by the smugglers were small enough that the issue was of little concern to the federal governments on either side of the border. So long as drugs were not sold in Mexico, the matter of enforcement was left in the hands of the local governments, which more often than not turned a blind eye to the smuggling.

By the end of the 1960s, internal political corruption within Mexico, a new appetite for drugs by American youth, and a long standing tradition of border smuggling created the perfect conditions for sophisticated drug trafficking organizations to arise. The smuggling of modest quantities of marijuana became an activity of the past.

### **C. THE PRI AND INSTITUTIONALIZED SMUGGLING: 1964–1975**

The decades during and after the Vietnam War saw a dramatic change in how the drug trade operated on both sides of the border. On the American side, President Richard Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 1973 to deal with what he considered “public enemy number one,” illegal narcotics.<sup>23</sup> The explosion of usage among American youth following the societal upheaval of the 1960s created a burgeoning market with higher profit margins that inspired a new business model.<sup>24</sup> In this new model, Mexican drug smuggling grew in size and became more organized. The necessity to traffic larger shipments increasingly required more sophisticated smuggling techniques, such as vehicles with false compartments and greater intelligence regarding border security. In addition, the movement of large quantities of drugs required active cooperation by the Mexican federal government, unlike in previous periods when

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<sup>23</sup> The White House, *Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1973* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title5/pdf/USCODE-2011-title5-app-reorganiz-other-dup96.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Maria Celia Toro, *Mexico's "War" on Drugs* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 15.

shipments were small. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) soon stepped in to take a controlling interest in every aspect of the trade in Mexico.<sup>25</sup>

Although full-time criminal groups were emerging to feed the demand, they were still in their infancy and not yet truly independent criminal organizations. As one informant related to noted Mexican journalist Anabel Hernandez, “In 1970, the term cartel did not exist. There were just cliques, which grew and transported marijuana and heroin across the border.”<sup>26</sup> Politicians loyal to the PRI held control over the vital areas of production and trade (known as *plazas*) and ensured that the system was mutually beneficial for all parties involved. Americans got their drugs, the PRI received its kickbacks, and the smugglers made their profit. The spoils were modest, and everyone was happy.

#### **D. OPEN MARKETS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MEXICAN FEDERATION**

The 1980s and 1990s saw the U.S. appetite for drugs change yet again as cocaine from Colombia flooded the market.<sup>27</sup> While the countries of South America provided the product, Mexican smugglers (still under the watchful eye and controlling arm of the PRI) accepted a role as middle men who facilitated distribution.<sup>28</sup> However, younger and more aggressive Mexican drug runners gradually saw an opportunity to take on a more powerful position within the drug world. Rather than simply act as middlemen in the business, the new generation increasingly took on a more central role within the drug trade.<sup>29</sup> Fleets of aircraft under the direction of creative people, like Amado Carillo

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<sup>25</sup> Anabel Hernández, *Narcoland: The Mexican Drug Lords and Their Godfathers* (New York: Verso, 2013), 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>27</sup> Toro, *Mexico's "War" on Drugs*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> June S. Biettel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of Violence* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Poppa, *Drug Lord*, 177.

Fuentes, began to deliver hundreds of tons of cocaine and other drugs to the “Norte Americanos.”<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the PRI began to slowly lose its tight grip on power as cries for a more democratic political process started to rise. These changes in Mexican politics allowed drug trafficking organizations (DTO) to exert more and more influence over the illicit activities within the plazas they controlled. The eventual dismantling of the major Columbian cartels in the late 1980s and early 1990s and their Caribbean smuggling routes further strengthened the position of Mexican DTOs. Soon the Mexicans traffickers were a drug cartel unto themselves.<sup>31</sup>

The successful growth of this first organization, known as the “Guadalajara Cartel,” was to be short-lived as the decision by its leader to enter semi-retirement (and his subsequent arrest) led to a division of his narco-kingdom among his top lieutenants.<sup>32</sup> For the next decade, the cartels he spawned, collectively known as the “Mexican Federation,” went about business as usual with only occasional bursts of violence directed almost exclusively at each other. Perhaps inevitably, competition amongst the cartel leaders, along with a changing political landscape in Mexico, resulted in increasing violence and an inability of the government to continue its unofficial regulation of the Mexican drug trade. In addition to the rise in violence, an earlier unofficial prohibition of selling drugs to Mexican citizens was slowly pushed aside resulting in a burgeoning market and rising addiction rates in Mexico.<sup>33</sup> As Mexico entered the twenty-first century and amid growing anger at the corrupt PRI, two dominant cartels emerged as powerful rivals that would again change the face of the drug trade in Mexico.

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<sup>30</sup> Sylvia Longmire, *Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Biettel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Malcolm Beith, *The Last Narco* (New York, New York: Grove Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Villagran, “As Mexico's Traffickers Ship Drugs North, They Leave Addicts in Their Wake,” *Christian Science Monitor Online*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0125/As-Mexico-s-traffickers-ship-drugs-north-they-leave-addicts-in-their-wake>



## **1. The Sinaloa Cartel**

In the northwestern region of Mexico, Joaquin “Chapo” Guzman, a man famous not only for violence but also for his business acumen, rose to a leadership position within the Sinaloa cartel.<sup>34</sup> Thanks to Guzman’s creativity and willingness to use extreme violence when necessary, this cartel now controls the majority of the smuggling routes that pass into California, New Mexico, and Arizona, a border nearly 700 miles long.

The Sinaloa cartel, in contrast to the newer cartels such as Los Zetas and the Caballeros Templarios, has retained a traditional or standard business model and remains primarily focused on transporting illegal narcotics as quietly and discreetly as possible.<sup>35</sup> The cartel is able to generate huge revenues by leveraging strategic locations that it controls (such as border crossing points) while guaranteeing its own security through the corruption of political leaders. According to *Proceso Magazine*, Chapo Guzman’s greatest contribution to the Mexican drug trade was in transforming the relationship between cartels and the government.<sup>36</sup> In the past, the cartels were essentially working for the government; under Chapo Guzman, “. . . the public officials became employees of the drug traffickers, and their armed wing.”<sup>37</sup>

## **2. The Gulf Cartel and the Rise of Los Zetas**

While the Sinaloa cartel was growing in size and power on the west coast of Mexico, *el Cartel de Golfo* (CDG) aka the Gulf cartel, led by Oseil Cardenas Guillen, focused its efforts on securing the profitable plazas that linked northeast Mexico to southeast Texas. Under the leadership of Cardenas Guillen, the Gulf cartel made its mark by not only moving massive quantities of cocaine across the Texas border, but also by adopting brutal military-style tactics to support its operations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hernández, *Narcoland*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 208.

<sup>36</sup> Hernández, *Narcoland*, 195.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>38</sup> George W. Grayson, *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico’s Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on U.S. Security*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 57.

As he grew in power, Osiel Cardenas Guillen, known as *el Mata Amigos* or “the friend killer,” became increasingly paranoid about his personal safety. His desire to protect his life at all cost led him to create an elite team of bodyguards recruited from former military and law enforcement personnel. The group was primarily composed of deserters from a Mexican Army Special Forces unit known as *el Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales* (GAFE).<sup>39</sup> Under Cardenas’ employment, they branded themselves *Los Zetas* in recognition of their former military radio call-sign. The responsibilities of Los Zetas quickly expanded beyond serving as mere bodyguards, as they increasingly carried out special missions for the cartel, such as kidnappings, extortion, and assassinations.<sup>40</sup> In addition to their skillful application of violence, Los Zetas leveraged their unique understanding of unconventional warfare tactics to conduct psychological warfare in support of the cartels objectives.<sup>41</sup> The effectiveness of these tactics was soon emulated by rival cartels. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the state of Michoacán.

## **E. DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MICHOACÁN**

Michoacán lies on the Pacific coast of Mexico within the south-central region of the country. It shares major borders with the states of Jalisco and Guanajuato to the north, and with the states of Guerrero and Mexico on its southern and southeastern borders respectively. A road network that crisscrosses its territory allows for the quick and easy movement of goods in all directions, especially from Central and South America. Most importantly, Michoacán possesses several sea ports, including the deep water port of Lazaro Cardenas. This strategically important port facilitates both the export and import of a variety of goods essential to the drug trade. Perhaps most valuable to the drug trade, chemical precursors necessary for the production of methamphetamine flow into the port while the finished product exits the port for consumption in North America and Asia.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner’s Men*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 93.

Seeking to control this port and the valuable production area and to secure local interest in Michoacán from rival outside groups, a group of traffickers, known as the *Tierra Caliente*, established a loose-knit vigilante organization in the mid-1980s.<sup>43</sup> The central leadership of this confederation of drug trafficking families included Carlos Rosales Mendoza at the top and would eventually include José de Jesús Méndez Vargas and Nazario Moreno González. By the late 1990s, the confederation had officially joined with the Millenio cartel (a regional cartel with allegiance to the Gulf cartel) to coordinate drug trafficking and production efforts in the state. This alliance continued until early 2002 when the senior members of the confederation, nicknamed the “12 Apostles,” sought to replace the Millenio cartel in Michoacán and take sole control of all illegal activity in the state.<sup>44</sup> In order to do so, the 12 Apostles declared a formal alliance with the Gulf cartel (CDG) and emerged as *La Empresa*, “The Enterprise.”<sup>45</sup>

### **1. La Empresa and Los Zetas**

The Millenio cartel enjoyed significant power in Michoacán, and the leaders of La Empresa recognized that the assistance of an outside power would be required if La Empresa was to seize control of the plazas in the state.<sup>46</sup> Luckily for the leadership of La Empresa, the Gulf cartel had recently created a paramilitary organization that was equipped and trained to conduct special operations missions. It was at this point that the members of La Empresa were introduced to the brutal tactics of Los Zetas.<sup>47</sup> Los Zetas’ membership consisted of former soldiers with special operations experience and its tactics in unconventional warfare proved extremely effective in battling the Millenio cartel. La Empresa quickly adopted the same tactics including the use of psychological operations to instill fear in its enemies and discipline within its ranks. By early 2003, La

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<sup>43</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner’s Men*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> Anabel Hernández, “Lords of Michoacán: Who They Are and How They Govern,” *Proceso Magazine Online*, November 2, 2013, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=357020>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> “La Empresa que originó a Los Templarios,” March 10, 2014, [http://www.milenio.com/policia/nacimiento-templarios-familia-michoacana-michoacan\\_0\\_259774453.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/nacimiento-templarios-familia-michoacana-michoacan_0_259774453.html).

<sup>47</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner’s Men*, 94.

Empresa and Los Zetas controlled the drug trade in the entire state, establishing a monopoly to be enjoyed by the Gulf Cartel.

## **2. La Familia Michoacán Emerges**

This successful alliance proved short lived as it soon became clear that Los Zetas were becoming a threat to both its masters in the Gulf Cartel and to its former allies, La Empresa. This growing distrust, coupled with the arrest of senior Gulf cartel leader Osiel Cardenas Guillen in 2003, eventually escalated into full-blown war in Michoacán. Stability was further eroded when José de Jesús “el Chango” Méndez Vargas and Nazario “el Mas Loco” Moreno Gonzalez began to influence the direction of the cartel after Carlos Rosales Mendoza’s arrest in 2004. The result was that by the end of 2005, La Empresa had morphed into a new organization known as La Familia Michoacán (LFM).<sup>48</sup>

In September of 2006, LFM announced its arrival by throwing five severed heads on to a crowded dance floor in the city of Uruapan, Michoacán.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the traditional “smuggler cowboy” image of the Sinaloans or the quasi-military persona of the Zetas, the leaders of La Familia decided to adopt a new identity. No longer characterizing itself as just another criminal union focusing on drug production and distribution, Moreno Gonzalez presented the cartel as a “messianic organization” intent on delivering “divine justice” (along with drugs).<sup>50</sup> In a manner similar to the founder of a cult, El Mas Loco developed a detailed ideology and drafted a specific doctrine to control his followers.

Adopting the writings of the conservative Christian evangelical author John Eldredge as a spiritual guide, Moreno Gonzalez created a declaration of identity called the “The Principles of the Family.”<sup>51</sup> This document described in detail what La Familia

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<sup>48</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco Violence and a Failed State?*, 180.

<sup>49</sup> Dane Schiller, “Mexican Drug Cartels’ New Scare Tactic: Beheadings,” *San Antonio Express-News*, September 26, 2006, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Mexican-drug-cartels-new-scare-tactic-beheadings-2488578.php>

<sup>50</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner’s Men*, 96.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

was, what it represented, and its objectives.<sup>52</sup> Incorporating Eldredge's ideas concerning masculinity, it centered on releasing the internal warrior and creating a purpose for members of the cartel.<sup>53</sup> The "sole motive" of the group, the catechism states, is to protect the state and people that they love, while ensuring that universal values are adhered to.<sup>54</sup> The document concludes with an appeal to the patriotism and honor of the men of Michoacán to support and join the group in order to "fight the maladies that afflict the state."<sup>55</sup>

**a. *La Familia as a Social Movement***

At its height, La Familia is believed to have had close to 9000 members who, in addition to conducting normal drug trafficking operations, also sought to build and maintain public support.<sup>56</sup> They did this by conducting numerous social outreach projects that in the past might have been carried out by the Catholic Church and other charitable organizations. They "financed dozens of schools; supported churches and drug rehab centers; provided gifts to the poor and . . . offered consumer loans."<sup>57</sup> In addition to social outreach, the cartel took a page from the Chapo Guzman's playbook and invested heavily in various political campaigns.<sup>58</sup> The politicians, once elected, ensured that the cartel could operate freely and brazenly within the state.

La Familia Michoacán, like La Empresa before it, was led by a small group of men who served as the strategic and operational directors of the organization. At the strategic apex were el Chango and el Mas Loco while newcomers like Servando "La

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<sup>52</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner's Men*, 212.

<sup>53</sup> Alfredo Garcia. "Violent Mexican Gang Hijacks U.S. Evangelical's Book," *The Christian Index*, July 25, 2010, <http://www.christianindex.org/6602.article>

<sup>54</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner's Men*, 212.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>56</sup> Anabel Hernandez, "Who Really Governs Michoacán and How They Do It," *El Diario de Coahuila*, November 3, 2013, Borderland Beat, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2013/11/who-really-governs-michoacan-and-how.html>

<sup>57</sup> Pamela L. Bunker, Lisa J. Campbell, and Robert J. Bunker, "Torture, Beheadings and Narcocultos" in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, ed. Robert J. Bunker (New York: Routledge, 2011), 170.

<sup>58</sup> "2 Mexican Politicians Sought: Drug Cartel Link Alleged," *CNN*, July 15, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/07/15/mexico.violence/>

Tuta” Gómez Martínez, Enrique “El Kike” Plancarte Solís, and Dionicio ““El Tio” Loya Plancarte headed up activities such as production, trafficking, extortion, recruitment, and public relations.<sup>59</sup> The leadership of LFM focused most of its recruitment efforts on the young and disenfranchised youth of Michoacán; “They emphasize(d) rehabilitation, empowerment, and self-renewal to drug addicts, alcoholics, juvenile delinquents, and others who [felt] alone and isolated.”<sup>60</sup> Hypocritically, while preaching the great evils of drug use, the cartel produced thousands of pounds of methamphetamine in its laboratories for overseas shipment.<sup>61</sup>

## **F. RISE OF THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS**

At the end of 2010, La Familia began to splinter just as the Gulf cartel had in the previous decade. Nazario Moreno, the enigmatic spiritual leader of the cartel, was allegedly killed in a shootout with government forces in December 2010 and soon after various factions within La Familia sought to inherit the kingdom of “El Mas Loco.”<sup>62</sup> Three months into 2011, a new criminal group callings itself the *Caballeros Templarios* or “Knights Templar” announced its existence by unfurling banners and posters throughout Michoacán.

To the People of Michoacán: We inform you, that as of today, we will be performing the duties previously realized by la Familia Michoacán. We will be at the service of the people of Michoacán to handle any situation that undermines their integrity. Our commitment to society is to preserve order, prevent thefts, kidnappings, extortions, and protect the State from possible interventions by rival organizations.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> United States Treasury Department, “Treasury Sanctions La Familia Michoacán Leadership,” February 25, 2010, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg564.aspx>

<sup>60</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner’s Men*. 97.

<sup>61</sup> William Finnegan, “Silver or Lead: The Drug Cartel La Familia Gives Local Officials a Choice: Take a Bribe or a Bullet,” *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2010, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/05/31/silver-or-lead>

<sup>62</sup> Damien Cave, “Mexicans Suggest That They Killed a Drug Leader,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/world/americas/11mexico.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/world/americas/11mexico.html?_r=0)

<sup>63</sup> “Templars’ Appear in Michoacan, Vow to Protect Society,” *Borderland Beat*, March 10, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/03/templars-appear-in-michoacan-vow-to.html>

By June of 2011, “El Chango” Mendez had been arrested, and this mysterious new group had absorbed the majority of the La Familia members remaining in Michoacán.<sup>64</sup> Like La Familia before it, the Templarios crafted a powerful message and identity that resonated with the people of Michoacán. In fact, the Templarios not only succeeded in acquiring its predecessor’s profitable drug trade, but also usurped La Familia’s spiritual tenets, further refining them into a fully developed code of conduct and ideology.<sup>65</sup>

Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, although rumored killed by the federal government, remained very much alive and continued to oversee the spiritual direction of the organization while sharing in the leadership of the group from the shadows.<sup>66</sup> Servando “La Tuta” Gómez Martínez, a former teacher, emerged as the de-facto leader and charismatic spokesman for the bizarre group, which not only claimed the “social justice” duties of La Familia but also the mantle and emblems of the medieval knights from the twelfth and thirteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

### **1. Establishment of a Shadow State**

Like its predecessor, La Familia, the Templarios sought to mask its criminal activities behind a veneer of social work and religious piety. However, unfortunately for their criminal rivals, federal security forces, and the citizens of Michoacán, the Templarios also proved itself just as brutal as La Familia. One of the first acts of violence the members of Templars committed in 2011 was to hang a man whom they had found guilty of kidnapping.<sup>68</sup> The cartel was initially welcomed by a people eager for swift

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<sup>64</sup> Tracy Wilkinson, “Leading Mexico Drug Gang Suspect Arrested,” *LA Times*, June 22, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/22/world/la-fg-mexico-familia-20110622>

<sup>65</sup> “Patterned after the Knights Templar, Drug Cartel Issues Code of Conduct,” *Fox News*, July 20, 2011, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2011/07/20/patterned-after-knights-templar-drug-cartel-issues-code-conduct/>

<sup>66</sup> “Ghost of ‘The Craziest One’ is Alive in Mexico,” *Insightcrime*, June 11, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/ghost-of-the-craziest-one-is-alive-in-mexico>

<sup>67</sup> Ioan Grillo, “Crusaders of Meth: Mexico’s Deadly Knights Templar,” accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.ioangrillo.com/mexico/narco2.php>

<sup>68</sup> “Knights Templar’ Present First Victim in Michoacán,” *Borderland Beat*, March 17, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/03/knights-templar-present-first-victim.html>

justice; this was an open challenge to the state's monopoly on violence. The people's already low confidence in established government institutions was eroded further by these and similar acts. Soon, everything from minor land disputes to domestic violence incidents were brought to the cartel for resolution.<sup>69</sup> The extent of the subversion of the criminal justice system became evident in the summer of 2014 when over 100 municipal police officers and other law enforcement officials were arrested for working for the cartel.<sup>70</sup>

The dispensation of justice was not the only way in which civil society was undermined; the Templarios (like the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas) also expanded its operations into areas not traditionally associated with drug trafficking.<sup>71</sup> As their political clout and influence increased within Michoacán the Templars increasingly expanded the scope of their operations to include extortion, illegal mining and logging, kidnapping, as well as numerous legitimate business ventures.<sup>72</sup>

## **2. Life under the Templarios**

La Familia and the Caballeros Templarios ruled Michoacán (as well as portions of the surrounding states) without a significant challenge for the better part of six years (2007-2013).<sup>73</sup> Capitalizing on popular support and pre-existing political connections established by La Familia, the Templarios further solidified its control of the state following the elections of 2012. By its own admission, the Templarios financed the political campaigns of numerous Michoacán politicians, including the eventual governor

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<sup>69</sup> Jo Tuckman, "Mexico Drug War Continues to Rage in Region Where President Fired First Salvo," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/30/mexico-drug-war-tierra-caliente-calderon>

<sup>70</sup> "Tenía 'La Tuta' a su servicio red de policías 'halcones': PGJ [La Tuta's Network of Police Hawks]," *Proceso*, August 24, 2012, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=380375>

<sup>71</sup> Dave Graham, "Chinese Iron Trade Fuels Port Clash with Mexican Drug Cartel," Reuters, January 1, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/01/us-mexico-drugs-port-idUSBREA000EG20140101>

<sup>72</sup> Michael Weissenstein, "Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel Rules Michoacán State 6 Years after Start of Drug War," *Huffington Post*, November 2, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/02/mexico-knights-templar\\_n\\_2063715.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/02/mexico-knights-templar_n_2063715.html)

<sup>73</sup> Gilian Horton, "Conflict in Michoacan: Vigilante Groups present Challenges and Opportunities for the Mexican Government," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/michoacan-conflict-mexico>



of the state, Fausto Vallejo Figueroa.<sup>74</sup> Vallejo was elected to the governorship of Michoacán as a member of the PRI and the Templarios brazenly directed that he and other politicians make good on prior agreements to support the cartel.<sup>75</sup>

Although the group had already enjoyed significant popular support under the banner of La Familia, the Templarios invested substantially more effort into advancing its pseudo-religious ideology. Statues and shrines devoted to the memory of Nazario Moreno Gonzalez established him as a new “narco-saint.”<sup>76</sup> The purpose of this was to not only to attract new recruits, but “to penetrate the social and popular consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> Efforts such as these appeared to work to some extent as popular support for the cartel increased. News reports during this period featured locals defending the cartels work. “Since the *caballeros* took over here, things have got much better,” a young female resident says. “I would rather this than what we had before.”<sup>78</sup>

The reign of the Templarios, while beneficial to its members and those who collaborated with them, had an overall negative impact on the average citizen. Despite statements to the contrary, kidnapping and extortion were becoming rampant under the Templars.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the number of violent crimes in the state rose dramatically.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the cartel’s brand of justice continued to be carried out in progressively gruesome ways. In one instance, the cartel crucified an alleged rapist, placing the body

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<sup>74</sup> “Caballeros Templarios Reveal Agreement with PRI Party,” Borderland Beat, December 2, 2012, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/12/caballeros-templarios-reveal-agreement.html>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Falko A. Ernst, “Seeking a Place in History—Nazario Moreno’s Narco Messiah,” Insightcrime, March 12, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/seeking-a-place-in-history-narazio-moreno-narco-messiah>

<sup>77</sup> Michael Lohmuller, “Rumors Fuel Legend of Narco-Saint,” Insightcrime, February 6, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/rumors-fuel-legend-of-narco-saint>

<sup>78</sup> Tuckman, “Mexico Drug War Continues to Rage.”

<sup>79</sup> Chivis Martinez, “Tuta Speaks, Emphasizes Z40 Must Be Killed,” Borderland Beat, August 22, 2012, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/08/new-video-tuta-speaks.html>

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of the Interior “Cifras de Incidencia Delictiva 1997–2014 [Crime Rate Statistics 1997–2014],” June 18, 2014, <http://www.secretariadodejecutivosnsp.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/09082013>.

along a busy highway.<sup>81</sup> By the start of 2013, the Caballeros Templarios effectively controlled the state of Michoacán through a concentrated campaign of coercion and fear.

## **G. FALL OF THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS**

As the Templarios consolidated power in Michoacán and the surrounding region they encountered limited institutional opposition to their rule. Having successfully undermined law enforcement throughout the state, the people were left with no one to bring their grievances to except the cartel.<sup>82</sup> It was in this environment that the beginnings of a counter movement took shape.

### **1. Emergence of a Counter Movement**

In May 2011, the small Indian village of Cheran in northern Michoacán successfully resisted efforts by the cartel to harvest timber illegally and extort the populace.<sup>83</sup> Over the next year, similar occurrences took place in other Indian villages with few inside or outside the state taking notice. Nothing indicated that these events were anything other than isolated incidents occurring in a few remote Indian villages. Sporadic cases of vigilantism had occurred throughout Mexico since the start of the current drug war, yet none had proven effective or inspired long-term movements.<sup>84</sup>

The first large-scale challenge to the Caballeros Templarios' dominance in the region occurred not in Michoacán but in the neighboring state of Guerrero. Located on the southern border of Michoacán, much of Guerrero was controlled by the Templarios. Like many of the southern states in Mexico with a large indigenous population, it had a long tradition of organizing volunteer police forces when necessary. Tolerated by the federal government, these "Policía Comunitaria" (community police) exercised limited

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<sup>81</sup> Elyssa Pachico, "Knights Templar Crucify Alleged Rapist," Insightcrime, September 11, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/knights-templar-crucify-alleged-rapist>

<sup>82</sup> Tuckman, "Mexico Drug War Continues to Rage."

<sup>83</sup> Elyssa Pachico, "Vigilantes Take Over Mexico Town," Insightcrime, May 10, 2011, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/vigilantes-take-over-mexico-town>

<sup>84</sup> George W. Grayson, *Threat Posed By Mounting Vigilantism in Mexico* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011).

jurisdiction and were less susceptible to external corruption.<sup>85</sup> Just as significantly, they enjoyed the full support of the localities they served, unlike their official government counterparts.<sup>86</sup>

When the Caballeros Templarios began to target the indigenous communities within Guerrero in 2012, the native people of the state fought back.<sup>87</sup> Former supporters of the cartel quickly changed their perception after kidnapping and extortion rates climbed, despite Templarios rhetoric to the contrary.<sup>88</sup> Unlike the earlier resistance in Cheran, the movement in Guerrero gained momentum with poorly armed groups organizing in numerous towns and villages.<sup>89</sup>

The year 2013 marked a turning point as it became clear that the vigilante movement in Guerrero was no longer restricted to indigenous towns and villages.<sup>90</sup> The *comunitarios* now numbered in the hundreds and were increasing in size and experience daily. As the comunitarios achieved greater and greater success, wealthy farmers and ranchers in Michoacán began to take notice of the events in their home state and Guerrero.<sup>91</sup> Rallying around a common desire to retake their communities and restore order, these initial “autodefensas” (self-defense groups) quickly went on the offensive.

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<sup>85</sup> International Crisis Group, “Justice at the Barrel of a Gun: Vigilante Militias in Mexico,” Update Briefing no. 29, May, 28 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/b029-justice-at-the-barrel-of-a-gun-vigilante-militias-in-mexico.aspx>

<sup>86</sup> Judith Matloff, “Portfolio: Mexico: Vigilante Justice,” *World Policy Journal* (spring 2014): 58–59, <http://www.worldpolicy.org/portfolio-mexico-vigilante-justice>

<sup>87</sup> Patricio Asfura-Heim and Ralph H. Espach, “The Rise of Mexico’s Self-Defense Forces,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 12, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139462/patricio-asfura-heim-and-ralph-h-espach/the-rise-of-mexicos-self-defense-forces>

<sup>88</sup> Leticia Pineda, “Mexican Vigilantes Seize Town from Drug Cartel,” *Tico Times*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2014/01/13/mexican-vigilantes-seize-town-from-drug-cartel>

<sup>89</sup> “Vigilante Groups Spring Up in Mexico in Fight Against Cartels,” *Fox News*, January 21, 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/01/21/vigilante-squads-spring-up-in-mexico-in-fight-against-cartels/>

<sup>90</sup> Ioan Grillo, “Mexico’s Vigilante Militias Rout the Knights Templar Drug Cartel,” *CTC Sentinel*, April 28, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/mexicos-vigilante-militias-rout-the-knights-templar-drug-cartel>

<sup>91</sup> Ioan Grillo, “The American Vigilante Versus the Mexican Cartel,” *Slate*, February 7, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/roads/2014/02/mexico\\_s\\_vigilantes\\_versus\\_the\\_knights\\_templar\\_inside\\_guerrero\\_state\\_s\\_bizarre.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2014/02/mexico_s_vigilantes_versus_the_knights_templar_inside_guerrero_state_s_bizarre.html)

Better armed, well organized, and funded with money from local businessmen, the Michoacán vigilantes enjoyed significant public support.<sup>92</sup> By May of 2013, the movement had grown to include numerous municipalities within Michoacán.<sup>93</sup> According to Grillo, “They gradually spread to neighboring towns and villages, establishing cells of vigilantes in each territory they entered.”<sup>94</sup> Most notably, these groups developed a tactic in which hundreds of individual vigilantes would swarm a cartel controlled town, quickly overwhelming their opponents.<sup>95</sup> In this way, the counter-movement adopted many of the same insurgent-like tactics the Templars used to seize control of the state.

The federal government in Mexico City initially condemned the actions of the vigilantes as illegal.<sup>96</sup> By November of 2013, however, the federal government realized the vigilantes had achieved considerable success in weakening the Templarios’ grip on Michoacán. Seizing the opportunity to defeat one of the most dangerous threats to federal and state sovereignty, President Pena-Nieto deployed military troops once again to Michoacán and seized the Lazaro Cardenas port.<sup>97</sup>

At the end of 2013, the leaders of the vigilante movement in Michoacán formed a loose confederation and began to articulate their collective grievances to the government.<sup>98</sup> Popular support for the vigilantes was at a high point, and the federal

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<sup>92</sup> Sanjuana Martínez, “Las batallas del doctor Mireles [The Battles of Doctor Mireles],” NEXOS, July 1, 2014, <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=21605>

<sup>93</sup> Dudley Althaus, “Can Vigilante Justice Save Mexico?” *Global Post*, February 3, 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/mexico/130201/mexico-vigilantes-law-justice-nieto-acapulco>

<sup>94</sup> Grillo, “Mexico’s Vigilante Militias Rout the Knights Templar Drug Cartel.”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “Mexico Legalizes Vigilantes, Nabs Cartel Leader,” AOL, January 24, 2014, <http://www.aol.com/article/2014/01/27/mexico-legalizes-vigilantes-nabs-cartel-leader/20817254/>

<sup>97</sup> José de Córdoba and Santiago Perez, “Mexico Takes over Crime-Besieged Port City,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304391204579178311928238246>

<sup>98</sup> Vato Martinez and Chivis Martinez, “Michoacán: A Fight to the Death...for Life,” *Borderland Beat*, November 16, 2013, [http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2013/11/michoacan-fight-to-deathfor-life\\_16.html](http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2013/11/michoacan-fight-to-deathfor-life_16.html)

government was forced to give limited recognition to the movement.<sup>99</sup> Although not officially sanctioned, the military made it known that the vigilantes would not be forcibly disbanded.

## **2. Vigilantes and the Government**

The year 2014 marked the beginning of the end for the Caballeros Templarios. The January arrest of Dionisio Loya Plancarte, one of the most senior members of the cartel, further disrupted the group's operations.<sup>100</sup> Working together, government security forces and vigilantes gradually defeated the Templarios in the largest municipalities. By the end of March, members of the Templarios inner council, including Enrique Plancarte Solís and Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, were dead. Soon, the only senior member still at large was Servando Gómez Martínez "La Tuta," the group's public spokesman.<sup>101</sup> Seeing little more need for the vigilantes, the government began to exert its authority and slowly dismantled the vigilantes. At first, the government proposed to incorporate the vigilantes into a newly formed rural defense force, but then reversed direction and began arresting the most prominent leaders of the vigilante movement.<sup>102</sup>

## **3. Aftermath**

While united in their hatred of the Templarios, the vigilantes and federal forces have a strained relationship. At this writing, La Tuta remains free and has allegedly formed a new criminal organization known as the Third Brotherhood (*La Tercera Hermanidad* (H3)).<sup>103</sup> This new group is thought to be composed of former members of

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<sup>99</sup> "Encuesta: Crece el apoyo de ciudadanos a las autodefensas, [Poll: Growing support to citizens self-defense]," January 29, 2014, [http://www.adnpolitico.com/ciudadanos/2014/01/29/encuesta-crece-el-apoyo-de-ciudadanos-a-las-autodefensas&usg=ALkJrhghLpfGCxC-QI0392r6YUPx\\_ZOWnQ](http://www.adnpolitico.com/ciudadanos/2014/01/29/encuesta-crece-el-apoyo-de-ciudadanos-a-las-autodefensas&usg=ALkJrhghLpfGCxC-QI0392r6YUPx_ZOWnQ)

<sup>100</sup> Reuters, "Dionisio Loya Plancarte, Knights Templar Drug Gang Boss Known As 'El Tio,' Arrested In Mexico," *The World Post*, January 27, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/27/dionisio-loya-plancarte-arrested\\_n\\_4675989.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/27/dionisio-loya-plancarte-arrested_n_4675989.html)

<sup>101</sup> Reed, "Mexico's Drug War: Substantial Changes Seen in Michoacán."

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Andrés Becerril, "Autodefensas dan origen a otro cártel; nace en Michoacán La Tercera Hermanidad o H3 [AUC gives rise to another cartel; The Third Brotherhood (H3) is born in Michoacán]," *Excelsior*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2014/05/06/957619>

the Caballeros Templarios, vigilantes, and assorted other criminal gangs.<sup>104</sup> The leadership of the vigilantes is fractured with several key individual having being arrested by the federal authorities, while others having accepted offers to be coopted into official rural defense forces. Despite their conflicts, however, these groups have completely displaced the Templarios as the single, de-facto authority in the region.

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<sup>104</sup> Oscar Lopez, "New Drug Cartel 'La Tercera Hermandad' Emerges in Troubled State," *Latin Times*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.latintimes.com/michoacan-news-new-drug-cartel-la-tercera-hermandad-emerges-troubled-state-171476>

### **III. THE NARRATIVE OF THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS**

Information operations allow cartels to gain an operational advantage by shaping the information environment in a manner that not only ensures survival but also expands their reach to every facet of Mexican life. Cartel influence is rooted in long-established images of benign bandits who rob from the rich and give a bit back to the poor. Today, this image lives on and it is enhanced by cartel propaganda and by the growing popularity of an entire genre of entertainment dedicated to cartel exploits. Combining this with a capability to demonstrate serious threats to their rivals and fulfill the material desires of supporters, Mexican cartels have a significant ability to influence behavior to their direct benefit.

Since its emergence in 2011, the Caballeros Templarios embraced propaganda and information operations as critical features of its operations to a degree well beyond that of its peers. Crafting a powerful narrative tailored to preconceived audience sensitivities, it was able to maintain a cohesive, flat, and highly resilient organization. This chapter will define the details of Caballeros Templarios' unique narrative. In particular, it will present the origin and content of the cartel's messages, and the broad strategic role they played in the Templarios evolution to a net-warlord within Michoacán.

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the terms “narrative” and “information operations” used will be used in the same manner in which the U.S. military employs them. Narrative is a story that provides a coherent framework for a group's actions. It explains “what has happened, what is happening, and why it has happened.”<sup>105</sup> Information operations are those techniques that allow an actor to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of an adversary.<sup>106</sup> In short, narrative is a tool that enables a group to define its identity

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<sup>105</sup> Department of the Army, *The Operations Process* (ARDP 5-0) (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-5, [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP\\_1.html](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/ADRP_1.html)

<sup>106</sup> Department of the Army, *Inform and Influence Activities* (FM 3-13) (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2013), 2-4, [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/Active\\_FM.html](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/Active_FM.html)

and objectives; information operations are those activities that focus on supporting the overall narrative.<sup>107</sup>

## **B. CARTEL INFORMATION OPERATIONS**

The ongoing Mexican drug war has seen not only unprecedented violence, but the employment and increasing importance of sophisticated information operations to shape the environment.<sup>108</sup> The conflict has evolved from one in which power and influence is measured solely by the ability to physically control plazas to one in which perceptions in the information environment are vital to victory. This fight for information dominance can be as fierce and technologically complex as the physical fight for territorial control. Likewise, the control of information has become just as important as production and delivery of product.<sup>109</sup>

Transnational criminal organizations, such as the Mexican cartels, are well suited to execute information operations. As entities that rely on multiple networks (social, familial, political and business) to achieve strategic and operational objectives, they have access to numerous conduits through which they can deliver messages and propagate perceptions. Cartels in general maintain robust information operations to support several goals. First, they seek to gain support of the populace through social outreach and public appeals. Second, they seek to gain new recruits and intimidate rivals through acts of violence and demonstrations of power. Finally, they seek to sustain and strengthen the bonds between cartel members. These goals will be discussed in more detail below.

### **1. Support**

Mexican cartels deliberately target audiences with images, messages, and activities that gain them freedom of action, as well as generate both passive and active support from the populace. These activities promote a two-faced, persona of the

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<sup>107</sup> David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, “What Next for Networks and Netwars?”, in *Networks and Netwars*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 328.

<sup>108</sup> John P. Sullivan, “Cartel Info Ops: Power and Counter-power in Mexico’s Drug War,” *MountainRunner* [Blog], November 15, 2010, [http://mountainrunner.us/2010/11/cartel\\_info\\_ops\\_power\\_and\\_counter-power\\_in\\_mexico\\_drug\\_war/](http://mountainrunner.us/2010/11/cartel_info_ops_power_and_counter-power_in_mexico_drug_war/)

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



respectable outlaw. As Terrence Poppa points out in his seminal work, *Drug Lord*, alongside acts of torture and murder, there is a tradition of bestowing gifts upon the poor going back to the earliest days of the drug trade.<sup>110</sup> According to this image, cartels adhere to a criminal code of honor: on one hand they support the unfortunate and downtrodden; on the other they do not hesitate to commit horrific acts of violence against their enemies.

The unique and pervasive Mexican cultural phenomenon known as “narcocultura” (drug culture) supports this image. This distinct set of popular media (cinema, music, literature, television) is in many cases directly funded and promoted by the cartels.<sup>111</sup> Credited with enabling modern cartel influence, *narcocultura* has existed as a powerful part of Mexican national identity for decades.<sup>112</sup> In fact, with the increased visibility of the cartels and subsequent sensationalized media attention, narcocultura has flourished, gaining widespread popularity in both Mexico and the United States.<sup>113</sup>

At its most extreme, narcocultura even promotes certain pseudo-religious practices. These include the veneration of Jesus Malverde<sup>114</sup>—a Robin Hood figure who protects outlaws and dangerous professions—and Santa Muerte (Saint Death)<sup>115</sup> — a grim reaper-like entity, who cares for the poor and downtrodden. Both of these religious concepts provide psychological and spiritual buffers for criminals and societies alike against the negative effects of committing or accommodating acts of violence. They also provide cartels conduits to influence both their members and the public to accept their activities.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Poppa, *Drug Lord*, 51.

<sup>111</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 188–190.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>113</sup> Guillermo Contreras, “Studying the Saints that Narcos Pray To,” December 15, 2010, [http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local\\_news/article/Studying-the-saintsthat-narcos-pray-to-885365.php](http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/Studying-the-saintsthat-narcos-pray-to-885365.php)

<sup>114</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 170.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 191–196.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

## **2. Recruitment and Intimidation**

Cartels also use information operations to recruit new members for their lower ranks, usually by appealing to basic desires for power and financial gain. This approach has a particular resonance with the large pool of impoverished and poorly educated youth in Mexico. Life in a cartel provides opportunities for material gain, respect, and power (through violence and fear). For potential recruits, this is an almost irresistible chance at rescue from lives of drudgery and frustration.<sup>117</sup>

## **3. Internal Cohesion**

Cartels actively seek to maintain and strengthen the links between the individuals and nodes of the organization. Appealing to a loyalty and self-preservation, they seek to tie members together in a way that resists the biggest threat to long-term group cohesion. This threat is the inherently self-interested and divisive influence of the larger narcocultura that supports cartel activity as a whole.<sup>118</sup> Leveraging narrative as described by Arquilla and Ronfeldt, Mexican cartels frequently use familial, geographic, or elitist themes to “...help keep people connected in a network whose looseness makes it difficult to prevent defection.”<sup>119</sup>

## **C. TEMPLARIOS NARRATIVE**

Militant Christian ideology was the core of the Caballeros Templarios narrative. Unlike branding efforts by other cartels (such as the Zetas), Templarios information operations did more than just instill fear or tactical discipline. The Templarios used complex, long-term, mutually-reinforcing, and wide-ranging means of communications to propagate a message focused on recruitment, bolstering popular support (active or passive), and justifying violence. Appealing to religious righteousness, they attracted hundreds of active recruits and public supporters, and maintained robust state-wide informal connections, as well as organizational cohesion. It also allowed members to

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<sup>117</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 166.

<sup>118</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 31–36.

<sup>119</sup> Ronfeldt and Arquilla, “What Next for Networks and Netwars?” 328.

rationalize violence and terror tactics against their victims. In line with the use of ideology in netwar, it used its group narrative, "...to confound people's fundamental beliefs about the nature of their culture, society, and government, partly to foment fear but perhaps mainly to disorient people and unhinge their perceptions,"<sup>120</sup> effectively reinforcing its image as the "shadow government" of the state of Michoacán.

Likewise, although not the first cartel to realize the importance of influence activities, the Templarios quickly became noted master practitioners.<sup>121</sup> The adoption of a powerful narrative, as well as sophisticated and extensive information operations made the Caballeros Templarios one of the most feared organizations in Mexico. In each of its incarnations, it was repeatedly named as the most dangerous cartel in the country.<sup>122</sup>

### **1. Identity and Mission**

The Templarios had a perception of themselves and their role in the world derived from a combination of mythologized histories of militant Catholic orders and modern evangelical ideas of personal mission.<sup>123</sup> In their propaganda, instead of a criminal union, they were "missionary warriors," or holy defenders of the state of Michoacán, focused on delivering "divine justice" to the enemies of the people.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the code of conduct of Los Caballeros Templarios explicitly states, "This struggle is for your people, my people, for ourselves and for our future generations."<sup>125</sup>

The Templarios founders developed the doctrine's basis while the cartel was still known as La Familia Michoacán. La Familia's declaration of identity (a precursor to the

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<sup>120</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 14.

<sup>121</sup> Humberto Padgett, "En La Mente De Los Caballeros Templarios [In the Mind of the Caballeros Templarios]," August 1, 2013, <http://www.sinembargo.mx/01-08-2013/705989>

<sup>122</sup> "Caballeros Templarios ya son el tercer mayor cártel de México [The Knights Templar are the Third Most Powerful Cartel in Mexico]," July 31, 2013, <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2013/07/caballeros-templarios-ya-son-el-tercer-mayor-cartel-de-mexico/#axzz2b7NbcgYk>; George W. Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2010). 3.

<sup>123</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner's Men*, 212–213.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>125</sup> Tribal Analysis Center, "Mexico's Knights Templar and Code of Conduct Implications," Tribal Analysis Center, November 2013, <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/Research-Completed.html>

Templar's Code of Conduct), "The Principles of the Family,"<sup>126</sup> was influenced heavily by the Christian evangelical author John Eldredge. This document was a detailed description of objectives and what the group represented.<sup>127</sup> The "sole motive" of the group, the catechism states, is to protect the state and people that they love, while ensuring that universal values are adhered to.<sup>128</sup> The document concludes with an appeal to the patriotism and honor of the men of Michoacán to support and join the group in order to "fight the maladies that afflict the state."<sup>129</sup>

The Templarios self-image as modern day crusaders against a corrupt government, vice, and rival cartel violence is further delineated in the "Codijo De Los Caballeros Templarios" (Code of the Knights Templar).<sup>130</sup> This code is widely disseminated among the Michoacán population and specifically describes cartel members as holy warriors, outlining their duties to the organization and each other.<sup>131</sup> This doctrine is further reinforced by images of an order of knights and is spread throughout Michoacán via every means possible: graffiti, social media, call in radio shows, full page newspaper advertisements. The group went so far as to conduct ceremonies with emblems of medieval knights from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These ceremonies included including armor, swords, and white cloaks emblazoned with crimson crosses, evoking a connection to the historic Knights Templar.<sup>132</sup>

The group was also able to capitalize on a messianic theme stemming from the story of the miraculous survival of the La Familia / Templarios founding father and

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<sup>126</sup> Grayson and Logan, *The Executioner's Men*, 212.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>130</sup> Associated Press, "Publican los Caballeros Templarios código de conducta [The Code of Conduct of the Caballeros Templarios]," *Cronica*, February 11, 2013, <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2011/593279.html>

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Grillo, "Crusaders of Meth."

spiritual guru, Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, from assassination. This story was enhanced by deliberate resurrection rumors by the overt leaders of the group.<sup>133</sup>

#### **D. THE IDEOLOGICAL EFFECT ON TEMPLARIOS OPERATIONS**

One of the key characteristics of any ideology, or strong group identity for that matter, is the ability to provide members a clear definition of the world.<sup>134</sup> A strong and appealing narrative offers answers to life's uncertainties, replacing confusion with confidence, and anxiety with clarity of purpose.<sup>135</sup> Newly acquired certainty also frequently inspires belief in the inherent wrongness of anyone not accepting the same ideas.<sup>136</sup> In worst case scenarios, anyone who does not agree is viewed as fundamentally "evil," categorized as a faceless entity, and undeserving of sympathy.<sup>137</sup> Unbelievers, societies, and institutions become valid targets for domination by those considering themselves truly deserving.<sup>138</sup>

Because of its ideology, the Templarios were far more willing to commit violence against individuals not normally considered appropriate cartel targets.<sup>139</sup> In this case, members of the Caballeros Templarios, with their self-appointed mission to protect and guide the people of Michoacán, provided an ideology that allowed members to inflict violence and dominate sinners, rivals, and any one they saw fit without remorse.

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<sup>133</sup> Joshua Partlow and Gabriela Martinez, "Mexican Authorities Think Knights Templar Cartel Leader Nazario Moreno Has Been Killed," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Rhys H. Williams, "Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35, no. 4 (1996): 375–376.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Sosis and Candace S. Alcorta, "Militants and Martyrs: Evolutionary Perspectives on Religion and Terrorism," in *Natural Security: A Darwinian Approach to a Dangerous World*, ed. Raphael D. Sagarin and Terence Taylor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 116–117.

<sup>136</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, "Does Religion Cause Terrorism?" National Policy Forum on Terrorism, Security and America's Purpose," September 2005, [www.juergensmeyer.com/files/Does%20Relig%20Cause%20Terr.doc](http://www.juergensmeyer.com/files/Does%20Relig%20Cause%20Terr.doc)

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–7.

<sup>139</sup> Joshua Partlow, "Mexican Bishop Takes on Cultish Cartel in Drug War Battleground State," *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/mexican-bishop-takes-on-cultish-cartel-in-drug-war-battleground-state/2013/12/01/62eea6d4-508f-11e3-9ee6-2580086d8254\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexican-bishop-takes-on-cultish-cartel-in-drug-war-battleground-state/2013/12/01/62eea6d4-508f-11e3-9ee6-2580086d8254_story.html)

Besides having a sense of higher purpose, individual Templarios were equally influenced by the hyper-violent and self-promotional narcocultura. In the end, the Templarios were a cartel full of members motivated as much by desires for wealth and infamy as a sense of righteous entitlement. The Templarios narrative layered on top of pervasive, aggressive narcocultura created the perfect combination for self-interested, ambitious warlords.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The Templarios' strategic narrative, manifested in their ideology, was a key component in their ability to execute operations. Through a detailed doctrine and a sophisticated recruitment and indoctrination process, it standardized group norms to maintain discipline and gain passive and active support from the populace in its areas of operation.<sup>140</sup> Leveraging a variety of tactics and strategies, including extensive propaganda and public relations, it de-sensitized the people of Michoacán to the cartel's illicit activities, ensuring certain behaviors and attitudes that enhanced the cartel's ability to dominate the region. The polished Templarios narrative enabled it to sustain and expand their operations even in the face of aggressive Mexican and United States government counter-narcotic actions.

At their inception as a comparatively small and regionally limited gang, Templarios founders faced the daunting prospect of facing larger, better-armed, and better-established rival cartels. Perhaps initially intended as a survival tactic, the Templarios narrative had an enormous effect on the group's overall end goal, changing it from local underworld dominance to total regional control—from a criminal kingpin to a warlord.

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<sup>140</sup> Patrick Corcoran, "Knights Templar Test Narco-Insurgency Theory," Insightcrime, October 13, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/are-the-knights-templar-the-vanguard-of-a-narco-insurgency-in-mexico?highlight=WzQ3NzJd>

## IV. CARTEL ORGANIZATION

This chapter describes the organizational design methods used to analyze the Caballeros Templarios. This provides basic background knowledge of the selected analysis methods. In addition, to provide context for comparison, the methods are applied to typical Mexican drug cartel structure. This serves to highlight the differences imparted by the Templarios use of narrative examined in Chapter III.

Accurately describing the organizational makeup and operations of cartels requires the use of several complementary organizational design concepts. First and most fundamental of these is Jay Galbraith's star model framework. Using this method as the foundation of analysis allows the basic cartel elements to be discussed individually. This simplifies understanding of the groups' overall behavior. The second design concept is Henry Mintzberg's organizational model. This addresses details of cartel structure and describes the basic functionality of cartels at a macro level. Specifically, Mintzberg's model highlights the purpose for their particular internal connective methods. Finally, to emphasize both the strength and vulnerabilities of cartel structure, William Evans network models is used.<sup>141</sup> This method is applied as interpreted in the netwar work of Arquilla and Ronfeldt, allowing clear visualization of how cartels organize to react to their environment. It will also set the basis for addressing the organizational differences of the Templarios.

### A. ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Mexican drug cartels in general operate in an environment that is dynamic, dangerous, but conceptually simple.<sup>142</sup> It is "simple" because of the limited number products and core activities involved (e.g., narcotics, extortion) and the relatively few key individuals truly involved in managing activity. Ultimately, the cartels' primary goal is the generation of profit as quickly and efficiently as possible.<sup>143</sup> Accordingly, they

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<sup>141</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 7–9.

<sup>142</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 6–14.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

largely limit themselves to areas that generate the most return with the least amount of investment.<sup>144</sup> Uncomplicated strategies, simple structures, straightforward processes, low-skilled personnel, and rewards targeting basic human desires are the foundations of the Mexican criminal cartels.<sup>145</sup>

As simplistic as basic operating principles in this environment may be, competition for the incredible potential profit in this environment is intense and often deadly. Cartels must defend themselves from brutal attacks by fellow criminals and strong pressures by both Mexican and U.S. authorities to limit their activities. They must also constantly guard against internal dissent.<sup>146</sup> Because of this, cartels have evolved methods of organization that allow them to quickly respond to threats and environmental changes, while maintaining tight control on the direction and activities of subordinates.

## **B. CARTEL ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS**

Cartels, despite their myriad connections to people and institutions at every level of Mexican society, are by themselves defined by only a few critical components. These components are best depicted and defined by Jay Galbraith's star model framework, depicted in Figure 2, and they are: strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people.<sup>147</sup> It is these core elements that determine how cartels structure themselves, and ultimately how they choose to pursue their profits.

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<sup>144</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 25.

<sup>145</sup> Veronica Maria Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso, 2006), 7–8.

<sup>146</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 27.

<sup>147</sup> Kates and Galbraith, *Designing Your Organization*, 3.



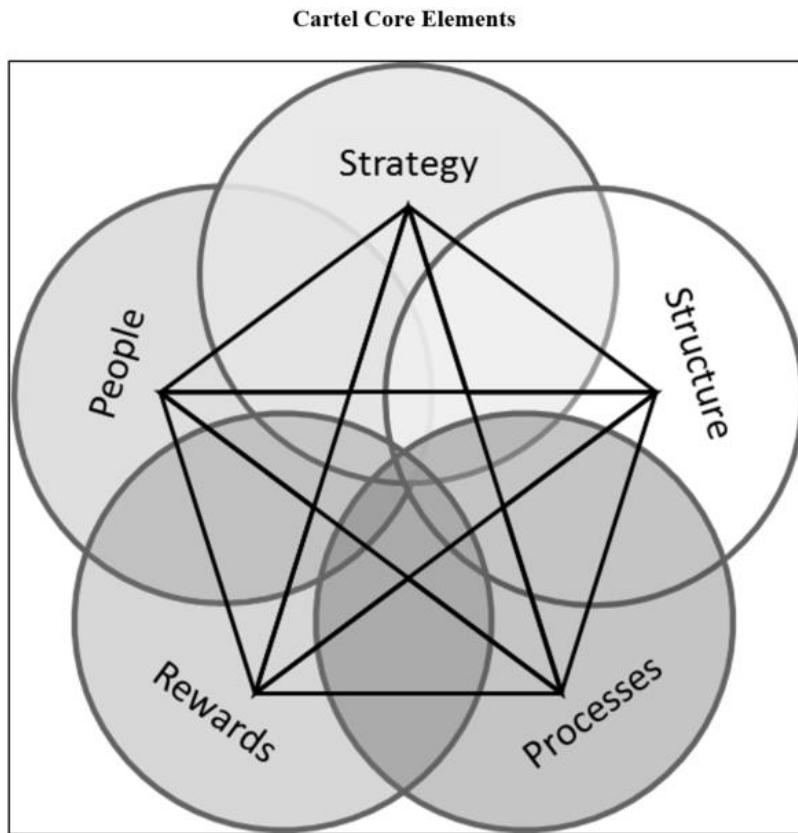


Figure 2. Galbraith star model showing the core elements of Mexican cartels<sup>148</sup>

### 1. Strategy

The ultimate cartel end goal is profit.<sup>149</sup> With this in mind, overall strategy takes the form of the straightforward application of money or intimidation. Cartels seek to extract as much profit as possible from high-return enterprises, with as little investment in time or resources as possible. By and large, they can be content to be left alone to pursue this profit and do not move very far outside of their illicit areas of interest. Even brutality and blatant bribery is intended to prevent interference in their activities. Despite this desire for basic freedom from interference, the sheer scale of profit in contention requires cartels to be willing take strong measures to deter rivals and attackers. As a result, cartel

<sup>148</sup> Kates and Galbraith, *Designing Your Organization*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 8–10.

strategy is best summed up by the traditional offer of “plata o plomo” (silver or lead); the choice between extreme violence and irresistible coercion.

## **2. Structure**

In their highly dangerous environment, cartels must resist attacks by fellow criminals as well as strong pressure from both Mexican and U.S. authorities aimed at limiting their activities. They must also constantly guard against internal dissent driven by individual desires for the very profits they organize to pursue.<sup>150</sup> Because of this, cartels have evolved methods of organization that allow them to quickly respond to threats and a variety of environmental changes, while maintaining tight control on the direction and activities of subordinates.<sup>151</sup>

### ***a. Mintzberg Formal Structure***

The method of modeling developed by Henry Mintzberg provides the clearest visualization of the formal superior-subordinate and intra-cellular connections of the cartels. At a macro level, Mexican cartels in general have evolved into what Mintzberg describes as a personalized-divisional form.<sup>152</sup> This form is a hybrid of two primary forms, the simple and the divisional, and imparts the strengths and weaknesses of each.

As defined by Mintzberg, a simple organization is one in which the key element is the strategic head.<sup>153</sup> For cartels, this is a group’s overall boss, who personally manages the activities of subordinate cells (plazas). A boss does this either directly or through a select few trusted lieutenants.<sup>154</sup> A divisional structure is one in which each subordinate cell, or division in an overarching organization operates independent of any other, and outputs are standardized. In typical cartels, this means that individual plazas are solely responsible for any cartel business in their defined territory. Inter-plaza support is

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<sup>150</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 27.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>152</sup> Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 399.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 305–313.

<sup>154</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt “The Advent of Netwar (Revisited),” 7–8.

generally limited to receiving or handing-off products to the next plaza in a larger chain of transport.

As depicted in Figure 3, the personalized-division basic combines simple and divisional characteristics.<sup>155</sup> In this hybrid structure, a series of compartmentalized, centralized, leadership-dependent sub-elements are managed by another centralized, leadership-dependent organization.<sup>156</sup> This results in an overarching structure that, while vulnerable to the targeting of key leaders and limited in the capacity and effective span of control, is also very tightly controlled, flexible, resilient,<sup>157</sup> and well-suited to criminal operations.<sup>158</sup>

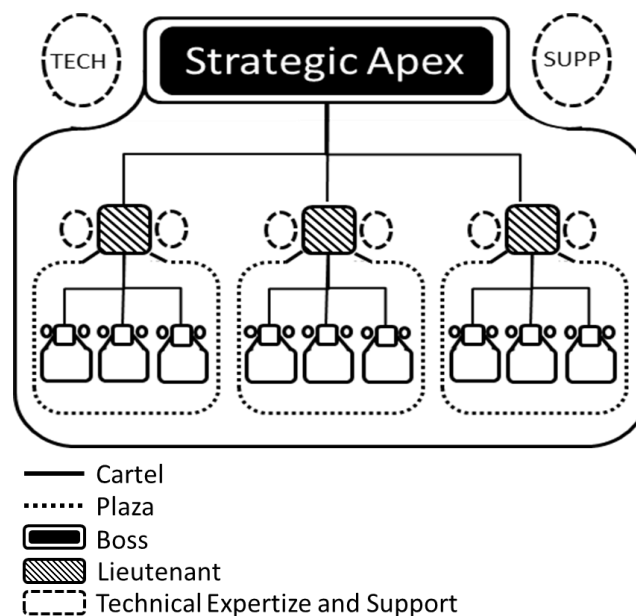


Figure 3. Henry Mintzberg's method personalized-divisional structure, showing internal cartel formal connections

<sup>155</sup> Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 381–383, 399.

<sup>156</sup> Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels*, 18, 20–21; Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 306, 399.

<sup>157</sup> Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 306–307.

<sup>158</sup> Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels*, 31.

*a. Evan Interconnectivity*

William Evan's modeling methods, as adapted by Arquilla and Ronfeldt,<sup>159</sup> enable Mintzberg-style models to be interpreted in a manner that shows both cartel strengths and limitations. As illustrated in Figure 4, the previously described personalized-divisional form, when arranged according to Evan's methods, can be depicted as a hub or star network.<sup>160</sup> The cartel boss (strategic head) forms the center of the array, and each of the subordinate plazas (divisions) radiates outward, independent of one another.

The hub form is highly resilient and capable of reacting very quickly to threats. The compartmentalized nature of the overall organizations makes cartels very difficult to completely defeat. A central leader is removed from likely contact with hostile forces behind layers of subordinates, making them difficult to locate and affect. In addition, centralized communication limits the individual knowledge of the periphery, ensuring an attacker cannot seriously damage the entire organization by damaging one single spoke.

This form also limits the potential reach of cartels, restricting them to certain areas of interest. This is due to an inherent limitation on the span of personal control of the central leadership. With the danger of internal dissent, a cartel traditionally retains as much power in the hands of as few key individuals as possible. Cartel leadership must have as much input into a subordinates activities as possible. This restricts the diversity and complexity of the cartels interests for the most part. As a result, cartels remain focused on a few core processes.

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<sup>159</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 7–10.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 7.

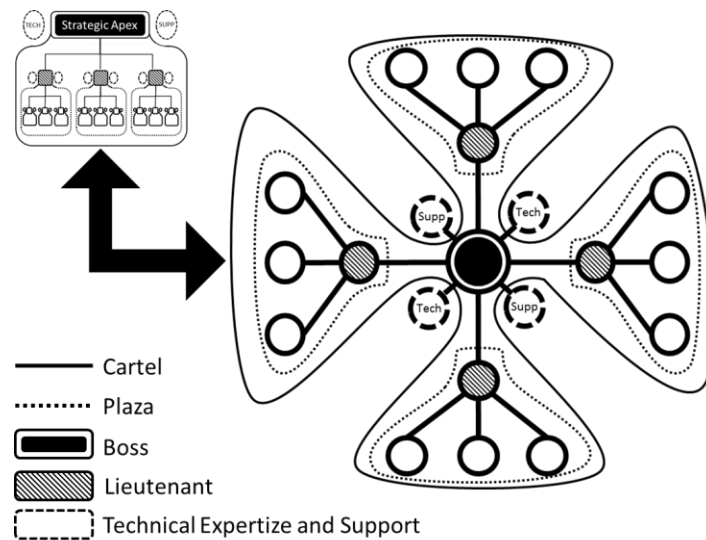


Figure 4. Mintzberg simple structure<sup>161</sup> represented as an Evan hub network,<sup>162</sup> showing both intra-cartel management and inter-plaza relationships

### 3. Processes

Mexican cartels rely on only a few core operational processes to extract profit and promote influence. These are: extortion, corruption, and propaganda (especially narcocultura).<sup>163</sup> Limiting themselves to these few area of interest allows Mexican cartels to operate without seriously interfering with day-to-day Mexican life.<sup>164</sup> Even the most direct means of communication is done in a way to keep cartels from becoming a focus of popular concern to the point that they are unable to pursue their profits.

Extortion although common, usually takes the form of demanding payment in exchange for not damaging people or property.<sup>165</sup> A large percentage of Mexican business and industry pays to keep cartels from harming individuals or operations, but it rarely exceeds what they can effectively afford. Like extortion, corruption by the cartels

<sup>161</sup> Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 307.

<sup>162</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 8–9.

<sup>163</sup> Yagoub, "Mexico Violent Cities List Reflects Chaotic Criminal Landscape."

<sup>164</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 139.

<sup>165</sup> Robert J. Bunker, *Narcos over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 19.

is widespread in Mexico.<sup>166</sup> However, like the use of violence, corruption primarily ensures protection from law enforcement and maintains a cartel's ability to operate unhindered.<sup>167</sup> Propaganda, most often in the form of narcocultura (clothes, songs, movies, and other media), does serve to build the attraction for cartel activities, but it is not normally to inspire active support or fear. Instead, it primarily functions as a way of psychologically buffering both cartel members and society.<sup>168</sup>

#### **4. People**

Cartels recruit from the large Mexican population of deprived and desperate individuals with limited skills.<sup>169</sup> Although, specialists and experts in particular areas do exist, they are not generally solidly aligned members of any one particular group.<sup>170</sup> This being the case, as a result of their impoverished, lower-class backgrounds the majority of true cartel members possess limited opportunities for alternative means of economic advancement.

Cartel work offers a chance at upward social mobility in return for a willingness to commit crime.<sup>171</sup> This offer appeals to prospective members who are willing to do whatever is required to attain the rewards offered.<sup>172</sup> As a result, cartel ranks are filled with individuals pre-disposed to violent and self-interested behavior. These recruits can easily become a threat to fellow members. In this situation, cartel personnel are simultaneously motivated to work with organizations for immense material gain, but are also highly likely to turn on those same organizations if there is a chance at greater reward for doing so. This makes managing and rewarding these personnel a central concern.

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<sup>166</sup> Robert J. Bunker, "Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 5: Border Corruption of U.S. Officials by the Mexican Cartels & Cases Shown." in *Mexican Cartel Essays and Notes: Strategic, Operational, and Tactical*, ed. Robert J. Bunker, (Bloomington: iUniverse Inc., 2013). Kindle Edition. loc: 3248–3263.

<sup>167</sup> Poppa, *Drug Lord*, 42–43.

<sup>168</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 142–143, 164–165.

<sup>170</sup> Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels*, 28.

<sup>171</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 166.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 167.

## 5. Rewards

Similar to the structural element, rewards seek to ensure strict loyalty and obedience but limit overall cartel control.<sup>173</sup> Cartel rewards are of two general types, positive and negative, which can contradict each other. Positive incentives can inspire greed and dissent, while negative incentives can breed resentment and revenge.

Traditional cartels positively motivate members and supporters via the prospect of material gain, reputation, and power.<sup>174</sup> They offer more opportunities for personal gain than other cartels in return for good work and loyalty. Negative motivation takes the form of serious threats to life and limb, with punishment meted out in brutal ways.<sup>175</sup>

This dichotomy of temptation and threat serves as a powerful incentive to cooperate with cartel activities in general. It also creates the temptation to make violent grabs for power or to change loyalties in return for bigger rewards.<sup>176</sup> As a result of their need to inspire action that can create an internal threat, cartels are forced to consistently monitor the changes in internal behavior, severely curtailing the attention they can pay to diversifying their interests.

## C. CONCLUSION

Using a combination of the Galbraith star framework, Mintzberg structural method, and Evan models, it is possible to break Mexican cartels down into an easily understood set of components. With these methods, cartels are shown to be simple entities, which use basic techniques to gain profit and maintain organizational cohesion. At the same time, it is easy to see them as an inherently limited organization. Despite their massive funds, extensive reach, and willingness to use violence, they remain for the most part constrained to certain illicit activities.

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<sup>173</sup> Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels*, 22–26,

<sup>174</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 166.

<sup>175</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 27.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–28.

As will be shown in Chapter V, the Templarios broke the traditional mold of a highly centralized, yet limited criminal group. Aided by a narrative that connected and inspired members, the group transitioned to a more ambitious strategy. Freed from the constraints imposed by limited communications, self-interested personnel, and need for constant internal monitoring, moving quickly to control areas of society far beyond the current capabilities of other cartels.



## **V. ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS OF LOS CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS**

Despite existing in a dynamic and dangerous environment, the organization of a drug cartel is defined by a few core elements. As stated in previous chapters, the organization of the Caballeros Templarios appeared in many ways similar to other cartels.<sup>177</sup> However, its distinct narrative affected the cartel's organization in a manner that fundamentally changed both the group's long-term goals and its external interactions. In this chapter, we use the Galbraith star model, introduced in Chapter IV, to examine the Caballeros Templarios' core organizational elements and the effect narrative has on each one. In doing, so we highlight the manner in which narrative and the core elements contributed to the group's success and subsequent warlord status.

### **A. NET-WARLORD STRATEGY**

As a drug cartel, the Caballeros Templarios end state was profit. As a result, the overall Templarios strategy became centered on the accumulation of power. Power would let it extract as much profit as possible from every available source: political, economic, and criminal.

To these ends, the cartel expended a high degree of effort on co-opting and influencing both key government and business personnel and the general public as well. Instead of staying solely in methamphetamine production or drug trafficking, the Templarios extended its reach to include dictating agricultural production, iron ore sales to foreign governments, and the campaigns of local politicians.<sup>178</sup> These activities,

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<sup>177</sup> Tomas Borges, "Cómo operan los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán [How to operate the Knights Templar of Michoacán]," Los Angeles Press, September 26, 2013, <http://www.losangelespress.org/como-operan-los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan/>

<sup>178</sup> José Gil Olmos, "From Michoacán to Guerrero, the Narco State," Borderland Beat, October 23, 2014, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2014/10/from-michoacan-to-guerrero-narco-state.html>

combined with its aggressive information operations,<sup>179</sup> expanded and “normalized” Templarios influence over the state.<sup>180</sup>

## **B. STRUCTURE**

Structurally, the predecessors of the Caballeros Templarios were similar to other cartels, possessing a leadership core that managed subordinate plaza cells through direct formalized links. Inadvertently though, the Templarios’ adoption of an ideological narrative imparted key differences in its structure. With a strong informal sense of identity and purpose that connected individual members, the Templarios were able to augment its formalized links, developing an all-channel “bucky-ball” form.<sup>181</sup> As a result of taking on this structural form, the character and makeup of key leadership was affected and changed. Rather than concentrating group control among a few key individuals,<sup>182</sup> the Templarios divided leadership among several individuals, both publically known and deliberately concealed.<sup>183</sup> This created a more flexible and resilient organization, capable of managing increasingly diverse enterprises.

## **C. PROCESSES**

The Caballeros Templarios share the core processes of extortion, corruption and propaganda with other cartels.<sup>184</sup> This concentration on a few, uncomplicated methods for producing profit allows Mexican cartels to exist, for the most part, as a kind of distasteful, yet tolerable evil.<sup>185</sup> The Templarios, however, in line with its warlord strategy and narrative pursued extortion and corruption to a degree not seen in any other group. Moving beyond mere intimidation and low level bribery, it went as far as dictating

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<sup>179</sup> H. Nelson Goodson, “La Tuta Sends Several Videos to News Source in Order to Expose Two Corrupted News Collaborators,” *Hispanic News Network USA Blog*, September 22, 2014, <http://hispanicnewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2014/09/la-tuta-exposed-several-news.html>

<sup>180</sup> Grillo, “Crusaders of Meth.”

<sup>181</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt “The Advent of Netwar (Revisited),” 9.

<sup>182</sup> Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*, 306.

<sup>183</sup> Grayson, *The Cartels*, 24–27.

<sup>184</sup> Yagoub, “Mexico Violent Cities List Reflects Chaotic Criminal Landscape.”

<sup>185</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 139.

critical aspects of businesses and politics to generate maximum profit for the cartel.<sup>186</sup> This effectively turned regional government and industries into components of the Templarios cartel, directly affecting the lives of thousands of ordinary citizens and even the national economy.<sup>187</sup>

Extortion, though common throughout Mexico, usually takes place at a relatively low level with criminals demanding payment from individual citizens in exchange for not harming people or property.<sup>188</sup> In Michoacán, the Templarios used extortion to dictate the very output of local industries.<sup>189</sup> This is of particular interest in Michoacán due to the fact that the state is home to some of the most productive mining, agriculture, and shipping industries in the country.<sup>190</sup> Instead of demanding simple monetary payoffs alone, the Templarios also directed production rates, delivery schedules,<sup>191</sup> and which customer base with which to engage.<sup>192</sup> This change to the cartel's core process significantly contributed to the Templarios subsequent downfall.

Like extortion, corruption of government officials by the cartels is not uncommon in Mexico.<sup>193</sup> For the most part, this corruption is to ensure protection from law enforcement and the ability to operate unhindered.<sup>194</sup> The use of corruption by the Templarios was much more ambitious.<sup>195</sup> In much the same way, that the cartel sought to control the industrial sector of Michoacán, the Templarios also sought control of social

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<sup>186</sup> Christopher Looft, "Knights Templar Raise Stakes, Target Big Business," InSight Crime, May 29 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/2692-knights-templar-raise-stakes-extort-big-business?highlight=WYJ0ZW1wbGFyaW9zIiwidGVtcGxhcmlvcyciXQ==>

<sup>187</sup> Graham, "Chinese Iron Trade Fuels Port Clash with Mexican Drug Cartel."

<sup>188</sup> Bunker, *Narcos over the Border*, 19.

<sup>189</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

<sup>190</sup> Graham, "Chinese Iron Trade Fuels Port Clash with Mexican Drug Cartel."

<sup>191</sup> Arturo Cano, "Hipólito Mora conoció a El Abuelo por medio mío, asegura El Kiro," *La Jornada*, February 13, 2014, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/02/13/politica/005n1pol>

<sup>192</sup> Paulina Villegas, "Mexico Targets Gang That Infiltrated the Mining Industry," *New York Times*, March 5, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/americas/mexico-targets-gang-that-infiltrated-the-mining-industry.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/americas/mexico-targets-gang-that-infiltrated-the-mining-industry.html?_r=0)

<sup>193</sup> Bunker, "Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 5," loc: 3248–3263.

<sup>194</sup> Poppa, *Drug Lord*, 42–43.

<sup>195</sup> Hernandez, "Who Really Governs Michoacán and How They Do It."

and political institutions.<sup>196</sup> In this way, it obtained not only freedom of maneuver, but the ability to directly control the lives of Michoacán citizens.<sup>197</sup> Instead of paying the government off, it co-opted and slowly supplanted government authority. By sponsoring loyal candidates for elected office, ensuring the removal of opponents, and ensuring passage of favorable policy, the Templarios tightened control over people and business, and further subordinated every function of the region to the will of the cartel.<sup>198</sup>

In line with its ideological narrative and the systematic corruption it sponsored, the Templarios showed an extreme interest in internal and external community support.<sup>199</sup> This push largely took the form of providing services unavailable from the government or other legal institutions in the very rural region.<sup>200</sup> It sponsored the development of numerous drug rehabilitation and religious study programs<sup>201</sup> and regularly assisted disadvantaged people, all in line with its doctrine of promoting aggressive evangelical Christianity.<sup>202</sup> These community activities served two important practical purposes. The first was as sources of highly impressionable recruits for the Templarios cause in the form of recovering addicts and social outcasts.<sup>203</sup> The second was to build public support and acceptance for its activities.<sup>204</sup> The community outreach of the Templarios garnered the cartel acceptance and support in Michoacán<sup>205</sup> making its presence overt and acceptable. This encouraged citizens to view Templarios criminality as the exception to a pattern of overall benign behavior.

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<sup>196</sup> Olmos, "From Michoacán to Guerrero, the Narco State."

<sup>197</sup> George W. Grayson, "Mexico Today and the Fight against Vicious Drug Cartels," Mexidata.info, May 3, 2010. <http://mexidata.info/index.html>

<sup>198</sup> Hernandez, "Who Really Governs Michoacán and How They Do It."

<sup>199</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

<sup>200</sup> Tuckman, "Mexico Drug War Continues to Rage."

<sup>201</sup> Hernandez, "Who Really Governs Michoacán and How They Do It."

<sup>202</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 206.

<sup>203</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

<sup>204</sup> John P. Sullivan, "Criminal Insurgency: Narcocultura, Social Banditry, and Information Operations," *Small Wars Journal*, December 3, 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/criminal-insurgency-narcocultura-social-banditry-and-information-operations>

<sup>205</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 44.

## D. REWARDS

The Templarios, by transitioning into the more complex and pressure-filled environment of state control, faced additional challenges to their organization.<sup>206</sup> In response, they promoted the idea that their members served a higher purpose. The Caballeros Templarios supplemented typical cartel material rewards with ones specifically designed to improve the personal, spiritual, and social status of its members. By emphasizing its central role in the physical, moral, and spiritual security of Michoacán, the Templarios added a powerful sense of personal fulfillment to the rewards available to the group's "Holy Warriors."<sup>207</sup>

As a result of this "holy mission," the cartel expanded into atypical areas of focus. Templarios doctrine characterized members as virtuous soldiers earning divine favor by conducting cartel business and protecting Michoacán society.<sup>208</sup> In members' minds, these ideas entitled them to respect and absolute obedience. As a result of supposed removal of negative outside influences (drugs, other criminal groups, and unpopular government elements),<sup>209</sup> Templarios earned a reputation as Robin-Hood-like defenders of the people.<sup>210</sup>

The Templarios narrative layered on top of a pervasive, aggressive narcocultura created the perfect combination to inspire self-interested, ambitious warlords.<sup>211</sup> In the end, it was also a cartel full of members motivated equally by both the temptation of wealth and infamy and a sense of righteous entitlement.<sup>212</sup> This inevitably, led Templarios members to see themselves as the only true authority in the state of Michoacán.

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<sup>206</sup> Grayson, *The Cartels*, 79.

<sup>207</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

<sup>208</sup> Patrick Corcoran, "Revelations of Mexico's Knights Templar Indoctrination Manual," InSight Crime, December 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/5023-revelations-of-mexicos-knights-templar-indoctrination-manual?highlight=WyJpbmRvY3RyaW5hdGlvbiJd>

<sup>209</sup> Grayson, *The Cartels*, 215.

<sup>210</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 199.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>212</sup> "Los Templarios desafían al gobierno: regresaremos y con más fuerza." *Proceso*, September 10, 2014 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=380375>

## **E. PEOPLE**

Crafting a nativist message that appealed to the fiercely independent peoples of Michoacán and the surrounding regions, the Templarios recognized the importance of this core element to the success of its organization.<sup>213</sup> The Templarios expanded its range of recruitment to a population normally overlooked by others. It specifically sought out individuals suffering from substance addiction and who wanted to improve their lives and who were eager for acceptance in a community.<sup>214</sup> This provided the Templarios with the ability to both vet and indoctrinate potential members from the very start, inculcating them with a sense of obligation, loyalty, obedience, and a desire to carry out orders no matter what the effects or consequences.<sup>215</sup> It also gained it access to a group particularly sensitive to the ideas of divinely inspired mission and open to the notion of expanding influence beyond mere criminal pursuits.

In addition to the recruitment of disenfranchised youth and drug addicts, the cartel also had the advantage of recruiting from a population that was susceptible to the ideas promulgated by the Templarios. The state of Michoacán has long been known as a birthplace to revolutionaries. The design of the Templarios ideology and code of conduct reflected this spirit and resonated with the Michoacán population.

## **F. LOS CABALLERO TEMPLARIOS: NETWARLORDS**

As depicted in Figure 5, the Templarios transitioned from the relatively simple cartel hub model to an intricate web-like structure.<sup>216</sup> In this organization, normal formalized command and control relationships were supplemented by informal and ideological connections created by the Templarios' narrative. This key addition made it into a version of the all-channel network described in netwar theory. The result was a significant change to both its behavior and capabilities. As an all-channel network- bound

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<sup>213</sup> Eduardo Stanley, "Michoacán, Drugs, Guns, Traditions and God," *Voxxi News*, February 15, 2014, <http://voxxi.com/2014/02/15/michoacan-drugs-guns-traditions-god/>

<sup>214</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Alvarez, *The History, Structure, and Organization of Mexican Drug Cartels*, 20.

together by a common sense of identity, the cartel was able to control increasingly varied and complex operations, including the administration of entire population centers.<sup>217</sup>

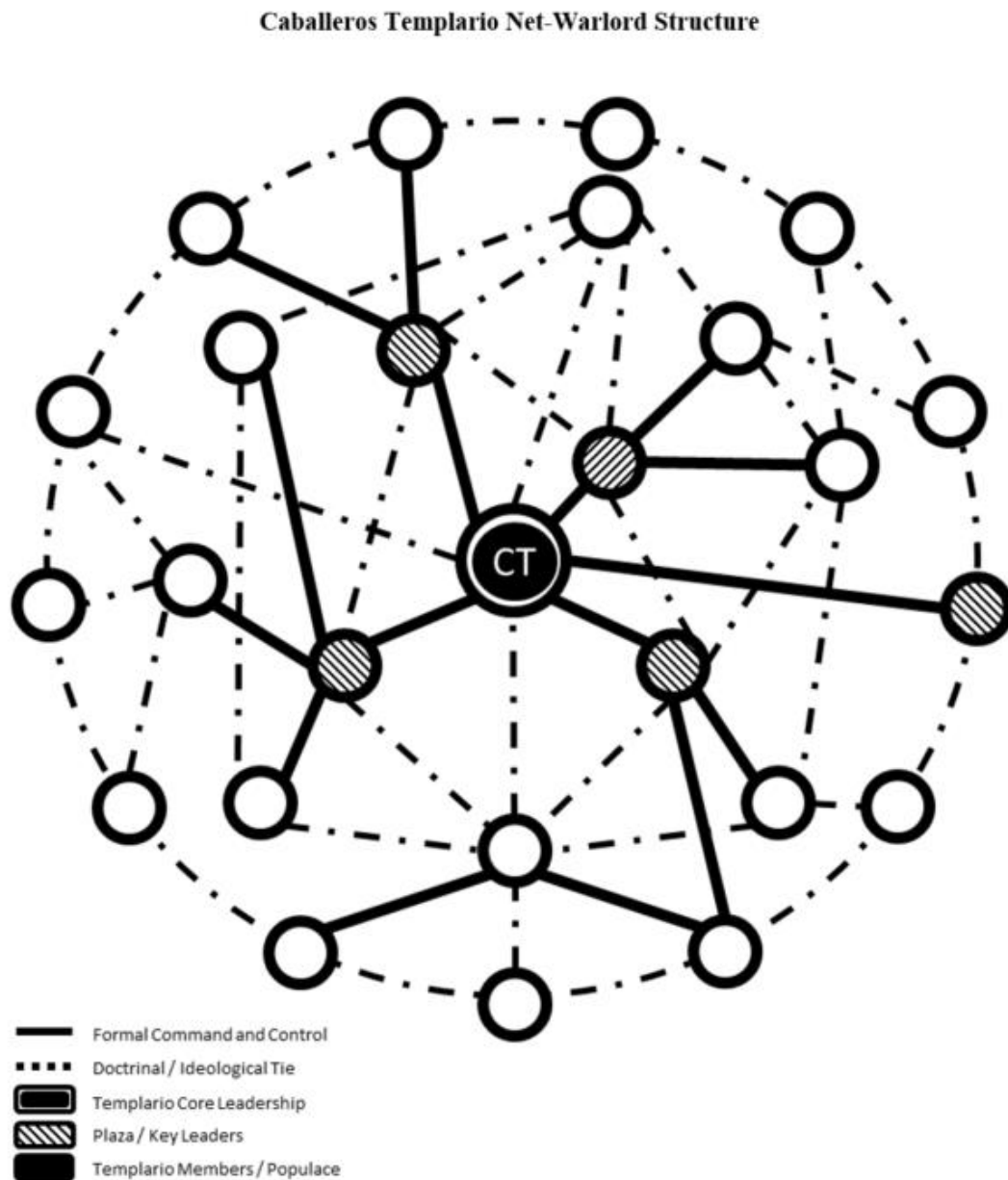


Figure 5. Modified Evan model showing the narrative linkages allowing the Templarios' evolution into net-warlords

<sup>217</sup> Finnegan, "Silver or Lead."

## **G. CONCLUSION**

Regardless of the fact that the Caballeros Templarios was a criminal organization that used ideology to further profits, the group's skillful use of a narrative radically changed its end goals and enhanced its capabilities compared to similarly organized cartels. The Templarios' information strategy is to link all members into a flexible, resilient, and mutually supportive network, inspiring warlord ambitions of total control.<sup>218</sup> Using a powerful narrative and a supportive, adaptive structure, the Templarios were able to move faster and more effectively than their compartmentalized and hierarchical enemies.<sup>219</sup> In the language of netwar, the Templarios moved well beyond a traditional cartel hub structure to a dangerous all-channel net-warlord model.

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<sup>218</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," 9.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 15.



## VI. CONCLUSION

### A. SUMMARIZED FINDINGS

This thesis focuses exclusively on how the application of netwar techniques allowed one particular group, the Caballeros Templarios cartel, to become the regional warlords of Michoacán, Mexico. With a structurally simple network and compelling narrative, this group managed to gain and maintain control of a complex environment. As depicted in Figure 6, the Templarios built on the already secure yet centralized hub models of preceding cartels, to create a highly decentralized, yet highly interconnected form. This hybrid method enables the cartel to maintain group cohesion and flexibility without the normal hub model limitations on spans of personal control.<sup>220</sup> Instead of a single leader tightly managing self-interested subordinates, the network relied upon a council.<sup>221</sup> In addition, it reinforced the loyalty of members through a combination of standard material reward and ideological indoctrination. This dual reward system replaces the need for the high centralization found in the typical hub form. The Templarios have transformed its structure from a relatively limited (if resilient) hub, to a potentially unlimited all-channel, bucky-ball model, capable of influencing every facet of life in its territory.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> John Arquilla and David F Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 7.

<sup>221</sup> Tribal Analysis Center, "Mexico's Knight Templar and Code of Conduct Implications," November, 2013, <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Codigo%20De%20Los%20Caballeros%20Templarios%20De%20Michoacan%20v1.pdf>

<sup>222</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 9.

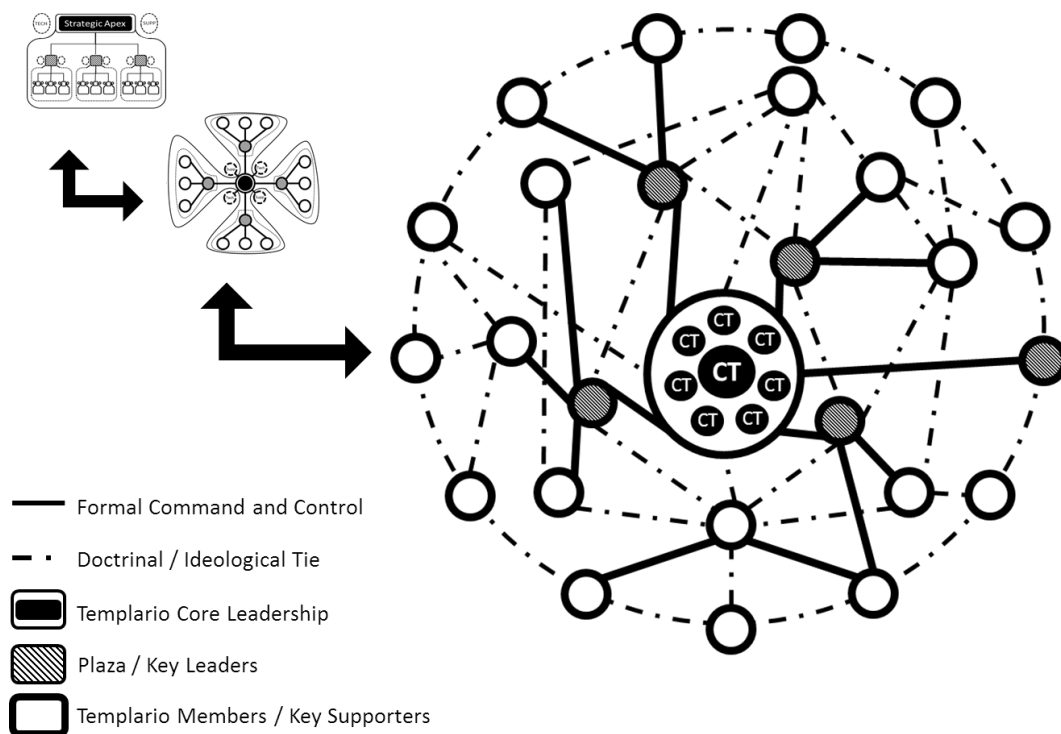


Figure 6. The Caballeros Templarios exhibit the defining characteristics and behavior of a third generation, hybrid “all-channel” network actor in an attempt to achieve de facto warlord status in the Mexican state of Michoacán.<sup>223</sup>

By creating a common sense of purpose and identity, the Templarios tied members together in a manner that resisted inherent Mexican cartel tendencies toward group fragmentation.<sup>224</sup> This shared narrative, bolstered by militant catholic iconography and published code of conduct—extended from the core leadership to the lowest thug. Whether genuinely believed or not, the romantic idea of the Caballeros Templarios strengthened the bonds of the organization, keeping members “all of one mind.”<sup>225</sup> As a result, even when dispersed and devoted to a variety of activities, it maintained a central conceptual and operational coherence.<sup>226</sup> Empowered by a common world-view and

<sup>223</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 8–9.

<sup>224</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 31–36.

<sup>225</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 9.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

narrative, individual Templarios knew what was required of them. This enabled further decentralization and reactive, adaptive operations, even when under threat of severe violence.<sup>227</sup>

In this thesis, net-warlords were defined as individuals (or groups) who successfully leverage the principles of netwar to obtain de-facto control over a geographic area thereby exerting total authority over politics, economics, and the application of violence. Unlike a traditional hierarchical criminal organization, which generally works outside the institutions of the state, the net-warlord seeks not to simply co-exist within the state, but to effectively co-opt the state if the opportunity arises, as its power increases and the state's weakens. These information age warlords not only degrade a state's hold over an area, but they also actively replace the state within the regions they control.

Templarios' ambitions, influenced by this narrative and capacity for control, were well beyond those of similar criminal organizations. Whatever ideas may have motivated their original formation (public defense or pure profit), the Templarios employed every means necessary to gain direct control over the political, social, and economic life of the state of Michoacán.<sup>228</sup> Instead of common, albeit powerful, criminal kingpins, they were fully functional net-warlords, capable of dictating their will at every level of life in Michoacán.

## **B. IMPLICATIONS**

The Templarios' move from members of Michoacán's criminal underworld to regional warlords has implications for the entire nation of Mexico. As a result of its activities, ultimately successful or not, similar cartels as well as any other ambitious entities have a blueprint to follow. Although the existence of influential cartels has been a fact of life for decades, there has never been such open usurpation of government

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<sup>227</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 9.

<sup>228</sup> Kimberly Marten, "Warlords," in *The Changing Character of War*, ed. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 304.

sovereignty.<sup>229</sup> The fact that a criminal organization, even when regionally contained, can successfully challenge legitimate civil authorities will not go unnoticed. Indeed, in *The Advent of Netwar*, Arquilla and Ronfeldt specifically emphasize that criminal groups such as cartels are already perfectly positioned to wage netwar.<sup>230</sup> In their words, “They [cartels] are versatile and adaptable and have a proclivity to form odd alliances and partnerships that can penetrate legitimate political structures.”<sup>231</sup>

The example that the Templarios have set in displacing local governments as the de facto authority within the state could inspire others to do the same. There is potential for other groups to see the incredible profits the Templarios reaped as a result of its power grab as the next logical step in their own evolution.

### C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER AREAS OF STUDY

Further study should focus on tracking the spread of Templarios net-warlord techniques to other related criminal groups in both the Central and South America. In addition, the network-versus-network success of the Michoacán vigilante groups against the Templarios deserves close analysis. Study of this response, its specific origins, its characteristics, and its repercussions may prepare governments and their security forces to respond to similar situations in the future.<sup>232</sup>

For anyone seeking an example of how to create or enhance an organization capable of challenging the sovereignty of a state, the Caballeros Templarios stands out as a valuable case study. Demonstrating the power of netwar, it provides a blueprint for taking advantage of local conditions, structuring a group for maximum power and flexibility, and keeping individuals united toward common goals. It also serves as a warning for potential pitfalls by showing how a primarily self-interested group, no matter how superficially benign their narrative, can quickly lose support and power if it pushes a population too far.

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<sup>229</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 43.

<sup>230</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar*, 61.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>232</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 15.

## D. CONCLUSIONS

As a small, regionally specific criminal gang, the Caballeros Templarios faced a daunting task. In particular, they faced government and cartel opponents that possessed similar and often greater firepower, resources, and organizational effectiveness. None of the contenders involved could be defeated by the standard method of “plata o plomo” (silver or lead) or the application of bribery or violence. Even the extreme violence pioneered by Los Zetas cartel—really just standard techniques on a massive scale—failed to make any single cartel dominant.<sup>233</sup> Without the ability to fight effectively using what could be labeled “conventional” methods, La Familia / Caballeros Templarios turned to an asymmetric solution: extreme doctrinal and organizational change. Combined with the conventional tools of violence and corruption, these changes (incorporating ideology and all-channel design) gave the Templarios the edge over their rivals and both the motivation and opportunity to seize power.<sup>234</sup>

The Caballeros Templarios cartel represents a clear example of what is possible for an organization unified by strong guiding principles, and intent on violently maintaining total civil power in a region in defiance of nominal state authority.<sup>235</sup> For six years, this infamous group was the de-facto ruler of an entire Mexican state. Using netwar strategies the Caballeros Templarios created a criminal parallel state, which has only recently encountered a serious threat to its existence. Though it was neither the first cartel to show some form of warlord potential, nor the only one currently challenging the Mexican state, the Caballeros Templarios cartel was the first to realize the means and methods to become fully developed net-warlords.

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<sup>233</sup> Kan, *Cartels at War*, 36.

<sup>234</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 15–16.

<sup>235</sup> Thomas, Kiser, and Casebeer. *Warlords Rising: Confronting Violent Non-state Actors*, 123–125.

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