

Street Gangs in Central America: Combating them with Intelligence Fusion Centers

Written by Thomas Bruneau

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THOMAS BRUNEAU, MAR 8 2014

Street gangs – *pandillas* in Spanish – are a major security challenge in the three Northern Triangle countries of Central America – El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.[1] They are also considered a threat in many US cities, with particular focus on the *Mara Salvatrucha*, MS-13. Domestic party politics in the three countries have resulted in the reliance of heavy hand (*mano dura*) responses to the gangs, which have mainly served to exacerbate the problem. The anomalous situation of Nicaragua, which has a lower level of per capita income and socio-economic development than its three neighbors to the North, but a much less serious gang problem, should attract the attention of serious researchers. The case of Nicaragua, and the more recent experience of the Government of El Salvador brokering a truce between the main gangs, suggests the importance of political variables, and specifically the extent and coherence of the security sector as an aspect of state presence.

Drawing on the experience in the U.S. with intelligence fusion centers, I suggest that some of the main lessons learned – the co-location of several elements of the security sector, the emphasis on implementation of the intelligence cycle, and the application of information technology (IT), can be usefully applied to assist these countries in combating the *pandillas*. Recent and dramatically increased foreign funding is heavily focused on prevention and rehabilitation of gang members, and minimally on combating the gangs directly. While there is a huge amount of unclassified primary and secondary literature on the U.S. experience with intelligence fusion centers, there is minimal general awareness of what they are and what they do. There is virtually no awareness at all in Central America where the *pandillas* are a major threat.

The Challenge of the *Pandillas*

The three Northern Triangle countries of Central America are infamous for the highest homicide rates in the world. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2011 the homicide rate per 100,000 people was 69 in El Salvador, 39 in Guatemala, and at 92, the homicide capital of the world, in Honduras.[2] Public opinion surveys in the Central America sub-region demonstrate that increasing numbers of the population in these three countries consider crime and insecurity by far the most serious problem of the country. For example, the data drawn from the highly regarded *Corporación Latinobarómetro* 2011 survey reported that, in response to the open – ended question – “in your opinion, what do you consider the most important problem in the country?”, 40% of respondents in El Salvador said crime and public security, and another 11% nominated *pandillas*/violence for a total of 51%; in Guatemala, the response was 30% for the first question and 21% for *pandillas*/violence for another total of 51%; and in Honduras, it was 30% plus 5% respectively for a total of 35%. In contrast, in Nicaragua, 33% identified economic problems as most important, with only a total of 4% responding crime, *pandillas* and violence.[3]

Central American *Pandillas* and Security in Central America

We know from the *Latinobarómetro* and other public opinion surveys that an increasing percentage of the population in the region view crime, or *delincuencia*, as the most serious societal problem. We also know that presidential candidates run on hardline platforms and, even in the case of President Mauricio Funes in El Salvador who did not run on this platform, implement hardline policies to combat the *pandillas* once they are elected. But none of the

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literature from the region itself deals with the implications of the *pandillas* for security; this may be, in part, because it is written by researchers who are methodologically aware and are thus sensitive to the lack of reliable data.[4]

We can, however, make several observations on the topic of street gangs and security. If we consider three possible levels of security – citizen, public, and national – we can document the following.[5] At the *citizen security* level the *pandillas* are a serious threat in that they rob, extort, kill, and generally threaten large sectors of the population, especially those in poorer sections of larger cities. At the *public security* level they are also a serious threat in that, to demonstrate their power and in order to extort, they routinely halt public transportation by killing the drivers, as they have done periodically in Guatemala City and San Salvador. Through their extortion of businesses in the bigger cities, they also challenge public security. As there is an identified tendency for the *pandillas* to resemble organized crime, at the level of *national security* they also may be considered a threat in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which remain fragile democracies with relatively poorly articulated political institutions and tentative popular support.[6]

The Relevance of Central American *Pandillas* for the US

The *maras* are considered a threat to some cities in the US for a number of reasons. First, the two most important *pandillas* in Central America, the *MS-13* and the *18th Street*, were founded in Los Angeles, California, and later exported to Central America via deportations of gang members. They maintain important presence and contacts in Los Angeles. Second, these two gangs in particular are located not only in Central America, but are regional, with a presence in the US and Canada. They operate with modern technology, including cell phones and social media, meaning that an imprisoned gang leader in San Salvador can order a homicide in Northern Virginia. According to the National Gang Intelligence Center, these two gangs are found in most of the US, and are expanding faster than other national-level gangs, both in terms of membership and geographically.[7] Third, the Federal Bureau of Investigation established the MS-13 National Gang Task Force in December 2004, and considers MS-13 the most dangerous gang in the US. Fourth, President Barak Obama issued Executive Order 13581 on July 25, 2011 blocking property of transnational criminal organizations. On October 11, 2012 the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated MS-13 as a significant transnational criminal organization under this Executive Order, freezing their US assets and banning Americans from conducting business with them. The gang was targeted for its involvement in "serious transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, human smuggling, sex trafficking, murder, assassinations, racketeering, blackmail, extortion, and immigration offenses." [8] In June of 2013 the Treasury department designated six leaders of the MS-13 as international criminals.

Fifth, the MS-13 has an effective *coyote* structure whereby they can move their people within Central America and from the Northern Triangle to the US in less than 72 hours. [9] Sixth, since the 2008 fiscal year, U.S. agencies have allocated over \$1.2 billion in funding for the Central America Regional Security Initiative, ('CARSI') and non-CARSI funding that supports CARSI goals.[10] In recognition of the importance of the Central American gangs to the US, there are annual reports for Congress on Central American gangs by the Congressional Research Service, the Government Accountability Office has conducted at least three studies on different aspects of US programs to combat crime and violence in Central America, the United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control has published a report on violence in Central America, and according to the GAO five US agencies, including the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, provide CARSI support activities.[11] It seems unlikely that there would be so much high level US government activity and the commitment of funds if the *maras* were not considered a threat in the US.[12]

The Impact of Heavy Hand (*MANO DURA*) Policies on *Pandillas*

Although the main street gangs, and especially MS-13 and 18th Street, are regional threats, the primary official focus so far has been on responding to them in Central America itself since it is in the sub-region that they have mutated to their present dangerous forms, elaborated their criminal strategies, and where their main leaders are located. [13] The principal response so far in the region has been heavy handed, or *mano dura*, even with the widespread agreement on the very negative impact of the *mano dura* policies implemented in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

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Three main aspects characterize the implementation of *mano dura* policies. First, the repressive plans were, at least in terms of rhetoric, inspired by zero-tolerance policies, oriented more toward penalizing wrongdoing than preventing it, implemented in several North American cities, particularly New York City. As probably the most respected analyst of the Central American *pandillas* states:

It [*mano dura*] was selected as a model because of its apparent success in reducing levels of criminality, but also because U.S. agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and police departments from several U.S. cities cooperated extensively with Central American governments in the area of public security.[14]

Second, the indiscriminate policies used in Honduras and El Salvador entailed the enactment of special laws, executive acts, and the rewriting of criminal codes to allow the police to round up, incarcerate, and prosecute gang members and any youth suspected of criminal activities. In 2003, the government of Honduran President Ricardo Maduro revised Article 332 of the Penal Code, which opened gang members to prosecution for membership in a criminal organization, regardless of whether they or their group had actually been convicted of any crime. In El Salvador, where the *mano dura* policy reached its highest level of sophistication, an anti-*mara* law was enacted in July 2003 under the government of Francisco Flores. This act, known as *Ley Antimaras*, also aimed to facilitate the detention and prosecution of suspected gang members based on the newly defined felony of “illicit association” (*asociación ilícita*) and gang membership. In both cases, the new rulings gave complete authority to the police – and in some cases to military personnel – to carry out arrests based on arbitrary decisions and thin evidence. In the case of El Salvador, police could use the presence of tattoos, hand signals, some dress codes, and physical appearance as evidence of gang membership. Although this specific directive was not included in the Honduran law, Honduran police acted on the basis of similar criteria, even jailing children dressed like gang members.

In Guatemala, although legal measures were not passed to support the anti-gang crackdowns, the police implemented suppression plans based on arbitrary interpretations of the existing laws. The general term referring to these policies was *Plan Escoba* (Operation Broom). The police jailed youth they suspected of gang membership by indicting them for possession of drugs, despite the fact that most of those detentions were carried out illegally. More recently, with the inauguration of President Otto Pérez Molina in January 2012, an “iron fist” policy has been implemented.[15] In short, public security institutions were given a license to hunt gangs and youth based on weak legal constraints.

Third, these heavy hand policies were essentially plans for suppressive police intervention. Honduras and El Salvador approved laws allowing security forces to pursue and capture youths suspected of belonging to a gang without evidence or due process. In these countries, as well as in Guatemala, the governments used these plans as linchpins for larger government agendas; all used the armed forces in operations against gangs; and all developed operations that allowed for the capture and mass incarceration of gang members, thus saturating and overpopulating their prisons. A major problem with these policies was that the prison system could not (and cannot) support this level of incarceration.

For example, in El Salvador, in early 2011 the prison system had sufficient space for 8,000 prisoners; at that time there were 24,600 imprisoned, at least one-third for gang-related crimes.[16] In Guatemala, between June 2003 and June 2004, 10,527 persons were detained for drug possession and an additional 11,708 were detained for petty crimes in “preventive” centers set up in the Department (district) of Guatemala, which contains the capital, Guatemala City. These arrests represented 49.3 percent of all incarcerations made in that one department. Only 1.1% of the arrests for drug-possession were then formally indicted by the courts. In the vast majority of the cases, the judge either did not find sufficient evidence or determined that the evidence was collected illegally, meaning that the detention was illegal.[17]

Table 1: Gang Membership and Homicide Rates in Central America, 2010-2011[18]

| Country | Number of gang members MS-13 and 18th Street in country | Number of MS-13 & 18th Street members in prison | Homicide rate per 100,000 (as of 2010) |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| El Salvador | 17,000 | Yes | 7,000 |
| Guatemala | 32,000 | Yes | 400 |
| | | | 66 |

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Honduras 24,000 Yes 800 81 Nicaragua 4,500 No NA 13

The first puzzle in Table 1 that must be addressed is the disparity between the rate of incarceration of *pandilla* members in El Salvador and those in the other two countries. Since 2005 the Salvadoran National Civil Police (*PNC*) and the district attorneys have jointly conducted investigations of such criminal activities. The district attorneys have seventy-two hours to decide whether or not they are going to charge a suspect. If they go ahead with prosecution, the suspect goes before one of eight special judges in the country who deal with gang crimes. If not, the suspect is set free. The legal system and the process for dealing with suspected gang activity are relatively sound; gang members who are convicted go to prison for an average of between ten and thirty years.

As one informant put it, what is different in Guatemala and Honduras is that, "There is no follow-through." [19] Indeed, Guatemalan legal expert Javier Monterroso Castillo calls attention to the total lack of effectiveness in his country's criminal proceedings, in which only 2.7% of criminal cases result in conviction. [20] Based on interviews in Tegucigalpa the situation in Honduras is little different. Indeed, Table 1 illustrates this point in that of 24,000 known *pandilla* members in Honduras, only 800 were imprisoned, even though Honduras also has a *mano dura* policy. [21] In one interview a US government official stated bluntly that there is competition, rather than cooperation, between the Honduran police and the district attorneys. [22]

The gang truce of early 2012 in El Salvador was possible only because of the relatively effective legal procedures, resulting in incarceration of 7,000 *pandilla* members, including the main leaders of MS-13 and 18th Street. Their imprisonment in the maximum-security prison of Zacatecoluc provided motivation for these leaders to make a deal in order to be transferred to somewhat less restrictive prisons. Once a deal was struck between these key leaders and the Government of El Salvador, the leaders spread the word among their *clicas*, component cells, to decrease the level of homicides. [23] There are still many complicated issues regarding the gang truce, including the lack of transparency and popular opposition, and whether it will hold or not. However, with the pathetic ineffectiveness of the legal system in Guatemala and Honduras, it is hard to believe that a truce could work. [24]

To comprehend the heavy hand policies, one must understand the political dynamics in this region, where the democratically elected politicians are expected to "do something" to show they do not tolerate widespread crime and violence. The problem is that the policies are counterproductive. Although homicide rates initially decreased with implementation of *mano dura*, within two years they reached – and then exceeded – the previous rates. Analysts demonstrate that the *mano dura* policies actually facilitated gang organization and recruitment, due to the simultaneous incarceration of thousands of youth gang members and "wannabes." It was in the prisons that dozens of members from widespread regional *clicas* of the same gang were first able to establish contact with each other, recognize that their gangs consisted of a myriad of uncoordinated groups, and work together to develop more structured and dangerous organizations. Incarceration enabled gang members to form a sort of permanent assembly in jail in which they could debate, make pacts, and decide on structures, strategies, and ways to operate that had to be observed by the members of all the *clicas*. This was made even easier, in part, by the decision of the authorities to separate prisoners in prisons according to their gang affiliation, to cut down on inter-gang violence within the prisons. [25] The heavy hand laws, by sweeping up gang members from several countries, also facilitated communications and connections at the international level among gang members.

The Anomalous Case of Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America by all socio-economic studies. [26] The second puzzle in the data displayed in Table 1 is that Nicaragua has both a lower homicide rate than its three Northern neighbors, and no presence of the most serious *pandillas*, MS-13 and 18th Street. I also noted earlier that, whereas crime and insecurity are considered the major national problems in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, they are not in Nicaragua. A common approach emphasizes differences between Nicaragua and the three Northern Triangle countries in terms of emigration, to Miami and Costa Rica and not Los Angeles, and land tenure. [27] However, the most respected experts, including José Luis Rocha, and the author's interviews in Managua, as well as recent communications from

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U.S. military personnel in Managua, emphasize the very different security apparatus in Nicaragua in contrast to the other three countries.

The Sandinista revolution, with the help of Cubans and allies in East/Central Europe, created a security apparatus that filled voids existing in the other countries. Consequently, the most violent *pandillas*, MS-13 and 18th Street, are unable to establish footholds in Nicaragua. Indeed, if it were only differences in emigration and land tenure, these factors would “flatten out” after a few years, as the *maras* have established themselves in Guatemala and Honduras, after their initial growth in El Salvador. While the security apparatus is integrated and coherent in Nicaragua, it is anything but in the other three countries. In simple terms, the state in Nicaragua is more robust and more pervasive. A quantitative indicator is tax revenue as a percentage of GDP. Whereas the percentage of tax revenue to GDP in Nicaragua was estimated at 26% in 2012, the same figure ranges from 11.7% in Guatemala to 19.4% in El Salvador, with the average of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras amounting to 61% of Nicaragua’s percentage.[28] In short, the government of Nicaragua has substantially more resources to apply to security, as well as an ability to actually impose and implement policies to capture these funds. This observation, plus the one above regarding incarceration in El Salvador in contrast to Guatemala and Honduras, forced me to consider the state and its ability to deal with security issues.[29]

Increased Funding for Public Security Interventions

In response to the widely recognized problems with crime and insecurity in the region, including the sub-region of Central America, there is currently a relatively large amount of foreign grants going to the region in support of “public security”. In their recent very informative and research based article, Robert Muggah and Katherine Aguirre demonstrate that a large number of states and international organizations, including the US, Germany, Spain, the EU, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Development Program, and others, have invested upwards of \$3 billion in what they term “citizen security interventions” until the present. They also note, however, that most of these funds do not allow for support to defense or intelligence-related matters; however, “the U.S. and the European Union (EU) can draw on political and development modalities to provide assistance for security and justice promotion.”[30]

My colleagues and I published the first book in English on the *pandillas* to establish a baseline of relatively objective and credible information on this complicated, and polemic, phenomenon. I then wrote an article that, among other goals, reviewed the main US assistance initiative regarding the problem of crime and insecurity in the sub-region, which is CARSI. In my writings I have spelled out and analyzed the various problems of CARSI, and this analysis is based on official documentation in the US, including the GAO, and interviews with US government officials and other governments’ officials in the three countries.[31]

In my view, the fundamental problems are organizational in that the US has no national police force nor can the US armed forces be involved in policing, at home or abroad. Thus the responsibility in dealing with the security sector in Central America falls to some FBI programs, the Department of State’s International Narcotics and Legal Affairs (INL), and USAID. According to the GAO, the US allocated \$1.2 billion between 2008 and the present for CARSI and programs in support of CARSI.[32] Even so, by all imaginable indicators crime and violence have grown apace in the Northern Triangle. The recent observation to me by a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer who is working on combating MS-13 in the US that these programs are “stale” is apt. In addition, having read the analysis and recommendations of prominent think tanks on the problems of crime and insecurity in the region, it does not make me sanguine that anybody has discovered an effective way to deal with *pandillas*, crime, and insecurity in Central America. [33] It is in this context, a serious problem of crime and no obvious solution, that the concept of an intelligence fusion center is appealing.

The Lessons Learned from the US Experience with Intelligence Fusion Centers

Confronting personally, and as a researcher, the violence and complexity of the Central American *pandillas* problem, and yet to see a policy that appears likely to deal adequately with it, I was impressed when I recently did a study on intelligence fusion centers in the US. I then communicated with US and other experts on crime and insecurity issues

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in the sub-region and found that none of them had ever heard of the intelligence fusion center concept. In what follows I will first define intelligence fusion centers, and then highlight three of the main points I believe recommend considering the export of the intelligence fusion center concept to Central America.

The formal definition of a Fusion Center is:

A fusion center is a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and information to the center with the goal of maximizing their ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. Intelligence processes – through which information is collected, integrated, evaluated, analyzed, and disseminated – are a primary focus. Data fusion involves the exchange of information from different sources – including law enforcement, public safety, and the private sector. Relevant and actionable intelligence results from analysis and data fusion. The fusion process helps agencies be proactive and protect communities.

The *Fusion Center Guidelines*, of 2006 and the *Baseline Capabilities for State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers: A Supplement to the Fusion Center Guidelines*, of September 2008, elaborate on the Guidelines and Key Elements of Fusion Centers. These documents, which total 160 pages, provide the details on fusion centers that follow and specifically include the 18 Guidelines and Key Elements.[34]

Fusion centers, or entities that came to be called fusion centers, existed in New York and Los Angeles prior to 9/11. They remain a local-level or state-level initiative. However, seeing that fusion centers were a useful concept, and became central to several national innovations in fighting terrorism and crime, the federal government, and especially the Departments of Homeland Security and of Justice, have been central in their development and growth to the point where there are today 78 in the U.S.

Fusion centers vary as they have been established to meet state and local needs. Today they are a component of the U.S. Information Sharing Environment (ISE) that was established by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to facilitate information sharing, access, and collaboration in order to combat terrorism more effectively.[35] The federal government has recognized that fusion centers represent a critical source of local information about potential threats and a mechanism for these agencies to disseminate terrorism and other threat-related information and intelligence. The National Strategy for Information Sharing states that fusion centers will serve as the primary focal points within states and localities for the receipt and sharing of terrorism-sharing information. Through the National Strategy for Information Sharing, the federal government promotes fusion centers to achieve a baseline level of capability and to ensure compliance with privacy laws, to become interconnected with the federal government and each other in a national network of sharing terrorism-related information.

Federal Funding

The federal government supports fusion centers through funding, personnel, and access. Federal funding accounted for about 61% of their total fiscal year 2010 budgets. However, the DHS Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), the main grant program through which fusion centers receive funding, is not specifically focused on, or limited to, fusion centers. Rather, states and local governments determine the amount of HSGP funding they allocate to fusion centers each year among a number of competing homeland security needs.

Personnel

DHS and DOJ have deployed, or assigned, either part-time or full-time personnel to fusion centers to support their operations and serve as liaisons between the fusion center and federal components. As of July 2010 DHS had deployed 58 intelligence officers and the FBI had deployed 74 special agents and analysts full time to 38 of the then 72 fusion centers.

Access to Information and Systems

DHS and DOJ share classified and unclassified homeland security and terrorism information with fusion centers

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through several information technology networks and systems. DHS reported that it had installed the Homeland Secure Data Network, which supports the sharing of federal secret-level intelligence and information with state, local, and tribal partners, at 33 of the then 72 fusion centers. DHS also provides an unclassified network, the Homeland Security Information Network, which allows federal, state, and local homeland security and terrorism-related information sharing.

Training and Technical Assistance

DHS has partnered with DOJ to offer fusion centers a variety of training and technical assistance programs.[36]

It is the combination of “intelligence”, as understood by the intelligence professional, with “law enforcement community approaches to intelligence”, taking place in the same physical location, which provides the synergy of the fusion center phenomenon. That is, there is a great emphasis on analysis, based on collection of information in accord with pre-defined requirements. Obviously, combining these different approaches is a serious challenge as there are cultural as well as bureaucratic obstacles to the combination – to the intelligence fusing process. Explicitly drawing from the definition of Mark Lowenthal, intelligence can be distinguished from information as follows:

Information is anything that can be known, regardless of how it is discovered. Intelligence refers to information that meets the stated or understood needs of policy makers and has been collected, processed, and narrowed to meet those needs. Intelligence is a subset of the broader category of information. Intelligence and the entire process by which it is identified, obtained, and analyzed respond to the needs of policy makers. All intelligence is information; not all information is intelligence.

It is certainly, as stated by Lowenthal, information, but information that has been obtained to meet the needs of policy makers, most often through the process described in the “intelligence cycle”. [37] The fusion center concept, in which the two types of intelligence are done simultaneously and come together, are fused, in the same location, makes for the unique dynamic of fusion centers. The information technology (IT) component, for both collection of information and sharing it, is also crucial for the success of the fusion centers.

Conclusion

All observers who are knowledgeable about the region agree that crime and insecurity are major problems in the Northern Triangle of Central America, and that the *pandillas* are an integral part of both. So far most governments in the region have been unable to deal effectively with the problem, and foreign assistance, including from the US is of dubious value. A central theme throughout this paper, drawing on the anomalous case of Nicaragua and the very different rate of incarceration in El Salvador compared to Guatemala and Honduras, is that the nature of the security sector matters. The importance of state presence, and how a state structures, and resources, its security sector consisting of the armed forces, the national police, and intelligence agencies is a key element of my analysis. So far, the most prevalent approach, the heavy hand, has been counterproductive. The intelligence fusion center experience has proved reasonably successful in the US.

It would seem that this concept could prove useful in the Northern Triangle of Central America. By introducing and resourcing fusion centers the three states could begin to insert a state presence, which will fill vacuums, or so-called ungoverned spaces, and bring together different elements of the security sector, including intelligence agencies, to focus on the gang problem. The main challenge will be, however, to identify the lead agency. Abroad, USAID does not deal with security, but only in the long-term, if ever. It would seem that INL would be the most obvious lead agency, and there is already some level of cooperation between INL and DHS in El Salvador.

The observations here are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Navy nor the U.S. Department of Defense

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[1] A *pandilla* is a street gang, while the term *mara* refers specifically to the gang known as MS-13, which began as a Los Angeles *barrio* gang called *Mara Salvatrucha*, made up of young Salvadoran immigrants whose parents had fled the civil war in the 1980s. While the exact derivation of the name is unclear, “*mara*” apparently signifies a fierce, tenacious type of Central American ant, “*salva*” stands for El Salvador, while “*trucha*” is something like reliable and alert in Salvadoran slang. While some observers refer to the 18th Street gang, (also *Barrio-18* or *Calle-18*) as a *mara*, in that they behave like the MS-13, they do not refer to themselves as a *mara*.

[2] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment. Executive Summary,” September 2012, p. 12. Available at www.unodc.org the exact number of these homicides that can be attributed to the *pandillas* while polemic is probably substantial. In an interview with the author on May 15, 2012, Minister of Security and Justice David Mugía Payés said that 90% of the homicides in El Salvador were gang-related. And, during the truce between the two main *pandillas* in El Salvador, the *MS-13* and the *18th Street*, the homicide rate dropped from their figure of 72 homicides per 100,000 in 2011 to 32 per 100,000 in 2012. See *InSightCrime: Organized Crime in the Americas* available at [www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/what-does-el-salvador-homicide-distribution-say-about-the-truce?](http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/what-does-el-salvador-homicide-distribution-say-about-the-truce/) Accessed May 8, 2013.

[3] Marta Lagos & Lucía Dammert, *La Seguridad Ciudadana: El problema principal de América Latina* (Lima: Corporación Latinobarómetro, 9 May 2012), p. 5.

[4] I have dealt with the most serious of these methodology issues in my “*Pandillas and Security in Central America*” *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 49, no. 2 forthcoming (Summer 2014).

[5] Drawn from Douglas A. Kincaid, “Demilitarization and Security in El Salvador and Guatemala: Convergences of Success and Crisis,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Vol 42, no 4 (2000), pp. 40-41.

[6] It is worth noting that *delincuencia* was defined as a national security problem by Minister of Security and Justice, David Munguía Payés, in El Salvador prior to the “truce” of mid-2012. See *El Faro*, January 21, 2010.

[7] National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment: 2011 Emerging Threats* (Washington, D.C.: National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011), p. 12.

[8] U.S. Department of Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organizations,” Press Center, October 11, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx> Accessed November 10, 2013.

[9] Douglas Farah and Pamela Phillips Lum, “Central American Gangs and Transnational criminal Organizations: The Changing Relationships in a Time of Turmoil,” International Assessment and Strategy Center, February 2013, p. 4. Available at <http://www.ibiconsultants.net.pdf> accessed November 7, 2013. For a very balanced view of the MS-13 also see Sonja Wolf, “*Mara Salvatrucha: The Most Dangerous Street Gang in the Americas*”, *Latin American Politics and Society* 54, 1, 2012, pp. 65-99.

[10] Government Accountability Office, *Central America: U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objectives* GAO- 13-771 (Washington, D.C.: GAO, September 2013) pp. 43 – 55 for US funding sources.

[11] *Ibid*, p.18.

[12] See the following: Clare Ribando Seelke, *Gangs in Central America* # RL 34112 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 28, 2013); Government Accountability Office, *Combating Gangs: Federal Agencies Have Implemented a Central American Gang Strategy, but Could Strengthen Oversight and Measurement of Efforts* GAO 10-395 (Washington, D.C.: GAO, April 2010); Government Accountability Office, *International Affairs: Status of Funding for the Central America Regional Security Initiative* GAO-13-295R (Washington, D.C.: GAO, January 30, 2013); United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control,

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Responding to Violence in Central America (Washington, D.C.: US Senate, September 2011); and Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress R 41731* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, May 7, 2013).

[13] In our co-edited book, with Lucía Dammert and Elizabeth Skinner, *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011) we provide background and analysis of the *pandilla* phenomenon in Central America, and its origins in Los Angeles, California. In their February 2013 report Farah and Lum argue convincingly that the leadership of MS-13 has moved from Los Angeles to San Salvador, specifically in the prisons of Ciudad Barrios and Zacatecoluca. p. 11.

[14] José Miguel Cruz, “Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression in Central America,” in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, eds. 2011, p. 142.

[15] International Crisis Group, “Police Reform in Guatemala: Obstacles and Opportunities” Latin American report no. 43, July 20, 2012, p. 1.

[16] Author interview with Edgardo Amaya, Advisor, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, San Salvador April 1, 2011.

[17] Elin Cecilie Ranum, “Street Gangs of Guatemala,” in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, eds. 2011, p. 79.

[18] The data for this table comes from several sources that I considered most credible. On homicides, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide; Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna: UNODC, 2011), p. 23. The gang numbers and presence of MS-13 and 18th Street are from material provided by Dr. Humberto Posada of the *Policía Nacional Civil* (PNC), El Salvador, at anti-*pandillas* conferences held in San Salvador, El Salvador in 2007 & 2008. The data on numbers in prison are from the author’s interview with Ismael Rodríguez Batres, Deputy Director General of Prisons for El Salvador, 27 March 2009, San Salvador, and subsequent email communication, 13 March 2009.

[19] Author interview with Ismael Rodríguez Batres, Deputy Director General of Prisons for El Salvador, 27 March 2009, San Salvador, and subsequent email communication, 13 March 2009.

[20] Javier Monterosso Castillo, “Investigación Criminal: Estudio comparativo y propuesta de um modelo de policía de investigación en Guatemala.” (Guatemala City: Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales de Guatemala, 2007), pp.73 and 158).

[21] These data are from author interview with Rodríguez Batres. The information on Guatemala is from a Guatemalan Powerpoint presentation from the 2008 anti-*pandillas* conference; the Honduran data was obtained from the Director of Prisons of Honduras.

[22] Author meeting with official in charge of security for U.S. embassy personnel in Tegucigalpa on 30 July 30, 2008.

[23] In author’s interview with Minister of Security and Justice, David Muguía Payés in San Salvador on May 15, 2012, he would not acknowledge that the government had been directly involved in the “negotiations”, and he would not use the term “negotiations”, but he made it clear that the motivation of the leaders of MS-13 and 18th Street was to get out of the high security prisons, and if this were done they were willing to direct their followers to cut back on the homicides. As he estimated that 90% of the leaders were in the maximum-security prison of Zacatecoluca, and the *pandillas* are very hierarchical, he was sanguine that the orders would be followed.

[24] On the truce see *El Faro* “Sala Negra” and a very useful review, in English, is Linda Garrett, *The First Year: A Chronology of the Gang Truce and Peace Process in El Salvador, March 2012-March 2013* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Democracy in the Americas, 2013).

Street Gangs in Central America: Combating them with Intelligence Fusion Centers

Written by Thomas Bruneau

[25] José Miguel Cruz, in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, eds. 2011, p. 155.

[26] See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire* (Washington, D.C.: UNODC, 2007), p. 27. See also Bruneau, forthcoming, 2014, for data and sources.

[27] See José Luis Rocha, "Street Gangs in Nicaragua" in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner eds., 2011 pp. 105-122 for a summary of this argument.

[28] Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* at www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook accessed October 27, 2013.

[29] These differences are to some degree recognized in Kincaid, Winter 2000, and International Crisis Group, July 20, 2012.

[30] Robert Muggah and Katherine Aguirre, "Mapping citizen security interventions in Latin America: reviewing the evidence," *Report* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resources Centre, October 2013), p. 4.

[31] The first is Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, 2011, and the second is Bruneau, forthcoming, 2014.

[32] GAO, 13-771, September 2013, p.9.

[33] See, for example, Michael Shifter, "Central America's Security Predicament", *Current Affairs* February 2011, pp. 49-55; International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Central America: confronting the drug gangs," *IISS Strategic Comments* Volume 18, Comment 23, August 2012; and, John Maisto, "U.S. Policy toward Central America" University of Miami, Center for Hemispheric Policy, The Central America Task Force, May 3, 2013.

[34] Available at www.it.oip.gov accessed October 15, 2013.

[35] Government Accountability Office, *Information Sharing: Additional Actions Could Help Ensure That Efforts to Share Terrorism – Related Suspicious Activity Reports Are Effective* GAO 13-233 (Washington, D.C.: GAO, March 2013).

[36] Government Accountability Office, *Information Sharing: Federal Agencies Are Helping Fusion Centers Build and Sustain Capabilities and Protect Privacy, but Could Better Measure Results* GAO-10-972 (Washington, D.C.: GAO, September 2010). Cent

[37] John Rollins, *Fusion Centers: Issues and Options for Congress* # RL34070 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service January 18, 2008), p.88.

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