

Organized Crime

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Mexico Alert: Authorities rescue 22 suspected migrants kidnapped by armed gunmen from hotel in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi on September 14; reflects worsening security situation in state

Please be advised

- On September 14, authorities rescued 22 foreigners, most of them Cuban and Haitian nationals, kidnapped earlier in the day by gunmen who forcibly entered a hotel in Matehuala, in the state of San Luis Potosi. The perpetrators had also kidnapped 16 Mexican nationals. The migratory status of the 22 foreign nationals remains unconfirmed as of writing.
- While the Mexican nationals were released earlier, the foreign nationals were rescued in a remote area near the road between Matehuala and the regional capital, Arturo Garza Herrera, according to official sources.
- The kidnappers arrived in three vehicles, ransacked the building, and took the hotel's logbook of guests.
- A human rights group reported in June 2021 that 3,300 migrants stranded in Mexico since January due to a US border policy had been kidnapped, raped, trafficked, or assaulted.
- In February 2020, members of the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) released a video on social media declaring that they are "here [in San Luis Potosi] to stay" and warning other groups operating in the area to stay away.
- Other cartels present in the state are the Cartel Del Golfo (CdG), the Cartel de los Alemanes- a splinter group of Los Zetas, and the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel (SRLC).



Assessments & Forecast

1. Based on the nature of the incident and the fact that the perpetrators decided to keep the foreign nationals longer than the Mexican ones, the incident was likely an attempt by drug cartels operating in the area to kidnap the suspected migrants for recruitment purposes, supported by the June 2021 report. Poor, disenfranchised migrants are known to be easier to recruit as drug mules to aid in cartels' drug-trafficking operations, given the lack of administrative oversight on their presence in the country and the promise of money and status acting as powerful incentives.
2. That the Mexican police managed to rescue the victims on the same day is a notable anomaly, given their delayed and often ineffective response to such incidents. Additionally, the lack of casualties or gunfighting during the rescue operation indicates that the kidnapped targets were 'low-value' for the group.
3. **FORECAST:** Given precedent, cartels and local gangs are liable to continue capitalizing on the migrant influx to pursue their illicit activities, utilizing migrants for recruitment, smuggling, and drug trafficking activities. As such, further mass kidnappings of large groups of migrants are expected in the coming months, amid the likely increase in migration from Haiti and Cuba over sociopolitical crises in these countries, as well as the continued migrant caravans from Central America headed towards the USA.
4. **FORECAST:** Additionally, given that San Luis Potosi constitutes a logistics hub, with multiple shipping companies operating in the state, the risk of high profile kidnapping attempts targeting foreign company employees, extortion of businesses or attacks targeting major distribution and industrial centers also remains heightened going forward.
5. **FORECAST:** Owing to the presence of key drug trafficking routes in San Luis Potosi, cartels are liable to continue engaging in turf wars and retaliatory violence, including public shootouts targeting both law enforcement and rival cartels. As a result, the risk of spillover violence affecting travelers and residents operating in the state will remain high moving forward. Further, given the rampant levels of corruption within security forces, the inadequate security response will also

contribute to the deterioration of security in the state and surrounding areas, with overall levels of personal safety expected to remain low.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Mexico should maintain heightened vigilance in San Luis Potosi due to the ongoing security risks from organized crime.
2. Travel during the overnight hours and on rural routes should be avoided. Keep companions informed of travel plans due to the potential for kidnapping.
3. Remain cognizant of local media updates regarding areas with a significant cartel presence, given the dynamic nature of the violence.