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# Narco Armor: Improvised Armored Fighting Vehicles in Mexico

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# ***Narco Armor***

## ***Improvised Armored Fighting Vehicles in Mexico***

ROBERT J. BUNKER AND BYRON RAMIREZ, editors

*In cooperation with  
Borderland Beat, InSight Crime,  
& Small Wars Journal—El Centro*

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Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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### **Editors' Background**

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## EDITORS' NOTE

Robert J. Bunker and Byron Ramirez

*March 2013*

Over the past seven years Mexico has witnessed an unprecedented wave of violence. Increasing competition among drug cartels has left thousands dead and analysts wondering when the levels of violence will subside. According to several conservative estimates, the number of dead during the Felipe Calderon presidency (2006-2012) is around 70,000. Moreover, it is estimated that close to 30,000 disappeared during the same period.

Ever since the Medellin and Cali drug cartels were dismantled in the 1990s, Mexico's cartels became increasingly powerful. Over the past couple of decades Mexican cartels created effective drug distribution and transportation networks which enabled them to expand their reach and increase their profits. These cartels, which now dominate the lucrative wholesale illicit drug market by controlling the great majority of the drugs that enter the United States, have branched out to many other illicit activities.

The wave of violence that has left thousands dead began in early 2005, when former Mexican president Vicente Fox sent government troops to Tamaulipas to fight the cartels. For the past seven years the government has ordered its military to fight the cartels directly, which, in turn, has led drug cartels to improvise and develop their own methods of warfare to combat both government troops and other competing cartels.

The extreme rivalry among various Mexican drug cartels for regional control of the drug trade market has yielded an arms race. The following collection of articles and images addresses a segment of the military technology utilized by violent non-state actors during this period: "narco armor" or, more accurately, improvised armored fighting vehicles (IAFV).

Mexico's new president, Enrique Peña Nieto, who came to office December 2012, has said that his administration will utilize a different strategy for combating the cartels. Whether the new strategy will work remains to be seen. However, it is important to highlight the significance of the military improvisation that has taken place in Mexico. Interestingly, during the Libyan revolution of 2011, a similar inventiveness took place as rebels also used IAFVs to fight Gaddafi's military.

Mexican cartel use of IAFVs and armored sport utility vehicles (ASUV) may yield some important lessons for military counter-criminal insurgency efforts. Still, many unanswered questions exist concerning the fielding of narco armor in Mexico. Reports of these vehicles being fielded span roughly from mid-2010 to the beginning of 2012, with a spike in activity

surrounding them taking place around mid-2011. These vehicles had predominantly been utilized in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas in engagements between the Zetas and Gulf cartels and in a few other locales (see Map Locations). While it has been said that the Mexican government has seized well over one hundred of these vehicles, only about two dozen photographic examples exist per our research (see Picture Gallery).

The introduction of this work analyzes the types and evolution of cartel IAFVs in Mexico. To this analysis can be added “vehicle number 24” in the picture gallery, which highlights fixed 50 cal. sniper rifles and machine guns found in or on various vehicles seized from the cartels. These represent multiple 50 cal. sniper rifles and heavy machine guns on fixed mounts inside vehicles and, in one instance, on the back of a vehicle with armored gun shield protection. While we have seen no photographic evidence of an organic (main) gun placed on cartel IAFVs as of yet, these weapons and the ammo identified on the back of vehicle number 19—the popemobile—as scaling out to approximately 25mm bore diameter along with the 50 cal. rounds suggest that heavy infantry weapons have been fired from the interior of some of the larger IAFVs. Additionally, one of the images in vehicle number 21 is thought to confirm antitank weaponry damage to the driver’s seat area of the vehicle. This would suggest that rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) or other antitank weaponry, not uncommon in cartel arsenals, were, indeed, used in engagements between opposing cartel mounted forces, as has been reported.

Given the apparent cessation of the fielding of narco armor since early 2012, quite possibly these vehicles have reached an evolutionary dead end, with more emphasis once again placed by the cartels on fielding more stealth-masked armored vehicles, such as armored SUVs, that better blend in with civilian cars and trucks so as to eluded identification and targeting by Mexican federal forces. Still, given the ever changing conflict waging in Mexico among the cartels and against the Mexican government, future resumption of IAFV employment will always remain a potential.

The editors would like to thank “Chivas,” Steven Dudley, and Dave Dilegge for their support in this project, and the many contributors to this work for their past writing on this topic. This work would not have been possible without the cooperation of the online sites *Borderland Beat* ([borderlandbeat.com](http://borderlandbeat.com)), *InSight Crime* ([insightcrime.org](http://insightcrime.org)), and *Small Wars Journal—El Centro* ([smallwarsjournal.com](http://smallwarsjournal.com)), which have provided reprint permission for their writings on this topical area. In fact, much of the picture gallery was initially built from the images contained in two of the earlier *Borderland Beat* stories created by bloggers and then expanded. Finally, we would like to thank the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), Fort Leavenworth, for its support in publishing this document and seeing its value vis-à-vis our need to better understand all elements of the ongoing criminal insurgencies in Mexico.

## GLOSSARY

AA	antiaircraft
AP	armor-piercing
ASUV	armored sport utility vehicle
Caltrop	multi-pointed metal jack; placed on the ground and used to deflate the tires of vehicles
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
El Monstruo	The Monster; a narco armored Mack dump truck
El Rinoceronte	The Rhinoceros— Rhino truck; a Mexican Federal police vehicle
Gun-trucks	field conversions of US wheeled vehicles later in the Vietnam War, with armor and weapons added; similar vehicles since have been seen in Somalia, Iraq, Libya, and Mexico and used by non-state forces
IAFV	improvised armored fighting vehicle
I&W	indications & warnings
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IED	improvised explosive device
Narco	drug trafficker in Mexico
Narcobloqueos	narco roadblocks; roadblocks used for kidnapping purposes and also to limit road access to areas where cartel operations are currently taking place
Narco-tanks	slang term for the improvised armored cars and trucks used by the Mexican cartels; improvised armored fighting vehicle
Narcotanques	narco-tanks
Narco-trucks	slang term for the improvised armored cars and trucks used by the Mexican cartels; improvised armored fighting vehicle
PF	Policia Federal
Popemobile	A lightly armored vehicle with bulletproof glass (for viewing purposes) used to transport the Pope for public events
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
Run-flat	special tires that can be ridden on even when deflated
SUV	sport utility vehicles
SWAT	Special Weapons & Tactics
Up-armored	upgrading the armor of a vehicle
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

# INTRODUCTION: NARCO ARMORED VEHICLE THREATS AND COUNTERMEASURES

Robert J. Bunker  
*Small Wars Journal*  
*Originally published August 29, 2011*

**Who:** Mexican Cartels (Lev III/IAFV; primarily Zetas & Gulf Cartel)

**What:** The deployment of narco armored cars and improvised armored fighting vehicles (IAFV) in Mexico as a byproduct of the criminal insurgencies taking place.

**When:** Indications & warnings (I&W) traced back to at least 1979 to the Dadeland Mall shooting in Florida, tied to a Colombian cartel assassination team using improvised ballistic protection in a delivery truck (historical). Mexican cartel deployment of armored sport utility vehicles (SUV) begins by the late 1990s and has greatly increased over time. A firebreak was crossed with the initial deployment of IAFVs in 2010.

**Where:** Threat Level I- sporadic at best in Mexico; Threat Level II- throughout cartel areas of operations in Mexico; Threat Level III- primarily in North-Eastern and Central Mexico, with vehicles recovered in the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

**Why:** For well over a decade a deadly arms race has been taking place in Mexico among the various warring cartels and their gang and mercenary auxiliary forces. Weaponry has been shifting from civilian arms to law enforcement arms and then to infantry combat small arms. The introduction of cartel enforcers with former military and special forces backgrounds has resulted in the fielding of cartel units that have been increasingly professionalized. A component of this process is the deployment of armored SUVs and IAFVs.

## Synopsis of Narco Armored Vehicle Threats

Threat Level	Description	Encountered	Specifics
I (Defensive)	Vehicle with improvised/hasty ballistic protection	“War wagon” at Dadeland Mall, Florida (1979); sporadic/hasty use in Mexico (current)	Ballistic vests hanging inside a delivery truck to provide protection to Colombian cartel assassination team (historical); vests, sand bags, and/or steel plates for basic ballistic protection



II (Defensive)	Professionally armored SUV	Throughout Mexico (increasingly since the late 1990s)	Internal armor kits, ballistic glass, run flat tires
III- <i>Early</i> (Offensive)	Improvised pill box/firing position on bed of truck [see Gerardo for evolutionary examples]	Primarily North-Eastern and Central Mexico (~2009-2010); typically superseded by more mature variant	Work trucks with soft cabs; armored screens/box with firing ports for gunmen in bed
III- <i>Mature</i> (Offensive)	IAFV [aka “narco-tanks” ( <i>narcotanques</i> ), “Rhino trucks,” and “monster trucks” ( <i>monstruos</i> ); [Sullivan/Elkus]	Primarily North-Eastern and Central Mexico (since 2010)	Platforms used are typically work trucks/ heavy equipment. Exterior armor plating (.5 to 2.5 cm), gun ports, and air conditioning for mounted troops; external gun mounts, turret firing ports, breaching rams
IV (Offensive)	IAFV with organic tank-like gun	<i>Predicted evolution</i>	Level III with organic anti-vehicular main gun

## Tactical Analysis

Narco armored vehicles come in defensive (Lev I-II) and offensive (Lev III) variants. While Lev II vehicles were superior in defensive armor to early Lev III vehicles (which did not have protected cabs/driver compartments), the early Lev III vehicles utilized gun ports as an offensive innovation. This allows for mounted infantry tactics to be conducted, much like those undertaken by military units.

## Defensive Vehicles

*Threat Level I:* Hasty/improvised ballistic protection utilized in otherwise soft vehicle. Countermeasures: utilize shredder/hardened projectiles (via shotgun) and higher velocity antipersonnel (AP) rounds (via semi-auto rifles) for anti-personnel use, targeting tires and engines (radiator) for mobility kills, and establishing perimeter to allow for more specialized SWAT response.

*Threat Level II:* Professionally armored SUVs can be encountered alone or in “commando units” of up to dozens of vehicles in Mexico. These threats can also be interspersed with soft (unarmored) vehicles. Since firing ports are atypical, cartel gunmen lose primary defensive advantage when dismounting to engage other forces. Still, the armored doors/vehicle body can

be used for ballistic shielding purposes. Countermeasures: attempt mobility kills against tires and engines (radiator), target dismounted gunmen with small-arms fire, establish perimeter to allow for more specialized SWAT response. The deployment of spike strips and/or commandeering trucks/big rigs to isolate avenues of approach/contain in urban choke points may be warranted.

## **Offensive Vehicles**

*Threat Level III- Early:* armored fighting position/pill box placed on the truck bed. Countermeasures: target driver in soft cab, engine (radiator), and/or tires for a mobility kill. Maintain standoff ranges/establish perimeter to allow for more specialized SWAT/military resources to engage armored position/pillbox.

*Threat Level III- Mature:* an IAFV with full body protection, gun ports, and an air conditioning unit carrying between 5-20 cartel gunmen. Variants may include breaching rams, turreted gun ports, cell boosters (for communications), and other innovations. Sizes range primarily from work trucks to dump-truck-size vehicles. They are somewhat like the Mexican Federal Police vehicle, El “rinoceronte,” but cruder in appearance. Tires may be exposed or protected by armor—no “run-flat” tire usage evident to date. These vehicles have only been seen individually or in small numbers operating together, though dozens of these vehicles (possibly more than 100) have now been built. The attachment of a few of these vehicles to provided security to a narco armored SUV convoy (Level II threat) must now be a consideration. Note— cartel gunmen riding in these vehicles may be carrying rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) or tube-launched antitank weapons that allow them to target and knock out opposing cartel IAFVs. This represents a concern in addition to military small arms (assault rifles, launchers, and grenades) being carried by these mobile infantry forces. This threat is beyond most Mexican state and federal law enforcement response capabilities. Countermeasures: military medium and heavy tanks and other antiarmor systems; in dire situations target tires can be targeted for mobility kill, spike strips and/or commandeer trucks/big rigs can be utilized to isolate/contain avenues of approach in urban choke points while awaiting military support.

*Threat Level IV (Predicted Evolution):* linear projection of the Level III Threat into the future. Superior antivehicular offensive capabilities of such an organic (main) gun added to IAFVs would generate a threat way beyond Mexican state and federal law enforcement response capabilities. Probable 50 Cal. initial machine gun system usage with an eventual increase into smaller 20-40 mm cannon sizes derived from AA (antiaircraft) guns. Countermeasures: same as Level III. Mature; responding to this threat would basically turn this into a conventional military armored fighting vehicle engagement. Utilizing attack helicopters with antiarmor systems against these vehicles would be warranted.

No expectation exists for US law enforcement inside US territory to encounter a narco IAFV [Level III Threat]. While such a vehicle in an overwatch position in Mexico could conceivably cover a drug load going into the US, such a scenario presently appears unlikely, though co-opted personnel in Mexican military vehicles in years past have been involved in such incidents. Far more likely scenarios for US law enforcement on the US side of the border are sporadic/

potential encounters with Mexican cartel operatives in defensive oriented Level I and Level II threat vehicles. (Note: some instances of cartel vehicles containing caltrop and oil slick dropping compartments have been reported. The effectiveness of such systems will vary.)

*\*Countermeasures guidance underwent a basic tactical review by retired law enforcement and military personnel with extensive special operations field experience.*

**Significance:** Cartel Tactics; Cartel Weaponry; Law Enforcement Countermeasures/Response; Officer Safety Issues

## SECTION 1: VIDEO NARCO-TRUCKS READY FOR WAR IN MEXICO

Elyssa Pachico

*InSight Crime*

*Originally published April 14, 2011*

The armored cars Mexican gangs use to do battle in the contested state of Tamaulipas are increasingly technologically sophisticated, equipped with sniper platforms and James Bond-style gadgets.

A video produced by newspaper El Universal surveys vehicles that the military has seized from the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel in the northern state, which is one of the most violent in Mexico.

The cars range from crude imitations of tanks to SUVs capable of stopping rounds from M-16 and AK-47s. Gunmen are shying away from using flashy, luxury cars, El Universal reports, opting instead for steel-plated vehicles more fit for combat, in some cases, than those used by the military.

Some of the modifications made to the vehicles depicted in the video indicate how bad street warfare has got in Tamaulipas. One tank-like car comes equipped with a perch, which allows a sniper to cover a 160 degree radius. A rhino truck is fitted with two shotguns in the driver's seat, as well as steel reinforcements capable of resisting grenade attacks. Other pick-up trucks have been fitted with gadgets that spray oil and nails on the road.

The army has confiscated 100 "narco-trucks" in Tamaulipas, reports El Universal. As the video shows, these are vehicles built to withstand serious offensive warfare. Armored car sales in Mexico rose 20 percent last year, according to Reuters, as upper class families sought ways to protect themselves from kidnapping and attacks. It is possible that criminal groups also contributed to the sales boom. The fact that gangs like the Zetas are buying Level 5 bulletproof cars, then further modifying them to better accommodate snipers, is an indication of how brutal the war in Tamaulipas has become.

Criminal groups in the state also make use of imitation military trucks and uniforms, like the ones thought to have been used at the Zetas roadblock where Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Jaime Zapata was killed in February. There is one key difference between the imitation trucks and those actually used by the military: army vehicles are often not even armored. That drug gangs like the Zetas are using military-style trucks and clothing, almost indistinguishable from the real thing except for small details, demonstrates their determination to exert territorial and social control in Tamaulipas. That the group are literally presenting themselves in state uniform in Tamaulipas lends support to those that compare them to an insurgency.

Perhaps more worrying than the evidence of advanced technical equipment is that the drug gangs are also showing increased sophistication in their use of “urban guerrilla” strategies. According to the video report, groups like the Zetas are known to travel in convoys of ten to 20 vehicles, carrying up to five gunmen each. They carry out carefully planned attacks, ambushing targets such as a military patrol, making use of side streets to encircle and trap their intended victim.

This kind of strategic advantage— knowledge of the ground and, presumably, pointmen on the streets who can track the movements of the security forces— will likely prove just as important for the drug gangs as sophisticated technological equipment. A decked-out truck is one thing, but knowing how to best mobilize an army of grenade-resistant vehicles is another.

Tagged under Drug Trafficking • Central America • video • Gulf Cartel • Zetas • Z3 • Z40 • Tony Tormenta

*To see the El Universal video in link goto:*

<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/video-narco-trucks-ready-for-war-in-mexico>.

## SECTION 2: ZETAS-NARCO TANK SEIZED IN NORTH MEXICO

Staff

*InSight Crime*

*Originally published May 11, 2011*

Mexico's police seized an armored tank belonging to drug trafficking organization the Zetas in the border state of Tamaulipas.

The tank is built out of metal, and *El Blog del Narco* said it showed technological developments compared to similar vehicles that have previously been seized.

It can travel at up to 110 kilometers per hour, and carry 12 passengers, with two openings from which gunmen can deploy rocket launchers, grenades and rifles. The vehicle reportedly had a space at the back from which passengers could release nails or oil onto the road to thwart pursuers.

The body of the tank was not damaged by a gunfight with the authorities, but its tires were punctured, as it lacked proper wheel guards.

Police made the find in Ciudad Mier, a small town which hit the headlines in November last year when the majority of its residents left, fleeing a turf war between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel.

This is the latest in a series of seizures of increasingly sophisticated armored vehicles owned by Mexico's drug trafficking organizations.

Tagged under Drug Trafficking • Central America • Mexico • Zetas

## **SECTION 3: MEXICAN ARMY FINDS ‘MONSTERS’ IN CIUDAD CAMARGO**

Overmex  
*Borderland Beat*  
*Originally published June 5, 2011*

Heavily armored vehicles — similar in design to so-called “Monsters” used by the Zetas cartel in firefights against the Mexican military and the Gulf Cartel — were seized Saturday, June 4, 2011, by the Mexican Army in Ciudad Camargo, across the border from Rio Grande City. The military announced the results of the warehouse raid in a news release Sunday, June 5, 2011

The Monitor

The Mexican Army announced Sunday night the results of a raid at a warehouse that was being used as a makeshift machine shop by cartel members to build armored assault vehicles.

The raid took place Saturday in the Prolongación Gonzalez area in the city of Camargo, across from Rio Grande City, during a routine patrol where a military convoy came across the warehouse, according to a news release from the Mexican Army.

As a result of the raid, the Mexican military seized two dump trucks that had been heavily armored and modified to carry a squad of gunmen. The two trucks were painted black.

The military also seized two other dump trucks, 23 tractor-trailers, four backhoes, two trailers, seven load-bearing attachments for trailers, seven towing platforms, one tractor and some ammunition and magazines.

The military didn’t report any confrontations or arrests.

The military didn’t state which criminal organization the heavily armored trucks belonged to, but in other parts of Mexico, armed forces have found similar designs belonging to the Zetas, who typically call the vehicles “Monsters.”

The Monsters have been used by the Zetas in a number of firefights — both against their rivals, the Gulf Cartel, and the Mexican military. The heavily armored vehicles vary in design, ranging from modified Ford F-350’s to large tractor-trailers — all armored in makeshift shops and painted black.

In one firefight last year, in rural northern Tamaulipas, the Gulf Cartel defeated a squad of Zetas who were using Monsters and — after the fight — spray-painted insults on them. Those Monsters were later found by authorities.

## SECTION 4: 'NARCO-TANK' FACTORY FOUND IN NORTH MEXICO

Patrick Corcoran

*InSight Crime*

*Originally published June 7, 2011*

Mexico's army discovered a warehouse with four "narco-tanks," two still unfinished, near the border city of Camargo. This is the biggest-yet find of such heavily fortified vehicles belonging to drug gangs.

Authorities said that the trucks were being manufactured for the Gulf Cartel. This is the first time so many of these armored vehicles have been discovered in the same location. (See video below).

The "tanks," which are actually heavy trucks outfitted with homemade armor, gun turrets, and even James Bond-like rear nail releases to throw off pursuers, have mostly been discovered in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas, where Camargo is located. A narco-tank was also discovered in the Pacific state of Jalisco last month.

The tanks are typically homemade, with ad hoc designs and fixes. However, in the U.S., legitimate businesses are catering to Mexicans' demand for armored vehicles. As UPI reports, companies such as Safeguard Security Holdings, Inc., which has a deal to supply the Mexican government with more than 40 vehicles with the highest level of armor on the market, are finding clients among private businesses and government agents alike.

Tagged under Drug Trafficking • Central America • Mexico • Video • Video México

*To view the Porvenir video see the link at:*

<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/narco-tank-factory-found-in-north-mexico>



## SECTION 5: MEXICO'S 'NARCO-TANKS' NOT A GAME CHANGER

Patrick Corcoran

*InSight Crime*

*Originally published June 9, 2011*

Recent discoveries of homemade “tanks” belonging to Mexican criminal groups have caused widespread concern, but these heavily-armored trucks do not mark a change in gangs’ real source of power: their ability to corrupt.

Narco-tanks do represent an increase in gangs’ capacity to inflict, and, perhaps more importantly, withstand attacks. As InSight has noted, recent discoveries of tanks and armored cars represent increased technological sophistication on the part of the gangs. But, so far, these military-style vehicles do not appear to be a game-changer. There are no reports of the tanks allowing gangs to attack and overwhelm convoys of soldiers, for example. Nor have they been turned on civilian populations.

While the “narco-tanks,” as the vehicles are often called, make for great blog fodder and provide entertaining videos, seeing their rise as a significant escalation in Mexico’s drug war would be wrongheaded. Unlike another recent technological innovation in criminal hardware, “narco-subs” (semi or fully submersible vessels used by Colombian traffickers to avoid maritime interdiction), these tanks don’t help their owners to carry out any task fundamental to their strength.

Their use, in fact, appears to be concentrated in one area. This is the north Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, where the Gulf Cartel and their former armed wing, the Zetas—who turned on them in force in 2010—are fighting for control of this lucrative strip of territory. The military approach comes, in part, from the groups’ shared history. The Zetas’ core is former Mexican Special Forces; the Gulf has long used current and former police to fill their ranks.

The tanks are useful in this area also because the battle-lines are different. As opposed to the fight for other cities in Mexico, specifically Juarez and Acapulco, where the battle is about controlling specific neighborhoods for small time drug-peddling, this fight is about controlling an entire trafficking corridor. This means moving groups of ten to fifteen “soldiers” at a time. To date, the traffickers have used bullet-proof SUVs, but they are obviously suffering too many casualties, and have therefore turned to the “tanks.”

Still, the emphasis on military strength as we evaluate the Mexican criminal groups’ power is misdirected. Mexico’s gangs may be famous for the tens of thousands of dead bodies left in their wake, but their firepower is not the source of their strength. The gangs present the threat they do because their massive profits give them the capacity to corrupt the state and overwhelm criminal

justice institutions. The ability to inflict violence while avoiding arrest is merely an unpleasant byproduct of this.

While narco-submersibles make it easier for Colombian traffickers to send cocaine northward with little risk of capture, thus driving up their profit margins and causing the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to dub the vessels a “game changer,” Mexico’s armored trucks do not increase the gangs’ wealth, or their power to corrupt.

Furthermore, the novelty of the tanks is not so much in their weaponry, which is not very different to what the narcos have long had in their arsenals, but rather their armor. That is to say, insofar as they represent an improvement from armored SUVs, it is in their defense more than their attack capacity.

A focus on hardware like these trucks, which is the most visible manifestation of Mexico’s drug conflict, forms part of a long-existent pattern of observers misunderstanding the nature of Mexico’s criminal groups. Among some of the most frequently repeated falsehoods: that the gangs are hierarchical organizations set up like army divisions, capable of, or interested in, overthrowing the Mexican government, who are moving to take over the streets in hundreds of U.S. cities.

These groups are more federations than vertical, military-like structures. And they are increasingly fragmented, a fact that will make the use of these “narco-tanks” obsolete, especially as smaller, more mobile units enter into more of an asymmetrical war.

In the end, the “tanks” are a sexy narrative, but these mistaken notions about the criminals’ “military might” not only inflate the power of Mexico’s groups far beyond any reasonable assessment, they also obscure the problem, and its potential solutions.

Tagged under Drug Trafficking • Central America • Mexico

## SECTION 6: NARCO-ARMOR IN MEXICO

John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus

*Small Wars Journal*

*Originally published July 14, 2011*

Known alternatively as “narco-tanks” (narcotanques), “Rhino trucks,” and “monster trucks”(monstruos), the crude armored vehicles emerging in Mexico’s cartel war are evidence of a changing tactical logic on the ground. “Narco-tanks” are better characterized as improvised armored fighting vehicles (IAFVs)—portending a shift in the infantry-centric nature of the cartel battlespace.

Narco-tactics have been, for the most part, infantry-centric—consisting of small raids, blockades, and gun battles. The use of armored sport utility vehicles for transportation, raids, and tactical inbattle maneuver is largely an extension of the small unit infantry operations that characterize the tactical logic of the cartel war. The presence of armored vehicles ups the ante.

Although press accounts label them as “tanks,” Heinz Guderian would scoff at the rust buckets increasingly being found in Mexico. But those familiar with the history and development of armored fighting vehicle (AFVs) will recognize the tactical logic—however crude—of the “narco-truck.”

The narco-truck is an IAFV with armor plating, air conditioning, and gun ports. Some models have 2.5 cm steel plates. Others have gun turrets. These trucks are enough to stop personal weapons but not defend against anti-vehicle weapons.<sup>1</sup> While these IAFVs are limited by the lack of shielding for the tires, they are flexible enough to serve in a combination of direct fire and troop transport roles.<sup>2</sup> As Gordon Housworth noted, the increased complexity and lethality of platoon and company sized engagements in the drug war has led to a greater demand for mobility—and armored SUVs are not enough to create a “poor man’s mechanized infantry.” Each narco-truck can transport a squad, and are reminiscent of the “gun trucks” used in convoy security operations in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

Narco-trucks grant an advantage over dismounted forces, municipal and state police, and low level federal units. The importance of this should not be understated, despite the fact that they would be instantly destroyed in any stand-up engagement with a well-ordered conventional formation armed with anti-vehicle weapons. IAFVs grant greater mobility, the ability to deploy larger numbers of gunmen, and are sure to provoke countermeasures in the escalating battle for territory among respective cartels and their opponents at municipal, state and federal levels. Conventional police tactics are insufficient to address IAFVs. A shift to gendarmerie-type light and mechanized infantry with military support is needed. The Policia Federal (PF) is rapidly adjusting its force structure to accommodate this threat. Municipal and state police have yet to make the shift. This will require higher levels of integration and cooperation among Mexico’s

police and military than has been seen in the past.

As William F. Owen noted, combined arms does not depend on having an established state military.<sup>4</sup> Operations in Libya (as well as the “Toyota War” before it) demonstrate that primitive conventional capabilities can be reverse-engineered from commonly available industrial products. Commercial medium and heavy-duty trucks and tractors provide the raw material for these modifications, and future models will likely continue to be progressively upgraded into IAFVs.<sup>5</sup> The cartels assemble and modify IAFVs in makeshift factories within areas they control. It is likely the cartels will accelerate use of IAFVs in their competition to control the plazas and retain freedom of maneuver within their zones of impunity. The result is a cartel arms race.

Cartel tactics in Mexico, which began with assassinations and raiding missions bridging the gap between crime and irregular warfare, are looking more and more like conventional combined arms and infantry and mechanized infantry missions. IAFVs can not only transport squads but—with armaments for gun turrets—also have the capacity to support them in firefights.

Whatever the ultimate outcome of Mexico’s criminal insurgencies, the “narco-trucks” demonstrate that the concept of combined arms is inherently flexible. As the military historian Archer Jones noted, it makes more sense to conceive of a set of basic weapons systems that repeat themselves throughout history rather than a set of specific time-dated capabilities.<sup>6</sup> Although there is thought to be a strict dividing line between irregular and conventional warfare, what Stephen Biddle dubs the “modern system” of ground tactics—defined by tactical combat in the First World War—remains a basic and ignored element of warfare in many irregular conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

On the ground in Mexico, it is important to recognize the impact of this tactical innovation. Light infantry-like gendarmerie force structure augmenting civil police, with military and intelligence support—is needed to create the needed military conditions for security and governance. Hopefully the presence of IAFVs / narcotankers will stimulate innovations needed to address this threat.

## SECTION 7: 'NARCO-TANKS'— MEXICO'S CARTELS GET ASYMMETRIC WEAPONS

Gordon Housworth

*InSight Crime*

*Originally published July 19, 2011*

The discovery of a “narco-tank” factory in north Mexico is the latest evolution in traffickers’ increasingly tactical struggle for territory. While some minimize the importance of these vehicles, they could escalate the battle, pushing Mexico to resemble conflicts such as the Iraq war.

The tanks are an example of asymmetrical weaponry. This can be defined as the use of a non-military device as a substitute for traditional means to achieve military objectives.

The latest discovery included four heavy trucks, complete with gun turrets and 2.5 centimeter steel plates that were strong enough to “resist the caliber of personal weapons the soldiers use,” a “source” told the AFP. Authorities said there were 23 more trucks ready for an assembly-line of sorts.

These vehicles are evidence of an arms race between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas, with the Gulf Cartel now attempting to match and surpass their former enforcers, who broke from the Gulf’s grip in 2007, and have since formed their own criminal group.

The two groups are fighting for control of the lucrative strip of land along the Texas border, mostly in the states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon. Control of that territory gives the winner the right to tax (known as “cobrar piso” in Mexican underworld parlance) other legitimate and criminal businesses that operate within it, a major source of revenue for these organizations.

The Zetas, the core of which are defectors from Mexico’s Special Forces, likely elevated this latest arms war to asymmetrical weapons. “Narco-tanks” from this groups have been found in various parts of the country, including one dubbed “El Moustro” (Mexican for “The Monster”) for its size and look.

### **Escalation from conventional to asymmetrical weapons**

The scramble of these groups to outgun each other dates back years. Guns have long been part of the country’s cultural fabric, but criminal organizations added thousands of military-grade and civilian semi-automatic rifles to their stocks, especially as the battle for territory heated up in the early 2000s.

This was followed by the addition of weapons such as grenades, grenade launchers, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), most diverted from Mexican and Guatemalan military stockpiles.

Criminal groups, in particular the Zetas and parts of the Juarez Cartel, have also moved towards bombs. This includes the systematic use of commercial blasting products, primarily the water-gel explosive, Tovex, which was placed in fixed locations beginning in 2009.

The first Mexican Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED), or car bomb, only appeared in late 2010, despite the fact that a VBIED is both a lethal shrapnel pack and convenient delivery mechanism for an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

### **Emergence of the poor man's mechanized infantry**

Just as with conventional weapons, successful sustained employment of an asymmetrical weapon implies good tradecraft in operational security, weapons and munitions procurement, recruitment, training and operations.

The increase in the number of pitched battles involving platoon or company-sized engagements attempting to take territory from a rival, for instance, demanded better mobility in moving troops. Initially, this meant armoring sedans and SUVs with ballistic glass and alloy steel, making this an established Mexican growth industry even though it has been repeatedly shown that the advantage goes to the determined attacker on offense.

(To be sure, beginning in 2000, SUVs and four-door trucks, which were primarily unarmored, had become the de facto personnel carriers for cartel foot soldiers. The demand from the cartels was so great that these vehicles were being stolen across Mexico from both Mexican and foreign nationals, despite the fact that such vehicles caught in ambush suffered withering casualties.)

Targets in an unarmored vehicle, untrained driver, or poorly trained bodyguards have a nominal one in nine chance of survival; targets in armored vehicles, with a driver trained in escape and evasion, as well as all bodyguards trained and properly armed, only see their survival rate rise to a nominal one in seven.

Thus, the emergence of “narco-tanks,” is a natural result of the desire to “up-armor” larger vehicles that could transport a squad level unit along with their weapons in order to close on their adversaries without significant attrition.

### **Making and Using These Vehicles**

Illicit procurement of military-grade tracked or wheeled mechanized armor differs from that of conventional weapons such as assault rifles and machine guns. Mechanized armor is large, heavy, relatively costly, difficult to conceal in transit, has specialized maintenance and spare

parts requirements, moves through more specialized sellers, and generally yields the element of surprise by early discovery. Its mere presence often invites immediate counterattack prior to its deployment.

Conversely, commercial medium and heavy duty trucks and tractors are readily available by purchase and theft as are parts and skilled mechanics and fabricators. Covert modification of these vehicles into asymmetrical weapons can sustain the element of surprise to the point of engagement with the enemy.

These Mexican “monsters” follow the footsteps of the “gun truck” field conversions done by United States’ forces in Vietnam from late 1967 through late 1972. Gun trucks were essential for convoy security and perimeter defense. Considered by many to be the key U.S.-wheeled vehicle of Vietnam, these armor-cladded weapons platforms were usually built on 2.5 or 5 ton 6x6 trucks. Gun trucks reappeared in Iraq in 2003 for the same convey security role. Mexico appears to be following a similar trajectory.

The first report of such vehicles came in 2010 when the *Blog Del Narco* reported that an armored truck belonging to the Zetas was captured after a firefight near Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas. That model had no sloping armor and could only cruise at 40 kilometers per hour (kph), an obvious sitting duck in a firefight.

A year later, Zeta models could cruise at 110 kph, carry 12 men, and had better deflecting armor. Its Achilles heel appears to have been its exposed, unarmored tires. One assumes that protected run-flat tires will appear in succeeding models.

Interestingly, in concert with proper operational tactics, these new asymmetrical weapons platforms are not appreciably different from Mexican Federal Police vehicles such as the “rinoceronte.”

## **The Implications**

Cartels can now produce a wide variety of cladded armor vehicles by mating commercial trucks with local materials. Mexican adversaries will continue to “up-armor” civilian trucks with better alloy steels, fiberglass, kevlar and ballistic glass, deploying them in larger numbers than would be possible with conventional mechanized armor.

While the appearance of classic gun trucks with heavy weapon turrets will require access to larger caliber weapons than what is currently fielded in Mexico, it is a given that armored trucks blending features of both tank and armored personnel carrier will have an increasing operational role. That presence will be met with opposing tanks, opponents’ procurement of RPGs and the deployment of another asymmetrical weapon, the Improvised Explosive Device or IED, not unlike the ones employed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## ASYMMETRY'S UNEXPECTED RISKS

Asymmetrical attackers employ unexpected, non-traditional and broadly applicable methods. You, the target, should keep three equations in mind to characterize Risk, Threat and Impact:

Threat = Vulnerabilities X Intentions X Capabilities

Risk = Threat X Vulnerability X Asset Value

Impact = Resources + Unexpected Methods + (Understanding + Exploitation)  
Vulnerabilities + Effect Multipliers (M1+M2+M3+...Mx)

To be effective, however, you must learn to view them through the eyes of the asymmetric attacker. If you are proactive you have the chance to be at the beginning of this progression (prevent and deter):

Prevent, Deter, Prepare, Detect, Respond, Recover, Mitigate.

If you are not, you will remain at the painful end (recover and mitigate).

Tagged under Drug Trafficking • Central America • Mexico • Merida Initiative

*To view the video of El Moustro de Los ZZZ.. see the link:*

<http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/narco-tanks-mexicos-cartels-get-asymmetric-weapons>



## SECTION 8: NARCO ENGINEERING

Arm Chair, trans.  
(Juan Alberto Cedillo)  
*Borderland Beat*  
Originally published June 19, 2012

Editors' Note: The images have been removed from this essay.

*Organized crime is engineering increasingly sophisticated equipment and armaments, their ability to use improvisation is impressive, for example, the unusual armored vehicles that are used to protect drug shipments. With crude materials such as steel plates and railway tracks, "narco engineering" has created real monsters, unbeatable with conventional weapons. Their place of origin is from Tamaulipas, however its use appears to extend to other entities, such as Zacatecas and Sinaloa.*

Juan Alberto Cedillo  
June 14, 2012

REYNOSA, TAMPS. (Proceso)-monsters, armored vehicles crafted by the Gulf Cartel, were assembled in a clandestine workshop of Camargo, a municipality of Tamaulipas in an area known as "Frontera Chica." In June 2011, troops of the 8th military zone based in Reynosa, found two finished monsters and other 23 others in waiting to be completed.

These units are result of the "Militarization of organized crime driven by Los Zetas", says proceso's Guadalupe Contreras-Correa, a researcher at the University of Texas at Brownsville, and explains: "The Zetas were formed from elements of the Mexican army's elite groups and were trained by foreign advisors in highly specialized weapons handling and counter-insurgency tactics."

Contreras-Correa adds that one effect of the militarization introduced by Los Zetas involved the professional tactics to eliminate the adversary: the use of non-conventional attack tactics, as the use of IED's and fragmentation grenades, mass kidnappings and roadblocks or "narcobloqueos." Furthermore, they introduced heavy weapons and armored vehicles, such as those made by the same group and the Gulf Cartel.

All types of vehicles were modified in the underground workshop of Camargo, with the aim to turn them into monsters: big rigs, dump trucks, flatbed trucks and even tractors.

An officer of the eighth military zone explains that the criminals changed the suspension so that

it could support up to 30 tons of weight. They would as the Officer indicated, cover the engine, the cabin and the back with at least one inch thick steel plates. The original supports were replaced by pieces of railroad rails.

The military emphasizes that the armor of these “monsters” can withstand attacks with AK47 and AR15 assault rifles and even .50 caliber and 40 mm grenades.

They designed several “models;” from one resembling the Popemobile, a light vehicle whose armored cabin could only have housed a couple of shooters, to trucks with capacity to carry 20 snipers. The inner walls of these vehicles were coated with polyurethane to dampen the noise produced from assault rifles.

During 2010, it was common to see monsters circulating through the traditional trafficking routes that branch from the municipality of San Fernando. This town is located in the Gulf of Mexico, 120 kilometers south of the border with United States.

“The monsters are used only to monitor and protect the transfer of drugs carried out in rural areas of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, as protection from rival groups”, the military emphasizes, and stresses that until now the narcos have not used such vehicles to combat the army or the Federal forces.

The existence of monsters dates from the first months of 2010, after the split between the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, former armed branch of that organization.

“Rupture had been brewing for some time, since Los Zetas expanded so rapidly. As they controlled important squares, which made the leadership of Los Zetas decide that it was time for more independence from their former partners,” says researcher Guadalupe Contreras-Correa.

The official split occurred after that, in February 2010, when the Concord 3, a sicario of Los Zetas in Reynosa, was executed by Metro 3, who worked for Los Zetas counterpart, the Gulf Cartel.

In March of that same year a bloody dispute for control of squares and territories in the area began, especially in the region known as the “Frontera Chica.” This included San Fernando, northern Veracruz, Tampico and Tamaulipas.

As both sides knew their places and methods of operation, the dispute reached the proportions of a civil war. Small armies of gunmen clashed in bloody battles in cities of Mier, Camargo, Guerrero, Miguel Alemán, and San Fernando, and these were only the towns the press covered.

Because of this it became important to protect drug shipments from looters. Out of this dilemma came the idea to create the monsters, vehicles that we began to see in other regions of

the country dominated by organized crime, such as in the States of Zacatecas and Sinaloa. The only way to destroy the monsters is to attack them with 20 mm anti-tank grenades, adds military source. In the past three years the military zone VIII has seized in Tamaulipas, more than 120 armored vehicles. These include six that are considered “real monsters,” because they weigh more than 30 tons and can accommodate more than 20 gunmen.

For the original Spanish version see <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=310970>

## PICTURE GALLERY

Note—This section expands upon the photo essays NARCO MOTOR TREND by Gerardo originally published June 19, 2011 in *Borderland Beat* and NARCO ENGINEERING by Arm Chair originally published June 19, 2012 in *Borderland Beat*.

*For various videos of these vehicles see:*

<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

### **Vehicle No. 1**

Name: Six IAFVs seized by Mexican Army

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 2**

Name: Pickup with Armored Box

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 3**

Name: Flatbed with Armored Fighting Position

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=310970>

**Vehicle No. 4**

Name: Red Double-Cab with Armored Boxes in Bed

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



**Vehicle No. 5**

Name: Red Double-Cab with Large Armored Box

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



**Vehicle No. 6**

Name: Metallic Gray Double-Cab with Large Armored Box

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 7**

Name: White Ford Truck with Armored Box

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 8**

Name: Green and Brown Truck with Armored Box

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 9**

Name: Very Large White Armored Truck

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 10**

Name: Armored Greenish Truck

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>

**Vehicle No. 11**

Name: Blue Toyota with Fighting Position on Top

Location: Nayarit

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



**Vehicle No. 12**

Name: Wrecked Red Armored Truck

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: July 2011



<http://m3report.wordpress.com/2011/07/09/twenty-seven-gunned-down-in-mexican-bar-mexican-cartels-plant-drugs-in-vehicles-of-unsuspecting-motorists/>

**Vehicle No. 13**

Name: 'El Monstruo 2011'

Location: Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas

Date: May 2011



<http://www.blogdelnarco.com/2011/05/localizan-vehiculo-de-los-zetas-el-monstruo-2011/>



<http://www.blogdelnarco.com/2011/05/localizan-vehiculo-de-los-zetas-el-monstruo-2011/>





<http://puronarco.com/2011/05/localizan-vehiculo-de-los-zetas-el-monstruo-2011/>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



[http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357\\_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html)



[http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357\\_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html)



[http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357\\_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357_a115355/mexicos-narco-tanks.html)

**Vehicle No. 14**

Name: 'El Monstruo 2010'

Location: Jalisco

Date: May 2011



1. [http://centralcurrentevents.blogspot.com/2011\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://centralcurrentevents.blogspot.com/2011_05_01_archive.html)

2. <http://www.globalpost.com/photo/5670555/mexico-cartel-narco-tank-2011-07-14>



<http://badassdigest.com/2011/06/06/your-mexican-drug-cartels-vehicle-of-choice/>





[http://www.carsguide.com.au/news-and-reviews/car-news/drug\\_war\\_monster\\_vehicles](http://www.carsguide.com.au/news-and-reviews/car-news/drug_war_monster_vehicles)



[http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357\\_a115356/mexicos-narco-tanks.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/06/115357_a115356/mexicos-narco-tanks.html)



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



[http://www.ocultos.com/fotos\\_de\\_guerras/es148/Fotos-del-Monstruo-2010-compacto](http://www.ocultos.com/fotos_de_guerras/es148/Fotos-del-Monstruo-2010-compacto)



[http://www.ocultos.com/fotos\\_de\\_guerras/es148/Fotos-del-Monstruo-2010-compacto](http://www.ocultos.com/fotos_de_guerras/es148/Fotos-del-Monstruo-2010-compacto)

**Vehicle No. 15**

Name: Buried Narco Tank

Location: Progreso, Coahuila

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>





<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.narcored.com/descubren-otro-monstruo-en-coahuila.html>

**Vehicle No. 16**

Name: Heavily Armored Truck with Ram

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: January 2012



<http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?199304-Mexico-soldiers-find-narco-tank-factory>



<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/01/18/mexican-cartels-moving-drugs-in-armored-vehicles/>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



**Vehicle No. 17**

Name: Bare Metal Armored Truck and Pill Box

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: January 2012



<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/01/18/mexican-cartels-moving-drugs-in-armored-vehicles/>

**Vehicle No. 18**

Name: 'Batmobile'

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/06/narco-engineering.html>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>





<http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?199304-Mexico-soldiers-find-narco-tank-factory>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/9320546-mexican-army-destroys-drug-cartel-narco-tanks>



<http://dennis22b.livejournal.com/pics/catalog/422/566203>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/mexican-army-finds-zeta-monsters-in.html>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



[http://abcnews.go.com/meta/search/imageDetail?format=plain&source=http://abcnews.go.com/images/Blotter/nc\\_narcotank\\_ciudad\\_camargo\\_1\\_nt\\_120118](http://abcnews.go.com/meta/search/imageDetail?format=plain&source=http://abcnews.go.com/images/Blotter/nc_narcotank_ciudad_camargo_1_nt_120118)



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://shusharmor.livejournal.com/582540.html>



**Vehicle No. 19**

Name: Papamóvil (Popemobile)

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/06/narco-engineering.html>



<http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/9330742-mexico-this-is-the-narcotank-war-truck-of-the-drug-gang>



<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2011/0607/Mexican-drug-traffickers-latest-weapon-monster-narco-tanks>



<http://holykaw.alltop.com/mexican-drug-cartels-add-armored-vehicles-to>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/narco-motor-trend.html>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?199304-Mexico-soldiers-find-narco-tank-factory>



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



**Ammo analysis by David A. Kuhn:**

The linked ammunition is not identifiable even after significant photo enhancement, however, it 'scales' out at approximately 25mm bore diameter and is no doubt HE or better. The style of the steel link on the belt is consistent with RFAS or Romanian links.

There are two possibilities on the 40mm grenade. The photo is a close match for the U.S. M 433 HEDP which is also produced by Charter Industries of Singapore. The other possibility would be South African. The stamping across the circumference of the lower portion of the cartridge casing is in the exact position and total number of characters as the M8842A1 HV, HE Swartklip grenade manufactured in South Africa. Swartklip grenades have been encountered in the cartel's inventories before.

The .50 cal. rounds appear to be standard armor piercing -which would be black tipped. I think that the green tint is just reflected background light. The only green tip ammunition that I seem to recall would be light green.



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?199304-Mexico-soldiers-find-narco-tank-factory>



<http://laddo.org/bin/content.cgi?news=1817&lang=en>



<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/06/mexican-army-finds-zeta-monsters-in.html>



<http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/14/mexico.guns/index.html>



<http://dennis22b.livejournal.com/pics/catalog/422/566906>



<http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=310970>

**Vehicle No. 20**

Name: Destroyed and Graffitied Narco Tank

Location: Unknown (Suspected Tamaulipas)

Date: 2010/2011





[http://www.blogdelnarco.com/2010/07/es- ... de\\_04.html](http://www.blogdelnarco.com/2010/07/es-...de_04.html)  
Link is dead.



<http://www.todopormexico.com/t2680-captura-el-ejercito-dos-narco-tanques-en-tamaulipas>





<http://telstarlogistics.typepad.com/telstarlogistics/2011/06/mexican-drug-cartels-create-diy-armored-vehicles.html>

<http://trickfist.com/content/damn-cool-pics/narco-tanks-and-armored-vehicles-of-mexican-drug-cartels/>

**Vehicle No. 21**

Name: Probable RPG Damaged Armored Truck

Location: Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas

Date: November 2010



<http://onceuponatimeinthewest1.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/mexican-narco-state-file-narcistas-kill-colima%E2%80%99s-ex-gov-troops-clash-with-gunmen-in-nayarit-ciudad-mier%E2%80%99s-6000-citizens-flee-zetas%E2%80%99-%E2%80%9Cmad-max%E2%80%9D-tank/>

**Vehicle No. 22**

Name: Black Armored Truck [Vehicle on the left]

Location: Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



<http://www.taringa.net/posts/noticias/15352208/Narco-Tanques.html>



**Vehicle No. 23**

Name: Metal Warehouse IAFV Factory

Location: Camargo, Tamaulipas

Date: June 2011



[http://viejo.narcored.com/?attachment\\_id=9544](http://viejo.narcored.com/?attachment_id=9544)



<http://puronarco.com/2011/06/hallaron-narcotanques-en-tamaulipas/>



<http://viejo.narcored.com/?p=9540>

**Vehicle No. 24**

Name: Examples of fixed sniper rifles & machine guns in vehicles

Location: Throughout Mexico

Date: n.d.



<http://www.zonafranca.mx/el-gobernador-de-sinaloa-mario-lopez-valdez-planteo-dar-armas-del-narco-a-su-policia-elite/>



1. <http://www.survivalistboards.com/showthread.php?p=2778024>
2. <http://seanlinnane.blogspot.com/2010/03/cartel-wars.html>

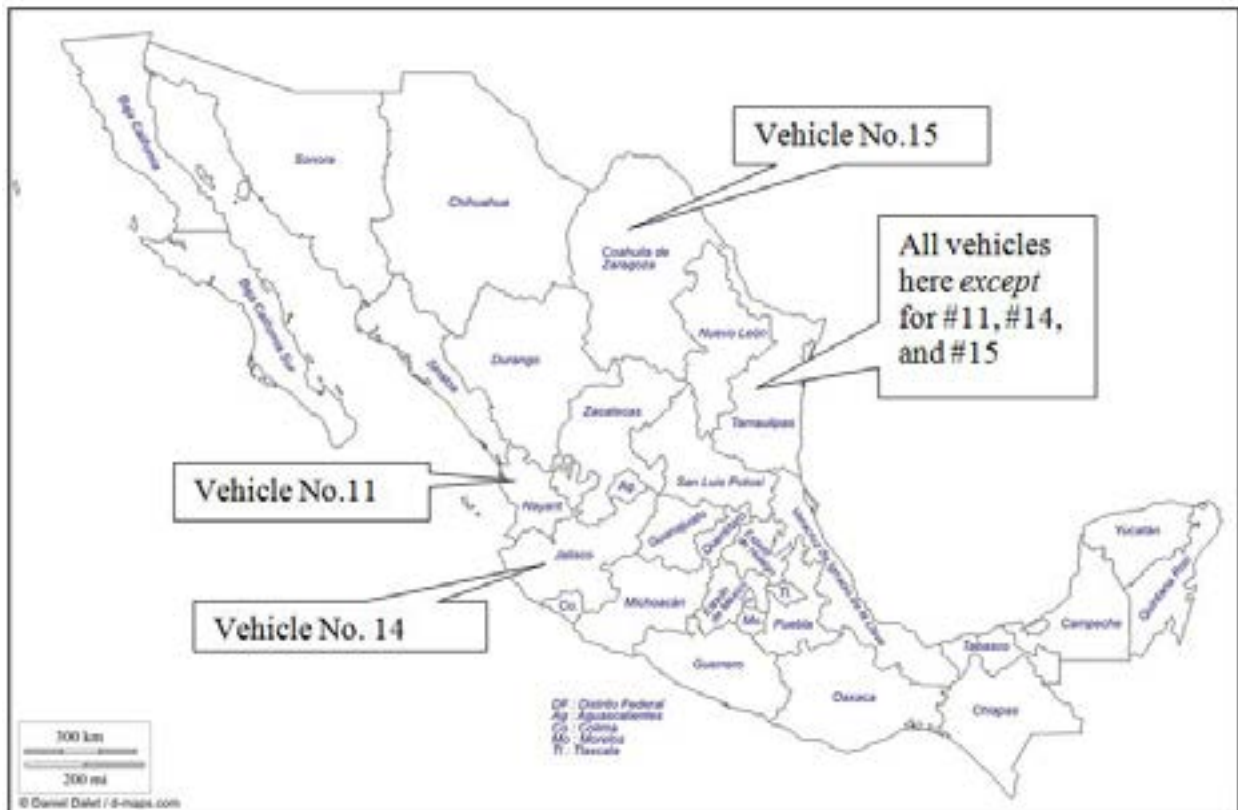


<http://pjmedia.com/blog/u-s-weapons-in-cartel-hands-blame-uncle-sam/>



<http://www.mexicoarmado.com/general/33514-50mm-2.html>

## MAP LOCATIONS



- Vehicle No. 1 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 2 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 3 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 4 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 5 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 6 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 7 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 8 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 9 - Tamaulipas
- Vehicle No. 10 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 11 - Nayarit

Vehicle No. 12 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 13 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 14 - Jalisco

Vehicle No. 15 - Coahuila

Vehicle No. 16 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 17 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 18 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 19 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 20 – Unknown (Suspected Tamaulipas)

Vehicle No. 21 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 22 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 23 - Tamaulipas

Vehicle No. 24 - Unknown

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION: NARCO ARMORED VEHICLE THREATS AND COUNTERMEASURES

Sources:

“Mexican Cartels now using ‘tanks’”- William Booth, *Washington Post*, June 7, 2011.

“Narco Motor Trend”- Gerardo, *Borderland Beat*, June 19, 2011. [See source for extensive collection of vehicular pictures].

“Monster Trucks in Mexico: The Zetas Armor Up”- *StratFor*, July 4, 2011.

“Narco-Armor in Mexico”- John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, *Small Wars Journal*, July 14, 2011.

“‘Narco-Tanks’: Mexico’s Cartels Get Asymmetric Weapons”- Gordon Housworth, *In Sight*, July, 2011.

Also see the numerous English and Spanish <http://www.youtube.com> video clips of these vehicles.

### SECTION 6: NARCO-ARMOR IN MEXICO

1. “Narco-tanks’ the latest innovation in Mexico’s drug war,” *Poder 360°*, 7 June 2011, Damien Cave, “Monster Trucks on the Road, From Gangs in Mexico,” *New York Times*, 7 June 2011, and Gordon Housworth, “Narco-Tanks: Mexico’s Cartels Get Asymmetric Weapons,” *InSight*, 11 June 2011, <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latestnews/item/1073-narco-tanks-cartel-competition-elevates-to-asymmetrical-weapons>.
2. Diana Wueger, “Mexican Drug War Gets More Fierce,” *UN Dispatch*, 17 May 2011, <http://www.undispatch.com/mexican-drug-war-gets-more-fierce>.
3. Houseworth, op cit.
4. William F. Owen, “The Toyota Horde,” *Small Wars Journal*, 7 April 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/04/the-toyota-horde/>.
5. Housworth, ibid.
6. See Archer Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
7. See Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Military Power in Modern Battle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.



## ADDENDUM

October 2013

### Vehicle No. 11

Name: Blue Toyota with Fighting Position on Top

Location: Nayarit

Date: June 2011

Additional Photos:





[http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-\(updates\)/page97](http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-(updates)/page97)

**Vehicle No. 25 (New Entry)**

Name: Silver 4-Door Truck with Hinged Roof Metal Shield

Location: Nayarit

Date: April 2011



Note: Shown next to Vehicle No. 11







(1) En Orizaba, lamentablemente, en Navarrit no sabemos de estas cosas. Ahora se



[http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-\(updates\)/page97](http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-(updates)/page97)

Photographic Example of the Mexican Military Deployed with Anti-tank Weaponry Against Zetas Cartel Vehicles

Name: Bazooka variant; possible RL-Blindicide (Belgium)

Location: Escobedo, Nuevo Leon

Date: May 2011



[http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-\(updates\)/page99](http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?156820-Weapons-seized-from-Drug-Cartels-by-Mexico-s-Military-amp-LE-(updates)/page99)

## CONTRIBUTORS

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