Insider’s Guide to the MS-13 Gang

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Overview

• Presenter’s Background
• MS-13’s Origins & History
• Operating Locations & Organization
• Gang Identification
• Criminal History
• Possible Links to al Qaeda
• Questions
Presenter’s Background

- Retired USAF Colonel & OSI Special Agent
- 25+ year career in federal law enforcement and CI
- 13 PCS moves
- Commanded 5 units, incl wing
- Senior Military Advisor to Henley-Putnam University
MS-13's Origins & History

- 1980s civil war in El Salvador
- Significant migration to the US
- Los Angeles concentration
- Rivalry with existing Mexican gangs
- MS-13 formed to protect immigrants from rivals
MS-13's Origins & History

• Many returned to El Salvador & group grew there, as well as neighboring countries
• Now largest gang in El Salvador
• Rival US gang is 18th Street gang...or is it?
Operating Locations & Organization

- FBI assesses 6-10K members in 42 states
- Other estimates much higher
- CA, DC, northeast
- Central America
- Worldwide, as many as 300K
- No formal leadership structure
Operating Locations & Organization

• Moderate expansion rate
• Many work for legit businesses
• Prefer US because crackdown harsh in Central America
• Primarily El Salvadorian, but other ethnic groups now members
• 11 – 40 years old
Gang Identification
Criminal History

- “Any crime, any time”
- All-purpose criminal enterprise
- “New turf” approached violently
- PG County, Maryland
- Connection to gangs in Central America
Criminal History

- American LE efforts
- Revolving door of criminals and illegals
- Is MS-13 deterred?
Criminal History

- No fear of LE
- Unclear if women can be members
- Women used by gang, but trust issues key
Possible Links to al Qaeda

- al Qaeda leaders spotted meeting with MS-13 members
- Adnan G. El Shukrijumah, met MS-13 in Honduras in 2005
- FBI: Not commenting
Possible Links to al Qaeda

- Cross-border incidents
- $30 – 50K per sleeper agent smuggled
- Using bogus matricula consulars
Possible Links to al Qaeda

- Complexity of problem has grown...terrorists, drugs, gangs
- MS-13/MS-18 truce?
- Cooperation with variety of terrorist groups?
- Multiple smuggling methods
Future Outlook

• Immigration reform and roadblocks
• Dangerous combination of harsh life in Central America and a “soft” culture in USA
• Terrorism nexus only adds to worry
Our Strength Remains...