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# Criminal Intelligence Bulletin

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## **Gangs in the Military and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)**

The Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) has recently received information indicating that gang members in general, and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in particular, are increasing their presence on or near US military installations. The purpose of this Criminal Intelligence Bulletin is to notify law enforcement personnel of the threat this poses to the Department of Defense (DoD). Also included are descriptions of how these organizations operate, how they may be identified, and where they are located. More information is available by contacting the Crim Intel Branch.

DCIS agents occasionally conduct investigations into allegations of unauthorized access to sensitive DoD facilities. Such investigations frequently involve undocumented workers and, as evidenced by the data that follows, there is a significant potential that undocumented workers could be affiliated with gangs or be susceptible to exploitation by gang members. Therefore, DCIS agents who are involved in such investigations should be aware of the potential for gang involvement and take appropriate steps to (1) determine the extent of access to controlled areas by undocumented workers and (2) protect law enforcement and other personnel who are involved in the investigation or operation from potential violence. Where there is reason to believe an undocumented worker has accessed controlled areas, efforts should be made to determine if the subject has acquired military weapons or training materials. DCIS agents should also be alert to potential gang recruitment of military members and/or dependants by undocumented workers and coordinate any such information with the appropriate Military Criminal Investigative Organization.

Intelligence reports from other law enforcement sources indicate that gangs are hand-picking certain members to enlist in the military in order to obtain training, skills, and access to weapons for the benefit of the gang. According to such reports, gangs are targeting urban warfare training, which is emphasized in US military training due to current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. This training, in the hands of gang members, could prove effective when used against law enforcement personnel. Additionally, gangs find military members and dependants susceptible to recruitment because they are often far from home, somewhat isolated from their close circle of family and friends, and looking for companionship and a sense of belonging. Gangs are able to quickly fill this void. Finally, military officials should pay particular attention to contract workers who have access to military installations. Members of MS-13, unlike many traditional gang members, generally have jobs and are often employed in the construction business. These workers are often undocumented aliens and in the country illegally. It is for these reasons this report focuses attention on MS-13 as the primary gang-related threat to DoD.

While there is little direct evidence of a link with terrorist organizations, several intelligence reports state that members of Al Qaeda have been seen from the Tri Border region in Argentina to Matamoros and Mexicali, Mexico. This is significant because it is from these areas that gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) begin their illegal entry into the US. Additionally, the Honduran Minister for Public Security, Oscar Alvarez, has long contended that Al Qaeda uses MS-13's human trafficking routes to smuggle its agents into the US. While we should exercise caution to prevent inaccurate assumptions in grouping these two organizations, the potential for Al Qaeda's exploitation of MS-13's access to the US generally, and US military installations specifically, cannot be ignored. If recruiting gang members or gang associates into the military or hiring civilian DoD employees with ties to gangs goes unchecked, DoD will be vulnerable to gang-related crimes, including domestic terrorism and major theft.

### **Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)**

Criminal activity engaged in by MS-13 include the typical gang-related crimes of homicide, extortion, robbery, burglary, drug trafficking, larceny, money laundering, auto theft, illegal export, and alien smuggling from Mexico to United States. Of particular interest from a DoD perspective is potential illegal export of weapons, ammunition, Night-Vision Goggles (NVG), or other export-controlled items.

There are an estimated 50,000 MS-13 members in at least 32 states, comprising approximately 29% of all gangs reported in the continental United States. These states include California, Alaska, Oregon, Utah, Texas, Nevada, Oklahoma, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, Washington DC, and Florida (*Attached is a list of known MS-13 sub-groups (or “cliques”) and where they presently operate*).

### **Identifying MS-13 Gang Members**

MS members show their gang affiliation by claiming turf, writing graffiti, and flashing their gang's hand sign. In order to get letters or symbols tattooed on their bodies, they have to fulfill a violent act to show their commitment.

#### **Tattoos:**

- Large gothic style tattoos.
- The area code where the MS clique originated (ex: “213”).
- Theatrical happy or sad faces.
- Three dots on the hands or face signifying “MI VIDA LOCA” (my crazy life). A tattoo of tear drops on a gang member usually signifies that they have killed someone or spent time in prison.
- Since most members are from Southern California, many have “sureno” or “sur” which means “southern” or “south” in Spanish.
- Other members may show their allegiance to the Mexican Mafia by using the number “13.” Salvadoria Pride.

## **Colors are blue black:**

- Wear all white Nike Cortez shoes.
- Dallas Cowboy shirts and hats (same colors).
- Members usually wear baggy type clothing opting for brown “dickies” pants or jeans.
- Seen wearing white shirts and more often white tank tops.
- Wear Jersey shirts with the number “13” on them.
- Gang members also use belts with the initials “MS” or the number “13” on the belt buckle.
- Junior members wear blue bandanas, senior members wear black bandanas.

## **Members attempt to adapt to police by:**

- Changing their colors.
- Putting their bandanas in their pockets instead of on their heads.
- Wearing the number 67 or 76 instead of 13 (6 and 7 add up to 13).

The following are sample photographs of MS-13 members and identifying tattoos. If interested in more information concerning the background, history, MO, and other facts about MS-13 (or other gangs)—including additional photos - please contact Crim Intel at (703) 602-3760 or (703) 602-3761.

*Contributing writers to this bulletin include SA CR Gillum, SA Daniel Peterson, SA Scott Mumper.*

