

Counternarcotics: How Can We Better Track Drug Cartels

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Introduction

Drug cartels, aka transnational criminal organizations, are the most significant threat to counternarcotics. These criminal organizations are the primary source of drug trafficking, and this source begins the entire cycle of all national and international drug-related issues. The most significant problem involving drug trafficking operations is financial, including the associated money laundering.

The money associated with drug trafficking has many negative implications. Cartels and crime families notoriously buy their way up through corrupt governments; they purchase land, buildings, even sports teams (Dudley, 2016), and even their own jails. (Dimuro, 2019) The purchases made help guarantee that their operations continue to run and that the people involved stay out of exposure.

Money laundering is necessary for drug organizations to safeguard their profits and avoid the seizure of such assets. These cartels aim to make their money appear as though it has come from a legal source. (UNODC Research, 2021) According to a 2005 article from the Institute for Policy Studies, they estimated the illicit drug trade to be worth “\$400 billion a year, or 8% of all international trade.” (Ehlers & Zagaris, 2005)

The challenge for counternarcotics resides in having the ability to follow the financial path. The ability to watch the money as it transfers hands and see where and to whom the money travels will provide enormous benefits. The ability to monitor and track all related "drug money" will allow agencies to make arrests, realize who is involved and their involvement, and potentially bring down entire empires. (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2011)

Priority Intelligence Requirements

(UNODC, 2011) (Hanlon, 2004)

1. How can we track money transfers from narcotics sales nationally and internationally?
2. How can a cryptocurrency work to leave a narcotics financial trail?

The FBI has proven phenomenal results with the phone app ANOM. (Hymes, Clare w/ CBS, 2021) Using the same strategy but with a financial app such as a cryptocurrency or cryptocurrency device, counternarcotics will witness an enhanced ability to monitor money flow from narcotics profits. With the current trend of reducing the use of cash, criminals will need to find alternative ways to finance their illicit activities. With the rise of cryptocurrency and the slow dissolution of printed money, following these criminal trails becomes easier for counternarcotics agents. This technology aims to monitor the cash flow, understand who is involved, and the businesses benefiting from narcotics sales.

- Cryptocurrency has seen a trend toward more prominent international use, including illicit use.
- Technology can assist in tracking criminal groups' financial transactions.
- We can witness money laundering with almost all global narcotics sales.

Essential Element of Information

(King, 2018) (Clark, 2017)

- What drug cartels currently use cryptocurrency?
- How could criminal groups be convinced to use a specific cryptocurrency or app for cryptocurrency exchange?
- What businesses are financially supported by drug cartels?
- How could we infiltrate the idea of cryptocurrency or the app into the criminal group(s)?
- Which cartel will be easiest to infiltrate?
- Who in that criminal organization will be the easiest to execute the ideas?

Indicators (FM 34-7)

- Biographical data on prominent personalities
- Cryptocurrency usage by drug cartels
- Business Information and business owners' biographies of those associated with cartels.
- Countries involved and affected by cartels' narcotics transactions.
- Past performance of related units and organizations
- Drug harvesting, processing, and transport

Based out of Mexico, the Sinaloa Cartel (Insight Crime, 2021) is the largest drug cartel and the leading organization transporting drugs into the United States. The most influential person in this group is Ismael Zambada García, also known as Mayo; he is a fugitive wanted by the DEA.

(Drug Enforcement Administration, 2021) Infiltrating this cartel is a top priority. Finding a successful connection to this cartel is critical to disbursing the knowledge and application.

Agencies Tasked:

(Homeland Security, 2010) (Vergen, 2020) (The Department of the Treasury, 2021)

- FBI
- DEA
- US Coast Guard
- Treasury/ IRS
- DHS
- DOD
- NSA
- CIA
- NGA (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2013)

SIR

(FM 34-7)

- A. Obtain and report on the biographical data of the top leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel and their closest affiliates.
- B. Report on the usage of cryptocurrency within the cartel
- C. Report on money transfers through businesses associated with this cartel

- D. Information on countries that have been affected by the sales of narcotics by the Sinaloa Cartel over the past 12 months
- E. Report on the success rate of the Anom app within drug cartels
- F. Information on any known technology used by this cartel
- G. Report on countries that would require knowledge of the application
- H. Report on countries that would require involvement in the application and potential arrest
- I. Report any known informants with access to the Sinaloa Cartel
- J. Report known media outlets that would reach the Sinaloa Cartel
- K. Report on any information obtainable on cartels' current ideas surrounding cryptocurrency

Collection Plan

(Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012) (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2014)

SIR	PIR/I	SIR	Agency	Collect Type	Time
	R	Priorit			
		y			
<i>A. Obtain and report on the biographical data of the top leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel and their closest affiliates.</i>	1,2	1	FBI, DEA, DHS	OSINT, HUMINT, IMINT, COMINT	AS SOON AS OBTAINED
<i>B. Report on the usage of cryptocurrency within the cartel</i>	2	8	FBI, DEA, TREASURY, NSA	SIGINT, COMINT, HUMINT, OSINT, ELINT	AS SOON AS OBTAINED/ INDEF.

<p><i>C. Report on money transfers through businesses associated with this cartel</i></p>	2	9	<p>FBI, NSA, TREASURY, DEA</p>	<p>OSINT, ELINT, SIGINT, COMINT, HUMINT</p>	INDEF.
<p><i>D. Report on countries that have been affected by the sales of narcotics by Sinaloa Cartel over the past 12 months</i></p>	1,2	7	<p>FBI, DEA, CIA, DOD, DHS, NSA, NGA</p>	<p>OSINT, HUMINT, ELINT, MASINT, SIGINT, COMINT, IMINT</p>	<p>AS SOON AS OBTAINED</p>

<i>E. Report on the success rate of the Anom app within drug cartels</i>	1,2	2	FBI, CIA, DOD, NSA, DEA,	HUMINT, SIGINT, COMINT, IMINT, OSINT,	AS SOON AS OBTAINED
<i>F. Report on any known technology used by this cartel</i>	1,2	3	DEA, FBI, NSA, DHS, IRS, CIA,	HUMINT, SIGINT, COMINT, IMINT, OSINT, ELINT, MASINT	INDEF.
<i>G. Report on countries that would require knowledge of the application</i>	2	11	FBI, US COAST GUARD, NSA, DHS, CIA, TREASURY	HUMINT, SIGINT, OSINT, COMINT, ELINT, IMINT	INDEF.

<p><i>H. Report on countries that would require involvement in the application and potential arrest</i></p>	2	10	<p>FBI, DEA, CIA, NSA, TREASURY, DOD, DHS, NGA, COAST GUARD</p>	<p>HUMINT, OSINT, SIGINT ELINT, COMINT, IMINT</p>	INDEF.
<p><i>I. Report any known informants with access to Sinaloa Cartel.</i></p>	1,2	4	<p>FBI, DEA, CIA, DHS, NSA, DOD</p>	HUMINT, COMINT	INDEF
<p><i>J. Report known media outlets that would reach</i></p>	1,2	6	<p>CIA, NSA, FBI</p>	<p>HUMINT, COMINT, SIGINT, ELINT, OSINT</p>	INDEF.

<i>the Sinaloa Cartel</i>					
<i>K. Report on any information obtainable on the cartel's current ideas surrounding cryptocurre ncy.</i>	1,2	5	CIA, DEA, NSA, FBI, DHS, DOD	HUMINT, COMINT, ELINT, SIGINT, OSINT	INDEF.

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