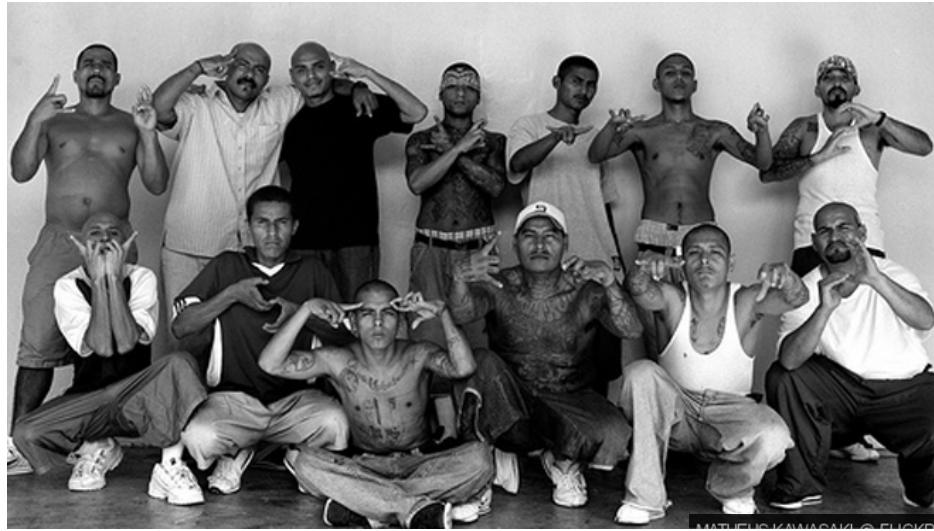


Mexican Cartel Allegedly Hired MS-13 To Carry Out Torture Operation In Minnesota

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The Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area is a long way away from the home turf of Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel, but that didn't stop three cartel enforcers from making their way up the region in an attempt to hunt down two teenagers they accused of stealing drugs and money from a stash house.

The three enforcers were allegedly sent from Los Angeles to St. Paul on orders from the Sinaloa cartel to find the people who stole 30 pounds of methamphetamine and \$200,000 from a stash house in St. Paul. The two teens that the cartel hit men snagged were tortured, had their lives and that that of their families threatened and were told to find the missing drugs or come up with \$300,000 to compensate the cartel, [according to court documents obtained by the \(Minneapolis\) Star Tribune newspaper](#).

"The kidnapers told [the 19-year-old] that if he didn't return the drugs or come up with the money, he and his entire family would be killed," according to court documents.

Despite indictments pending and two of three enforcers taken into custody, the story has people in the Twin Cities area shocked and worried as law enforcement deals with a spike in drug trafficking and heroin overdoses.

Federal authorities told the *Star Tribune* that they are not shocked that the Sinaloa cartel would go to such lengths to retrieve their money and drugs, especially in the lucrative Midwest heroin market. What worries them is that instead of using their own people, the cartel apparently hired the hit men from the feared Mara Salvatrucha 13 street gang (MS-13).

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One of the men, 22-year old Jonatan Alvarez Delgado, was arrested in Minnesota and confessed to the crime. Another, Jesus Ramirez, 31, was captured in California after leading FBI agents on a chase through downtown Los Angeles and the third, known only as "Chapop," is still at large.

MS-13 was founded by immigrants fleeing El Salvador's civil war more than two decades ago. Its founders took lessons learned from the brutal conflict to the streets of Los Angeles as they built a reputation as one of the most ruthless and sophisticated street gangs in the country, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent Jason Shatarsky.

With as many as 10,000 members in 46 states, the gang has expanded beyond its initial and local roots. Members are accused of crimes ranging from kidnapping and murder to drug smuggling and human trafficking.

Shatarsky, an MS-13 expert assigned to ICE's national gang unit, said the group quickly established itself in Los Angeles before spreading across the country. The group's penchants for violence — using a machete to hack a victim to death or shooting someone in the head in broad daylight for instance — surprised authorities and rival gangs.

The gang now has a large presence in Southern California, Washington D.C. and Northern Virginia, all areas with substantial Salvadoran populations. And in any community where the gang operates, Shatarsky said, its members often prey on their own community, targeting residents and business owners for extortion, among other crimes. The gang is also active in Central America and in parts of Mexico and authorities in Europe have reported evidence of MS-13 expanding operations there.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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