

The Circuit

ISSUE
49

For Security And Protection Specialists

**HIDING FROM
OSINT**

**LESSONS FROM
BUSINESS AND
PROTECTION
SERVICES**

OPERATING IN MEXICO **THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH**

**EXTENDING THE
PROTECTIVE NET**

A FAMILY AFFAIR

KIDNAP & RANSOM

**UNDERSTANDING
AND RESPONDING TO
THE UNTHINKABLE**

By: Orlando 'Andy' Wilson

BODYGUARDS IN MEXICO

There are many misconceptions about close protection and private security operations in Mexico. As usual, most of the myths originate from Hollywood movies and fictional T.V. dramas.

The realities of working as a bodyguard in Mexico are quite different, it's definitely a lot more dangerous and a lot less glamorous than Hollywood would have you believe.

Mexico is a very high-risk environment that most people know very little

about other than what they see in the movies or what is scantily reported in the media. There is very little factual media coverage of what's going on in Mexico as journalists that report unfavorably about the Narcos, and others tend not to live very long. Most of the mainstream media ►

channels in the U.S. etc. have stopped sending their reporters into Mexico or even taking reports from locals due to the risk and liability.

In Mexico, at the moment, the Narcos control a vast amount of the country, some estimate over 80%, directly and indirectly. In many places, the Narcos are law and order. If the military or police enter these areas, they are doing so with the consent of the local gangs or can expect confrontations. These days, Narcos are para-military organizations, especially those that are affiliated with the major Cartels. They are well-armed, trained, organized, and paid; in short, they're more than willing to fight!

Hostile Environments

One thing I am going to discuss here is something that applies to all potentially hostile environments. However, many in the security industry and especially those in close protection, are entirely ignorant about it... Let's call it the "Politics of Protection"...

To describe "Politics of Protection," I will use an example from when I was

offered a job in Russia in the mid-1990s. To keep a long story short, I was asked to provide security for a couple of businessmen who needed to go to a remote region of Russia. They wanted to settle a business dispute with a prominent politician. At the time, I had a very good and experienced network of associates in Russia who provided me with excellent advice and guidance on many occasions.

When I asked my contacts if they could help me with the project, they told me they could help, but there would be no point and just a waste of money for the clients and potential headaches for us. We could have had the best operators in the region, but they would not be loyal to us as it was in their interest to be loyal to the local politicians and government. These people live in the region with their families, why would they want to create problems for themselves in exchange for a short-term contract from foreigners. We could hire them, but they would be reporting back to the local politician and could set us up.

We could have used operatives from outside



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of the region, but the risk for them would have been high. They could easily have been targeted for and arrested on trumped-up charges just to ensure the clients understood the locals were serious people.

Sadly, most clients (and even those supplying close protection services) seem to think that having an armed person following you is all there is to close protection. So, in reality, most clients have no effective security as those supplying the services have no clue how to look after themselves, let alone someone else. But, bullshit baffles brains and as long ►

as people are paying, who cares, right?

My associates and I turn down the vast majority of enquires we get for work in Mexico as the risks are too high. We know that realistically, we cannot provide protection services with the budgets most people are willing to spend. The main reason we do not offer services in certain areas is that we do not have known and trusted contacts, people who will work in our favor and not sell us out. If things go wrong in areas where we don't know

people, we can expect little help from the police; on the contrary, chances are they will be on the take from the Narcos.

Could I get people to work the jobs we are offered in Mexico and the like? Sure, quite easily, but all I would be doing is putting their lives and those of the clients at risk, not to mention putting my own reputation on the line. A few years ago, I received several enquires for services in the city of Monterrey when it was 'hotter' than usual. The



Narcos were fighting over turf, and the federal and military forces were trying to keep control. When they found out we were turning down work, I had quite a few "security" guys in South Florida begging me to take the jobs as they wanted to go.

I understood these guys' eagerness for adventure and a paycheck, but in reality, even though they were providing executive protection services in the U.S., they had no clue what they were asking to get involved in. Sure, I could have made some money, but then, I'm not sure how I would've taken the likelihood of the Narcos kidnapping, torturing, and executing these Executive Protection Specialists. No to mention the clients and the ordeal they would have been put through.

Seriously, at that time and even today, wannabe foreign bodyguards would have been identified by the local forces as soon as they landed at the airport. If they were complete clowns and they and their clients were worthless and causing no problems, they might have been left alone. But if their clients were worth something

or they were acting like assholes, they would have had problems, and not the type of issues you will encounter at a golf course in West Palm Beach.

In high-risk locations like Mexico realistic threat assessments and trusted local contacts are essential for successful operations. By trusted, I don't mean people that you have just met in some Facebook group or on some industry website. I mean, really trusted since you will potentially have to rely on them and entrust them with yours and others' lives.

I remember I was contacted once by a gentleman who was moving from the U.S. to Nicaragua. He was planning to drive his camper van and possessions across Mexico and wanted a security professional to accompany him. It was a reasonable request for services, and it could have been okay if the routes and stops were correctly planned, so I gave him a decent quote. He responded that my quote was extremely high. When I asked him what he had been quoted by others, he told me a ►

Mexican company had told him they would supply a B.G. for \$70.00 a day.

Now, let's put this into context. The man was emailing me from an iPad, which at the time cost around \$800.00 US. He was going to be driving a vehicle full of his possessions worth thousands of dollars. So, why would someone living in a relatively lawless country go to work for \$70 a day when they could just steal everything this guy had? And then possibly even sell him to kidnappers or ransom him themselves?

I don't know what happened with this guy. I hope all went well for him, but if he disappeared, it would have been due to his own stupidity. In my books, one less stupid person in this world is not too negative of an outcome.

Bodyguards in Mexico

To understand a little more about the realities of the bodyguard industry in Mexico, I spoke with an old friend of mine. "Jacob," as I'll refer to him, served with an elite police tactical team, as well as working in the private security

industry. Here's what we discussed.

Q. What is the level of training undertaken by those providing protection services in Mexico

A. In Mexico, most decent people in the protection business have police or military backgrounds, but many have just learned things as they went along. There are a few security schools in Mexico, and the standards vary greatly, as they do everywhere. Just because someone has spent a few days or even weeks on a training course and holds a certificate means little in reality. You need to know and trust those you are working with, especially in Mexico...

Q. Is the Mexican security business open to foreigners

A. I have seen internet talk and movies about Americans working in Mexico, but it's minimal and usually, just corporate managers coming to oversee projects. I have never heard of foreigners working as bodyguards. To operate in Mexico is very difficult for Mexicans, and it's our country. A foreigner would not know the culture. They might



speak Spanish, but they won't know the slang, and from a legal perspective, they won't be able to get firearms and work permits.

Q. What are the laws concerning the security industry in Mexico

A. There are licenses for security companies in Mexico. I am not sure of the

details exactly, but I know there is a lot of state and federal bureaucracy and it's very expensive, I think \$10,000 plus. As far as I know, there are only two companies that can officially supply bodyguard services. If things are formally done, their cars must have special plates, etc., a lot of bullshit. Security companies provide

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bodyguards or guys work for clients directly, the laws are not enforced unless there is a problem.

Q. What are the restrictions on firearms

A. Firearms are very restricted in Mexico, and officially all you can work with are .380 caliber pistols or shotguns. Unofficially, there are a lot of guns in Mexico! To have firearms legally, you need a permit, and there are two ways to get the permit. firstly, you can apply officially to the Army, which costs Mex\$18,000 Pesos (approx. \$950 US) and then wait; only about 2% of applications are approved.

The second option is to pay intermediaries who can influence the process. This can cost between Mex\$80,000 Pesos (approx. \$4500 US) and Mex\$120,000 Pesos (approx. \$6500 US), maybe less, depending on who you know. There is a yearly renewal fee of about Mex\$15,000 Pesos (approx. \$750 US) to Mex\$20,000 Pesos (approx. \$1000 US). If the bodyguards are police, then, of course, you don't have to worry about this and can carry 9mm's, shotguns, and carbines. ►



That's the official process. Of course, it does not apply to the Narcos and criminals, as they do what they want in the areas they control. The only time they have problems is if military units or federal police from outside their area arrive for operations. The Narcos are very well armed, and

some are at the same level as the military. You have seen the CJNG (Jalisco New Generation Cartel) and Zeta convoys... these guys will fight.

Q. Where do the Narcos get their guns

A. Most of the pistols and carbines come in from the

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The chances are if they bought guns off the streets the dealer would sell them out to the Narcos or the local police to start with

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U.S. The heavier stuff like grenades, and machine guns can come in from Central America or are bought from the Mexican Army. There are A.K.'s "A.K. Chinos" now turning up directly from Asia. As for prices, a Glock costs about Mex\$20,000 Pesos (approx. \$1000 US), AR-15 Mex \$18,000 to Mex\$25,000 Pesos (approx. \$950 to \$1350 US), AK Chino Mex\$25,000 Pesos (approx. \$1350 US), it all depends on who you know, prices can be much higher. Ammo costs about Mex\$1200 Pesos (approx. \$60 U.S.) for a box of 50 X 9mm and about Mex\$1500 Pesos (approx. \$75 U.S.) for a box of 50 X .223.

Q. Can foreigners carry firearms

A. NO, foreigners cannot legally own or carry firearms in Mexico. All the movies and T.V. shows about armed Americans coming into Mexico to

rescue "Goldie Locks" and getting into fights with cartel members are bullshit. They are cool things to watch but complete fantasy.

Could foreigners come to Mexico and buy guns and work illegally? Sure, but the chances are if they bought guns off the streets, the dealer would sell them out to the Narcos or the local police to start with. Once they were arrested or chopped up, the dealer could buy the guns back from the cops or Narcos at a discount... Everyone's a winner, well almost....

Let's say these foreigners now have their guns and shoot someone, what will happen? The cops will investigate and want to know who did it. Generally, the police can operate quite well, there is just the corruption issue. Once caught, these foreigners will face significant charges and will be made an ►

example of. If they are in a Narco area and shoot a Narco, they can only hope and pray the police or military get to them first, though, that probably won't be enough to save them. And, even if they live that long, they won't have fun in jail.

If the foreigners are working for Narcos, then they could carry but they are totally illegal. Maybe they're okay in the areas their friend's control, but outside of those areas, they will have a problem if stopped by the police, military, or rival Narcos. If foreign bodyguards come to Mexico with clients, stay in the safe areas, don't draw attention, or cause any problems, then they should be okay. However, if they decide to play Rambo, they and their clients can just disappear.

Q. What can a Mexican bodyguard expect to be paid

A. It depends on the client, but they are looking at Mex\$5000 to Mex\$8000 Pesos (approx. \$250 to \$425 US) a week for legal

work. Those working for the Narcos can earn \$5000.00 US a week. Whoever you work for the risks are high, and money means little when you're dead.

Q. What are the main problems you can expect to encounter

A. Getting killed and your family being killed. As you know, there was a recent incident in GTO where two B.G.'s were ambushed and killed just after they dropped off their client at his residence in the evening. Why did the criminals not ambush the car when the client was in it? Because they were sending a message to him, he is the business owner, the guy with the money. The Cartel guys were just letting him know they could kill him at any time. What did they want? Who knows, money, favors, or he had pissed someone off, who knows, who cares! Two good guys died for that message to be sent.

Life is valuable, but also very cheap, and this is what people don't understand, once it's gone, it's gone. When we are young, we don't

“I am well trained and capable, but I understand that if people want me dead it's only a matter of time before they get me”

care, but once you have a family, life has a different perspective. I am well trained and capable, but I understand that if people want me dead, it's only a matter of time before they get me. I also understand that my family is more vulnerable than I am, and I can't protect them, I will die and kill for them, but I cannot be with them all the time.

Clients bring their own problems, and you must

know who they are and who their opponents or enemies are. It's very easy to end up working for clients who have issues with the Cartels or are associated with them. That's business in Mexico, so you have to be very careful. Getting involved with the wrong clients can get you jailed or killed. The main concern in Mexico is staying alive long enough to get paid, and to do so takes a lot more than having a gun.

Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 25 years. He has become accustomed to the types of complications that can occur, when dealing with international law enforcement agencies, organized criminal and Mafia groups. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time traveling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.