



Brutal MS-13 Gang Targeted by Trump Has Spread to 22 States

A February 2018 report from the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) — a non-profit research organization specializing in immigration-related matters — reveals that the MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) transnational criminal gang has spread to 22 U.S. states.

The report noted that 207 murders have been tied to MS-13 since 2012, and there are over 500 cases nationwide of MS-13 members being charged in major crimes. The states with the greatest number of such cases were California, with 92; Maryland, with 85; New York, with 80; and Virginia, with 63.



CIS researchers, after reviewing more than 500 cases of MS-13 gang members arrested nationwide since 2012, concluded that the growth of the gang's influence represents an extremely serious threat to public safety in communities where MS-13 has established itself. Furthermore, concluded CIS, this growth is directly connected to the illegal arrival and resettlement of more than 300,000 Central American youths and families that has continued unabated for six years. Another factor named by the immigration organization has been the de-prioritization of immigration enforcement in the interior of the country that occurred during the same time as the arrival of the young illegal aliens.

Jessica Vaughan, the director of policy studies at CIS, noted that the Trump administration has declared war on MS-13, reprising a similar initiative launched by the Bush administration in 2005 that stifled the gang's activity after several years. However, noted the report, the gang has been able to rebuild itself since 2012, which was the year that Barack Obama was re-elected to the presidency.

The report said that the growing number of so-called sanctuary cities has hampered efforts to apprehend MS-13 members, stating, "The proliferation of sanctuary policies that interfere with cooperation between state and local law enforcement agencies threatens to hamper efforts to stifle MS-13 activity. The federal government must take steps to clarify how federal law permits such cooperation and also must set up consequences for those jurisdictions and officials who impose sanctuary policies."

Regarding Vaughan's observation that the Trump administration has declared war on MS-13, that fact was made evident to millions of viewers who watched the presidential State of the Union address on January 30. The president invited the parents of two girls who were brutally murdered while walking in their neighborhood by six members of MS-13.

"These two precious girls were brutally murdered while walking together in their hometown. Six members of the savage gang MS-13 have been charged with Kayla and Nisa's murders. Many of these gang members took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as unaccompanied alien minors and wound up in Kayla and Nisa's high school," Trump said during his address.



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“Everyone in America is grieving for you,” the president continued. “And 320 million hearts are breaking for you. We cannot imagine the depth of your sorrow, but we can make sure that other families never have to endure this pain.”

CBS News provided details of the brutal murder in a January 30 report:

On September 13 [2016], the day before her 16th birthday, Nisa Mickens’ brutally beaten body was found on a tree-lined street. The next day, the beaten body of her lifelong friend, 16-year-old Kayla Cuevas, was discovered in the wooded backyard of a nearby home. In March, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York announced 13 defendants were charged with seven murders, including the deaths of Nisa and Kayla.

Those charged with the murder of the two girls were identified as members of MS-13.

CBS News noted that MS-13 is headquartered in El Salvador, according to the FBI. In 2012, the brutal gang was designated a transnational criminal organization by the Treasury Department, which said the gang is involved in “serious transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, human smuggling, sex trafficking, murder, assassinations, racketeering, blackmail, extortion, and immigration offenses.”

The State of the Union address was not the first time that Trump has publicly declared war on MS-13. Last July, CNN reported that the president traveled to Long Island to deliver a speech in front of law-enforcement officers at Suffolk County Community College. Long Island has been plagued with large numbers of MS-13 gang members in recent years.

“Together we’re going to restore safety to our streets and peace to our communities and we’re going to destroy the vile, criminal cartel MS-13 and many other gangs,” Trump told his audience.

“We’ve gotten a lot of them out of here,” Trump said, “But the rest are coming. They’ll be out of here quickly, right? Quickly.”

The CNN report noted that there were roughly 24,000 MS-13 members in Central America in 2012, according to an analysis by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. As of last July, the Justice Department estimated roughly 30,000 members worldwide and more than 10,000 in the United States, a number that has held steady for some years but that the DOJ believes is trending upward.

MS-13’s infiltration of the United States, hidden among “unaccompanied immigrant children,” was reported as far back as 2014. We reported back in July of that year that an internal summary of Border Patrol operations at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Nogales (Arizona) Placement Center stated that 16 unaccompanied immigrant children being held at the facility were members of MS-13.

We noted at the time that the then-current report from Border Patrol officials confirmed what had been known for some time. On June 12, 2014 then-Arizona Governor Jan Brewer sent a letter to then-House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), in which she expressed serious concerns about the gang presence among the illegal immigrants from Central America crossing our borders. Her letter stated:

By the Obama administration’s own estimation, 230,000 unaccompanied alien minors are expected to cross through the Rio Grande Sector by the end of next year.... If Border Patrol is overwhelmed, what consideration is being given — and what is being done — to determine if any of these illegal aliens have criminal histories or gang affiliations? For example, we know that MS-13, one of the world’s most notorious international gangs, has strong ties to several of the Central American



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countries from which these aliens are arriving. The administration's refusal to properly verify that violent criminals are not among those entering the United States shows an alarming lack of concern for our homeland's security. As a nation, we cannot sit back and allow this policy to continue.

While it is encouraging that Trump is taking the problem of MS-13 more seriously than did his predecessor, the job of reining in and stopping this violent criminal gang is much more difficult now that they have had several years to spread across our nation and become more firmly entrenched.

Photo of MS-13 gang members being escorted to arraignment in Mineola, New York: AP Images

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