

INTRODUCTION¹

Various academic papers and newspaper articles have focused on the recent violence in northern Coahuila.² El Colegio de México's Seminar on Violence and Peace has approached the analysis of this situation in two phases. The first studied two paradigmatic bouts of violence in northeastern Mexico, and took the form of a book: *State of Neglect: Los Zetas, the State, Society and the Victims of San Fernando, Tamaulipas (2010) and Allende, Coahuila (2011)*.³ In collaboration with the Inter-American Academy of Human Rights in Coahuila, the second phase explored the findings and reflections of the first part of the research in greater detail. This resulted in *The Zeta Yoke*, containing a detailed analysis of the internal dynamics of the Piedras Negras prison, and furthered research in northern Coahuila.⁴

This paper supplements *The Zeta Yoke*, with the objective of describing the expansion of criminal groups operating in the region. Divided into two parts, the first includes the history of the Zetas, from their origins and operations to their break from the Gulf Cartel, and what we know of their current situation; the second part examines northern Coahuila's strategic importance, the reasons behind the Zetas' arrival in the area, and some aspects of their operation in the region.