

Threat Profile - Linohas

Background and Overview

In ancient Eastarian, the word 'Linoha' means self-preservation, but the intent of this organized criminal group is not limited to such activities. Founded after Garland achieved its independence from Eastland in 1983, the group's raison d'être is generating profit from a range of illegal activities. Its leader, Jon Mkali, like most of its members is a former member of the Eastland Armed Forces (EAF), who left after the Eastland government, lacking funds due the loss of Garland's revenues, reduced pay by 50% across the public sector.

Jon Mkali had been a Colonel in the EAF, with responsibility for the tri-border area between Garland, Northland and Eastland. He commanded a Brigade of 1500 men and knew the local population and terrain very well. Facing the loss of his salary – and his pension benefits – Mkali gathered a group of his most loyal subordinate officers, NCOs, and soldiers and deserted. The group initially numbered approximately 100 men, who had armed themselves with small arms, RPGs, and sniper rifles.

At the time, the EAF was concerned that Mkali's desertion would encourage others in the EAF to follow suit and, as such, did not pursue him or his men, giving Mkali time to build small bases in the tri-village border area. The Eastland recession continued during the years from 1983 to 1988, which allowed Mkali to recruit other equally disaffected EAF personnel to his Linoha banner; by now the term Linoha was synonymous with smuggling (people, drugs, and weapons), and violence.

The Linohas steady growth in power and influence was also a product of Mkali's links to his former security force networks, which he used to gather intelligence on EAF patrol routes. This allowed him to move Linoha goods along Eastland MSR's from the tri-border area to the coast. Smuggling routes moved from Northland and Garland into Eastland and in the other direction. The Linohas moved drugs and trafficked women to and from IDP camps and other urban areas in Northland and to North Province in Eastland. The Linohas also attempted to move into the Eris, but were unable to do so due to the strength of the ENLF; in late 1986, several Linoha convoys into the Eris were ambushed as they moved from Sunia and Ganush towards Conville and tens of Linohas were killed. As a result of this Mkali decided that his group would not operate in the Eri's, and pursued a strategy of appeasement with the ENLF that saw the Linohas launder money and move arms for the group. It is understood that Mkali and Joseph Le Pew developed something approaching a friendship.

Over time, the Linohas became the strongest OCG in Eastland, moving in on the territory of other criminal gangs and taking over their territory. Indeed, by 1987, the Linohas had monthly revenues of more than one million USD. However, it was the 1988-1990 Garland-Eastland war that saw the Linohas reach the peak of their powers. During the war, the EAF needed a guerilla group to move money and arms to the ENLF in a clandestine manner. The EAF wanted to use the ENLF as a 'fifth column' against the Garland Armed Forces (GAF), by increasing instability in North and South Eri, thereby forcing the GAF to deploy there; the rationale was that any GAF soldier deployed to the Eris could not be deployed against the EAF. The Linohas, with pre-existing links to ENLF leadership, and with in-depth knowledge of hidden border crossing points, were perfectly placed to act as a go-between.

Naturally, co-operation of this kind led to a strengthening of Linoha-EAF links at the tactical and operational levels, and allowed the Linohas to make alliances with Eastland intelligence services. This period saw Linoha power and influence steadily increase and also gave them access to new and more sophisticated weaponry, including Heavy Machine Guns, Mortars, and armoured vehicles; these vehicles were meant to go to the ENLF – and most did – but the Linohas kept some as a 'tax'.

After the war ended in 1990, the Linohas were the de-facto power in the tri-border area and controlled most criminal activity in Eastland. Their power has only increased since then, despite occasional EAF forays into their territory ahead of elections in order to make the Eastland government look like it is 'doing

something' to combat organized criminal activity. It is worth noting that Eastland government figures and many in the security services consider the Linohas to be a strategic asset, albeit one with an adverse reputational impact, should war with Garland break out once more.

Despite his advancing age (it is thought he is 74), Jon Mkali continues to control the group through his most trusted lieutenants – generally those that deserted with him from his former EAF unit. He is known to be cunning and brutal in equal parts. He understands that instability in eastern Garland and official Eastland concerns of renewed war with Garland allows his group to prosper. As such, it is rumoured that the Linohas sometimes attack GAF posts dressed as EAF and ENLF personnel. It is also believed that his men have raided EAF border posts dressed as Garland military personnel. All this is done to maintain an air of fragility and tension along the Garland – Eastland border.

Mkali continues to have links with the ENLF, but has no dealings with the EIMF. The ENLF consider the Linohas to be a useful source of revenue and are known to impose a tax on Linohas operating in North Province of Garland, and on trucks moving through ENLF territory. However, the ENLF is known to crackdown on drug dealing and prostitution in areas under its control. Understanding that the ENLF could disrupt Linoha operations, Mkali rarely responds to these occasional provocations; North province (specifically Ashra and Zasa towns) is a useful area for Linoha leadership to take shelter in during EAF operations.

The EIMF does not deal with the Linohas as it considers that any association with the group would tarnish its image, and undermine its nascent relationship with both Eastland and Garland. Indeed, the EIMF does not need to deal with the Linohas, considering its own considerable revenue raising ability and its control of formal and informal border crossing points in South Eri.

The Linoha group is reputed to have some links with Anti-Western Fighters (AWF), but these remain unconfirmed and are probably limited to the Linohas paying taxes rather than fighting the group at its illegal checkpoints further inland. The Linoha leadership is generally thought unwilling to deal with terrorist groups, not because of any moral objections, but because it understands that its greatest threat comes from external counter-terror forces.

The Linohas do not enjoy the support of the local population in either the Garland or Northland border areas, which they sometimes use for shelter. However, the group is generally popular in NE Eastland, where it uses its criminal gains to support local farmers/businesses (buying their produce at market prices), and where its members live and work; after operating in NE Eastland for more than 30 years, its members now have families and extended families living there.

Notwithstanding this support, the group is not popular elsewhere in Eastland. Its leadership does not hesitate to resort to extreme violence and brutality. For example, the Linohas is well known to kill the entire family of those that resist its expansion and of informers. The group will also attack anyone that attempts to interfere with its criminal activity, including key local leaders, vigilante groups, and security forces. For the Linoha cartel, business is business and nothing else matters; the group does not align or identify with any political party or country, although its members remain connected to the EAF.

Recent and Significant Activity

In the first quarter of 2018, Linoha smugglers are reported to have increased its shipment of Coltan from Garland into Eastland. Reporting indicates that the Coltan was provided by the ENLF.

In May 2018, a UN panel of experts' report indicates that the Linohas have expanded activity to Northland, where they reportedly move drugs to local IDP camps. It is also reporting that the group continues to transport people from these camps to both Eastland and Garland. The individuals being trafficked pay up to 1500 USD for transportation, believing they will be moved to the 7th Continent. However, most have their identification papers stolen and end up working on farms as labourers until they pay off 'debt' to the Linohas. Many women are also forced to work as prostitutes. The report concludes that the ENLF does not allow such activity in North Eri, but that trucks carrying people are allowed to move through North Eri after a tax is paid.

In August 2018, the Linoha group is reported to have shipped several consignments of weapons to the ENLF. Reliable reporting indicates that the ENLF is attempting to increase its access to modern weaponry, including commercial off the shelf drones, as it fears encroachment from the EIMF.

Threat Profile

The Linoha cartel controls almost all organized criminal activity in Eastland, but asserts almost complete control of smuggling routes to and from Northland and Garland. However, it cannot act in South Eri and has difficulty operating in North Eri. Its interests range from the trafficking of humans and drugs to prostitution. The group also forces businesses in major Eastland urban areas to pay for protection. Overall, the group has significant revenues, with profits thought to exceed one million USD per month. There is more than enough for the group to pay its personnel, and to attract new soldiers from elite EAF units when it needs to replenish its ranks.

The group enjoys links with the Eastland intelligence services and with the Eastland security forces and politicians, some of whom consider the Linohas a strategic defensive asset. It also co-operates with some Northland Armed Forces' commanders and with the ENLF.

The Linohas are armed with a variety of weapons, including AK47s, Sniper Rifles, modern anti-tank weapons, RPGs, and has access to Technical Vehicles with mounted HMGs. It has no anti-air capability. The group also has personnel that can operate fast boats, which allows it to operate in Eastland's coastal waters and affords the group a limited riverine capability. The group can operate in terrain denied to conventional forces and has significant expertise in clandestine operations. Its personnel are all trained military personnel, most of whom have combat experience. As one would expect with such personnel, it has a hierarchical command structure and each of its 'Active Service Units' is assigned a specific AOR. Notwithstanding this hierarchical command structure, all ASUs have a detachment of former special forces personnel, expert in small unit operations, which are meant to lead the ASUs in a decentralized manner during intense periods of EAF operations against the group.

When the Linoha group must take action, it does so with extreme violence, understanding that fear is an effective way to generate loyalty, respect, and silence. The group has been known, for example, to cut off the entrances and exits to local villages while exacting punishments on transgressors, often executing entire families with the whole village expected to watch.