



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN MEXICO:  
LESSONS FROM COLOMBIA**

by

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June 2011

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.			
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> June 2011	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Fighting Corruption in Mexico: Lessons from Colombia		<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Humberto Ovidio Ventura and Jonathan David New		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A		<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number N/A	
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release: distribution is unlimited		<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b> A	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> The elevated levels of violence seen recently in Mexico are not a sign of a worsening security situation as the media would lead one to believe. Instead, they give witness that the Government of Mexico has implemented an unparalleled offensive against the deadly drug cartels. Despite the unprecedented assault against the cartels, cartel prevalence and violence is increasing when it should be decreasing. Drawbacks, such as widespread corruption within Mexican public agencies, have provided cartels with the flexibility to avoid functional elimination. The inability of the Government of Mexico to address the problem of corruption effectively not only undermines the state's actions, but also encourages cartel influence. Similarly, Colombia has struggled against powerful drug cartels and other nefarious entities for nearly 60 years. Whilst the Government of Colombia struggled to target the criminal organizations, it was forced to tackle corruption, lack of security and other factors. The causal symptoms of Colombia's problems, while not identical to Mexico's, share several similarities identified through case studies and center of gravity analyses. Ultimately, lessons learned from Colombia's experience are scrutinized to determine their suitability for application in Mexico's war against its powerful cartels.			
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Mexico, Colombia, Corruption, Drug Cartels, Illegal Drug Trade, Drug-Related Violence, Center of Gravity, Reform, Organized Crime, Transparency, Military Professionalization, FARC, Human Trafficking, Weapons Trafficking			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 131
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU

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**FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN MEXICO:  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The elevated levels of violence seen recently in Mexico are not a sign of a worsening security situation as the media would lead one to believe. Instead, they give witness that the Government of Mexico has implemented an unparalleled offensive against the deadly drug cartels. Despite the unprecedented assault against the cartels, cartel prevalence and violence is increasing when it should be decreasing. Drawbacks, such as widespread corruption within Mexican public agencies, have provided cartels with the flexibility to avoid functional elimination. The inability of the Government of Mexico to address the problem of corruption effectively not only undermines the state's actions, but also encourages cartel influence. Similarly, Colombia has struggled against powerful drug cartels and other nefarious entities for nearly 60 years. Whilst the Government of Colombia struggled to target the criminal organizations, it was forced to tackle corruption, lack of security and other factors. The causal symptoms of Colombia's problems, while not identical to Mexico's, share several similarities identified through case studies and center of gravity analyses. Ultimately, lessons learned from Colombia's experience are scrutinized to determine their suitability for application in Mexico's war against its powerful cartels.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>THE PROBLEM AT HAND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	1. Conventional Wisdom .....	2
	2. Cartels As Organized Crime Syndicates.....	4
	3. Root of the Problem .....	6
<b>B.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
	1. Background Comparison of Mexico and Colombia .....	7
	<i>a. Geographic and Topographic Comparison.....</i>	<i>9</i>
	<i>b. Economic Comparison.....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>c. Culture of Corruption in Latin America.....</i>	<i>11</i>
	<i>d. Military Comparison .....</i>	<i>14</i>
	<i>e. Cartel Comparison .....</i>	<i>16</i>
	2. Center of Gravity Analysis.....	18
	3. Conclusion .....	20
<b>II.</b>	<b>WHAT IS CAUSING THE VIOLENCE? .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>BROAD LOOK AT CORRUPTION .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>HISTORY OF CORRUPTION IN MEXICO .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>PREVALENT TOOLS OF CORRUPTION IN MEXICO.....</b>	<b>25</b>
	1. Bribery .....	27
	2. Nepotism .....	28
	3. Official Theft and Fraud .....	30
	4. Conflict of Interest .....	30
<b>E.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>CASE STUDY: MEXICAN DRUG CARTELS AND CORRUPTION.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>HISTORY OF THE CARTELS IN MEXICO .....</b>	<b>33</b>
	1. Sources of Income .....	35
	2. Activities.....	37
	3. Political Connections .....	39
	4. Ability to Corrupt .....	39
<b>C.</b>	<b>GOVERNMENT ANTI-CARTEL POLICIES.....</b>	<b>40</b>
	1. Mexican Policy Background .....	41
	2. Military Actions .....	42
	3. Reforms Implemented .....	44
	4. International Cooperation.....	46
	5. Lessons Learned.....	49
<b>D.</b>	<b>CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>50</b>
	1. Root of the Problem .....	50
	2. Capabilities, Vulnerabilities and Requirements Identified.....	51
	3. Where Should Energy Be Focused .....	55

E.	CONCLUSION .....	57
IV.	CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA’S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE DRUG TRADE AND CORRUPTION.....	59
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	60
B.	HISTORY OF DRUG TRAFFICKING IN COLOMBIA .....	61
1.	The Medellín Cartel.....	63
2.	The Cali Cartel.....	66
3.	The “Cartelitos” and the FARC .....	67
C.	CORRUPTION AS A NEXUS FOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITY .....	68
D.	COLOMBIA’S STRATEGY .....	69
1.	Background and Implementation.....	71
2.	Political Reform .....	74
3.	Military Reform .....	75
4.	International Cooperation.....	76
5.	Outcomes/Lessons Learned.....	78
E.	CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS .....	79
1.	Root of the Problem .....	80
2.	Strengths and Weaknesses .....	82
3.	Government of Colombia’s Focus .....	83
4.	Outcome .....	84
F.	CONCLUSION .....	84
V.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	87
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	87
B.	APPLICABILITY OF COLOMBIAN LESSONS TO MEXICO .....	88
1.	Corruption Lessons from Colombia.....	88
2.	Mexico Applicability .....	90
C.	WAY AHEAD .....	91
1.	Reform .....	92
2.	Implementation .....	93
3.	The Need for a Strong International Partnership .....	94
D.	CONCLUSION .....	97
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	99
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	113

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Attacking a Center of Gravity through its Critical Vulnerabilities.....	19
Figure 2.	Levels of Corruption in Mexico (1995–2009).....	22
Figure 3.	Cycle of Corruption in a Neighborhood <i>Plaza</i> .....	29
Figure 4.	Mexican Cartels’ Areas of Influence.....	35
Figure 5.	Illustration of the Mexican Cartels’ Current COG, CC, CR and CV.....	55
Figure 6.	Map of Colombia with Coca Cultivation Areas Highlighted. ....	59
Figure 7.	Pablo Escobar-Gaviria; Leader of the Medellín Cartel (December 1, 1949– December 2, 1993).....	65
Figure 8.	“Clear, Hold & Build” Model.....	73
Figure 9.	U.S. Aid to Colombia, 1997–2005.....	78
Figure 10.	Homicide Rates in Colombia 1960–2005.....	81
Figure 11.	Colombia Drug Cartel COG Analysis. ....	83
Figure 12.	Global Cocaine Flows As of 2008.....	85

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**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1. Key Cartel Leaders Arrested or Killed by the Mexican Military .....43

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATF	Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
CC	Critical Capabilities
CN	Counter Narcotics
CNDH	Human Rights Commission
COG	Center of Gravity
COLAR	Columbian Army
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
CR	Critical Requirements
CV	Critical Vulnerabilities
EVSG	European Values Study Group
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i>
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOC	Government of Colombia
GOM	Government of Mexico
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
PAN	National Action Party <i>Partido Acción Nacional</i>
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party <i>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</i>
SEDENA	Mexican Ministry of Defense
WoG	Whole of Government
WVSA	World Values Survey Association

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bert: I would like to thank my wonderful wife Ivy and my precious daughters Paloma and Bella for their unwavering love and support not only during our time in Monterey, but also throughout the years. Ivy, it is your love and devotion that gives me the strength to persevere during the most difficult of times. Thank you for believing in me and for being my partner. I love you. I also want to thank my parents for instilling in me the drive to succeed and for showing me that anything is possible as long as you work hard for it.

Jonathan: Throughout the past decade of my life, my angelic wife Jill has followed me around the world, sacrificing her ambitions and comfort in support of my career. Jill, you have been my perfect companion, and you are the foundation of our entire household. Without you, my life would be virtually empty. Thank you for all the joy and support that you have given to me during our years together, and never forget how much I love and adore you.

We would like to give a special thank you to Dr. Heather Gregg for believing in us and in this project. Your patience, guidance and assertiveness made researching and writing this thesis an unforgettable experience. We would also like to thank Dr. Maiah Jaskoski for sharing her subject matter expertise and for keeping our research precisely focused. This thesis would not have been what it is without your valuable input.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. THE PROBLEM AT HAND

Mexico's cartels have been in existence for decades and have earned vast profits from any and every means of trade available, including the primary feeding of the United States' insatiable hunger for illicit drugs.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. government estimates that anywhere from 50 percent–70 percent of the illegal narcotics that enter the United States do so through Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Competition amongst the different cartels has created a turf war as they battle for control over the rights to this lucrative market and the violence resulting from these wars has been steadily increasing for many years. While most of the cartel violence is targeted at competing cartels, this violence has also been taking its toll on ordinary citizens in Mexico. For example, on March 17, 2011, police in Acapulco found the body of a 4-year-old child who had been shot in the chest. Several days earlier, three others, including a woman, her two-year-old and six-year-old grandchildren were also gunned down inside their home. Within the same week, two 15-year-olds were shot at on separate occasions. Also during this same week, the Guerrero state police found a body near an Acapulco prison. All of these killings were part of the steady increase in local cartel violence since the 2009 slaying of the Beltran Leyva cartel's leader, Arturo Beltran Leyva.<sup>3</sup>

The death toll of Mexican citizens caught within the cross hairs of the warring cartels has risen to over 35,000 since 2006.<sup>4</sup> These deaths are attributable largely to the cartels and to a smaller degree to human rights violations by Mexican security forces. Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city separated from El Paso, Texas by the Rio Grande, is

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<sup>1</sup> The United States is the world's largest consumer of narcotics.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin A. Self, *Counterterrorism Policy in Colombia* (Master's thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), <http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA473382>.

<sup>3</sup> Sergio Flores, "5th Child Victim Killed in Mexico Drug Violence," News, *msnbc.msn.com*, March 10, 2011, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42138870/ns/world\\_news-americas/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42138870/ns/world_news-americas/).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

currently a hotbed for cartel activities. To put it in context, the drug cartel wars in Ciudad Juarez claimed the lives of more civilians in 2010 than the entire civilian death toll in Afghanistan since 2001. In 2010 alone, Juárez experienced 3,111 civilian murders compared to Afghanistan's 2,421 civilian casualties. In other words, one out of every 427 civilians in Juárez is killed compared to one out of every 12,029 civilians in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

The elevated levels of violence seen recently in Mexico are not a sign of the worsening security situation, as the media would lead one to believe, but instead demonstrate that the Government of Mexico (GOM) has implemented an unprecedented counter cartel offensive. According to FBI testimony given to the U.S. Congress in May 2010, drug related violence in Mexico falls into three wide-ranging categories: intra-cartel violence occurring amongst cartel affiliates, inter-cartel violence occurring between rival cartels and cartel against GOM violence and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> While the GOM is executing their extraordinary assault against the cartels, cartel prevalence should be diminishing while security should be increasing, but this is not the case. Drawbacks such as widespread corruption within Mexican public agencies have provided cartels with the necessary flexibility to avoid functional elimination. The inability of the GOM to effectively address the problem of corruption not only undermines the state's actions, but also encourages cartel influence.

## **1. Conventional Wisdom**

Countless scholarly opinions have been published as to why Mexico is experiencing a notable increase in cartel related violence. According to a Master's thesis written by Mexican Naval Officer, Lieutenant Commander Alfonso Reyes-Garces, Mexico's government remains one step behind the cartels for two reasons, (1) Mexico's history of government corruption, and (2), the ineffective measures of success in its anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Edwin Mora, "One U.S.-Mexico Border Town Had More Civilian Casualties Last Year Than All Afghanistan," News, *cnsnews.com*, March 3, 2011, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/one-us-mexico-border-town-had-more-civil>.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony P. Placido, *Statement Before the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control* (Washington, DC: FBI, n.d.).

drug policies. He states that, from the early 20th up to the 21st century, complex social, economic and political processes have shaped Mexico's drug trade. Although the Mexican government has aggressively fought the cartels, their efforts have been centered on repeating "forward assault" actions and attempts to "decapitate" the organizations by arresting its leaders, which has not worked as effectively as hoped. While the Mexican government is acting on old policy, the cartels are modifying their organizations, their relation to the state, and to the public in an effort to adapt more quickly than the government.<sup>7</sup> Reyes-Garces also notes that the Mexican Ministry of Defense (SEDENA) is the only government entity that has set goals in the fight against the cartels, but the goals are supply based and only address a superficial portion of the problem. For example, in 2007, some of SEDENA's goals were to execute "28 high-impact eradication operations per year" and "reduce by 70 percent" the total surface area of illegal crops planted in Mexico. While these goals seem ambitious, the total surface area of illegal crops grown in Mexico is currently unknown. In other words, while the total number of illegal crop destructions can be measured, effectiveness on the overall drug trade cannot be measured because the baseline is unknown; therefore, the efforts of SEDENA cannot be accurately validated.<sup>8</sup>

While supply and demand based theories certainly play into the drug problems plaguing Mexico, another broader set of theories holds strong arguments as well. Some critics are proponents of harm-based theories that center on the actual drug trade market. These theories include the demand for the market and the public services, such as police forces and justice systems, designed to deter people from participating within the illicit market. Mexico expert Colleen Cook states that the Mexican President's National Drug Control Strategy for 2007 declares that the GOM is following a balanced drug strategy that focuses on prevention of drug use, treatment, and disrupting the illicit drug market. In the last five years, significant achievements have been made in reducing youth use of LSD, Ecstasy, and methamphetamine. The GOM maintains that domestic and

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<sup>7</sup> Alfonso Reyes-Garces, *Winning the War on Drugs in Mexico? Toward An Integrated Approach to the Illegal Drug Trade* (Master's thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), 33–39, <http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA514370>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

international law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking not only disrupt the drug supply, but also are key to combating the corrosive impact of the drug trade on societies and governments.<sup>9</sup> However, despite all these aggressive policies towards a balanced anti-drug strategy, drug cartel activity is on the rise.

The preceding studies highlight a common theme that targeting the drug supply is not the most efficient policy for attacking the drug trade. The studies also suggest that a harm-based policy is more effective at diminishing the drug trade. These themes are in line with and further support the hypothesis of this thesis, that corruption is a central inhibitor for the drug trade in Mexico.

Similarly, Colombia has struggled against powerful drug cartels and other nefarious entities for nearly 60 years. Whilst the Government of Colombia (GOC) struggled to target the cartels, it was also forced to tackle the corruption, lack of security and other factors similar to the GOM. The causal symptoms of Colombia's problems, while not identical to Mexico's, shared several similarities examined further during the Case Studies conducted in Chapters III and IV. Ultimately, lessons learned from Colombia's experience are examined to determine their suitability for application in Mexico.

## **2. Cartels As Organized Crime Syndicates**

While examining drug cartels, it becomes evident that the nature of these organizations most clearly resembles organized crime syndicates, such as a Mafia family, rather than other anti-law organizations, such as a terrorist or insurgent group. Similar to an insurgent or terrorist organization, cartels endeavor to maintain a stranglehold on both the local population and its governing bodies; however, in contrast to an insurgent or terrorist group's political aspirations, cartel goals are purely financial—more akin to an organized crime syndicate.

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<sup>9</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *CRS Report for Congress: Mexico's Drug Cartels* (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, October 16, 2007), 20–21, [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34215.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34215.pdf).

To further understand a drug cartel or organized crime groups, a clear understanding of an organized crime syndicate should be developed. In 1983, organized crime expert Frank Hagan wrote that “analysis of criminology literature indicates that a large number of works including textbooks, fail to offer a clear definition of organized crime.”<sup>10</sup> Despite this failure, the 1967 U.S. Presidential Task Force on Organized Crime Report offers the following description: “organized crime is a society that seeks to operate outside the control of the population and its government.”<sup>11</sup> Noted author Howard Abadinsky proposes a definition in his book, *Organized Crime*, “organized crime is a non-ideological enterprise involving a number of persons in close social interaction, organized on a hierarchical basis, with at least three levels/ranks, for the purpose of securing profit and power by engaging in illegal and legal activities.”<sup>12</sup> Organized crime scholar Joseph Albin says that organized crime is “(1) the use of force, intimidation or threats of such, (2) the structuring of a group or organization whose purpose is that of providing illicit goods and services, and (3) providing legal and political forms of protection that assure its operation.”<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, the previous definitions are combined to create an overarching definition of an organized crime syndicate as it applies to a cartel. “Organized crime is an organization that operates on a hierarchical basis, using both legal and illegal activities to seek profit, while using force, intimidation, and coercion to operate outside the control of the population and its government.” The qualities of this definition are further applied in the case studies conducted on Mexico and Colombia in Chapters III and IV.

Also of importance to this thesis is how closely corruption factors into the operations of organized crime syndicates. Without the existence of corruption, organized

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<sup>10</sup> Frank E. Hagan, “The Organized Crime Continuum: A Further Specification of a New Conceptual Model,” *Criminal Justice Review* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 52.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph L. Albin, “Donald Cressey’s Contributions to the Study of Organized Crime: An Evaluation,” *Crime & Delinquency* 34, no. 3 (July 1, 1988): 338.

<sup>12</sup> Howard Abadinsky, *Organized Crime* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1990), 8.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the Patron-Client model, see Abadinsky, *Organized Crime*, 25; Albin, “Donald Cressey’s Contributions to the Study of Organized Crime,” 338.

crime syndicates could not prosper. According to organized crime and corruption scholars, Edgardo Buscaglia and Jan van Dijk, the indices of organized crime, corruption and violence were compared across 70 countries, and the results pointed to a high correlation of interconnectedness in all 70 case studies.<sup>14</sup> Corruption and organized crime syndicates are symbiotic in that both help each other to not only exist, but also to thrive in any environment. Corruption, therefore, is the main focus of this thesis and how it directly facilitates the operations of cartels.

### **3. Root of the Problem**

The supposition of this thesis is that the chief contributor to the success and survival of the Mexican cartels is cartel influence, specifically through corruption. The Mexican judicial system, especially at the local district level, is widely corrupted and is a key component of the cartel problem requiring immediate reform. Not surprisingly, Latin American expert and author Stephen Morris attributes the lack of progress in Mexico's battle against the cartels directly to the shortage of accountable institutions to combat corruption;<sup>15</sup> but more interestingly, he also suggests that change will not be successful until the Mexican people truly desire and work together towards reform.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Professor Leonarda Reyes states "reform has been unsuccessful in Mexico because there has been no national reflection, no revising of moral values and ethics to build a new and better Mexico."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the fight against organized crime syndicates will never be won unless the GOM and its citizens reject the historic and pervasive culture of corruption present in their society. This thesis considers reforms that the government of Mexico can implement to curb the corruption that permeates every facet of life in Mexico.

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<sup>14</sup> Edgardo Buscaglia and Jan van Dijk, "Controlling Organized Crime and Corruption in the Public Sector," in *Forum On Crime And Society*, vol. 3 (New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003), 5–6, [www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/forum/forum3.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/forum/forum3.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Morris believes that all the anti-corruption laws implemented in Mexico will remain incapable of combating corruption until Mexican society embraces anti corruption as part of its culture.

<sup>17</sup> Leonarda Reyes, "Mexico: Corruption Notebook," *Global Integrity Report 2004*, n.d., 178, <http://www.globalintegrity.org/reports/2004/2004/country9fe7.html?cc=mx&act=notebook>.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

The research approach for this thesis utilizes case study comparisons between Mexico and Colombia, as well a center of gravity (COG) analysis to determine the true root of the problem and the actions required to defeat or minimize it. A COG analysis will be conducted on each case to evaluate the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the government's ability to target vulnerabilities. Specifically, the COG analysis examines the history of the cartels, focusing on their activities, sources of income, actions taken by their respective governments to combat the cartels, and finally, what has and what has not worked.

The purpose of the case studies is to examine the history of each country's struggles against violent antagonist organizations, such as cartels, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) (FARC), and paramilitaries independently. The Colombian case study provides several examples of successful policies that if tweaked, may be implemented with success in Mexico. The similarities between the two countries, discussed in the following paragraphs, provides initial justification for comparing Mexico to Colombia instead of one of the many other Latin American countries currently struggling with organized crime.

### **1. Background Comparison of Mexico and Colombia**

While many, including Mexican President Felipe Calderón and U.S. President Barack Obama, argue that one cannot compare what is happening in Mexico today to what happened in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>18</sup> many similarities between the countries make further exploration worthwhile. However, the basic characteristics of both Colombia and Mexico, which ultimately have shaped their cultures, common thought process, and political policies towards outside influence, are shown to share a rather close likeness. However, random parallels alone do not justify comparing the two in an attempt to find a solution to Mexico's dilemma. The research for this thesis compared many facets of both countries in an attempt to justify whether Colombia were a good fit to

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<sup>18</sup> William Booth, "Mexico's War Compared to Insurgency," News, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/08/AR2010090807134.html>.

compare with Mexico. The comparison between Mexico and Colombia is not a perfect fit, but enough evidenced similarities exist between them to take some lessons learned in Colombia for Mexican adaptation and implementation.

Since most narcotics production largely occurs in South America, Mexico is currently experiencing a significant amount of violence attributable to the cartels vying over control of the lucrative smuggling market. In response, the Mexican government has deployed tens of thousands of troops and Federal Police to combat the cartels, but the violence has worsened. Drug related murders remain in the hundreds every month and the cartel members have stepped up the frequency and brutality of their attacks.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the current struggle in Mexico, the conflict in Colombia has been a turf war between criminal organizations. The GOM is currently targeting its cartels in a similar fashion to the manner in which the GOC did. However, the GOM has failed to set the conditions necessary to take on such a monumental task; effectively, implementing reform aimed at weeding out corruption within the security forces and the justice system. If those items are not addressed efficiently, then the military operations have been conducted in vain.

After the big cartels were taken down in Colombia and new problems arose, the GOC would finally embrace a more effective strategy called the “whole of government” (WoG) approach. The Colombian government’s strategy was to take back areas controlled by cartels and other criminal organizations and to replace their influence with improved social programs. The Colombian government knew they could not completely eradicate the criminal organizations; instead, they sought to keep them on the run and make life so miserable for them that they would want to quit and re-integrate into society.<sup>20</sup>

It is evident that the Mexican government must adopt a new strategy if its fight against the cartels is to be successful. As the following chapters show, Colombia experienced problems similar to Mexico’s and continues to battle an ongoing insurgent

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<sup>19</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 1-7.

<sup>20</sup> Garry Leech, *Beyond Bogota: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 110.

movement that has taken over the drug trade from the big cartels. However, despite the fact that Colombia's problems are not over, the reality remains that the government of Colombia, through its actions, was able to turn the tide on the cartels and reduce corruption that was threatening the country's stability. Those successful actions are what this thesis endeavors to dissect and apply to Mexico's current dilemma.

The following paragraphs highlight that many similarities exist between Colombia and Mexico besides their individual cartel problems. They include each country's topography and geography, economy, culture of corruption, military and law enforcement systems, and finally their cartels. It is important to note that Colombia and Mexico also have some important differences, which are also discussed below.

*a. Geographic and Topographic Comparison*

One important difference between Colombia and Mexico is their geographies. Geography determines agriculture, population density, transportation methods and access to intended markets, specifically, as it applies to this thesis topic, the United States. Mexico, at over 1.94 million square kilometers of land, contains more than 830,000 square kilometers of land than Colombia. According to photius.com, Mexico and Colombia rank as the 17th and 28th largest countries in the world by land area, respectively.<sup>21</sup> More land suggests that that Mexico is capable of supporting a larger population. It also presents a greater challenge for policing and internal control.

Mexico boasts 9,330 kilometers of coastline, ranking 21st amongst the world, whereas Colombia's coastline is considerably smaller. Having a significantly larger coastline means that Mexican cartels have a greater opportunity to ship illicit goods via maritime routes to any point on the United States' 19,924 kilometers of coastline. The Mexico-United States border ranges 1,951 miles, which is moderately guarded by fences, cameras and roving patrols. Consequently, Mexican cartels have a

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<sup>21</sup> Leech, *Beyond Bogota*.

geographic advantage and many more methods of moving their illicit goods to their consumers in the United States than the cartels of Colombia in the early 1980s through the late 1990s.

Another key difference between Mexico and Colombia is that of topography. Possessing both coastline and the northern tip of the Andes Mountain Range, Colombia has a much larger range of elevation going from sea level up to mountains that reach to just under 19,000 ft. Between the three mountain ranges in Colombia, lay plains, as well as vast uninhabited and largely inaccessible portions of the Amazon jungle.<sup>22</sup> The inaccessibility and remoteness of these regions make them ideal for drug production, as well as hiding places for cartels and FARC. While Mexico also has a high rising mountain chain, a central plateau that averages between 4,000 and 8,000 ft. dominates most of its topography. Mexico is mostly arid desert with only one major river, the Rio Grande.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, far less regions of Mexico are inaccessible to government forces. The differences in topography between Mexico and Colombia also determine what types of illegal agriculture the countries are capable of producing.

#### ***b. Economic Comparison***

Mexico is predominantly a service-based economy. According to the United States Department of State, 64 percent of Mexico's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) derives from its service industry, including commerce and tourism, financial services, communication and transportation. Only 4 percent of Mexico's \$1 trillion GDP in 2010 came from agriculture. Mexico exported \$230 billion of goods or services in 2009. Of the \$230 billion of exports, \$185 billion or 80 percent went to the United States. Mexico is the world's sixth largest producer of petroleum products; other natural resources include precious metals, natural gas and timber.<sup>24</sup> According to the United Nations' 2009 World Drug Report, Mexico is also a growing producer of marijuana,

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<sup>22</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, "Colombia - Topography," *Nations Encyclopedia*, n.d., <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Colombia-TOPOGRAPHY.html>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> "Background Note: Mexico," *U.S. Department of State*, n.d., <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>.

opiate based drugs and methamphetamines. More specifically, the report states that in 2007 alone, marijuana seizures in Mexico represented 39 percent of the world total. Nearly 98 percent of the opiates found in the United States originated in Mexico and Colombia with close to 75 percent of that total coming from Mexico. Finally, Mexican cartels are believed to own and operate more than twice as many meth labs as what is currently believed to exist in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Colombia's economy, while also service industry dominated, is much smaller and slightly more agriculturally based. Sixty-four percent of Colombia's \$140.8 billion GDP is from its service industry including construction, transportation and government spending. Eight percent of this GDP is derived from agriculture while only 8.2 percent of Colombia's land is dedicated to agriculture. On these lands, Colombians grow bananas, coffee, cut flowers, tobacco, and sugar cane and as discussed later, as well as other illicit crops including the coca, poppy and marijuana.<sup>26</sup> In summary, tourism represents a significant portion of Mexico's economy, which boasts a GDP almost ten times greater than that of Colombia, while Colombia is far more dependent on agriculture and far less on tourism than Mexico.

### *c. Culture of Corruption in Latin America*

Often described as "a violation of the norms of public office for personal gain," corruption is a common theme in many parts of the world.<sup>27</sup> However, in Latin America, the subject is as synonymous to the region as apple pie is to the United States. Since the release of their first Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in 1995, Transparency International has continually found that Latin American countries are among the most corrupt in the world.<sup>28</sup> To illustrate the problem further, a survey conducted in seven Latin American countries (including Mexico and Colombia), by the European Values

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2010* (New York: United Nations, 2010), [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2010/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2010\\_lo-res.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/World_Drug_Report_2010_lo-res.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 61, no. 2 (June 1967): 417-427.

<sup>28</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2009* (London: Pluto Press, 2009): 2, [http://www.transparency.org/news\\_room/in\\_focus/2009/gcb2009#dnld](http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2009/gcb2009#dnld).

Study Group and World Values Survey Association (EVSG and WVSA 1995–1997), found that a large majority of citizens considered “almost all” or “most” public officials to be corrupt. Only in Uruguay and Chile did a majority claim that “few” were corrupt.<sup>29</sup> According to the same source, more than 70 percent of the Mexican population taking the poll thought that its own government had high levels of corruption.

The origins of corruption in Latin America seem to have its roots in the legacy of corruption left by colonial Spaniards in practically every one of their former colonies years prior to the arrival of democracy to the region.<sup>30</sup> Historical analyses conducted by Burkholder and Johnson (1994), Ewell (1977), Gibson (1966), Hopkins (1974), McFarlane (1996), Nef (2001), Posada-Carbó (2000), Phelan (1960), and Whitehead (2000) have all found that corruption in Latin America dates to the colonial period.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, democracy did not create corruption; instead, democracy brought to light the pre-existing culture of corruption when citizens began demanding transparency and accountability from their governments.<sup>32</sup> Nowhere has this been more evident than in

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<sup>29</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2009*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 291–313; Charles Gibson, *Spain in Latin America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Jack W. Hopkins, “Contemporary Research on Public Administration and Bureaucracies in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 9 (1974): 109–139; Robin Emmott, “Police Corruption Undermines Mexico’s War on Drugs,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2007, 41–64, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/23/us-mexico-drugs-police-idUSN1521094020070523>; Jorge Nef, “Government Corruption in Latin America,” in *Where Corruption Lives*, ed. Gerald E. Caiden, O.P. Dwivedi, and Joseph Jabbra (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001), 159–173; Eduardo Posada-Carbó, “Electoral Juggling: A Comparative History of the Corruption of Suffrage in Latin America, 1830–1930,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, no. 3 (October 2000): 611–645; John Phelan, “Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5 (June 1960): 47–65; Laurence Whitehead, “Institutional Design and Accountability in Latin America,” in *Combating Corruption in Latin America*, ed. Joseph S. Tulchin and Ralph H. Espach (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2000), 107–129.

<sup>31</sup> Burkholder and Johnson, *Colonial Latin America*, 291–313; Gibson, *Spain in Latin America*; Hopkins, “Contemporary Research on Public Administration and Bureaucracies in Latin America,” 109–139; Emmott, “Police Corruption,” 41–64; Nef, “Government Corruption in Latin America,” 159–173; Posada-Carbó, “Electoral Juggling: A Comparative History of the Corruption of Suffrage in Latin America, 1830–1930,” 611–645; Phelan, “Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy,” 47–65; Whitehead, “Institutional Design,” 107–129.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen D. Morris, “Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico,” in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 6.

Mexico, where according to Latin American political scholars Charles Blake and Stephen Morris, the prevalence of corruption encompasses nearly every facet of daily life.<sup>33</sup>

Corruption scholars Kathleen Bruhn and Michael Tangeman argue that corruption in Mexico today is largely a result of 71 years of hegemonic dominance by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI).<sup>34</sup> During those years, the PRI maintained an oligarchy where the president and his closest allies ran the country largely unchecked by the legislative, judiciary and other branches of the government. The result was the systematic corruption of nearly every government, state and local agency in the country. Shady and blatantly corrupt practices became the norm when accomplishing even the most mundane of tasks.<sup>35</sup> Mexico's government did not experience significant pressure to reform while the PRI remained in control of the government. This dynamic changed in 2000, however, with the election of President Vicente Fox, a member of the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN).

Similarly, Colombia has also struggled with corruption throughout its pre and postcolonial history. Claims abound that drug cartel money has funded presidential campaigns, and by the late 1980s, it is believed that the combined profits of the cartels equaled over 30 percent of Colombia's GDP,<sup>36</sup> which made nearly every politician or government official susceptible to corruption.<sup>37</sup> However, the concerted effort placed on professionalizing the country's security forces along with the successful efforts to purge them of corrupt officials ultimately helped greatly in reducing cartel influence in the

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<sup>33</sup> Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris, "Political and Analytical Challenges of Corruption in Latin America," in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Bruhn, "Social Spending and Political Support: The 'Lessons' of the National Solidarity Program in Mexico," *Comparative Politics* 28, no. 2 (January 1996): 151–177; Michael Tangeman, "Election Spending," *Infrastructure Finance* 6, no. 4 (April 1997): 1.

<sup>35</sup> Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Roberto Steiner and Alejandra Corchuelo, *Economic and Institutional Repercussions of the Drug Trade in Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, December 1999), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB243/19931100.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Drug Enforcement Intelligence Division, *The Illicit Drug Situation in Colombia: Drug Intelligence Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Justice Department, November 1993), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB243/19931100.pdf>.

security forces. Most importantly, it aided tremendously in gaining the support and approval of the population.<sup>38</sup> While corruption is still a problem in the government of Colombia, the country's security forces now are the standard bearer of low corruption when compared to other agencies within their government and even other Latin American nations.<sup>39</sup> The methods used to reduce corruption are discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

*d. Military Comparison*

During President Andres Pastrana's term (1998–2002), the Colombian military began a series of aggressive reforms that increased professionalization and capabilities. According to Colombia expert Thomas Marks, this reform was necessary due to internal dislocation caused by the growing drug trade, U.S. government sanctions being placed on Colombia from inadequate Counter Narcotics (CN) cooperation, and mediocre senior military leadership.<sup>40</sup> This reform, focusing primarily on the Colombian Army (COLAR), revitalized the military education system, turning lessons learned into operational and organizational modifications and developing sound NCO leadership to enhance small unit performance. Simultaneously, attention was given to human rights instruction, information warfare, and joint and special operations.<sup>41</sup>

Colombia's military spending has been rapidly increasing since the early 2000s. Colombia's security forces number 435,000 including 285,000 military personnel and 150,000 police forces. According to the World Bank as of 2009, Colombia was spending 4.1 percent of its GDP on defense, which is a testament to the government's dedication towards national security.<sup>42</sup> Colombia's Ministry of Defense maintains a close relationship with the United States and continues to develop these ties by sending its

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<sup>38</sup> Gonzalo G. Francisco, "Armed Conflict and Public Security in Colombia," in *Colombia Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 94.

<sup>39</sup> Juan C. Rodriguez-Raga and Mitchell A. Seligson, *Democracy in Colombia: 2006* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas A. Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002–2006) vs. FARC," *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2007): 42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Lena Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption between Mexican States Elaborating the Gender Perspective*, QoG Working Paper Series 2010: 18 (Göteborg: The QOG Institute, June 2010), 5–6, [www.qog.pol.gu.se/working\\_papers/2010\\_18\\_Wangnerud.pdf](http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/working_papers/2010_18_Wangnerud.pdf).

military personnel to the United States for training or by hosting American personnel in Colombia to provide military assistance programs, international narcotics control programs, and foreign military sales.<sup>43</sup> An example of the close Colombia/U.S. anti-drug cooperation is *Plan Colombia*, a program designed to maximize cooperation and assistance in critical areas of promoting peace, counternarcotics operations, human rights awareness, improved social programs and other programs to stimulate the Colombian economy.<sup>44</sup> As part of the program, the United States funds, trains and equips a brigade of COLAR personnel in CN tactics. The United States has equipped this brigade with more helicopters than the entire compliment of the COLAR inventory. However, the legislation outlining Plan Colombia allowed for only the eradication of drug production, which placed operational and geographic limitations on Plan Colombia's capabilities.<sup>45</sup>

By contrast, Mexico spends approximately 0.5 percent of its GDP on its national security.<sup>46</sup> Its armed forces total 225,000, which combines the Army and Air Force into one autonomous service comprising 75 percent of that total. The Mexican Navy is a separate entity that has its own cabinet agency and chief of staff. Mexican police forces consist of 450,000 personnel and are divided into federal, state and municipal roles. These police forces are further divided into two groups, preventive and judicial police. Preventive police are in charge of good order and do not investigate crimes, while the judicial police perform the remaining duties. Both groups are subject to monumental levels of corruption. In fact, President Calderon, on 10 occasions, has deployed his military into different districts to relieve the weak and corrupt state and municipal police forces.<sup>47</sup> While Mexico is seeking to make reforms to its police forces, this process is only initializing and still has much room for growth.

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<sup>43</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption*, 5–6.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony P. McFarlane, "Political Corruption and Reform in Bourbon Spanish America," in *Political Corruption in Europe and Latin America*, ed. Walter Little and Eduardo Posada-Carbo (South Africa: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 41-64.

<sup>45</sup> Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency," 43.

<sup>46</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption*, 5–6.

<sup>47</sup> "Background Note: Mexico."

While Colombia has a close relationship with the U.S.'s military, Mexico, on the other hand, has a less cooperative relationship with the U.S.'s military that is in the process of improving. According to United States Air National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Salas, "a shared hostility exists between the Mexican and U.S. militaries that is deeply rooted in a history of military intervention by U.S. forces in Mexican affairs, not the least of which was the expansion of the United States westward at Mexico's territorial expense and various interventions culminating with General Pershing's brutal expeditions in the early 1900s."<sup>48</sup> Despite this history of hostility, progression towards a better relationship between the two militaries has begun. According to a *USA Today News* source, the United States approved \$1.3 billion in aid for Mexico's war on drugs. However, the Mexican government is believed to have wanted this cooperative deal in order to avoid a higher level of negative press.<sup>49</sup> In the same article, Mexico's limited military-to-military cooperation with the U.S. is further highlighted by the fact that only a small number of U.S. military members are allowed into Mexico per year on a training advisory status. This small number constitutes 20 teams of one to five members per year.<sup>50</sup>

#### *e. Cartel Comparison*

The cartels of Mexico and of Colombia have many similar operational characteristics. Most important, all cartels functioned as individual organized crime syndicates fighting for control over illicit markets. While all the cartels share common modes of operation, some differences do exist between the Mexican and Colombian cartels that should be noted. The first difference between the cartels of both countries is

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew E. Salas, *U.S.—Mexico Military to Military Cooperation Revisited* (Master's thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2003), 14, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCMQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dtic.mil%2Fcgi-bin%2FGetTRDoc%3FLocation%3DU2%26doc%3DGetTRDoc.pdf%26AD%3DADA417524&rct=j&q=U.S.%20E2%80%93%20Mexico%20Military%20to%20Military%20Cooperation%20Revisited&ei=VIeSTfXME5KisAOZ59D5DA&usg=AFQjCNGlwTJJ10cte5d4iGS0T0kfvLZFsHQ&cad=rja>.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Michaels, "U.S. Military Works with Mexico to Fight Drug Traffickers," News, *USATODAY*, April 6, 2010, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-04-06-Mexico\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-04-06-Mexico_N.htm).

<sup>50</sup> Michaels, "U.S. Military Works with Mexico to Fight Drug Traffickers."

the numbers of cartels present. During the early 1980s to mid-1990s, the government of Colombia primarily battled three major cartels operating within its borders, the Medellín, Cali and the Valle del Norte cartels. However, the two most powerful were the Medellín and the Cali cartels. Mexico, on the other hand, currently has seven active cartels of varying degrees of power. They include the Gulf, Sinaloa, La Familia, Los Zetas, Juárez, Tijuana and the Beltran-Leyva cartels.

Another difference between the cartels in Colombia and Mexico are their respective sources of revenue. Colombia's cartels were drug manufacturing and distribution organizations. During their zenith in the early 1980s to their decline in the late 1990s, they were the principle producers of cocaine in the world and ranked as one of the biggest exporters of heroin.<sup>51</sup> While Colombian cartels dominated the cocaine manufacturing industry, Mexican cartels are currently involved in the production and trafficking of methamphetamines, marijuana, and heroin, in addition to cocaine. Mexican cartels are also involved in human and arms trafficking, auto theft, and kidnapping.<sup>52</sup> According to illicit drugs author Michael Lyman, the primary source of the U.S. methamphetamine production shifted throughout the 1990s from outlaw motorcycle gangs to Mexican cartels operating out of Mexico and California.<sup>53</sup> Lyman further elaborates on Mexico's drug production capabilities by saying that Mexico is the U.S.' primary producer of marijuana and grows almost 50 percent of the marijuana consumed in the country.<sup>54</sup> While Mexico produces most of the U.S. methamphetamine, marijuana and heroin supplies, Colombia remains the world's largest producer of cocaine, followed by Peru and Bolivia.<sup>55</sup>

The levels of power also differentiate the Mexican and Colombian cartels. During their height of power, the Colombian cartels dominated the cocaine production

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<sup>51</sup> Lee Rensselaer, "The Economics of Cocaine Capitalism," *COSMOS Journal* (1996), <http://www.cosmos-club.org/web/journals/1996/lee.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Cook, *CRS Report for Congress*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Michael D. Lyman, *Drugs in Society, Causes, Concepts and Control*, 5th ed. (Burlington, VT: Anderson, 2007), 137–138.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

markets of South America and had their own modes of transportation and distribution for their drugs into the United States. Following a concentrated effort by the U.S. government to shut down trafficking routes in and around Florida and the Caribbean, coupled with the demise of the cartels due to successful operations by the government of Colombia, Mexican cartels were allowed to take complete control of transportation and distribution markets. While cocaine production still continues in South America, Mexican cartels now transport 90 percent of the cocaine entering the United States.<sup>56</sup> Mexican cartels today have more power and influence than the Colombian cartels had during their last years in power because of the size of the market available to them. Mexican cartels are further empowered by the Mexican government's failure to implement adequate anti-corruption initiatives accompanied by low levels of government transparency.<sup>57</sup>

## 2. Center of Gravity Analysis

In his book, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz states that a center of gravity (COG) is “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends . . . the point at which all our energies should be directed.”<sup>58</sup> Contemporary definitions have elaborated further on this “hub” and U.S. Army FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* refers to a COG as “the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act.”<sup>59</sup> U.S. Military Joint Publication 3.0 elaborates this definition further to represent: “the set of characteristics, capabilities, and sources of power from which a system derives its moral or physical strength, freedom of action, and will to act.”<sup>60</sup> These definitions make evident that the COG is the principle target on which to focus, but determining what

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<sup>56</sup> Cook, *CRS Report for Congress*, 4–5.

<sup>57</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2005* (Berlin: Transparency International, December 9, 2005), [http://www.transparency.org/content/download/2160/12762/file/Global\\_Corruption\\_Barometer\\_2005\\_full\\_report\).pdf](http://www.transparency.org/content/download/2160/12762/file/Global_Corruption_Barometer_2005_full_report).pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael E. Howard and Peter Paret, 1st ed. (Princeton University Press, 1989), 242.

<sup>59</sup> Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, n.d.), [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_0.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf).

exactly is an adversary’s COG it is not as clear-cut as assumed. Success depends on understanding the specific characteristics of the COG and knowing where and how to best attack the adversary.

A COG exists because of the critical capabilities (CC) it possesses, which are vital to the adversary’s survival. Each CC has several critical requirements (CR) that provide the channels through which the CCs operate. Since attacking a COG directly may be impossible or perhaps too costly, it is preferable to attack the COG through its critical vulnerabilities (CV), see Figure 1.

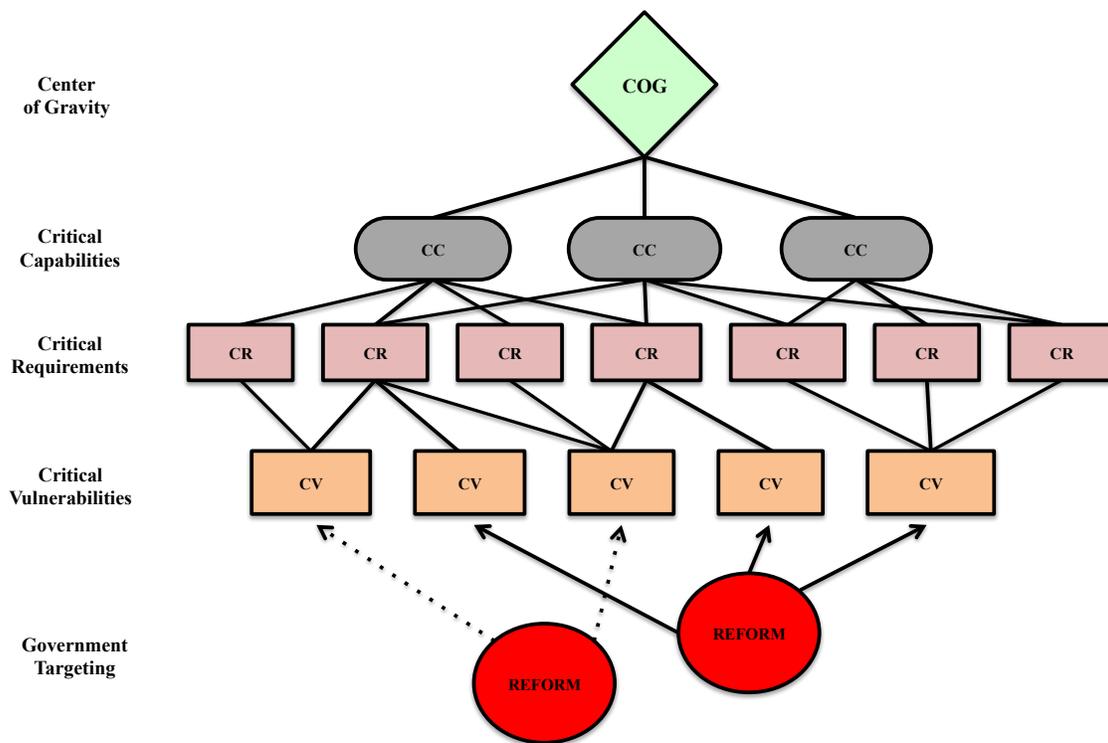


Figure 1. Attacking a Center of Gravity through its Critical Vulnerabilities.

U.S. Military Joint Publication 5-0 defines a CV as “an aspect of a critical requirement, which is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects.”<sup>61</sup> When considering what CVs to attack, it is essential to scrutinize the CCs and CRs they support to ensure the target vulnerability will have a

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006).

direct effect on the COG, as well as its capabilities. Attacking insignificant vulnerabilities merely for the sake of attacking them offers no substantial benefit in the long run. Attacking critical vulnerabilities, albeit small but focused on weakening the CC, is far more effective at making the adversary's COG collapse.

The principle idea behind the COG Analysis is that, once the problem is understood well enough, a strategy for attack becomes self-evident. In the case of Mexico's drug cartels, the goal should not be to attempt to attrite or decapitate them, but instead to eliminate certain key elements that will incapacitate them systematically. To accomplish this objective, it is necessary to understand how they operate, what keeps them in business and from where their strength derives. Once understood, the appropriate course of action emerges intuitively and the process of generating multiple courses of actions becomes largely unnecessary. The case studies and COG analyses used in this thesis aims to accomplish this goal.

### **3. Conclusion**

This thesis strives to offer a stimulating new answer to an old problem. Specifically, a COG analysis of Mexican cartels aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the problem? (2) What is the preferred outcome? (3) Where must energy be focused to achieve the preferred outcome? (4) What is the general plan to achieve the desired outcome? While the methodology utilized in this thesis answers the questions listed above, the most difficult task is the GOM's implementation of these findings.

Having determined that Mexico's cartels are most similar to organized crime syndicates and resemble those faced by Colombia, the next task is to examine these organizations to find their COGs. The root similarities and differences between Mexico and Colombia provide a great starting point for identifying policies that minimize corruption, and ultimately, cartel violence. With an established beginning, the focal point of this study can turn to the believed culprit: corruption including its types and effects.

## II. WHAT IS CAUSING THE VIOLENCE?

Con dinero baila el perro...  
Sin dinero uno baila como perro.  
[With money the dog dances...  
without money, one dances like a dog.]<sup>62</sup>

### A. INTRODUCTION

On January 27, 2011, Mexican authorities ordered the arrest of over 115 ex-municipal employees from the Mexican gulf coast state of Veracruz. Of those arrested, over 30 were former mayors who were charged with embezzling over 67 million pesos (\$5.5 million) by siphoning money from public works projects in their municipalities between 2004 and 2008.<sup>63</sup> In mid-November 2009, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released a report ranking countries around the world by levels of corruption. Mexico dropped 17 spots from the 2009 list and was ranked the 89th most corrupt country out of 180 countries polled. Mexico's CPI number in 2009 was a 3.3, and the average number for the rest of the world was a 3.963. In other words, Mexico has a higher level of corruption than the global standard. Professor Lena Wängnerud elaborates further by stressing that data collected by both Transparency International and the World Bank since the mid-1990s consistently portray Mexico as “a highly corrupt state.” See Figure 2, Levels of Corruption in Mexico (1995–2009).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> These are common Mexican sayings alluding to the prevalence of corruption in everyday life in Mexico.

<sup>63</sup> Associated Press, “33 Ex-Mayors Accused of Corruption in Mexico,” News Article, *Fox News*, January 28, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/28/ex-mayors-accused-corruption-mexico/>.

<sup>64</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption between Mexican States Elaborating the Gender Perspective*, 5.

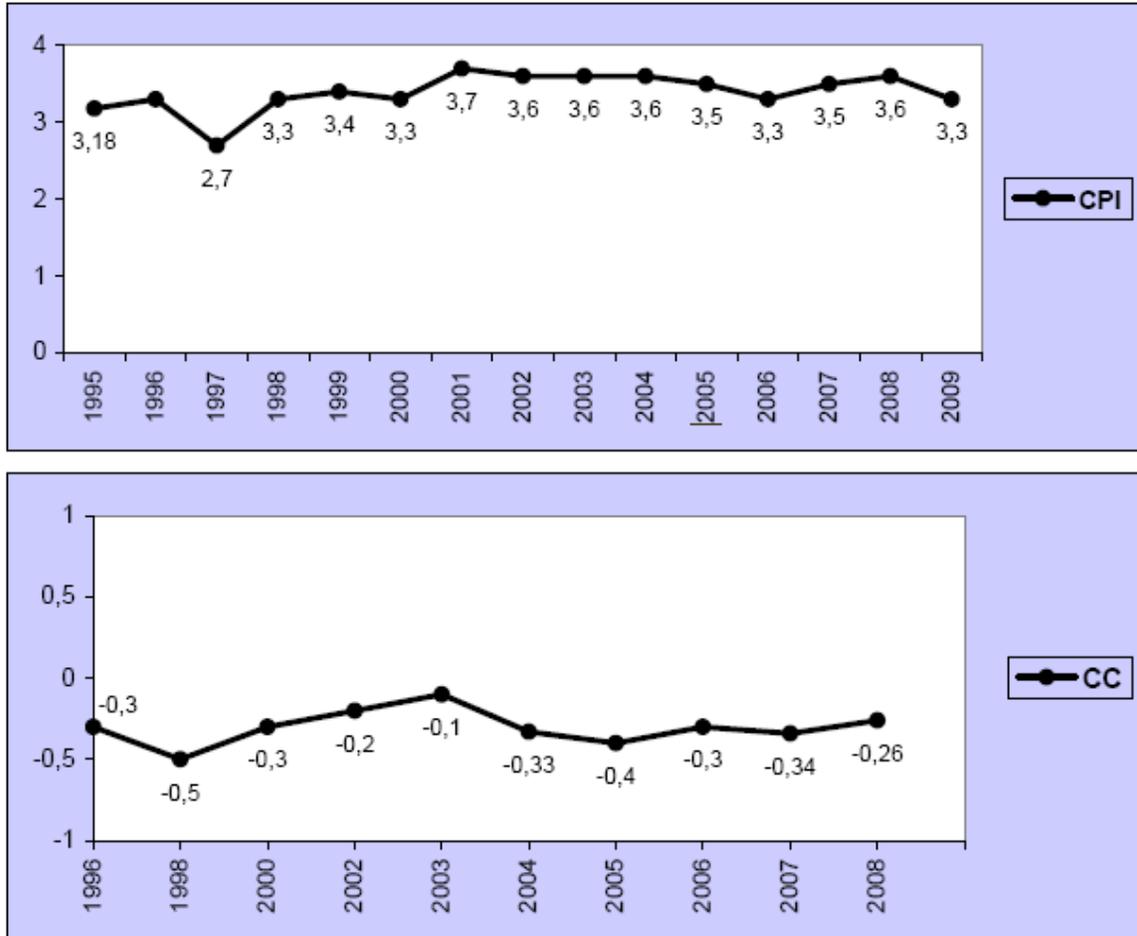


Figure 2. Levels of Corruption in Mexico (1995–2009)<sup>65</sup>

**Observations:** The charts illustrate levels of corruption in Mexico as perceived by its citizens. “Both sources define corruption as the exercise of public power for private gain.”

*Top Chart: Corruption Percentage Index—(CPI)* Represents data collected by Transparency International regarding corruption as perceived by professionals, such as businessmen, researchers and scientists in Mexico from 1995–2009.

Legend: 0 = highly corrupt, to 10 = highly clean.

*Bottom Chart: Control of Corruption—(CC)* Represents data collected by the World Bank based on numerous sets of data also intended for measuring perceptions of corruption.

Legend: -2.5 = highly corrupt, to 2.5 = highly clean.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze corruption, which this thesis hypothesizes is a critical requirement for the Mexican cartels and can be reduced by

<sup>65</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption*, 5.

better social and institutional reforms. For that reason, Mexican corruption is the primary focus of this chapter since the intent of this thesis is to determine how to minimize corruption in Mexico to defeat the criminal organizations responsible for countless illegal activities. The review of corruption includes its origins, types, symptoms and effects, which should lead to a better understanding of the culture of corruption present today in the Mexico. A thorough understanding of corruption, coupled with the case studies presented in the following chapters, help identify a viable strategy the Mexican government can implement to eliminate or reduce the rampant corruption that has allowed the violent drug cartels to operate largely with impunity.

## **B. BROAD LOOK AT CORRUPTION**

Numerous types of corruption exist including public, private, economic, institutional, academic, judicial, and political to name a few. Acts of corruption may also be categorized by type as well. Furthermore, economic gain is not the only motivation for corruption; a variety of different motives for corruption exist, some of which include increased status or power, addiction to drugs or gambling, sexual gratification, as well as economic gain.<sup>66</sup> For the most part, corruption is most often viewed as bribery, nepotism, fraud, laundering and embezzlement inside of public institutions.<sup>67</sup> In 2009, the United Nations convened a convention against corruption in New York City. The purpose of this convention was to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and fight corruption, and promote international cooperation and accountability in the management of public affairs and public property.<sup>68</sup> One key preventative measure recommended by the convention to the international community is the establishment of an independent organization dedicated to investigating corruption within each country's law enforcement agencies.<sup>69</sup> In U.S. law enforcement agencies, these organizations are called Internal Affairs and are

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<sup>66</sup> Seumas Miller, "Corruption," n.d., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/corruption/>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Technical Guide to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption* (Vienna: UNODC, 2009), 7, [http://www.unicri.it/documentation\\_centre/publications/series/docs/Technical\\_Guide\\_UNCAC.pdf](http://www.unicri.it/documentation_centre/publications/series/docs/Technical_Guide_UNCAC.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 9.

charged with ensuring adherence to agency rules and standards while also investigating charges of misconduct among the agency's members. In the U.S. military, these organizations are commonly known as the Inspector General and are charged with similar duties. As discussed during the Mexican case study, Mexico is lacking in this endeavor. The UN convention also included other activities, such as money laundering, position of trust abuse, embezzlement, illicit enrichment, concealment, and obstruction of justice as the over-arching issues associated with corruption.<sup>70</sup>

### C. HISTORY OF CORRUPTION IN MEXICO

Often described as “a violation of the norms of public office for personal gain,”<sup>71</sup> corruption is a common theme in many parts of the world. According to Mexican political scholars Charles Blake and Stephen Morris, the prevalence of corruption in Latin America encompasses nearly every facet of daily life.<sup>72</sup> In addition, while both declare that corruption is not a recent phenomenon in the region, they emphasize “the arrival of democracy to Latin America in the 1980s is responsible for spotlighting the problem of corruption due to increased citizen demand for accountability and transparency from the government.”<sup>73</sup> Many, who have studied the history of corruption in Mexico over the past century, including authors Kathleen Bruhn and Michael Tangeman, share their assertion. Bruhn and Tangeman claim that corruption in Mexico today is largely a result of 71 years of hegemonic dominance by the PRI or the “Institutional Revolutionary Party.”<sup>74</sup> During those years, the PRI maintained an oligarchy where the president and his closest allies ran the country largely unchecked by

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<sup>70</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Convention Against Corruption*, 17–22.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph S. Nye, “Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis,” *American Political Science Review* 61, no. 2 (June 1967): 417–427.

<sup>72</sup> Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris, “Political and Analytical Challenges of Corruption in Latin America,” in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Stephen D. Morris, “Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico,” in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Bruhn, “Social Spending and Political Support: The ‘Lessons’ of the National Solidarity Program in Mexico,” 151–177; Michael Tangeman, “Election Spending,” *Infrastructure Finance* 6, no. 4 (April 1997): 1.

the legislative, judiciary and other branches of the government. The result was the systematic corruption of nearly every government, state and local agency in the country. Shady and blatantly corrupt practices became the anticipated norm when accomplishing even the most mundane of tasks.<sup>75</sup> Mexico's government did not experience significant pressure to reform while the PRI remained in control of the government. This dynamic changed in 2000, however, with the election of President Vicente Fox.

The election of President Fox and the PAN or "National Action Party," effectively ended the PRI's 71-year reign over the country. With the PRI out of the driver's seat, and the government progressively moving towards democracy since the 1980s, the country began to see the implementation of administrative reforms aimed at combating corruption.<sup>76</sup> Yet, despite that, many had expected and hoped for a significant decline in corruption, but the population would not see the changes it was anticipating. As previously mentioned, this lack of change is a direct result of the lack of responsible institutions held accountable for ensuring reform measures are not only implemented, but also enforced. Ultimately, the Mexican government must take the steps necessary to encourage a social awakening of sorts aimed at embedding in the population a true intolerance and disgust for corrupt public officials and corruption as a whole. This task while daunting is achievable as long as the government does not regress to the ways of the past and enforces the reform measures.

#### **D. PREVALENT TOOLS OF CORRUPTION IN MEXICO**

Authors Blake and Morris argue, "corruption is associated with such dominant issues today as the weak rule of law, the security crisis, the lack of democratic deepening, the crisis of political representation, the issue of accountability and democratic consolidation."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, while the Mexican government has undoubtedly taken numerous steps towards reducing corruption over the last decade, nothing appears to

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<sup>75</sup> Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, 1–25; Stephen D. Morris, *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University Alabama Press, 1991), 22–35.

<sup>76</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Morris, "Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico," 16.

work indefinitely. Whereas, the government has tried purging police forces of corrupt police, these attempts are only temporary solutions and corruption ultimately reenters the ranks. In 2009, all 1,142 traffic policemen in Monterrey were pulled off duty for corruption tests. More than 270 failed and were dismissed, followed by a further 250 being told that they were “overweight” and dismissed.<sup>78</sup> Another example of police purging is the 2007 purge of the federal police chiefs of all 31 states of the Mexican Federal District.<sup>79</sup> So how are the ranks corrupted again? Corruption does not begin at the police chief level in Mexico but actually reaches the levels of the political elites.<sup>80</sup> The case study of Mexico in Chapter III further identifies corruption related reforms the Mexican government is currently implementing.

While a difference certainly exists between perceived and actual corruption, many people fail to make the distinction regularly. Scholars, such as Davis et al, 2004, and Canache and Allison, 2005, have conducted numerous studies exploring this topic.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, they concluded that “women, older respondents and people with greater levels of political interest tend to perceive higher levels of corruption than do others; in contrast, males and individuals from higher income and education brackets are more likely to be involved in corrupt activities or be victims of corruption.”<sup>82</sup> Of the many prevalent tools of corruption in Mexico, as noted by corruption scholar Michael Johnston, bribery, nepotism, official theft, and fraud, as well as conflict of interest, are noteworthy to examine.<sup>83</sup> The following paragraphs define the previously mentioned requirements

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<sup>78</sup> Stephen Gibbs, “Mexican purge axes corrupt police,” News, *BBC*, November 12, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8356140.stm>.

<sup>79</sup> Sam Enriquez, “Mexico Purges Top Officials of Federal Police,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, June 26, 2007), <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jun/26/world/fg-mexdrug26>.

<sup>80</sup> Morris, “Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico,” 169–170.

<sup>81</sup> Damaris Canache, “Corrupted Perceptions: The Effect of Corruption on Political Support in Latin American Democracies” (presented at the XXIV International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, TX, 2003), [home.earthlink.net/~allisonmhsd/.../politicalcorruption.pdf](http://home.earthlink.net/~allisonmhsd/.../politicalcorruption.pdf); Charles Davis, Roderic Ai Camp, and Kenneth M. Coleman, “The Influence of Party Systems on Citizens’ Perceptions of Corruption and Electoral Response in Latin America,” *Comparative Political Studies* 37, no. 6 (August 2004): 677–703.

<sup>82</sup> Mitchell A. Seligson, “The Measurement and Impact of Corruption Victimization: Survey Evidence from Latin America,” *World Development* 32, no. 2 (February 2006): 381–404.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

for corruption and provide examples of how and when they occur.<sup>84</sup> Note, the following is not intended to be an all-inclusive or all-encompassing list of corrupt activities in Mexico but, instead, provide the reader an idea of the challenges faced by Mexicans every day.

## 1. Bribery

Bribery is the most widespread tool of corruption in Mexico because practically every type of corruption revolves around having to bribe someone to obtain what is needed. Whether it be a driver's license, a building permit, or even for a police officer to do his job, Mexico tops the list of places worldwide in which a bribe is required to receive even the most basic of public services.<sup>85</sup> The most common type of bribe is referred to as "*la mordida*" or "*a bite*." Sadly, many government officials expect to receive a *mordida* for simply doing their job. In her paper, "Variation in Corruption between Mexican States," Lena Wängnerud provides a colorful anecdote from an interview with a Mexican police officer:

All of us take *mordidas*—100% of us, says the Mexican police officer Antonio Martínez in an interview, and he continues: Maybe not all the time. Maybe one time in 10. It buys lunch for the day.<sup>86</sup>

While most Mexicans complain about the *mordidas*, it is widely accepted as the price for getting things done.<sup>87</sup> A 2005 survey conducted by Transparency International concludes that over 31% of Mexicans acknowledged having paid a bribe within the last 12 months.<sup>88</sup> Whereas, in the United States, a politician might be bribed with campaign

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<sup>84</sup> This topic is discussed again in later chapters.

<sup>85</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption*, 2–5; (USA Today, September 16, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Canache, "Corrupted Perceptions."

<sup>88</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2005* (Berlin: Transparency International, December 9, 2005), [http://www.transparency.org/content/download/2160/12762/file/Global\\_Corruption\\_Barometer\\_2005\\_\(full\\_report\).pdf](http://www.transparency.org/content/download/2160/12762/file/Global_Corruption_Barometer_2005_(full_report).pdf).

contributions with hopes of swaying a vote; in Mexico, customs and immigration officials, police officers and even judges expect a *mordida* in exchange for providing the services they were hired to provide.

## 2. Nepotism

Another common tool of corruption in Mexico is nepotism, which is most often seen as public officials appointing friends or relatives to positions within their organizations over better qualified persons, which is rarely done free of charge. Often referred to as a “*plaza*” or assignments, most public officials are forced to pay bribes in exchange for being hired or to hold a particular *plaza*.<sup>89</sup> The bribes are usually recurring and much higher than the official salary provided by the government. Thus, the employee has little option but to resort to corrupt practices to both pay the *plaza* costs, and to earn a living. For example, if a police officer desires to work in a particular neighborhood, he must pay his police supervisor a bribe in exchange for that neighborhood or *plaza*. The price depends on the earning potential in that particular *plaza* by extorting businesses, and residents, as well as the criminals and cartel members wishing to do business in that neighborhood.<sup>90</sup>

The following is a depiction of a typical day in a police officer’s *plaza*: a criminal has burglarized a local business and has remained in the neighborhood. The business owner approaches the local police officer and informs him of the crime and that the criminal is still nearby. The police officer is uninterested in arresting the criminal because he extorts him in exchange for allowing him to burglarize the local businesses. The police officer tells the business owner his shift is almost over and that he must get going. The business owner pleads with the police officer to make the arrest but the police officer is resolute about doing nothing. Finally, the business owner offers the police officer a bribe

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<sup>89</sup> “Plaza” refers to an area controlled by organized crime syndicates, which are predominantly drug-trafficking organizations. This control involves corruption of public officials and the protection of trafficking corridors from other criminals.

<sup>90</sup> Regarding cartel influence, it is important to note that more often than not the police officer must accept the bribe whether he wants to or not or he risks being killed. The practice of forcing someone to take a bribe is called “*plomo o plata*” or “lead or cash,” i.e., take the cash or take a bullet. This topic is discussed further in later chapters.

in exchange for arresting the criminal or essentially doing his job (the first *mordida*). The police officer happily accepts the bribe, proceeds to the corner and apprehends the criminal. The police officer, not wanting to be the one to press charges against the criminal instructs the business owner to file formal charges against the criminal at the local court. The police officer takes the criminal to jail then stops in to see the judge and pays him a bribe in exchange for releasing the criminal (the second *mordida*). The judge agrees, accepts the *mordida* and later, during the criminal's arraignment, declares that sufficient evidence to charge or hold the criminal has not been presented, and orders the criminal set free. The criminal, upon release, returns to the neighborhood, pays another bribe to the police officer for getting him out of jail (third *mordida*), and then proceeds to vandalize the business owner's place of business in retaliation for having him arrested. In the end, the only person who loses is the business owner. Figure 3 illustrates the cycle.

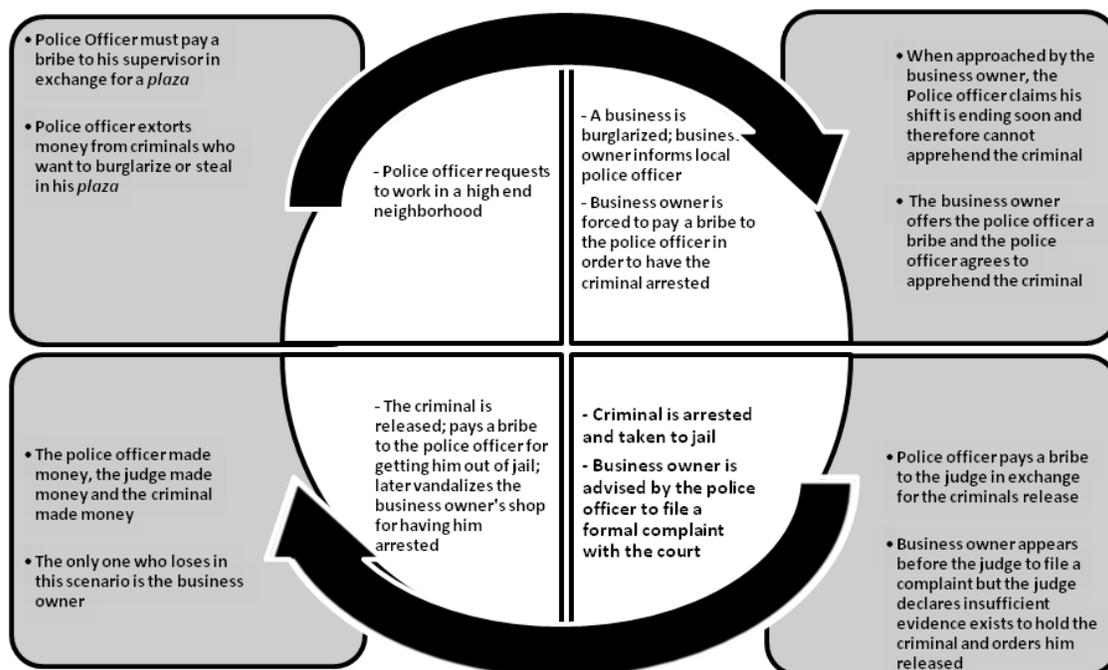


Figure 3. Cycle of Corruption in a Neighborhood Plaza

### 3. Official Theft and Fraud

This tool of corruption refers to the unauthorized use or sale of government property by either government officials or private citizens. An example of fraud is a public official, usually an agency supervisor or director, placing fictitious employees on a payroll. The obvious goal is for those corrupt officials to pocket the salaries of “ghost” employees. While this may seem like a less significant form of corruption, it is very successful at lessening the public’s confidence and trust in the government’s ability to manage its own assets. As stated by Blake and Morris, “impunity towards corrupt public servants further degrades the legitimacy of the state.”<sup>91</sup> Studies conducted by Bardham, Brunetti and Weder, and Djankov et al. show that a direct connection exists between “regulatory burden, red tape, low salaries, high discretion levels, opaque bureaucracies, and a limited rule of law to corruption.”<sup>92</sup>

### 4. Conflict of Interest

After reviewing the tools of corruption previously mentioned, it is not difficult to understand how corrupt government officials create conflicts of interest by the very nature of their corrupt activities. In theory, a conflict of interest is a competition of interests between the interests of the individual and those of the organization this person is entrusted to protect. Every public official who accepts a bribe or *mordida* is guilty of this conflict of interest, and the public knows this. Nieto argues, “the population must be convinced that corruption can in fact be fought effectively in order for things to improve.” Thus far, the Mexican government has failed to do so.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Morris, “Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico,” 12.

<sup>92</sup> Pranab Bardhan, “The Economist’s Approach to the Problem of Corruption,” *World Development* 34, no. 2 (2006): 341–348; Aymo Brunetti and Beatrice Weder, “A Free Press Is Bad News for Corruption,” *Journal of Public Economics* 87, no. 7–8 (2003): 1801–1824; Simeon Djankov et al., “The Regulation of Entry,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 1 (January 2002): 1–37.

<sup>93</sup> Francisco Nieto, “Desmitificando la corrupción en América Latina,” *Nueva Sociedad*, December 2004, 54–68.

## E. CONCLUSION

In 2003, just three years after the PRI was voted out of office, Transparency International conducted a study, which found that despite the creation and implementation of numerous anti-corruption laws in Mexico by President Fox's government, government transparency had not reached the levels many had expected.<sup>94</sup> It could be argued that the previously mentioned study was conducted too soon after PRI's departure for notable improvements to take hold. Latin American political scholar Strom Thacker supports this hypothesis by stating, "while democracy tends to lower corruption in the long run, in the short term it virtually has no impact."<sup>95</sup>

Thus, what options are feasible for the Mexican government? Mexican politics expert Strom C. Thacker stresses that "governmental and nongovernmental accountability mechanisms including: an independent judiciary, a well-paid civil service, a media sector able and willing to conduct investigative journalism on corruption, and a set of interest groups dedicated to the reduction of corruption is a critical step towards reducing corruption."<sup>96</sup> So far, the Mexican government has not been able to achieve those goals. The judiciary is largely corrupt, journalists are harassed and even killed if they bring certain corruption to light and the interest groups are also largely corrupt and self-serving. Therefore, the police forces must be effectively purged of corrupt officials and anti-corruption measures must be effectively implemented to prevent them from falling prey to corrupt practices again. This step requires significant reform, which is discussed in detail in later chapters. Only an honest and capable police force can earn the respect and support of the population. As mentioned earlier, social change is a prerequisite to reform. Popular attitudes must shift from acceptance of corruption and skepticism towards the

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<sup>94</sup> Transparency International, *Corruption Fighters' Tool Kit 2002 Civil society experiences and emerging strategies* (Transparency International, 2002), 90, [http://www.transparency.org/content/download/598/3580/file/toolkit2002\\_complete.pdf](http://www.transparency.org/content/download/598/3580/file/toolkit2002_complete.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Strom C. Thacker, "Democracy, Economic Policy, and Political Corruption in Comparative Perspective," in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 25–45.

<sup>96</sup> Morris, "Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico," 9–14.

government to respect for the rule of law, intolerance of corruption and a demand for things to change. Once this shift happens, the government will have no other option but to reform.

### **III. CASE STUDY: MEXICAN DRUG CARTELS AND CORRUPTION**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The cartels of Mexico have a history tied closely to drug trafficking that has endowed upon them the ability to assert influence throughout Mexico and much of the Western Hemisphere. This influence, based on financial capital and the ability to deliver violence, allows the cartels to conduct business with little fear of reprisal from Mexican authorities, the population or rival cartel members. To develop a clear picture of what comprises cartel influence, this thesis examines the history of the cartels, their capabilities, and the activities in which they are most commonly involved. Next, the Mexican government's actions are examined to determine what impact anti-drug policies and reforms implemented to date have had on cartel capabilities. Finally, a center of gravity analysis is conducted to illustrate the root problem facing Mexico today. Through this case study, it will become apparent that Mexico has initiated many policies and reforms geared towards taking down the cartels in hopes of reducing violence while ineffectively addressing intangible social issues, and more specifically, corruption within the law enforcement agencies, which is a critical capability of the cartels and goes hand-in-hand with levels of violence.

#### **B. HISTORY OF THE CARTELS IN MEXICO**

Drug cartel expert Malcolm Beith argues that Mexico's modern drug cartels were formed in 1987 by Mexican Judicial Federal Police agent Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo who controlled all illicit drug trade in Mexico and transportation of drugs into the United States. Known as "The Godfather," Felix Gallardo became so powerful that he divided the different corridors of Mexico amongst his top drug lords. The Tijuana route went to the Arellano Felix brothers and would become the Tijuana Cartel. The Ciudad Juárez route went to the Carrillo Fuentes family, which established the Ciudad Juárez Cartel. Miguel Caro Quintero ran the Sonora corridor, but this cartel would later split into the

Sinaloa and Tijuana Cartels. The control of the Matamoros Tamaulipas corridor was delegated to Juan Garcia Abrego and would become the Gulf Cartel. Joaquin Guzmán Loera and Ismael Zambada Garcia took control of Pacific coast operations and formed the Sinaloa Cartel. Félix Gallardo retained authority over the entire country but did not interfere with the cartel's daily business.<sup>97</sup>

With the formation of the initial cartels, decentralized command and control over Mexican narcotics trade operations was intended to increase efficiency and decrease the risk of the drug lords being arrested. Since their inception, alliances between the cartels have led to hostility and infighting, and alliances have also caused powerful cartel cronies to split from their parent organizations and form new cartels. For example, Los Zetas ran the Gulf Cartel, founded by Arturo Guzmán Decena in 1999,<sup>98</sup> but in 2010, they split from the Gulf Cartel and became enemies of their former employer.<sup>99</sup> La Familia Cartel and Los Zetas shared a similar beginning, as La Familia was the paramilitary wing of the Gulf Cartel. They trained with Los Zetas, but after their split in 2006, La Familia became enemies to both Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartels.<sup>100</sup> The last large-scale cartel in existence today is the Beltrán-Leyva Cartel, which was formed by Marcos Arturo, Carlos, Alfredo and Héctor Beltrán-Leyva in 2008 after a split with the Sinaloa Cartel. They were top men in the Sinaloa Cartel under Joaquin Guzmán, and after the arrest of Alfredo, Arturo ordered the assassination of both the commissioner of the Federal Police and the son of Sinaloa Cartel leader Guzmán. A 15-man hit squad killed the son of Joaquin Guzmán, and understandably, this caused a huge rift between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Beltrán-Leyva brothers, forcing the brothers to create their own cartel.<sup>101</sup> These alliances and

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<sup>97</sup> Malcolm Beith, *The Last Narco: Inside the Hunt for El Chapo, the World's Most Wanted Drug Lord* (New York: Grove Press, 2010), 138–140.

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Army Special Forces at Fort Bragg, NC trained the Los Zetas cartel, which is primarily comprised of elite ex-Mexican Special Forces soldiers. This fact explains why both rival cartels, as well as the Mexican government, consider Los Zetas the most dangerous of the cartels.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Ware, “Los Zetas Called Mexico’s Most Dangerous Drug Cartel,” *CNN World*, August 6, 2009, [http://articles.cnn.com/2009-08-06/world/mexico.drug.cartels\\_1\\_los-zetas-drug-cartels-drug-war?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2009-08-06/world/mexico.drug.cartels_1_los-zetas-drug-cartels-drug-war?_s=PM:WORLD).

<sup>100</sup> “Mexico Offers \$2m for Drug Lords,” *BBC*, March 24, 2009, sec. Americas, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7960198.stm>.

<sup>101</sup> Beith, *The Last Narco*, 141–145.

splits formed the primary cartels in operation today: Gulf, Sinaloa, Tijuana, Los Zetas, La Familia, Beltran-Leyva and Ciudad-Juarez. Figure 4 is an illustration of the territory controlled by each cartel and the disputed area over which they are fighting.

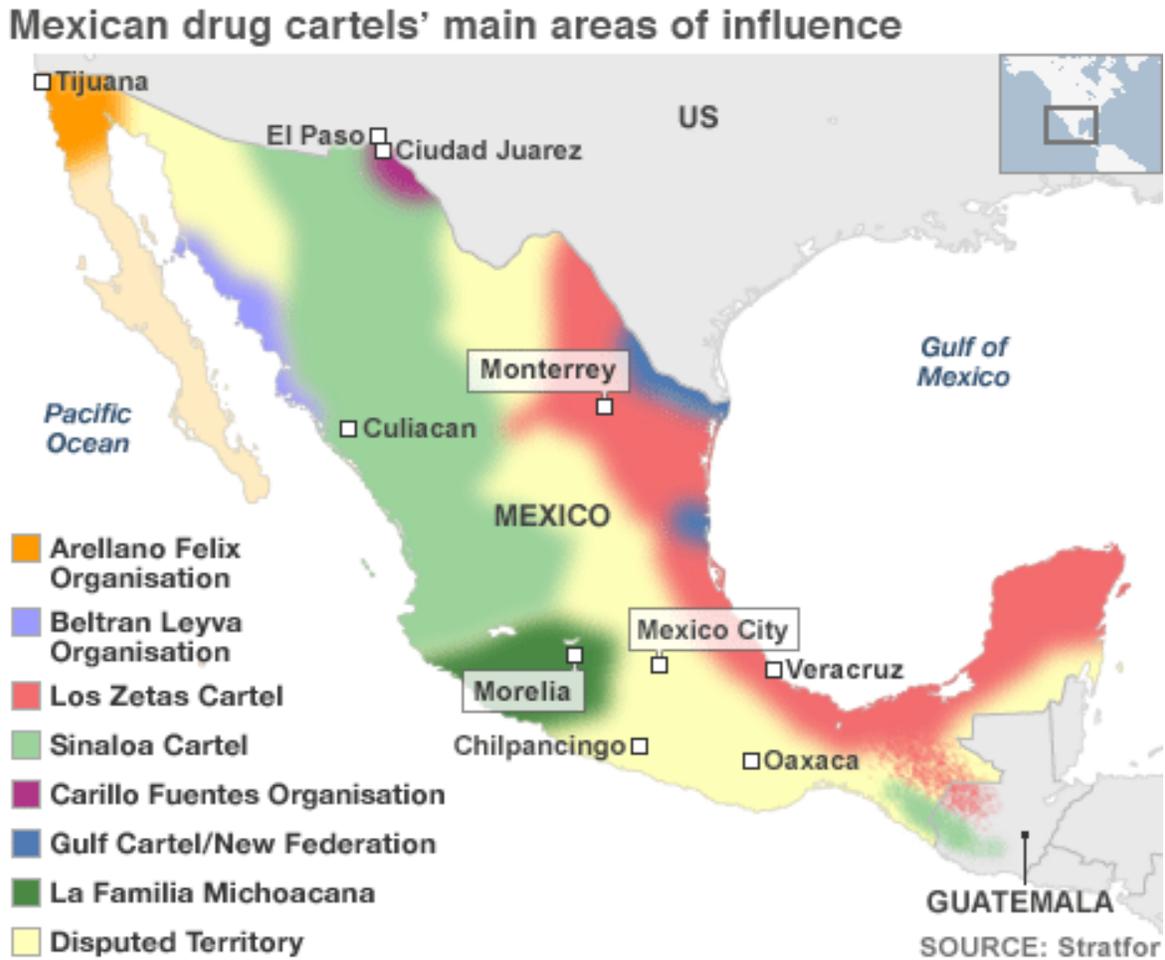


Figure 4. Mexican Cartels' Areas of Influence<sup>102</sup>

### 1. Sources of Income

While drug production and trafficking comprise the lion's share of the Mexican cartels' income, they also find other sources to fund their activities, such as human

<sup>102</sup> "Two More Held in U.S. Agent Killing," *BBC*, February 28, 2011, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12593679>.

trafficking, kidnapping and piracy. Although money laundering is not a great contributor to cartel income—its primary function is simply to conceal the source of illicit income—cartels do find some marginal income by laundering foreign illicit money, such as Colombian drug money. Mexico expert and U.S. Congress advisor Colleen Cook estimates that Mexican cartels launder annually anywhere from \$8.3 to \$24.9 billion of both Mexican and Colombian drug money.<sup>103</sup> Another source of income is piracy. For example, La Familia has been selling pirated copies of Microsoft software and can earn as much as \$2.2 million per day.<sup>104</sup>

Human trafficking and kidnapping compose a larger portion of cartel income, but still does not compare to the income that illicit drugs garners. The kidnappings of Americans, Mexican officials and migrants can net extortion fee of \$200 up to approximately \$85,000. From April through September of 2010, over 11,333 migrant kidnappings were reported,<sup>105</sup> an increase from the 1,600 migrant kidnappings reported from September 2008 through February 2009.<sup>106</sup> Not all reported cases result in extortion profit for the cartels; however; some kidnapping victims join the cartel ranks, while others are used as drug mules and others are simply executed.<sup>107</sup> Overall, human trafficking is the second largest source of income for the Mexican drug cartels, which supplies them with \$15 to \$20 billion annually.<sup>108</sup>

The chief source of financial income for the cartels is their production and trafficking of illicit drugs. Mexico is the primary producer of methamphetamines and marijuana and 90 percent of the cocaine used in the United States is trafficked through

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<sup>103</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *CRS Report for Congress: Mexico's Drug Cartels* (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, October 16, 2007), 5, [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34215.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34215.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> Zach Epstein, "Mexican Drug Cartel Sells Counterfeit Microsoft Software to Fund Kidnappings, Drug Trafficking," *BGR*, February 4, 2011, <http://www.bgr.com/2011/02/04/mexican-drug-cartel-sells-counterfeit-microsoft-software-to-fund-kidnappings-drug-trafficking/>.

<sup>105</sup> Lorena Segura and Mica Rosenberg, "Mass Kidnappings New Cash Cow for Mexico Drug Gangs," *Reuters*, April 11, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/11/us-mexico-drugs-migrants-idUSTRE73A2D220110411>.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Arthur Brice, "Human Trafficking Second Only to Drugs in Mexico," *CNN World*, August 26, 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-26/world/mexico.human.trafficking\\_1\\_human-trafficking-cartel-human-rights?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-26/world/mexico.human.trafficking_1_human-trafficking-cartel-human-rights?_s=PM:WORLD).

Mexico. Through drug production and trafficking, Mexican cartels generate an estimated \$35 to \$45 billion annually, with an 80 percent profit margin.<sup>109</sup> Control over this immense, highly profitable market drives brutal competition between the seven major cartels.

## 2. Activities

In addition to income generating operations, cartels perform other activities that primarily support cartel operations, which include weapons smuggling and intimidating the Mexican population. Weapons smuggling is not a great source of income for the cartels, but smuggling allows the cartels to obtain weapons easily and cheaply from gun shops in the United States or from weapons traffickers in Guatemala. It is worth noting that most of the smuggled weapons are not obtained from the United States; in fact, 90 percent of all the smuggled weapons enter Mexico through Guatemala.<sup>110</sup>

Public intimidation is also a major cartel activity. Public intimidation can occur in many forms, but perhaps the most effective tactic is the targeting of innocent civilians and public executions. A 2011 video of a man being castrated and decapitated provides an example of the public displays of violence and intimidation of the population.<sup>111</sup> These videos are intended to intimidate rival cartel groups, Mexican public officials, police forces and the Mexican public. The problem with this tactic is that it generally fails to incite true intimidation in rival cartel members. Instead, the rival cartel will seek revenge, which thus perpetuates this cycle of violence. To break this cycle of violent public executions, either a dominant winner must emerge or a ceasefire must be reached between the cartels and the Mexican government.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Devon Duff and Jen Rygler, "Drug Trafficking, Violence and Mexico's Economic Future," *Knowledge Wharton*, January 26, 2011, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2695>.

<sup>110</sup> EFE, "Mexican Cartels Get Heavy Weapons from CentAm, U.S. Cables Say," Text. Article, *Fox News Latino*, March 30, 2011, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2011/03/30/mexican-cartels-heavy-weapons-centam-cables-say/>.

<sup>111</sup> Smurf, "Narco Execution Videos and Their Effects on the General Population," *Borderland Beat*, March 8, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/03/narco-execution-videos-and-its-effects.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Smurf, "Narco Execution Videos and Their Effects on the General Population," *Borderland Beat*, March 8, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/03/narco-execution-videos-and-its-effects.html>.

Another cartel-employed method of controlling the population is targeting innocent citizens with violence. For example, children have become an intentional target of violence. Historians of the Mexican drug-trafficking culture say that, until recently, children were considered off-limits in the code honored by crime bosses, who used to portray themselves as Robin Hoods dealing dope to gringos and donating alms to the poor. However, beginning around 2006, this attitude changed. The Children's Rights Group estimates that 994 Mexican people under the age of 18 have been killed between 2006 and 2010, but this figure is underestimated because Mexican media outlets are highly susceptible to cartel intimidation.<sup>113</sup>

The cartels are not just operating within Mexico. According to the *LA Times*, cartels have begun to create and operate distribution centers throughout the United States as well.<sup>114</sup> In April 2011, federal law enforcement officers raided a house in Columbia, South Carolina occupied by a member of the Sinaloa Cartel. Within the house, authorities found 10 kilos of cocaine worth over \$350,000. The *LA Times* also identified Atlanta as a major cartel hub for the storage and distribution of drugs to smaller cities throughout the Southeast. Other U.S. cities named as having cartel influence include the Tijuana Cartel operations in Seattle, WA, Juárez Cartel operations in Minneapolis, MN and Gulf Cartel operations in Buffalo, NY.<sup>115</sup> Mexican cartels are also operating across the border in Guatemala. Los Zetas Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel have made their presence known by recruiting Guatemalan military members and low-level Guatemalan criminals. Since the assassination of Guatemalan drug lord Juan Jose "Juancho" Leon in 2008, the Los Zetas Cartel has controlled all cocaine trafficking within the area of Guatemala.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Anne-Marie O'Conner and William Booth, "Mexico's Drug Cartels Have New Target: Children," *The Irish Times*, April 12, 2011, <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/0412/1224294477784.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Richard A. Serrano, "Mexican Cartels Setting Up Shop Across U.S.," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, April 17, 2011), <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/17/nation/la-na-crack-house-20110417>.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> "Official: Mexican Cartels Hiring Common Criminals," *Fox News*, April 6, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/04/06/official-mexican-cartels-hiring-common-criminals/>.

### **3. Political Connections**

While cartels do not exhibit strong political agendas, other than combating anti-cartel policy, they do need the connections within local and state governments to maintain political invulnerability. According to law enforcement official and scholar John P. Sullivan and *Red Team Journal* editor Adam Elkus, cartels, such as La Familia are building social services and infrastructure protection in rural areas and small towns to build a social base from which to increase their influence within communities. In urban areas, they are funding political patron-client relationships—reinforced by corruption, propaganda, political marches and demonstrations to help shape future conflicts in their favor.<sup>117</sup> This tactic is a common strategy amongst criminal syndicates, such as the American mafia. Without these connections to political figures, police officials or social figures, the crime syndicates would be completely on their own, depending on what limited resources were available. In other words, without these connections, no inside man would be able to forewarn them of coming threats or to provide advice on prudent action.

### **4. Ability to Corrupt**

Mexican cartels are responsible for corrupting officials at all levels of Mexican government, the military and police forces. Steven David, a renowned authority on civil conflict, highlights cartel dedication to corruption by arguing that the Arellano brothers “invested” over \$75 million yearly towards the corruption of local, state and federal officials.<sup>118</sup> This corruption is not limited to Mexican government institutions but also includes the United States and neighboring Central American countries, such as Guatemala. An example of higher-level government corruption is shown in 2008: a Mexican officer attached to President Calderón’s guard staff was arrested for leaking information to the cartels in exchange for bribes and also training hit men through a

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<sup>117</sup> John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, “Mexican Crime Families: Political Aims and Social Plans,” *Mexidata.Info*, July 27, 2009, <http://mexidata.info/id2344.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Steven R. David, *Catastrophic Consequences: Civil Wars and American Interests* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 107.

private security firm and supplying military weapons to the cartels.<sup>119</sup> On April 14, 2011, *Fox News Latino* reported that 16 Mexican municipal police officers were arrested for their connections to a mass grave containing 120 people killed execution style. These officers allegedly helped to cover up information about the killers, who were believed to be members of Los Zetas cartel.<sup>120</sup> In fact, police forces have had such high levels of corruption that Mexico's only reliable option to combat the cartels and corrupted police forces is the Mexican military.<sup>121</sup> However, Mexico's military, primarily its army, is subject to corruption as well. Mexico reports that over the past few years, over 150,000 military personnel have defected to work for the better paying cartels, and have taken their mostly U.S.-made weapons with them.<sup>122</sup>

Corruption related to Mexican cartels also affects agencies outside of Mexico as well. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection are also prone to corruption by Mexican cartels. Recently, Customs and Border Protection officer Margarita Crispin was sentenced to 20 years in prison for accepting \$5 million in bribes from Mexican cartels in exchange for allowing drugs to be smuggled through her assigned section of the U.S./Mexico border. The DEA reports that 80 people have been convicted of such corruption, while hundreds more are under investigation.<sup>123</sup>

### C. GOVERNMENT ANTI-CARTEL POLICIES

Although corruption is the primary focus of this thesis, establishing a picture of other anti-cartel policies implemented by Mexico will help develop an idea of where most of Mexican efforts have been dedicated. Mexico, under the leadership of President

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<sup>119</sup> Larry Keane, "Corrupt Mexican Army Officer in Calderon's Inner Circle Supplied Drug Cartels with Weapons," *NSSF Blog*, February 24, 2011, <http://www.nssfblog.com/corrupt-mexican-army-officer-in-calderons-inner-circle-supplied-drug-cartels-with-weapons/>.

<sup>120</sup> EFE, "State of Corruption: 16 Mexican Cops Arrested in Connection with Mass Graves," *Fox News Latino*, April 14, 2011, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2011/04/14/16-mexican-cops-arrested-connection-mass-graves/?test=latestnews>.

<sup>121</sup> Alfonso Reyes-Garces, "Winning the War on Drugs in Mexico? Toward an Integrated Approach to the Illegal Drug Trade" (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), 5, <http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA514370>.

<sup>122</sup> EFE, "State of Corruption."

<sup>123</sup> Mark Potter, "Mexican Cartels Corrupting More U.S. Border Officials?," *MSNBC*, April 7, 2011, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42061290/ns/world\\_news-americas](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42061290/ns/world_news-americas).

Felipe Calderón, has established an extremely aggressive approach to its drug problems by declaring war against the cartels when he took office in 2006. The war has been exceedingly bloody with little headway towards a victory over the cartels. The following sections examine the policies, intended effects and outcomes of Mexican government policies and those of members of the international community who maintain an interest in this situation.

## **1. Mexican Policy Background**

On December 11, 2006, Calderón initiated Operation Michoacán, a controversial still ongoing operation and prompted the deployment of over 6,500 Mexican troops to the Michoacán area, which is under control of the drug cartels. To date, Operation Michoacán is responsible for the deaths of over 500 cartel members, as well as 50 soldiers and 100 police officers. In addition, 10 Michoacán mayors and 20 other local officials have been detained on corruption charges.<sup>124</sup>

One possible solution to the war on cartels has been the legalization of drug production and its use. In 2009, Mexico passed a bill that decriminalized the personal use of major narcotics; the law stipulated that people could use but not produce the narcotics. Under this law, the maximum amount of marijuana permitted for “personal use” is five grams—the equivalent of about four marijuana cigarettes. Other limits are half a gram of cocaine, 50 milligrams of heroin, 40 milligrams of methamphetamine and 0.015 milligrams of LSD.<sup>125</sup> The intent of this bill was to distinguish the addicts and casual users from the large-scale drug traffickers. However, Mark Stevenson and Mexican political scientist Javier Oliva indicate that this bill is a “serious contradiction” to the tone set by the Calderón administration.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, former Mexican President Vicente

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<sup>124</sup> Buggs, “Operation Michoacán,” *Borderland Beat*, July 14, 2010, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2010/07/operation-michoacan.html>.

<sup>125</sup> The Associated Press, “Mexico Legalizes Drug Possession,” *The New York Times* (New York, August 21, 2011), sec. International / Americas, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/world/americas/21mexico.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Mark Stevenson, “Mexico Decriminalizes Small-Scale Drug Possession,” *Breitbart*, August 21, 2010, <http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9A763HO0>.

Fox is one of the many proponents of drug legalization that would make both the use of and production of drugs legal, while giving the government the right to regulate the markets.<sup>127</sup>

## 2. Military Actions

The Mexican military, as opposed to the vastly corrupt Mexican police forces, is the primary governmental tool used for combating the cartels, collecting intelligence and maintaining order within the population. Both President Fox and President Calderón found it necessary to use the Mexican military in a police role against the cartels due to the widely known corruption that plagues the Mexican police forces. The Mexican government deployed troops on several occasions to restore order in numerous cities across Mexico including Tijuana,<sup>128</sup> Ciudad Juárez<sup>129</sup> and Michoacán. In Ciudad Juárez alone, from 2008 to 2011, over 7,386 people have been killed, which includes cartel members, civilians, police, military, as well as American tourists and diplomatic personnel.<sup>130</sup> While fighting these bloody battles against the cartels, the Mexican military has seen its share of success, as it has arrested or killed cartel leaders throughout the country. Table 1 highlights key cartel leaders arrested or killed by the Mexican military.

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<sup>127</sup> COHA, “Legalizing Marijuana: An Exit Strategy from the War On Drugs,” *Eurasia Review: News and Analysis*, April 19, 2011, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/legalizing-marijuana-an-exit-strategy-from-the-war-on-drugs-oped-19042011/>.

<sup>128</sup> “Mexico Beefs Up Military in Violent Tijuana,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/29/idUSN29365757>.

<sup>129</sup> Rob Quinn, “Mexican Army Sweeps Into Juarez,” *Newser*, March 4, 2009, <http://www.newser.com/story/52347/mexican-army-sweeps-into-juarez.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Associated Press, “Ciudad Juarez Drug War Death Toll Hits 3,000,” *CBS News World*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/12/15/world/main7151506.shtml>.

Name	Cartel / Position within the Cartel	Date	Location	Arrested / Killed
Carlos Adrian Martinez-Muniz	Los Zetas Cartel / Second in Command	Oct 2009	Monterrey	Arrested <sup>131</sup>
Jesus Israel de la Cruz-Lopez	Sinaloa Cartel / Capo	Jan 2011	Tijuana	Arrested <sup>132</sup>
Arturo Beltran-Leyva	Beltran-Leyva Cartel /Cartel Leader	Dec 2009	Cuernavaca	Killed <sup>133</sup>
Sergio Villarreal-Barragan	Beltran-Leyva Cartel /Top Capo	Sep 2010	Puebla	Arrested <sup>134</sup>
Osiel Cárdenas-Guillén	Gulf Cartel/ Cartel Leader	Mar 2003	Matamoros	Arrested <sup>135</sup>

Table 1. Key Cartel Leaders Arrested or Killed by the Mexican Military

The *LA Times* reports that, since 2006, the Mexican government has deployed over 50,000 troops in support of the war on drugs. By utilizing roadblocks, checkpoints, city patrols, and raids, the government has seized a vast amount of drugs and guns.<sup>136</sup> However, due to allegations of human rights violations by the military, as well as its susceptibility to corruption by cartel members, the Mexican military has begun to lose the support and trust of the population. In 2009, 72 percent of Mexicans viewed the army favorably, an 11 percent drop from 2007.<sup>137</sup> In 2011, in response to a large number of human rights complaints against the military, the United Nations sent a group of experts

<sup>131</sup> “Top Mexican Cartel Leader Arrested, Military Says,” *CNN.com/World*, October 22, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/10/22/mexico.arrest/index.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Nick Valencia, “Mexican Military: Suspected Drug Cartel Leader Arrested,” *CNN World*, January 6, 2011, [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-06/world/mexico.cartel.arrest\\_1\\_drug-cartel-teodoro-garcia-simental-mexican-president-felipe-calderon?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-06/world/mexico.cartel.arrest_1_drug-cartel-teodoro-garcia-simental-mexican-president-felipe-calderon?_s=PM:WORLD).

<sup>133</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, “Mexico Deals a Blow to a Cartel but Warns of Continued Drug-Related Violence,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2009, sec. International/Americas, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/18/world/americas/18mexico.html?\\_r=1&hpw](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/18/world/americas/18mexico.html?_r=1&hpw).

<sup>134</sup> E. Eduardo Castillo, “Mexico’s Military Nabs Drug Cartel Kingpin,” *KVUE.com/ABC*, September 13, 2010, <http://www.kvue.com/news/Mexicos-military-nabs-drug-cartel-kingpin-102774499.html>.

<sup>135</sup> “Drug Boss Captured in Mexico,” *BBC*, March 15, 2003, sec. Americas, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2852197.stm>.

<sup>136</sup> Ken Ellingwood, “Mexico Military Faces Political Risks Over Drug War,” *latimes.com*, March 23, 2010, <http://freedom syndicate.com/mayfair/latimes033.htm>.

<sup>137</sup> Ken Ellingwood, “Mexico Military Faces Political Risks Over Drug War,” *latimes.com*, March 23, 2010, <http://freedom syndicate.com/mayfair/latimes033.htm>.

and scholars to Mexico to study interactions between the military and the population. This group concluded that the military does not currently possess the training or ability to conduct police duties and effectively interact with the civilian population. The UN further recommended that Mexico remove its military from the front lines of the war on drugs,<sup>138</sup> which would most certainly create a power vacuum that cartels could exploit to their benefit.<sup>139</sup>

### **3. Reforms Implemented**

During the 71-year rule of the PRI, the public and international community did not pressure the government to reform. However, with the election of President Vicente Fox in 2000, the pressure to reform became apparent. The reforms that President Fox pursued during his presidency were largely geared towards fiscal and immigration progress. While the majority of President Fox's reforms were not focused on countering drugs and cartels, U.S. policy and Mexico experts Laurie Freeman and Jorge Luis Sierra state that Fox did disband the Federal Judicial Police and replaced them with the Federal Investigations Agency, which was designed to be more professional and effective with improved command structures, internal controls and compartmentalized intelligence procedures. This institutional reform, however, did not aggressively prosecute corrupt police officers and most of the personnel that comprised the AFI were members of the disbanded Federal Judicial Police.<sup>140</sup> Successes during President Fox's term included improved Mexican inflation to single digits, increased reserve money, drastically slowed the devaluation of the Mexican peso, reduced foreign debt, strengthened U.S./Mexico immigration ties and initiated the use of the military against the cartels, whose power was

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<sup>138</sup> "U.N. Urges Mexico to Get Military Out of Law Enforcement," *Fox News Latino*, April 1, 2011, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2011/04/01/urges-mexico-military-law-enforcement/>.

<sup>139</sup> Wängnerud, *Variation in Corruption between Mexican States Elaborating the Gender Perspective*, 18.

<sup>140</sup> Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2004), 275–276.

increasing exponentially.<sup>141</sup> President Fox's reforms went a long way towards establishing the roots for success that Mexico will require to defeat the cartels effectively.

Similarly, President Calderón's political agenda from the beginning was and still is based upon the defeat of the cartels. In October 2010, President Calderón revealed that he planned to eliminate Mexico's approximate 2,200 local police squads and move towards a national unified police command in hopes of reducing the ability of the cartels to corrupt police officers, while also presenting a more cohesive and professional force to both Mexican citizens and to the international community. President Calderón admits that the reformation of the police forces into a transparent and nationally unified police force will take time and will not be completely immune to the corruption that has taken hold of approximately half of all local police forces.<sup>142</sup>

One of the unintended drawbacks of the Mérida Initiative, discussed in the subsequent section, is that numerous violations of human rights occurred during the implementation phases of the new U.S./Mexico partnership. In March 2011, the Mexican Senate approved the reform of 11 articles of the Mexican Constitution to include elevating human rights provisions in international treaties approved by Mexico to the same level as the Constitution, incorporating respect for human rights into Mexico's education and penitentiary systems and in foreign policy, and establishing the right to a judicial hearing for any foreigner threatened with deportation. These constitutional reforms also expanded the powers of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and the state-level human rights commissions that would allow them to field and investigate complaints and to issue recommendations regarding labor law violations. These debated reforms also initiated the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual preference.<sup>143</sup> Another human rights reform that President Calderón initiated in late 2010

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<sup>141</sup> Carlos Luken, "Mexico Continues to Advance Under Vicente Fox," *Mexidata.Info*, September 26, 2005, <http://mexidata.info/id619.html>.

<sup>142</sup> EK, "Calderon Announces New Unified Command Force to Fight Cartels," *National Security Law Brief*, October 17, 2010, <http://nationalecuritylawbrief.com/2010/10/17/calderon-announces-new-unified-command-force-to-fight-cartels/>.

<sup>143</sup> Maureen Meyer, "Historic Human Rights Reforms Passed in the Mexican Senate; Now State Congresses Should Follow Suit," *Mexico Portal*, March 16, 2011, <http://mexicoinstitute.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/al-dia-historic-human-rights-reforms-passed-in-the-mexican-senate-now-state-congresses-should-follow-suit/>.

is that Mexican soldiers who commit crimes of torture, forced disappearance, and sexual violence be tried in civilian courts instead of military tribunals. Many human rights groups, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico, criticize this reform as inadequate in that it does not cover all crimes against humanity, such as extrajudicial execution.<sup>144</sup>

#### **4. International Cooperation**

Although Mexico does not boast a strong partnership with the U.S. military, the United States has provided support to Mexico's fight against the cartels. In an effort to combat the growing threat of drug-related violence, the United States and Mexico announced the Mérida Initiative in October 2007. Since then, Congress has appropriated over \$1.3 billion for this program in Mexico and almost \$300 million for related programs in Central America and the Caribbean under the theory that improved security and reforms in these countries will improve security in the United States.<sup>145</sup> The money provided to Mexico is intended to promote troop deployment to regions affected by drug violence and to establish a legal system with reduced corruption.<sup>146</sup> A further \$175 million of this initiative was appropriated to help President Calderón expand appropriate judicial reforms.<sup>147</sup> The future goals of the Mérida Initiative are to disrupt organized criminal groups, institutionalize reforms to sustain rule of law and respect for human rights, create a 21st century border, and build strong and resilient communities.<sup>148</sup>

Perhaps one of the biggest successes of the Mérida Initiative was the institutionalization of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with the Mexican government. In addition to initializing 10-week long investigative training

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<sup>144</sup> Anonymous, "Mexico: Controversial, Calderón's Initiative to Reform the Military Tribunal," *SIPAZ Blog*, October 25, 2010, <http://sipazen.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/mexico-controversial-calderons-initiative-to-reform-the-military-tribunal/>.

<sup>145</sup> U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, *U.S. - Mexico Security Cooperation: Next Steps for the Merida Initiative* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 4, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

programs for Mexican customs officials, a partnership program was created called “Armas Cruzadas” designed to combat the smuggling of firearms and “Operation Firewall” to combat bulk-cash smuggling. From 2008 to 2010, Armas Cruzadas seized over 3,800 weapons, \$10.5 million in U.S. currency and made 749 arrests. From 2005 to 2010, Operation Firewall made almost 4,000 seizures totaling \$302 million in addition to arresting 679 individuals.<sup>149</sup>

ICE has not been the only agency to benefit from the enhanced cooperative relationship formed between the United States and Mexico through the Mérida Initiative. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has worked with the Mexican government to establish a Spanish e-Trace web-based system to track smuggled U.S. originated weapons. The two are also creating and perfecting Plataforma Mexico, a data tracing and drug intelligence collection and sharing system of Mexico’s criminal justice data system in hopes of reducing the incentive to obtain U.S. firearms illegally.<sup>150</sup>

Many critics who refer to the similarities between the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia often sarcastically refer to the Mérida Initiative as “Plan Mexico.”<sup>151</sup> These same critics are quick to stress that, while the U.S. spent over \$1 billion on Plan Colombia, cocaine production has steadily increased and registered a 27 percent increase in 2007.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to Plan Colombia, which was largely based on military aid to Colombia, the Mérida Initiative contains provisions aimed at addressing broader concerns, such as human rights training for Mexican Soldiers and over \$73.5 million alone in earmarks for institutions building and rule-of-law issues.<sup>153</sup> These provisions were deemed crucial in light of the current levels of human rights abuses committed by

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<sup>149</sup> U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, *U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, 25–26.

<sup>150</sup> Ray Walser, PhD, “U.S. Strategy Against Mexican Drug Cartels: Flawed and Uncertain,” *The Heritage Foundation*, April 26, 2010, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/04/us-strategy-against-mexican-drug-cartels-flawed-and-uncertain>.

<sup>151</sup> “Is the Merida Initiative a Solution or Part of the Problem?,” *iNewsit*, January 8, 2009, <http://www.inewsit.com/articles/entry/Is-the-Merida-Initiative-a-solution-or-part-of-the-problem->.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> “Is the Merida Initiative a Solution or Part of the Problem?,” *iNewsit*, January 8, 2009, <http://www.inewsit.com/articles/entry/Is-the-Merida-Initiative-a-solution-or-part-of-the-problem->.

the armed forces, which totaled about 800 in the first five months of 2008 alone.<sup>154</sup> While most Human Rights abuses claims are filed for misconduct or illegal searches, others are as serious as rape and torture. A growing number of citizens are concerned that the Mexican military is “becoming too powerful in the face of state weakness—a chilling reminder of a more repressive era.”<sup>155</sup> Rights groups have often questioned the use of the military to fight the drug cartels, but political analysts agree that troops are the only real option in a country where as many as half the police could be on the payroll of drug cartels.<sup>156</sup>

Mexico has not always been a proponent of extraditing Mexican nationals to the United States; however, since Present Calderón took office, he has increased extradition rates as a tool against the cartels. Despite this, extradition terms between Mexico and the United States still do not promote maximum legal flexibility. For example, the 1978 Extradition Treaty does not make extradition a requirement and does not provide clear guidelines for crimes that do not fit the description of one of the 19 types of offenses listed in the treaty. Other extradition difficulties arise because of the difference in punishments allowed by Mexico as compared to the United States. Mexico’s government considers capital punishment and life imprisonment to be unconstitutional, while the United States allows for both—depending on the state of prosecution.<sup>157</sup> Two notable Mexico extraditions to the United States include Gulf Cartel boss Osiel Cárdenas-Guillén in 2007,<sup>158</sup> and Tijuana Cartel boss Benjamin Arellano Felix in 2011.<sup>159</sup>

Mexico has also developed a working bond with Colombia, and received training on better police practices and commando tactics to apply against the cartels. The training

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<sup>154</sup> “Is the Merida Initiative a Solution or Part of the Problem?,” *iNewsit*, January 8, 2009, <http://www.inewsit.com/articles/entry/Is-the-Merida-Initiative-a-solution-or-part-of-the-problem>.

<sup>155</sup> “Merida Initiative a Solution or Problem.”

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> The Brownsville Herald, “Mexico-to-U.S. Extraditions Increasing, Report Shows,” *The Monitor*, March 7, 2011, <http://www.themonitor.com/articles/cartel-47801-osiel-extraditions.html>.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “Mexican Kingpin Extradited to United States,” *CNN World*, April 29, 2011, [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-04-29/world/mexico.us.extradition\\_1\\_arellano-felix-organization-drug-cartels-drug-trafficking?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-04-29/world/mexico.us.extradition_1_arellano-felix-organization-drug-cartels-drug-trafficking?_s=PM:WORLD).

also incorporates resources from the United States, such as personnel and funding—\$800,000 as of 2011.<sup>160</sup> Another international player with great interest in the Mexican cartels is the government of Guatemala. Initially, Guatemala had not played a dominant role in combating the Mexican cartels due largely to its inability to confront the better equipped and trained cartels, such as Los Zetas.<sup>161</sup> However, in December 2010, the president of Guatemala declared a state of siege for 30 days to go after the cartels in northern Guatemala near the border with Mexico.<sup>162</sup> While cooperation between Mexico and Guatemala has mainly come in the form of information exchange, the recent arrest of Guatemala's top drug lord, Juan Ortiz Lopez, may signal the beginning of closer cooperation between the United States, Guatemala, and ultimately, Mexico.<sup>163</sup>

## 5. Lessons Learned

The problems that arise from the policies, military actions and reforms implemented by the Mexican government help to narrow the focus of decision makers to which policies are working most effectively and what else needs to be done. From what has been discussed, due to law enforcement corruption, military action has been most effective at physically combating the cartels, but this combat is encouraging greater violence, military corruption levels and degraded public trust. According to the UN, more specific law enforcement training is required for the military if Calderón continues to place the military at the front lines of the war.

Also severely lacking is transparency in the Mexican government and police force. Calderón is working towards reforms that should allow the public to see that the

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<sup>160</sup> United Press International, "Mexico Training Drug Cops in Colombia," *UPI.com*, January 22, 2011, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2011/01/22/Mexico-training-drug-cops-in-Colombia/UPI-29821295721385/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2011/01/22/Mexico-training-drug-cops-in-Colombia/UPI-29821295721385/).

<sup>161</sup> Herbert Hernandez, "Guatemala Army No Match for Mexican Drug Gangs," News, *Borderland Beat*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/01/guatemala-army-no-match-for-mexican.html>.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Sara Miller-Llana, "Arrest of Guatemala's No. 1 Drug-Trafficking Suspect Shows Growing U.S. Role in Region," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2011/0331/Arrest-of-Guatemala-s-No.-1-drug-trafficking-suspect-shows-growing-U.S.-role-in-region>.

government and police forces are not plagued by corruption, but these reforms are only in their political infancy and will take several years to take effect. The slow pace of progress, however, is not surprising due to the extensive nature of reforming the roots of a country's embedded law enforcement structure.

The Mérida Initiative has enhanced the cooperation between the United States and Mexico by introducing intelligence sharing capabilities, funding the purchase of equipment for the Mexican military, and providing more efficient border control cooperation. Through this partnership with the United States, Mexico has made forward progress against the cartels. Mexico has developed a closer working relationship with Colombia, and other bordering countries that share in Mexico's problems, such as Guatemala, have also improved cooperation with Mexico.

#### **D. CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS**

To perform a COG analysis, it is important to investigate what makes the cartels function, as well as what holds them together and allows them to flourish. These critical capabilities enable the COG, including the ability to corrupt and coerce, which are essential to cartel operations. The final goal of this chapter is to identify the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the cartels, which the Mexican government can target for exploitation to defeat its center of gravity.

##### **1. Root of the Problem**

Many members of the Mexican government once believed that the drug market was the center of gravity of its drug trade, but Mexican drug eradication policies from the 1970s through the early 1990s provided only limited success and were later abandoned.<sup>164</sup> Another popular theory was that the Mexican cartels' center of gravity was cartel leadership. However, numerous cartel kingpins have been arrested or killed only to

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<sup>164</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia," *Foreign Policy at Brookings* 12 (March 2009), [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2009/03\\_mexico\\_drug\\_market\\_felbabbrown/03\\_mexico\\_drug\\_market\\_felbabbrown.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2009/03_mexico_drug_market_felbabbrown/03_mexico_drug_market_felbabbrown.pdf).

have a new leader step up and assume leadership duties without any notable decline in cartel activity. The transition periods are especially violent as rivals fight for control of trafficking operations.

The authors of this thesis argue that cartel influence is the actual center of gravity of the cartels. Cartel influence is an inclusive variable that refers to the cartel's ability to conduct its operations through its critical capabilities. This influence allows the cartels to corrupt officials, conduct intimidation tactics and control the illicit drug market.

## **2. Capabilities, Vulnerabilities and Requirements Identified**

Cartel critical capabilities are essential for the cartel to function. Four critical capabilities are particularly important for this center of gravity analysis: versatility, extended reach, ability to corrupt and coerce government officials, and the ability to operate independently.

Cartels are very versatile in that they have numerous sources of funding and are involved in various activities. In other words, cartels are not dependent on any one portion of their operations for survival but have diversified sources of income including drug trafficking, kidnapping, and other moneymaking enterprises. Furthermore, cartels operate heavily not only in Mexico, but also in Guatemala and the United States.

The capability of the cartels to reach out with violence or other types of influence extends well beyond the borders of Mexico. Mexican cartels use financial influence to corrupt U.S. Border Patrol agents and to create large distribution networks extending all the way from Atlanta to Seattle. Foot soldier recruitment occurs in the United States, as well as in Guatemala. Arms are trafficked into Mexico from the United States, Central America, South America and the Caribbean Islands. Human smuggling is also an extremely lucrative activity for the cartels that involves virtually every country directly reachable by Mexican transportation.

Corruption and coercion are mechanisms used by the cartels that allow them to operate freely without serious fear of arrest. Having this influence over military, police and government agencies is a critical capability common to all organized crime

syndicates. Corruption opens up drug trafficking entryways into the United States, influences police forces to both ignore and to help cartel activities and keeps low-level cartel members on the streets and in business. Successful and continuous corruption provides cartels with independence, notoriety and freedom of action. Cartels gain the majority of their influential capabilities through corruption and coercion.

Lastly, cartels have the capability to operate almost completely independently. This critical capability is more of a survival requirement resulting from one of the critical vulnerabilities of the Mexican cartels—competition. With the drug trade generating upwards of \$45 billion annually, competition for the biggest slice of the pie grows fierce. This “every-man-for-himself” scenario creates a Darwin-like environment in which only the strongest survive and thrive. To operate, cartels rely on the voluminous flow of illicit income, corrupt political partnerships, criminal networks, and foot soldiers to maintain their mandate, gun supply sources, distribution routes, infrastructure and other various logistics support.

Throughout the chapter, a few necessary requirements can be found to sustain the cartels’ critical capabilities, which are illicit markets, cartel notoriety, corruptible officials, political connections, foot soldiers, networks, guns and equipment. Without a market, cartels would lose some level of versatility that would depend on which market was being affected. Control over market supply is largely a product of poverty. Impoverished citizens have two options: earn little to no money in a licit market or earn higher profits in the extremely lucrative illicit drug market. According to drug expert Michael Lyman, drug traffickers can earn gross profit margins of up to 300 percent.<sup>165</sup> Youngers and Rosin show that in 2005, 24.3 percent of Mexican families lived in poverty

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<sup>165</sup> Michael D. Lyman, *Drugs in Society: Causes, Concepts and Control*, 5th ed. (Burlington, VT: Anderson, 2007), 174.

(<\$2/day) and 8 percent live in extreme poverty (<\$1/day),<sup>166</sup> compared to the 9.7 percent of U.S. families living in poverty, which for the United States, is over 13 times higher than the poverty line of Mexico.<sup>167</sup>

A cartel's notoriety helps to determine the cartel's ability to corrupt and coerce. The more notorious a cartel, the more effective its coercion and corruption efforts will be. For corruption and coercion to be effective, the target official must be willing to be corrupted or coerced.<sup>168</sup> Otherwise, the official could stand against the cartel, which could possibly force the cartel to assassinate the official. The final product of a cartel's ability to corrupt or coerce is the political connection collected. This connection provides intelligence, perhaps some level of political immunity from law enforcement, and further facilitates political corruption, which increases the reach and the individual cartel's ability to operate independently.

Networks are necessary as they allow more efficient communication between cartel members and better logistics. If a cartel has a strong network, the organization will increase its influential reach, ability to operate independently and capability to corrupt or coerce. Finally, foot soldiers, infrastructure, guns and equipment are all required to do the work of the cartel, which grants the cartel increased influential reach and ability to operate independently.

Cartel recruitment amongst Mexican military deserters and veterans has been very successful. Mexico cartel authority George W. Grayson states that the Mexican military has raised commando salary to \$1,100 per month in 2007 in an effort to pay commandoes more than the cartels were offering. However, the cartels promptly increased the pay of their foot soldiers and cartel recruitment was again unaffected.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Youngers and Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, 264.

<sup>167</sup> "Poverty Thresholds by Size of Family Unit: 1980 to 2008," *U.S. Census Bureau, 2011*, <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0709.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> This point is subjective because drug cartels often offer their targets a choice between cooperating with them or the threat of violence to either them, their families or both. This situation is often referred to as "*plomo o plata*," "*Lead or Silver*;" in which lead represents a bullet and silver represents money.

<sup>169</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 254.

Cartels have few critical vulnerabilities, and as a result, are exceptionally difficult to target, eliminate or even weaken. Competition between cartels is one critical vulnerability. Competition over the drug trade creates great incentive for cartels to plot against one another. Although not the prime source of violence, inter-cartel violence is still a significant contributor to the death toll in Mexico. A cartel on the losing side of competition may experience a loss of notoriety and base resources, such as foot soldiers, guns, equipment and infrastructure.

*Hubris* is another critical vulnerability displayed by the Beltran-Leyva Cartel, as well as others.<sup>170</sup> The Beltran-Leyva Cartel, as noted earlier in this chapter, has experienced a string of arrests or deaths of its leaders since its inception in 2008. Other cartels that may have experienced hubris include Gulf and Sinaloa, both having documented arrests or deaths of their top leaders. Hubris can lead to a cartel over extending itself, which can result in slip-ups, such as arrests of cartel leaders and losing control over market sectors to rival cartels. Hubris, or just an underestimation of government abilities, could lead to further seizing of cartel drug lords in the future.

Perhaps the best approach to attacking the cartels' center of gravity is through the implementation of social, law enforcement and political reform. Figure 5 is an illustration of the Mexican cartels' current COG, CC, CR and CV.

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<sup>170</sup> "Beltran Leyva Organization (BLO)," *In Sight: Organized Crime in the Americas*, February 11, 2011, <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/beltran-leyva-org/item/81-beltran-leyva-organization>.

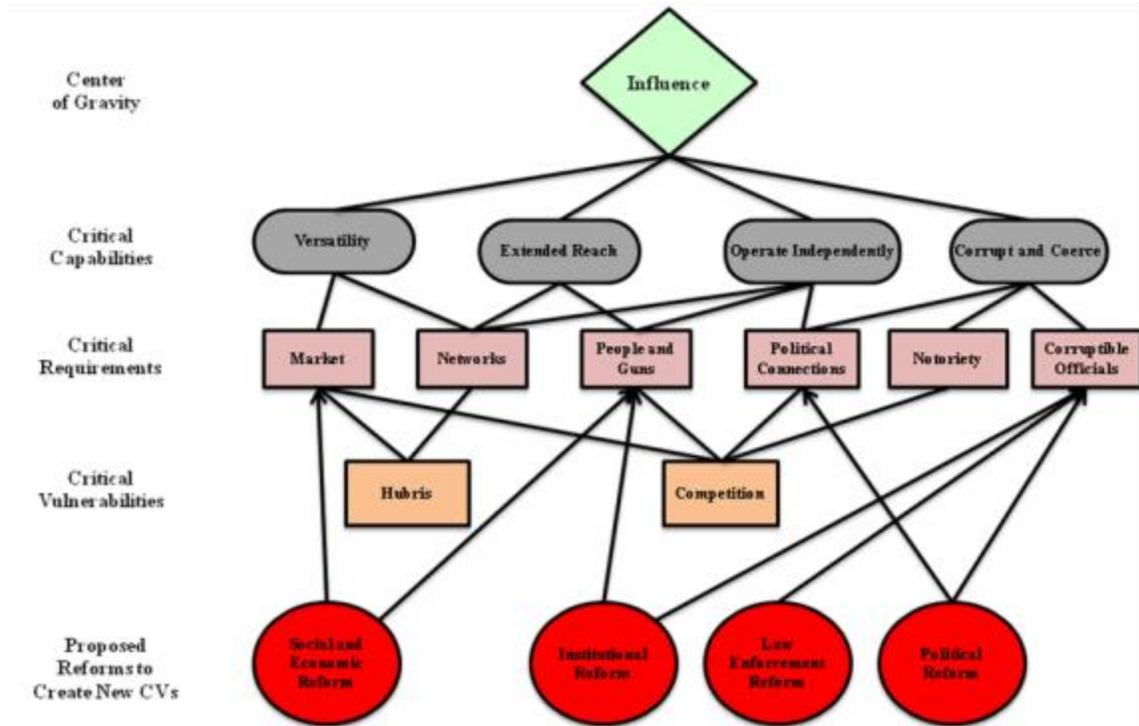


Figure 5. Illustration of the Mexican Cartels' Current COG, CC, CR and CV

### 3. Where Should Energy Be Focused

Mexico must focus on strengthening its vulnerabilities to maximize its ability to combat the cartels. From the case study, a few critical vulnerabilities of the Mexican government become evident. Corruption is deeply rooted within the ranks of Mexican politics, military and law enforcement. Associated with this corruption is Mexico's lack of transparency, which causes a decrease of public trust in the government. Without trust, the government experiences diminished support from the public, which is necessary for conducting military operations against the cartels. Governance scholar Steven David argues, "Mexico faces a crisis of legitimacy. In the face of a myriad of problems, its government, characterized by a weak presidency and a divided Congress, is unable to do much of anything. To make matters worse, while the government has drastically promised reforms and improvement to both law enforcement and the army, drug

traffickers have infiltrated every level of government, including the president's office.”<sup>171</sup> Until the Mexican government is successful in attacking corruption, the cartels will continue to have the upper hand.

Mexico also needs to improve its collaboration with its border states. Mexico has very little cooperation with Guatemala, which shares in the troubles of the Mexican cartels. Mexico’s political cooperation with the United States is very active, but the military-to-military cooperation is practically non-existent, which stems from a history of mistrust towards the U.S. military on Mexican soil.

Another goal that Mexico must focus on is creating more critical vulnerabilities for the cartels. To do this, Mexico must turn cartel critical requirements into vulnerabilities. For example, through the implementation of true institutional and social reform, Mexico can remove the opportunity for cartels to own the loyalties of government and police officials. Latin American democracy and corruption expert, Stephen Morris suggests that corruption and perceived impunity go hand in hand—corrupt officials must be seen as being punished for actual and perceived corruption levels to drop. Blake and Morris emphasize other factors that will reduce corruption, which include increased wealth in the population, horizontal accountability and separation of powers.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, social reforms that create more jobs in slum border towns and throughout Mexico could lower poverty levels and increase incentives for licit market participation. These reforms must be implemented with institutional reforms that will give police forces, military and judicial organizations the needed transparency to lower corruption to a level allowing efficient function. If both social and institutional reforms are designed and implemented effectively, the citizens of Mexico should develop a strong sense of legitimate economic security and enough trust in Mexican law enforcement to turn their loyalties against the cartels with protection from cartel retaliation—protection that is not currently offered by Mexican law enforcement agencies. Once these reforms have been implemented, certain cartel critical requirements

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<sup>171</sup> David, *Catastrophic Consequences*, 110.

<sup>172</sup> Stephen D. Morris, “Corruption and Democracy at the State Level in Mexico,” in *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Charles H. Blake and Stephen D. Morris (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 193–199.

can be weakened to the point that they become critical vulnerabilities. Not having a vast number of corruptible officials and political connections would open up cartel independence and its ability to corrupt and coerce to attack. This attack could come in the form of military and police assault on cartel leadership or foot soldiers. While this form of attack is already being conducted against the cartels, the same attacks would have much more legitimacy with the real support of the police and of the public. The final chapter of this thesis further explores further possible reforms, their effects and the attacks that become available to Mexico against the cartels.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Mexico's cartels have their hands in a vast number of operations and tactics, have many capabilities, few vulnerabilities and are responsible for much of the corruption plaguing Mexican politics and its security forces. The Government of Mexico, on the other hand, also has various vulnerabilities. However, a key difference between the Mexican government and the cartels is that the government has international allies with great interest in defeating the cartels while the cartels are independent entities fiercely competing with one another for market and resource control.

The Mexican military, law enforcement, and constitutional and social reforms must be implemented for Mexico to defeat its cartels. While President Calderon has taken an aggressive approach to this problem under his aggressive leadership, the country is making some strides towards reform; however, these reforms remain in a relative infancy. The Mexican government has a long road of reform and military operations ahead of it.

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#### IV. CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE DRUG TRADE AND CORRUPTION

If a state is not even present in certain areas, it “doesn’t play.” It leaves the human terrain to the challenger. If the state is present but dysfunctional, corrupt, and brutal, it is probably better that it is absent.<sup>173</sup>



Figure 6. Map of Colombia with Coca Cultivation Areas Highlighted.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Thomas A. Marks, Sebastian L.v. Gorka, and Robert Sharp, “Getting the Next War Right: Beyond Population Centric Warfare,” *PRISM* 1, no. 3 (June 2010): 95–96, [http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/images/prism1-3/Prism\\_79-98\\_Marks\\_Gorka\\_Sharp.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/images/prism1-3/Prism_79-98_Marks_Gorka_Sharp.pdf).

<sup>174</sup> “Coca Cultivation Areas,” *Colombia: PBS*, June 15, 2008, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/an-honest-citizen/map-colombia-cocaine-and-cash/colombia/536/>.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Colombia is regularly referred to as one of the oldest continuous democracies in Latin America; interestingly, it also has one of the bloodiest histories in the region. The incidents of murder, political assassinations, kidnappings, and drug related violence rank amongst the highest in the world.<sup>175</sup> This violence could be said to have its roots in political violence between liberal and conservative groups beginning in the 1940s that culminated in an urban insurrection in Bogotá known as “*El Bogotazo*” in 1948.<sup>176</sup> The 10-year period that followed referred to as *La Violencia* or *The Violence* was a bloody civil war that claimed anywhere from 80,000 to more than 400,000 lives, depending on the source referenced.<sup>177</sup> By the 1960s, rural Liberal groups inspired by the Cuban Revolution and other Marxist sympathizers had formed leftist guerilla movements to challenge the GOC. These groups quickly grew in numbers and soon controlled large portions of the country. In response, paramilitary groups, formed under the pretext of battling these insurgent groups, grew in numbers and, like their insurgent counterparts, became beneficiaries of the drug trafficking business.<sup>178</sup> In addition, powerful quasi-military drug cartels would surface wielding fortunes so vast that they could threaten national security. The icing to the cake is provided by the “the ever-present corruption in an environment saturated with the easy money of the narcotics trade” and it becomes

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<sup>175</sup> Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001), 345.

<sup>176</sup> El Bogotazo refers to a riot sparked by the assassination of populist Liberal politician and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. Gaitán’s support for land reform had made him extremely popular with the poor and disenfranchised in Colombia. Rioting and violence, which claimed the lives of over 2,000, followed his murder and left the capital nearly destroyed. In addition, the following 18 years known as *La Violencia* were marked with armed groups claiming to represent both the liberal and conservative parties settling political scores with violence while the government’s security forces employed repressive measures in an attempt to stop the violence.

<sup>177</sup> Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 41; Safford and Palacios, *Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, 345; Nina M. Serafino, *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003); Daniel Pecaut, “Guerillas and Violence,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñarada, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: S R Books, 1992), 218.

<sup>178</sup> Eduardo Pizarro, “Revolutionary Guerilla Groups in Colombia,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñarada, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: S R Books, 1992), 169–184; *Killing Pablo—Part 2*, 2009, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyrS8gyVW3k&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyrS8gyVW3k&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

clear that the government is at a problematic impasse.<sup>179</sup> The widespread corruption present in the Colombian government (GOC) and its security forces, chiefly its police forces, played a central role in the disastrous situation that Colombia by the mid-1980s.

By 1998, Transparency International's Global Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Colombia as 2.2 out of 10, where 10 represents "highly clean" and 0 is "highly corrupt." In 2010, the index ranked Colombia 78 out of 178 countries, with an index score of 3.5.<sup>180</sup> While this score still appears to show high levels of corruption, it is a huge leap from the 2.2 score it earned in 1998. This case study shows that corruption in Colombia was a catalyst for illicit drug trafficking and the criminal organizations that profit from it.

## **B. HISTORY OF DRUG TRAFFICKING IN COLOMBIA**

The Internal Relations and Security Network-Zurich emphasizes that, "Colombia is the only country in the world to produce three plant-based drugs: marijuana (from hemp), cocaine (from the coca leaf) and heroin (from poppy).<sup>181</sup> Several authors and Colombian experts trace the origins of large-scale drug production in Colombia to Medellín in the early 1950s during which the first illegal drug laboratory was reportedly established.<sup>182</sup> The drugs, including cocaine, heroin and morphine, were smuggled from Colombia to Cuba where American and Cuban organized crime groups further smuggled them into the United States using intricate distribution networks to disperse the product.

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<sup>179</sup> Thomas A. Marks, "Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security," *Strategic Studies Institute: U.S. Army War College*, Shaping the Regional Security Environment in Latin America (July 2005): 21, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?PubID=610>.

<sup>180</sup> Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 Results* (Brussels: Transparency International, 2011), [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results).

<sup>181</sup> ISN Zurich, "Drug Trade in Colombia," *ISN*, May 2008, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&ots627=fce62fe0-528d-4884-9cdf-283c282cf0b2&id=123022&tabid=123967&contextid734=123022&contextid735=123967>.

<sup>182</sup> Mario Arango and Jorge Child, *Narcotrafico: Imperio de la Cocaína* (Mexico City: Edivision Compania Editorial, 1987), 119–120; Andres Lopez- Restrepo and Alvaro Camacho-Guizado, "From Smugglers to Drug-Lords to 'Traquetos': Changes in the Colombian Illicit Drugs Organizations," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28, no. 55–56 (2003): 249–276; Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 71.

In their book, *Narcotrafico*, Colombian scholars Arango and Child recount an interview they conducted with an old Colombian drug smuggler, who was imprisoned in Cuba and later deported to Colombia.<sup>183</sup> The old smuggler claimed that the Medellín laboratory only worked part of the year and produced small quantities of drugs to prevent detection by the GOC.<sup>184</sup> Once demand for these drugs increased in the 1960s and 1970s, the drug production business mushroomed into a multi-billion dollar per year industry, and thus, making the risk of detection bearable.

Marijuana did not become a major export product for Colombia until both domestic and international demand increased exponentially during the 1960s. The increase in demand coincided with decreases in Mexican and Jamaican marijuana production due to eradication campaigns conducted by those governments under pressure from the U.S. government.<sup>185</sup> Another reason for the growth of the drug organizations in Colombia during the 1970s was their decision to eliminate their Cuban distribution network inside the United States by assassination, which gave them control of the entire wholesale market of marijuana inside the country.<sup>186</sup> They further consolidated control by bribing corrupt politicians, judges and policemen. Once it became clear that Colombia had taken over the marijuana market, the United States began applying pressure on the government of President Julio César Turbay-Ayala, whom the U.S. government suspected of being highly corrupt and having ties to drug traffickers.<sup>187</sup> The eradication of marijuana coupled with the increased demand for cocaine, which was easier to produce and yielded far higher profits, soon made the coca industry in Colombia explode. This lucrative cocaine economy gave rise to the notorious drug cartels of Colombia, and more notably, the Medellín and the Cali cartels. Cocaine would also eventually become the

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<sup>183</sup> Arango and Child, *Narcotrafico*, 119–120.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–148. Although Arango and Child have provided invaluable insight into Colombia's struggle with drugs, the authors of this thesis do not encourage conspiracy theories or assumptions not based in verifiable fact, and therefore, disagree with Arango and Child's claim in their book that the U.S. Peace Corps, working for the Pentagon, encouraged the use of marijuana in Colombia's youth during the 1960s to prevent the spread of revolutionary ideas promoted by the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara.

<sup>186</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 71.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

main source of income for insurgent groups, such as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, “Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia” (FARC,) as well as other illegal armed groups.<sup>188</sup>

## 1. The Medellín Cartel

Undoubtedly, the most notorious Colombian cartel was the Medellín Cartel, headed by Pablo Escobar. Beginning as early as the 1970s, Escobar’s cartel controlled vast portions of drug production, smuggling and distribution inside the United States and was the most feared cartel until Colombian security forces eventually dismantled it in the early 1990s with assistance from the United States.<sup>189</sup> Pablo Escobar gained international notoriety and has been called the wealthiest criminal of all time by Forbes magazine, which also declared him the seventh richest person in the world in 1989.<sup>190</sup> At its peak, his cartel’s profits were believed to be nearly \$50 million dollars a day.<sup>191</sup> While bribing corrupt government officials often facilitated their operations, the Medellín cartel was also known for intimidating public officials with the threat of violence and is believed responsible for the assassination of scores of people.<sup>192</sup> For example, in August 1989, Pablo Escobar is believed to have ordered the assassination of presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, who was a strong supporter of extradition and had led a previous

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<sup>188</sup> While numerous armed groups have and continue to operate in Colombia, this thesis focuses on the FARC because it is the only armed group that continues to seek power and demonstrates the capacity to forcefully deny the state sovereignty over vast portions of its territory. The other groups include the *Guevarist* “National Liberation Army” (ELN), which never gained the strength of the FARC and has proved more of a nuisance due to its criminal activity, and the right-wing paramilitary/vigilante groups known as the “United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia” (AUC), which arose due to the lack of state presence in rural areas. Unlike the FARC who have never negotiated in good faith, the GOC has been able to bring the ELN and AUC to the negotiation table and strike demobilization deals.

<sup>189</sup> Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America’s War in Colombia*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 71–91.

<sup>190</sup> MSN Business, “Pablo Emilio Escobar 1949–1993 9 Billion USD,” Business News, *MSN Business*, January 17, 2011, <http://businessnews.za.msn.com/gallery.aspx?cp-documentid=155873587&page=1>.

<sup>191</sup> Vaughan Tucker, “The Lost Treasure of Cocaine King Pablo Escobar,” article, August 19, 2010, <http://www.suite101.com/content/the-lost-treasure-of-cocaine-king-pablo-escobar-a276131>.

<sup>192</sup> Serafino, *Colombia, Current Issues & History*, 3; Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 71–91.

movement to disqualify Escobar from running in the presidential elections.<sup>193</sup> Escobar also ordered the assassination of the federal justice who indicted him for Galán's murder.

By 1990, the Medellín cartel's terror tactics, indiscriminate bombings, and daytime shootings would turn the streets of Bogotá into a war zone and cause a sense of panic among the populace.<sup>194</sup> Although the cartel wielded a great degree of influence over corrupt government officials during its peak, it was Escobar's declaration of war against the GOC in the mid-1980s that set his cartel apart from others. In his book, *Killing Pablo*, Mark Bowden recalls a message released by a group of assassins under Escobar's employment called *The Extraditables*:

We are declaring total and absolute war on the government, on the individual and political oligarchy, on the journalists who have attacked and insulted us, on the judges that have sold themselves to the government, on the extraditing magistrates — on all those who have persecuted and attacked us. We will not respect the families of those who have not respected our families. We will burn and destroy the industries, properties and mansions of the oligarchy.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Phillip McLean, "Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2002): 128.

<sup>194</sup> World Bank, *Violence in Colombia: Building Sustainable Peace and Social Capital* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1999), 1–2.

<sup>195</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Penguin Group, 2001), 85.



Figure 7. Pablo Escobar-Gaviria; Leader of the Medellín Cartel (December 1, 1949–December 2, 1993).<sup>196</sup>

Prior to his death in 1993 at the hands of a Colombian special tactics unit trained by U.S. Special Forces, and the eventual collapse of the Medellín cartel, Escobar successfully oversaw the assassination of countless journalists, politicians, judges, police officers, up to five presidential candidates and even the downing of an Avianca flight, which killed 119 persons.<sup>197</sup> According to narcoterrorism expert Vanda Felbab-Brown, the FBI in Florida intercepted an attempt by Medellín cartel members to purchase more than 100 stinger-surface to air missiles.<sup>198</sup> Unquestionably, that FBI operation saved hundreds of lives and millions of dollars in aircraft.

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<sup>196</sup> “Pablo Escobar” (London: News Mirror, April 11, 2009), <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/11/04/drug-lord-pablo-escobar-burned-1m-to-keep-daughter-warm-115875-21795790/>.

<sup>197</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 75.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

## 2. The Cali Cartel

After the fall of the Medellín cartel, the Cali cartel wisely chose to rely more on their ability to bribe public officials rather than the use of violence. After his arrest and eventual extradition to the United States for drug trafficking, former Cali cartel boss Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela stated, “we don’t kill judges or ministers, we buy them.”<sup>199</sup> During a congressional testimony given by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 1996, DEA administrator Thomas Constantine stated, “the Cali cartel, fashioned itself after the *Sicilian Mafia*, also known as *La Cosa Nostra* and therefore became far more sophisticated and successful than its predecessors.”<sup>200</sup> The cartel members aspired to enter the elite political circles of Colombian society and come across as businessmen rather than drug trafficking thugs. Although the Cali cartel never achieved the profit levels of the Medellín cartel, their operations were far more sophisticated and involved the systematic corruption of nearly every government ministry.<sup>201</sup>

While the Cali cartel preferred low-key operations to attract little attention, its desire to enter Colombian political circles ultimately led to their demise.<sup>202</sup> By 1994, leaked tapes revealed that the Cali cartel had heavily funded the presidential campaign of Ernesto Samper, which led the United States to formally decertifying Colombia in 1997 for failing to support drug eradication efforts, and consequently, suspending U.S. foreign aid.<sup>203</sup> The U.S. Secretary of State at the time, Madeleine Albright, stated in a press conference that the measures against the GOC were taken “as a result of our concern that corruption remains rampant at the highest levels of the Colombian government and that senior officials are failing to cooperate with us in the fight against drugs.”<sup>204</sup> To get back

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<sup>199</sup> Krauss, “Drug Trade in Colombia.”

<sup>200</sup> Thomas A. Constantine, *Drug Control in the Western Hemisphere* (Washington, DC, 1996), <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/cngrtest/ct960606.htm>.

<sup>201</sup> Serafino, *Colombia, Current Issues & History*, 3.

<sup>202</sup> Francisco E. Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 210–225.

<sup>203</sup> Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia*, illustrated edition. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 193.

<sup>204</sup> Douglas Farah, “Stung by U.S. Decertification, Colombia May Cut Cooperation,” *Sun Sentinel*, March 2, 1997, [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1997-03-02/news/9703010255\\_1\\_drug-war-colombian-government-coca-and-poppy/2](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1997-03-02/news/9703010255_1_drug-war-colombian-government-coca-and-poppy/2).

into the good graces of the U.S. government, President Samper went after the Cali cartel and, by 1995, the GOC had arrested the cartel's leaders, which soon led to the disintegration of the organization.

### 3. The “Cartelitos” and the FARC

Following the defeat of the Cali cartel, countless small and less powerful cartels, often called *cartelitos*, emerged to fill the colossal and extremely lucrative worldwide demand for cocaine. The increased competition and production drove the price of cocaine down and, by 2000, Colombian cocaine production had reached an all-time high of 695 metric tons, which had increased from approximately 120 metric tons during the height of the two big cartels.<sup>205</sup> In addition, insurgent and paramilitary groups, primarily the FARC, which had been steadily growing since the 1960s, stepped in and took control over large swaths of the drug business. While none of these organizations have operated at the levels the Medellín or Cali cartels once did, as a whole, they have continued to supply over 90% of the U.S. cocaine market.<sup>206</sup>

Unlike the drug cartels, the FARC initially opposed drug trafficking because of the capitalistic nature of the business. While the FARC historically targeted Colombian political, economic and security infrastructure, initially, they also sabotaged coca production facilities and destroyed harvests in the name of their Marxist revolution. However, the strategy of targeting coca production soon diminished its public support among the rural population that largely depended on coca farming to support their families. The FARC was left with little choice but to accept the drug trafficking business as a necessary evil, and instead, taxed coca farmers and traffickers in exchange for protection against government eradication efforts.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2010* (New York: United Nations, 2010), 66, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2010/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2010\\_lo-res.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/World_Drug_Report_2010_lo-res.pdf).

<sup>206</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*.

<sup>207</sup> Marc Chernick, “Negotiating Peace amid Multiple Forms of Violence: The Protracted Search for a Settlement to the Armed Conflicts in Colombia,” in *Comparative peace processes in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1999), 166; Thomas A. Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002), 6, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB18.pdf>.

After the breakup of the two major cartels in the late 1990s, it was estimated that more than 70% of the opium trade and over 55% of the cocaine trade had fallen under control of the FARC. Additionally, by the early 2000s, the FARC controlled the cultivation, production and wholesale distribution to the criminal organizations that further distribute the drugs within North America and Europe.<sup>208</sup> It is estimated that over 50% of the FARC's income is derived from the drug business, 34% comes from the extortion of oil companies and other businesses, 8% from kidnapping, 6% from cattle rustling, and the remainder from bank robberies and nepotism.<sup>209</sup> Kidnapping alone provided the FARC nearly \$1 billion dollars in revenue between 1991 and 1998.<sup>210</sup> The decentralization of the drug industry in Colombia along with the threat of extradition to the United States because of a 1997 constitutional amendment pushed the smuggling and distribution facet of the business over to Mexican cartels.

### C. CORRUPTION AS A NEXUS FOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

Criminal organizations cannot flourish without corruption; it is an indispensable requirement for criminal activity. Whether bribing a police officer or enticing a high-ranking politician to influence government policies, Colombia's criminal groups have relied greatly on the wealth provided by the drug trafficking business to buy influence with practically any politician or government official. The violent nature of these groups has also helped to intimidate the population into participating in the illicit drug trade either indirectly (e.g., coca crop production) or directly (e.g., transporting and selling narcotics) as is witnessed largely in rural areas of Colombia.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, the threat of violence against individuals unwilling to be corrupted is always present. As previously

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<sup>208</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 79–80.

<sup>209</sup> M. Moor and L. Zumpolle, *The Kidnap Industry in Colombia: Our Business?* (Utrecht, BE: Pax Christi Netherlands, 2001), 33-36, [http://www.ikvpaxchristi.nl/catalogus/uploaded\\_file.aspx?id=167](http://www.ikvpaxchristi.nl/catalogus/uploaded_file.aspx?id=167).

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>211</sup> U.S. Drug Enforcement Intelligence Division, *The Illicit Drug Situation in Colombia: Drug Intelligence Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Justice Department, November 1993), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB243/19931100.pdf>.

mentioned, this is referred to in Spanish as *plomo o plata*—“Bullet or Money?” Elizabeth Mora-Mass, a Colombian journalist who interviewed Pablo Escobar several times during the 1980s and early 1990s, quoted him as saying:

Money can be a weapon as well as an instrument for manipulation, everyone has a price, the important thing is to find out what it i... and Sometimes I feel like God, when I order someone killed—they die the same day...<sup>212</sup>

In 1991, Pablo Escobar boldly issued an ultimatum to a Colombian congressional assembly convening to discuss whether a new constitution should ban extradition to the United States. The ultimatum delivered to assembly members read:

If you vote “no” to extradition, Mr. Escobar promises to pay you each \$1 million dollars in cash and he also promises not to kill you and your entire family.<sup>213</sup>

The congressional assembly approved the new constitution banning extradition in a closed-door session by a vote of 51–13.<sup>214</sup>

#### **D. COLOMBIA’S STRATEGY**

Prior to the election of President Uribe in 2002, the GOC viewed the security threat posed by drug trafficking organizations, the FARC and the paramilitaries, as a military problem best left to the Colombian military. The state did not assume a direct role in the fight, and thus, left the civil-military aspect of the fight incomplete. In other words, the Colombian government did not view the problem as significant enough to require a unified national approach utilizing all the elements on national power. As witnessed by the decapitation operations of the two major cartels threatening Colombian national security in the 1990s, ultimately, the GOC’s purely military strategy led to the

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<sup>212</sup> Juliet Paez-Parada, “Lovers and Other Monsters - Pablo Escobar-Gaviria,” <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/ww1/paez.html>.

<sup>213</sup> Author’s discussion with Colombian academics and retired military officers at the National Defense University, Washington, DC, November 2009.

<sup>214</sup> Jim Lehrer, “Colombia’s Civil War,” *PBS*, 2010, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/colombia/timeline.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/timeline.html).

rise of the cartelitos and provided the FARC an avenue to grow.<sup>215</sup> U.S. Naval Special Warfare Officer and counterinsurgency expert, Commander Victor Hyder, offers that while the killing of Pablo Escobar did serve to liberate “Colombia and the world of an extremely dangerous enemy...the structure of the Colombian narcotics industry as a whole is not vulnerable to decapitation.”<sup>216</sup> Therefore, a strategy that addresses the conditions that encourage illicit activities must be implemented. This condition is corruption.

In 1998, Colombian Presidential candidate Andrés Pastrana first made mention of a “Colombian Marshall Plan” aimed at targeting social ills believed at fault for the continuing drug smuggling and providing alternatives that would attract peasants from joining the insurgencies or the drug trade. Retrospection today shows that U.S. lawmakers inaccurately assumed that Colombia’s problems stemmed from the narcotics trade and not from a lack of security or social problems.<sup>217</sup> This flawed thinking led to strict restrictions on how U.S. aid money could be utilized, which focused on counternarcotics (primarily aerial spraying to eradicate illegal crops), and minimally, on counterinsurgent operations or the social ills highlighted by President Pastrana. Colombian expert Enrique Desmond Arias states that drug trafficking in Colombia “involves active participation from leftist insurgents and paramilitaries, corrupt police and military officers, and common criminals.”<sup>218</sup> For this reason, a new strategy was urgently needed to combat the growing threat. The strategy presented by President Alvaro Uribe in 2003, albeit not perfect, made important strides towards the reform needed in Colombia.

Upon his election to office in 2002, President Álvaro Uribe-Velez introduced the *Democratic Security and Defense Policy* (DSDP), which provided the GOC a new

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<sup>215</sup> Victor D. LCDR Hyder, “Decapitation Operations: Criteria for Targeting Enemy Leadership” (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), 45, [http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll3&CISOPTR=118&REC=61](http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll3&CISOPTR=118&REC=61).

<sup>216</sup> Hyder, “Decapitation Operations,” 45.

<sup>217</sup> Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency,” 43.

<sup>218</sup> Enrique Desmond Arias, “Drug Cartels: Neither Holy, nor Roman nor an Empire,” in *International Crime and Justice*, ed. Mangai Natarajan, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 279.

strategy aimed at not only destroying the criminal groups, but also addressing the social ills that enable their existence.<sup>219</sup> The DSDP stresses that “strengthening of the rule of law is the essential prerequisite to achieving the aim of Democratic Security: the protection of each and every citizen.”<sup>220</sup> However, a fundamental prerequisite to effective rule of law is the lack of rampant corruption. Therefore, it was essential that the policy focus great attention on the problem of corruption. The policy promises the citizens that the government aims to gain their trust by assuring them that corruption is no longer acceptable and will be punished harshly. It is stated directly as such:

Just as citizens are expected to contribute to the strengthening of the security forces through the payment of taxes, so will the Government and the security forces work within the principles of efficiency, transparency and economy, to ensure that every peso spent contributes to security.<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, the policy states, “the strengthening of a culture of honesty and openness with effective mechanisms and tools to eradicate corruption is a matter of priority.”<sup>222</sup> This belief is a critical facet for gaining the support of the population in any country because if the citizenry believes the government condones corruption, it is nearly impossible to inspire it to obey laws and much less to share in the struggle against lawlessness. The culture of corruption present in Latin America must be eradicated if any government wishes to earn the respect of its citizens effectively.

## **1. Background and Implementation**

In 2002, President Uribe introduced many changes in the country’s strategy against crime syndicates. Chiefly, his administration addressed the systematic issues believed to be the root causes of the problem. Colombian expert Thomas Marks highlights the issues with an excerpt from DSDP that states:

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<sup>219</sup> Thomas A. Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe’s Colombia (2002–2006) vs FARC,” *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2007): 41.

<sup>220</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, *Democratic Security and Defence Policy* (Bogota: Ministry of Defence, 2003), 13.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

- Lack of personal security is at the root of Colombia's social, economic, and political ills.
- This lack of personal security stems from the state's absence from large swaths of the national territory.
- Therefore, all elements of national power need to be directed toward ending this lack of national integration.<sup>223</sup>

The third bullet refers to the lack of a *Whole of Government* (WoG) approach to the problem. WoG commonly refers to the application of all instruments of national power to address a threat posed against the state, often referred to as **DIME**—**D**iplomatic, **I**nformational, **M**ilitary, and **E**conomic; or **PMESII**—**P**olitical, **M**ilitary, **E**conomic, **S**ocial, **I**nfrastructure, and **I**nformation. Since the fight in Colombia was internal, the GOC viewed WoG as an interagency/inter-ministry effort in which all elements of national power must be employed against the threat to achieve victory.<sup>224</sup> While the Democratic Security and Defense Policy divides this strategy into six courses of action (COAs), this thesis explains the process more clearly by using a “Clear, Hold & Build” model as illustrated in Figure 8.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, “The Uribe Administration’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy” (Embassy of Colombia, 2003), [http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita\\_bush/documentos/security.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita_bush/documentos/security.pdf).

<sup>224</sup> Thomas A. Marks, “Colombia: Learning Institutions Enable Integrated Response,” *Prism/NDU Press* 1, no. 4 (September 2010): 143.

<sup>225</sup> Julian Borger, “Senate Presses Rice Over Iraq Exit Strategy | World news | The Guardian,” October 20, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/20/usa.iraq>; This term was first referenced 2005 by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice while discussing U.S. strategy for defeating insurgents in Iraq.

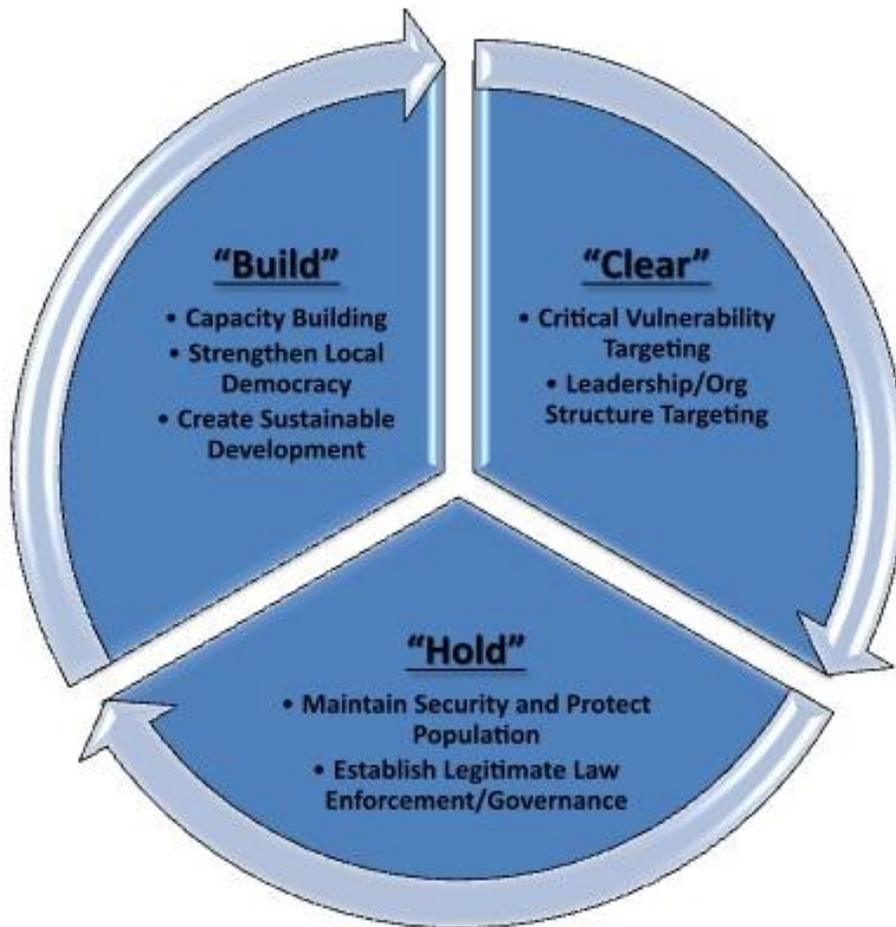


Figure 8. “Clear, Hold & Build” Model.

The first key requirement for the success of this model is a strong and professional security force that possesses the complete and total support of the population. The government utilizes the military to target vulnerabilities and target the leadership structure. Particular attention is paid to enemy critical nodes, physical capabilities, and operational methods. The desired outcome is to capture or kill the organization’s leadership. Second, the government immediately establishes security and protects the population with professional military, national police and local forces recruited from among the population and trained by the military. Establishing fusion centers in which information is shared both vertically and horizontally synchronizes this

task.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, effective security denies criminals the opportunity to return. The police also assist in re-establishing courts to address complaints and ensure the legal system remains in place.<sup>227</sup> Lastly, with the establishment of security comes economic assistance in the form of food grants, money grants for economic development, electricity, email connectivity, roads, schools and all the good things derived from good governance. Most importantly, these things must happen quickly so that the population promptly sees the tangible benefits of improved governance.

## **2. Political Reform**

The DSDP addresses the lack of security caused largely by corruption and reminds the citizens that security is everyone's responsibility, not only the state's. The policy declares:

It is the role of the State to uphold the rights of the citizen and to provide the institutional mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. However, the proper functioning of institutions also requires the active participation, solidarity and commitment of the citizen. Democratic participation consists not only in the use of the vote, but also in the observation and promotion of the civic values which uphold pluralistic political debate, in playing an active role in public affairs and in the defence of the freedom of each individual.<sup>228</sup>

President Uribe acknowledged that the criminal organizations operating within Colombia's borders were unique entities that could not be defeated simply with a military approach; instead, it would require the population's help to succeed. The DSDP notes that all elements of national power must be mobilized and all must participate for the survival and prosperity of the nation.

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<sup>226</sup> Improved wages, effective vetting of personnel and the use of an internal affairs type organization will reduce instances of corruption amongst the security forces.

<sup>227</sup> Marks, "Colombia: Learning Institutions," 131–133.

<sup>228</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, *Democratic Security*, 13.

The State will embark upon a policy of territorial consolidation, re-establishing the normal operation of the justice system, strengthening local democracy, meeting the most urgent needs of the population, broadening state services and initiating medium to long term projects aimed at creating sustainable development.<sup>229</sup>

President Uribe began his term by changing his country's strategy of addressing the drug production problem<sup>230</sup> by introducing a plan that made the security of the citizens of Colombia the foundation upon which all counter drug policies would be built.<sup>231</sup> Proof of President Uribe's resolve was the 2006 implementation of a "war tax" on higher-income families and corporations to fund the training of 6,000 new Special Operations soldiers, 10,000 new police officers and to recruit over 100,000 civilian informants.<sup>232</sup> In addition to military spending and action, the plan has initiated reform. It also relies heavily on international cooperation.

### **3. Military Reform**

Military reform is most visible in the professionalization of the Colombian military. While the military had begun taking the steps necessary to implement reforms under President Pastrana's administration, a clear lack of leadership was missing until the arrival of President Uribe in 2002. The new administration emphasized recruiting and creating specialty units. Historically an all draftee force, the Colombian Army soon had volunteer numbers as high as 1/3 of its force, while specialty and key units boasted a 100% all-volunteer force. Military education was overhauled by using lessons learned to modify operational and organizational doctrine and by developing a strong and capable

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<sup>229</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, *Democratic Security*, 42.

<sup>230</sup> This strategy was a result of the GOC's appeasement of the United States who was providing large volumes of foreign aid to Colombia under Plan Colombia focused on targeting drug production with the aim of reducing supply. Whereas the government of President Pastrana was viewed as weak when it came to confronting the U.S.'s flawed policy, President Uribe is responsible for implementing the first sound plan, the Democratic Security and Defense Policy.

<sup>231</sup> Carlos Ospina-Ovalle, "Insights from Colombia's 'Long War': Counterinsurgency Lessons Learned," *Counterterrorism* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 30.

<sup>232</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, "The Uribe Administration's Democratic Security and Defense Policy," 2.

NCO corps capable of leading small units.<sup>233</sup> While nearly every facet of the Colombian military was affected during this reform, no single action had a bigger effect on reform than the fact that Colombian military officers led the reform. The officers taught their men that integrity and selfless service are nonnegotiable, and they taught it by example. Former Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces General Carlos Ospina notes that a testament to the Colombian military's professionalism is that it routinely ranks at the top of public opinion polls regarding the most respected institutions in the country.<sup>234</sup>

#### **4. International Cooperation**

Colombia is the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid outside of the Middle East. Since the United States is the world's largest consumer of illegal drugs, it is not surprising that it has the strongest desire to reduce drug production and trafficking. When President Pastrana officially presented his plan to U.S. President Bill Clinton in 1999, the plan came under intense scrutiny by U.S. lawmakers for its lack of focus on counter-drug operations, military aid and aerial spray fumigation. It was subsequently rewritten with strong U.S. government input.<sup>235</sup> The outcome was a multi-million dollar per year aid package named *Plan Colombia*, which focused primarily on counter-drug efforts with a strong emphasis on eradication and interdiction.

The plan approved by the U.S. had five stated goals to: (1) equip the police with 30 Black Hawk and 18 Huey helicopters to be used solely for counternarcotics operations primarily in the southern part of the country; (2) provide local and regional radar facilities to strengthen interdiction capabilities; (3) expand the aerial spraying program with more

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<sup>233</sup> Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency," 43.

<sup>234</sup> Ospina-Ovalle, "Insights from Colombia," 32; It is noteworthy to mention that much of the success of the Colombian armed forces is a result of the close military to military cooperation shared between the Colombian and U.S. military; specifically the U.S. 7th Special Forces Group, which continues to train its Colombian counterparts to this day.

<sup>235</sup> USAID, *Assessment of the Implementation of the United States Government's Support for Plan Colombia's Illicit Crop Reduction Components* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Aid, April 17, 2009), 2–3, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDACN233.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACN233.pdf).

planes and basing facilities; (4) promote crop substitution; and (5) encourage reform to the justice system to decrease violence and increase the adherence to human rights laws.<sup>236</sup>

After the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, closely followed by the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the U.S. government eased many of the restrictions on Plan Colombia, which allowed for the use of funds for counterinsurgent operations. In addition, the United States also deployed the 7th Special Forces Group to train Colombian special operations units and increased the number of military advisors and contractors significantly. Nevertheless, the plan largely continued to ignore the social problems that permitted the situation to grow to its current levels.<sup>237</sup> Figure 9 shows U.S. aid to Colombia from 1997–2005 and clearly illustrates the U.S.’s change of posture from counter-drug to counter-guerilla operations; but little remained allocated to addressing social problems. Uribe’s plan would have to confront this portion with minimal foreign assistance.

Since 2000, Colombia has received over \$3.15 billion in U.S. aid for Plan Colombia with more than \$4.3 billion allocated under the program’s new name; the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI).<sup>238</sup> The fact that Colombia has only received \$106 million in non-U.S. grant contributions raises the question of whether other nations have opted not to donate because the plan largely favors U.S. policy goals.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 232–233.

<sup>237</sup> Ramirez-Lemus, Stanton, and Walsh, “Colombia: A Vicious Circle of Drugs and War,” 109–110; Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 79–80.

<sup>238</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *Colombia: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 9, 2007), 34, [<sup>239</sup> Ramirez-Lemus, Stanton, and Walsh, “Colombia: A Vicious Circle of Drugs and War,” 109.](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=3&sqi=2&ved=0CCkQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.colombiaemb.org%2Fdocs%2FReporte_de_Colombia_Congreso_U.S._2007.pdf&rct=j&q=colleen%20cook%20crs%20report%20for%20congress%20colombia%20issues&ei=fqTRTfX3NoLksQOJ14mjCQ&usg=AFQjCNEw1KE8Ai9-ESK51Cut4lq4sSACoA&cad=rja; Ramirez-Lemus, Stanton, and Walsh, “Colombia: A Vicious Circle of Drugs and War,” 109.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
INC/ACI*	57	200.1	686.4	48	243.5	412	313	313
INC/ACI†	0.5	5.75	208	0	134	168	150	150
FMF	0	0.44	0.02	4.49	0	93	98.45	99.2
IMET	0.863	0.92	0.9	1.04	1.165	1.676	1.7	1.7
ATA	0	0	0	0	25	3.28	0.2	3.92
506	41.1	58	0	0	0	0	0	0
1004	11.78	35.89	68.71	150	84.9	136	110.2	110.2
1033	2.17	13.45	7.23	22.3	4	13.2	13.2	13.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113.4</b>	<b>314.6</b>	<b>971.3</b>	<b>225.8</b>	<b>492.6</b>	<b>827.2</b>	<b>686.8</b>	<b>691.2</b>

Legend: ATA, Anti-Terrorism Assistance; FMF, Foreign Military Financing; IMET, International Military Education and Training; INC/ACI, Int'l Narcotic Control/Andean Counterdrug Initiative (\*funding for counter-drug arms transfers, training, services; †funding for counter-drug economic and social aid); 506, Emergency Drawdowns; 1004, CN from Defense Budget; 1003, Riverine CN from Defense Budget; *Not included*– ETA, Excess Defense Articles (\$10.1 million total); ESF, Economic Support Funds (\$7.0 million total). (figures in millions of dollars)

Figure 9. U.S. Aid to Colombia, 1997–2005.<sup>240</sup>

## 5. Outcomes/Lessons Learned

Three principle lessons can be derived from Colombia's experience prior to the election of President Uribe and the introduction of the Democratic Security and Defence Policy: (1) the GOC was following a U.S. backed policy counterdrug/interdiction strategy that failed to address the underlying issues adequately that allowed illicit activities to flourish; (2) while the GOC was following the U.S. backed strategy, they failed to implement policies aimed at reducing corruption and improving governance; and (3) GOC officials initially misread the problem as one of violence and failed to apply all the elements of national power against the problem.

The U.S.'s strategic goals in Colombia resulted from a failure by U.S. lawmakers to understand fully the problem at hand, or simply, the inclination to ignore the problem

<sup>240</sup> Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency," 44.

and pursue self-seeking policies. U.S. lawmakers were focused on reducing drug flow to the United States and not Colombia's social ills, and thus, the focus was on counterdrug and interdiction operations. Likewise, Colombian lawmakers also had an unsound vision of the problem, which they viewed principally as one of violence. These problems were likely exacerbated by cartel and FARC influence on corrupt Colombian officials. Whatever the case may have been, improvements finally materialized when President Uribe, who dismissed the Colombian/American counterdrug/interdiction strategy and presented his DSDP, which placed the emphasis of the government's actions on protecting the people first and building from there. In other words, the government provides security, improved transparency, and legal alternatives to its population, while actively hunting down and eliminating nefarious groups. President Uribe understood that his forces already had legitimacy with the population; therefore, they needed to capitalize on the support of the population by giving them a central role in improving governance. This approach came largely in the form of creating non-corrupt local security forces and neighborhood watch programs vetted and funded by the government.<sup>241</sup> The Center of Gravity analysis in the following section examines the two large cartels to support the claims made in this chapter that the root of the problem in Colombia was not a narcotics problem or a violence problem, but instead, the activities of the criminal organizations facilitated by corruption.

#### **E. CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS**

Examining past Colombian strategies toward reducing corruption and combating criminal organizations may provide useful insights that the Government of Mexico may be able to capitalize on in its struggle with corruption and drug cartels. While Colombia continues to struggle with drug production and smuggling at the hands of the cartelitos, the FARC (approaching its fifth decade in existence) and the paramilitary groups, the country has had many successes that merit analysis. A center of gravity (COG) analysis examines the GOC's campaign against the Medellín and Cali Cartel to extract exportable

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<sup>241</sup> Ospina-Ovalle, "Insights from Colombia," 30; Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency," 46-49.

lessons learned from those campaigns. Although not identical, the two large cartels operated in a similar fashion and for the purpose of conducting the (COG) analysis, is examined using the same criteria.

## **1. Root of the Problem**

In their article, *Linking Doctrine to Action: A New Coin Center-of-Gravity Analysis*, Colonel Peter Mansoor and Major Mark Ulrich of the U.S. Marine Corps utilized a medical metaphor to describe the root cause of an insurgency. “If the root cause of a problem is a wound, then an insurgency is the infection that emanates from the wound...therefore the counterinsurgent must treat the infection to heal the wound, but must also find and remove whatever caused the wound.”<sup>242</sup> This lesson on counterinsurgency can also be applied directly to the war on drugs and the cartels that traffic them.<sup>243</sup>

Despite U.S. lawmakers’ requests that the GOC view the drug trade as Colombia’s COG,<sup>244</sup> the GOC was more concerned with rising homicide rates and powerful cartels that threatened national security. Therefore, the GOC chose to focus its efforts on dismantling the cartels. While the GOC understood that the drug trade would be too difficult a target to go after directly, it wisely chose to exploit cartel vulnerabilities to defeat it and reduce violence. Although the illegal drug industry in Colombia has a long history, it did not gain notoriety until the drug cartels became so powerful that, instead of dodging the government as the minor drug producers had done in the 1950s and 1960s, they began directly confronting the government through either violence or corruption. The ideal scenario for a drug cartel or other criminal organization is a corrupt state in which they can operate freely; in Colombia, the big cartels used both corruption and violence to achieve their goals. In particular, the Medellin cartel conducted high

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<sup>242</sup> Peter R. Mansoor and Mark S. Ulrich, “Linking Doctrine to Action: A New Coin Center-of-Gravity Analysis,” *Military Review* 87, no. 5 (October 2007): 46–47.

<sup>243</sup> While going after the drug cartels will provide some benefits, ultimately, success lies in targeting the things that allow the cartels to flourish; principally, corruption.

<sup>244</sup> Marks, “Colombia: Learning Institutions,” 130; Marks, Gorka, and Sharp, “Getting the Next War Right,” 80; Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency,” 43.

levels of indiscriminate violence and the Cali cartel capitalized on corrupt high-level officials. In spite of their efforts, the cartels' indiscriminant actions ultimately served to unite the country against them.

Efforts to confront powerful drug cartels usually increase violence in the short term, particularly when the organization is decapitated. This is clearly evident today in Mexico and it was evident in Colombia in the 1990s, during which record levels of violence led up to and followed the demise of the Medellín and Cali cartels.<sup>245</sup> In addition to cartels' reprisal attacks against the government, inter and intra cartel violence represented the largest cause of homicide in Colombia. Figure 10 illustrates the history of violence in Colombia from 1960–2005. As seen, spikes in violence began in the late 1970s during the establishment of the Medellín cartel and reached its highest levels near the time of Escobar's death in 1993. It took until 2005 for violence levels to drop to what they nearly were two decades earlier, which supported the claim that violence increases after cartel decapitations, or at least in the short term.

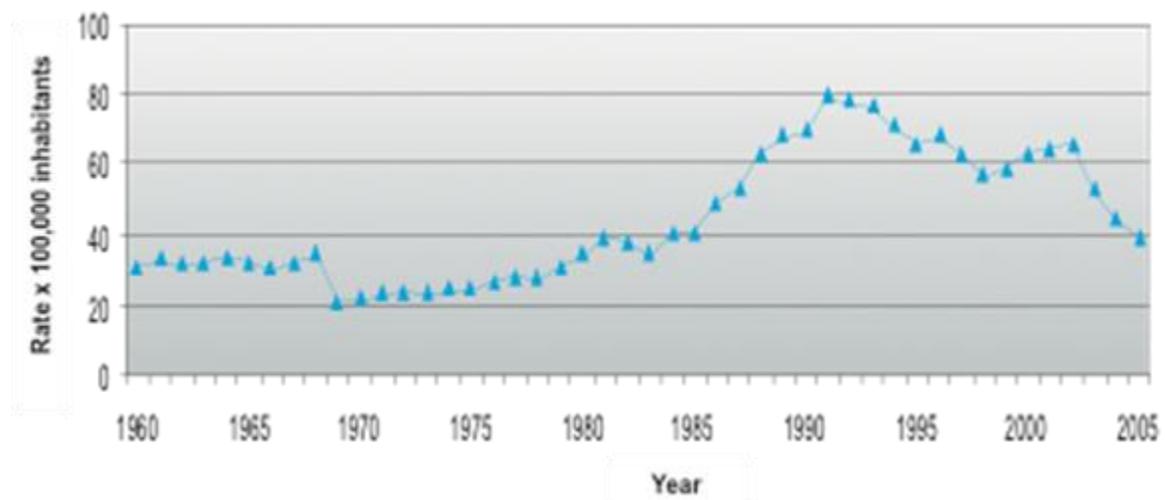


Figure 10. Homicide Rates in Colombia 1960–2005.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>245</sup> UNODC, *Violence, Crime, and Illegal Drug Trafficking in Colombia* (Bogotá: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, December 2006), 17–18, [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Colombia\\_Dec06\\_en.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Colombia_Dec06_en.pdf).

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

## 2. Strengths and Weaknesses

The GOC astutely determined that the drug cartels' COG was in fact the large profits of the illegal drug trade and not the drug trade itself. The *critical capabilities* of the drug cartels were examined to determine what actions or assets were absolutely critical to the survival of the drug cartels' profits. During this process, three critical capabilities stood out as most relevant to the operational capacity of the cartels, which were money laundering, drug trafficking and drug production. These activities were the principle profit-making activities of the cartels. Each of the previously mentioned critical capabilities had several *critical requirements* vital to their survival. Among these requirements were weak or corrupt law enforcement, corrupt government officials, front companies for laundering drug profits, drug distribution networks, a market demand for illegal drugs, chemicals required for the production of the drugs, and finally, the drug crops themselves. These critical requirements directly affected the capacity of the cartels to bribe public officials, command and control cartel operations, produce and distribute illicit drugs, safeguard the product while in production and during transit, and even recruit future cartel members.

A COG's critical requirements are often vulnerable to direct or indirect attack, which are referred to as *critical vulnerabilities* because they possess the potential to produce decisive or significant effects on the COGs critical capabilities. Of the critical vulnerabilities identified, transparency focused on anti-corruption campaigns played the biggest role in weakening the ability of the cartels to conduct their operations. Coupled with anti-corruption measures, decisive operations by Colombia's security forces played a critical part in killing or capturing cartel leadership, as well as disrupting drug production and distribution efforts. President Uribe's DSDP reemphasized transparency and also focused on further improving governance and strengthening security. Figure 11 provides an illustration of the COG analysis.

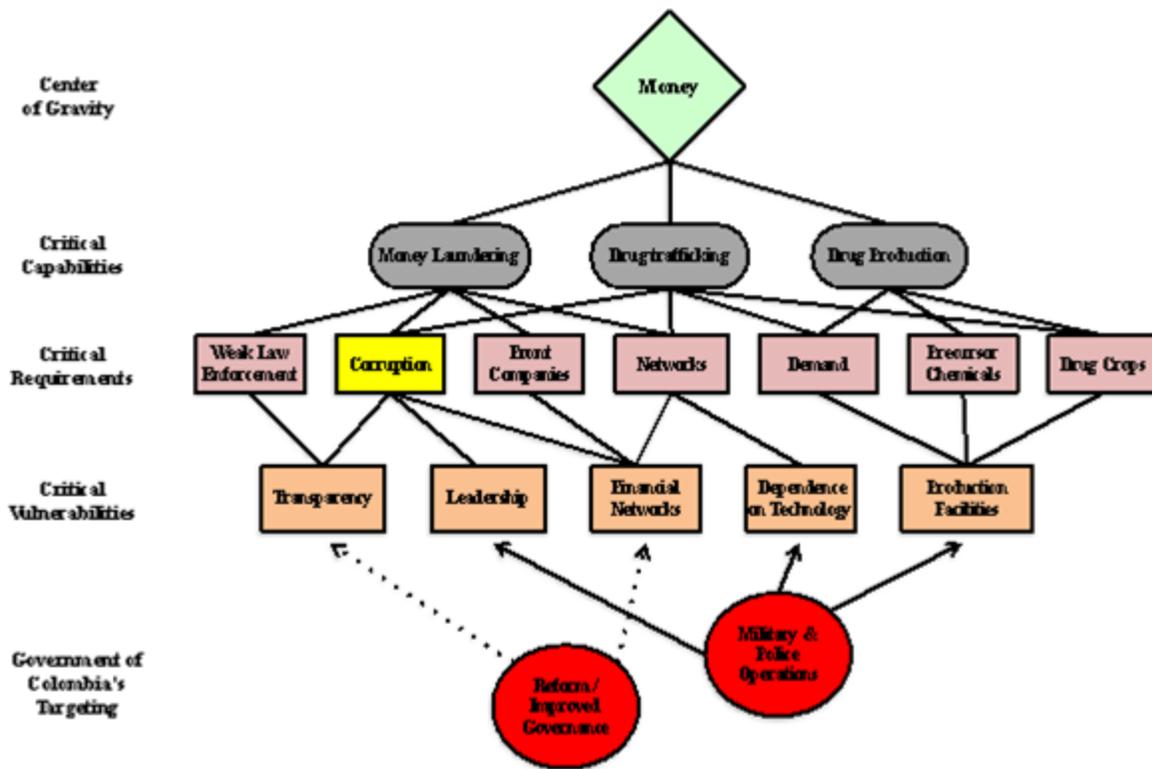


Figure 11. Colombia Drug Cartel COG Analysis.

### 3. Government of Colombia's Focus

The GOC accurately recognized the need for international support to address its security problem.<sup>247</sup> Support came primarily in the form of technological and operational assistance, which was the government's Achilles' heel. Fortunately, the United States provided Colombia with access to sophisticated electronic equipment that enhanced the GOC's eavesdropping capabilities for monitoring cartel communications and activities, as well as U.S. Special Operations Forces to offer critically needed counter-terrorist training and advisory support. This assistance was provided directly to the Colombian National Police and Colombian military. In addition, the Colombian government increased salaries for security personnel and instituted strong vetting procedures for their forces that included polygraph tests to ensure intelligence was not leaked, which allowed

<sup>247</sup> Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 72–74.

the government to arrest the Cali cartel's leadership, and thus, successfully dismantle that cartel only three years after killing Pablo Escobar and taking down the Medellín cartel.

#### **4. Outcome**

While the destruction of the two large cartels in the 1990s was viewed as a success, it did not end the violence or drug trafficking as many had hoped; instead, it created new challenges because the root problem of corruption and poor security had not been addressed. While the country had rid itself of a giant threat to its security, the rise of the “cartelitos,” along with the massive growth of the FARC emboldened by drug profits, soon proved that more was needed than simply taking down the two big cartels. The GOC's obsession with dismantling the cartels, but not addressing the conditions that had allowed the drug trade to flourish, would need to be addressed with a comprehensive strategy.<sup>248</sup> The results of this miscalculation would prove deadly when only three years after the death of Pablo Escobar, the GOC would find itself up against an insurgency that had crossed the threshold to Phase II of Mao's people's war model—conventional warfare against the government.<sup>249</sup> Eventually, Uribe's WoG approach would put the country on a path towards increased security.

#### **F. CONCLUSION**

Although Colombia is still struggling with cartelitos, insurgent groups and paramilitaries involved in the drug trade in some form or another, the country's successes dismantling the cartels during the 1990s and reducing corruption and improving governance under the Democratic Security and Defence Policy, serve as a success story in the fight against organized crime.

It is important to note that the destruction of the two largest cartels pushed the transportation and distribution share of the drug trafficking business—undoubtedly the most profitable portion of the business—into the hands of Mexico's cartels. Therefore, it

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<sup>248</sup> Marks, Gorka, and Sharp, “Getting the Next War Right,” 80; Ospina-Ovalle, “Insights from Colombia,” 29; Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency,” 43.

<sup>249</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Chairman Mao Tse-Tung on People's War* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967).

is imperative to remember that taking down large criminal organizations does not defeat the root of the problem—the culture of corruption directly responsible for the industry’s success. Figure 12 depicts the common trafficking routes and corridors as of 2008, as well as the world’s largest consumers of cocaine.

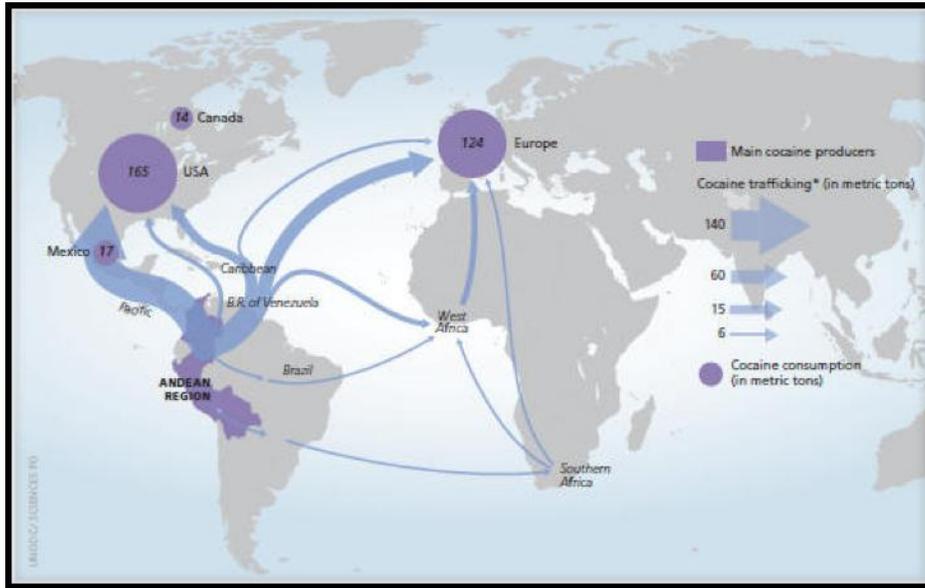


Figure 12. Global Cocaine Flows As of 2008.<sup>250</sup>

<sup>250</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2010*, 70.

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## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. INTRODUCTION

The circumstances faced by the Government of Mexico today is in many ways similar to that faced by the Government of Colombia 20 years ago; powerful drug cartels challenging the state's authority, widespread government corruption, and a general mistrust of the government by the population. Nevertheless, in less than 10 years, the GOC was able to dismantle both of its large cartels and significantly reduce the murder rate from a high of nearly 80 per 100,000 people in 1990 to fewer than 40 per 100,000 by early 2005.<sup>251</sup> Mexico's murder rate, by contrast, stands at 18.4 per 100,000 when last reported by the GOM in January 2011.<sup>252</sup> While this thesis does not profess that Colombia is a flawless example of how to conduct counter-drug or counter-cartel operations, it did achieve numerous successes against the nefarious groups operating within its borders. These successes were possible in part due to the clear strategy implemented by the GOC that included rooting out corruption and professionalizing its security forces, building a strong and capable police force, close military to military cooperation with the United States, and ruthlessly targeting nefarious groups.

Similarly, Mexico has been plagued by increasing violence attributed to drug cartels attempting to maintain control of the drug trafficking trade within the country. The high degree of influence wielded by the Mexican cartels has become the center of gravity for the international drug trade since the demise of the Colombian cartels in the 1990s. In addition to inter-cartel rival violence, fractures among cartel leadership, exacerbated by the increasing pressure applied by the GOM, have also led to significant increases in intra-cartel violence. All the same, despite the considerable amount of firepower being brought to bear on the cartels by the GOM, violence or cartel activities have yet to exhibit

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<sup>251</sup> UNODC, *Violence, Crime, and Illegal Drug Trafficking in Colombia* (Bogotá: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, December 2006), 18, [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Colombia\\_Dec06\\_en.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Colombia_Dec06_en.pdf).

<sup>252</sup> "Q&A: Mexico's drug-related violence," *BBC*, May 4, 2011, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10681249>.

any sign of slowing down. This reality proves that the GOM's current strategy of principally targeting the cartels and their illicit activities is ineffective, inefficient, and requires reconsideration. A new strategy is needed that effectively targets the center of gravity—the cartels' influence and the corrupt environment that allows them to thrive.

## **B. APPLICABILITY OF COLOMBIAN LESSONS TO MEXICO**

Building on the case studies of Colombia and Mexico, this chapter highlights shared problems in both countries and identify which applicable lessons can be drawn from Colombia and applied to Mexico. As is highlighted, Colombia's root issues were very different from those in Mexico today; however, the corollary was strikingly similar. For instance, unlike Colombia, the GOM is not currently wrestling with insurgent and paramilitary groups that obtain funding largely from the illegal drug trade. Despite these intrinsic differences, there are still valuable lessons to be learned from Colombia's successes and failures.

Having identified the COG of Mexico's cartels as *influence*, facilitated specifically by corruption, similarities between the Colombian and the Mexican problems become evident. Corruption is the *critical capability* that facilitates organized crime and as such must be addressed. The GOC did not experience real gains in their fight against organized crime until it addressed corruption and its ramifications on society.

### **1. Corruption Lessons from Colombia**

In 1998, Colombia's Corruption Perceptions Index score was 2.2 out of 10 and ranked 79 out of 85 countries polled (bottom 7%). By 2010, Colombia's CPI score had risen to 3.5, and ranked 78 out of 178 countries, (top 44%). Colombia's index score experienced marked increases during the time period following the decapitations of the Cali and Medellín cartels.<sup>253</sup> The increase is attributed to improved confidence in the government because of better policing, military and political reform, international cooperation, and a strong effort made towards enhancing citizen security as seen by

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<sup>253</sup> Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 Results* (Brussels: Transparency International, 2011), [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results).

President Uribe's initiation of a Whole of Government (WoG) approach. President Uribe's changes to national security policies, including the professionalization of the military and law enforcement, as well as institutional reforms throughout the government, has aided greatly in Colombia's progress towards becoming more transparent. One noteworthy measure of reform implemented in the Colombian law enforcement agencies and military was the ousting of corrupt anti-drug officials. The introduction of well-paid and vetted personnel, along with the recruitment and employment of large numbers of paid civilian informants, had an immeasurable effect on preventing future corruption. These changes accomplished three important goals: purged the Colombian anti-drug initiatives of corrupt drug agents, amplified public trust by increasing transparency, and further swayed public support from criminal organizations to the state.<sup>254</sup>

Also beneficial to Colombia's fight against the cartels was a close relationship with the United States. For nearly 30 years, the United States has provided large amounts of military supplies and other funding aid to Colombia to build its capacity to take the fight to the cartels and other groups. Military training and advising in particular have been invaluable for professionalizing Colombian security forces, building their special operations capacity and improving their capability to confront their internal threats.<sup>255</sup> While the close relationship with the United States provided Colombia much of the necessary technical and operational assistance lacking, it was also at times counterproductive. For example, U.S. political pressure in the 1980s led Colombia initially to implement ineffective anti-drug policies that focused on the drug supply and not the underlying social problems. The result of this misapplied policy was a splintered drug trade after the dismantling of the big cartels and redistribution of the drug trade between the insurgent groups, paramilitaries and the cartelitos. These errors were corrected later and the GOC readjusted its strategy. However, the experience

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<sup>254</sup> Thomas A. Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002–2006) vs FARC," *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2007): 43–46.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–50.

demonstrates that, at the time, neither Colombia nor the United States had placed enough priority on addressing the root cause of the drug trade, which in turn, allowed the splintering of the drug trade.<sup>256</sup>

## **2. Mexico Applicability**

As compared to Colombia, Mexico has moved downward on the CPI charts. It dropped from a 3.3 index score and a rank of 55 out of 85 countries polled in 1998 (top 35%), down to a 3.1 index score and 98 out of 178 countries polled in 2010 (bottom 45%). Mexico has attempted to reform its police forces once, in 2000, when President Fox restructured the Federal Judicial Police, but that attempt was unsuccessful largely because corrupted officials were replaced with more corrupt officials. In 2010, President Calderón stated that he intended to begin shifting Mexico's local police into a nationally unified police force in hopes of greatly reducing corruption levels. This reform, however, has yet to be implemented and will take a considerable amount of time and management to develop before changes are visible.

Another challenge facing Mexico is its limited but improving relationship with neighboring countries that share its cartel problems. Cartel operations routinely spill over Mexico's borders into the United States, Guatemala, Belize and other nations. In addition, the GOM only permits small numbers of U.S. military forces to provide military assistance or training on Mexican territory and then heavily limit what those forces are permitted to do. This restriction is the result of ingrained perceptions of the United States meddling in Mexican domestic affairs and suspicion over U.S. intentions.<sup>257</sup> This suspicion has precluded the United States from providing very useful operational assistance on the ground with the Mexicans.

On an equally frustrating note, U.S. financial aid provided to Mexico comes with many earmarks dictating it can purchase, as well as the allowable uses of the equipment.

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<sup>256</sup> Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, "The U.S. 'War on Drugs': Its Impact in Latin America and the Caribbean," in *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy*, ed. Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2004), 3–12.

<sup>257</sup> Dr. Graham H. Turbiville Jr., "Mexico's Evolving Security Posture," *Foreign Military Studies Office*, June 2001, [http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/mexico\\_evolve/mexico\\_evolve.htm](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/mexico_evolve/mexico_evolve.htm).

Even more similar to the Colombia case is that minimal amounts of aid (less than \$75 million) has been earmarked for social reforms aimed at curbing corruption or providing alternative economic alternatives to the poor.<sup>258</sup> As with Plan Colombia, by not addressing the primary issues facing Mexico—corruption—the Mérida Initiative is not effectively addressing the cartel COG. For example, in 1991, a report prepared by the U.S. Government Accountability Office offered evidence that eradication and counter-drug operations alone do not reduce drug production or trafficking. The report showed that two years of extensive eradication efforts in Colombia using herbicide spraying did not reduce the production of coca; instead, it increased by 50%.<sup>259</sup> While cartels may initially be weakened by government operations, they are able to quickly regroup or splinter into alternative cartels because the root causes have not been addressed.

### C. WAY AHEAD

Despite multi-million dollar efforts by both Mexico and the United States, competing drug cartels, illegal arms sales, human trafficking, corrupt government officials and law enforcement, non-responsive GOM agencies, and ever-increasing levels of violence continue to play a significant role in Mexican instability. Of these issues, corruption has undoubtedly played the largest role in creating space for illicit and illegal activities to flourish, and has gone largely unaddressed. A report published in December 2009 by Transparency International (TI) showed that the GOM had failed to capitalize on anti-corruption efforts initiated under former Mexican President Fox beginning in 2000. The director of TI's Mexican affiliate, *Transparencia Mexicana*, Eduardo Bohorquez, emphasized that while the GOM has made numerous strides in improving transparency, “it has not moved to the second phase, which is effective accountability and coordination

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<sup>258</sup> Latin American Working Group, “Mérida Initiative ‘Plan Mexico’ Fact Sheet” (Witness for Peace, n.d.), [http://www.witnessforpeace.org/downloads/Mex\\_Merida%20Initiative%20factsheet%20WFP2.pdf](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/downloads/Mex_Merida%20Initiative%20factsheet%20WFP2.pdf).

<sup>259</sup> Winifred Tate, “Repeating Past Mistakes: Aiding Counterinsurgency in Colombia,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34, no. 2 (October 2000): 2.

of national agencies with local laws.”<sup>260</sup> A new way ahead that places reform at the forefront is critical to addressing the problems of corruption effectively, and ultimately, the unsuccessful government policies incapable of defeating the cartels.

## 1. Reform

In his book, *The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency*, Seth Jones argues that “the Afghanistan government’s inability to provide basic services and establish law and order” was largely to blame for the rise of the Taliban insurgency.<sup>261</sup> Using Dr. Jones’s theory, similarly, it could be argued that criminal organizations, such as drug cartels, flourish because of corrupt law enforcement and public officials that either tolerate or do not have the power to prevent illicit activities. In addition, the GOM has failed to provide ample opportunities for its citizens to live fulfilling lives without having to resort to illegal activities. While there always will be a small percentage of any population that will embrace a nefarious lifestyle regardless of the opportunities afforded, this percentage would be minimal and manageable from a law enforcement standpoint.

For the GOM to retake control of areas controlled by the cartels successfully and begin to shift the population that supports the cartels towards legitimate lifestyles, it must first create an environment in which the population feels that they and their children have a stake in the future of their nation. A state’s failure or inability to create and maintain that bond with its citizens ultimately results in a loss of trust between the people and their government.<sup>262</sup> In the case of Colombia, President Uribe’s WoG approach provides a strong foundation for how to approach this problem because of the importance it places on re-establishing security, providing economic opportunity and gaining the trust of the

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<sup>260</sup> SourceMex, “Mexico Falls Several Slots in the Global Corruption Index for 2009,” *Business News*, December 9, 2009, <http://www.allbusiness.com/reports-reviews-sections/rankings/13579735-1.html>.

<sup>261</sup> Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 8.

<sup>262</sup> Ashraf Ghani, Clare Lockhart, and Michael Carnahan, “Closing the Sovereignty Gap: An Approach to State-Building” (Overseas Development Institute, September 2005), 9, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1819.pdf>.

population.<sup>263</sup> As mentioned in the Colombian case study, “the strengthening of the rule of law is the essential prerequisite to achieving the aim of Democratic Security: the protection of each and every citizen... a fundamental prerequisite to effective rule of law is the lack of rampant corruption.”<sup>264</sup> In the parts of Mexico controlled by cartels, the cartel members make the rules, not the state. Therefore, the citizen does not have the luxury of rejecting demands made by cartel members; whom would they turn to if they did? For this reason, a strong, non-corrupt and effective government is absolutely critical. Just as the state depends on the citizens to live within the limits of the law, the citizens need the guarantee of safety and security.

## 2. Implementation

Many members of the GOM, such as Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina-Mora, believed the solution to police corruption was as simple as purging the forces of corrupt officers and hiring new officers.<sup>265</sup> Initial attempts at purging the forces of corrupt officers proved unsuccessful because the root causes of the corruption were not addressed: low police salaries, high risk when operating against cartel members, inadequate personal protection equipment, and little to no state back up. To illustrate, *Reuters* news agency reported in 2007 that on average, “Mexican police officers earn \$375 a month, well below the \$660 that even the GOM says is just enough for officers to feed their families and cover basic needs. Furthermore, in some small border towns, officers receive as little as \$300 a month, have threadbare uniforms, worn-out pistols and are expected to buy their own bullets.”<sup>266</sup> Add to this quandary a weak and corrupted

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<sup>263</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, “The Uribe Administration’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy” (Embassy of Colombia, 2003), [http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita\\_bush/documentos/security.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita_bush/documentos/security.pdf).

<sup>264</sup> Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, *Democratic Security and Defence Policy* (Bogota: Ministry of Defence, 2003), 13.

<sup>265</sup> Robin Emmott, “Police Corruption Undermines Mexico’s War on Drugs,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/23/us-mexico-drugs-police-idUSN1521094020070523>.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

justice system and it becomes clear why Mexican police officers accept bribes from cartel members or resign as many honest officers do when faced with real life threats of violence from better-armed and equipped cartel members.

The GOM must do away with the hundreds of state and local police departments, and invest heavily in a strong, capable, vetted and well-paid National Police Force similar to Colombia's. As was the case in Colombia, the effort to reform the police must come from within the ranks, as a patriotic movement from respected Mexican officers. The outcome must be a professional and respectable force that truly wants to serve and protect its citizens, and not its own selfish desires. Mexican citizens want a dependable and non-corrupt police force and should receive nothing less. The GOM's attempts to weed out corruption until now have been ineffective because officials who refused to be corrupted or spoke out against it were quickly assassinated.<sup>267</sup> Officials need better security to speak out and act against corruption without the fear of violence against them or their loved ones. The GOM must provide this.

Mexico has also made positive strides towards providing their officers superior training by sending police officers to Colombia to receive specialized paramilitary/anti-terror training.<sup>268</sup> Colombia, because of its long history fighting powerful cartels, as well as insurgent and paramilitary groups, is in a unique position to provide the specialized training the Mexican's need. However, the United States remains the much better choice to provide the training due to its technical expertise and availability of funding for equipment that the GOM needs to produce a capable, well-trained and dependable police force.

### **3. The Need for a Strong International Partnership**

As GOM anti-cartel efforts continue to provide mixed results at best, the need to build a cooperative capacity to fight corruption and break the perpetual cycle of illegal

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<sup>267</sup> Dudley Althaus, "Mexico's Plague of Police Corruption," *Chron / World*, October 18, 2010, <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/world/7251246.html>.

<sup>268</sup> Juan Forero, "Mexico Seeks Lessons From Colombia's War On FARC," *NPR*, n.d., <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/02/132492582/mexico-seeks-lessons-from-colombias-war-on-farc>.

activity has become apparent. In particular, Mexico must design closer working relationships with other countries either sharing its problems or that have experience confronting these sorts of issues. The example mentioned previously about cooperation with Colombia provides an excellent starting point. The cooperation currently occurring is with Colombia's elite *Jungla* or Jungle Unit that has been providing tactical training to Mexican police in Colombia. The courses are four months long and provide the Mexican officers with training in the use of explosives, assault rifles, jungle tactics and how to perform raids on heavily fortified compounds.<sup>269</sup> During an interview with the *United Press International* (UPI), Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos stated, "Mexico has what we had some years ago, which are very powerful cartels...what we can provide is the experience that we have had dismantling those cartels, training intelligence officers, and training judicial police."<sup>270</sup>

During a visit to Mexico in January 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed the co-responsibility of the United States for Mexico's drug problems given its position as the largest consumer of illegal drugs and other illicit activities.<sup>271</sup> However, despite more than \$400 million dollars in Mérida initiative funding provided to the GOM, almost all of it has been spent on military equipment and not addressing the root causes of the problem, such as corruption and poor social programs.<sup>272</sup> To date, less than \$75 million has been applied towards social programs, which would aim to improve the lives of Mexico's poor that comprise the largest portion of the cartel members.<sup>273</sup> The only

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<sup>269</sup> Forero, "Mexico Seeks Lessons."

<sup>270</sup> United Press International, "Mexico Training Drug Cops in Colombia," *UPI.com*, January 22, 2011, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2011/01/22/Mexico-training-drug-cops-in-Colombia/UPI-29821295721385/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2011/01/22/Mexico-training-drug-cops-in-Colombia/UPI-29821295721385/).

<sup>271</sup> Carin Zissis, "Clinton Signals U.S. Support during Mexico Visit," *Americas Society/Council of the Americas*, January 25, 2011, [http://www.as-coa.org/articles/2962/Clinton\\_Signals\\_U.S.\\_Support\\_on\\_Mexico\\_Visit/](http://www.as-coa.org/articles/2962/Clinton_Signals_U.S._Support_on_Mexico_Visit/).

<sup>272</sup> Latin American Working Group, "Plan Mexico Fact Sheet," 3.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

positive result of the initiative thus far have been several high-level arrests and killings of drug cartel leaders; more often than not, at the hands of the Mexican military and not the police due to high levels of corruption within the police.<sup>274</sup>

With the assistance of the United States, the GOM could establish a strong anti-corruption task force that would target the nexus between the cartels and corrupt GOM agencies. All task force members would be subject to rigorous vetting procedures to include random polygraph examinations, continual background investigations and new and improved training. This endeavor would utilize a combined military/law enforcement and interagency approach. The unity of effort would concentrate on different approaches to the same goal. U.S. assistance to train the Mexican Task Force and share ideas would enhance an appropriate response to criminal events.

The use of technology is also important in the fight against the cartels as was witnessed by the GOC's establishment of a shared database to track the shipments of the precursor chemicals required to produce cocaine from the countries in which they are manufactured. This database allowed the GOC to disrupt the cocaine manufacturing process. A similar database could be created to track and disrupt the flow of the drug pseudoephedrine into Mexico, which is used to make methamphetamine.<sup>275</sup> Before this could be effective, Mexican customs must be reformed and purged of corrupt officials.

The use of technology, while important in the fight against the cartels, is not the absolute solution. The GOM must also create and implement a strong Internal Affairs (IA) department within its government, judiciary, military and law enforcement agencies that would monitor personnel with the primary goal of minimizing instances of future corruption. The implementation of this new IA unit would come with considerable costs to the GOM in the form of both finances and personnel that have not been corrupted.

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<sup>274</sup> Avelardo Valdez, "Failure to Curb Drug War Exposes Mexico's Weakness," *Chron: Viewpoints, Outlook*, January 26, 2011, <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/editorial/outlook/7399732.html>.

<sup>275</sup> Alberto Islas, "Why Did Mexican Organized Crime Grow So Out of Control?," *Borderland Beat*, March 5, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/03/why-did-mexican-organized-crime-grow-so.html>.

With new personnel manning both the IA department and other law enforcement agencies, the GOM stands a much stronger chance than it does today of defeating the cartels.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Transparency International's President Huguette Labelle maintains, "countries can control the growth of corruption by strengthening their legislative and judicial branches, promoting strong and independent auditing agencies, and devoting adequate resources to combating illegal activities."<sup>276</sup> In Mexico today, the military is taking the lead in the war against the drug cartels. It is doing so out of sheer necessity because of the unreliable and corrupt police forces, but it is a stopgap solution. The country desperately needs to reform and overhaul its hundreds of separate state and municipal police forces. It will most likely be several more years before the Mexican Federal Police is strong enough to take over this war from the army, perhaps even then, the military will likely have to assist the police in confronting heavily armed paramilitary units of the cartels. As Washington sends money south as part of the Mérida Initiative to combat crime and drug trafficking in Mexico, it must be careful not to focus too much on military assistance and neglect other, more effective forms of aid essential to success, such as training, the creation of transparent institutions and a wider perspective on the problem.

In Colombia, nearly all of the initial U.S. aid in the 1980s came in the form of military equipment, which gave the Colombian government the erroneous impression that the cartels could be destroyed using military force alone. The United States has thus far made the same mistake in Mexico. Virtually all of the first \$300 million of Mérida funding—25 percent of the total so far—went to military equipment.<sup>277</sup> Some of this equipment is useful, of course, but it is more important in the long run for the United States to concentrate its assistance on the development, training, and professionalization of Mexico's law enforcement officers. Mexico needs new police officers paid well enough to make them less susceptible to bribery. The best solution may be to abolish the

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<sup>276</sup> SourceMex, "Mexico Falls Several Slots."

<sup>277</sup> Latin American Working Group, "Plan Mexico Fact Sheet."

municipal police departments altogether and have reformed state police agencies, comprised of officers trained at a national police academy, take over policing in the cities. Only with these rigorous and comprehensive changes can the wider problem of corruption be addressed, which is the environment that allows the cartels to flourish.

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