

DEFEATING MEXICO'S DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS:
THE RANGE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN MEXICO

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

DEFEATING MEXICO'S DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS: THE RANGE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN MEXICO, by Major Mark J. Wade, 102 pages.

Drug Trafficking Organizations within Mexico have become a challenge to the state and are affecting both Mexican and U.S. citizens within the U.S. and Mexico border region. As the situation continues to spiral out of control, the U.S. military, with approval of the Mexican government, may need to conduct operations within Northern Mexico to defeat drug trafficking organizations and stabilize the region. As the full range of military operations have been conducted within Afghanistan, this study explores those military operations and their applicability to defeating drug trafficking organizations within Northern Mexico. Through operational design, the primary conclusion drawn is that there is no single military operation that should be conducted. Rather, the U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat drug trafficking organizations and stabilize Northern Mexico are a combination of security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	1
Primary Research Question	5
Secondary Research Question One: What is the Current Situation in Mexico?.....	6
Secondary Research Question Two: What Military Operations in Afghanistan apply to Northern Mexico?	7
Key Terms.....	7
Assumptions.....	12
Limitations and Delimitations	13
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Gaps and Commonalities in Literature	18
History of Mexican Drug Trafficking and Current Situation	21
Security Cooperation	23
Limited Contingency Operations.....	24
Major Operations	24
Military Operations Doctrine and Theory	25
Other Sources of Literature.....	25
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	27
Data Collection	27
Method.....	27
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS	32
Section One: History and Current Situation in Mexico.....	32
The Rise of DTOs	32

Plazas	40
DTO Centers of Gravity.....	42
DTO Recruitment.....	46
DTO Insurgency Style Operations.....	47
Mexican Government Involvement	50
Section Two: U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan.....	52
Security Cooperation	53
Direct Support.....	54
Civil-military Operations	54
Military Information Support Operations (formerly called Psychological Operations).....	56
Military Training to Host Nation Forces	57
Logistics Support	58
Intelligence Cooperation.....	58
Limited Contingency Operations	59
Strikes	59
Raids	61
Major Operations	63
Operation Rhino.....	63
Operation Anaconda	65
Operation Moshtarak	67
 CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 75
Section One: United States Military End State in Mexico	75
Friendly.....	76
Enemy	76
Terrain.....	76
Civil.....	77
Section Two: Operational Design.....	78
What is going on in the Environment?.....	78
What the Environment Should Look Like	79
Where the U.S. military should Act to Achieve the Desired End State.....	80
Operational Approach: How to get from the Current State to the Desired End State	82
Objectives	82
Decisive Points.....	84
Lines of Effort.....	85
Limitations	85
Risk	86
Section Three: Significance of Conclusions and Recommendations	88
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 90
 INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	 93

ACRONYMS

CMO	Civil Military Operations
DTO	Drug Trafficking Organization
HN	Host Nation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
SOF	Special Operation Forces

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Drug Trafficking Routes	5
Figure 2. Northern Mexico (depicted in outlined area).....	11
Figure 3. Mexico’s Golden Triangle (depicted in outlined area).....	33
Figure 4. DTO Areas of Operation.....	38
Figure 5. Paramilitary Style Weapons.....	41
Figure 6. DTO Center of Gravity Analysis	45
Figure 7. Los Zetas recruiting poster that reads in part, “Operations group Los Zetas wants you military or ex-military. We offer you good pay, food, and attention to your family. Do not suffer abuse and hunger anymore. We do not feed you Maruchan noodles.”.....	47
Figure 8. Range of Military Operations	52
Figure 9. Foreign Internal Defense: Integrated Security Cooperation Activities.....	53
Figure 10. Graphical Representation of Current Situation in Mexico	79
Figure 11. Graphical Representation of what the Environment Should Look Like.....	80
Figure 12. Operational Approach.....	87

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As [drug] violence continues to escalate and reach more of Mexico's territory, more observers and policy analysts are raising concerns about the Mexican state's stability. The U.S. government and the administration of Mexican President Felipe Calderón strongly deny the so-called "failed state" thesis that was put forward by some analysts in 2008 and 2009, which suggested that the Mexican government was no longer exercising sovereignty in all areas of the country.

— June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify which options the United States military can employ to defeat drug trafficking organizations (DTO) and stabilize Northern Mexico. Violence in Northern Mexico has increased significantly over the past several years. According to the Trans-Border Institute in San Diego, California, the trend in DTO related killings in Mexico rose from 14 per day in 2008 to 30 per day in 2010 with a sharp increase between 2009 and 2010. In 2009, 6,587 killings were reported compared to an excess of 11,000 murders reported in 2010.¹ Additionally, DTO related violence is reported highest in the Northern Mexican border states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Chihuahua, Baja California, and Sinaloa (see figure 2) with 60 percent of all killings in 2008 reported in three cities: Tijuana, Baja California; Culiacan, Sinaloa; and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua.² Ciudad Juarez had the highest rate of DTO related deaths; this is significant for the U.S. because this city sits on the border adjacent to El Paso, Texas.³

Several complex issues that surround the problem of DTO violence are a consequence of DTO competition for trafficking routes known as *plazas*. The

competition is turning Northern Mexico into a de facto war zone evident in the DTO's adoption of insurgent techniques, challenges to Mexican sovereignty, and bribery of Mexican government officials. DTO pursuit of profit from other crimes "such as kidnapping, assassination for hire, auto theft, prostitution, extortion, money-laundering, and human smuggling"⁴ are now affecting more than just Mexican citizens. According to a 2009 report by the National Drug Intelligence Center these criminal actions and other forms of violence are spilling over into United States cities such as El Paso, Laredo, Phoenix, and San Diego.⁵

One example of the spillover violence affecting U.S. citizens is the 358 drug trafficking related kidnappings for ransom in Phoenix, Arizona, reported by the National Drug Intelligence Center in 2008.⁶ A contributing factor to the spillover violence is the correlation between the rise of violence in Mexico and the rise of violence in the United States. General Barry McCaffrey, U.S. Army (Retired), notes that as violence spikes in Mexico it rises in the U.S.⁷ In his Texas border security assessment, McCaffrey states that DTOs might be seeking sanctuary on whichever side of the border offers the best security, much like the "Taliban winters in comfort in the Pashtun regions of Pakistan."⁸ The issues of DTO competition for *plazas*, insurgent like activities, challenges to the Mexican government, and bribery are not all-inclusive and only skim the surface of the problem. These are the core issues affecting both Mexico and the United States on an ever-escalating scale.

Compounding the problem is the Mexican Government's unsuccessful attempt to stop DTOs from challenging the state through bribery and violence, which has led to speculation that Mexico is becoming a failed state. In August 2010 at a National Security

Conference, Mexican President Felipe Calderon personally acknowledged the threat of DTOs to the Mexican state when he stated, “This criminal behavior is what has changed, and become a challenge to the state, an attempt to replace the state.”⁹ With unsuccessful Mexican efforts on the border, spillover violence into the United States is on the rise. Now organizations within the United States government, such as the National Drug Intelligence Center, consider DTOs “the greatest organized crime threat” to the United States.¹⁰ The National Drug Intelligence Center’s statement illuminates that something must be done to stop DTOs. If Mexico cannot stop this seemingly hopeless problem, it is apparent that the United States must assist in order to protect its own citizens and stabilize Northern Mexico. With approval of the Mexican government, intervention by the United States military in conjunction with inter-agency, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations may stabilize Northern Mexico and defeat DTOs.

While it appears DTOs do not wish to overthrow the Mexican government, the DTO challenge to the Mexican state is real. The goals of DTOs in Mexico are “impunity to traffic drugs and engage in other illicit activities for profit.”¹¹ In order to pursue their goals, DTOs engage in the killing and coercion of government officials. In June 2010 a Tamaulipas gubernatorial candidate was assassinated, and from January through October 2010, 12 sitting mayors were executed for refusing to cooperate with DTOs.¹² In the same year, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that such violence might be “morphing into or making common cause with what we would call an insurgency.”¹³ Coercion techniques are equally threatening to the Mexican state. DTOs use money from drug sales to compel border officials, Mexican law enforcement, security forces, and public officials to ignore or support DTO activity.¹⁴ The Sinaloa DTO has enjoyed a

lower arrest rate than competing DTOs generating the appearance that Mexican law enforcement may be enabling their activities. The most infamous case of corruption was in the 1980s when the Gulf DTO leader Juan Garcia Abrego turned elite Mexican military forces against their own government and convinced them to fuse with the Gulf DTO as assassins. These former elite military forces formed Los Zetas, an organization feared for its use of military tactics and extreme violence. Los Zetas went so far as to perform commando-style raids on state prisons.¹⁵ Members of another regional DTO, the Beltran Leyva Organization, infiltrated upper levels of the Mexican government and were responsible for the 2008 “assassination of the acting federal police director Edgar Millan Gomez.”¹⁶ These actions by DTOs have led some to refer to their activities as a “criminal insurgency” in which they will do anything to protect their profits including “undermining the authority and legitimacy of the state.”¹⁷

DTOs create instability within Mexico and threaten the population and legitimacy of the government. Through violent tactics and intimidation, DTOs are growing in numbers and acquiring areas of sanctuary from which to operate with autonomy. Although drug trafficking has occurred in Mexico for more than 100 years, the increased violence and intensity of DTO actions have become more than a problem for Mexican authorities. Over the past three decades DTO activities have risen to a level that now threatens United States citizens along the U.S. and Mexico border.

The scope of this study spans 30 years from 1980 to present. As Mexico has had a problem with drug trafficking for over a century, the purpose of this limited scope is to focus on the problems in Mexico after the adjustment of drug trafficking routes in the 1980s and 1990s from the Caribbean region to Mexico. This shift in drug trafficking led

to the rise of DTOs in Mexico as these organizations attempted to gain control over the plazas that offered the greatest capacity for the flow of drugs into the United States.



Figure 1. Drug Trafficking Routes

Source: Fred Burton and Ben West, "When the Mexican Drug Trade Hits the Border," Stratfor Global Intelligence, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090415_when_mexican_drug_trade_hits_border (accessed 19 November 2011).

Primary Research Question

There are several questions associated with the problem of drug trafficking and violence in Northern Mexico and the border region. The primary question is: Which U.S. military operations can be employed to defeat Mexican DTOs in Northern Mexico and

prevent border violence from affecting United States citizens? This question is important because it will explore the validity of the application of the military instrument of national power to combat the problem. While there are other instruments of national power that may produce positive effects in Northern Mexico, this study focuses primarily on the military instrument of national power. In determining the validity of military application, particular emphasis will be placed on adequacy, feasibility, and acceptability of its use in Northern Mexico. This research question includes the stability of all of Northern Mexico and not merely the United States and Mexico border as DTOs may now be considered an insurgency.

To answer this question, this study will determine which military operations are applicable in Northern Mexico to include limited aspects of inter-agency, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations when appropriate. In answering the question, U.S. military doctrine will be considered along with lessons learned from a range of military operations applied over the past decade in Afghanistan. Specifically, three types of operations will be studied for applicability: security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations.

Two secondary research questions, when answered, provide depth and understanding of the primary question. These secondary questions have elements that identify the background of the situation and establish the relevance of the application of military power in Northern Mexico.

Secondary Research Question One: What is the Current Situation in Mexico?

Understanding the historical facts and actions that led to the current state of affairs in Mexico will develop a base of understanding for why DTOs have become so

powerful and how they operate so effectively. This question will highlight what led to the rise of DTOs, DTO centers of gravity, trafficking routes, Mexican government involvement, DTO recruitment, and DTO insurgency operations.

Secondary Research Question Two: What Military Operations
in Afghanistan apply to Northern Mexico?

Over the past decade, the U.S. military has conducted a range of military operations in Afghanistan. Several operations have been very successful and may have application in Mexico. Examining elements of security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan will aide in understanding the relevancy of military application in Mexico.

Key Terms

The following list encompasses definitions of key terms, locations, and organizations. Some of these terms may have more than one definition. The following definitions will define each term, location, or organization in this study.

Adequacy: The joint operation plan review criterion for assessing whether the scope and concept of planned operations can accomplish the assigned mission and comply with the planning guidance provided.¹⁸

Agency AORs: The Department of Homeland Security is charged with securing the U.S. and Mexico border with its component agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Within the Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Border Patrol is charged with detecting and preventing the illegal entry of aliens and narcotics. The Department of Defense has responsibility to “provide support to DHS and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, when requested.”¹⁹ For the purpose of this study, DHS will

retain responsibility for the U.S. and Mexico border and Department of Defense will have responsibility for Northern Mexico.

Area of Responsibility: The geographical area associated with a combatant command within which a geographic combatant commander has authority to plan and conduct operations.²⁰

Center of Gravity: A center of gravity is a source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act.²¹ Typically the center of gravity has the ability to “do” or “use” specific resources or capabilities.

Combatant Command: “A unified or specified command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander established and so designated by the President, through the Secretary of Defense and with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”²²

Combatant Commander: “A commander of one of the unified or specified combatant commands established by the President.”²³

Counterinsurgency: Comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances,²⁴ which are “issues, real or perceived, in the view of some of the population.”²⁵

Counterterrorism: Actions taken directly and indirectly against terrorist networks to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to them.²⁶

Country Team: “The senior, in-country, U.S. coordinating and supervising body, headed by the chief of U.S. diplomatic mission, and composed of the senior member of each represented U.S. department or agency, as desired by the chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission.”²⁷

Critical Capability: A means that is considered a crucial enabler for a center of gravity to function as such and is essential to the accomplishment of the specified or assumed objective.²⁸

Critical Requirement: An essential condition, resource, and means for a critical capability to be fully operational.²⁹

Critical Vulnerability: An aspect of a critical requirement which is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects.³⁰

Defeat: The standard definition of defeat is a tactical mission task that occurs when an enemy force has temporarily or permanently lost the physical means or the will to fight.³¹ The defeat of DTOs will be measured by the number of DTO related criminal actions that occur in Northern Mexico and in the United States.

Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO): The National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy refers to DTOs as transnational criminal organizations based in Mexico that dominate the drug trade.³² For the purpose of this study, a DTO will be defined as an organization involved in the trafficking of drugs that uses violence or bribery, or both, to achieve its end state. Additionally, there are DTOs in more states than just Mexico. For the purpose of this study, any reference to a DTO is a Mexican DTO unless otherwise stated.

End State: The end state is a set of conditions that describe victory.³³

Foreign Internal Defense: Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.³⁴

Insurgency: An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.³⁵

Joint Force: “A general term applied to a force composed of significant elements, assigned or attached, of two or more Military Departments operating under a single joint force commander.”³⁶

Limited Contingency Operation: Small-scale, limited-duration operations such as strikes and raids.³⁷

Line of effort: Using “cause and effect” to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions by linking multiple tasks and missions.³⁸

Line of operation: A line that defines the interior or exterior orientation of the force in relation to the enemy or that connects actions on nodes and or decisive points related in time and space to an objective.³⁹

Major Operations: Extended-duration, large-scale operations that usually involve combat.⁴⁰

Northern Mexico: All Mexican states that border the United States. Northern Mexico also includes two states that do not physically touch the U.S. and Mexico border. Northern Mexico states are: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, and Sinaloa (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Northern Mexico (depicted in outlined area)

Source: June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 7.

Operational Approach: A commander's description of the broad actions a force must take to achieve the desired military end state. The operational approach is based largely on an understanding of the operational environment and the problem facing the joint force.⁴¹

Operational Design: The conception and construction of the framework that underpins a campaign or major operation plan and its subsequent execution.⁴²

Plazas: Geographically specific corridors along the U.S. and Mexico border used for trafficking drugs.⁴³

Operational Environment: “A composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander.”⁴⁴

Posse Comitatus Act: United States Northern Command offers a clear definition of the Posse Comitatus Act applicable to this study. “The PCA generally prohibits U.S. military personnel from direct participation in law enforcement activities. Some of those law enforcement activities would include interdicting vehicles, vessels, and aircraft; conducting surveillance, searches, pursuit and seizures; or making arrests on behalf of civilian law enforcement authorities.”⁴⁵

Security Cooperation: All Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.⁴⁶

Assumptions

Assumptions in this study relate to the Mexican government and Mexican sovereignty. The first assumption is that the Mexican government cannot control the actions of DTOs operating within its borders through military, police, and the use of other government entities. This assumption is made because DTOs continue to grow and operate with increased autonomy. If Mexican forces controlled DTO actions then their rampant violence and criminal activity would not be unmanageable. The second assumption is that prior to involvement of the United States military within the borders of

Mexico, the President of Mexico will ask for United States assistance. This assumption is important because the U.S. will not and should not violate the sovereignty of Mexico.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are limitations and delimitations in this study. Limitations include the inability of the researcher to personally interview anyone physically in the state of Mexico to include its citizens or government officials. Therefore, all research will be conducted through literature review.

There are several delimitations in this study. The first delimitation is the time period researched. The history of drug trafficking in Mexico dates to the 1900s. For the purpose of this study, research will focus principally from 1980 to the present day. The purpose of limiting the time period studied from 1980 to the present is because around 1980 drug trafficking routes shifted from the Caribbean to Mexico. The shift in trafficking routes resulted from pressure by the U.S. government on Colombian DTOs in the Caribbean, making the convenient use of the Caribbean routes not worth the profit losses created by U.S. law enforcement. To combat the U.S. government's interference, Colombian DTOs began subcontracting drug trafficking to Mexican DTOs. Over time, Mexican DTOs rose from being merely traffickers of cocaine to wholesalers.⁴⁷

The second delimitation is the issue of drug demand in the United States. This research will not analyze demand for drugs because the focus of this study is the deteriorating situation in Northern Mexico and on the U.S. and Mexico border because of Mexican DTO operations and criminal activity. As drug demand is the reason drugs flow into the United States, addressing the U.S. market for drugs would greatly increase the size and scope of this study outside the bounds of the primary research question.

The third delimitation is the level of war through which military operations and DTO actions are considered. This study will acknowledge aspects of the strategic level of war relating to DTOs, but will focus primarily on the operational level of war for U.S. military operations and all other aspects of DTOs. The purpose for this delimitation is that at the operational level of war “campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained” which relates to the employment of the joint force within Northern Mexico and is the focus of this study.⁴⁸

Another delimitation is that this study merely acknowledges that DTOs sometimes operate similarly to an insurgency. This study will not explore if DTOs are an actual insurgency. Determining whether DTOs are an insurgency would increase the scope of this study beyond what is necessary to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

The final delimitation is the types of military operations considered. Through aspects of security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations the U.S. military can target and execute missions against DTOs while simultaneously assisting Mexican forces to increase their capability to secure Mexican citizens. Of the military operations considered, the only limited contingency operation studied is strikes and raids. While there are six different limited contingency operations, strikes and raids have particular application against DTOs.

Violence in Mexico and in the United States is on the rise from DTO related criminal activity and competition over *plazas*. Mexico has demonstrated an inability to prevent DTO activity. Through bribery, intimidation, and extreme violence, DTOs have rendered Mexican officials virtually powerless in some areas of Northern Mexico. These

factors may prompt the Mexican government to solicit U.S. military intervention to assist in stabilizing Northern Mexico and defeating DTOs in the region. To establish a new approach to this possible contingency, a thorough study of literature in the field must be considered.

¹June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 14.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 6.

⁵National Drug Intelligence Center, *The Impact of Drug-Related Violence in Mexico on U.S. Border Communities* (Washington, DC: NDIC Publication, 2009), 2-4.

⁶Kristen M. Finklea, William J. Krouse, and Marc R. Rosenblum, *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 10.

⁷Barry R. McCaffrey and Robert H. Scales, *Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment* (Mico, TX: Colgen, 2011), 23.

⁸Ibid., 24.

⁹Tracy Wilkinson and Ken Ellingwood, "Mexico drug cartels thrive despite Calderon's offensive," *Los Angeles Times*, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/07/world/la-fg-mexico-cartels-20100808> (accessed 11 November 2011).

¹⁰National Drug Intelligence Center, "National Drug Threat Assessment 2009," National Drug Threat Summary, <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs31/31379/summary.htm#Top> (accessed 12 October 2011).

¹¹Beittel, 25.

¹²Ibid., 1.

¹³Ibid., 3.

¹⁴Ibid., 4.

¹⁵Ibid., 10.

¹⁶Ibid., 11.

¹⁷Bob Killebrew and Jennifer Bernal, *Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels and U.S. National Security* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010), 44.

¹⁸U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 4.

¹⁹R. Chuck Mason, *Securing America's Borders: The Role of the Military* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 1.

²⁰Ibid., 24.

²¹U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), xxi.

²²Joint Publication 1-02, 55.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 79.

²⁵U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), II-6.

²⁶Ibid., 81.

²⁷Joint Publication 1-02, 78

²⁸Ibid., 82.

²⁹Ibid., 84.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 1-54.

³²The White House, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 1.

³³Joint Publication 3-24, II-10.

³⁴Joint Publication 1-02, 134.

³⁵Ibid., 167.

³⁶Ibid., 177.

³⁷U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), x.

³⁸Joint Publication 1-02, 203.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Joint Publication 3-0, xi.

⁴¹Joint Publication 5-0, xx.

⁴²Joint Publication 1-02, 252.

⁴³The White House, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 52.

⁴⁴Joint Publication 1-02, 246.

⁴⁵U.S. Northern Command, “About U.S. NORTHCOM: Posse Comitatus Act,” http://www.northcom.mil/about/history_education/posse.html (accessed 17 September 2011).

⁴⁶Joint Publication 1-02, 301.

⁴⁷Beittel, 5.

⁴⁸Joint Publication 1-02, 246.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify potential U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat DTOs and stabilize Northern Mexico. This chapter has seven sections. The first section explains gaps and commonalities among all literature associated with this study. The second section discusses material pertaining to the history of Mexican drug trafficking and events that have shaped the existing situation. The next three sections discuss literature about the following military operations in Afghanistan: security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations. The sixth section discusses current United States doctrine with respect to the range and scope of military operations, and the last section discusses other sources of literature.

Gaps and Commonalities in Literature

There are gaps in literature that cover the application of the U.S. military in Mexico. Few sources consider the U.S. military instrument of national power in addressing Mexican instability. For example, Agnes Schaefer, Benjamin Bahney, and K. Jack Riley's, *Security in Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options*, outline three U.S. policy options to improve the security in Mexico. These policy options are Strategic Partnership, Status Quo, and Retrenchment. Although a few of their recommendations include efforts to support reform, build institutions, cooperate with Mexican law enforcement agencies, and isolate the U.S. from Mexico, none of the three options incorporate the military instrument of national power.

In the Congressional Research Service report *Securing America's Borders: The Role of the Military*, R. Chuck Mason explains the restrictions and authorizations of Department of Defense along the U.S. side of the border. He includes details of Operation Jump Start enacted by President George W. Bush which authorized 6,000 national guard troops to support the border patrol along the U.S. and Mexico border; however, Mason does not address the employment of Department of Defense within the country of Mexico. In another Congressional Research Service report *U.S. Mexican Security Cooperation: the Merida Initiative and Beyond*, Clare Seelke and Kristin M. Finklea outline efforts by the U.S. government to assist Mexico's fight against DTO operations. These efforts include \$1.5 billion provided through the Merida Initiative to the Mexican government between FY2008 and FY2010 for training and equipping Mexican military and police combating DTOs. Although the U.S. is providing assistance to the Mexican government with money and training, the Merida Initiative does not include the use of the U.S. military in Mexico.

Additionally, the 2011 *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* published by the Office of National Drug Control Policy refined the Merida Initiative to include four goals of the new "Beyond Merida Initiative": disrupting and dismantling organized criminal organizations, institutionalizing reforms to sustain rule of law and respect for human rights, creating a 21st century border, and building strong and resilient communities.¹ The use of the U.S. military in Mexico was not considered to support any of the goals outlined in the "Beyond Merida Initiative."

Many options are explored in existing literature for deterrence, monetary intervention, or training and equipping Mexican security forces to combat or prevent

Mexico's problems with DTOs. This study fills the gap in literature related to the use of the United States military instrument of national power in Mexico—assuming the concurrence of the Mexican government (see assumptions in chapter 1).

All of the literature reviewed address major problems with DTOs in Mexico, and most notably in Northern Mexico. The primary commonality among all the literature is the DTO's struggle to control plazas. In Kristen M. Finklea, William J. Krouse, and Marc R. Rosenblum's *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence* the authors state that “the nature of the conflict between the Mexican DTOs in Mexico has manifested itself, in part, as a struggle for control of the smuggling routes into the United States.”² Similarly, the DTO's “turf war” over plazas is highlighted in the Rand Corporation study *Security in Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options* and June S. Beittel's authoritative work *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, both of which illuminate DTO competition for trafficking routes. In the same report, Beittel addresses another commonality among all literature: the threat of DTOs against the Mexican government.

DTOs have targeted and continue to target Mexican government officials, police, military, and federal agents as outlined in the 2007 Congressional Research Service report *Mexico's Drug Cartels* by Colleen W. Cook. More recently the Strategic Studies Institute 2009 report by Hal Brands, *Mexico's Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy*, begins with recounting a gruesome event in April 2006 in which the severed heads of two police officers were left in front of a municipal building in Acapulco. The heads were left with “a hand-written note reading, ‘So that you learn some respect,’ a message meant to make clear that the cartel would brook no interference from the

authorities.”³ In the same SSI report, Brands offers additional insight into the DTO’s challenge against government officials by explaining *plata o plomo*, which means money or lead.⁴ This technique is as simple as it sounds—either government officials co-opt with DTOs or they will find themselves targeted and killed by DTOs.

History of Mexican Drug Trafficking and Current Situation

Considerable literature exists on the history and present situation of Mexican drug trafficking. Sources of literature vary from off-the-shelf books to government agency publications. An essential work, published by the Office of National Drug Control Policy, is the 2011 *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*. This reference covers the U.S. perspective on the flow of illegal drugs, money, and weapons across the United States/Mexican border.⁵ Besides the Office of National Drug Control Policy, one government agency that provides the most current and useful information is the Congressional Research Service. In 2011, June S. Beittel published *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, and in 2007 Colleen W. Cook published *Mexico’s Drug Cartels*. Both Beittel’s and Cook’s works were written for the Congressional Research Service and offer significant insight into the problem with DTOs in Mexico, including background and identification of the major Mexican DTOs, casualty estimates, locations of violence, Mexico’s strategy against DTOs, and trends. Another Congressional Research Service publication is Kristen M. Finklea, William J. Krouse, and Marc R. Rosenblum’s *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence*, which provides insight into the United States drug market and the relationship between drug markets and violence.

One essential work establishes relevance regarding the current situation and actions taken on the U.S. side of the border. Army General (Retired) Barry McCaffrey and Major General (Retired) Robert Scales released their report, *Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment*, that outlines the current state of DTO trafficking and violence in Texas and the state's response to it. This work is particularly important because it provides a model for U.S. border states to combat DTO operations that appears to have achieved positive results. Additionally, the Texas model may complement U.S. military operations south of the border in Northern Mexico.

Noteworthy publications on drug trafficking include theses from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. U.S. Marshal David R. Campbell's thesis *Evaluating the Impact of Drug Trafficking Organizations on the Stability of the Mexican State* provides insight into the stability issues of the Mexican state resulting from drug trafficking. In his thesis *Drug Trafficking within Mexico a Law Enforcement Issue or Insurgency*, U.S. Army Major Terry Neil Hilderbrand facilitates understanding of the complex issues that surround drug trafficking. He concludes that the drug trafficking situation in Mexico is clearly an insurgency.

Some notable secondary sources about the history and current situation of Mexican drug trafficking that will be explored during the course of this study are Sylvia Longmire's *Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug Wars* and Jerry Langton's *Gangland: The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels from El Paso to Vancouver*. These books examine the scope and depth of drug trafficking and DTOs. Two additional detailed accounts of the drug trafficking problem that will be analyzed in this study are

Ion Grillo's *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency*, and George W. Grayson's *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*

Security Cooperation

Many published sources address security cooperation in Afghanistan. Of the relevant literature, books on the history that led to the Taliban's rise to power and monographs examining the U.S. role in security cooperation are particularly valuable. Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, is particularly helpful in understanding the events which set the conditions for the Taliban and al-Qaeda's rise to power. A work that will be explored during the course of this study is Antonio Guistozzi's *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, which will give additional insight into the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Sources that cover specific elements of security cooperation including counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and foreign internal defense will also be included in this research. Two books that explore counterterrorism are Russell Howard, Reid Sawyer, and Natasha Bajema's *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment, Readings and Interpretations* and Yonah Alexander and Jose Maria Aznar's *Counterterrorism Strategies: Successes and Failures of Six Nations*. Works about counterinsurgency that will be included in this research are Seth G. Jones' two books *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* and *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. Research on foreign internal defense in Afghanistan that will be included in this study are Anthony H. Cordesman, Adam Mausner, and David Kasten's

Winning in Afghanistan: Creating Effective Afghan Security Forces and Afghanistan's Local War: Building Local Defense Forces by Seth G. Jones and Arturo Munoz.

Limited Contingency Operations

Literature studied about limited contingency operations in Afghanistan will focus on one specific element: Strikes and raids. Two works that will be studied are *Weapon of Choice: United States Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* by Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp from the Combat Studies Institute and Steve Call's *Danger Close: Tactical Air Controllers in Afghanistan and Iraq*.

Major Operations

Major operations within Afghanistan provide insight to combating organizations that do not recognize the sovereignty of the host nation government and operate in areas of sanctuary. In this respect, and on some occasions, DTOs operate similar to the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Literature on most major operations in Afghanistan is limited and primarily available through the World Wide Web. However, several books on the more widely known Operation Anaconda will be included in this research, namely: *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* by Sean Naylor and *Roberts Ridge: A Story of Courage and Sacrifice on Takur Ghar Mountain, Afghanistan* by Malcolm MacPherson. *Weapon of Choice: United States Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* by Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp from the Combat Studies Institute briefly covers Operation Rhino.

Military Operations Doctrine and Theory

U.S. military doctrine covers many aspects of how to employ the U.S. joint force, and provides the framework through which military operations are applied. Several Department of Defense publications also cover the range and scope of military operations. These publications include Joint Publication Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, and Joint Publication 3-26, *Counterterrorism*. U.S. doctrinal publications that cover planning and employment of the joint force are Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* and Joint Publication 3-07.4, *Joint Counterdrug Operations*.

Other Sources of Literature

New information is continuously published on the subject of Mexican drug violence and border security because Mexican DTO operations and strategies continue to evolve. For this reason, articles from recent news sources, government agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, and U.S. Army and Navy War Colleges offer relevancy to this study. These sources of literature will be referenced throughout this thesis, but are not significant enough to mention in this literature review.

Although there are many options explored in literature to combat or prevent Mexican DTOs and their spreading violence, this study fills the gap in literature that does not explore the use of the United States military instrument of national power to defeat Mexican DTOs. The literature reviewed in this study explores the history of the DTO problem in Mexico and the range of military operations available that the U.S. military

can potentially apply to combat the problem. All of the literature reviewed will be applied through an applicable research methodology described in chapter 3.

¹The White House, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 55.

²Kristen M. Finklea, William J. Krouse, and Marc R. Rosenblum, *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 2.

³Hal Brands, *Mexico's Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 16.

⁵R. Gil Kerlikowske, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* (Washington, DC: Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2011), i.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify potential U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat DTOs and stabilize Northern Mexico. This chapter has two sections that outline the manner of data collection and method of research.

Data Collection

The manner in which data will be collected for this qualitative study is through literature review. Data collected from literature will be acquired through books, governmental publications, congressional research documents, historical documents, and scholarly articles. All literature obtained will be synthesized and compared to obtain answers to questions raised in this study that will ultimately answer the primary research question. Any quantitative data obtained will be used to bring historical clarity to this study and assist in forming trends and identifying potential gaps in understanding. This study will not incorporate opinion editorials. Following the analysis of all relevant data, field manuals and joint publications will provide the framework to ensure validity and accuracy of any recommendations and conclusions.

Method

Four study methods will be used to analyze all research data: exploratory, case, center of gravity analysis, and operational design. All four methods will be used to prove or disprove the relevancy of elements of military operations conducted by the joint force in Northern Mexico.

Through the exploratory study method, the following secondary research question will be answered: What is the current situation in Mexico? The exploratory study method will analyze historical and current data on DTOs and DTO operations in Mexico. This method will also prove or disprove that DTOs are operating like an insurgency in Mexico.

Through case studies of military operations in Afghanistan, this research will explore the relevance of specific elements of military operations if applied in Northern Mexico. The case study method will be used to answer the secondary research question: What Military Operations in Afghanistan apply to Northern Mexico?

For several reasons, Afghanistan was chosen as an appropriate and relevant case study when considering U.S. military application in Northern Mexico. Similar to the Bonn Agreement which created ISAF in Afghanistan, this study suggests that a similar bilateral agreement or Mexican government invitation must occur prior to U.S. military involvement in Mexico. Additionally, the U.S. military in Afghanistan conducts joint operations with Afghan security forces. These joint operations offer a recent model to study and apply with the U.S. military and Mexican security and military forces in Mexico. Finally, the entire range of military operations has been conducted in Afghanistan to include security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations, all of which are considered in this study.

Three specific major operations in Afghanistan—Operation Rhino, Operation Anaconda, and Operation Moshtarak—will be examined for several reasons. Operation Rhino was the first major operation in the Afghanistan campaign which included 3rd battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment's airborne insertion to seize a desert landing strip south

of Kandahar. If a similar airborne insertion is required in Mexico based on the findings of this study, Operation Rhino is a familiar major operation that will offer a recent parallel construct. Operation Anaconda is probably the most widely known major operation in the past ten years and offers insight into the planning, coordination, and execution of major operations focused on eliminating a select few individuals. Through the course of this study a similar operation may be needed to target key individuals or leaders of DTOs in Mexico. Operation Moshtarak is a lesser-known Afghan led operation in the Afghanistan campaign in which a combined force of Afghans and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) targeted insurgents that refused to recognize the government. Operation Moshtarak offers excellent insight into a major joint operation led by the host nation, and is similar to an operation that may need to be conducted in conjunction with the Mexican Armed Forces targeting DTOs.

In order to determine the DTO operational level center of gravity, a center of gravity analysis will be performed. The center of gravity analysis consists of four steps:

1. Determine the enemy's critical capability, the absolutely essential function the enemy's system performs. The system might have several capabilities, but not all are critical in every situation.
2. Identify the enemy's critical capability's source of power, which is the enemy's center of gravity.
3. Identify the center of gravity's critical requirements.
4. Identify the critical requirements or components that are vulnerable to attack or disruption. These [critical vulnerabilities] become targets to attack or are requirements for the enemy to protect.¹

Identifying the center of gravity and its critical factors are essential to understand prior to applying the range of military operations in Northern Mexico.

Through the operational design concept outlined in Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, all data collected on the current situation in Mexico will be synthesized to identify military operations that are appropriate for the U.S. military to conduct in Northern Mexico.² The operational design template used in this study consists of four steps which have questions associated with each step. The first step defines the current operational environment and answers the question, “what is going on in the environment?” In this step aspects of the current situation in Mexico will be explored. The second step defines the desired operational environment and answers the question, “what do we want the environment to look like?” The third step defines the problem and answers the question, “where conceptually should we act to achieve our desired end state?” This step considers areas of tension, competition, opportunities, and challenges that must be addressed to transform current conditions to achieve the desired end state. The fourth and final step is the operational approach and answers the question, “how do we get from the current state to our desired end state?” In this step possible combinations of actions are explored to reach the desired end state. Through the final step of operational approach the specific type or types of military operations will be selected along with possible lines of effort or lines of operation to achieve the desired end state.

Through these research methods, both secondary research questions will be answered to ultimately answer the primary question: What options can the United States military employ to defeat Mexican DTOs in Northern Mexico and prevent border violence from affecting United States citizens? This study’s chapter 4, which follows, presents this analysis.

¹Dale C. Eikmeier, “Center of Gravity Analysis,” *Military Review* (2004): 4.

²U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), III-2 – III-18.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify potential U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat DTOs and stabilize Northern Mexico. This chapter has two sections and associated subsections that analyze the research data collected. The first section covers the history and current situation in Mexico and analyzes what led to the rise of DTOs, the importance of *plazas*, DTO centers of gravity, DTO recruitment, DTO insurgency style operations, and Mexican government involvement. The second section covers military operations in Afghanistan and their application in Mexico. The second section specifically analyzes security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations.

Section One: History and Current Situation in Mexico

The Rise of DTOs

The rise of DTOs in Mexico is complex and dates back more than a century. It is rooted in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains where men would smuggle opium produced from poppy seeds for money. The Sierra Madre spans 932 miles from the Arizona, Texas, and Mexican border through the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua. The states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua are considered Mexico's Golden Triangle because they produce so much opium and marijuana (see figure 3).¹ Within the Golden Triangle, Sinaloa remains the cradle of DTOs and was the birthplace of Mexico's oldest DTO: the Sinaloa Cartel.² Many generations of traffickers from the Sierra Madre established international networks that generated billions of dollars in

revenue from drug trafficking and in turn kept many families free from poverty.³ Over time several Mexicans involved in the drug trade from the Sierra Madre migrated to the Mexican border cities of Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, which created a link between the Golden Triangle and the U.S. and Mexico border.⁴ It was no surprise that Sinaloans pressed hard into the opium trade as the state was ripe with poppies and lawlessness and the United States offered a market for opium only 360 miles to the north.⁵



Figure 3. Mexico’s Golden Triangle (depicted in outlined area)

Source: June S. Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 7.

The opium trade from Mexico to the U.S. went through highs and lows all the way to the 1960s until the U.S. entered an era in which its citizens began experimenting with an increasing variety of mind-altering drugs. Within this era, a newly formed market for marijuana overshadowed the opium market. Therefore, the market drove an increase

in production of marijuana and the Sierra Madre offered a perfect location for locals to begin growing marijuana plants for profit. While marijuana had been used in Mexico continuously since the days of Spanish rule, a span of 300 years, the new U.S. market brought a financial opportunity for poor Mexican farmers. In an interview in Iacono Grillo's *El Narco*, a man named Efrain explained his family's decision to start growing and selling marijuana. "We had some cows and grew corn and limes and some other crops. But it was still hard to get enough money to feed everyone. We were nine brothers and sisters, and my dad also looked after the children of his brother, who had been killed in a feud. My dad was lazy, but clever. He would look for ways to make money that took less effort and brought in better rewards. So we tried marijuana."⁶ Efrain's family highlights the reason why marijuana was so abundantly trafficked across the U.S. and Mexico border: the U.S. generated a market for it and that market paid extremely well.

The U.S. market for marijuana remained strong through the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1970s the Colombians began building up a market for cocaine in the United States, using the same trade routes. U.S. elected officials realized their nation had a drug problem that needed to be controlled. For this reason, U.S. President Richard Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration and attempted to shut down the U.S. and Mexico border starting with Operation Intercept.⁷ The operation's aim was to search anyone entering the United States by foot or vehicle at points along the border. Additionally, "in between posts, the U.S. Army set up mobile radar units, while drug agents patrolled in rented planes."⁸ Even though some drugs were seized, Operation Intercept was a failure and ended after 17 days because the roads leading into the U.S. were so clogged that produce was rotting on trucks and Mexican workers could not make

it to their jobs across the border.⁹ Meanwhile, the Colombians were setting the conditions to pump billions of dollars worth of cocaine into the United States.

Late in the 1970s and early 1980s cocaine gained traction in discos across the United States. Additionally, motion picture stars, recording artists, and even professional athletes were enjoying the energy boost of cocaine.¹⁰ “In 1981, *Time* magazine ran a front cover calling cocaine THE ALL AMERICAN DRUG.”¹¹ With the cocaine market fully established in the U.S., Colombian gangster Pablo Escobar, from the Medellin Cartel, began building his personal nine billion dollar empire by trafficking cocaine through Florida and California.¹² The Medellin Cartel smuggled cocaine 900 miles across the Atlantic Ocean from the shores of Colombia to the environs of Florida in planes where they would drop the cocaine in the ocean to be picked up and ferried to the Florida coast in speedboats.¹³ With the increase of cocaine flowing into south Florida, the crime rate also increased. Miami-Dade County reported 600 homicides in 1981 up from 200 just five years earlier in 1976.¹⁴ The homicide rate in Miami-Dade County gained the attention of government officials and eventually sparked the interest of U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

In 1982 President Reagan established the South Florida Task Force to address the Colombian drug trafficking problem. The South Florida Task Force was comprised of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Army and Navy, and was led by U.S. Vice President George H. W. Bush.¹⁵ The Federal Bureau of Investigation focused on cash flow into Florida banks and the army and navy conducted surveillance and seizure of cocaine shipments.¹⁶ The South Florida Task Force was a huge success and within eight months cocaine seizures were up by 56 percent.¹⁷ The Medellin Cartel lost millions of

dollars and needed to rethink its strategy to get cocaine into the United States. Mexico was an obvious choice for transporting cocaine from Colombia to the U.S. as it sits between Colombia and the United States, the largest producer and consumer of cocaine.¹⁸

The Medellin Cartel sought out Honduran born Matta Ballestros who had previously and successfully trafficked Colombian cocaine into California with Alberto Sicilia Falcon's Tijuana based trafficking operation.¹⁹ Falcon had since been imprisoned, so Matta turned to relationships he had formed with Sinaloan gangsters in the heart of Mexico's Golden Triangle.²⁰ The Sinaloans already had trafficking routes into the U.S., so Matta and the Medellin Cartel simply needed to get the cocaine to the Sinaloans to carry into the U.S. so they could start making money again. First Matta had to find the right person for the job and then the Colombians had to negotiate with the Mexicans. Jay Bergman from the DEA describes the initial negotiations:

The first stage of negotiations was 'We're the Colombians, we own this product, we own distribution of cocaine in the United States. Mexicans have got your weed and your black-tar heroin. Cocaine distribution from the sunny shores of Los Angeles to the mean streets of Baltimore, that is our territory. That is what we do. What we are going to do for you is we want to negotiate with you. We are going to provide you cocaine and you are going to deliver it from somewhere in Mexico to somewhere in the United States, and you are going to turn it back over to us, to our cartel emissaries.' That is the way it started out.²¹

Deals were made to traffic the Colombian cocaine between the Medellin Cartel and Sinaloan born Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. Felix Gallardo, who ran what was later called the Guadalajara Cartel, is still considered to be the godfather of the drug trade in Mexico.²² Felix Gallardo, with the help of Matta, pushed cocaine to distributors in Arizona, California, and New York and grew his operation so large that he was suspected of personally making \$5 million per week.²³ The size of the operation may have led newly elected Mexican President Carlos Salinas to order the arrest of Felix Gallardo in

1989 because Felix Gallardo was becoming too powerful. Regardless of the reason, after Felix Gallardo was arrested his Guadalajara Cartel was broken up into three separate cartels: the Tijuana Cartel, Juarez Cartel, and Sinaloa-Sonora Cartel.²⁴ The break up of the Guadalajara Cartel into the aforementioned cartels was a mutual agreement among the remaining underbosses in a meeting in Acapulco arranged by Felix Gallardo from prison. Each underboss was granted a specific *plaza* to traffic drugs and tax other smugglers.²⁵

The three separate cartels, or DTOs, continued to split and morph because of greed and the struggle for power. This struggle continues today. Currently there are seven major DTOs that operate within Mexico: the Gulf Cartel, Sinaloa Federation, Beltran-Leyva Organization, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization also known as the Juarez Cartel, Arellano Felix Organization also known as the Tijuana Cartel, La Familia de Michoacan, and Los Zetas (see figure 4).²⁶ Although alliances may be temporary and fluid, most of the major DTOs have formed two main alliances. One alliance is comprised of the Juarez Cartel, Tijuana Cartel, Los Zetas and the Beltran-Leyva Cartel. The other alliance includes the former rivals Gulf Cartel and Sinaloa Federation.²⁷ The alliances formed by DTOs demonstrate that although they are independent organizations they will put aside some differences and unite for a common cause. These alliances are important to consider when considering U.S. military action in Northern Mexico. As one DTO may present a threat to another DTO, and those actions cause DTOs to unite against a common enemy such as Los Zetas to the Sinaloa Federation, the presence of the U.S. military in Northern Mexico may cause all seven DTOs to unite.

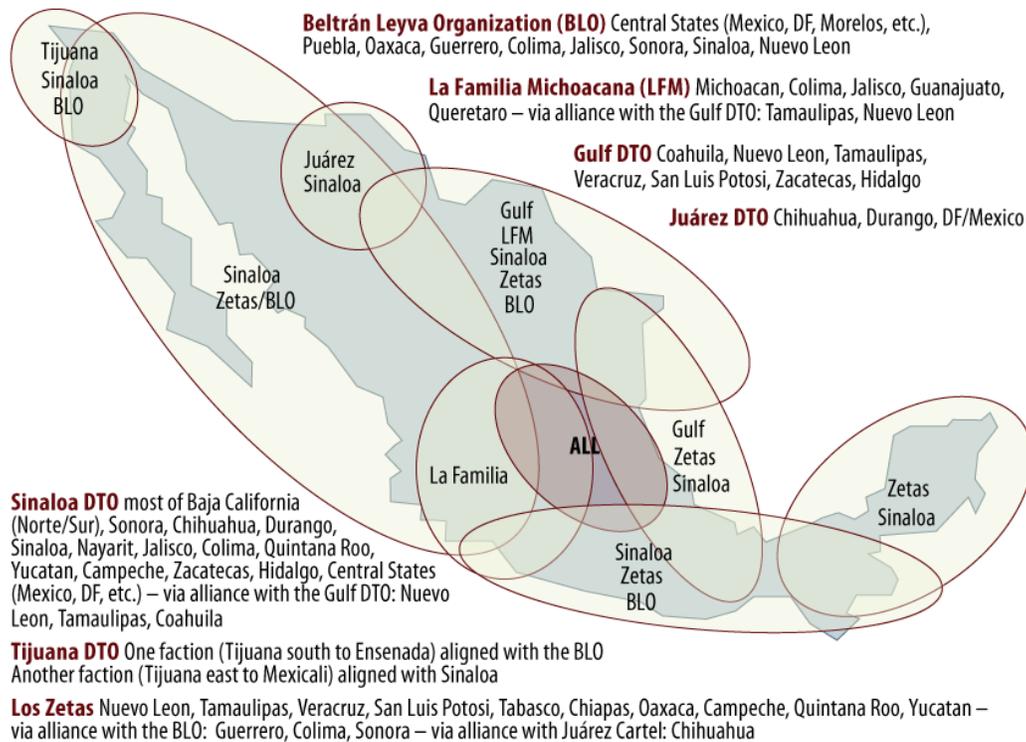


Figure 4. DTO Areas of Operation

Source: June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 7.

The history and organization of DTOs in Mexico demonstrate several interesting characteristics about them. DTOs are learning organizations that adjust their structure and operation based on conditions that affect their profits. After DTO bosses started going to jail in both Mexico and the U.S., the way in which operations ran changed. A unique example is the corporatism that has evolved among DTOs. Through corporatism, DTO leaders are able to operate in safe locations that receive assistance and accommodation from local officials, which enables them to manage regional offices in cities along the U.S. and Mexico border from afar.²⁸ This structure keeps the leaders from being captured and possibly extradited to the United States.

Another example of DTOs demonstrating their learning ability is their experience with Colombian cocaine. DTOs realized that they could expand their business from trafficking locally farmed drugs into the U.S. to a larger and more lucrative cocaine trafficking operation. Their partnership with organizations on an international level illustrates that they not only have the capability to seek cooperation outside of Mexico, but they are also willing to find alternate means to achieve their goals. Therefore, what is currently known about specific DTO operations may change as the U.S. military, in conjunction with the Mexican military, exploits their weaknesses.

Perhaps the most important realization of DTOs is their leadership or command and control structure. Unlike a traditional army, DTOs do not necessarily take their lead from one single person. Their command and control structure is cellular, making it difficult to stop the organization by merely capturing or killing its leader. History has shown the cellular structure to be true as previously highlighted when the Guadalajara Cartel broke up after the arrest of Felix Gallardo into three separate cartels but still continued to function. The cellular command and control structure was revealed again when Arturo Beltran Leyva, the leader of Beltran-Leyva Organization, was arrested and his brother Hector took over the operation.²⁹ Other considerations for the organization when DTO leaders are captured or killed are the eruption of extreme violence to fill the power vacuum and the temporary weakening of the DTO.

In describing the violence resulting from the elimination of a leader, one observer refers to 'internal vacancy chains' that result when an organization is squeezed by the government and there is great uncertainty about how the leader will be replaced (either through internal succession or external replacement). In some cases, the weakened DTO will be attacked by other DTOs in a 'feeding frenzy' until the uncertainty of succession is resolved.³⁰

In weighing U.S. military operations to target DTO leaders there must be consideration for the consequences. While temporarily weakening a DTO can create opportunities, extreme violence within and against the DTO can cause unintended civilian casualties.

Violence that occurs from targeting DTO leadership may occur, but does not occur in all cases. However, there is one issue that creates extreme violence between DTOs on a regular basis. This issue is DTO competition for trafficking routes or *plazas* into the United States.

Plazas

Formation of *plazas* was the most critical event that ultimately fractured the relationship between DTOs. In 1982, as the South Florida Task Force shut down trafficking routes that flowed through Florida, Colombian cartels began subcontracting an increasing number of shipments to Mexican DTOs. Mexican DTOs were already strong despite the break-up of the Guadalajara Cartel, so instead of merely ferrying cocaine for the Colombian cartels they eventually took over nearly all cocaine trafficking into the United States.³¹ A December 2010 report from the U.S. Department of State cites that more than 90 percent of the cocaine that enters the U.S. flows through Mexico.³² With the amount of cocaine that pours through *plazas* across the U.S. and Mexico border, DTOs have a vested interest in protecting these routes and thus protecting their profits.

The importance of *plazas* to DTOs cannot be overstated. These routes are the primary conduits for getting drugs into the U.S. and money out. To protect these *plazas*, DTOs use military style tactics such as “command and control, logistics, intelligence, information operations and the application of increasingly deadly firepower.”³³ Their

tactics have progressed from simple shoot-outs on the streets to all out paramilitary style operations complete with armored vehicles and robust automatic weapons (see figure 5).



Figure 5. Paramilitary Style Weapons

Source: Border Security Operations Center, *Nuevo Laredo Cartel Battle* (Department of Public Safety, Texas Rangers, 2010), 13.

U.S. military operations to target *plazas* may need to be considered early in the intervention. However, it is ineffective to mass a military force, along the U.S. and Mexico border, in an attempt to prevent trafficking along *plazas* because there is not enough manpower to do so. Additionally, DTOs have demonstrated their ability to adapt to changing conditions and shift routes to avoid detection. If routes shift and DTOs use different *plazas*, it is possible that paramilitary style operations outside of normal or expected trafficking routes may be an indicator that *plazas* have changed.

DTO Centers of Gravity

The effectiveness of U.S. military operations in Northern Mexico is contingent upon targeting the most critical component of DTOs. Viewed from the perspective of Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operataion Planning*, this entity would be considered the center of gravity and possesses the ability to perform the action that achieves the end state of DTOs. To ultimately understand what the center of gravity is for a DTO, the end state and methods to achieve that end state must be examined. Only after these are determined can other critical factors be applied such as critical capabilities, critical requirements, and critical vulnerabilities.

Although ends and ways exist at both the strategic and operational levels of war, exploring DTO ends and ways above the operational level of war can be misleading. Whereas strategic ends and ways infer theater, national, and multinational connotations, operational ends and ways are generally, but not exclusively, tied to military or security organizations or entities.³⁴ However, acknowledging the strategic end state and center of gravity of DTOs assists in analyzing end state and center of gravity at the operational level. At the strategic level the DTO end state is autonomy. Autonomy enables DTOs to perform criminal activities in order to generate revenue. The DTO strategic center of gravity is the top leader of the organization. The leader directs activities and operations to achieve the end state.

The operational end state pursued by DTOs is to generate revenue. DTO actions are rooted in creating opportunities to generate money for the organization. From control of *plazas* to bribery of government officials, revenue is the common denominator behind all DTO actions. The ways, or sequence of actions, DTOs perform in revenue generation

are trafficking drugs into the United States. Therefore, the end state of DTOs is the generation of revenue, and the way in which they achieve this end state is through drug trafficking. The fundamental understanding of DTO ends and ways will illuminate which critical factors are connected to DTOs and DTO operations. Once critical factors are explored the center of gravity and its vulnerabilities will emerge.

Actions DTOs perform that are essential to generate revenue are critical capabilities. There are five critical capabilities that DTOs must perform to generate revenue: influence government officials, influence the population, control *plazas*, conduct paramilitary operations, and transport drugs (see figure 6). Through the influence of government officials, DTOs create areas of sanctuary from which to operate freely. In some cases DTOs corrupt government officials, like Mexican law enforcement agents, to perform violent actions against other DTOs.³⁵ DTOs influence the population to create compliance or cooperation. They sway the population to work for DTOs or allow freedom of movement within towns and cities. Influence can occur through handouts of money and food to threatening families of young men in order to coerce them into working for DTOs. The critical capabilities of control of *plazas* and paramilitary operations are tied together. Controlling *plazas* establishes the conduit to smuggle drugs into the United States, and the conduct of paramilitary operations is how DTOs control *plazas*. The final critical capability is the transportation of drugs. Without this capability revenue generation would not occur, as trafficking drugs is the reason these organizations exist.

One entity within DTOs has the ability to perform all of the critical capabilities: the enforcement arm (see figure 6). Although there are other entities that are extremely

important for DTOs to operate, (e.g., leaders, popular support, weapons) these entities cannot perform all of the critical capabilities or use all of the critical requirements. Only the enforcement arm of DTOs can do or use these critical factors. Therefore, the enforcement arm of DTOs is their center of gravity, and all DTOs have some form of enforcers. For example, the reason the Gulf Cartel rose to dominate the drug trade in Nuevo Laredo is because of its partnership with an enforcer gang known as Los Zetas. The Los Zetas were comprised of former Mexican military special forces from the Special Air Mobile Force Group.³⁶ Once Los Zetas were introduced to drug trafficking, their level of training and advanced weapons gave them a dominant advantage over other DTOs. Enforcers are the soldiers on the ground performing the actions that generate revenue.

To target the center of gravity, its critical requirements must be considered. These requirements are essential resources and means that allow the center of gravity to perform functions of the critical capabilities.³⁷ Of all possible requirements, the following are critical requirements: population support (whether coerced or compliant), sanctuary, storage of material, transportation assets, recruitment, security, leadership, production and acquisition of drugs, relationships within the U.S., and weapons (see figure 6). From these critical requirements there are some that are “vulnerable to attack or disruption” which are the critical vulnerabilities.³⁸

DTO critical vulnerabilities are population support, sanctuary, leadership, and recruitment. If the enforcement arm of DTOs does not have support of the population they will lack the manpower to produce and package drugs, and they will lose the ability to move freely within towns and cities. Without sanctuary DTOs lose the ability to store

drugs, protect key individuals, and maintain necessary equipment. Although DTO leadership is cellular in structure, when leaders are removed from power DTOs become unstable and vulnerable to attack. Recruitment is the means by which DTOs maintain and increase in strength. Degrading DTO recruitment would create an organization incapable of regenerating manpower. When considering the application of the U.S. military in Northern Mexico, these critical vulnerabilities will become objectives.

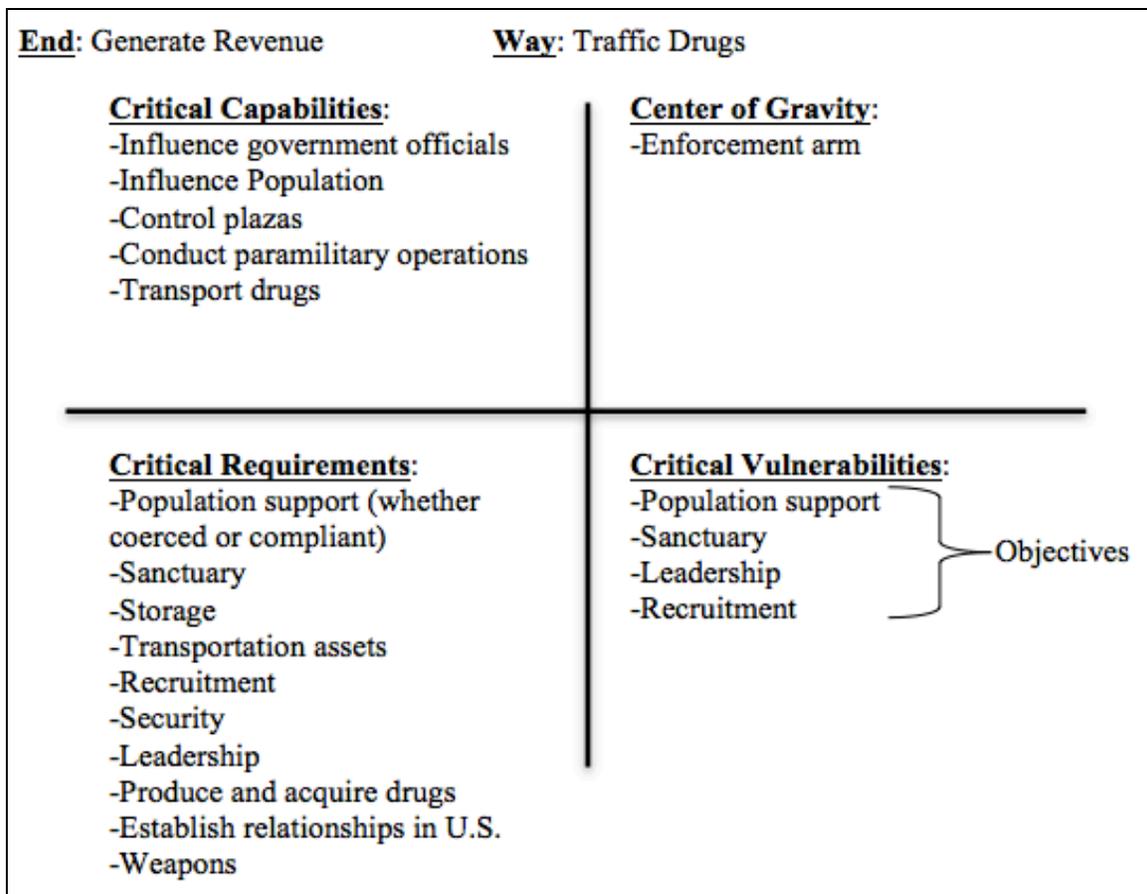


Figure 6. DTO Center of Gravity Analysis

Source: Created by author.

DTO Recruitment

DTO recruitment is typically successful because there is a large gap between the rich and poor in Mexico. Employment opportunities offered by DTOs dwarf those of regular paying jobs. Thus, DTO recruitment has increased by promising better wages and food for families (see figure 7). The CIA World Factbook states that the percentage of Mexicans living below the poverty line is 18.2 percent based on the food-based definition of living below the poverty line, and in 2008 47 percent of the population lived below the asset-based definition of living below the poverty line.³⁹ According to the United States Agency for International Development “over 40% of the country’s population is poor (living on less than \$2 per day), while close to 18% is extremely poor (living on less than \$1 per day).”⁴⁰ These statistics illuminate the disparity between those with and without access to money and means to live in Mexico making DTO recruitment highly enticing. For this reason, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor is a long-term strategy that will eventually render DTOs ineffective.⁴¹ However, establishing programs that merely add to the wealth of the established few in power with the hope that they will distribute money to the less fortunate has proven ineffective.⁴² Assisting Mexico “generate employment and increase opportunities is key to ultimately cutting off the flow of recruits to criminal cartels.”⁴³ In conjunction with U.S. military efforts in Northern Mexico, it is clear that intergovernmental organizations such as United States Agency for International Development must increase monetary efforts in Mexico beyond the almost \$70 million projected for 2012.⁴⁴ In comparison, DTO profits within Mexico from drug trafficking range from \$25 to \$40 billion, almost 5 percent of the Mexican Gross Domestic Product. Without a strategy that is focused on narrowing the gap between the

rich and poor, coupled with security for the Mexican population, DTO recruitment will continue to grow.



Figure 7. Los Zetas recruiting poster that reads in part, “Operations group Los Zetas wants you military or ex-military. We offer you good pay, food, and attention to your family. Do not suffer abuse and hunger anymore. We do not feed you Maruchan noodles.”

Source: TRADOC Intelligence Support Activity, “Worse than Iraq-Decision Point: The Potential Escalation of Force in Northern Mexico and on the US Border” (Powerpoint presentation, Operational Environment Analysis Team and A Foreign Military Studies Office–Border Security Team, 2008), 19.

DTO Insurgency Style Operations

Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, defines an insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority. Insurgency can also refer to the

group itself.”⁴⁵ The purpose of this sub-section is not to confirm or deny that DTOs are an insurgency. While it is widely debated whether or not DTOs are an actual insurgency, the purpose of this sub-section is to analyze aspects of insurgency to validate that insurgent style tactics and operations are being conducted by DTOs.

Violence has increased in Northern Mexico as DTOs battle each other over control of *plazas* and fight against the government for the ability to operate autonomously. Increasingly complex attacks, use of armored vehicles, integration of explosives, and targeting of government officials has led Mexican President Calderon to state that DTO behavior has “become a challenge to the state, an attempt to replace the state.”⁴⁶ Similarly, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented, “DTOs in Mexico may be ‘morphing into or making common cause with what we would call an insurgency.’”⁴⁷ The comments from Clinton and Calderon point to actions that DTOs are performing which are characteristic of an insurgency.

Similar to an insurgency, DTOs threaten government officials with violence in an attempt to coerce freedom of operation. It is believed that some DTOs like the Beltran Leyva Organization have “infiltrated the upper levels of the Mexican government to help maintain its strong presence and control.”⁴⁸ Additionally, DTOs

delegitimize the Mexican government by providing employment and essential services to the population. In areas that the Mexican government is weak and unable to provide those services to the population is where the cartels have the most leverage and are the strongest. Inserting themselves as the leadership, voice, and protector of the people, cartels easily gain the support of the population.⁴⁹

The infiltration into the Mexican government and establishment of leadership and protection at the local level is similar to a shadow government. DTOs have shown signs similar to a shadow government, which provides support to the population, competes

with the existing government, and attempts to convince the population that the existing government is the reason for remaining grievances.⁵⁰

The largest commonality between an insurgency and DTO operations is the rampant violence. DTOs have integrated combined arms maneuver that resembles infantry-style tactics. Some DTOs have developed infantry armored fighting vehicles complete with 2.5 centimeter armor plating, air conditioning, gun ports, and turrets.⁵¹ Others have integrated improvised explosive devices demonstrating the subversion aspect of insurgency. Such was the case in July 2010 in Ciudad Juarez when a car bomb was detonated with a cell phone. A message on the wall of an elementary school near the explosion warned that “more car bombs would follow in the next two weeks unless U.S. agents investigated alleged ties between Mexico’s ‘corrupt federal authorities’ and Joaquin ‘El Chapo’ Guzman’s Sinaloa drug cartel, which is fighting for control of the billion-dollar smuggling routes to the United States.”⁵²

While DTOs may or may not be an insurgency, it is clear that they are conducting actions similar to insurgent style operations. Thus, when considering employment of the U.S. military to combat DTOs in Northern Mexico the possibilities of applying one of three operational approaches to counterinsurgency should be measured: direct, balanced, or indirect. Through a direct approach, the force would protect U.S. and Mexico interests while simultaneously attacking DTOs.⁵³ Through the indirect approach the force would attempt to establish security and stability while Mexican forces attack DTOs with only the help of the U.S. military.⁵⁴ The balanced approach is a blend of diplomatic and military efforts where the military effort is secondary to diplomatic efforts.⁵⁵

Mexican Government Involvement

The Mexican government has gone through periods of enabling DTOs as well as periods of all out campaigns against DTOs. During the Institutional Revolutionary Party's rule that spanned 71 years, drug trafficking flourished because the Institutional Revolutionary Party allowed it to happen and in some cases protected the practice.⁵⁶ Therefore, through the 1990s, "arrests and eradication of drug crops took place, but due to the effects of widespread corruption the system was 'characterized by a working relationship between Mexican authorities and the drug lords.'"⁵⁷ After the election of National Action Party candidate Mexican President Vicente Fox in 2000, government officials were no longer able to "ensure the impunity of drug traffickers" because the National Action Party party's form of democratic government did not allow single heads of state to act with as much latitude as they had under the Institutional Revolutionary Party.⁵⁸

While the 2000 election of Mexican President Vicente Fox marked a significant change in the Mexican government's stance towards DTOs, the 2006 election of National Action Party candidate Felipe Calderon and his subsequent partnership with the U.S. in the form of the Merida Initiative gave way to the most significant blow to DTOs. The Merida Initiative appropriated \$1.5 billion to train and equip Mexican military and police forces.

Since taking office in December 2006, President Calderon has made combating drug trafficking and organized crime a top priority of his administration. His government's anticrime strategy has involved (1) carrying out joint police-military operations to support local authorities and citizens; (2) increasing the operational and technological capacities of the state, such as increasing the size of the Federal Police; (3) initiating legal and institutional reforms; (4) strengthening crime prevention programs; and (5) strengthening international cooperation.⁵⁹

With a clear defined strategy and a force better-trained and equipped, President Calderon's strategy has seemed to work because he has weakened some DTOs. However, DTO violence has continued to rise. "According to recent Mexican government estimates, more than 34,500 people have died in violence related to organized crime between January 2007 and December 2010."⁶⁰ While the deployment of the Mexican military against DTOs is the cornerstone of President Calderon's strategy and has subsequently weakened DTOs, his strategy has gained criticism for its inability to reduce DTO crime. "Kidnappings in Mexico have increased by 188 percent since 2007, armed robbery by 47 percent, and extortion by 101 percent."⁶¹ These estimates solidify the United States government's concern over DTO spillover violence and the Mexican government's inability to stop it.⁶² The surge of Mexican military and police forces targeting DTO leadership has proven ineffective as DTO leadership is cellular in structure leaving more violent leaders in charge after other leaders are killed or captured.⁶³ "As the Mexican military has shifted resources to its pursuit of leaders of the DTOs, it appears to have fewer resources to devote to eradication and other programs. This may be contributing to the increases in the cultivation of opium and marijuana, and production of heroin and methamphetamine, which, unfortunately, are generating more income for the DTOs."⁶⁴ Additionally, the surge of military and police has elicited complaints of human rights violations "that include forced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detention."⁶⁵

Although the Mexican government, operating under President Calderon's strategy, has made a significant attempt to combat DTOs, it is clear that DTOs are a much larger problem than the Mexican government can handle on its own. If President

Calderon would ask for U.S. military assistance, then he may have the resources available to combat most aspects of DTOs and DTO operations instead of solely focusing on one or a few facets of DTOs. In the event that President Calderon requests assistance, the U.S. military must be prepared to conduct a range of military operations in Mexico. Therefore, U.S. military operations conducted in Afghanistan may provide insight into which ones are appropriate to exercise in Northern Mexico.

Section Two: U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan

Military operations in Afghanistan range from relatively minimal U.S. involvement, such as limited contingency operations, to large scale U.S. involvement such as major operations. Regardless of the spectrum of U.S. involvement, security cooperation is conducted across the range of military operations (see figure 8).



Figure 8. Range of Military Operations

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), I-4.

Security Cooperation

Security cooperation is one element of Foreign Internal Defense. Foreign Internal Defense encompasses military engagements, security cooperation, and deterrence. Specifically, “[security cooperation] involves all [Department of Defense] interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a [host nation].”⁶⁶ There are three subcategories of security cooperation: indirect support, direct support, and combat operations. Within Afghanistan, all three cooperation subcategories, under the umbrella of Foreign Internal Defense, have been conducted (see figure 9). When considering security cooperation activities in Afghanistan that have application in Mexico, direct support has enormous function.

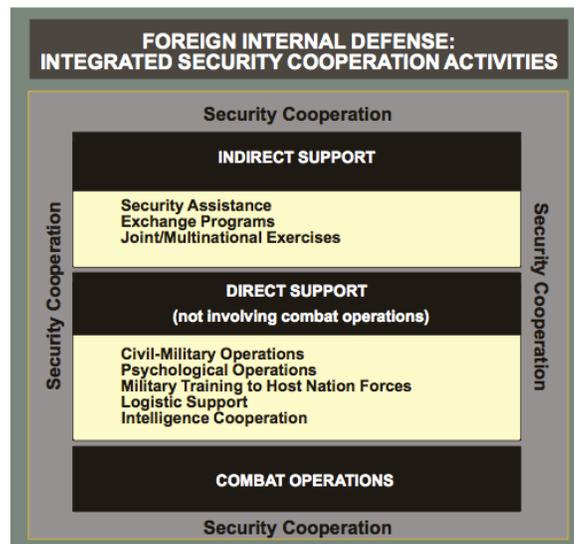


Figure 9. Foreign Internal Defense: Integrated Security Cooperation Activities

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), I-8.

Direct Support

Direct support “involve[s] the use of U.S. forces providing direct assistance to the [host nation] HN civilian populace or military” and are conducted when the HN is faced with “social, economic, or military threats beyond its capability to handle.”⁶⁷ As previously discussed in section one of this chapter, DTO operations in Mexico have reached a level that is potentially outside the scope of the Mexican government to handle; therefore, direct support activities conducted in Afghanistan may provide a framework for direct support in Northern Mexico.

Direct support is divided into five subcategories: civil-military operations, military information support operations, military training to HN forces, logistics support, and intelligence cooperation. This section will briefly describe each subcategory, along with its application in Afghanistan, and then analyze its application in Northern Mexico.

Civil-military Operations

Civil-military operations (CMO) “maintain, influence, or exploit relations among military forces, governmental and nongovernmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in a friendly, neutral, or hostile operational area in order to facilitate military operations, and to consolidate and achieve operational U.S. objectives.”⁶⁸ CMO can specifically be applied in counterdrug support. Within Afghanistan, CMO focuses on providing services to the local population in an effort to prevent dissatisfaction among the population.

Dissatisfaction among Afghans has been one of the greatest sources of strength from which insurgents leverage the population against the legitimate government. To counter dissatisfaction in Afghanistan, the U.S. military, as part of the International

Security Assistance Force (ISAF), performed several humanitarian and civic assistance missions such as Medical Civic Assistance Programs, Veterinary Civic Assistance Programs, and infrastructure improvement. These programs have greatly assisted Afghans as well as Afghan and U.S. military relations. However, the greatest advantage of CMO in Afghanistan has been military civic action performed by Afghan National Security Forces.

Under the supervision of the U.S. military, Afghan National Security Force-led military civic action established a greater trust of the population for the government of Afghanistan. For example, in August 2011 Afghan government officials and Afghan National Security Forces led and partnered with the U.S. military to conduct a humanitarian assistance mission in Helmand province Afghanistan. “More than 80 heads-of-households visited the event to accept humanitarian assistance handouts on behalf of their families. The Afghan government officials’ and security forces’ demonstration of genuine good will and ability to provide for the people was well received.”⁶⁹ Through CMO, and specifically the Afghan-led humanitarian assistance mission in Helmand province, the Afghan government established a stronger connection with the local population and is growing closer to “achieving its political, economic, and informational objectives.”⁷⁰

A similar outcome is possible in Northern Mexico. With poverty rampant in Northern Mexico, CMO efforts between the U.S. military and Mexican forces will demonstrate the legitimacy of the Mexican government. As DTOs have proven capable of providing for some aspects of local population needs where the government has not provided, DTOs gain support from civilians. The Mexican government, in conjunction

with the U.S. military, can win its own support from the local population through efforts such as humanitarian and civic assistance and military civic action creating greater confidence in the legitimate government.

Military Information Support Operations (formerly called Psychological Operations)

Military Information Support Operations (MISO) are conducted during Foreign Internal Defense to “support U.S. national objectives, to support the [Geographic Combatant Commander’s] GCCs regional security strategy objectives, and to support the objectives of the country team.”⁷¹ Additionally, “PSYOP [MISO] are planned operations to convey selected truthful information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of their governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of PSYOP [MISO] is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator’s objectives.”⁷² Since MISO have several missions to include support to combat operations, support to Department of Defense capabilities in peacetime, civil support to domestic lead federal agencies, and support to special operations, MISO have been used in Afghanistan in various and effective ways.

Within Afghanistan, U.S. Marine Corps MISO teams have successfully incorporated “specific messages and products in order to directly affect [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] GIROA’s self-sufficiency and the security environment.”⁷³ Through MISO in Afghanistan two ISAF objectives have been directly assisted: “[reducing] the capability and will of the insurgency, and [facilitating] improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.”⁷⁴

Incorporating MISO into military operations in Northern Mexico should enhance the joint U.S. and Mexico military efforts to increase legitimacy of the Mexican government among the local population. Although it is argued by some that DTOs are not an insurgency, their tactics resemble that of an insurgency. Therefore, similar to ISAF's objectives in Afghanistan, applying MISO in Northern Mexico may reduce the will of DTOs and facilitate a secure and stable environment for the local population.

Military Training to Host Nation Forces

Military training to HN forces assists the “HNs in anticipating, precluding, and countering threats or potential threats.”⁷⁵ Specifically, it provides training, equipment, advice, and assistance to HN forces. The ISAF mission in Afghanistan includes military training to HN forces, and reads in part that ISAF is charged with supporting “the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces.”⁷⁶

ISAF's support to the Afghan National Security Forces includes training at the tactical and operational levels. At the tactical level ISAF teaches small unit tactics such as battle drills while at the operational level tasks such as staff training and planning are instructed. As Mexican forces have been operating far longer than Afghan National Security Forces, there may be counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures the U.S. military can offer to the Mexican military from its experiences in Afghanistan. Providing training to Mexican forces is necessary to increase their capacity to target and defeat DTO operations. The overarching purpose of this training is to ensure that Mexico retains a force with the ability to combat DTO operations following the withdrawal of the U.S. military.

Logistics Support

Logistics support provides “deployment and distribution, maintenance, supply, and construction support to the HN military or civilians.”⁷⁷ Within Afghanistan logistics support incorporates all of the aforementioned functions and has applicability to Northern Mexico. Projects to improve civil infrastructure, led by Mexican forces and supported by the U.S. military, can increase the legitimacy of the Mexican government. Through logistics support, Mexican forces will increase their operational reach for combat operations and assistance to the civil population. Providing logistics support to Mexican forces is another tool to potentially sway sections of the population supporting DTOs to trust in the government.

Intelligence Cooperation

“Intelligence cooperation is enabled by an information sharing environment that fully integrates joint, multinational, and interagency partners in a collaborative enterprise.”⁷⁸ Intelligence cooperation in Afghanistan has led to successful raids against Taliban and al-Qaida by both ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces. In Northern Mexico a similar approach to information sharing should be considered to successfully target DTOs. Including Mexican forces in intelligence collection and analysis will not only aid the U.S. military in increasing its depth of understanding on DTO operations, it will also demonstrate to Mexican forces the way in which the U.S. military conducts intelligence collection and targeting. Intelligence cooperation is one of several direct support activities that will enhance both U.S. and Mexican operations in Mexico.

Integrating direct support activities under the umbrella of security cooperation has several advantages when considered in Northern Mexico. Direct support enhances the

HN force and legitimizes the government among the population. Through direct support, Mexican forces will be better able to target DTO enforcers and leadership and negate DTO activity. When considering U.S. military assistance in Northern Mexico, incorporating direct support CMO early will facilitate a better-trained HN force that has greater ability to combat DTOs. CMO can prevent the U.S. military from becoming engaged in a protracted war against DTOs. While security cooperation is effective in Afghanistan and has application in Northern Mexico, consideration of limited contingency operations may offer a more direct approach to target DTO enforcers and leadership.

Limited Contingency Operations

Within the military operation category of crisis response and limited contingency operations, there are six different types of operations: non-combatant evacuation, peace operations, foreign humanitarian assistance, recovery operations, strikes and raids, and homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities. Of the six types of operations the following section explores strikes and raids, their effectiveness in Afghanistan, and their application in Northern Mexico.

Strikes are attacks conducted to damage or destroy an objective or a capability. Strikes may be used to punish offending nations or groups, uphold international law, or prevent those nations or groups from launching their own attacks, [and] raids are operations to temporarily seize an area, usually through forcible entry, in order to secure information, confuse an adversary, capture personnel or equipment, or destroy an objective or capability. Raids end with a planned withdrawal upon completion of the assigned mission.⁷⁹

Strikes

At the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, Tactical Air Control Parties in conjunction with special operation forces (SOF) would link up with either the Northern

Alliance or U.S. and coalition units to “get as close to enemy positions as possible, and call in airstrikes.”⁸⁰ The lethality with which Tactical Air Control Parties and SOF teams delivered strikes on the Taliban and al-Qaeda was devastating. During the fall of the Taliban regime in the early days of the war, strikes against them “set off a steady stream of Taliban defectors, mostly Afghani, surrendering to [Northern Alliance Commander General Muhammad] Daud’s forces and joining the rebel side. Daud’s men would question them as they came over, and this steady stream helped to improve Daud’s intelligence on his enemy’s forces and disposition.”⁸¹ While it was predicted that the Afghan rebels would not be able to defeat the Taliban, the incorporation of strikes controlled by Tactical Air Control Parties and SOF units enabled the Afghan rebels to break the Taliban hold on Afghanistan within a few weeks.⁸²

When considering the application of strikes in Northern Mexico there are some key and concerning differences between the Taliban in Afghanistan and DTOs in Northern Mexico. The Taliban operated in an austere environment and would mass their forces. Steve Call illuminates this point when explaining the fall of the Taliban in his book *Danger Close*, “the entire valley was filled with massed enemy forces.”⁸³ Typically within Northern Mexico’s desert environment, DTOs operate in and around urban population centers and do not mass forces for long periods of time. Rather, DTOs typically employ smaller forces for paramilitary operations.

Because DTOs do not normally mass forces or operate in austere environments like the Taliban strikes may not be the most effective type of operation for sustained use against DTOs as it was in the early stages of the war in Afghanistan. However, there may be times that warrant the use of strikes against DTOs. As previously explained, DTO

leaders sometimes convene to determine alliances, which DTOs will control certain *plazas*, and territorial disputes. Through successful intelligence and targeting these meeting locations may provide opportunities to incorporate strikes against leaders or large groups of DTO enforcers providing security for leaders. Strikes may also be considered if intelligence suggests a particular DTO stronghold is outside of the possibility for collateral damage. As strikes may not be effective in densely populated urban areas, raids can be used almost anywhere at anytime.

Raids

In Afghanistan, raids have been used since the beginning of the war in a myriad of environments. The raid at Hazer Qadam during the winter of 2001 and 2002 is noteworthy for analysis as it demonstrates the reason raids are implemented and it details skillful execution by U.S. SOF. Hazer Qadam consisted of two compounds that were suspected of housing al-Qaeda operatives approximately 166 kilometers northeast of Kandahar, Afghanistan.⁸⁴

The purpose of the mission at Hazer Qadam “was to kill or capture any Taliban or al-Qaeda personnel and collect material for intelligence analysis.”⁸⁵ The reason the raid was chosen over an airstrike was because intelligence suggested that there might have been women and children within the compounds. The mission was issued to SOF teams on 9 January 2002 with an execution date of 17 January 2002, leaving only five days to plan and rehearse prior to execution. The compounds at Hazer Qadam were one and half kilometers apart, and each compound was given an objective name: Objective Brigid was given to the eastern compound, and Objective Kelly was given to the western compound.⁸⁶

After aircraft mechanical problems and severe weather delayed the mission, on 23 January 2002 the raid at Hazer Qadam was implemented. Planned and rehearsed as a simultaneous assault on both compounds, it was executed with exact precision as “both assault leaders initiated their attacks according to a well-rehearsed sequence of commands: ‘Stand by . . . I have control. Five, Four, three, two, one—Execute!’”⁸⁷ On Objective Kelly, the SOF team “overpowered two dozen enemy fighters in the 10 buildings on the compound” within minutes.⁸⁸ On Objective Brigid, the SOF team had a tougher fight and not only fought with direct fire weapons, but also had to use hand-to-hand combat to defeat the enemy fighters. Both objectives were secured within two hours of initiating the raid and neither SOF team sustained soldiers killed-in-action. The raid was a success as the SOF teams “had taken 27 detainees; confirmed 16 dead enemy fighters; seized radios and documents; and . . . [demolished] antiaircraft cannons, mortars, and other weapons and munitions.”⁸⁹ While the raid at Hazer Qadam was a large success for U.S. forces, the intelligence prior to the raid was not as precise as the SOF teams expected. Two weeks prior to the raid, the Afghan fighters at Hazer Qadam had crossed over to the Afghan Interim Authority government, which was not reported to the coalition by Afghan officials.⁹⁰

Although the intelligence was not precise prior to executing the raid, the purpose and execution of the raid has applicability to Northern Mexico. Leaders concerned with collateral damage chose to conduct a raid at Hazer Qadam instead of executing an airstrike. If an airstrike were carried out, there would have been collateral damage as women and children were confirmed on both compounds during the raid. This operation demonstrates that raids can be conducted within urban areas of Northern Mexico with a

significantly decreased possibility of collateral damage. The timing with which the Hazer Qadam raid was performed reveals that raids can be conducted simultaneously on multiple specific locations. This capability greatly increases the ability to prosecute multiple targets within the DTO cellular structure at once. The outcome at Hazer Qadam highlights that the precision and sheer shock of a raid can facilitate mission accomplishment without a large firefight, as was the case on Objective Kelly.

Some circumstances require a much larger force and less precision than strikes and raids. In these situations the United States may commit to a campaign to “achieve national strategic objectives or protect national interests.” Within these conditions, major operations are considered.

Major Operations

Over the past 11 years, there have been several major operations conducted in Afghanistan. Operations Rhino, Anaconda, and Moshtarak are major operations with potential applicability to military operations conducted in Northern Mexico. This section briefly reviews each operation and analyzes its relevance to the situation in Northern Mexico.

Operation Rhino

On 19 October 2001, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment conducted “a night combat parachute assault to seize a remote desert landing strip to destroy Taliban forces; gather intelligence; provide a casualty transload site for other simultaneous combat operations; establish a forward arming and refueling point for rotary-wing aircraft; and assess the capabilities of the airstrip for future operations.”⁹¹ Objective Rhino was

subdivided into four separate objectives that led the Rangers to simultaneously assault each objective. At 1845 Zulu time, 199 Rangers jumping at an altitude of 800 feet, in complete darkness, executed an assault on Objective Rhino. The Rangers met little resistance but proved to the Taliban and al-Qaeda “that there were no safe havens and that America could project its military power at will.”⁹² General Tommy Franks, Commander, U.S. Central Command called Operation Rhino a success, and further stated that, “the objective was to prove . . . we will go anywhere we choose to go.”⁹³

The psychological impact of Operation Rhino on the Taliban and al-Qaeda is difficult to measure; however, the confidence it gave to the U.S. military and citizens was significant. The combined effort between U.S. Army Rangers, Special Operations Forces, and the U.S. Air Force demonstrated to the Taliban and al-Qaeda that successful employment of the joint force in an austere environment is not outside of the U.S. military’s capabilities. Furthermore, the combined employment of direct fire, indirect fire, air strikes, and combat parachuting validated the U.S. military’s ability to project combat power across the joint force towards a specific target. This application of combat power may have resulted in the little resistance the Rangers met on the objective. Regardless of the reason for little resistance, the mission was successful and may have applicability in Northern Mexico if an objective similar to Objective Rhino presents itself such as an area of a state that has fallen to DTOs.

Within Northern Mexico DTOs not only battle to control *plazas* but they also employ the concept of “state capture” in which they attempt to seize and control large areas of states from which to operate with autonomy.⁹⁴ “When a cartel controls a territory, it becomes a shadow local government, one that officials and businessmen have

to answer to. If [citizens] are being shaken down in such a realm, [they] don't know which police commanders are in the pockets of the mafia and usually prefer to pay up—or run for [their] life.”⁹⁵ When areas of the state are captured by DTOs, a surprise operation similar to Operation Rhino may present a way to reclaim the territory and destroy DTO enforcers occupying the area. Additionally, conducting such an operation early in U.S. military involvement in Mexico will demonstrate the capability of the U.S. military to project combat power and deliver a significant blow to DTOs in an area they deem as a sanctuary.

As DTOs continue to conduct “state capture” to control more terrain, an opportunity could arise in which a larger-scale major operation is warranted. In this instance an operation that is smaller in scale such as Operation Rhino may not suffice. Therefore, the U.S. military may need to plan for an operation similar to Operation Anaconda in which a large conventional force is used.

Operation Anaconda

In March 2002, the Shahikot valley in Afghanistan was believed to contain several hundred Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters. Joint Task Force Mountain developed a plan that included the isolation and encirclement of the Shahikot valley and incorporated attacks to destroy al-Qaeda fighters.⁹⁶ The plan comprised “a mixture of Afghan militia, U.S. and coalition Special Operations, and conventional forces [that] would establish three sets of concentric rings astride enemy escape routes before the main strike into terrorist defenses in the valley.”⁹⁷

At D minus 1, about 600 SF-led Afghan forces, TF ANVIL, would move into position along major enemy routes of retreat. Then, on D-day, the CJTF MOUNTAIN would air-assault elements of the 101st Airborne and 10th

Mountain Divisions (TF RAKASSAN) into an inner ring of blocking positions along the eastern side of the valley. Simultaneously TF HAMMER, about 260 Special Forces and AMF, would attack around the southern end of the Whale and into the valley as the main effort, while a secondary effort set up a blocking position near the Little Whale at the northern entrance to the valley with about forty AMF and Special Forces soldiers. The goal was to hit the enemy hard enough to kill or capture as many of the al Qaeda as possible and to squeeze the survivors out of the valley into the blocking positions where they would then be eliminated. Those that somehow escaped the trap would be tracked using air and ground reconnaissance assets as they moved along the various "ratlines" through safe houses and refuges in an attempt to reach Pakistan.⁹⁸

Despite command and control structure problems, loss of vehicles along the rugged terrain, and the significant loss of eight service members, including Chief Petty Officer Neil Roberts, the operation was considered a success. The success was largely attributed to the size of the force, which incorporated SOF, Afghan forces, and conventional forces that enabled Joint Task Force Mountain to isolate and assault the Shahikot valley over a period of nine days. Using a robust force, in conjunction with the hammer and anvil approach similar to operations in the Shahikot valley, has useful application to some DTO sanctuaries.

The Operation Anaconda example has particular use when targeting DTO training camps. These training camps are "built on ranches and farmlands . . . [and] are equipped with shooting ranges and makeshift assault courses and have been found storing arsenals of heavy weaponry, including boxes of grenades."⁹⁹ DTO training camps located in areas away from population centers leaves them vulnerable to major operations that incorporate a large size force capable of isolating and destroying the camp. With the amount of weapons and DTO personnel located at training camps, the use of a large force is essential to prevent escape and to ensure overwhelming fire superiority on the objective. Although combining SOF, HN forces, and conventional forces is necessary for some

major operations, there are major operations that lend themselves to the HN forces in the lead with U.S. conventional forces in support once the appropriate conditions are established.

Operation Moshtarak

Operation Moshtarak was an Afghan-led major operation that proclaimed the authority of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan within Helmand province in February 2010.¹⁰⁰ The operation aimed to force Taliban insurgents to “accept the government’s offer to reintegrate and join the political process [or] be met with overwhelming force.”¹⁰¹ Operation Moshtarak marked a key shift in the war in Afghanistan when Afghan forces took the lead and Regional Command South ISAF forces assisted the operation. Operation Moshtarak was considered the largest operation in Afghanistan since the beginning of the war in 2001 with a force of approximately 15,000 Afghan, United States, and United Kingdom soldiers. Afghan forces were comprised of five brigades “including members of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police and Afghan Gendarmerie (formerly Afghan National Civil Order Police).”¹⁰²

The combined Afghan and ISAF force met their objectives during the course of the operation to include clearing and controlling the last Taliban stronghold within Helmand province in the town of Marjah. The operation demonstrated to the Afghan government and population that Afghan forces were capable of securing their own population. By the 12th day of the operation the Afghan flag flew over Marjah and dislocated civilians were returning to the area and opening shops within the bazaar.¹⁰³

Operation Moshtarak provides an example of the success among the population major operations can have when conducted in conjunction with host nation forces. Similar to the civilian population in Helmand province prior to the Operation Moshtarak, Northern Mexico's civilian population has little confidence in Mexican security forces because they are not effective against DTOs. The Mexican government acknowledged the ineffectiveness of its forces when "following a brutal massacre of 15 youth at a party in Ciudad Juarez in January 2010, President Calderon made a series of visits to the border city and announced that police and military action alone were insufficient to address Juarez's problems."¹⁰⁴ Further complicating Mexican trust in the government and military are "operations of the Mexican military [which] have led to widespread human rights complaints for violations that include forced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detention."¹⁰⁵ Following vetting and training of Mexican forces, major operations targeting DTO controlled areas, led by Mexican forces, may restore confidence that the government can secure the population.

Through understanding the history and current situation of DTOs it is clear that the situation in Mexico is complex, dating to the 1980s when Colombian cocaine trafficking routes shifted from the Atlantic Ocean to Mexican *plazas*. This shift caused DTOs to rise to power and dominance and over time have become a burden upon Mexican citizens and a threat to U.S. citizens along the U.S. and Mexico border. In order to stop this threat, U.S. military intervention in Northern Mexico may be necessary with the approval of the Mexican government. Through the range of military operations that have application in Northern Mexico, operational design can be applied to determine an operational approach for U.S. military involvement in Northern Mexico.

¹Ioan Grillo, *El Narco* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 19.

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³Ibid., 18.

⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵Ibid., 28.

⁶Ibid., 40.

⁷Ibid., 43-44.

⁸Ibid., 44.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 59.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 60.

¹³Ibid., 62.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 63.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Finklea, Krouse, and Rosenblum, 5.

¹⁹Grillo, 58.

²⁰Ibid., 63.

²¹Ibid., 63-64.

²²Ibid., 77.

²³Ibid., 65.

²⁴Michael A. Lenhart, “The Mexican Drug Cartel Threat to U.S. National Security” (Monetary, CA: Naval Post Graduate School, 2010), 1.

²⁵Grillo, 78.

²⁶Killebrew and Bernal, 20-21.

²⁷Mexico: News, Travel, Culture, “Mexico’s Drug Cartels and The Drug War,” Mexico: News, Travel, Culture, <http://www.mexico.vg/tag/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed 1 February 2012).

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³⁰Beittel, 12.

³¹Ibid., 5.

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³⁴Eikmeier, 5.

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⁴¹Killebrew and Bernal, 52.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴United States Agency for International Development, “Latin America and the Caribbean: Mexico,” http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/mexico/index.html (accessed 11 February 2012).

⁴⁵Joint Publication 3-24, GL-6.

⁴⁶Beittel, 2.

⁴⁷Ibid., 3.

⁴⁸Ibid., 11.

⁴⁹Terry N. Hilderbrand, “Drug Trafficking within Mexico: A Law Enforcement Issue or Insurgency?” (Master’s Thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2011), 79.

⁵⁰Joint Publication 3-24, II-16.

⁵¹Adam Elkus and John P. Sullivan, “Narco-Armor in Mexico,” *Small Wars Journal*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/narco-armor-in-mexico> (accessed 12 February 2012).

⁵²William Booth, “Ciudad Juarez Car Bomb Shows New Sophistication in Mexican Drug Cartels’ Tactics,” *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/21/AR2010072106200.html> (accessed 12 February 2012).

⁵³Joint Publication 3-24, III-8.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Beittel, 4.

⁵⁷Ibid., 5.

⁵⁸Ibid.

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⁶³Beittel, 18.

⁶⁴Ibid.

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⁶⁶U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), I-10.

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⁶⁸Ibid.

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⁷¹Joint Publication 3-22, I-16.

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⁹⁰Ibid., 241

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⁹³Ibid.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify potential U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat DTOs and stabilize Northern Mexico. This chapter has three sections. The first section describes what this study determines is the end state for U.S. military operations in Mexico. The second section uses operational design to determine the operational approach and which military operations should be applied to in Northern Mexico. Specifically, the second section answers the questions: what is going in the environment; what should the environment look like; where, conceptually, should the U.S. military act to achieve the desired end state; and how does the U.S. get from the current state to the desired end state (operational approach). The third section explains the significance of the conclusion and operational approach, and recommends areas for further exploration.

Section One: United States Military End State in Mexico

“The desired end state consists of those desired conditions that, if achieved, meet the objectives of policy, orders, guidance, and directives issued to the commander. A condition is a reflection of the existing state of the operational environment. Thus, a desired condition is a sought-after future state of the operational environment.”¹ This section describes the successful end state for the U.S. military in Mexico in four conditions: friendly (U.S. military and Mexican forces), enemy (DTOs), terrain, and civil. These conditions represent all aspects of the desired future state with respect to the situation in Mexico.

Friendly

Friendly success must be defined for both the U.S. military and Mexican forces with near, mid, and long term conditions. In the near-term, the U.S. military must establish a significant intelligence network to target DTO critical vulnerabilities and begin vetting and training Mexican forces with help from senior Mexican officials. Near-term conditions for Mexican forces are recruiting, training, and sharing information with their U.S. counterparts. Successful mid-term conditions for the U.S. military are gaining actionable intelligence and conducting operations against DTO critical vulnerabilities while incorporating Mexican forces within the range of military operations. In the mid-term, Mexican forces should gain in strength and capability. Long-term conditions for both the U.S. military and Mexican forces are that the U.S. military is no longer needed to conduct operations within Mexico and Mexican forces are capable of securing its citizens and defeating DTOs on their own.

Enemy

The end state for DTOs is degradation of population support and recruitment, and disintegration of leadership. Through targeting these three critical vulnerabilities the enforcement arm, or the DTO operational center of gravity, will be severely degraded. However, only through targeting all four critical vulnerabilities will the enforcement arm be decisively damaged achieving the complete end state conditions for DTOs.

Terrain

The terrain end state has two elements. First, the remaining critical vulnerability of DTO sanctuary must be eliminated so they cannot operate with autonomy. These areas

of sanctuary must be secured by Mexican forces and returned to Mexican citizens. Second, the U.S. and Mexico border should be void of DTO control with Mexican forces controlling DTO *plazas*. Eliminating DTO sanctuary and controlling *plazas* will greatly assist in a safe secure environment for Mexican citizens in Northern Mexico and U.S. citizens residing in border towns.

Civil

The civil end state conditions are mutually supporting: safe and secure environment, infrastructure improvement, and economic growth. Through a safe and secure environment infrastructure improvement can begin in poor and rural areas providing jobs for locals. Providing jobs for Mexican citizens leaves them less likely to traffic drugs for money and increases economic growth for the entire country. As the civil conditions are achieved the government will grow in legitimacy and DTOs will lose a vast majority of their recruiting pool.

Combining all end state conditions, success for U.S. military operations in Mexico is defined as follows: the U.S. military is no longer needed to conduct operations within Mexico and Mexican forces are capable of securing its citizens and defeating DTOs; DTO enforcers are decisively damaged; DTO sanctuary areas are returned to Mexican citizens with a secure border; and Mexican citizens live within a safe and secure environment with improved infrastructure and economic growth.

Section Two: Operational Design

What is going on in the Environment?

Within Mexico, the situation is extremely complex and involves DTOs, the government, and Mexican citizens. DTOs are using paramilitary style operations to fight the Mexican government and its forces for areas of sanctuary from which to operate with autonomy. From these areas of sanctuary, DTOs are trafficking drugs across the U.S. and Mexico border through *plazas*. DTOs battle among themselves for control of *plazas* and often create collateral damage among the civilian population in Mexico and within the United States. When Mexican President Calderon took office he launched a large-scale operation to stop DTOs within Mexico. This operation led to a loss of government legitimacy among the population because Mexican forces were not able to secure the population from DTO violence while simultaneously committing human rights violations. Therefore, DTOs have only grown more popular in many areas and threaten the population through violence and kidnappings in areas that do not offer support. Through popular or coerced support, more civilians are turning to DTOs for trafficking jobs because the pay is better and merely transporting drugs is easy. Additionally, DTO threats extend beyond the population to government officials who oppose them through bribery, extortion, and murder.

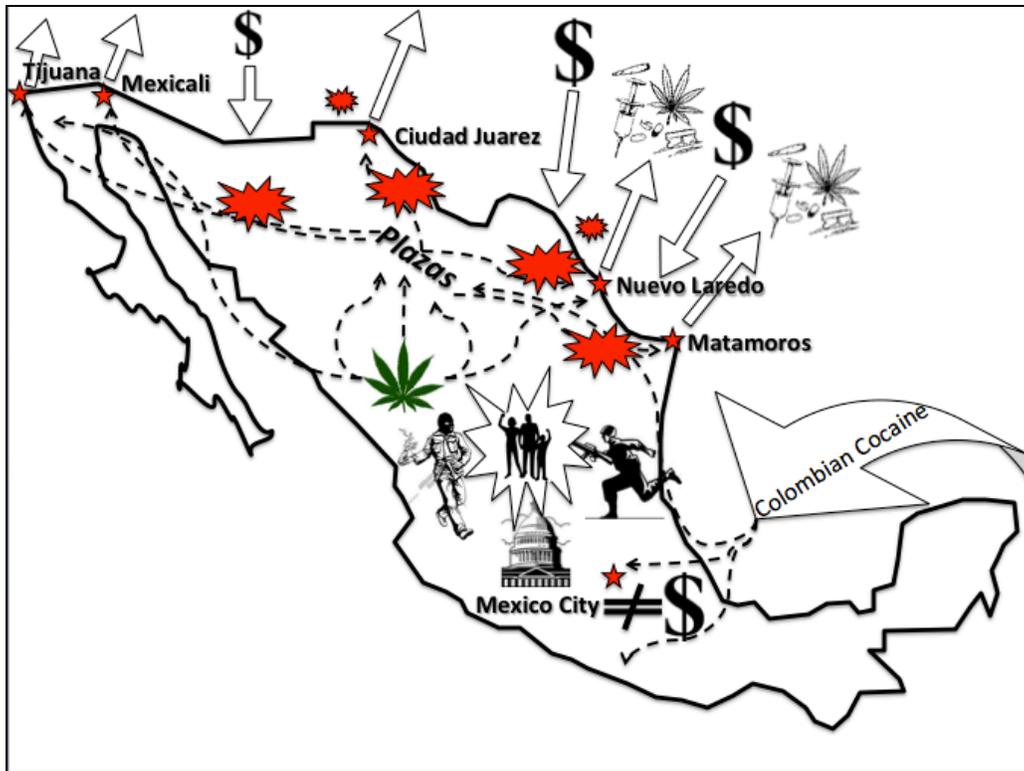


Figure 10. Graphical Representation of Current Situation in Mexico

Source: Created by author.

What the Environment Should Look Like

The environment in Mexico should look like the antithesis of the current situation. Understanding that ridding Mexico of all drugs and DTO operations is unrealistic, the Mexican government should have the ability to prevent DTO autonomy through its use of well-trained and vetted forces. Mexican forces should be able to collect intelligence, target DTO critical vulnerabilities, and ultimately prosecute enforcers and leaders. DTOs should be void of sanctuaries and control of *plazas*, and their drug operations should be severely hindered, restricted, and on the decline. The government of Mexico should have legitimacy among its people through its growth in capabilities, strong security measures,

and assistance to the population. Through security the Mexican economy, infrastructure, and free market should grow with increased job creation and trust in the government. Along the border region, U.S. and Mexican border towns should be safe and secure without violence.

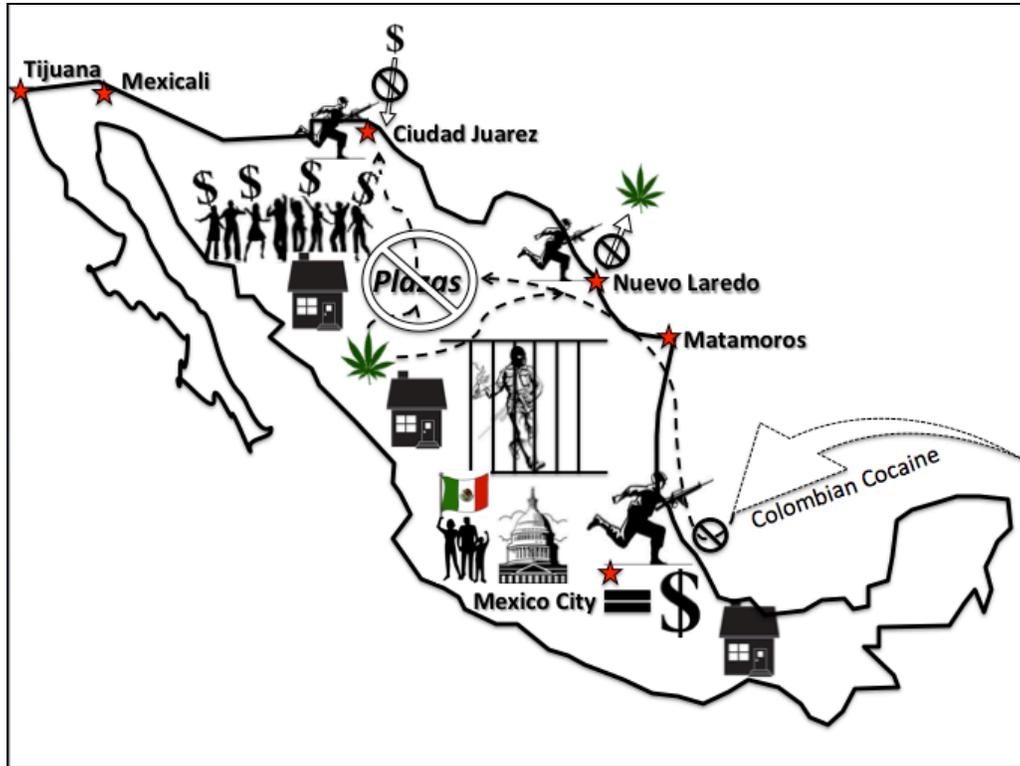


Figure 11. Graphical Representation of what the Environment Should Look Like

Source: Created by author.

Where the U.S. military should Act to Achieve the Desired End State

Conceptually, the U.S. military should act in several different areas to achieve the desired end state. Focusing efforts on vetting and training Mexican forces should be an immediate and on-going process to ensure they can assume complete and effective

responsibility for Mexico's security. Until Mexican forces are ready for this responsibility, and during the vetting and training process, the U.S. military should provide civil security for Mexican citizens. Simultaneously, the U.S. military must target the DTO critical vulnerabilities of leadership, sanctuary, recruitment, and population support.

Within the areas to act, there may be tension, competition, opportunities, and challenges. Upon the U.S. military's initial deployment to Mexico there may be tension between Mexican forces and the U.S. military as they have been at war with DTOs since President Calderon took office. Realizing this tension early and reassuring that the U.S. is not occupying Mexico is critical to establishing quality relationships between U.S. and Mexican forces. As there may be tension between U.S. and Mexican forces, there may also be competition from Mexican forces to prove that they do not need assistance from the U.S. military. Increasing Merida Initiative assistance in the form of equipment upon initial U.S. military deployment to Mexico may provide incentive for Mexican forces to embrace their U.S. counterparts instead of taking a competitive stance. Increased equipping of Mexican forces through the Merida Initiative provides opportunities for U.S. service members at the lowest level to train and mentor their Mexican counterparts fostering relationships early in the intervention.

In addition to vetting, training, and equipping Mexican forces, the U.S. military will have to secure the population, gather actionable intelligence on DTOs, and conduct a range of military operations. These tasks will challenge the U.S. military to maintain morale and prevent overextension of the force. Planning for the correct number of forces to deploy to Mexico along with a realistic troop rotation is essential. Therefore, during

planning, the types of operations to be conducted along with the amount of time the U.S. needs to invest in Mexico should be carefully considered. Having a clear operational approach will assist U.S. government and military leaders determine the correct force structure and time allocation.

Operational Approach: How to get from the Current State to the Desired End State

As the current situation and end state have been identified, the way in which the U.S. military will achieve the desired end state is defined through objectives, decisive points, lines of effort, limitations, and risk. For each objective the appropriate military operation or operations are identified. These elements combined form the operational approach for U.S. military involvement in Northern Mexico.

Objectives

There are eight objectives within the operational approach: generating capable Mexican forces, degrading DTO population support and recruitment, disintegrating DTO leadership, seizing DTO areas of sanctuary, controlling *plazas* and the border, infrastructure improvement, job creation and growth, and creating a positive civil view of the Mexican government. Some objectives support multiple lines of effort and desired conditions (see figure 12). However, all objectives support the desired end state while each objective is accomplished through specific military operations.

Capable Mexican forces will be attained through aspects of security cooperation. Specifically, using the direct approach method with the elements of military training to host nation forces and logistics support, Mexican forces will grow in strength and capability. This objective is critical to the end state of U.S. military operations in

Northern Mexico along with the transition of security to Mexican forces. Without capable Mexican forces, the U.S. may become engaged in a protracted war with DTOs.

Degrading DTO population support and recruitment will be achieved through the security cooperation direct support elements of CMO and MISO. CMO performed in conjunction with Mexican forces should prevent some dissatisfaction among the population with their current situation and aide in legitimizing the government. Simultaneously conducting MISO may reduce DTO recruitment success and increase popular support for the Mexican government.

Disintegration of DTO leadership will be accomplished primarily through strikes and raids. Once actionable intelligence is attained, the U.S. military can incorporate elements of SOF and conventional forces to remove specific leaders. As destruction of DTO leadership temporarily weakens and confuses a DTO, the joint force can capitalize on the success to target up and coming leaders or groups of junior leaders that may meet together to discuss future actions and heads of the organization.

Through major operations the seizure of DTO sanctuary areas can be accomplished. Utilizing a large force will be necessary as DTOs are not willing to relinquish control of these areas. Additionally, major operations are necessary because areas of sanctuary can be extremely large. Major operations should also be used to control *plazas* and the border. Strikes should be incorporated outside of urban areas along known *plazas* to force DTOs to utilize different routes. Strikes will add a psychological factor of fear to traffickers and possibly reduce flow of money and weapons to DTOs.

Infrastructure improvement and job growth will be supported through CMO and security of the civil population. Providing humanitarian assistance to the poorest

population centers by Mexican forces will increase legitimacy of the government. The government can capitalize on the humanitarian assistance and security and begin infrastructure improvement by employing locals from these poor areas to build or rebuild in their towns. The area improvements by locals may provide a source of pride among the population and spur an increase in economic development.

Creating a positive view of the Mexican government is the only objective along all lines of effort. Through combined U.S. and Mexican CMO efforts in conjunction with U.S. military information support operations, and Mexican forces security of the population, a positive view of the Mexican government should emerge. It is essential that the civil population believes the security and assistance provided by the government is real and will last beyond U.S. involvement.

Decisive Points

Decisive points are “a geographic place, specific key event, critical factor, or function that, when acted upon, allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an adversary or contribute materially to achieving success.”² Any action that degrades the DTO center of gravity is decisive; therefore, the DTO critical vulnerabilities of population support, sanctuary, leadership, and recruitment are initial decisive points within the operational approach. As the situation develops through U.S. military involvement, additional decisive points will inevitably arise. Maintaining strong intelligence collection on DTO meetings, movements, and logistical assets may present further events, factors, or functions that will present an advantage for the joint force.

Lines of Effort

There are five lines of effort within the operational approach: security, defeating DTOs, legitimizing the Mexican government, information operations, and economic growth. All five lines of effort mutually support each other and the desired end state conditions. Security for Mexican citizens legitimizes the Mexican government and fosters economic growth. Defeating DTOs promotes a safe and secure environment while also setting conditions for economic growth. Legitimizing the Mexican government increases security and establishes confidence among citizens for economic development and infrastructure improvement. Information operations support all lines of effort through targeting messaging focused towards DTO members and the civilian population. Economic growth aids the civilian population in seeking legal and legitimate jobs while increasing their monetary assets. Economic growth will largely support the defeat of DTOs as it may decrease DTO popular support and remove their large recruiting pool.

Limitations

There are two limitations, or one constraint and one restraint, for U.S. military operations in Mexico. The main constraint for the U.S. military is incorporating Mexican forces within all aspects of operations in Northern Mexico. It is vital that temporary and permanent gains that are achieved are viewed as advances from Mexican forces and the government. Even during the initial phase of the operation, after successfully vetting Mexican forces during their training, Mexican forces should be incorporated into every possible aspect of military operations.

The restraint for the U.S. military is that it cannot conduct operations that may create collateral damage to civil infrastructure or the civilian population. Collateral

damage will delegitimize the government and provide DTOs with an opportunity to offer an alternative other than the government to the civilian population. This restraint may initially require the force to rely heavily on strikes and raids until DTOs withdraw from population centers.

Risk

Risk will not be accepted in security for the population or Mexican forces during their training. The U.S. military must maintain strong security presence within population centers and operational security in the vicinity of training sites until Mexican forces are prepared to assume the lead for security.

Risk will be accepted during the vetting process of Mexican forces. As the U.S. military will rely heavily on host nation sources for this process it is likely that some individuals will remain or join the Mexican force that have connections or loyalty to DTOs. This risk will be mitigated by utilizing U.S. soldiers as sensors to partnering Mexican forces with U.S. service members. U.S. service members will be able to observe their counterparts actions and report any that appear to be out of the ordinary. Close partnership between U.S. soldiers and Mexican forces will assist commanders in maintaining situational awareness of potential threats from within Mexican forces.

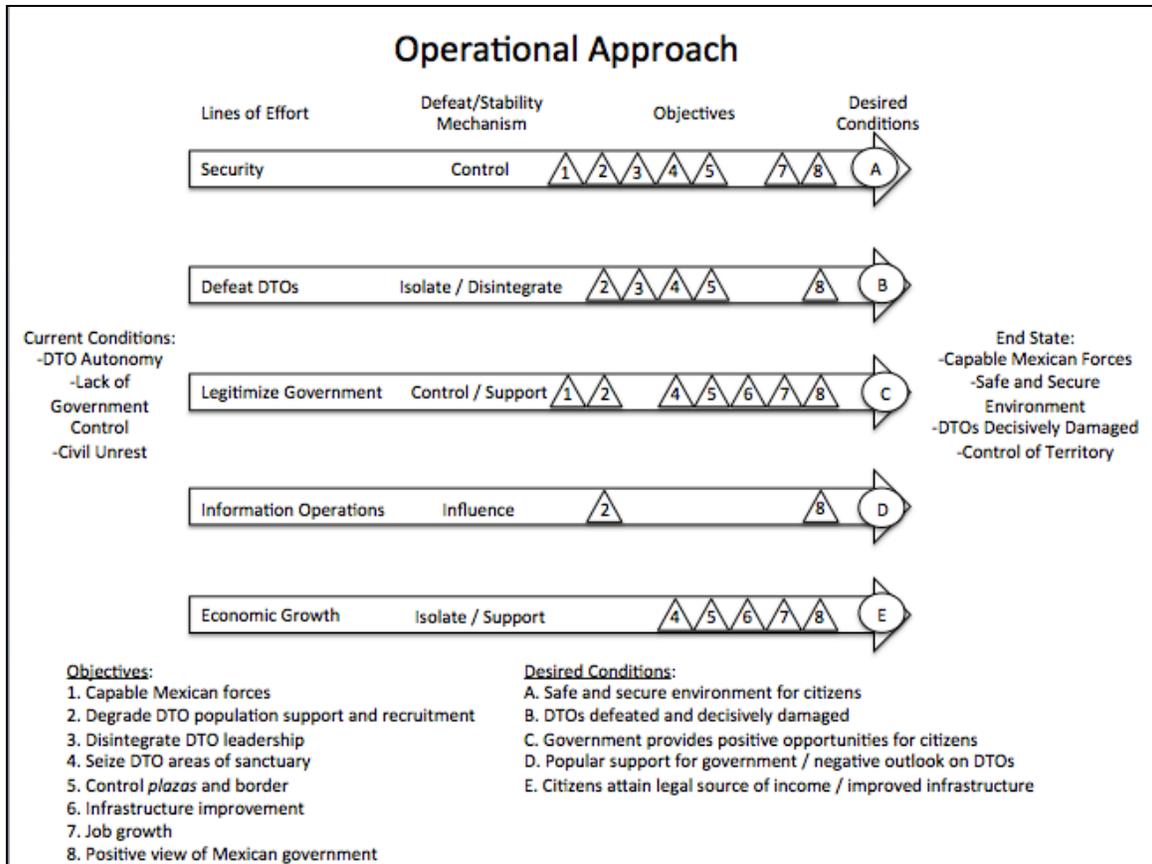


Figure 12. Operational Approach

Source: Created by author.

Using the operational approach outlined will provide a start point for the U.S. military to conduct a range of military operations within Northern Mexico. As the situation in Mexico is complex, there is no single military operation that should be conducted. Rather, the U.S. military operations that can be employed to defeat DTOs and stabilize Northern Mexico are a combination of security cooperation, limited contingency operations, and major operations.

Section Three: Significance of Conclusions and Recommendations

The significance of the conclusions within this study are that it is feasible to conduct military operations within Northern Mexico if the situation with DTOs continues to spiral out of control and U.S. military intervention is needed and requested. It is also important to note that the recommended operational approach follows the doctrinal format in Joint Publication 5-0. Therefore, a Joint Force Commander can use it as a starting point to develop a strategy in Mexico within the context of this study.

Simply reviewing the range of military operations for use in Mexico, without the perspective of their application in Afghanistan, can potentially limit the operations a Joint Force Commander may consider. For example, as the situation in Mexico resembles that of a counterinsurgency environment, merely applying elements of security cooperation within Northern Mexico limits the Joint Force Commander's ability to destroy or dislocate DTO leadership. This study explores the application of each military operation in Afghanistan to ascertain if there was feasibility for its use in Northern Mexico. Notably, the entire range of military operations can be employed in Northern Mexico.

The conclusions of this study are timely. DTOs are increasing in size and exploiting more violence to achieve their ends, so the possibility for U.S. military involvement continues to grow. As U.S. military involvement may occur in the future, the conclusions within this study may serve as a starting point from which to generate a way, or approach, for the joint force.

In order to increase the depth of understanding for the employment of the U.S. military in Mexico the following areas are recommended for further study: joint force structure, command and control structure, and phasing and execution of the operational

approach. Determining the structure of the joint force, in relation to the objectives highlighted within the operational approach, will assist joint staffs develop a template of forces available within potential operational plans. Additionally, analysis of parallel or lead-nation command and control structures should be considered to establish the best way in which to employ the multinational U.S. and Mexican force. Exploring the phasing and execution of the proposed operational approach may refine the approach and more importantly determine specific areas within Northern Mexico in which to act first to ensure success later in the operation. Through continued study of these recommended areas joint staffs may become better prepared to generate timely orders in the event that crisis action planning is needed.

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