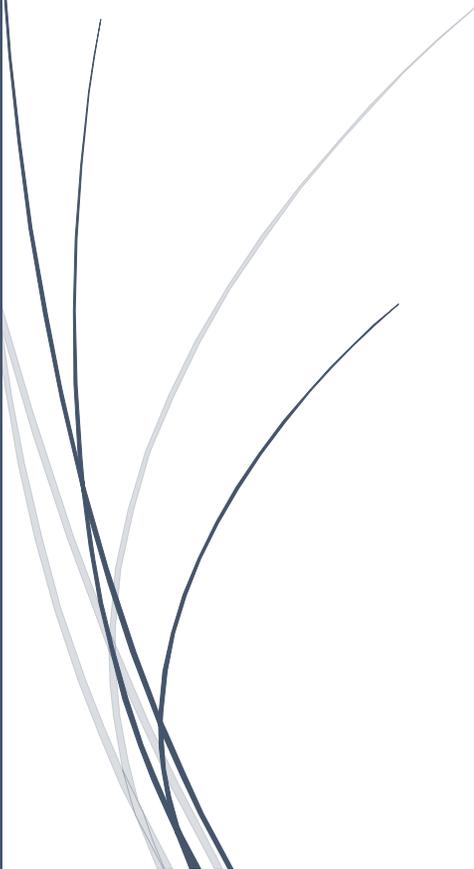# El NARCO

THE ROLE OF THE MEXICAN DRUG CARTELS IN AMERICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT

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The trafficking and abuse of illegal drugs have been a problem for the United States of America for many years. American Law Enforcement has battled the drug problem for decades and there seems to be no end in sight. The drug landscape in the United States has changed in the last 10 years with the opioid threat from prescription drugs, fentanyl, and heroin reaching epidemic levels. Methamphetamine remains a threat and cocaine, which had been in decline for several years, appears to be rising once again. Drug poisoning is the leading cause of injury death in the United States and are currently at the highest levels ever recorded.   Mexico has a unique role in this drug problem; Mexico not only controls the transportation routes of illegal drugs that flow into the United States but they also are able to import drugs into their country from both coasts due to their unique geographic location. The purpose of this paper is to examine and critique the role that Mexican Drug Cartels have in American Law Enforcement and to suggest possible solutions to the ever-growing influence of the Mexican Drug Cartels.

History

What is a cartel? It is reasonable to assume that in order to understand a cartel and how they operate, we first need to understand what they are. Mexican drug cartels are not street gangs. They are highly organized organizations that are structured like many of the top companies in the world. They have a leader, or chief executive officer if you will, and a hierarchy of employees that filter down from the top. They control certain areas of Mexico's terrain and are able to cultivate, produce, import, and transport multi-ton amounts of illicit drugs into the United States on a yearly basis. Once the drugs are across the border into the United

States, the cartels often use contractors or mules to transport the drugs to major urban areas. These contractors often are independent of the cartel and are used by multiple cartels.

What if I told you that there was a single phrase that describes a person that is involved in the drug movement in Mexico? The citizens call those people El Narco. El Narco is a whole way of life for a segment of society. They have their own genre of music called narcocorridos. They have their own fashion style called buchones and they worship their own religious sects. The songs, styles, and sermons build up the drug lords as iconic heroes. (Grillo, 2011). El Narco has entrenched themselves into these communities for a century and with this history, it becomes easier to understand why a society would put up with the level of violence that Mexico has put up with for a number of years.

The birth of the Mexican drug cartel can be traced back to a man named Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. Gallardo became Mexico's liaison with the notorious Colombian cocaine trafficker Pablo Escobar in the 1980's. Escobar was the first person to establish smuggling routes to the United States from Colombia around the year 1975. As the demand for cocaine grew in the United States, Escobar smuggled more and more cocaine into the United States and also created transportation routes. At the height of his power, Escobar and the Medellin Cartel brought in more than $70 million per day, or roughly $26 billion per year. They even had to write off 10 % of the profits every year due to the rats that would sneak in and chew on the bills (Escobar, 2009).

Gallardo, the head of the Guadalajara Cartel, went underground after a United States Drug Enforcement Agent named Enrique Camarena was abducted and murdered, by Gallardo's order, in 1985. Camarena had been responsible for tipping off authorities who destroyed 2,500 acres of marijuana that belonged to Gallardo. Camarena was then tortured and killed at

Gallardo's ranch. His skull, jaw, cheekbones, and windpipe were crushed and a hole was drilled into his head with a drill. Camarena's body was discovered outside the small town of Michoacán on March 5, 1985, approximately 1 month after he was abducted (Seper, 2010). During the United States government's investigation into Camarena's death, they uncovered widespread corruption in all levels of the Mexican government. A large portion of the Jalisco state police force, it turned out, was on the payroll of the Guadalajara cartel and were actually responsible for the abduction of Agent Camarena, at the behest of the Guadalajara cartel. The corruption extended into the governor's office and the federal government, including the Mexican Federal Judicial Police (MFJP). The Mexican Federal Judicial Police oversaw all federal police in each state and had been bought off by the cartels. The command positions within the MFJP were going for several million dollars each.

Gallardo then held a meeting with Mexico's largest drug traffickers. During the course of that meeting, Mexico was divided up into plazas, or regions, and each region would be controlled by various drug-trafficking organizations.   This agreement marked the beginning of the Mexican drug cartels and established the Sinaloa Federation and the Arellano Felix Brothers of Tijuana (Davis, 2016).

At first, the Mexican cartels acted primarily as transporters for the Colombian cartels and the Mexican cartels were paid in cash. By the early 1990s, the Colombian cartels started paying the Mexican cartels in powder cocaine. This lead to the Mexican cartels establishing their own distribution networks in the United States and Mexico and their power and influence eventually eclipsed that of the Colombian cartels. Over the last twenty years, the cartels evolved into what they are today; vertically integrated multinational groups with over 200 distribution arms in over 200 cities throughout the United States (Bonner, 2010).

Politics

As the 1990's went on, Mexico was a one party political system at the time. That party was the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and they allowed the major drug cartels to increase their influence and power. It was a compounded problem and had two different fronts. The corruption inside the government led to a lack of accountability for anyone in the government. Who was responsible for this mess? The other front that made the issue more difficult was the weak law enforcement agencies within the state of Mexico. The cartels largely controlled the state and municipal police and the federal police lacked the skills and authority to carry out effective investigations; they were compromised by the cartels who often paid for their housing. When the federal police were able to conduct effective investigations, the kingpins of the cartels were often tipped off before arrests could be made. The judicial and penal officials were also bribed by the cartels, none of which was more evident than when Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman escaped prison in 2001 after paying off several prison guards.

Carlos Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo were Mexican presidents in the 1990s and made some effort to control the drug cartels, but they lacked an overall focus or sustained effort to combat the problem. Zedillo formed a joint task force with the Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Customs and tried to dismantle the Tijuana cartel. He also created a national drug control center that was headed by a powerful director that would serve as the Mexican counterpart to the head of the DEA in the United States, however, this effort proved to be futile because evidence was uncovered that the Mexican drug director, Jesus Gutirrez Rebello was on the payroll of the Juarez cartel.

The decade of the nineties was marked by periods of cooperation between the Mexican government and the United States government followed by periods of distrust and pessimism. In May of 1998 the cooperation between the two countries vanished when 12 Mexican bankers who had been laundering money for the drug cartels were lured to Las Vegas at the invitation of DEA undercover agents. The United States government estimated that Mexican banks were laundering more than $15 billion annually in drug money. The operation, called Casablanca, was the culmination of a 3 year undercover effort that led to the arrest of 160 people, including 22 Mexican bank officials, the criminal indictment of three of Mexico's largest banks, and the confiscation of $150 million in assets from Colombia's Cali cartel and Mexico's Juarez cartel (Aspinwall and Reich, 2016). The operation was undertaken without the knowledge of the Mexican government or the US State Department and it caused an enormous strain between the two governments. The DEA had convinced US officials that the operation needed to be kept secret because of the criminal convictions of several high-ranking Mexican Government officials.

A major turning point occurred in 2000, when the Institutional Revolutionary Party lost power to Vicente Fox of the National Action Party. For the first time in over 70 years, Mexico was no longer a one party country. The impact of this election was profoundly important in the battle of the Mexican government with the drug cartels. The cartels could no longer assume immunity from the federal government and the Mexican government moved closer to a true democracy. The cleansing of the federal government from cartel influence began under Vicente Fox but it happened slowly. Fox took steps to clean up the customs service and the federal police. He was forced to dispatch the military to Nuevo Laredo in 2005 because when the Gulf Cartel threatened to take control of the city. There was also a sharp increase in extraditions of

drug traffickers to the United States during this time. Prior to Fox's tenure, six Mexican citizens had ever been extradited to the United States; during Fox's term there were 133 extraditions.

Felipe Calderon became Mexico's president in 2006. He ran on a platform of establishing a rule of law by confronting organized crime and corruption and he followed through on his campaign promise. Calderon began his presidency by sending 6,500 Mexican army troops to his home state of Michoacán in an attempt to curb the violence that had taken place between two different cartels. During Calderon's time in office, he deployed 45,000 Mexican army troops to combat the drug cartels. A majority of those troops were stationed in Ciudad Juarez, just south of the city of El Paso, Texas on the United States-Mexico border. That was the site of some of the most violent confrontations between the drug cartels and the Mexican military.

The violence that occurred during the Calderon presidency from 2006-2011 was some of the worst that Mexico has ever seen. It included not only the deaths from the cartels doing battle with the Mexican army but also the cartel violence with each other and the innocent civilians that died by being caught in the middle of it. Within three years of Calderon taking office, the number of deaths in Juarez was almost 2,400, in just one city. To put that in perspective, the country of Mexico had close to 2,000 deaths in the year preceding Calderon taking office. The Mexican government reported that during the five years of Calderon's presidency, almost 50,000 Mexicans were killed in drug related violence (Hanen, 2016).

Calderon also strengthened the security along the border with the United States and at the Mexican ports in order to interrupt the flow of drugs and weapons into and out of Mexico. As a result of the extra security measures, Mexican authorities have seized over 80 metric tons of cocaine in the first two years that Calderon took office (Bonner, 2010).

In the year 2012, Enrique Pena Nieto succeeded Calderon as Mexico's president. Nieto formed new policies to deal with the Mexican drug cartels. He did not want to focus on fighting the cartels; he wanted his administration to focus on prevention and other non-violent measures. He wanted to create a culture of peace. Did it work? In the first fourteen months of Nieto's presidency, 2,234 Mexican citizens were killed as a result of the drug war.

Nieto's job also became increasingly difficult because the cartels continued to evolve into diverse criminal organizations. The cartels increased their presence into other criminal activities such as extortion, kidnapping, cybercrime, and human trafficking. They discovered how lucrative human sex trafficking could be. The anonymity the internet provides the cartels the opportunity to expand their drug empire but it also helped them expand their criminal activities, so much so that the cartels sexually exploit immigrant children and have become the world's number one child pornography producer (Hanen, 2016). The cartels also extort businesses in Mexico through the threat of violence, costing the country of Mexico almost $6 billion a year. It is clear that the Mexican Drug Cartels are highly organized multi-billion dollar criminal enterprises. They have a vast array of branches in different criminal areas and their power and influence has not been affected by any measureable degree by any of the changes in the Mexican government's administration. So what kind of effect has the Mexican Drug Cartels had on law enforcement? Does their sphere of influence stretch across the border into the United States? You bet it does.

Organization

All of the major Mexican drug cartels operate in the United States. The following cartels are the major players, the regions which they work in, and the drugs they primarily specialize in. The cartels also have specific structures and strategies for their operation in the Unites States, which will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

The Sinaloa Cartel is one of the oldest and more established drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. It began in the state of Sinaloa but controls various regions in Mexico, especially along the Pacific coast. The Sinaloa cartel exports and distributes wholesale amounts of methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin in the United States. They maintain distribution hubs in major cities including Phoenix, Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago. The Sinaloa cartel smuggles illegal drugs into the United States through crossing points along the Mexican border with California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Joaquin Guzman, better known as El Chapo, was the former head the Sinaloa cartel and gained international fame by escaping from prison twice after getting arrested, often by bribing prison guards. He was eventually extradited to the United States early in 2017.

The Jalisco New Generation Cartel is one of the newer drug trafficking organizations in Mexico and was formed in 2010 after splintering from the Sinaloa Cartel. The Jalisco New Generation cartel has quickly formed a potent reputation for its willingness to engage in violent confrontations with the Mexican Government security forces and rival cartels. Their primary drug of distribution is methamphetamine but they also distribute cocaine, heroin, and marijuana through their main corridors in Tijuana, Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo.

The Juarez Cartel operates out of the Mexican state of Chihuahua. The Juarez cartel impacts the United States with distribution centers in Denver, Chicago, Oklahoma, and Kansas

City. They traffic primarily in cocaine and marijuana, but has recently expanded to heroin and methamphetamine. The Juarez cartel survived a multi-year turf war with the Sinaloa cartel.

The Gulf Cartel has been around for some time and is centered in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. They focus primarily on marijuana and cocaine and maintains its dominance in northeastern Mexico. They use smuggling routes between the Rio Grande Valley and South Padre Island in south Texas and they also have distribution hubs in Houston and Atlanta. The Gulf Cartel also has links to suppliers in Arkansas and Michigan. The Gulf Cartel has recently weakened due to arrests of its key leaders, resulting in the decline of their drug trafficking influence in the United States.

The Los Zetas Cartel formed in 2010 when it officially split from the Gulf Cartel. The Los Zetas maintained regions in eastern, central, and southern Mexico. They focus mainly in marijuana and cocaine and use smuggling routes between Del Rio and Falcon Lake, Texas. The Los Zetas maintain distribution hubs in Dallas, New Orleans, and Atlanta.

The Mexican drug cartel activity in the United States is managed primarily by Mexican nationals or United States citizens of Mexican origin. These members try to conceal themselves by going to densely populated areas with large Mexican American communities. The cartel members often possess familial ties to the originating areas of the leading cartel figures in Mexico. The U.S. based members may reside in the United States prior to being employed by the cartels and there have been some examples in the past where the cartel members have been directed by cartel leadership to establish or resume drug operations in the major U.S. cities. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, "U.S. members are given high-ranking positions within the cartels upon returning to Mexico after years of successful activity in the United States."

The United States based Mexican drug cartels are composed of compartmentalized cells, all of which have specific duties assigned to them such as distribution, transportation, consolidation of drug proceeds, and money laundering. The operators within these cells are aware of their function within the cartel but are often unaware of other cells within the cartel. This aspect of the cartel structure is beneficial to the cartel and challenging to American Law Enforcement because it's very difficult to tie multiple members of the same organization together during a drug investigation. While there is always a risk to the cartels that a specific cell might be taken out, it is unlikely that multiple cells with the cartel will be stopped.

The transportation and distribution of illicit drugs to the United States consumer markets is coordinated by the Mexican drug cartels. The retail-level distribution is usually handled by smaller local drug trafficking groups, which are often not directly affiliated with the Mexican drug cartels. Sometimes the drug cartels will work with local criminal gangs for the distribution and transportation of their drugs.

The Mexican drug cartels have a major influence in most major metropolitan areas in the United States. In Chicago, the cartels dominate the wholesale distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. In the city of Boston, Massachusetts, the local distribution groups are receiving cocaine directly from the cartels based in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. The cartels have established routes for the transportation of Mexican white heroin into the Pittsburgh area. The heroin shipments are sent via couriers on passenger buses to Pittsburgh. New Jersey serves as a transshipment hub for the Mexican drug cartels. The hub functions as the distribution center for heroin and fentanyl shipments originating from Mexico, which are then bound for the Pittsburgh area. In Washington D.C., the Mexican drug cartels

based along the southwestern United States have become the principal suppliers of crystal methamphetamine in the region.

Law Enforcement

Extensive corruption inside the Mexican government, judicial system, and law enforcement has been one of the most challenging obstacles in the government's ability to stop the drug cartels and their violent activity. The cartels have billions of dollars and their levels of influence and power infiltrate all levels of the Mexican government. The cartels influence does not stop at the border. The cartels have begun to target the Department of Homeland Security employees to help the cartels smuggle contraband across the United States and Mexico border. In a written testimony presented the US House of Representatives, DHS Inspector General John Roth said that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have turned to recruiting and corrupting DHS employees. Agents along the border receive cash bribes, sexual favors, and other gratuities to the contraband through the inspection lanes at border crossings. (Riesenfeld, 2015) There have been cases where a border patrol agent helped three traffickers smuggle 147 pounds of marijuana across the U.S.-Mexico border. Some of the more concerning cases are when the border patrol agents leak sensitive information to drug traffickers, which allows them to track investigations and root out informants. In one particularly glaring case, a former Arizona state prison guard who worked with the cartels supplied the cartels with the locations of the border patrol units, sensor maps, access codes to gates along the border, and computer records of drug seizures.

In a study conducted by El Universal, a major Mexican newspaper, revealed that a large number of law enforcement officials working in southern Texas have been bribed by criminal

organizations. These law enforcement officials include sheriffs, border patrol agents, and customs agents. It makes sense that the law enforcement agencies along the border are at the most risk for corruption. There are seven major Mexican drug cartels that are active along the border, most notably being the Gulf Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Zetas.

The Department of Homeland Security also published a report that revealed that approximately 2,000 police and law enforcement officials have been under investigation for their involvement in organized crime. These officials have been investigated for receiving bribes to protect criminals, facilitate drug trafficking, escort drug shipments, and traffic the Mexican Cartels drugs. The latest report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicates that 144 border patrol agents were arrested between 2005 to 2012 for corruption, and many of those cases were drug related (Pardo and Inzunza, 2014).

How do the Mexican Drug Cartels corrupt law enforcement agents and officers that have sworn oaths to uphold the law and fight corruption? For one, it is part of the cartel's business plan. They have billions of dollars invested in their business and for that business to work, they have to find ways to get their product across the border without being detected. The corrupt relationships often start off with agents taking small bribes for small favors. Over time, these connections can escalate into more serious affairs. Many of the agents that work for US Customs and Border Protection hail from the border regions. They have friends and family ties with the people in those communities, making them prime targets for the cartels to recruit. A woman named Nora, who was featured in an investigative report into the corruption at the border, and who has worked as a confidential informant with the law enforcement and for the drug cartels as a smuggler stated, "It's really true what they say: Money talks. Oh, you show

someone some money and they're going to be in. I don't care who it is. That's never going to

change" (Del Bosque and Michels, 2015).

In an investigative report done by Melissa del Bosque and Patrick Michels with the Texas

Observer, concerns about the corruption within the US Customs and Border Protection was

brought to light. The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is the nation's largest law

enforcement agency and employs approximately 60,000 agents, officers, and specialists. To put

that into perspective, the New York City Police Department employs 34,500 officers and the Los

Angeles Police Department employs 10,000 officers. The CBP is also growing at a fast pace,

nearly doubling the amount of employees that work for them in a decade. This massive size and

growth of the CBP has led to scathing reports of corruption inside the agency. For many years,

the CBP had no oversight personnel that was responsible for investigating internal affairs. The

DHS Office of the Inspector General was given the task of investigating internal affairs. They

became known for hoarding cases and leaving the cases uninvestigated. The office would often

refuse help from the FBI and other law enforcement agencies that also kept watch over customs

officers and Border Patrol agents. This would often lead to officers guilty of corruption going

unpunished. The Office of the Inspector General was responsible for overseeing all of the

220,000 employees of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a ratio of one investigator

for every 1,000 workers. In comparison, the FBI has 250 internal affairs investigators for its

13,000 agents, a ratio of one investigator for every 52 agents. It was clear that the Office of the

Inspector General was overwhelmed and ineffective.

When the CBP was finally given its own internal affairs investigators, it still did not have

enough investigators to properly fight corruption. James Tomsheck, the former head of the

CBP's internal affairs division from 2006 to 2014 told reporters, "It was very clear to me that the

Department of Homeland Security was attempting to hide corruption, and was attempting to control the number of arrests of CBP personnel on corruption charges so as not to create a political liability for DHS." In 2010, Tomsheck warned the Senate Homeland Security subcommittee that there was a concerted effort by the Mexican Drug Cartels to infiltrate, through hiring initiatives, and to compromise our existing agents and officers. In fact, a woman named Margarita Crispin joined the CBP in 2003 in El Paso. Investigators from the DHS suspected that she had been recruited by a friend who had ties to the cartels. It turned out they were right. Crispin began helping the drug traffickers bring their loads across the border as soon as her career began. It is estimated that Crispin let more than 2,200 pounds of marijuana across the border in her brief career before she was arrested in 2007.

There are certain things that the United States government could do to combat the corruption inside the DHS. It would be beneficial to continue efforts to investigate and prosecute officers that are already under the suspicion or working with criminal groups. It would send a message to the existing agents that the existence of that behavior would not be tolerated. It would also help to hire more internal affairs investigators and to perform more thorough background checks on new recruits which could help stem the tide of the corruption.

One disturbing trend is that the Mexican drug cartels have recently been tied to Islamic terrorist organizations. Janet Napolitano, the former Department of Homeland Security Secretary, said in 2012, "terrorists have crossed the Southwest border with the intent to harm the American people." It is also known that individuals with Al Qaeda connections are coming to Mexico, changing their Islamic surnames to Hispanic surnames, obtaining false Hispanic identities, learning to speak Spanish, and are pretending to be Hispanic immigrants (Hanen, 2016). That trend is a scary prospect for American citizens. The Mexican drug cartels control

the border and collect a tax for everything that crosses the border, whether that is drugs and weapons, or people. If the Mexican drug cartels continue to retain control over the border, they will have an enormous influence on the homeland security of the United States.

Insurgency

Insurgency is defined as an active revolt or uprising. Are the Mexican Drug Cartels revolting against something? What exactly is their motivation? The answer to that question goes straight to the heart of what these cartel members are. If they deliberately kill civilians to make a point, that would make them terrorists by many definitions. If they are trying to win the monopoly of violence in a certain area, that would make them warlords. If they are fighting a full-on war against the government, that in turn would make them insurgents.

This criminal insurgency, however, is not a unified project. Cartels have been fighting other cartels for years. They also fight the government for control of smuggling routes. The United States have worried about the extent of the violence for years. They fear that if the violence gets bad enough, it could trigger a governmental collapse that would threaten the national security of the United States and demand a military response. Can you imagine a scenario where U.S troops are crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico? In September of 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "We face an increasing threat from a well-organized network, drug-trafficking threat that is, in some cases, morphing into or making common cause with what we would consider an insurgency, in Mexico and Central America…And these drug cartels are now showing more and more indices of insurgency-you know, all of a sudden car bombs show up, which weren't there before. So it's becoming-it's looking more and more like Colombia looked twenty years ago."

What former Secretary of State Clinton was referring to was Colombia in the 1980's and early 1990's, the height of the power of their two most powerful drug cartels, the Medellin and Cali cartels. The infamous Pablo Escobar was the head of the Medellin cartel and the power that Escobar held during that time was unmatched. Escobar clearly was a threat to the national security of Colombia. He blew up a passenger airplane, a police headquarters, funded guerillas to assassinate Supreme Court Justices, and had the number one Colombian presidential candidate assassinated.

Mexican drug cartels have clearly morphed into organizations with a capacity for violence that goes way beyond the bounds of criminals and into the realm of national security. Some liberal voices argue that the Mexican drug cartels are not true insurgents because they do not, like Islamic or communist insurgents, want to take power. They do, however, stand against the expansion of the military and any anti-insurgency tactics used by the Mexican government because it threatens their interests. I would say that even if the drug cartels have no interest in running a government and being responsible for education, health care, etc., they clearly pose serious challenges to the security of the state. They revolt against the civil authority, they attack army barracks, they assassinate high-ranking police and politicians, and they conduct mass kidnappings. They might not have a political agenda as most insurgencies have in the past but they do have an economical agenda (Grillo, 2011).

The Mexican Drug Cartels have tremendous power. In many cases, the cartels carry out attacks with clear agendas. The Zetas kidnapped a soldier and decapitated him on video because he was a military intelligence officer who got too close to the activities of the Zetas. The La Familia cartel attacked a dozen police baes and killed fifteen officers in response to the arrest of one of their lieutenants. Tis kind of violence is a reaction to the government strikes of the

criminal organizations. The cartels are sending a message that they want a soft government that will not interfere with their business. There are other examples, however, that outline a different strategy. Cartels also attack political candidates, sometimes before they are even in office. The candidates have not even had a chance to hurt the cartels business but the cartels want to make sure the politicians are already in their pocket before they take office. For those candidates that refuse them; they send their message to. The ability of the drug cartels to choose whether or not political front-runners live sends an ominous message to the Mexican people about their power.

Strategies to Combat the Cartels

The modern drug war contains many different strategies to combat the Mexican drug cartels. It's a filthy game the drug investigators play to get close to the cartels. The DEA, FBI, CBP, the state police agencies based on the Mexican border, and the Sheriff's Departments and city police departments in the United States of America all have their role to play in the fight. The Mexican drug investigators also have their role to play, and I've already outlined how dangerous it can be working with the Mexican police. It would be difficult to know who to trust because of the enormous influence that the cartels have in bribing Mexican law enforcement. They do have influence on U.S. law enforcement as well but to a lesser extent. What many people don't know about this game is what it takes to bust the cartels. The huge busts that you see on the news do not happen by luck or brute force. The cases are made by intelligence. The investigators need to know specifics about when shipments are coming in or which safe houses are being used as stash houses. This information often comes from informants (Grillo, 2011).

The DEA has a vast network of informants, or people that the DEA pays that are close to the cartels and can give them information about cartel activity. They also pay informants for

information that leads to major arrests and busts, as do most law enforcement agencies. These informants are often questionable characters and do not lead highly ethical lives but in order for law enforcement to get close to the cartels, they must rely on these characters to get the information that they want. It's a dangerous game. Agents worry about whether the informants are double agents feeding information to the cartels. They also try not to know what their informants are doing or if they are involved in other criminal activity. Agents have to take calculated risks in the drug war. This is not a crime where you have a clear victim. In the narcotics trade, there is no classic victim and the billions of dollars are spread among thousands of people. The drug takers on the street have no idea where their product is coming from or who is moving it. In order for agents to find that out, they have to develop informants and go undercover.

Many of the largest drug busts and arrests have been made possible by the information from informants. This leads the drug cartels to be extremely violent with suspected turncoats. Once high profile drug kingpins are arrested and extradited to the United States however, many become informants themselves. They make deals with American law enforcement to give up other high ranking cartel members and locations of millions of dollars in assets that the US government can seize. This leads to more arrests and more drug busts. It's a cycle that's been going for four decades.

The current situation in Mexico is often compared to the situation in Colombia in the 80's and 90's. Colombia had a weak, corrupt law enforcement during that time when drug violence and civil war made Colombia the most violent country in the world. The United States and Colombia formed a plan to address the drug violence and take down the drug cartels. The United States supplied cash that helped Colombia build a fearsome military and police. The Colombian

National Police now boasts over 143,000 officers and dozens of planes, helicopters, and heavy armaments. The antinarcotics division has a considerable success rate of taking down drug traffickers. The Colombian National Police based its antidrug policy on the DEA's use of informants. The Colombian National Police have even taken this to a new level. Large resources are given over to paying informants large rewards, rewards big enough that can make them rich for the rest of their lives. The government also works to persuade the community that ratting out the bad guys is an honorable rather than dishonorable activity (Grillo, 2011).

Mexico has also implemented this strategy of rewarding informants. President Calderon introduced a major reward system in 2010. For years, paying informants was illegal in Mexico but the information that Mexican law enforcement gained from informants enabled them to arrest several high profile targets in 2010 and 2011. The people with the most knowledge of the drug cartels activity are often the right-hand men of the cartel leaders. Sometimes they are given ranks, like lieutenants. When these lieutenants are arrested, law enforcement authorities bleed them for as much information as they can because they have a vast knowledge of the cartel activity. The Colombian authorities realized in the 1980's that these high-ranking cartel members posed less of a threat when they were extradited to the United States so the Mexican authorities have begun extraditing cartel members to the United States. Gustavo Salazar, an attorney that represented Pablo Escobar and many other high ranking cartel members explained the negotiations with these cartel members. "I deal with these drug lords every day. They are these fearsome gangsters and then they get arrested and are like crying children. They are scared. They don't want to be locked up in isolation for the rest of their lives. So they make deals. They let agents know where some of their bank accounts and assets are and they hand over names and routes of other traffickers to get time in easier prisons and reduced sentences."

For the past several years, the United States and Mexico have forged an unparalleled alliance to combat the Mexican drug cartels. They share sensitive intelligence, they train together, and they have joint operational planning. Mexico granted the United States permission to fly spy planes through Mexican airspace. The United States also provided electronic signals technology, ground sensors, voice-recognition gear, cellphone-tracking devices, data analysis tools, computer hacking kits, and airborne cameras capable of reading license plates from three miles away. The U.S was basically given complete access to Mexico and the secrets of its citizens. Since President Nieto took office in 2013, however, his administration has shifted their priorities away from the U.S. backed strategy of arresting drug kingpins. This strategy, which began when President Calderon took office, sparked an unprecedented level of violence in Mexico. President Nieto's top priority during his campaign was stopping the cartel violence that had plagued Mexico for years. The U.S. officials did not know what this meant. They feared that the partnership that the two countries had forged in their battle against the cartels would come to an end.

Mexico's top security team met with United States officials and outlined the plan they would be putting in place. President Nieto would not be nearly as directly involved in counterdrug efforts as President Calderon was. Mexico's interior minister would coordinate the relationships between various Mexican and U.S. agencies and other Mexican units. The director of the Mexican intelligence agency will decide which Mexican agency should receive and act on sensitive U.S. information. U.S. officials stated that they would be unwilling to share sensitive information until they have vetted the people involved and understand how their information would be protected. This is understandable given Mexico's history of corruption. The Mexican government also planned to create five regional intelligence centers, staffed with federal and

state officials, and to build a 10,000 member super police force. The force would be steeped in military discipline but would use police tactics, rather than the overwhelming military force, in hopes that it would reduce violence. Mexican officials also informed the United States that U.S. authorities would no longer be allowed to work inside any fusion center (Priest, 2013).

The Future

All of the time, resources, and effort that has been put into this war against the Mexican Drug Cartels boils down to an uncomfortable truth for the U.S and Mexican counterdrug officials. The flow of drugs coming from Mexico into the United States has not been interrupted or slowed for many years. Whenever drug kingpins are arrested, other villains always take their place and the flow of drugs does not change. It's one of the fundamental criticisms of the drug war, the fact that the war cannot be won. As long as there is a cash incentive to smuggle narcotics and as long as millions of people in the United States choose to use drugs, someone will find a way to supply the drugs to them. This fact is backed by historical experience. Former United States President Richard Nixon was the first to declare a war on drugs and when he did it, he spoke in absolute terms. He called for "the complete annihilation of the merchants of death." Four decades later, no one dares to show that much optimism. The goal in the drug war has changed from victory to damage control.

The Colombian experience is a classic example of this paradox. The Colombian police have gotten much better at busting drug traffickers. The police spray crops, bust labs, seize submarines, and arrest kingpins, but the amount of cocaine coming out of Colombia has not changed significantly. Other villains sow more cocoa leaves, build more labs, and ship new product out on speedboats. So what has Colombia achieved? The question was asked to the

DEA Bureau chief of the Andean region, Jay Bergman. Bergman answered, "By hammering

traffickers, their power to threaten national security has been severely reduced. When you go

back to Pablo Escobar, this guy blew up a passenger plane, police headquarters, funded guerillas

to kill Supreme Court Justices, and had the number one presidential candidate assassinated.

Now, there is no organization that can go toe-to-toe with the government that can threaten the

national security of Colombia. In each successive generation of traffickers, there has been a

dilution of their power." The reign of Pablo Escobar lasted fifteen years. The average kingpin in

Colombia now lasts fifteen months. The government of Colombia and the government of the

United States will not allow a trafficker to exist long enough to become a viable threat (Grillo,

2011).

The dynamics of the Mexican drug cartel situation is different than the situation in

Colombia, despite many similarities. Mexico has seven major drug cartels. When one of the

leaders of the seven major cartels have been taken out, the cartels have only become more

violent in part because the lieutenants in those particular cartels are fighting for power. The

question remains, since this war on the Mexican Drug Cartel leadership began, have the

authorities in Mexico and the United States done enough to say that the cartels are not a national

security threat. Some of the drug agents advised that this has already occurred. The cartels are

weaker with all of the arrests and the violence is an act of desperation from the cartels. They say

that Mexico just needs to see this through. Are they right?

When you try to come with solutions to the Mexican drug war and the Mexican drug

cartels influence on the United States, it seems like an insurmountable task. This problem has

been raging for 40-50 years and we don't seem to be any closer to a solution than we were back

then. Portugal chose to decriminalize drug possession sixteen years ago. This included

everything from marijuana to heroin. The drugs are still illegal but Portuguese authorities no longer arrest anyone in possession of less than a ten day supply of an illicit drug. The offenders receive citations, just like a speeding ticket, and are ordered to go before a dissuasion panel made up of legal, social, and psychological experts. Most cases are suspended and for individuals that repeatedly go before the panels, they are prescribed treatment ranging from motivational counseling to opiate substitution therapy.

The results have been eye opening to say the least. The rate of HIV infections has declined from 1,016 cases in 2001 to only 56 cases in 2012. Overdose death decreased from 80 the year that decriminalization was put into place to 16 in 2012. In the United States, 52,404 people died from prescription opioid overdoses in 2015 and that number continues to rise. Portugal's current drug induced death rate, three per million residents, is more than five times lower than the European Union's average of 17.3. Skeptics assumed that drug use would skyrocket in Portugal when this went into place but that did not happen. A marginal increase occurred with adolescents but overall drug use has fallen. The drug use rate in Portugal now rises and falls with the overall trends in Europe. Portugal also has a vast network of services that assist the drug users, everything from needle replacement, detox, therapeutic communities, and employment options for drug users. This system, combined with the police that coordinate with health officials to ensure drug treatment, has elevated Portugal as a case study that diplomats in the United Nations have to consider when discussing global drug policy (Oakford, 2016).

I believe that Mexico and the United States have to work together to come up with a group of policies that can help become part of the solution. The prohibitionist policies based on eradication, interdiction, and criminalization of consumption have not worked. The taboos that inhibit public debate about drugs in our country has to be shattered so alternative solutions can

be considered. Drug legalization has long been a touchy issue and there are so many different ways to look at it. Some people want to legalize because they see a business opportunity. Some want to tax everything to make billions for the country. Religious driven organizations believe that drugs are immoral and many in the drug fighting establishment stand firmly against it. They don't want to see their life's work has been in vain. Advocating legalization of drugs is by no means saying that drugs are good, everyone agrees that heroin is a terrible drug. The reformers argue that getting drugs out in the open, taxing and regulating them, and investing the money spent trying to prohibit narcotics on prevention campaigns and rehabilitation would go a long way toward a solution.

Decriminalizing marijuana has begun in several states in the United States and if it is changed in every state in the future, the billions of dollars in Mexico's marijuana market would be taken away from the Mexican drug cartels but the cartels would not disappear overnight. They have diversified into other criminal activities that must be dealt with. The United States needs to step up their efforts in training Mexico's police force. I'm not talking about the gangsters in uniform who get paid by the cartels. I'm talking about the police force that want to help the helpless. The quality of the Mexican police force has to vastly improve. Whether Mexico creates a single national police force or separate agencies, the police ranks have to be trained, improved, monitored, screened, cleaned out, and trained again. The Mexican police also have to prioritize. They need to focus on the mountain of unsolved murders and Mexico's wave of kidnappings rather than busting small-time drug dealers. The Mexican government also has to improve opportunities for children, like scholarship programs to stop kids from dropping out of school and hooking up with one of the cartels. The poorest areas of Mexico also has to be developed. In Medellin, Colombia, Sergio Fajardo became mayor and began pouring resources

into the slums. He hired world famous architects to build public buildings and he invested in

public transportation to make it easier for the middle class citizens to travel there. The middle

class began traveling to the slums and the murder rate in Medellin plummeted. I believe that if

Mexico can institute some of these changes and the United States and Mexico can work together

to formulate real solutions, the future of Mexico, the United States, and American law

enforcement in general can be very bright.

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