

Canadian  
Forces  
College

Collège  
des  
Forces  
Canadiennes



## **PRESIDENT FELIPE CALDERÓN'S 'WAR AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME': TREATING THE SYMPTOMS BUT NOT THE SICKNESS**

Major J.G. Hanson

**JCSP 39**

**Master of Defence Studies**

**Disclaimer**

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the  
Minister of National Defence, 2013

**PCEMI 39**

**Maîtrise en études de la défense**

**Avertissement**

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le  
ministre de la Défense nationale, 2013.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 39 – PCEMI 39  
2012 – 2013

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES – MAÎTRISE EN ÉTUDES DE LA DÉFENSE

**PRESIDENT FELIPE CALDERÓN'S 'WAR AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME':  
TREATING THE SYMPTOMS BUT NOT THE SICKNESS**

By Major J.G. Hanson  
Par le major J.G. Hanson

*“This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions, which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”*

Word Count: 18 472

*“La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.”*

Compte de mots : 18 472

## ABSTRACT

From 2006 to 2012, Mexican President Felipe Calderón waged his self-proclaimed ‘war against organized crime’ – a massive counter narcotics strategy to eliminate the drug cartel strongholds and defeat the growing drug industry that was increasingly paralyzing Mexico. Using a four prong approach, Calderón’s interdiction and eradication strategy focused on strengthening the military and using it to combat organized crime groups, targeting and dismantling drug cartels, introducing reform into domestic law institutions, and soliciting continued US assistance in the anti-drug fight. This plan brought little success. During Calderón’s term, Mexico’s drug trade continued to operate unhindered and organized crime violence soared and diversified into record breaking levels.

This seemingly undefeatable organized crime is a symptom and consequence of Mexico’s long-term state fragility, which can be traced back for decades. Mexico has a history of weak security and rule of law, as well as a struggling economy and rampant corruption. The weakness or absence of these critical state services created the perfect environment in which organized crime could flourish, and it did. Past Mexican administrations have attempted to combat organized crime, but with little to no success. This paper uses the recent example of President Felipe Calderón to examine why this has been so.

Successive governments have been too focused on trying to eradicate the drug trade instead of developing the state – President Calderón being no exception. This paper examines his strategy and applies it to the foundational concepts and functions of the state to determine the level to which his actions addressed the underlying problem of Mexican state fragility. Using this framework, this paper argues that although President Calderón achieved some success in his ‘war

against organized crime,' it was ultimately a failure because it did not properly address the underlying state problems of weak security, corruption and weak rule of law. Organized crime will continue to threaten Mexico's potential and sovereignty if the above state fragility problems are not resolved. The Mexican government must adopt policies that will address the roots of its state fragility in order to defeat organized crime and transform its country into a viable, sustainable state.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	iii
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review	5
3. Historical Review	11
4. Calderón's Plan of Attack	31
5. Success, Failure and Calderón's Legacy	50
6. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Administrations	68
Bibliography	78

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mexico is known for many things: the Aztecs and Mayans, all-inclusive hotels, Cancun, Puerto Vallarta, sunny beaches, tacos, nachos, burritos, tequila, piñatas, and sombreros, to name only a few. These are positive, fun-loving images that highlight the bright side of the US' southern neighbour. However, another aspect of Mexico – one that is much less appealing – has attracted growing international attention over the last six years: its war against the drug trade. From December 2006 to December 2012, then-President Felipe Calderón waged an aggressive war against the drug industry: what he christened his 'war against organized crime.' Unfortunately, this war has emphasized the dark side of Mexico, bringing unwanted attention to its problems and weaknesses, earning it disrepute on the international stage as a fragile state.

Drug smuggling operations and efforts to defeat them are recurring themes in Mexican history. The drug trade's persistence and resiliency has perplexed Mexican and US government since the early 1900s. Upon taking office in 2006, President Calderón wanted to put an end to this trend and overpower the seemingly undefeatable cartels. He made it known to the world that he intended to defeat the illicit industry that was crippling his nation. He adopted aggressive counter-drug strategies that took deliberate action against the drug cartels and focused on interdiction and eradication. Despite initial indicators of success, the impact of Calderón's counter-drug strategies soon diminished as the drug war became increasingly violent, with battles between government forces and the drug cartels putting many Mexican citizens at risk. At the end of Calderón's presidency in 2012, the drug trade was as strong as ever and organized crime violence had risen to levels never seen before. It seemed as if history was repeating itself.

A significant consideration that has impacted the success of government anti-drug initiatives is the fragility of the Mexican state. On the 2012 Fragile State Index, Mexico was ranked 98<sup>th</sup> out of 178 – earning it a “High Warning” status.<sup>1</sup> Its worst score was in the security sector and it also scored poorly in state legitimacy, rule of law, human rights, economic development, human flight, brain drain, and public services.<sup>2</sup> Organized crime is a symptom and consequence of Mexico’s state fragility, and successive governments have been too focused on trying to eradicate the drug trade instead of developing the state – President Felipe Calderón being no exception. This paper will argue that although President Calderón achieved some success in his ‘war against organized crime,’ it was ultimately a failure because it did not properly address the underlying state problems of weak security, corruption and weak rule of law. Organized crime will continue to threaten Mexico’s potential and sovereignty if the above state fragility problems are not resolved. The Mexican government must adopt policies that will address the roots of its state fragility in order to defeat organized crime and transform its country into a viable, sustainable state.

Before examining and assessing the details of President Calderón’s ‘war against organized crime,’ a literature review will be conducted to examine and discuss existing theories concerning the concept of the state. This will include the comparison and contrast of institutional and functional definitions of the state. Existing functional definitions will help identify the differentiating characteristics between strong, fragile and collapsed states. Following this, an examination of existing theories on how to repair fragile and failed states will be conducted. This analysis will provide the necessary foundation to better understand the challenges Mexico faces

---

<sup>1</sup> Nate Haken, *et al.*, *Failed States Index 2012* (Washington, DC: The Fund for Peace, 2012), 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

as a fragile state and establish the benchmark criteria against which Calderón's strategy will be assessed – security, rule of law and corruption.

In order to establish the context of President Calderón's 'war on organized crime,' a historical review will be conducted that gives background to the long-standing drug trade in Mexico. This review will focus on the history of Mexico's economy, corruption, bilateral relations with the US, cartel evolution and regional state fragility to identify trends in governmental policies, their impact on the drug industry, and their relation to Mexico's state fragility. This section will set the stage to describe the drug trade problem that President Calderón inherited in December 2006.

The next section will examine the counter-narcotic strategy that President Calderón adopted during his six year 'war against organized crime' in detail to better understand its execution and elements. This chapter will study his aggressive use of the military in the policing role, his kingpin strategy, his reform of domestic law institutions, and his efforts towards establishing bilateral relations with and external assistance from the US. This will be followed by examination of the main obstacles to the war on drugs that Calderón experienced during his six year term.

The next chapter will identify the successes and failures of the above counter-drug strategy and determine the legacy that President Calderón left behind for the next administration. President Calderón's 'war against organized crime' was ultimately a failure, but his small success will be mentioned as well to give due credit. This section will illustrate how organized crime grew in occurrence, size, brutality, distribution, and diversification despite President Calderón's aggressive anti-drug approach. Additional consequences such as increases in human



rights violations and displaced personnel will also be examined. Exposure of these results will highlight the weaknesses of Calderón's counter-drug policies and point to the resulting fragile state and organized crime legacies that Calderón has left behind for the next administration and future governments to cope with.

The final chapter will discuss conclusions and recommendations by determining the requirements needed for Mexico to effectively resolve its organized crime problem. It will start with a review and assessment of recently articulated options for addressing organized crime that past and current governments have considered. This will be followed by arguments and recommendations that support the effective targeting of Mexico's real problem: state fragility. Future Mexican governments need to apply more concentration on adopting policies that aim to build a stronger, more sustainable state. Only then will Mexico have the necessary vigor to defeat organized crime.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before examining and assessing the details of President Calderón's 'war against organized crime,' the concept of the fragile state needs to be defined and established. This will provide the foundation to better understand Mexico's status as a fragile state during Calderón's six year term, and the subsequent challenges that came with this status. This section will first discuss how literature conventionally defines the state, followed by definitions of strong, fragile and collapsed states. It will then examine the literature that discusses how to repair failing and failed states.

In order to define and identify characteristics of a fragile state, the conventional definition of the state should first be examined. Weber's conventional definition of the state focused on political and military power: "a compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a 'state' insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order."<sup>3</sup> Mann builds upon this definition to create a more detailed institutional definition:

. . . 1. The state is a differentiated set of institutions and personnel 2. embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate to and from a center, to cover a 3. territorial demarcated area over which it exercises 4. some degree of authoritative, binding rule making, backed up by some organized physical force.<sup>4</sup>

Another definition proposes that the state "is the authoritative political institution that is

---

<sup>3</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press): 54-56, quoted in Micheal Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Micheal Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 55.

sovereign over a recognized territory”<sup>5</sup> and that it comprises of three functions: the state as the sovereign authority, as an institution, and as a security guarantor for a populated territory.<sup>6</sup> It can be seen here that the conventional definition of the state includes three common themes: the state as an institution, sovereignty over territory, and the use of physical force to enforce order.

The above definitions are more institutional than functional in nature; they describe what a state is rather than what a state does. In order to address this, some scholars have argued that the purpose of the state is “to provide a decentralized method of delivering political (public) goods to persons living within designated parameters (borders).”<sup>7</sup> The most important public good that the state must provide to its citizens is that of security:

...to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion.<sup>8</sup>

State security is the *carte blanche* that will allow the uncontested provision of all other political goods that will provide opportunity for the growth and expansion of civil society. These include an enforceable body of law, an effective judicial system, rule of law, free participation in politics and the political process, fundamental civil and human rights, medical and health care, schools and educational instruction, roads, railways, harbors, infrastructure, commerce, communications

---

<sup>5</sup> Adeed Dawisha and I. William Zartman, *Beyond Coercion: the Durability of the Arab State* (London: Croom Helm, 1988): 7, quoted in I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman, 1-11 (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 5.

<sup>6</sup> I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman, 1-11 (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair,” in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, 1-49 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

networks, banking systems and strong currency.<sup>9</sup> This extensive list of public goods represents the functional definition of the state.

Now that the institutional and functional definitions of the state have been reviewed, the question of how to distinguish between strong and fragile states becomes important. Existing literature proposes that the differentiation between strong and fragile states lies in the state's performance across the above-listed dimensions; "it is according to their performances – according to the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial political goods – that strong states may be distinguished from weak ones, and weak states from failed or collapsed ones."<sup>10</sup> Strong states demonstrate consistent and sturdy capacities to provide state functions; they "unquestionably control their territories and deliver a full range and a high quality of political goods to their citizens."<sup>11</sup> Typically a strong state is one which has established a reputation for peace, order and prosperity. Canada, the US, and the UK are such examples.

Fragile states, on the other hand, are the opposite of strong, viable states. Also termed as weak, fragile states cover a broad range of states. Some fragile states are weak due to their geographic or economic limitations. Some states are actually strong, but greatly weakened by internal conflicts. Regardless of the cause, the resulting state's performance in providing public goods is mixed, performing well in some dimensions but failing in others. This inability to perform well in all state facets leads to the status as a fragile state.<sup>12</sup> Indicators of a fragile state progressing towards failure include the loss of state authority over portions of its territory, growth in criminal violence, decrease in the provision of essential public goods, deteriorating or

---

<sup>9</sup> Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States" . . . , 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

destroyed infrastructures, thriving corruption, and the loss of trust of the citizens in the state.<sup>13</sup> Fragile states are those where these problems increasingly put the state at risk: where they “have grown to such systemic levels that they threaten stability.”<sup>14</sup> The fragile state cannot fully provide all the essential political goods that are required to continue successful operation of the state. Examples of fragile states are Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico.

Literature identifies the most serious state ailment as state collapse. This refers to a state where “the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new.”<sup>15</sup> Due to the resulting battle for order, power and authority resides amongst residual local groups and “for a period, the state itself, as a legitimate, functioning order, is gone.”<sup>16</sup> The state, which no longer has any governmental nor societal infrastructure, demonstrates no capacity to control its political and economic space, and as a result “the basic functions of the state are no longer performed.”<sup>17</sup> Examples of failed or collapsed states are Somalia, Haiti, and the DRC.

Although the rise and collapse of states has been occurring for centuries, numerous literary sources acknowledge that there is a difference in the rise of fall of modern states as compared to classical examples. Rotberg notes that there is a much larger variance between the capacity and capability of states as there was before; “they are more numerous than they were a half century ago, and the range of their population sizes, physical endowments, wealth, productivity, delivery systems, ambitions, and attainments is much more extensive than ever

---

<sup>13</sup> Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States” . . . , 6-9.

<sup>14</sup> Seth D. Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” . . . , 1.

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

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

before.”<sup>18</sup> Zartman argues that modern state collapse is based on the assumption that a state’s territory and population are divided into political areas with the identity, order and authority defined within each. As a result, he argues that the road to state collapse “is much more specific, narrow and identifiable, a political cause and effect with social and economic implications, and one that represents a significant anomaly.”<sup>19</sup> These factors create new complexities that must be considered when determining the status of a state.

Existing literature notes that not all fragile states are doomed. State failure is not a last minute shocking event with no time to react; it is a long, slow process, much like “a long term degenerative disease.”<sup>20</sup> Like some illnesses, state failure is treatable; it is “one whose outcome is not inevitable: cure and remission are possible.”<sup>21</sup> With the correct priorities, activities and commitment, a state can avoid fragility and failure and progress towards becoming a strong state.

There is much literature on how to repair fragile or failed states. Kaplan combines numerous political, economic, sociological and business theories to argue that weak formal institutions and weak social cohesion are the main causes of state problems. In his recommendations for curing fragile states, he proposes that wealthy countries should use a different aid lense to properly understand fragile states when developing aid strategies: history, culture, power dynamics, political landscape, incentives analysis and institutional analysis. Additionally, when discussing development of fragile states, he places a large amount of attention of the business and economic sector, arguing that the incorporation of identities, government capacities and investment climates are important factors to successful development.

---

<sup>18</sup> Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States” . . . , 2.

<sup>19</sup> Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” . . . , 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Linking back to his sociological theory, he argues that the proper consideration of the above factors when developing aid plans will promote social cohesion and contends that “the key to fixing fragile states is thus to legitimize the state by deeply enmeshing it within society.”<sup>22</sup>

By defining the concepts surrounding state fragility, it will be easier to understand the cause and effect relationship between Mexico’s state fragility and organized crime problems encountered by President Felipe Calderón from 2006 to 2012. This awareness will increase the probability of developing counter-drug strategies that address the underlying problems, thereby creating a better chance of building a stronger Mexico.

---

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States* . . . , 49.

## CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL REVIEW

Organized crime has been a long standing problem in Mexico. In order to put President Calderón's war on drugs into context, it is useful to examine specific elements that relate to Mexico's history of organized crime to understand why the narcotics industry has never been defeated. By identifying trends in Mexico's organized crime past and applying them against the criteria of security, rule of law, commerce and corruption, the roots of the legacy that Calderón inherited in 2006 – state fragility, corruption and widespread organized crime – will be identified. Areas of historical review will include Mexico's economic conditions, corruption, US-Mexican bilateral relations in the counternarcotic realm, cartel evolution, and regional state fragility. Studying these factors will highlight the historical relationship between Mexico's state fragility and organized crime, providing insight to the challenges that faced President Calderón during his war on drugs.

### **Trend One: Mexican Economic Volatility**

Mexico's history is spotted with numerous periods of economic instability which have led to periods of high unemployment and a weak economy. The drug industry used these periods to great effect and solicited citizens to work for them when the state could not provide employment. This allowed organized crime to prosper and triumph over governmental efforts to combat it.

History has illustrated that at times, economic volatility and associated government policy have contributed to the increased employment of Mexican citizens in the drug industry. Due to a weakened economy in the 1960s, small farmers began to accumulate debt – so much so



that they either sold their land or were pushed towards drug production to make money.<sup>23</sup> Many others moved to urban areas, looking for work.<sup>24</sup> This influx of rural citizens into urban areas with limited job opportunities created a very large informal sector where people were looking for any kind of paid job – jobs that the drug industry could provide.

In the 1970s, economic fluctuations caused Mexico to experience fiscal uncertainty which resulted in increased unemployment and fewer opportunities for labor markets.<sup>25</sup> Mexican citizens were looking for work. An unfortunate coincidence was the concurrent rise in heroin and marijuana use in both the US and Mexico<sup>26</sup> which created a large supply of jobs that met the demand for employment. Mexican citizens who could not find legitimate work were easily lured in to the drug trade, which offered employment and quick money; “during the mid-1970s at least 50,000 peasants became narcotics entrepreneurs either directly or indirectly.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, the country saw a marked increase in criminal activity during this time.

Illicit employment trends such as above continued into the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, the Mexican government introduced and implemented various free market reforms which did not produce substantial results. As a result, Mexicans were once again forced to “find alternative employment in an expanding underground economy that, by some estimates, accounted for 40 percent of all economic activity.”<sup>28</sup> The government could not provide its

---

<sup>23</sup> Judith Teichman, “Violent Conflict and Unequal Development: The Case of Mexico,” in *Economic Development Strategies and the Evolution of Violence in Latin America*, ed. William Ascher and Natalia Mirovitskaya, 41-69 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 56.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> David A. Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico: Confronting a Shared Threat*, Council Special Report No. 60 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Inc., March 2011), 7.

<sup>26</sup> María Celia Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs: Causes and Consequences* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico...*, 7.

people with secure employment, but citizens knew where to find it – the drug industry. In the mid-1990s, Mexico experienced another severe economic crisis, which further deteriorated Mexico's domestic security situation.<sup>29</sup> The NAFTA agreement of 1994 did not help either; it “fostered the growth of the drug trade because its trade routes could not be used to smuggle narcotics across the border with ease.”<sup>30</sup> This continued to push ordinary citizens towards engagements in crime and drug trafficking.

As the drug trade grew in size, so did its power. As cartel leaders gained more influence, they became actors at the highest levels within Mexico. For example, it was cocaine money that helped Mexico survive the 1986 collapse in oil prices and “dig the country out of a deep hole.”<sup>31</sup> Due to the strong influence of drug money, governments strongly considered the consequences of acting against that power when they were faced with an economic crisis.<sup>32</sup> Whether it was the population's need for employment or the government's need for a bailout, the organized crime network has made itself available to solve these issues, thereby establishing its value to various parties. Consequently, while the legitimate economy has experienced instability, the underground economy has continued to grow and expand, generating more power for itself in the face of anti-narcotic policies and actions.

The historic economic weakness of Mexico contributed to the continued growth of organized crime because it pushed citizens to participate in the drug trade to survive. The inability of the Mexican state to provide its people with reliable employment speaks to its long

---

<sup>29</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico...*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Teichman, “Violent Conflict and Unequal Development” . . . , 56.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, “The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story,” in *Mexico's Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence*, ed. Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, 29-53 (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

term state fragility issues. It was issues such as this that provided excellent conditions for organized crime to survive and flourish.

### **Trend Two: Corruption**

Corruption is a disease that has plagued Mexican government officials for decades. Existing within the lowest municipal levels to the highest federal offices, rampant corruption has continuously hindered the Mexican government's ability to effectively defeat organized crime and has prevented the development of a viable Mexican state. A viable and strong state should employ government officials who would "find no profit in their decisions."<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, Mexican officials reaped the personal benefits of corruption for years. Little progress can be made towards state development when efforts are undermined by the quick, secret exchange of cash. For corrupt officials, the end of the drug trade represented the end of large sums of money entering their pockets. Cartels have taken advantage of this lack of integrity and have a long history of manipulating public officials to obtain freedom of movement and protection.

For many, corruption is a way of life and Mexican citizens acknowledge this problem with pragmatism. It has become a cultural phenomenon among those with power: "corruption in Mexico is not so much a symptom of illegality as much as it is a time-honored method by which successive groups of political and business elites amass influence and vast wealth on their rise to becoming Mexico's power brokers."<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Mexicans view the government with

---

<sup>33</sup> Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* . . . , 446.

<sup>34</sup> Luz E. Nagle, "Corruption of Politicians, Law Enforcement, and the Judiciary in Mexico and Complicity Across the Border," in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, ed. Robert J. Bunker, 95-122 (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 96.

cynicism and “are prepared to live and work somewhere outside official channels.”<sup>35</sup> An excellent indicator of how widespread corruption has become is to examine how much money drug traffickers have historically invested in it: “by the 1990s criminal organizations in Mexico were . . . spending up to US \$500 million a year in bribery – double the budget of the attorney general’s office.”<sup>36</sup> The culture of corruption is the essential ingredient to organized crime’s recipe for success.

In the very beginning, it was not always so. In 1929, when the original party was created, the founding members of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) - Institutional Revolutionary Party – once held high ideals. However, holding power for 80 years spoiled the party and it became “increasingly plutocratic and corrupt over the years, . . . typical of the single-party rulers throughout much of the developing world.”<sup>37</sup> During this long period, political competition was ultimately suppressed and voters had little impact on who lead the government:

. . . under the long control of the . . . PRI, the government of Mexico developed and solidified a centralized structure with an ineffective federal system, an authoritarian political scheme with a strong president and weak and subservient legislative and judicial branches. Such as arrangement allowed the government to cultivate a blueprint of corruption and a lack of accountability by asserting widespread clientless controls over the Mexican people.<sup>38</sup>

This continued to the every end of the seventy year PRI reign over Mexico. President Ernesto Zedillo’s administration was inundated with scandals and accusations; “governors were linked to drug traffickers in Sonora, Morelos, Puebla, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo.”<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Jerry Langton, *Gangland: The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels from El Paso to Vancouver* (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2012), 51.

<sup>36</sup> Kenny and Serrano, “The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story” . . . , 41.

<sup>37</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 47.

<sup>38</sup> Nagle, “Corruption of Politicians, Law Enforcement, and the Judiciary in Mexico” . . . , 96.

<sup>39</sup> Joe C. Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs? An Assessment of Mexico’s Counternarcotics Strategy” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2011), 49.

Over the years, government officials in all capacities have proven themselves corrupt and in alliance with the drug cartels. For example, the creation of the Federal Security Directorate (DFS) in 1947 was aimed to provide a better organized institution to fight organized crime. However, due to the corruption of its founding members, the DFS did exactly the opposite: it protected the drug trade and actually controlled it for a period of time. “The major institutions designed by the state to fight crime – the attorney general’s office and Federal Judicial Police . . . as well as the DFS – became the country’s major criminal mafia, especially in the 1970s.”<sup>40</sup> In the mid-1980s, the DFS countered any progress that other government departments made in the drug war: “instead of combating drug traffic, the DFS collaborated directly in its restructuring after it was disrupted by Operation Condor.”<sup>41</sup> Upon the dissolution of DFS, several of its commanders became major players in the drug trade.<sup>42</sup>

The Mexican police force has an extensive history of corruption. Regardless of the level – municipal to federal – police officers have been fired or arrested for corruption and participation in drug trade. The organized crime industry proved to be too tenacious and rewarding for police officers to fight; drug policing never truly became effective due to the “persistence of a lucrative trade for which the organizers could bribe officials and enforcers; at times the latter became active participants in the illegal business in a region . . . where law and order were far from the rule.”<sup>43</sup> In the 1990s, the national police force was investigated and vetted for corruption; “almost one-third of . . . [it was dismissed] for having verifiable links to

---

<sup>40</sup> Kenny and Serrano, “The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story” . . . , 33.

<sup>41</sup> Carlos Antonio Flores Pérez, “Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico,” in *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, ed. Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 93-124 (San Diego: University Readers, 2010), 101.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs* . . . , 11.

organized crime.”<sup>44</sup> Corruption affected senior level officers as well: “police commanders [were found] to be traffickers . . . it was the most incredible and intolerable thing to find the police body to be completely infiltrated by narcos.”<sup>45</sup> The persistent corruption in police forces symbolized a significant obstacle to the effective enforcement of law and security in the Mexican state.

Even the military, the last remaining entity that still holds the respect of Mexican citizens, has been party to corruption. Throughout the years, high ranking officers have been found guilty of being involved in the drug industry; the first high-ranking corruption incident took place in 1972 when a battalion colonel in Michóacan was arrested by the Mexican Secret Service.<sup>46</sup> Another incident involved a General officer that had been appointed as the drug czar in 1994. After having his praises sung by American counterparts in the press, he was found to be leaking information to the Juárez cartel for seven years.<sup>47</sup> Corruption has had a history of infiltrating all types and levels of Mexican institutions.

The extensive corruption that has enmeshed itself into Mexican culture has affected the state’s ability to develop an accountable and responsible bureaucratic system. This type of apparatus is required to “undertake effective interventions”<sup>48</sup> that would lead to the development of a stronger state. Mexico’s long-standing absence of a responsible, honest bureaucracy has thus contributed to the continued prevalence of organized crime. Bribery and corruption have

---

<sup>44</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 75.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>46</sup> Pérez, “Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico” . . . , 96.

<sup>47</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 77.

<sup>48</sup> Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Peter B. Evans, “The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, 44-77 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 68.

removed the will of government officials to refuse payoffs and to take action towards improving the state and defeating organized crime.

### **Trend Three: Unstable US-Mexico Bilateral Relations**

Over the past 100 years, the creation and execution of anti-drug legislature by both the US and Mexico administrations have created an age-old, volatile bilateral relationship between the two countries. As the following section will discuss, this bilateral relationship has experienced repetitive cycles of positive cooperation and heated disagreement brought on by numerous policies, misunderstandings, and incidents over the last century. The drug cartels have used this dissention to great effect, prevailing over the barrage of counter-drug operations aimed at them to continue growing and expanding.

Drug trafficking has occurred for almost two centuries in Mexico, creating much history in the realm of US-Mexico drug policy relations. Marijuana has been smuggled out of Mexico's borders into the US since the 1800s; its initiation began with Chinese immigrants who moved to Mexico to build railroads in 1849.<sup>49</sup> The southern rainforest states of Mexico proved to be fertile ground for poppy growing, which led them to introduce opium into Mexico's drug smuggling trade in the early 1900s. These Chinese immigrants are believed to be the nation's first opium growers.<sup>50</sup> This drug trafficking across the US-Mexico border caused both the US and Mexico to create various laws, policies and legislations in attempts to criminalize the production, trading, and possession of drugs. Examples include the 1909 Act to Prohibit the Importation and Use of Opium for Other than Medicinal Purposes, the 1919 Volstead Act, the 1914 Harrison Law Act,

---

<sup>49</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 53.

<sup>50</sup> Toro, *Mexico's "War" on Drugs* . . . , 7.

the 1914 and 1923 criminalization of cocaine and marijuana respectively in the US, and the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act.<sup>51</sup> Despite the good intentions of these and subsequent laws, drug trafficking in Mexico continued to develop and flourish.

The enactment of anti-drug policies and legislations did little to distinguish the flow of drugs within Mexico and across the border. In effect, it did the opposite: the alcohol and drug prohibitions in the US enticed Mexican smugglers to create underground markets in order to export these goods and take advantage of the higher profits.<sup>52</sup> Nor did legislation reduce the demand for drugs; “demand for cocaine rose steadily and it [became] the second-most consumed illegal drug after marijuana for generations.”<sup>53</sup> These factors inevitably caused the narcotics trade to move underground and grow at rates that were difficult for governments of the time to determine. Between the end of WWI and the late 1960s, the marijuana market increased from an estimated fifteen percent of the United States market to approximately 75 percent.<sup>54</sup> Organized crime was proving to be a more complex problem that mere legislature could not resolve.

In the late 1960s, the US started the first true fight against organized crime in Mexico. By that time, Mexican-produced marijuana and heroin was in such high demand in US markets that it caused the Nixon administration to take action. In July 1969, President Richard Nixon sent a Special Message to the Congress on Control of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs – essentially declaring a “war on drugs.”<sup>55</sup> This document committed the US “to an ambitious program involving federal and state legislative efforts, international cooperation, and interdiction of

---

<sup>51</sup> Toro, *Mexico's "War" on Drugs* . . . , 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 59.

<sup>54</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?” . . . , 14-16.

<sup>55</sup> Tony Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 23.



illegal import, suppression of trafficking, education, research, rehabilitation, training and local law enforcement coordination.”<sup>56</sup> This strategy differed from pre-1969 counterdrug strategies in that its purpose was to reduce the amount of cross-border drug trafficking and incarcerate criminals. For example, previous Mexican counterdrug strategies did not target these goals; usually “[they] were used to as a tool to exert dominance over individual political opponents within the Mexican political system.”<sup>57</sup> Nixon’s strategy planted the seed for the next 40 plus years of war against organized crime.

The first operation to fall out of this new strategy – Operation *Intercept* – created a rocky start to bilateral relations between the two countries with respect to counternarcotic strategies. *Intercept* made the Mexican government uncomfortably aware of the US’ intentions to eliminate the drug problem. For 20 days in September 1969, approximately 2000 US border agents were placed along the US-Mexican border and conducted inspections on every single vehicle.<sup>58</sup> It created considerable chaos at the border, causing massive vehicle line ups and delays. This surprised and outraged the Mexican government. They accused the Americans of violating human rights and acting in a racist manner and demanded that the border searches cease. The Americans did cease the operation shortly thereafter, but not before creating negative feelings between the two countries.

Over time, however, the friction between US and Mexico was reduced by additional anti-drug operations in which the two countries successfully participated together. The execution of Operation *Cooperation* – in which Mexican soldiers were tasked to manually cut down drug

---

<sup>56</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?”..., 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> George W. Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’,” *Foreign Policy Association*, no. 331 (Winter 2009): 17.

plants on plantations<sup>59</sup> – renewed bilateral relations between the US and Mexico.

Acknowledging its need for continued participation in the drug war, in 1975 Mexico adopted *La Campaña Pemanente* – the Permanent Campaign – against illegal drugs. The result was substantial reductions in the size of Mexico’s share of the US drug market.<sup>60</sup> Also in the 1970s, Operation *Condor* was launched with the three following goals: the eradication of marijuana and poppy fields, the interdiction of narcotics in transit, and the dislocation of trafficking organizations.<sup>61</sup> To this cause, the American government dedicated \$35 million and a force of approximately 3000 personnel including troops, federal police agents and state police forces,<sup>62</sup> while the Mexican government contributed tens of thousands of soldiers.<sup>63</sup> During this operation, US-Mexican cooperation was evident; “Mexican police and DEA agents worked together to build conspiracy cases.”<sup>64</sup> The operation was considered a triumph due to its successful destruction of numerous marijuana and opium poppy plantations in the Golden Triangle area.

The 1980s saw no significant change in counterdrug strategies, but it did see another corrosion in Mexican-US bilateral relations. Two events were the main contributors to this corrosion. First, the US continued to take an aggressive stand on the counter-drug issue; “by the end of the decade [1980s], the United States ha[d] developed the most powerful and encompassing drug law enforcement apparatus ever in its quest to reduce drug abuse among its population.”<sup>65</sup> As part of this strategy, the US – through the use of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and US Coast Guard (USCG) – conducted numerous operations in the Caribbean

---

<sup>59</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’” . . . , 18.

<sup>60</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?” . . . , 26.

<sup>61</sup> Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs* . . . , 18-21.

<sup>62</sup> Pérez, “Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico” . . . , 94.

<sup>63</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’” . . . , 20.

<sup>64</sup> Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs* . . . , 27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

in attempts to eliminate Colombian cocaine trafficking routes into the US through Florida. These operations were quite successful and forced the Colombians to look for an alternative smuggling route. Since the Mexican drug cartels had well-established networks of overland marijuana smuggling plazas that ran into California, Arizona and Texas, the Colombians made the logical choice of hiring the Mexican cartels to smuggle cocaine along the same routes.<sup>66</sup> Hence drug trafficking in Mexico increased significantly to the point where Mexico “had not only recovered its standing as the main supplier of both marijuana and heroin for the US market, but 30 percent of all cocaine available for US consumers was believed to be crossing through Mexican territory.”<sup>67</sup> The spike in drug trafficking alarmed the Americans.

The second alarming incident that weakened US-Mexico bilateral relations in the 1980s was the March 1985 kidnapping, torture and murder of Enrique “Kiki” Camarena Salazar, a DEA agent. He was the agent responsible for uncovering the massive marijuana factory at the *el Bufalo* Ranch, thereby exposing several cartels. The Mexican government’s poor management of the case created suspicion amongst the Americans which was exacerbated by the exposure of several senior Mexican government officials that were allegedly linked to the case.<sup>68</sup> The Americans saw this incident as a reflection of the arrogance of drug kingpins and the debilitating weakness of the corrupt Mexican government to conduct lawful investigations.<sup>69</sup> The result was a deterioration in bilateral trust and cooperative counter-drug strategies because the Americans began to question the Mexican government’s integrity.

---

<sup>66</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs...*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?”..., 33.

<sup>69</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 219.

Consequently, the American skepticism of Mexico brought about another series of US operations conducted against drug trafficking that Mexico did not agree with: Operation *Intercept II* and Operation *Leyenda*. Feeling as if it was “under siege”<sup>70</sup> and wanting to escape that, the Mexican government took actions to be more accommodating to the US; it “defined drug trafficking as a threat to Mexico’s national security . . . [and] reconsidered Mexican programs against drugs.”<sup>71</sup> As a result of this increased American pressure, Mexico entered new bilateral agreements with the US in efforts to gain more input into counternarcotic strategies.

In the 1990s, both the American and Mexican governments increased existing attention on the drug war. The end of the Cold War allowed the US to switch focus to the drug trade issue and Mexico wanted to maintain input in bilateral counternarcotic policies to protect its sovereignty. The war became more militarized, with both countries contributing significant amounts of forces and finances to the anti-drug effort. President George H. Bush “increasingly employed the armed forces . . . in the U.S. military [drug] enforcement”<sup>72</sup> and “[President] Salinas further strengthened his relationship with both the U.S. and his own military by incorporating the Mexican military more completely in the anti-drug campaign.”<sup>73</sup> Roughly 25,000 soldiers were deployed throughout Mexico, replacing federal, state and local police forces in nearly every state; “approximately 25 percent of the armed forces . . . were permanently engaged in counter-narcotic operations. The number of federal policemen on permanent anti-

---

<sup>70</sup> Toro, *Mexico’s “War” on Drugs* . . . , 66.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?” . . . , 39.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

narcotics assignment was 580. The Army had taken control.”<sup>74</sup> With both countries adopting similar strategies, this decade saw positive bilateral relations in the war against drugs.

The early 2000s saw two significant events that affected the war on drugs. First, in 2000, for the first time in more than 70 years, the PRI lost the Mexican presidential election.<sup>75</sup> The victory of Vicente Fox and the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) – National Action Party – represented the end of the PRI’s political monopoly and control over the drug industry. Second, in the US, the events of 9/11 once again shifted American attention away from the war on drugs to the war on terror. With this in mind, American anti-drug policies in this era morphed to include the concepts of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. President Fox initiated numerous vetting operations to improve border inspections, which resulted in increased contraband seizures and approximately 22,000 drug-related arrests during his tenure.<sup>76</sup> In concert with these strategies, he also conceded to the US on issues such as continued militarization of law enforcement – he increased the use of this strategy when he ultimately wanted to lessen it. These actions earned him better relations with the US than with his own administration. He also earned enough favour with the Mexican population for it to subsequently elect another PAN member – Felipe Calderón – in 2006.<sup>77</sup> It was time for President Calderón to influence counter-narcotic bilateral relations and take action against organized crime.

Despite a long history of eradication and interdiction efforts by both US and Mexican administrations, the Mexican drug trade was never defeated. Successes were usually temporary in nature and the drug trade always bounced back to either full or higher capacity. Despite the

---

<sup>74</sup> Kenny and Serrano, “The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story” . . . , 38.

<sup>75</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 77.

<sup>76</sup> Shipley, “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs?” . . . , 61.

<sup>77</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 50.

counternarcotic strategies used in the 1960s and 1970s, “the illegal drug smuggling business was booming along the border. There were numerous small gang-like groups in Mexico that operated to smuggle drugs into the United States. . . . Mexico was a major supplier of marijuana and heroin.”<sup>78</sup> The anti-drug policies of the 1980s did not succeed in annihilating a permissive drug trafficking environment; most top cartel leaders continued to conduct drug trade operations virtually unobstructed, controlling various routes, crossings, production areas and smuggling practices undisturbed.<sup>79</sup> In the 1990s and 2000s, the increase in drug trafficking was notable and the threat of uncontrollable organized crime began to emerge. By the end of 2005, millions of people were crossing into the US with backpacks full of drugs, and emerging cartels were continuing to gain confidence, conduct business and earn substantial sums of money.<sup>80</sup> Despite years of massive efforts on the part of the American and Mexican governments, the drug trade continued as if almost nothing had ever been done to stop it.

A particular weakness that could be considered a factor in the inability to abolish drug trafficking is strategic clarity. The inconsistent status of bilateral relations between the US and Mexico has made it challenging for the two countries to agree, commit to and follow a long-term strategy with defined measures of effectiveness. Due to the absence of clearly articulated policies and goals, the last forty years of drug wars have “lacked clear, consistent, or achievable objectives; [have] had little effect on aggregate demand; and [have] imposed an enormous social and economic cost.”<sup>81</sup> Also, past strategies have mainly focused only on surface issues such as eradication and interdiction, but not root problems such as abolishing cartel entities; “for most of

---

<sup>78</sup> Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars...*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico . . .*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 84.

<sup>81</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico...*, 17.

that period few serious efforts to dismantle major DTOs were made.”<sup>82</sup> Although millions of dollars and many lives have been sacrificed in the war on drugs, much of this effort proved ultimately ineffective due to weaknesses in policy creation and execution.

The continued instability of US-Mexico bilateral relations contributed to the growth of organized crime because it became an additional obstacle the two governments had to overcome in their combined efforts to combat organized crime. This diverted the governments’ focus from collaborating more effectively on counter-drug activities and establishing better strategic clarity. Drug cartels were quick to identify this weakness and took advantage of it at every opportunity, allowing them to avoid eradication and expand operations.

#### **Trend Four: Cartel Evolution**

Drug cartels have continued to evolve and grow over the years despite ongoing counternarcotic strategies introduced by US and Mexican governments. In the 1920s and 1930s, cartels operated as mid-level smugglers for more powerful groups, smuggling drugs into the US. Over time however, cartel leaders saw the increased demand for drugs as an opportunity to expand their own powers and started using existing smuggling networks themselves to traffick marijuana into the US. In the 1980s, this practice was reinforced as the Colombians started searching for alternate cocaine routes into the US to avoid aggressive US anti-drug campaigns. It created numerous powerful drug lords such as Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, who became “a cocaine baron in his own right, with up to 50 percent of the entire product moving through his channels – instead of being a mere organizer of drug mules, he was a true drug lord like the

---

<sup>82</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico...*, 9.

Colombians.”<sup>83</sup> Gallardo’s flexible reaction to government policies was a contributing factor in the creation of the modern cartel organization.

Adapting to US and Mexican counternarcotic actions, Gallardo divided his organization into smaller territories in 1987 to reduce his profile. Each territory was assigned a specific drug route or area that it would become responsible for: the Tijuana cartel was assigned the Tijuana route, the Juárez cartel the Juárez route, the Sinaloa-Sonora cartel the Sonora crossing area, and the Gulf cartel the Matamoros crossing area.<sup>84</sup> Gallardo continued to operate as the main contact for the Colombians, and the four cartels operated “without hindrance from law enforcement”<sup>85</sup> despite counter-drug activities.

Gallardo’s 1989 arrest and incarceration was the catalyst for the development of the numerous cartels in existence today. Since imprisonment prevented Gallardo from providing individual cartels leadership, infighting and rivalry amongst them emerged; they “began to operate independently and tensions rose steadily, especially where territories overlapped.”<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, one of Gallardo’s very own protégés – Hector Luis “*El Guero*” Palma Salazar – was involved in one of the first inter-cartel conflicts; “the murder of [his] two children and wife . . . was one of the first salvos in a new era of violence among Mexican [Drug Trafficking Organizations] DTOs, including the so-called Tijuana, Juárez, and Sinaloa cartels.”<sup>87</sup> The situation became even more volatile:

. . . overall, one thing that stands out about the evolution of drug-related violence in recent years is the extent to which it has been driven by the splintering of and

---

<sup>83</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 65.

<sup>84</sup> Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars* . . . , 29.

<sup>85</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 66.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>87</sup> David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001-2009* (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, January 2010), 9.



competition among DTOs. . . . this competition was virtually non-existent as Mexican DTOs began to take over smuggling routes from struggling Colombian traffickers in the 1980s. Effectively, in the 1980s, Mexican DTOs operated primarily under a single hierarchy.<sup>88</sup>

As inter-cartel battles continued, ousted cartel leaders would gather supporters and create new cartels: Beltran Leyva, La Familia, Los Zetas, Jalisco, South Pacific and Milenio cartels are such examples. These new cartels would add additional complexity to the DTO problem.

These additional cartels merely intensified inter-cartel violence and competition. For example:

. . . [the] Los Zetas became less loyal and more militant, often making their own deals without the consent or knowledge of the Gulf Cartel. With the Sinaloa and Beltran Leyva cartels moving in and the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas protecting their turf, a small war broke out.<sup>89</sup>

For self-protection, alliances with other cartels were routinely formed. However, these alliances were at best temporary in nature, subject to the very next act of violence or smallest perceived disrespect; “in 2005, Guzman Loera [Sinaloa cartel leader] walked into a restaurant in Nuevo Laredo [Gulf cartel territory] and ate there. That affront could not be tolerated by the Gulf Cartel . . . [and] it was seen as a declaration of war between the two cartel alliances.”<sup>90</sup> Activities such as these continued uninterrupted regardless of the continued counternarcotic strategies being exercised by the US and Mexican governments over the past 50 years.

### **Trend Five: Regional State Fragility**

Central America is home to numerous fragile states which pose a significant obstacle to Mexico’s ability to defeat narcotics and develop into a stronger state. Situated in the perfectly

---

<sup>88</sup> Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001-2009* . . . , 10.

<sup>89</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 82.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

wrong location, the countries of Central America make “ideal transit point[s] for drugs on their way from the Andean region to the US.”<sup>91</sup> Over time, this has led to some of the world’s highest violence rates, making the area a haven for the drug industry; “[drug] traffickers have carved paths through the region and crime and corruption remain a challenge for local governments.”<sup>92</sup> The 2012 Failed State Index illustrates the prevailing existence of fragile states in this region. Almost all Central American countries have been placed into the same category as Mexico: “High Warning.” On a scale of one to 178 – with one as the most unstable and 178 as the most stable – Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador ranked 69<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 93<sup>rd</sup> respectively.<sup>93</sup> Colombia’s ranking of 52<sup>nd</sup> is also important, since it is the major source of cocaine that travels through the Central American region and Mexico. Transnational organized crime has managed to catch these weak countries in its grasp and prevent them from developing into viable states. Regional state fragility has contributed to Mexico’s inability to defeat organized crime because the transnational organized crime of neighbouring fragile states continues to permeate Mexican borders, creating additional obstacles that Mexico must overcome.

### **The Weak State – Organized Crime Relationship**

The trends within Mexico’s history of organized crime – weak economy, rampant corruption, unstable bilateral relations, cartel resiliency and regional state fragility – highlight the historical relationship between Mexico’s organized crime and the long-term state fragility problems that the country has faced. These trends prevented Mexico from effectively providing

---

<sup>91</sup> Paula Miraglia, Rolando Ochoa, and Ivan Briscoe, *Transnational Organised Crime and Fragile States*, OECD DAC INCAF Project Working Paper 3/2012 (OECD Publishing, October 2012), 24.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Haken, *et al.*, *Failed States Index 2012 . . .*, 4-5.

the primary function of a state that was discussed in chapter two – security. Mexico’s weak security, weak rule of law, poor economy and corruption allowed organized crime to take advantage of Mexico’s state weaknesses to expand and evolve into a problem that today threatens the existence of the state. These trends led to a Mexico that is now “characterized by widespread poverty, inequality, political repression, violent feuds between communities, and banditry, [which has] provided fertile ground for the rapid expansion of organized criminal activity.”<sup>94</sup> This was the intimidating situation that President Calderón inherited in 2006.

---

<sup>94</sup> Teichman, “Violent Conflict and Unequal Development” . . . , 55.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CALDERÓN'S PLAN OF ATTACK

Chapter three identified trends in Mexico's history which contributed to a tradition of state fragility and failed attempts to defeat the drug trade. This left a challenging and volatile situation for President Felipe Calderón to inherit and conquer in December 2006. This chapter will examine and describe the four-prong strategy used and three significant obstacles faced by Calderón during his six year 'war against organized crime.' Examining his approach will demonstrate that his tactics were more focused on interdiction and eradication of the drug trade, and thereby failed to concentrate on the more fundamental state fragility issues of weak security, weak rule of law and corruption.

### **Aggressive Start**

President Calderón was extremely motivated to take action against Mexican organized crime during his time in office. His campaign message for the Presidency included emphasis on "three major goals: creating jobs, combating poverty and fighting crime."<sup>95</sup> He made it well known that he wanted to fight the drug industry head on; "when Mr. Calderón donned the presidential sash . . . [in December 2006] he vowed to crush the cartels."<sup>96</sup> Immediately after taking office he called out the drug trade; "his first priority was to curb the activities of increasingly savage cartels that were involved in the production, distribution and export of drugs."<sup>97</sup> His intense attention and exertion towards the 'war on organized crime' differed from past leaders; "more so than previous presidents, Calderón took pains to personally identify

---

<sup>95</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'" . . . , 37.

<sup>96</sup> Tom Wainwright, "Special Report Mexico: Going Up in the World," *The Economist*, November 24th – 30th, 2012, 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'" . . . , 37.

himself with Mexico's counter-drug efforts."<sup>98</sup> At times, he did this to the detriment of his own personal safety; "the chief executive [Calderón] . . . ignored death threats to fight the cartels hammer and tongs."<sup>99</sup> At the beginning of his term, Mexico's organized crime was a problem that President Calderón greatly wanted to conquer. He wanted Mexico to rise above and defeat the threat that organized crime posed to shed the international perception of weakness in the Mexican state.

President Calderón's strategy engaged four main activities to execute his war on the drug industry. These included: (1) the direct involvement of military personnel in combating organized crime groups; (2) the sequential targeting of specific organizations for the dismantling of leadership structures; (3) long-term investments and reforms intended to improve the integrity and performance of domestic law enforcement institutions; and (4) the solicitation of U.S. assistance in terms of intelligence, material support, and the southbound interdiction of weapons and cash.<sup>100</sup> Throughout his term, most of the counter narcotic activities Calderón's government planned and executed fall under one of these four categories.

Components of Calderón's strategy addressed certain symptoms of state fragility. As mentioned in chapter three, the benchmark criteria used in this thesis to assess his strategy are security, rule of law and corruption. The ability of a state to provide these services speaks to the strength or weakness of a state, and the goals within Calderón's anti-drug strategy seemed to relate to these criteria. However, Mexico faced significant challenges in these three areas, challenges which proved to be too difficult to overcome in the course of one presidential term.

---

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Daly, Kimberly Heinle and David A. Shirk, *Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico*, Special Report (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, 2012), 6.

<sup>99</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?...*, 273.

<sup>100</sup> Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001-2009...*, 11.

## The Mexican Military

Much concentration was placed onto the Mexican military during President Calderón's term, both in terms of reform and employment. One month into his presidency, to illustrate his great pride in the military and to win support from soldiers, he dressed in an olive-drab military uniform and addressed the soldiers and policemen deployed in his home state of Michoacán. He praised their work, reaffirmed continued governmental support, and urged them to continue their efforts.<sup>101</sup> To put his words into action, Calderón made significant financial commitments to the military to increase its size, equipment and benefits: "military budgets increased four-fold since 1996 despite low inflation rates."<sup>102</sup> The Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA), which includes the Army and Air Force, "grew by more than [six percent] over the course of the Calderón administration."<sup>103</sup> The other arm of the Mexican military, the Ministry of Navy (SEMAR), also saw significant growth in size; "manpower allocations for Marine infantry battalions were also raised from a previously depleted level of around 400 to the 650 – 680 mark, making the Mexican Marine Infantry Corps second in number only to that of the United States."<sup>104</sup> In order to combat expanding organized crime, Calderón took actions to similarly increase numbers in the military.

The President also drove the aggressive acquisition of improved military equipment to enhance counter narcotic operations. Previously stated requirements were vetoed to make room for more urgent, anti-drug equipment. In 2008, the Mexican military cancelled a 2006 stated

---

<sup>101</sup> Daly, Heinle and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity...*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Inigo Guevara Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire: The Mexican Military 2006-2011* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2011), 31.

requirement for 1000 High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) and purchased 4x4 pickup trucks in their place because the smaller vehicles were deemed priority equipment for anti-drug operations.<sup>105</sup> Between 2006 and 2011, 96 percent of all purchased Mexican Air Force assets – a total of 80 aircraft and helicopters – were procured in the name of counterdrugs as their primary or secondary roles. Aircrew training centers were established in order to train and fill this gap in the Mexican Air Force’s capabilities.<sup>106</sup> A network of 13 strategic control posts was also designed and built – at the cost of US \$140 million – as inspection centers “to detect narcotics, weapons, and other illegal goods.”<sup>107</sup> As illustrated above, the antinarcotic role extremely influenced President Calderón’s motivation to improve military equipment.

President Calderón also improved military pay and benefits in order to promote the enrollment and retention of members. Two months after taking office, he instituted a 46 percent pay raise to soldiers and concurrently reduced his own salary by ten percent.<sup>108</sup> One year later, in February 2008, he continued the trend and announced another pay increase for enlisted personnel. His priority on this issue did not diminish as he again “announced another 40 percent budget increase for enlisted personnel to be applied to pay and benefits”<sup>109</sup> in February of 2009.

In addition to increased military spending, President Calderón also implemented reforms to the military’s command structure and organization in order to enhance its law enforcement capabilities. Between 2006 and 2011, SEMAR’s command structure was significantly revamped from multiple regional headquarters (HQ) to a single HQ located in Mexico City. The intent of

---

<sup>105</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire . . .*, 20-21.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

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

<sup>108</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’” . . ., 45.

<sup>109</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire . . .*, 17.

this was to improve the efficiency to which the navy could fight organized crime and insecurity: “sea, land, and air elements of SEMAR [were] separated and reorganized within a so-called corps system, comprising a General Fleet Corps, Marine Infantry Corps, and Naval Aeronautics Corps.”<sup>110</sup> SEDENA also adopted new positions within its command structure to reflect long term internal security operations; in 2008, a new position – General Director for Human Rights – was generated “to promote and strengthen the practice and protection of human rights within the Army’s ranks.”<sup>111</sup> Calderón took aggressive steps to prepare the Mexican military for long term operations against organized crime and weak security.

President Calderón implemented massive reforms to the military because it was an essential requirement for his counternarcotic and domestic security strategy. He recognized the advantage that the reputable status of the military offered to the fight against organized crime; “the Mexican armed forces [were] the most valued and trusted forces in place to implement the national security policy, and to provide models for the type of stable and long-term institutions Mexico requires.”<sup>112</sup> The military institution displayed qualities and characteristics such as “strong institutional tradition, professionalism, submission to political control, and history of interaction with the population mainly through disaster relief efforts,”<sup>113</sup> which naturally made it the logical choice as the primary force to execute operations against organized crime. Throughout Calderón’s term, “the Mexican armed forces [were] the main implementing agents of the country’s national security policy, which identifies organized crime, drug trade

---

<sup>110</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire* . . . , 26.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.



organizations, and arms trafficking as its priority targets.”<sup>114</sup> He wasted no time to start using this reputable and newly enhanced force to commence his fight against the drug trade.

Concurrent with his actions to bolster the military, Calderón also deployed it at record levels. Immediately after taking office, he deployed a force of 4000 soldiers on a counter drug operation in his home state of Michoacán.<sup>115</sup> This operation – Operation *Michoacán* – was the first of numerous counter-narcotic operations that Calderón would execute over the course of his six year term. Other counter-narcotic operations included *Baja California* (January 2007), *Nuevo León-Tamaulipas* (January 2008), *Chihuahua* (March 2008), *Sinaloa* (May 08), *Solare* (September 2008), *Quintana Roo* (February 2009), *Xcellerator* (February 2009), *Lince Norte* (August 2011), and *Veracruz Seguro* (October 2011). On average, these operations involved several thousand personnel each and were deployed to regions and cities that were identified as high volume drug hubs.<sup>116</sup> Throughout the course of his term, personnel deployed in the name of counter-narcotics continued to grow. By February 2008, there were approximately 30,000 soldiers engaged in such operations,<sup>117</sup> and by the end of his presidency, estimates reported 50,000 troops were involved in Calderón’s ‘war on organized crime.’<sup>118</sup> The pervasive presence of the military was a dramatic effort to counter the drug trade in its production and trafficking hubs.

It could be argued that President Calderón’s use of the military as a policing force indirectly addressed the issue of weak security in Mexico. The Mexican Constitution defines

---

<sup>114</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire . . .*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Langton, *Gangland . . .*, 104.

<sup>116</sup> Daly, Heinle and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity . . .*, Executive Summary.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy’s New Killing Fields* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 11.

<sup>118</sup> Daly, Heinle and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity . . .*, 6.

national security as “defense from external enemies and internal threats.”<sup>119</sup> Defeating the drug cartels would improve domestic and national security, thus SEMAR and SEDENA were assigned the comparatively unusual mandate of preserving it; “unlike other armed forces in the hemisphere that are legally barred from projecting power internally, the Mexican Constitution explicitly mandates it.”<sup>120</sup> Hence Calderón’s military strategy could be perceived as an attempt to address the underlying problem of weak security by explicitly executing operations to counter the internal threat of organized crime. However, it must be remembered that Calderón’s use of the military was primarily intended to interdict and eradicate the drug trade. Security – the state fragility issue – was a secondary effect. His continued attention to the use of the military throughout his term illuminates his failure to address the larger issues: “the longer Mexico’s leadership delays in attacking serious economic and social problems, the more likely it is that the military will be called on to resolve violent disputes.”<sup>121</sup> Therefore, his use of the military did not bring the desired results and state security continued to deteriorate as violence escalated out of control and drug-related homicide rates exploded.<sup>122</sup> Further details of these results will be examined in the next chapter.

### **Cartels and Kingpins**

President Calderón’s second focus area involved directly targeting cartels and their associated kingpins in order to dismantle leadership structures. To demonstrate his dedication to this goal, he immediately started the extradition of drug kingpins to the US upon taking office.

---

<sup>119</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire*..., 2-3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Roderic Camp, “Mexico,” in *The Political Role of the Military: An International Handbook*, ed. Constantine P. Danopoulos and Cynthia Watson, 271-282 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 281.

<sup>122</sup> Bowden, *Murder City*..., 25.

The first seven weeks of his term saw fifteen transfers of suspects from Mexico to the US,<sup>123</sup> and the first two years saw “166 men and women [extradited] to the U.S., Europe and Latin America.”<sup>124</sup> His immediate actions demonstrated his desire to eradicate the drug trade by ridding it of head drug dealers as quickly as possible.

In this same vein, Calderón later introduced further pressure on the drug cartel leaders by implementing the kingpin strategy in March 2009. This line of attack involved publishing a list of thirty seven men that were believed to be the main cartel drug leaders. To urge cartel employees or citizens who had information to come forward, rewards of up to US \$2 million each were offered for the capture and arrest of these senior cartel leaders.<sup>125</sup> The intent for the capture of these leaders was to promote the disintegration of drug cartels and reduce their production and trafficking.

Calderón also commenced targeting not only the kingpins, but cartel groups too. Certain cartels became well-known for participating in escalated levels of violence and conducting increasingly brutal drug-related murders. In 2010, he started to specifically target the infamous Los Zetas cartel in attempts to reduce their conduct of increasingly violent crimes against enemy cartels.<sup>126</sup> By applying constant military force on the cartels, Calderón hoped to put enough pressure on them to compel them to stop their acts of violence.

---

<sup>123</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?...*, 104-105.

<sup>124</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’”...., 48.

<sup>125</sup> The Economist, “Kingpin Bowling: The Most Wanted Men in Mexico are Tumbling. Will Crime Follow Suit?” last accessed 04 February 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21564897-most-wanted-men-mexico-are-tumbling-will-crime-follow-suit>.

<sup>126</sup> Nathan P. Jones, “Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012,” *Small Wars Journal*, last accessed 11 January 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/iss/201301>.

Calderón also reached out to the Mexican public to apply pressure on the cartels. During his term, he instituted a neighbourhood watch program called “Clean Up Mexico,” in which he urged citizens to report on drug-related crime.<sup>127</sup> The goal of this program was to create a Mexico-wide cartel smothering network which would make it difficult for cartels to continue operations. Because many citizens did not trust the police force due to its corruption (which will be discussed later in this chapter), this strategy allowed citizens to directly contribute to the counter-narcotics program, thereby taking some ownership in the cause.

President Calderón applied direct pressure on cartels and their leaders by using extradition, the military and the public to eradicate cartel drug production and presence in Mexico. However, this component’s principal focus was also the eradication of the drug trade, not the creation of stronger security enforcement entities. Although successful execution of Calderón’s tactics against specific cartels and kingpins would have reduced the country’s internal threat temporarily, it would not have permanently solved the greater foundational issue – lack a state security for its people. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the extradition of drug industry criminals, arrests of kingpins and pressure on cartels did not create the intended result, and security remains a weakness that Mexico still faces after Calderón’s term.

### **Reform of Domestic Law Institutions**

The third component to President Calderón’s strategy involved conducting significant reforms to improve the reliability and performance of domestic law bodies such as the police and the judicial sector. Police forces – particularly local police forces – were widely regarded as corrupt and too incompetent to properly handle law enforcement issues; “the local police are not

---

<sup>127</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’”..., 43-44.

up to dealing with [cartels] . . . several of the baddies on the most-wanted list are themselves former officers. The federal police [force] is more widely trusted but remains too small to do the job on its own.”<sup>128</sup> Calderón intended to solve this problem by creating “32 state police forces that would absorb the roles and functions of the municipal forces, creating more resilient, accountable, and efficient forces.”<sup>129</sup> He set about executing a vetting scheme to rid forces at all levels – municipal, state and federal – of the worst officers.<sup>130</sup> He then restructured the federal police, increased its pay and improved corruption awareness training.<sup>131</sup>

The judicial sector was known to be extremely dysfunctional and Calderón took action to address this problem as well. The weak criminal justice system was believed to be a contributing factor to greater social problems involving the “civil and human rights abuses of those caught as defendants within it [and] impunity from prosecution, including political and economic elites, as well as criminal elites, due to corruption.”<sup>132</sup> As a result of this, Mexican citizens did not trust or believe that law enforcement bodies were able to effectively solve crimes. A strong testament to the lack of faith citizens held in their criminal justice system was the significant lack of crime reporting by victims “since they [had] so little faith in the justice system’s ability to vindicate their rights.”<sup>133</sup> This ineffective justice system would not hold up against the complexity or volume of law incursions that were a result of organized crime.

---

<sup>128</sup> Wainwright, “Special Report Mexico: Going Up in the World” . . . , 9.

<sup>129</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire* . . . , 14-15.

<sup>130</sup> The Economist, “Kingpin Bowling” . . . , <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21564897-most-wanted-men-mexico-are-tumbling-will-crime-follow-suit>.

<sup>131</sup> June S. Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, Congressional Research Service Report R41576 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2012), 33.

<sup>132</sup> Matthew C. Ingram, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira and David Shirk, *Assessing Mexico’s Judicial Reform: Views of Judges, Prosecutors, and Public Defenders*, Special Report (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, June 2011), 4.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Calderón recognized that significant reform was needed to address this weakness. He proposed numerous ambitious constitutional and legislative reforms for the criminal justice system which would bring great change and have significant implications on its design and performance; “together, these reforms touch[ed] virtually all aspects of the judicial sector, including police, prosecutors, public defenders, the courts, and the penitentiary system.”<sup>134</sup> In 2008, the Mexican Congress approved them and directed that state and federal governments were to fully implement them by 2016. The reforms included:

. . . 1) changes to criminal procedure through the introduction of new oral, adversarial procedures and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms; 2) a greater emphasis on the rights of the accused (i.e., the presumption of innocence, due process, and an adequate legal defense); 3) a similar emphasis on the rights of victims and restorative justice; 4) modifications to police agencies and their role in criminal investigations; and 5) tougher measures for combating organized crime.<sup>135</sup>

Essentially, the goal of the reforms was to transform the criminal justice system from an inquisitorial to an accusatorial system. It was aimed to align Mexico’s criminal justice system with those of more democratized western countries.

President Calderón’s efforts towards the component of reforming domestic law institutions demonstrated his attempts to address Mexico’s weak rule of law. It could be argued that by improving the efficiency and competency of the police force, government and criminal justice system, a more robust rule of law would be established that could counter organized crime more effectively. This would promote the quick and decisive defeat of the drug trade. However, these reforms would only be effective if they are accepted and supported. During Calderón’s presidency, this was not the case and judicial reforms encountered obstacles within

---

<sup>134</sup> Matt Ingram and David A. Shirk, *Judicial Reform in Mexico: Toward a New Criminal Justice System*, Special Report (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, May 2010), 3.

<sup>135</sup> Ingram, Ferreira and Shirk, *Assessing Mexico’s Judicial Reform...*, 12.

various governmental institutions, thereby preventing positive progression in this state provision. This will be further discussed in chapter four.

## **US – Mexico Bilateral Relations**

The fourth part of President Calderón’s strategy involved US – Mexico bilateral relations. More specifically, it involved soliciting US support for Calderón’s ‘war against organized crime.’ He wanted US support for two reasons: the first was the obvious financial and military strength it could bring to the fight; the second was the Mexican government’s desire for the Americans to do their part in the fight against this trans-national drug industry, since Americans are the primary consumers of Mexican drugs.<sup>136</sup> This translated into negotiations for the *Mérida* Initiative, which will be discussed below.

In November 2007, President Calderón negotiated the multi-billion dollar *Mérida* Initiative with the US to fight organized crime. It consisted of a \$1.5 billion security aid commitment over a three year span, with allocations going to various sectors: “\$500 million [was] earmarked for equipment and training of Mexican security agencies, [and] \$50 million for their counterparts in central America.”<sup>137</sup> The material support included Blackhawk helicopters, speed boats, and database equipment<sup>138</sup> – ideal for counter narcotic operations. It also included

---

<sup>136</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 121.

<sup>137</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’”..., 39.

<sup>138</sup> The Atlantic, “The ‘Dividends’ of U.S.-Mexican ‘Cooperation’ on the Drug War,” published 03 Oct 12, last accessed 10 Oct 12, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/the-dividends-of-us-mexican-cooperation-on-the-drug-war/263072/>.

increased support to intelligence and border security.<sup>139</sup>

The desire to improve bilateral relations was not only driven from the Mexican side. The US wanted certain outcomes as well: a reduction in the national security threat that the Mexican drug industry posed to America; more transparency in Mexico's financial handling; and more accountability and assertion in Mexico's investigations of human rights abuses by its police and military.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the US was willing to sign on to the *Mérida* Initiative and adapt its Mexican foreign policy to reflect state building strategies. President Obama directed that improvements to the rule of law, police reform, and community building and cohesion became the focus of US policy in Mexico.<sup>141</sup> Under this policy, the US provided aid in addition to that committed by the *Mérida* Initiative, such as extra police officer training, the funding and construction of police academies, and the funding of community building projects in crime-ridden communities of northern Mexico.<sup>142</sup>

The *Mérida* Initiative has had a positive impact on US – Mexico bilateral relations. Throughout the execution of the Initiative, “President Calderón has demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to collaborate with the United States, and the United States has shown a new trust and respect for its Mexican partners.”<sup>143</sup> Such positive relations encouraged the two countries to create a succession plan to continue the spirit of the *Mérida* Initiative upon its

---

<sup>139</sup> Shannon O’Neil, *Moving Beyond Merida in U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, Prepared Statement for the Committee on Foreign Affairs: Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; and Committee on Homeland Security: Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, United States House of Representatives, 111th Congress, 2nd Session (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Inc., 27 May 2010), 5.

<sup>140</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 121.

<sup>141</sup> The Atlantic, “The 'Dividends' of U.S.-Mexican 'Cooperation' on the Drug War”..., <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/the-dividends-of-us-mexican-cooperation-on-the-drug-war/263072/>.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations...*, 32.



expiration in 2010. The replacement program – called ‘Beyond *Mérida*’ – includes four pillars: 1) disrupting organized crime groups; 2) institutionalizing the rule of law; 3) building a 21st-century border; and 4) building strong and resilient communities.<sup>144</sup> As illustrated by the pillars, the new program changed its focus and funding priorities from the provision of equipment to security forces to the support of institutional reform in the Mexican government.<sup>145</sup> The long-term nature of these capacity building elements requires continued positive bilateral relations and cooperative support in order for them to come to fruition.

Improved bilateral relations and solicitation of US government initiatives are positive contributors towards combatting the drug industry, but they are not free from areas for improvement. Overall, both administrations viewed the programs as successful, as “collaboration under the initiative [was] credited with significant blows to drug trafficking organizations.”<sup>146</sup> However, criticisms have also been expressed; for example, the transfer of aid and money has been accused of being too slow and bureaucratic, and stories of security ineffectiveness at border crossings and poor inter-agency coordination have circulated.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, although ‘Beyond *Mérida*’ includes some focus on strengthening the rule of law, there is still much more focus on interdiction and eradication of the drug trade. The financial distribution of the program speaks to this; many American citizens wanted to see the money spent on drug education and rehabilitation instead of interdiction, and much of the global community did not agree with the further militarization of Mexican society.<sup>148</sup> Although the programs have seen some success in the drug

---

<sup>144</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations...*, 32.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Ríos and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011*, Special Report (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, March 2012), 23.

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

<sup>148</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 122.

war, their limited scope and integral weaknesses have limited their potential to either fully defeat organized crime or allow a strong Mexican state to flourish.

### **Obstacle One: Corruption**

Rampant corruption was a disease that plagued all levels of the Mexican government, preventing productive progress in the war on drugs. Calderón attempted to address this problem in several ways. One tactic he tried was pay: he tried to limit the salary of top government officials and he raised the pay of the military and national police personnel.<sup>149</sup> Another was to use shame: he started to target corrupt public civilian figures. In May 2009, he made an unprecedented move – he directed military and police forces to start arresting mayors. That month the President successfully targeted public figures in his home state of Michóacan, which was well known for its production and smuggling of drugs: ten mayors and various local officials were detained by federal authorities.<sup>150</sup> This represented a significant step towards combating corruption; “the President’s readiness to arrest public figures – those subterranean enablers of narco-traffickers – in addition to direct attacks on the criminals themselves will alter the dynamics of the drug war.”<sup>151</sup> Calderón’s goal was to reduce the pull of corruption by using exposure, reputation and pride to eliminate it.

Although Calderón attempted to fight corruption, its prevalence made it a formidable adversary. Despite raising salaries and improving training, corruption still permeated the Mexican police forces to the highest levels of office. In 2008, the Chief of the Federal Police

---

<sup>149</sup> Langton, *Gangland...*, 104.

<sup>150</sup> David A. Shirk, “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico,” in *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, ed. Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 225-257 (San Diego: University Readers, 2010), 230.

<sup>151</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?...*, 252.

resigned when he was discovered to have been bribed several times by the Beltran Leyva cartel.<sup>152</sup> In 2009 – three years in to Calderón’s various police reform efforts – 759 police officers were arrested in sixteen different states for drug trafficking.<sup>153</sup> Despite anti-corruption efforts by the government, cartels continued to infiltrate and corrupt the police forces, regardless of seniority: the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI) and Federal Preventative Police (PFP) were no exception.<sup>154</sup>

The cartels also reached government and military officials to corrupt them. It was commonplace to discover long-standing agreements between kingpins and governors or mayors. It did not stop there; Interpol’s top Mexican officer and his second in command were found to be leaking information to the Sinaloa cartel. Perhaps the most shocking example of the reaches of corruption is the discovery that one of President Calderón’s very own bodyguards was found to be on the payroll of the Beltran-Leyva cartel.<sup>155</sup> Even the military did not come out unscathed. Four top military officials were found to have connections with organized crime; one of them being a former deputy defense secretary.<sup>156</sup>

Corruption was a plague in Mexico that has so far proven to be undefeatable. With officials in all governmental departments demonstrating susceptibility to bribery and threats, “Mexicans who hoped for law and order were seriously disheartened. They

---

<sup>152</sup> Langton, *Gangland*..., 127.

<sup>153</sup> Shirk, “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico”..., 230.

<sup>154</sup> Grayson, “Mexico’s Struggle With ‘Drugs and Thugs’”..., 41.

<sup>155</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Mexico’s “Narco-Refugees”: The Looming Challenge for US National Security* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, October 2011), 24.

<sup>156</sup> CNN, “Mexico’s Calderon Defends Drug War in Final State of Nation Address,” last accessed 20 September 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/03/world/americas/mexico-calderon/index.html>.

didn't know who to trust.”<sup>157</sup> The Mexican state faced a difficult paradox: it was difficult to fight organized crime and improve state stability when the government officials responsible to do so were helping drug traffickers as much as they were hindering them.

### **Obstacle Two: Cartel Flexibility**

The ultimate success for President Calderón would have been to disperse all the drug cartels and eliminate drug trafficking in Mexico. However, the drug cartels proved to be incredibly adaptable entities that had no intention of succumbing to the pressures of Calderón or the US. They used the continued fragility of the Mexican state to their advantage, exploiting the weak security, weak rule of law and rampant corruption to continue expansion of their operations. During times of increased counter-narcotic operations, the cartels merely modified their procedures and maneuvers to continue doing business: “they invest[ed] in more sophisticated methods to smuggle drugs across the border, they recruit[ed] new members, they corrupt[ed] more officials, and they [sought] innovative ways to remove obstacles to the business of the organization.”<sup>158</sup> Their operational boundaries routinely changed due to counter-drug avoidance techniques or internal fighting; “even the seven organizations that formerly dominated the picture . . . were only loosely geographically based. The conflict evolve[d] as fighting between [cartels] over drug plazas and corridors [was] exacerbated or resolved.”<sup>159</sup> Power structures within cartels were fluid, making it difficult to properly track and plan operations against key drug leaders: “an additional complexity [was] that the drug

---

<sup>157</sup> Langton, *Gangland*..., 156-157.

<sup>158</sup> Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars*..., 29.

<sup>159</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*..., 35.

organizations [were] adapting and transforming themselves from hierarchical and vertical organizations to become more multi-nodal and horizontal in their structure.”<sup>160</sup> Cartels proved themselves extremely capable of adapting and overcoming counter-narcotic operations, and the lack of legitimate state-wide security and law enforcement allowed them to move about and exert power as required.

### **Obstacle Three: Gangs and Vigilante Justice**

Two other challenges emerged for Calderón to deal with as well. The first, gang warfare, was a result of increased drug abuse in cities near the US border. In these towns, numerous gangs developed and they started fighting to control the local drug trade.<sup>161</sup> Today, estimates of drug gangs distributed throughout this area range from 60 to 80.<sup>162</sup> The second challenge that emerged was vigilante justice. This became more frequent in small towns. Instead of calling the local police to resolve crime or conflicts, “some communities [took] matters into their own hands.”<sup>163</sup> These secondary effects of organized crime further complicated an already difficult battle and illustrated the alarming weakness of security and rule of law that afflicted Mexico.

This chapter examined the counter-narcotic strategy undertaken by President Calderón during his six year term from 2006 to 2012. The elements of his strategy consisted of improving and employing the military in counter-drug and policing functions, targeting cartels and their leaders, instituting judicial reform and soliciting US assistance in counter-narcotic operations. For the most part, this four-prong attack gave Mexico’s state fragility issues of weak security,

---

<sup>160</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations...*, 32.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>162</sup> Patrick Corcoran, “Mexico Has 80 Drug Cartels: Attorney General,” *In Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas*, 20 December 2012, last accessed 03 January 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/mexico-has-80-drug-cartels-attorney-general>.

<sup>163</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations...*, 41.

weak rule of law and corruption only indirect attention. The main purpose of his plan was to seize illicit drugs and arrest drug traffickers,<sup>164</sup> not improve fragile state characteristics. Consequently, although President Calderón took aggressive and significant action in all four of his focus areas, he continued to face significant challenges from organized crime that could have been resolved if more attention had been given to underlying state fragility issues. Hence, modern Mexico still faces an organized crime problem, which will not be resolved until the occurrence of “long-term institutional reform and the replacement of a culture of illegality with one of rule of law and legality.”<sup>165</sup> The next chapter will examine the empirical results of Calderón’s six year drug war to demonstrate its ultimate failure and determine the legacy he has left behind for the next administration.

---

<sup>164</sup> Molzahn, Ríos and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 23.

<sup>165</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 41.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUCCESS, FAILURE AND CALDERÓN'S LEGACY

From 2006 to 2012, President Calderón took aggressive steps against organized crime involving increased military deployment, drug cartel and kingpin targeting, domestic law institutional reform, and solicitation of American aid. The end of his presidency provides an opportunity to examine and assess the results of his 'war against organized crime.' The results demonstrate that he achieved minimal success and that his efforts were ultimately a failure because they did not address the state fragility problems of weak security, weak rule of law and rampant corruption nor defeat organized crime.

### Success

Calderón achieved some success in his battle against the drug industry. His targeted approach of using police and military forces against the cartels and kingpins resulted in some notable achievements. By March 2012, out of the 37 drug trade leaders published on his 2009 kingpin list, 25 of them had been arrested or killed.<sup>166</sup> Shortly after publishing the list, Calderón's forces arrested the second-in-command of the Tijuana cartel and made a record number of other drug-related arrests.<sup>167</sup> In September 2012, the leader of the Gulf cartel was captured,<sup>168</sup> and the following month the head of the Los Zetas cartel was killed.<sup>169</sup> These arrested and killed men on the published list hailed from the

---

<sup>166</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 1.

<sup>167</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 251.

<sup>168</sup> In Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas, "Capture of Gulf Boss Pushes Zetas Split into Spotlight," last accessed 20 September 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/capture-gulf-boss-zetas-split>.

<sup>169</sup> Jones, "Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012" . . . , <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/iss/201301>.

seven most significant DTOs operating throughout Mexico during Calderón's administration. The arrest and killing of these leaders had a significant effect on several of the larger cartels in Mexico; the Gulf and Beltrán Leyva cartels were "virtually wiped out,"<sup>170</sup> and the Sinaloa and Los Zetas cartels were hurt by the loss of influential figures in their operations. This loss of leadership to the cartels was a success that Calderón can claim for his administration.

However, this success was limited. To Mexican citizens, Calderón's effort was seen as commendable, but ineffective: in a May 2008 poll, "81 percent of respondents applauded the president's military strategy against drug-traffickers, even though 56 percent of those interviewed believed the cartels were winning the battle."<sup>171</sup> The cartels continued to prove themselves an insurmountable adversary, as will be illustrated below.

## Failures

Ultimately, the four prong strategy Calderón used in his 'war against organized crime' did not prove strong enough to defeat the drug trade. The drug industry continued to thrive. No amount of seizures, arrests or successful eradication operations were able to stem the movement of narcotics: "overall, flows of drugs remain[ed] relatively uninhibited by these efforts."<sup>172</sup> In the grander scheme, positive results were only temporary or negligible in effect; "officials . . . rarely managed to curtail more than a minor share of overall production and consumption, with the supply and accessibility of drugs to consumers remaining at sufficiently reasonable prices to sustain fairly steady rates of consumption."<sup>173</sup> Drug profits from trafficking remained solid and

---

<sup>170</sup> The Economist, "Kingpin Bowling" . . . , <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21564897-most-wanted-men-mexico-are-tumbling-will-crime-follow-suit>.

<sup>171</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'" . . . , 54.

<sup>172</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 28.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*



unhindered; drug revenue estimates during this time ranged from three percent of Mexico's GDP – approximately US \$3 billion<sup>174</sup> – to as high as US \$29 billion, depending on which governmental organization was reporting.<sup>175</sup> Mexico and the US have spent trillions of dollars over the last half century in anti-drug efforts, yet drug use and drug trafficking has “remained constant, with ebbs and flows based on shifts in the types of drugs consumed.”<sup>176</sup> The uninterrupted conduct of the drug trade is the outcome of a sequence of smaller consequences instigated by Calderón's strategy. These will be discussed below.

### **Power Vacuum**

Although the extensive use of the military and police forces to target cartel kingpins and operations achieved some limited results, it created a significant problem that led to numerous follow on effects. By arresting and killing drug traffickers at all levels, Calderón unintentionally created a power vacuum in the drug industry. As high and mid-level drug dealers were arrested or killed, the “surviving lieutenants competed with each other to succeed a fallen capo, and just as often a rival cartel moved in to fill a power vacuum in the aftermath of ‘successful’ government initiatives.”<sup>177</sup> Calderón's use of the military against the drug cartels “aggravated turf wars between organized crime groups and provoked greater violence as a result of clashes between the military and DTOs.”<sup>178</sup> His strategy “increased fragmentation and upset whatever equilibrium the organizations [were] trying to establish by their displays of violent power. As a result, the violence in Mexico [was] more extensive, more volatile, and less predictable.”<sup>179</sup> This

---

<sup>174</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico* . . . , 7.

<sup>175</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 36.

<sup>176</sup> Kan, *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees"* . . . , 30.

<sup>177</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 251.

<sup>178</sup> Daly, Heinle, and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity* . . . , 8.

<sup>179</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 3.

fragmentation caused several follow on effects that have proven to be extremely daunting obstacles for the government to overcome, which have prevented Mexico's progression to becoming a stronger state.

### **Cartel Defiance**

Calderón's intensive strategy against the cartels and kingpins also roused defiance from the cartels. In response to pressure from the military and police forces, DTOs took to extreme violence "to communicate their lack of fear of the government."<sup>180</sup> Part of this boldness came from the power of money. Thanks to the incredible wealth acquired from illegal drug profits, cartels could "afford to meet government-sponsored police and military action against their operations with even higher levels of violence (private armies) and bigger payments to police and government officials."<sup>181</sup> The cartels knew the influence of money and used it in conjunction with the government's inherent corruption to their advantage. Despite significant federal presence, cartels rebelliously continued to partake in activities that actively defied the government. They reconfigured their organizations, upgraded recruitment campaigns, developed their own militias, levied taxes on businesses, bought expensive properties, acquired athletic teams, organized underground financial institutions, sold protection to municipal governments, provided jobs in distressed regions, forged relations with their counterparts in other countries, contributed to religious projects, exacted tolls to cross plazas they control, and paid musicians to compose ballads that extolled the virtues of their leaders.<sup>182</sup> The cartels wanted to send the

---

<sup>180</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 28.

<sup>181</sup> Teichman, "Violent Conflict and Unequal Development" . . . , 58.

<sup>182</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'" . . . , 61.

message that they would not be easily defeated by the government. The evidence of drug violence that will be discussed below demonstrates their insolence.

### **Proliferation of Organized Crime Violence**

The most significant consequence of Calderón's unplanned power vacuum effect was his failure to reduce violence – in particular, drug related homicides. Intended to eradicate drug trafficking and drug-related violence, Calderón's strategy failed to do either. It was already a rising problem before he took office – narco-related homicides had been on the rise since 2004<sup>183</sup> – but drug violence skyrocketed during his term due to his counter-drug actions. The rate of homicides doubled from 2007 to 2008, grew by 40 percent between 2008 and 2009, and grew by 60 percent between 2009 and 2010.<sup>184</sup> From 2006 to 2009, drug related killings increased from 2120 to over 9000 per year: “according to authorities, 9,635 people were killed in Mexico as a direct result of the Drug War in 2009, more than 26 per day.”<sup>185</sup> The number of deaths in 2010 was shocking: “the death toll . . . was 15,273 – a 59 percent increase over 2009 and an incredible 42 people killed per day.”<sup>186</sup> With this uncontrolled rise in homicide rates, the safety of all Mexican citizens was a risk.

Although most victims of narco violence were drug traffickers, others fell victim as well. Police officers and soldiers have also died while on duty fighting the drug war. Their murder rates have climbed in relation to the rise in drug organization victims: 420 in 2008, 511 in 2009, 776 in 2010, and 620 for 2011.<sup>187</sup> Although 2001 saw only an eight percent increase as compared to the previous year, it must be noted that 2011 still saw over 1500 more murders than 2010 and

---

<sup>183</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 97.

<sup>184</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 22.

<sup>185</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 167.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>187</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 19.

nearly six times the number of killings in 2007.<sup>188</sup> In total, there have been over 50,000 victims of organized crime during President Calderón's six year term. The rate at which murders occur in Mexico is startling; "at the start of the [his] administration, there was one drug related homicide every four hours; by 2011, the worst year on record, there was one every 30 minutes."<sup>189</sup> Currently, approximately half of all intentional homicides are conducted in the name of organized crime. Not only did drug-related violence increase under the Calderón administration, it became widespread as well.

Drug-related homicides and violence spread throughout the country during Calderón's reign. Originally concentrated in areas of high drug trafficking and production, organized crime branched out into new states that had not experienced much of this type of violence before. Border states such as Chihuahua, Baja California Norte, Sonora and Sinaloa saw the highest crime rates – in 2009, "these three states accounted for more than half of all of Mexico's drug-related killings."<sup>190</sup> However, drug-related homicides and crimes spread to other states as well: Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Veracruz, Guerrero and Coahuila. In 2011, these states accounted for 77 percent of all the increases in violence that occurred in Mexico.<sup>191</sup> As crime distributed throughout Mexico, it began to occur with higher frequency in highly populated and economically important cities. Two such examples were the tourist centers of Acapulco and Guadalajara: "the resort city of Acapulco . . . [saw] a sharp increase in violence and was the second-most violent city in Mexico in 2011. Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, saw

---

<sup>188</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011 . . .*, Executive Summary.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>190</sup> Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001-2009 . . .*, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011 . . .*, 16.

increasing violence in 2011 and . . . continued to experience incidents in 2012.”<sup>192</sup> Narco-violence spread like a plague during Calderón’s term and his counterdrug strategy did nothing to stop it. Today, almost all of Mexico is affected by this violence; “the fact remains that only a fraction of Mexico’s municipalities (16%) have been untouched by organized crime and drug related violence.”<sup>193</sup> The proliferation of violence also produced a gruesome side effect – increased brutality of crime.

As drug-related homicide multiplied and extended its reach throughout Calderón’s term, its brutality increased as well. As cartels continued warring, the method of murdering enemies became an important part of a cartel’s identity and its status was “based on [its] capacity to commit the most sadistic acts.”<sup>194</sup> As a result, horrific homicide events such as “mass-casualty shootouts in public plazas, corpses hanging from bridges, decapitated heads placed in front of public buildings, bodies deposited in mass grave sites, and killings that bear markings and messages from organized crime groups”<sup>195</sup> became commonplace occurrences across the country. In 2011, 9.5 percent (1173 incidents) of murder victims were tortured before being killed and 4.5 percent of them were decapitated (556 incidents).<sup>196</sup> An example of the extremity to which the barbarity had reached was a man named Santiago Meza Lopez – ‘The Stewmaker.’ Hired by the Tijuana cartel, he dissolved over 300 bodies in sodium hydroxide to dispose of them.<sup>197</sup> Youth were not spared from drug related violence either. It became the leading cause of death for young Mexicans in 2007, with a shocking 3,741 deaths in 2010.<sup>198</sup> Incredibly, Mexican

---

<sup>192</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 29.

<sup>193</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 18.

<sup>194</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 183.

<sup>195</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 3.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>197</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 133.

<sup>198</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 20.

citizens became desensitized to this cruel phenomena and developed slang that described the vicious murder methods or the ways bodies were discovered: *decapitado* = decapitation, *descuartizado* = quartering or carving up of a body, *encuelado* = body in the trunk of a car, *encobijado* = body wrapped in a blanket, *entampado* = body in a drum, *enteipado* = eyes and mouth of corpse taped shut, and *pozoleado* = body dissolved in acid, looking like Mexican stew.<sup>199</sup> The prevalence of brutality that spread across Mexico despite Calderón's efforts can be seen as a significant failure in his plan to reduce crime.

### **Gang and Cartel Growth**

Another inadvertent side effect of the fragmentation of cartels was the resulting creation of new cartels and gangs out of dispersed cartel individuals. When Calderón took office in December 2006, there were four main DTOs: the Tijuana/Arellano Felix organization (AFO), the Sinaloa cartel, the Juárez cartel, and the Gulf cartel. Approximately two years later, this grew to seven dominant DTOs as the Los Zetas, Beltrán Leyva, and La Familia Michoacana cartels were created. Near the end of Calderón's term, as cartels became further fragmented, it was estimated that the number of existing cartels, gangs and groups had reached between twelve and twenty.<sup>200</sup> With a wide network of drug organizations to track, it became even more difficult for the Calderón administration to effectively combat the cartels. In addition to the challenge of tracking more cartels, the government also had to deal with the evolution of crime activities that these smaller groups introduced to the organized crime scene.

---

<sup>199</sup> Kan, *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees"* . . . , 7.

<sup>200</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 8.

## Crime Diversification

Organized crime diversified in several ways during President Calderón's term, from homicide targets to the nature of crimes committed. At the onset of Calderón's presidency, drug-related homicide victims typically consisted of drug industry members. However, this changed and journalists, reporters and editors became murder victims as well. The cartels used this threat to force news media to "tone down or eliminate coverage of narco-crimes."<sup>201</sup> Today, although many journalists have conceded to the cartels and now write whatever the traffickers want them to, Mexico is still the most dangerous country in the world for them to work.<sup>202</sup> Journalists were not the only new targets; public officials and even American officials started to be at risk. A total of 29 Mexican mayors have been assassinated by cartels since 2007,<sup>203</sup> and in March 2010, "cartel gunman killed U.S. consulate staff employees and their spouses in the presence of their children in the middle of the day as they left a consulate social event."<sup>204</sup> Narco-homicides became a significant threat to all citizens of Mexico, threatening everyone's feeling of security.

The nature of crimes that drug organization became involved in expanded during Calderón's term, as well. The war over drug smuggling routes intensified as new and old cartels fought over these limited areas of profit. As a result, cartels diversified into other types of crimes to minimize their dependence on drug smuggling. "In addition to selling illegal drugs, [cartels] . . . branched into other profitable crimes such as kidnapping, assassination for hire, auto theft, controlling prostitution, extortion, money-laundering, software piracy, resource theft, and human

---

<sup>201</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'". . . , 41.

<sup>202</sup> Kan, *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees"* . . . , 11.

<sup>203</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 19.

<sup>204</sup> Juan P. Nava, "Mexico: Failing State or Emerging Democracy?" *Military Review* 91, no. 2 (Mar/Apr 2011): 31.

smuggling.”<sup>205</sup> Kidnapping for ransom has increased 88 percent since 2007,<sup>206</sup> and the Mexican government has not yet implemented effective counter strategies to money laundering.<sup>207</sup>

Two extremely disturbing trends that emerged were the use of IED attacks and the use of young children as *sicarios*, or hitmen. In July 2010, the first use of an IED by cartels killed four people in Ciudad Juárez and introduced concerns and accusations of terrorism throughout the country.<sup>208</sup> Cartels also started to hire children as hitmen, using their youth as an advantage to circumvent the criminal justice system. Since children received lesser punishments than adults if prosecuted, they became available sooner to perform another hit or other crime.<sup>209</sup> As Calderón attempted to eradicate the existence of cartels, their crime habits continued to grow, expand and evolve seemingly without limits.

### **Human Rights Violations**

President Calderón used the military as a policing force against the drug industry because it was the last remaining institution that still held the respect of the Mexican population. However, the use of the military ended up producing another type of crime – human rights violations – despite the numerous American and International Human Rights Conventions that Mexican government signed party to.<sup>210</sup> As Calderón deployed Mexican troops across the country and their interactions with the Mexican population increased, their lack of training in domestic law enforcement became evident in the form of growing complaints against soldiers

---

<sup>205</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 18.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico* . . . , 13.

<sup>208</sup> Kan, *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees"* . . . , 17.

<sup>209</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 233.

<sup>210</sup> Daly, Heinle, and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity* . . . , 26.



committing human rights violations.<sup>211</sup> Reports indicated that complaints of alleged abuses filed against SEDENA (particularly the Mexican army) rose from 182 in 2006 to 1626 in 2011.<sup>212</sup> Common abuses included torture, physical abuse, cruel or inhuman treatment, loss of life, arbitrary detention and robbery, among others.<sup>213</sup> These abuses occurred in 21 out of 31 states, but were mostly concentrated in those along the northern border, where the military was deployed in greatest numbers.<sup>214</sup> On a positive note, more recommendations from the Mexican National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) to both SEDENA and SEMAR were submitted for action to reduce these violations.<sup>215</sup> However, many of the recommendations have stalled within the justice system and violations continue to occur today. This onslaught of violence from both sides – the bad side being cartels and the supposed good side being the military – started to convince Mexican citizens to move both within and out of Mexico to ensure their safety.

## Displaced Persons

The threat and violence from the drug war forced thousands of Mexicans to move from their homes, which speaks to the lack of human security provided by the Calderón administration. In order to seek refuge and safety, citizens have moved both within Mexico and out of it into the US. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reported that Mexico “had at least 160,000 internally displaced persons as a result of the drug war.”<sup>216</sup> In 2010, approximately 115,000 people fled to the US to find safety there.<sup>217</sup> This move across the border created an

---

<sup>211</sup> Shirk, “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico” . . . , 227.

<sup>212</sup> Daly, Heinle, and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity* . . . , 11.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, Executive Summary.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Jones, “Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012” . . .

<http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/iss/201301>.

<sup>217</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 31.

increase in Mexican citizens seeking political asylum in the US: in only two years – from 2006 to 2008 – the number of cases rose from 54 to 2543.<sup>218</sup> Numerous Mexican businessmen and even public officials chose another option – to live on the US side and work in Mexico. Ciudad Juárez's mayor, major newspaper publisher, and several business professionals have chosen to live in El Paso, Texas instead of living in their home city. Businesspeople in Chihuahua are doing the same.<sup>219</sup> Mexican citizens felt they were forced to move to a neighbouring country in order to provide better safety to them and their families. The inability of the Calderón administration to resolve this can be considered a failure in the provision of domestic human security.

### **Economic Effects of Violence**

The Calderón administration's inability to control drug war violence also affected the Mexican economy. Copious amounts of small town businesses closed due to continued drug violence. As people moved away or were killed, small business owners did not have the required customer base to remain open. Also, in some towns the cartels collected fees from storeowners to 'guarantee' their safety, thereby running proprietors into debt, forcing them to close their businesses.<sup>220</sup> Larger businesses, some of them international, also decided to close and move elsewhere: in 2011, a reported 160,000 businesses stopped operations and left Mexico due to the drug violence.<sup>221</sup> Tourism – the major industry in Mexico – was also damaged by the violence.

---

<sup>218</sup> Kan, *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees"* . . . , 2.

<sup>219</sup> Bowden, *Murder City* . . . , 7.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>221</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 30.

Tourism in major tourist centers such as Acapulco, Cancún, Mazatlan, Taxco, Cuernavaca, and the US-Mexico border area “also suffered a dramatic decline because of fears of violence.”<sup>222</sup>

Natural gas and oil fields also felt the effects of drug violence. Certain natural gas and oil fields became caught in the cartel conflicts. As a result, they were either damaged or tampered with and were rendered ineffective to collect the natural resources that lie beneath. These sites now sit unserviceable and useless to the Mexican government. Finally, the most negative consequence of a threatened economy is that the “continuing poverty and lack of economic opportunity means the cartels will continue to find people to join their ranks.”<sup>223</sup>

### **Domestic Law Institution Reforms**

The domestic law institution reforms that Calderón introduced during his presidency never reached full realization. The police reforms that Calderón instituted made minimal progress; “while the federal government [strove] to stand up a capable police force in order to relieve and eventually replace the military, that possibility is still distant.”<sup>224</sup> Delays in process were evident; with respect to Calderón’s police vetting plan, “ten of the 31 states . . . have not evaluated half their forces.”<sup>225</sup> His proposal to establish 32 state police forces was held up by Congress for over a year.<sup>226</sup> Police reform posed a challenge that not all officials were willing to accommodate.

---

<sup>222</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 30.

<sup>223</sup> Teichman, “Violent Conflict and Unequal Development” . . . , 59.

<sup>224</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire* . . . , vii.

<sup>225</sup> The Economist, “Kingpin Bowling” . . . , <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21564897-most-wanted-men-mexico-are-tumbling-will-crime-follow-suit>.

<sup>226</sup> Moyano, *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire* . . . , 14-15.

Calderón faced the same hesitation from officials in the criminal justice system, which created delays and postponement to the implementation of proposed reforms. Some officials believed that the previous system was adequate and that reform was not really necessary; a survey given to Mexican justice officials by the Trans-Border Institute in June 2011 exposed that 59 percent of judges and 44 percent of prosecutors held that opinion. Only defenders were more inclined towards the adoption of reforms for improvement to the system – only 37 percent of them believed that the existing system was sufficient.<sup>227</sup> More importantly, a startling 40 percent of surveyed officials believed that Mexico was pressured into reforms by foreign governments and organizations.<sup>228</sup> This telling statistic threatened the legitimacy of the reform project, which could be an explanation as to why “reforms have been implemented in only 13 of Mexico’s 32 states.”<sup>229</sup> Whether officials believed that reform was not required, was a result of peer pressure, was too ambitious without enough resources or was not ambitious enough, Mexico was still in its infancy stages with respect to reform of democratic police forces and judiciary systems. It was too comfortable with the old way, where “Mexican law enforcement agencies were an extension of autocratic or semi-authoritarian systems of control.”<sup>230</sup> Therefore, the weakness and unwillingness of officials within the police forces and judicial structures had themselves prevented the resolution of the very issues that plagued the country.

---

<sup>227</sup> Ingram, Ferreira and Shirk, *Assessing Mexico’s Judicial Reform...*, 13.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>229</sup> Ingram and Shirk, *Judicial Reform in Mexico...*, 1.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## President Calderón's Legacy

### Persistence of Organized Crime

The results of President Calderón's 'war against organized crime' have left a challenging legacy for the next Mexican administration. Ultimately, his strategy was a failure and Mexico faces the same – if not worse – organized crime challenges it did six years ago. Although his approach can be credited for targeting drug kingpins, this was not significant enough to defeat larger organized crime issues. This is the widespread belief amongst the Mexican population, as well. More than half of Mexicans – 53 percent – believe that organized crime is “winning the fight against government forces. Only 28 [percent] felt Calderón's strategy had been successful.”<sup>231</sup> The failures of his strategy included the following: uninterrupted continuation of the drug flow out of Mexico, creation of a power vacuum amongst DTOs, provocation of defiance by cartels, record breaking growth in homicide rates, spreading of violence, escalation in homicide brutality, creation of additional gangs and cartels, diversification of crimes, increase in human rights violations and displaced persons, setbacks to the economy, and unreformed domestic law institutions. These failures all have created an even greater challenge for the next government to defeat. Not only did Calderón's strategy fail to defeat these organized crime problems, but they also ignored Mexico's state fragility issues, thereby sentencing the country to continued existence as a weak state.

---

<sup>231</sup> Daly, Heinle, and Shirk, *Armed with Impunity* . . . , Executive Summary.

## Continued State Fragility

Mexico continues to exhibit characteristics of a fragile state. The illicit drug industry has continued to defy the authority of the state and the above failures demonstrate the disruption that organized crime has had on Mexico's ability to provide security. As recently as January 2012, "19 Mexican cities were among the 50 most violent cities in the world . . . [and] of the cities included, five were in the world's top ten, including Acapulco, Ciudad Juárez, Torreón, Chihuahua, and Durango."<sup>232</sup> These ratings ring true with the Mexican population; "few Mexican citizens feel safer today than they did ten years ago, and most believe that their government is losing the fight."<sup>233</sup> Unless Mexico can take control of security back from the cartels, Mexican citizens will not be able to enjoy full domestic freedom.

Mexico's weak security not only threatens the Mexican population, but those of neighbouring countries as well. Spillover violence, crime and insecurity from the drug war have been experienced at a growing scale in the US to the point where it has declared Mexico's drug violence a national security threat. Crimes and brutalities commonly seen in Mexico have also been witnessed in the north: cartels were slashing throats and beheading victims, American financial institutions were found to be aiding cartels, "and to complete the cycle, elected officials and the police had been found to be corrupt – running illegal firearms to the cartels for profit."<sup>234</sup>

The US now has to deal with these security issues as well as the influx of Mexican refugees trying to get into the US. Approving too many political asylum claims would imply that the US doesn't think the Mexican government has the capacity to conquer the cartels and create a

---

<sup>232</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 16.

<sup>233</sup> Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico* . . . , 3.

<sup>234</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 252.

safer state. However, denying people asylum at this stage “would be sending Mexican citizens potentially to their deaths back in Mexico.”<sup>235</sup> If not controlled, Mexico’s weak security will continue to pose a threat to domestic and international communities and complicate bilateral relations.

Another weak state characteristic that Mexico continues to exhibit is weak rule of law. Despite Calderón’s efforts to introduce and implement judicial reforms, the rule of law has not improved; “Mexico’s law enforcement and courts have been ineffective in investigating and prosecuting the perpetrators of violence, leaving the DTOs to continue their attacks free of legal consequences.”<sup>236</sup> Mexico currently harbours hundreds of ‘zones of impunity’ – regions or states “where crimes run rampant.”<sup>237</sup> Such ‘zones’ include the Golden Triangle, the Tierra Caliente mountainous region, the US-Mexican border, the Mexican-Guatemalan border, and metropolitan areas around Mexico City. Crime and drug operations occur in these areas with little to no interruption by law enforcement authorities.<sup>238</sup> Six years later, after Calderón’s presidency has ended, law institutions continue to lack the experience, capabilities, manpower and most importantly – will – to properly enforce the required rule of law that would enable Mexico to develop into a stronger state.

President Calderón’s legacy is a fragile state seized with long-standing organized crime and governmental problems. Enrique Niña Pieta – the newly inaugurated President – essentially faces the same issues that previous administrations have for years, except that the severity of the drug violence is now much more substantial. He has a challenging road ahead if he wants to

---

<sup>235</sup> Kan, *Mexico’s “Narco-Refugees”* . . . , 4.

<sup>236</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations* . . . , 28.

<sup>237</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 271.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

make progress in the drug war and strengthen the state. One thing is certain: “future Mexican governments will likely have to deal with the DTOs and the violence they generate. . . . It may take years of building stronger institutions before violence is markedly reduced.”<sup>239</sup> The next administration will need to create plans and adopt strategies that will attack institutional corruption and establish reforms. Such reforms will need to unite the political, religious, business and media sectors into bodies that will support the journey towards democracy and a stronger state. Only through these means will organized crime ever be fully defeated – by the combined desire and resolution of the Mexican population to rid itself of this disease. The next chapter will discuss recommendations for future strategies that would allow the Mexican government to achieve more success against organized crime and state fragility.

---

<sup>239</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations . . .*, 38.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ADMINISTRATIONS

### Conclusion

This thesis examined and assessed Mexican President Felipe Calderón's 'war against organized crime' that he waged from December 2006 to December 2012. It has been proven here that although he achieved small success in his 'war,' it was ultimately a failure because it did not address the underlying state fragility problems of weak security, corruption and weak rule of law. As a result, organized crime continues to threaten Mexico's potential and sovereignty. President Calderón's failure to adopt policies that addressed the roots of Mexico's state fragility consequently led to failure in two realms: the defeat organized crime and the transformation of his country into a viable, sustainable state.

In order to establish a framework upon which to apply the analysis of Calderón's counter drug strategy, the conventional concepts and definitions of the state were established first. Existing literature was analyzed to determine common institutional and functional definitions of the state, as well as to identify differentiating criteria between strong, fragile and collapsed states. The review of existing publications also revealed various strategies on how to counter state fragility. From this review, the state political goods of security and rule of law, as well as the element of corruption, were chosen as the benchmarks against which to assess Calderón's 'war against organized crime.'

By identifying historical trends in Mexico's economic conditions, corruption, US-Mexican bilateral relations in the counternarcotic realm, cartel evolution, and regional state fragility, it was demonstrated that past governmental policies have ineffectively addressed state

fragility issues and failed to defeat organized crime. This evidence illustrated how the neglect on behalf of previous governments allowed the continuous growth of the drug trade to a point where it currently exerts substantial power and influence – through bribes and threats – over public and government officials. This was the situation President Calderón inherited in 2006 and resolved to correct.

Describing and examining the finer details of Calderón's counter-drug strategy demonstrated his ambition to interdict and eradicate the drug trade. His use of the military to combat drug cartels, pursuit of drug cartel kingpins, proposals of national police and judiciary reforms, and negotiations with the US to establish the *Mérida* Initiative all demonstrated his will to defeat organized crime. Although components of these strategies could be linked to the resolution of state fragility issues, it was demonstrated that more importance was placed on interdiction and eradication of the drug trade than on development of the state.

Empirical evidence from 2006 to 2012 demonstrated the minimal impact of Calderón's anti-drug activities on the drug trade during his term, which proved the inherent weaknesses of his overall strategy. It was proven through data and statistics that organized crime violence grew in frequency, brutality, distribution, and diversification. Other fragile state issues such as human rights violations and citizen displacement were demonstrated through empirical evidence as well. The use of survey results demonstrated the barriers to domestic law reform that Calderón failed to overcome. The review of these results corroborated the argument that Calderón's 'war against organized crime' was a failure and left a challenging legacy of continued state fragility and organized crime. This unstable, fragile state is the inheritance he bestowed upon the next government administration.

## Future Recommendations

A review of the results of Calderón's 'war on organized crime' naturally leads to the next question: 'now what?' How can the seemingly undefeatable drug problem be resolved so Mexico can become a stronger state? Past proposed policy recommendations include continued use of the military for law enforcement, decriminalization of certain drugs, and cartel-government collaboration. Although the present absence of a capable national police force does require continued use of military policing, this cannot be a long term solution. Militarization must be maintained as a short term solution because its personnel do not receive the training or required authorization to conduct the investigative police duties and aggressive prosecution that such high levels of crime require.<sup>240</sup> The military cannot itself enforce rule of law indefinitely; Mexico must keep a "constant eye towards long-term improvements in the domestic public security apparatus."<sup>241</sup> Use of the military in a policing role must be considered only a placeholder until the true bodies of law enforcement – the national police – can be employed effectively against organized crime.

Decriminalization as a solution to the drug problem produces mixed results. Proponents of drug legalization argue that it would be cheaper by legalizing the medicinal use of marijuana and cocaine for adults because it would facilitate drug use to be treated as an illness instead of a crime.<sup>242</sup> Further arguments for decriminalization declare that it would allow "beleaguered law enforcement agencies to concentrate their time and resources on larger dealers and trafficking operations . . . and [eliminate] opportunities for police to harass and extort drug users"<sup>243</sup> so they

---

<sup>240</sup> Shirk, "Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico" . . . , 232.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>242</sup> Grayson, "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'" . . . , 59-60.

<sup>243</sup> Shirk, "Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico" . . . , 252.

could receive treatment without repercussions. There is existing support for this proposal on both sides of the border; the US recently passed legislation legalizing the recreational use of marijuana in Washington and Colorado,<sup>244</sup> and 40 percent of Mexicans support its legalization as well.<sup>245</sup>

However, despite this support, decriminalization will not likely happen in Mexico. Calderón was strongly opposed to it during his administration: “My government does not negotiate nor will it ever negotiate with criminal organizations, with those that we combat without favoritism [and we] are committed not only to confront them but to defeat them with all the force of the State.”<sup>246</sup> His sentiments prevail throughout most of the Mexican government, as well. There is little support to legalize highly addictive and destructive drugs, so little that upon hearing discussions about decriminalization “the view from inside the Mexican government [is] one of rage and frustration.”<sup>247</sup>

Perhaps due to the exhausting intensity and length of the drug war or to desperation, propositions to collaborate with DTOs have been voiced in recent years. Proponents argue that there are two paths to ending the intense violence that the drug war has created: either continue the war and hope that it will subside like the crack cocaine wars did in the US or go back to collaborating with the cartels to keep peace, much like the PRI did for decades.<sup>248</sup> From the 1950s to the early 1980s, there was significantly less drug violence because the state regulated the illegal drug market through corruption. A state’s corrupt representative often held the threat

---

<sup>244</sup> Jones, “Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012” . . . , <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/iss/201301>.

<sup>245</sup> Shirk, “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico” . . . , 250.

<sup>246</sup> President Felipe Calderón, quoted in Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 259.

<sup>247</sup> Jones, “Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012” . . . , <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/iss/201301>.

<sup>248</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 253.

of force to exert power and control over the drug cartels.<sup>249</sup> Now, however, the situation is reversed. The threat of force is exerted by drug cartels over government officials in the form of a brutal choice: *‘plata o plomo’* – silver or lead. “You’re offered a bribe. If bribery doesn’t work, you’re offered violence. And that violence will be exacted against you or your family members.”<sup>250</sup>

Although collaboration is an option, it is the status quo and can no longer be considered a viable path for Mexico. The continued existence of DTOs in Mexico – whether they collaborate with the government or not – is a symptom of a sickness that must be healed if Mexico is to ever reach its full potential. Although the above policy recommendations address certain specific factors of the drug problem, they do not tackle the root problems of state fragility, which is what is required to ultimately defeat organized crime and enable Mexico’s progress towards becoming a viable state. Recommendations for addressing state fragility will be discussed in the next section.

### **Focusing on State Fragility: Recommendations**

In order for future presidential administrations to effectively defeat organized crime, they will have to focus on Mexico’s larger underlying issue of state fragility. In Mexico’s case, this includes resolving the widespread problems of weak security, weak rule of law and corruption. To do this, there are a number of activities and actions future Mexican governments will have to assign more priority to than solely the eradication of the drug trade. Of primary importance are the development of functional law enforcement and judicial institutions and the eradication of

---

<sup>249</sup> Kenny and Serrano, “The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story” . . . , 41.

<sup>250</sup> Langton, *Gangland* . . . , 75.

corruption at all levels. Other important activities that would help to target Mexico's fragile state issues include the promotion of economic development, the development and implementation of drug education, treatment and prevention programs, and the improvement of medical and health care. In concert with these initiatives, the government needs to exert concentrated effort to connect the Mexican state to the social cohesion of its citizens in order to generate the strong political will and support of its population to commit to reforms and changes. This motivation of the population will be the most influential driver for change towards a sustainable, stronger Mexican state.

First and foremost, the Mexican government must work towards providing stronger security to its citizens. Without strong domestic security, few – if any – other initiatives will be able to succeed. Without security, citizens would continue to encounter threats, violence and other phenomena that would prevent them from participating in reforms. The Mexican government needs to exert increased effort towards reforming and improving its defunct police forces. Recommended activities include raising entry, training and qualification standards, providing better pay, compensation and benefits, improving the education and training of its officers, upgrading working conditions, and reforming the internal organization of the forces.<sup>251</sup> To encourage better relations with citizens, police forces should be focused more towards community-oriented policing methods, where they interact more fully with civic groups and communities.<sup>252</sup> With these improvements, police officers would potentially breed a sense of commitment and pride in the force and develop the opinion that policing is a worthwhile career in the Mexican public service. This would attract better candidates, improve police force

---

<sup>251</sup> Shirk, "Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico" . . . , 231.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

retention rates, and significantly reduce corruption – all necessary elements to establishing a capable, comprehensive entity to provide security.

Linked to effective security is the legitimate rule of law. Future Mexican governments must also concentrate efforts towards establishing this so that fair and equal law can reign over daily life and reduce criminal impunity. Crucial to the rule of law is “the development of a strong legal profession – particularly the development of adequately supported public defenders.”<sup>253</sup> However, Mexico’s organized crime violence indicates a gap in this essential element: there is a “need to raise the professional standards for police and prosecutors through a more effective system of public defenders and greater adherence to due process in the administration of justice in Mexico.”<sup>254</sup> Therefore, future Mexican governments need to take more action regarding judicial reforms and training of judicial employees at the federal and state levels to make the rule of law more efficient and effective. While this has been conducted in the past, it has not reached all those involved in the judicial process; “while there are a number of U.S. and Mexican government programs for the training of judges and prosecutors, support for similar programs for training public defenders and private attorneys are more rare and even less well funded.”<sup>255</sup> Until resolution of this shortfall in training and statewide institutional reform is achieved, legitimate rule of law will not be established and organized crime will continue to take advantage of the weak judicial system and disrupt order in Mexican society. Successful achievement of these improvements would enforce the rule of law against organized crime, making offenders accountable for their actions and potentially diminishing crime rates. This would generate more confidence in the law system from citizens, thereby generating more support and obedience from

---

<sup>253</sup> Shirk, “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico” . . . , 232.

<sup>254</sup> Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011* . . . , 27.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

them. These factors together would establish a stronger rule of law in Mexico, thereby accomplishing another step towards becoming a sustainable state.

A major impediment to providing stronger security and rule of law in Mexico is corruption. As this paper has discussed in previous sections, corruption is a rampant disease that affects all levels of governmental and public institutions and thwarts the success of counter-drug strategies. DTOs rely on the greed of various government and public officials to continue their successful operations. Therefore, future governments need to adopt aggressive anti-corruption strategies to target and expose fraudulent government and public officials, thereby making it known that corruption will not be tolerated. Strategies such as pay increases or corruption prevention programs could counter this problem in official circles. It is essential for future governments to create an anti-corruption culture within its institutions in order to have any real hope for successful reforms. As long as widespread corruption continues to hamper state services and promote organized crime, Mexico's chances to defeat the drug trade and make progress towards providing security and rule of law will be limited. As mentioned before, the establishment of security is essential for further development activities that are recommended below.

Establishing security and legitimate rule of law, as well as abolishing corruption, are essential tasks for Mexico to undertake if it wants to successfully tackle organized crime and become a stronger state. Following these, there are other activities that would continue the progress towards state-enhancement. These include promoting economic development, establishing various programs aimed at drug education, treatment and prevention, and improving medical and health care. Devising policies to promote economic development would help to re-create Mexico's commercial environment and make it more appealing to investors. This would



encourage national and international private investment and competition, “without which no development can occur or be sustained.”<sup>256</sup> A stronger economy would create more jobs, thereby reducing the need to look to drug cartels for employment. In terms of prevention programs, both US and Mexican governments should place more importance on drug education and treatment programs to counter the demand side of the drug trade; “only when U.S. officials accept co-responsibility with Mexico by placing as much weight on curtailing consumption as they do on reducing supply will progress take place.”<sup>257</sup> Such education and treatment programs should be promulgated in prisons, schools, community centers, churches and other places where it is deemed a substantial impact could be achieved. Decreasing the user demand for drugs in both countries through education and awareness provides another indirect method of fighting the drug war. Future Mexican governments should also adopt policies aimed at improving the medical and health care services provided to its citizens. This would promote the overall health of the population, which could potentially decrease the desire to use drugs as a way to cope with medical issues.

The solid foundation that must underlie all of these recommendations is the political will of the people. In order to successfully resolve the roots of state fragility and defeat organized crime, the Mexican population will need to fully accept, support and participate in new government strategies that are aimed at those goals. To realize improved state legitimacy and rule of law, the Mexican government must cultivate support for reforms from all segments of the Mexican population. Ensuring new policies complement local conditions will enable future Mexican governments to construct a positive state-society connection, which will empower it to

---

<sup>256</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States* . . . , 2.

<sup>257</sup> Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* . . . , 260.

“win legitimacy, develop competency, and encourage investment, rule of law, and the other ingredients necessary to foster a self-sustaining, internally driven process that will lead to development.”<sup>258</sup> Improved state-society cohesion would provide the force required to push Mexico in the right direction; “a country’s ability to advance is crucially tied to its citizens’ ability to cooperate – both among themselves and in partnership with the state – in increasingly sophisticated ways.”<sup>259</sup> Future Mexican governments and the population must work together as a team and portray the required political will to attack the existing state fragility problems of weak security, weak rule of law and rampant corruption. By addressing these issues and becoming a stronger state, Mexico will also become better equipped to effectively combat organized crime.

---

<sup>258</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States* . . . , 9.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aguila, Emma, Alisher R. Akhmedjonov, Ricardo Basurto-Davila, Krishna B. Kumar, Sarah Kups, and Howard J. Shatz. *United States and Mexico: Ties that Bind, Issues that Divide*. Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2012.
- Beittel, June S. *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*. Congressional Research Service Report R41576. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2012.
- Bowden, Charles. *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*. New York: Nation Books, 2011.
- Bunker, Robert J. "Cartel Evolution Revisited: Third Phase Cartel Potentials and Alternative Futures in Mexico." In *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, edited by Robert J. Bunker, 30-54. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- . "Strategic Threat: Narcos and Narcotics Overview." In *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, edited by Robert J. Bunker, 8-29. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- Camp, Roderic. "Mexico." In *The Political Role of the Military: An International Handbook*, edited by Constantine P. Danopoulos and Cynthia Watson, 271-282. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Campbell, Lisa J. "Los Zetas: Operational Assessment." In *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, edited by Robert J. Bunker, 55-80. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- Corcoran, Patrick. "Mexico Has 80 Drug Cartels: Attorney General." In *Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas*, 20 December 2012. Last accessed 03 January 2013. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/mexico-has-80-drug-cartels-attorney-general>.
- CNN. "Mexico's Calderon Defends Drug War in Final State of Nation Address." Last accessed 20 September 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/03/world/americas/mexico-calderon/index.html>.
- Daly, Catherine, Kimberly Heinle, and David A. Shirk. *Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico*. Special Report. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, 2012.
- Dawisha, Adeed, and I. William Zartman. *Beyond Coercion: the Durability of the Arab State*. London: Croom Helm, 1988.

- DeShazo, Peter, Johanna Mendelson Forman, and Phillip McLean. *Countering Threats to Security and Stability in a Failing State: Lessons from Colombia*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2009.
- Evans, Peter B., Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. "On the Road Toward a More Adequate Understanding of the State." In *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, 347-366. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. *Calderón's Caldron: Lessons from Mexico's Battle Against Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking in Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Michoacán*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, September 2011.
- Grayson, George W. *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010.
- . "Mexico's Struggle With 'Drugs and Thugs'." *Foreign Policy Association*, no. 331 (Winter 2009): 3-96.
- Grillo, Ioan. *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011.
- Haken, Nate, J. J. Messner, Krista Hendry, Patricia Taft, Kendall Lawrence, Tierney Anderson, Raphaël Jaeger, Natalie Manning, Felipe Umaña, and Amelia Whitehead. *Failed States Index 2012*. Washington, DC: The Fund for Peace, 2012. Last accessed 03 February 2012.  
<http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=cfsir1210>.
- Human Rights Watch. *Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs"*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011.
- Ingram, Matt and David A. Shirk. *Judicial Reform in Mexico: Toward a New Criminal Justice System*. Special Report. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, May 2010.
- Ingram, Matthew C., Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David Shirk. *Assessing Mexico's Judicial Reform: Views of Judges, Prosecutors, and Public Defender*. Special Report. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, June 2011.
- In Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas. "Capture of Gulf Boss Pushes Zetas Split into Spotlight." Last accessed 20 September 2012.  
<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/capture-gulf-boss-zetas-split>.
- . "Re-Emergence of Splinter Criminal Groups is Bad Sign for Mexico." Last accessed 20 September 2012. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/guerrero-gang-mexico-cartel-fragments>.

- Jones, Nathan P. "Mexico Drug Policy and Security Review 2012." *Small Wars Journal*. Last accessed January 11 2013. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/iss/201301>.
- Kan, Paul Rexton. *Mexico's "Narco-Refugees": The Looming Challenge for US National Security*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2011.
- Kaplan, Seth D. *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008.
- Kenny, Paul and Mónica Serrano. "Introduction: Security Failure Versus State Failure." In *Mexico's Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence*, edited by Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, 1-25. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
- . "The Mexican State and Organized Crime: An Unending Story." In *Mexico's Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence*, edited by Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, 29-53. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
- Langton, Jerry. *Gangland: The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels from El Paso to Vancouver*. Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2012.
- Lecuona, Guillermo Zepeda. "Mexican Police and the Criminal Justice System." In *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, edited by Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 39-64. San Diego: University Readers, 2010.
- Manaut, Raúl Benítez. "Containing Armed Groups, Drug Trafficking, and Organized Crime in Mexico." In *Organized Crime & Democratic Governability: Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands*, edited by John Bailey and Roy Godson, 126 – 158. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.
- Mann, Micheal. *The Sources of Social Power Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760-1914*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Manwaring, Max G. *A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2007.
- Melis, Alberto M. "Foreword: A View From the Borderlands." In *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, edited by Robert J. Bunker, 3-7. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- Miraglia, Paula, Rolando Ochoa, and Ivan Briscoe. *Transnational Organised Crime and Fragile States*. OECD DAC INCAF Project Working Paper 3/2012. OECD Publishing, October 2012.

- Moloeznik, Marcos Pablo. "The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico." In *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, edited by Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 65-92. San Diego: University Readers, 2010.
- Molzahn, Cory, Viridiana Ríos, and David A. Shirk. *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011*. Special Report. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, March 2012.
- Moyano, Inigo Guevara. *Adapting, Transforming, and Modernizing Under Fire: The Mexican Military 2006-2011*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2011.
- Nagle, Luz E. "Corruption of Politicians, Law Enforcement, and the Judiciary in Mexico and Complicity Across the Border." In *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, edited by Robert J. Bunker, 95-122. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- Nava, Juan P. "Mexico: Failing State or Emerging Democracy?" *Military Review* 91, no. 2 (Mar/Apr 2011): 31-40.
- Olson, Eric L., and Christopher E. Wilson. *Beyond Merida: The Evolving Approach to Security Cooperation*. Working Paper Series on U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, May 2010.
- O'Neil, Shannon K. "Mexico Makes It: A Transformed Society, Economy, and Government." *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 2 (March/April 2013): 52-63.
- . *Moving Beyond Merida in U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*. Prepared Statement for the Committee on Foreign Affairs: Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; and Committee on Homeland Security: Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, United States House of Representatives, 111th Congress, 2nd Session. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Inc., 27 May 2010.
- Payan, Tony. *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006.
- Pérez, Carlos Antonio Flores. "Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico." In *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, edited by Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 93-124. San Diego: University Readers, 2010.
- Ríos, Viridiana, and David A. Shirk. *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2010*. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, February 2011.
- Rotberg, Robert I. "Failed States in a World of Terror." *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July-August 2002): 127-140.

- . “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair.” In *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg, 1-49. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Rueschemeyer, Dietrich and Peter B. Evans. “The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention.” In *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, 44-77. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Sadler, Louis R. “The Historical Dynamics of Smuggling in the U.S.- Mexican Border Region, 1550 – 1998.” In *Organized Crime & Democratic Governability: Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands*, edited by John Bailey and Roy Godson, 161 – 176. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.
- Seelke, Clare Ribando, and Kristin M. Finklea. *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond*. Congressional Research Service Report R41349. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 15 August 2011.
- Shipley, Joe C. “What Have We Learned From the War on Drugs? An Assessment of Mexico’s Counternarcotics Strategy,” Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2011.
- Shirk, David A. *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001-2009*. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, January 2010.
- . “Future Directions for Police and Public Security in Mexico.” In *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, edited by Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, 225-257. San Diego: University Readers, 2010.
- . *The Drug War in Mexico: Confronting a Shared Threat*. Council Special Report No. 60. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Inc., March 2011.
- Skocpol, Theda. “Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research.” In *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, 3-37. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Teichman, Judith. “Violent Conflict and Unequal Development: The Case of Mexico.” In *Economic Development Strategies and the Evolution of Violence in Latin America*, edited by William Ascher and Natalia Mirovitskaya, 41-69. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.
- The Atlantic. “The 'Dividends' of U.S.-Mexican 'Cooperation' on the Drug War.” Last accessed 10 Oct 12. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/the-dividends-of-us-mexican-cooperation-on-the-drug-war/263072/>.

- The Economist. "Kingpin Bowling: The Most Wanted Men in Mexico are Tumbling. Will Crime Follow Suit?" Last accessed 04 February 2013.  
<http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21564897-most-wanted-men-mexico-are-tumbling-will-crime-follow-suit>.
- The European Strategist. "Drug Trafficking and Countermeasures in Turkey: A General Assessment." Last accessed 11 March 2013.  
<http://www.europeanstrategist.eu/2011/11/drug-trafficking-and-countermeasures-in-turkey-a-general-assessment-2/>.
- Toro, María Celia. *Mexico's "War" on Drugs: Causes and Consequences*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2011*. Vienna, Austria: UNODC, 2011.
- United States. Executive Office of the President of the United States. *National Drug Control Strategy 2012*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012.
- Vulliamy, Ed. *Amexica: War Along the Borderline*. New York: Picador, 2011.
- Wainwright, Tom. "Special Report Mexico: Going Up in the World," *The Economist*, November 24th – 30th, 2012, 1-16.
- Walther, Lieutenant Colonel Micheal F. *Insanity: Four Decades of U.S. Counterdrug Strategy*. Carlisle Paper. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2012.
- Watt, Peter and Roberto Zepeda. *Drug War in Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*. New York: Zed Books, 2012.
- Weber, M. *Economy and Society Volume I*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Williams, Phil, and Vanda Felbab-Brown. *Drug Trafficking, Violence, and Instability*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2012.
- Yoo, John. "Fixing Failed States." *California Law Review* 99, no. 1 (February 2011): 95- 150.
- Zartman, I. William. "Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse." In *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, edited by I. William Zartman, 1-11. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.
- . "Putting Things Back Together." In *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, edited by I. William Zartman, 267-273. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.