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Plan Mexico?

Towards an Integrated Approach in the War on Drugs

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The illegal drug trade has been present in Mexico since the beginning of the twentieth century when prohibition of the opium trade started. Since then, the social harm of the illegal drug trade in all its forms has been constantly increasing. Today, the most obvious example of the social harm of the illegal drug trade in Mexico is drug-related crime. As a result, Mexican authorities have launched a frontal attack against the drug cartels in an effort to reduce drug-related violence. However, the results of these efforts have not been as expected. One of the main problems that Mexican authorities face in their war on drugs is the lack of a well-coordinated anti-drug strategy to fight the illegal drug trade. Further, the efforts made by the Mexican government are based on a supply-reduction approach that has proved ineffective both in Mexico and around the world over the last century because it is not aimed at the social roots of the illegal drug trade. Thus, Mexico's war on drugs has become a never-ending story. This thesis traces this history and then proposes a broader integrated approach based on attacking the roots of the illegal drug trade in Mexico.

Part I: The "War on Drugs" in Mexico

For more than ten years, the Mexican government has been following the same anti-drug policy in an effort to deter the illegal drug trade and the major drug-trafficking organizations that are based in various parts of the country. Mexico's anti-drug policy has focused mainly on trying to reduce the supply of illegal drugs by attacking the drug cartels. However, regardless of the vast amount of resources expended on interdiction operations, the flow of illegal drugs into and out of Mexico continues more or less unabated, while the negative by-products associated with the illegal drug trade keep growing. The most visible of these is the increase in violence as different groups fight over control of the main trafficking routes to the United States and the distribution centers within Mexico, and/or engage in armed conflict with the government forces in the latter's unsuccessful attempt to curtail or eliminate the illegal drug trade.

It can be argued that the main reason both the flow of illegal drugs and the violence continues, is that the Mexican government has overlooked the deeper social roots that underpin the continued importance and expansion of the illegal drug trade. Both the supply-side and the demand-side of the illegal drug trade can only be understood and appropriately addressed when the deeper social roots, such as poverty and inequality, are brought into the picture. The main question at this juncture (given the lack of success of the supply-reduction approach over the past 10 years or more) is whether a change in Mexico's anti-drug policy can reduce the violence and the flow of drugs, as

well as address the deeper social problems related to the illegal drug trade.

To this end this introductory Part first sketches out the main research question, and then outlines the organization of the thesis. This is followed by a short reiterative conclusion.

Is Mexico's Anti-Drug Policy Working?

While poverty and social inequality have longer and deeper origins than the illegal drug trade as such, the latter has been present in Mexico in one form or another for most of the last century. However, it has only been in the later years of the twentieth century, and now in the first decade of the twenty-first century, that the illegal drug trade has been, and is formally regarded as, a national security threat. Despite this fact, the Mexican government's anti-drug policy is relegated to a few paragraphs in Mexico's National Development Plan 2002–2012 (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Presidencia de la República [Presidencia de la República], 2007), at the same time as its operation is spread across a range of federal programs. However, these programs tend to treat the problem mainly as a police issue.

Apart from a narrow conception of the problem as a law enforcement issue handled by different branches of the government bureaucracy, another shortcoming of Mexico's anti-drug policy is its lack of a clear objective. Thus, Mexico's government is not able to measure and compare the quantitative outcomes of its current counter-drug campaign. For example, what is the real impact of the arrest of thousands of drug cartel members over the last three years on the illegal drug trade in Mexico as a whole? In addition, the use of the term "war on drugs" and the lack of a clear definition of what victory in the "war on drugs" should look like, is making Mexican authorities appear to be neither losing nor winning the war on drugs.

Even though it is clear that improvements in law enforcement are a priority for the Mexican government, improved law enforcement by itself is not the way to curb or end the illegal drug trade. More specifically, the supply-reduction approach has not actually affected the demand for illegal drugs in Mexico, or their flow to markets further north, especially the United States. Instead, the supply-reduction approach has highlighted the weakness of the Mexican government, with all the socio-political implications that this involves. Unfortunately, as illegal drug consumption in Mexico and exports increase, only a handful of socially oriented harm-reduction programs exist. Furthermore, none of them has enough support to be effective. In order to achieve real progress in the battle against the trafficking and consumption of illegal drugs, it is imperative that supply-reduction and harm-reduction policies operate in tandem, and focus on the social roots of the illegal drug trade. That is to say, an integrated anti-drug policy needs to be put in place.

Organization: The History and Contemporary Dynamics of the Illegal Drug Trade

To provide the context for formulating a new, more effective anti-drug policy, Part II outlines the history of the illegal drug trade in Mexico. It is crucial that we understand how and why the illegal drug trade in Mexico evolved in the way it did over the last century. It is also worth noting that recurring patterns are to be found. Successive Mexican governments have repeatedly followed supply-reduction approaches, to address the increase of drug-related crimes and the increase in Mexican drug demand. They repeatedly initiate operations aimed at the decapitation of drug cartel leaders, and attempt to combat official corruption with limited or no evidence of long-term success against the backdrop of continued social inequality and

poverty. An historical overview will help support the argument that social inequality and poverty should be the main focus of anti-drug policy in relation to both supply and demand, and the achievement of a longer term solution.

In Part III, a comparison between a supply-reduction approach and a harm-reduction approach is made, in order to lay out the way these two approaches can complement each other to develop a more effective and comprehensive anti-drug policy. The current Mexican anti-drug policy is also analyzed, as are its results, in order to highlight the overall weaknesses of the present approach. Finally, Part III explores why, despite the high risks associated with the illegal drug trade (ranging from death to long-term incarceration) people keep joining the drug cartels. Part III does this in order to make clear that social issues are fueling both the rising levels of participation in the illegal drug trade in Mexico, and the increasing demand on the consumption side of the equation.

In Part IV, possible solutions to improve the Mexican anti-drug policy are laid out based on a better balance between supply-reduction and harm-reduction approaches. It is important that the Mexican government re-evaluate the current anti-drug policy and define a new and clear anti-drug policy. But more important still is to highlight that maintaining a frontal attack on the drug cartels in Mexico without addressing the social grievances that drag people into criminal conduct, has been and will be the best way to sure a never-ending fight between the government and the drug cartels.

In the present work, several aspects of the illegal drug trade in Mexico are intentionally left out of the discussion. The first aspect left out is the participation and role of the Mexican armed forces in current counterdrug operations. Whatever the problems associated with using the armed forces might be, the high level of complicity by local police forces in the drug trade left federal decision makers with little choice. The Mexican government turned to the Mexican armed forces as the most reliable organization capable of engaging directly (and often violently) with the cartels and with some of the local police forces (as the latter are often effectively part of the cartels). The second area not covered in this thesis is the drug cartels' finances. The financial aspect is obviously a key component in the operation of the drug cartels; however, the scale and complexity of the ways in which the cartels turn illegally acquired profits into legitimate businesses and investments would require at least one or two more Parts to address the subject properly. Meanwhile, the major impact that illegal drug-trade revenues have on a range of local economies is a thesis topic on its own.

Another important theme beyond the scope of this thesis is the international side of the illegal drug trade and its relationship to things such as the illegal trade in firearms in Mexico. Although the demand for illegal drugs in the United States and the black market in firearms north of the border are very important in shaping the illegal drug trade in Mexico, this thesis focuses on the fact that Mexicans themselves have become major consumers of illegal drugs, and this aspect is more important than ever, both to the operation of the Mexican cartels and to any attempt to address the problem. Unless the Mexican government improves its own anti-drug policy at the domestic level, drug harm is going to continue increasing in Mexico regardless of what happens in the United States. On the other hand, the illegal arms trade is also driven by demand. Thus, even if the United States were able to crack down on illegal arms exports to Mexico, the drug cartels could easily look for their arms elsewhere (Vera, 2009), and the consumers of illegal drugs are going to cover the in-

crease in operational costs that the cartels might incur in doing so.

Winning the "War on Drugs" in Mexico

Finally, the purpose of this thesis is to show that Mexico can improve its anti-drug policy without dishonoring international treaties, but also without waiting for other countries to change in order to achieve better outcomes in Mexico. Regardless of the willingness of the Mexican government to fight the illegal drug trade, Mexican authorities cannot expect improvements in their anti-drug strategy if they continue following the same anti-drug strategy that has proven to be ineffective and inefficient for almost a century. The way the illegal drug trade has evolved in Mexico is complex and has been driven by a wide range of factors, as we will see in Part II. Thus, the solution will not be simple and will require far more than just vigorous or innovative law enforcement efforts, because the roots of the issue go well beyond the drug cartels and their diverse criminal networks.

Part II: Causes and Consequences: How did Mexico get from "There" to "Here?"

The high levels of drug-related violence over the past few years have made Mexico the focus of worldwide attention. However, the violence within and between the drug cartels and/or the federal police and the military in Mexico—even the illegal drug trade itself—is not anything new. The illegal drug trade in Mexico, with all its negative consequences, including fluctuating levels of violence, can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the 1910s, drug prohibition policies developed, implemented, and encouraged by the United States have been followed by the international community, regardless of the fact that, down to the present, drug prohibition policies have failed to slow either the demand for drugs or their illegal trade worldwide.

The long-term causes that explain the current situation and why the major Mexico-based drug cartels dominate the illegal drug trade in the Americas are complex. Many simplistic explanations for, and solutions to, the latest surge in drug-related violence in Mexico have been offered by academics and policy makers. For example, José L. Velasco (2005) mentions that the "democratic transition [in Mexico] dismantled several links between the state and important social groups," including the drug cartels in Mexico (p. 10). According to Velasco, this situation contributed to a more "independent" and "confrontational" groups (p.10). However, even though important, the changes to Mexico's political system in recent years are necessary, but not sufficient to explain the illegal drug trade in Mexico generally, and the cycles of drug-related violence more specifically. The confluence of democratization in Mexico with the unilateral efforts made by the United States to crack down on the Caribbean drug routes, the turn towards neoliberal economic policies, the rising demand for illegal drugs in the United States and Mexico, and the structural weaknesses in the current international and national anti-drug policies have all contributed to the present situation. In order to pave the way for a multi-causal or holistic explanation for the contemporary problems brought on by the illegal drug trade in Mexico, this Part will set out the historical background to Mexico's illegal drug trade, examining how it has been shaped over time.

The Harrison Bill and the Invention of the Modern Illegal Drug Trade

Even though alkaloid cocaine was first extracted from the leaves of the coca plant in Europe in 1844, little was known about its effects until 1883, when it was prescribed to Bavarian soldiers to reduce fatigue (Brecher, 1972). By the late 1890s, cocaine was commonly used in the United States and elsewhere for therapeutic purposes (Brecher). One of the medical uses was to sniff small doses of cocaine to mitigate the symptoms of a cold. However, sniffing cocaine soon became a popular social and recreational activity (Courtwright, 2001).

In the 1850s, a few decades prior to cocaine becoming a common medical remedy and then a focus of recreational use, opium smoking had been introduced into the United States by Chinese immigrants, who arrived to work on the construction of the western railroads (Brecher, 1972). According to accounts of the period, Americans were soon smoking opium in Chinese opium-smoking houses. However, opium "dens" were not widely accepted by the community (Brecher). In 1875, government authorities in San Francisco promulgated the first law against the smoking of opium. This approach was followed by other cities, and by 1914 there were 27 similar laws within the United States prohibiting opium smoking (Brecher).

This was part of a wider trend, as opposition to the non-medical use of opiates gained strength around the world. The main arguments against the non-medical use of opiates were: the direct harm that users do to themselves and to others; the social cost of drug abuse; religious disapproval; the association of a particular drug with dangerous minorities; and a general concern about the risk to the future of society in the context of the widespread use of both legal and illegal intoxicants (Courtwright, 2001). These concerns were partially addressed at a meeting, encouraged by the United States, in Shanghai in 1909 and then in the 1912 Hague International Opium Convention. The outcome of these conventions was a drug control treaty which addressed the use of drugs for recreational purposes, which later on shaped drug control laws all over the world (Courtwright; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2009).

By 1914, discussion and debate about the non-medical use of opium in the United States revolved around the Harrison Bill, which was named after Congressmen Francis Burton Harrison from New York, who initially proposed it. The main argument presented in favor of the bill was based on Washington's international obligations under the Hague Convention of 1912 rather than on health or moral grounds (Brecher, 1972). Even though the Harrison Bill was supposed to be a regulatory law, it included an important sentence indicating that a physician should have recourse to cocaine or opium "in the course of his professional practice only" (Brecher, p. 49). This particular part of the Harrison Bill was later interpreted by the police to mean that those addicted to opiates did not suffer from an illness and were therefore not to be considered or categorized as patients (Brecher). This interpretation ensured that addicts were not able to acquire their drugs in a legal and open system.

Turning to marijuana, it is worth noting that marijuana was first introduced to North America in the seventeenth century by settlers, who sought to grow hemp for textiles (Brecher, 1972). By the 1760s, the colonial authorities in Virginia were enthusiastically encouraging marijuana crops; George Washington, the first president of what would later become the United States of America, was among those farmers who grew marijuana. Some commentators suggest that he also experimented with improving the thera-

peutic characteristics of the plant (Brecher). With the development of cotton fibers by the early twentieth century, the production of marijuana decreased. However, when the price of alcohol increased and its quality declined in the wake of the National Prohibition Act in 1920, marijuana became an attractive recreational alternative to alcohol (Brecher).

Later on, marijuana experienced the same legal fate as other drugs; by 1937, most of the state governments in the United States had enacted anti-marijuana laws. In that year also, the Marijuana Tax Act was proposed in the middle of a media campaign designed to warn the public of the "evils" of the weed. Even though the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 recognized and allowed the use of marijuana for medical purposes and banned it only for recreational use, there was a controversy between authorities and physicians about the convenience and costs of implementing such a law (Brecher, 1972).

None of the above laws or subsequent ones were successful in reducing the consumption of the drugs concerned. Nor did they succeed in achieving the more nebulous goal of improving the overall "moral fiber" of American society. On the contrary, both the demand for the drugs, and the black market for their buying and selling, increased. In 1918, an ad hoc committee that analyzed the results of the Harrison Bill observed that there were, approximately one million drug users in the United States, that the black market in illegal drugs was effectively the same size as the legal drug market, and that there were significant criminal organizations smuggling drugs into the United States from both Canada and Mexico. Finally, the committee concluded that addicts moved from their rural population centers into the cities in order to obtain drugs in the black market (Brecher, 1972).

Cocaine, Opium, Marijuana, and Prohibition in Mexico

As in the United States, Mexico, by the late nineteenth century, was following the increasingly widespread tendency towards the therapeutic and recreational uses of cocaine, opium (and heroin), and marijuana (Astorga Almanza, 2005). The use of marijuana for asthma sufferers, heroin for coughs and colds, not to mention opium in laudanum and coca-based tonics, was common in this period (Astorga Almanza). Although most of the discussion in Mexico about cocaine, opium and its derivatives, as well as marijuana, was about how to regulate rather than prohibit their use, by 1897 there was an increasing amount of opposition to their recreational use (Astorga Almanza).

As in the United States, opium smoking was introduced into Mexico by Chinese immigrants, beginning especially in 1864 when large numbers arrived to work on the construction of the railway in Ciudad Juarez and in the cotton fields around Mexicali (Astorga Almanza, 2003). Even though most of the opium smokers in Mexico were either Chinese or American people who crossed the border explicitly to visit opium dens, there was concern on the part of many Mexicans, both within the government and among the general public (often presented in a moralizing fashion), about the apparently increasing number of Mexicans who were starting to smoke opium (Astorga Almanza, 2005).

Although Chinese immigration was encouraged by the Mexican government, the Chinese were treated to a great deal of social discrimination. For some Mexicans, the Chinese were an inferior race and a threat to Mexican culture (Treviño Rangel, 2008). In this racist context, anti-Chinese committees were constituted in Mexico. The basis for these committees was ostensibly the rising tide of anti-Chinese racism (Treviño Rangel). However, popular wisdom in the north-

ern states attributed the real reason of anti-Chinese racism to the desire to take control of the illegal opium trade (Astorga Almanza, 2003). In the states of Sonora and Sinaloa, Chinese immigrants taught Mexican peasants how to grow opium; there were cases in which it is suspected that expulsion of the Chinese—from Sonora, for example—would have put anti-Chinese activists in a favorable position to control the illegal drug trade (Astorga Almanza).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, economic relations between Mexico and the United States were becoming increasingly important. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, between 1900 and 1901, 79% of Mexico's exports went to the United States, and 54% of its imports came from north of the border (Gaona Rivera, 2007). Most of the trade was transported by rail at the major railway crossing points of Ciudad Juarez–El Paso, Piedras Negras–Eagle Pass, Nuevo Laredo–Laredo, and Matamoros–Brownsville along the Mexico-Texas border. Apart from the trade itself, the growing railway network helped to develop Mexico's northern states (Gaona Rivera).

The growing importance of the United States to Mexico's economic development, combined in a somewhat contradictory fashion after 1910 with the growing chaos of the revolution, provided the backdrop for the acceptance by the Mexican government of the Hague Convention on illegal drugs in 1912. However, thanks to the revolution in Mexico (1910–1920), actually doing something about the illegal drug trade was a very low priority (Astorga Almanza and Gónzalez Román, 2008). This would change somewhat with the promulgation of Mexico's new constitution in 1917. More important still, once the Mexican revolution was officially over in 1920, the Mexican government banned the growing and selling of marijuana, a decision that was linked to its membership in the League of Nations. By 1926, the ban had been extended to the growth and sale of opium (Astorga Almanza, 2005). In fact, since the 1920s, Mexico has generally followed Washington's lead on setting and enforcing policies aimed at control or criminalizing the growing, producing, and selling of illegal drugs. However, the Mexican political system that emerged from the Mexican Revolution and the structural limitations of drug prohibition policies set the stage for the way that the illegal drug trade grew in scale and scope in Mexico over the course of the twentieth century.

The Illegal Drug Trade and the Mexican Political System

Even though the writing and promulgation of the 1917 constitution was seen as officially marking the end of the Mexican Revolution, the post-revolutionary period continued to be characterized by serious and violent political conflict. Under these circumstances, the early post-revolutionary Mexican governments had to make arrangements with local elites in order to bring peace and order (Paris Pombo, 1998). This was the beginning of "corporativismo"; this much-debated term is being used here, as it is often used, to describe the way in which the loyalty of local politicians, business people, trade union leaders, and the caciques that ran peasant organizations, were co-opted by the central government via the effective use of patronage and concessions (Meyer, 2007).

The new central government was focused on rebuilding, and in many cases building, federal political and administrative institutions nationwide; however, it did not initially have a strong presence in many of the states of Mexico. This meant that state governors in the 1920s had almost absolute control over what happened in their part of the country; thus, they could do almost eve-

rything they wanted to do. In his book, *Drogas sin Fronteras,* Luis A. Astorga Almanza (2003) documents several reports by U.S. authorities in the 1920s, indicating that they had information about Mexican state governors who, they suspected, were in charge of the illegal drug trade in their respective states. For example, it is mentioned in one of these reports that the former governor of Baja California, Esteban Cantú, made a deal in 1916 with a Chinese opium trafficking group, to let it run its opium-smoking houses in Ensenada, making a payment of $45,000 for the initial concession and monthly payments of $10,000 (Astorga Almanza). These amounts of money would be the equivalent of $878,156.42 and $193,145.87 respectively, in terms of contemporary currency value and purchasing power (United States Department of Labor, 2009).

In the U.S., reports about the illegal activities of Governor Cantú, Chas Berstein, a friend of Cantú are reported to have mentioned that the governor had told him that he planned to "stop the opium trade" and close the gambling houses when he had "enough resources" to meet "government expenses" (qtd. in Astorga Almanza, 2003, p. 19). This and other aspects of the report indicate that the illegal drug trade might have been supported by some government officials not only for personal benefit, but also as a means of keeping the incipient post-revolutionary local governments running, at a time when government finances were scarce at best.

There are at least two things to notice in particular about what was going on in Mexico in the early decades of the twentieth century. First, the illegal drug trade did not create corruption among Mexican authorities. On the contrary, the illegal drug trade was just one of the many illegal activities that corrupt officials were running in their states and which they were more or less permitted, even encouraged, to do given the political arrangements of the day (Astorga Almanza, 2001). Second, several cities that were mentioned as important to the illegal drug trade at the beginning of the twentieth century have retained their importance down to the present day. For example, Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, remain crucial transit points for drugs entering the United States because the high number of vehicles and people crossing each day between the two countries makes it very difficult to search them all (Blancornelas, 2002; Ravelo, 2006).

The Political Party System in Mexico

In 1929, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) was created, as part of an attempt to move beyond the caudillo (military-leader) politics that had prevailed before, during, and immediately after the Mexican Revolution. The goal was for Mexico to become a country of institutions and laws. This was a major theme of the address of then President Calles to the Mexican Congress in 1928 ("Breve historia del PRI," 2008). The PNR was supposed to channel the aspirations of the caudillos through political institutions, instead of disputes being resolved via armed conflict. This marked the start of a political system in Mexico constructed to weaken the power of local elites, or caudillos. Once seen as necessary, caudillos had become an obstacle to building a modern state (Meyer, 2007).

However, the PNR was not created to usher in democratic elections and political parties; on the contrary, it was created to maintain the power of the new elite who had won the revolution (Furtak, 2007). The PNR modified its structure and changed its name several times until, in 1946, it was renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the name it has retained to this day ("Breve historia del PRI,"2008). Despite some changes, the loyalties of local elites and social and political organizations continued to be bought by the use of patronage. The president of Mexico was also the de facto head

of the PRI and the reach of his decisions sometimes went well beyond any written law. For example, although not official policy, the president chose his successor and the governors of the various states. This reflected the fact that the authority of the president was basically beyond question. This model was exported to the state level, and governors routinely wielded a very high degree of power within their states (Meyer, 2007; Paris Pombo, 1998).

Throughout this period, the illegal drug trade was growing in Mexico. Smugglers in Mexico were making a lot of money satisfying the demand in the United States, and their informal relations with the governors and local authorities in the northern states of Mexico in particular became increasingly normalized (Astorga Almanza, 2005). Given an authoritarian political system such as Mexico had in the PRI-era ("Mexico: Damage limitation," 1993), there is no other way to explain how smugglers could have thrived.

The Second Period of the Illegal Drug Trade in Mexico

According to Astorga Almanza (2001), in 1947 the transfer of anti-drug responsibilities from the Department of Health to the Office of the General Prosecutor (PGR) and the creation of the Federal Security Directorate (DFS) marked the start of a distinct second period of the illegal drug trade in Mexico.

Corrupt officials in these two government organizations reshaped the way the illegal drug trade was conducted. During the Cold War era, the DFS was very powerful because it was in charge of the fight against the Mexican guerrilla movements and it also helped the CIA track the movements of agents of the Soviet Union and Latin American leftist organizations in Mexico (Blancornelas, 2005; Shannon, 1988). Officials were very "effective" at repressing leftist activities that did not have the approval of the PRI ("Dirección federal de seguridad," *2008*). Although the CIA had information concerning the involvement of some of the DFS's members with drugs, the CIA's priority was to stop the advance of communism; therefore, it did not want to affect its working relationship with the DFS by raising the issue of illegal drugs (Shannon). Mylene Sauloy and Yves Le Bonniec (1994) go even further and suggest that in the 1980s Mexico's illegal drug organizations played a key role in the Iran-Contra case and that the CIA used haciendas in Guadalajara that belonged to one of the Mexican drug cartels to train Nicaraguan contras.

Compared to the present, there were relatively few drug cartels in Mexico in the 1980s, and those there were operated in well-defined areas of influence under the informal control of the DFS. In order for this arrangement to work, it was necessary to maintain the corrupt DFS commanders in their positions, which meant the drug cartels had to maintain a low profile. However, this original arrangement ended in 1985 when Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a DEA agent, was killed in Mexico, apparently on the orders of the leaders of one of the drug cartels (Astorga Almanza, 2001). As a result of Camarena's murder, Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo and Rafael Caro Quintero, cofounders of the Guadalajara cartel (which, once disbanded gave birth to the Tijuana/Arrellano Félix and Sinaloa cartels) were arrested and the DFS was dismantled because it was evident that it had been involved in the crime and that, as an organization, it had been corrupted by the drug cartels from top to bottom (Willoughby, 2003). In an effort to keep the illegal drug trade going in a "peaceful manner", Félix Gallardo, one of the main drug leaders in the 1980s, from prison arranged a meeting among his lieutenants at which they subdivided Mexico into territories that would al-

low them to continue to control the drug trade despite his arrest (Dávila, 2009). The arrangements made at this Acapulco meeting worked for a while. However, it was a fragile arrangement from the outset, as would become increasingly apparent.

At the same time the DFS was being dismantled and the drug traffickers were regrouping, in the 1980s, other important events were transpiring in Mexico and beyond. The first steps toward a free trade agreement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada were underway. The United States, meanwhile, had been very successful in its interdiction efforts aimed at dramatically reducing, if not eliminating, Florida as an entry point for Colombian drugs while, at the same time, the demand for cocaine continued to rise. Finally, by the 1980s, legal changes were starting to be made in an effort to democratize the Mexican political system (Meyer, Youngers, & Bewley-Taylor, 2007; Velasco, 2005; Willoughby, 2003). All of these developments impacted the illegal drug trade in Mexico.

The Third Period of the Illegal Drug Trade in Mexico

A crucial outcome of the Camarena affair, as previously noted, was the disbanding of the DFS. This was one of numerous efforts to "clean up" the various branches of the police at the federal level, efforts that have continued down to the present. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration (1988–1994) declared "a national crusade" against the drug cartels and their links to various branches of the Mexican government and law enforcement agencies ("Mexico: Damage limitation," 1993). By the end of his administration, one hundred commandants and federal agents from all over the country had been fired after being charged with working for the drug cartels (Blancornelas, 2002). However, this group represented just the tip of the iceberg. President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994–2000), who succeeded Salinas, increased the use of the armed forces for anti-drug tasks and continued to purge the federal police. By the end of his administration, the ranks of the PGR had been thinned down from almost 4,000 to about 1,000 agents countrywide (Artz, 2000; Ravelo, 2006). In an effort to deal with the weakening of the PGR, the Mexican government commissioned army troops to work as PGR agents. However, once cut away from the army, some of these troops were coerced by the drug cartels and later on formed the leadership of a powerful group of killers, called "Los Zetas," that worked for, and eventually rose to increasing prominence within, the Gulf Cartel.

Meanwhile, the outcome of the meeting of the major drug traffickers in the 1980s in Acapulco, referred to earlier, was that the country was divided into seven regions, each controlled by a different drug cartel (Blancornelas, 2002). The agreement was that every group could transport drugs wherever it liked, but it would have to pay "taxes" to the "owner" of the territory through which it transited (Blancornelas). However, according to Jesús Blancornelas, this arrangement did not keep the peace for long because drug cartels started to cheat each other to avoid paying "taxes." In a scenario without a strong actor (formal or informal), who could have encouraged the agreement this was the outcome to be expected. Thus, according to Blancornelas, the surge in drug-related violence can be track back to 1988, when a member of the Arrellano Felix Cartel (AFC), based in Tijuana, killed a member of the Sinaloa Cartel (SC) and then, in an alleged effort to avoid retaliation, also killed the brother and father of the Sinaloa cartel member he assassinated.

Once the turf wars between cartels began, retaliatoral acts increased in those territories that were being contested. By 1999, in Tijuana and the state of Sinaloa alone, there

were more than 500 deaths directly related to the battle between the AFC and the SC (Blancornelas, 2002). The main point to note here is that the purge of the federal police agencies in the 1980s, which broke their linkages to and the protection they provided the cartels, combined with the ever-increasing demand for drugs in the United States, and a shift from the Caribbean routes to Mexican routes for smuggling drugs into the United States, along with the waning of the PRI, produced an uneven but clear trend towards increased levels of violence between the cartels. Thus, the most recent violence is not "new"; with ups and downs, the current cycle goes back at least twenty years or more and, to a certain degree, is inherent to and can be considered a structural aspect of the illegal drug trade. At the same time, as we approach the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, new factors have come into play to fan the flames of drug-related violence. For example, although Mexico has become the main conduit for drugs into the United States, violence has also clearly risen because of an expanding struggle over access to the growing and increasingly lucrative markets for illegal drugs within Mexico itself.

NAFTA and the Democratization Process in Mexico

One of the first steps towards neoliberal reforms took place in 1986, when Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT). The agriculture sector, which had once made Mexico self-sufficient in food thanks to tariff barriers, subsidies and other protective mechanisms, was thrown open to the laws of the free market by the late 1980s (Ita, 2009). Small-scale producers, who used to focus on local markets, could not always compete with their U.S. counterparts (McDonald, 2005). The loss of jobs in the countryside, as a result of these neoliberal reforms, tended to favor those who grew marijuana over those who grew corn (McDonald). Consequently, it appears that people who did not leave the rural areas were more easily tempted to participate in the illegal drug trade. The disproportionate pricing between the legal and illegal crops, along with the lack of a strong state presence, made the decision simple; as Maria Celia Toro has observed, one ton of corn was equal in value to one kilo of marijuana by the late 1980s (qtd. in Willoughby, 2003).

GATT and NAFTA also had an impact on the business that some illegal organizations were conducting. Before the free trade agreements, some organizations were smuggling goods from the United States into Mexico. Therefore, when these goods became available in Mexico through the legal market, these organizations adapted their structures to smuggling drugs instead. It thus was not just factories and legal businesses adapting to the new conditions of the market, but so were drug cartels. Some were even establishing fake businesses along the border in preparation for the opening of the U.S. market ("Mexico: Damage limitation," 1993). Thus, while the U.S. Government was successfully cracking down on the cocaine routes through the Caribbean in the 1980s—and the Colombian drug cartels were looking for new ways to meet the growing demand for drugs in the United States (Meyer et al., 2007)—the Mexican drug cartels were in an ideal position to take control of the cocaine market. Since cocaine was easier to transport than marijuana, they were able to increase the revenues for the Mexican drug cartels.

Even though there is a debate about when the democratization process started in Mexico (Velasco, 2005), one of the first visible signs, was the election in 1989 of the first non-PRI governor. By the 1990s, there were four non-PRI governors, and the political power in local congresses was becoming

more evenly balanced (Velasco). This new reality helped reduce the power of the president and created a political vacuum that was filled by the governors, who gained greater power and political bargaining capabilities (Rascon, 2008).

The drug cartels adapted to all of these changes. As Astorga Almanza points out, the drug cartels eventually realized that they did not have to subordinate themselves to the control of corrupt government authorities (qtd. in Willoughby, 2003). This shift started at the local level, as control over local elites and police organizations became more important for drug traffickers than the previous need for connections to authorities at the federal level (A. Mendéz, 2009). This does not mean that the cartels stopped trying to bribe high-ranking officers in the government. Instead, it means that it became cheaper and more effective to bribe, or co-opt, local police and municipal authorities (and thus control entire towns) because, at the end of the day, high-ranking officials do not control what police officers on the ground actually do or do not do.

The Pan in the Presidency

In 2000, after a 70-year monopoly of political power nationwide and of the presidency in particular, the PRI was defeated at the ballot box. Vicente Fox Quesada of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) became the first non-PRI president of Mexico since the Mexican Revolution. His accession took place against the backdrop of high levels of violence between the drug cartels (Ravelo, 2006). In this context, President Fox announced that he would work to dismantle the network of government corruption and organized crime. He characterized this network and the violence associated with it as among the gravest threats that Mexico faced at the start of the new millennium (Moore, 2000). One of his first actions when he assumed office was to declare his own "war on drugs," sending a contingent of Federal Preventive Police (PFP) troops to the northwestern border city of Tijuana (Fernández Menéndez, 2001).

President Fox was hampered by having to deal with a congress in which no single political party held a majority, while the PRI remained a strong political force in congress and at the state and municipal level. Despite these constraints, his "war on drugs" was viewed as a success internationally (Smith, 2002). By 2002, as a result of the "war on drugs," 40 drug cartel leaders had been arrested and a government-corruption network of 22 senior officials from the PGR had been dismantled (Smith). However, the vacuum that these arrests created was either quickly filled by members of these same cartels, or rival cartels took advantage of the opportunity to expand their areas of influence.

At the same time, other problems were becoming increasingly apparent. The demand for illegal drugs in Mexico almost doubled between 1988 and 2002 ("El consumo de drogas en México," 1998; Estados Unidos Mexicanos Consejo Nacional Contra las Adicciones [CONADIC], 2002). Yet, rehabilitation programs were underfinanced, and the managers of these programs complained about the general lack of support for attacking the demand side of the problem ("Mexico: New drugs strategy," 2002). Although the Mexican drug cartels, taken together, were estimated to make on average $30 billion a year (Cevallos, 2002), the main beneficiaries were the large-scale distributors and transporters rather than the peasants and workers employed in processing or producing the various drugs. According to the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) the growth, harvesting, processing, and production of drugs were taking place in some of the poorest parts of Mexico. The Mexican government was concerned that a strong eradication campaign, without the provision of serious alternative options for

the peasants and workers involved, would worsen already high levels of poverty, which, in turn, would bring its own set of problems ("Mexico: New drugs strategy").

Even though the increase in drug seizures in Mexico during Fox's presidency was estimated by the Mexican government to have produced losses of more than $17 billion for the drug cartels (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Procuraduría General de la República [PGR], 2006, p. 51), and the extradition of more than two hundred drug cartel members to the United States was viewed as a great success (United States House of Representatives [HR], 2007), the overall impact on the illegal drug trade was actually negligible. In the last two years of President Fox's administration, the production of drugs in Mexico, and the price for cocaine and methamphetamine being sold in the United States, remained constant (PGR; United States Department of Justice [DOJ], 2008a; DOJ, 2008b). However, levels of drug-related violence reached record highs as the cartels increasingly fought against the government and each other, and successive struggles were carried on between them.

When President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa won the presidential elections in 2006, the situation that he faced was not much different from that of his predecessor. He did not have a majority in Congress; the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) had done well and the PRI remained an important political force. Drug cartel-related deaths in 2006 numbered more than 2,000 ("Se logro frenar y revertir," 2007). As a result, 10 days after he assumed office, President Calderón ordered a joint operation in the state of Michoacán, which became the first of several counterdrug operations throughout the country led by the Mexican armed forces (Ravelo, 2007).

By early 2009, the Mexican army had deployed more than 46,000 troops in counterdrug operations; that number represents 23% of the entire Mexican army (more if it is measured as a percentage of the operational units only) (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional [SEDENA], 2009a). Meanwhile, not altogether surprisingly, drug-related violence in Mexico rose from more than 2,500 deaths in 2007 to more than 5,600 deaths in 2008 ("Ejecutados en el Gobierno de Calderón," 2009).

Despite the major focus placed on combating the cartels, by the Fox and Calderón administrations, the core of the Mexican government anti-drug strategy has not changed over the years. The supply-reduction approach, with the decapitation of the drug cartels as its main focus, has produced few tangible results as far as reducing the supply of, or demand for, illegal drugs in Mexico. The demand for drugs in Mexico and drug-related violence have been increasing in Mexico for at least the last twenty years (Blancornelas, 2002; CONADIC, 2002; CONADIC, 2008), giving birth to what are now more or less permanent turf wars between the major drug cartels.

Conclusion

The history of the illegal drug trade in Mexico, from the early twentieth century to the twentieth-first century, has been shaped by complex social, economic, and political processes. Over the years, the drug cartels have been able to survive and adapt at a faster rate than has the Mexican government. While the Mexican government has been using the same anti-drug strategy over the years—focusing on a "frontal assault" on the main drug cartels—the drug cartels themselves have modified their organizations, their relations with the state, and their relations with society.

The evolution of the illegal drug trade in Mexico was not planned, but one crucial factor shaping its evolution has been the continued reliance on anti-drug policies that

have proved to be ineffective over the years. The way the Mexican government has measured the success of its anti-drug strategy has made it think that it need only do more of the same. However, as the next Part will demonstrate, there are structural issues related to the supply-reduction approach that Mexico has been using over the years that have not allowed—and will not allow—better outcomes in Mexico's fight against the illegal drug trade.

Part III: Reasons and Results: Current Policy Towards the Illegal Drug Trade in Mexico

As noted in the previous Part, Mexico has essentially followed the main international approach taken against drugs over the past century. During this time, Mexico has based its anti-drug policies on a supply-reduction approach. The aim of the supply-reduction approach is to diminish the supply side of the illegal drug trade, based on the assumption that this will, in turn, reduce or eliminate access to and use of illegal drugs among the populace. The results achieved by the Mexican government using this approach do not much differ from those elsewhere in the world. Even though the considerable resources expended in this fight may not have been totally wasted, the goal of creating a society free of illegal drugs is nowhere in sight. In fact, as in the case of numerous other countries, Mexico is increasingly suffering from the negative effects of rising levels of illegal drug trafficking and use. The supply-oriented, anti-drug policy, which in Mexico involves attacking the powerful drug cartels head-on, has reached its structural limits. The signs are clear that it is time to try a new approach.

Even though the Mexican government has been praised for its commitment to fighting the drug cartels, it is difficult to determine who is winning on this particular front of the larger war on drugs. The issue is not a lack of sincerity on the part of the Mexican authorities; on the contrary, the commitment expressed in this fight is clear. Yet, sustained willingness to fight against the drug cartels has not diminished the scope and scale of their operations despite high levels of mortality and incarceration. The Mexican government can point to the capture or killing of large numbers of drug traffickers, but it cannot declare victory. In fact, it is not clear it knows what victory should or would look like. Indeed, the Mexican Government has focused so much effort on fighting the drug cartels in frontal attacks, that it has paid little attention to the roots of its drug-related problems. The violence associated with the drug cartels, and the growth in their size, are symptoms of a bigger illness—namely, the addiction of people to illegal drugs and the social costs associated with widespread illegal drug use. Along with these, are the social processes that encourage people to participate in the illegal drug trade, and that focus directly or indirectly for the major drug cartels.

Law Enforcement and Supply Reduction

At the broadest level, there are, as most policy-makers know, two main approaches to developing an overall anti-drug strategy and the tactics that go with it. One of these is the supply-reduction approach that has underpinned the "war on drugs" for decades, and is based on the logic that if the drugs are not available they cannot do any harm. On the other hand, there is the harm-reduction approach that assumes that the illegal drug

trade is already established, and regardless of how much effort goes into trying to constrain or stop it, the drugs will still get through. The logic behind the harm-reduction approach is that there is a need to reduce the harm that illegal drugs are causing now, rather than waiting for some point in the future when the supply-reduction approach finally produces results. Although many observers draw a sharp distinction between the two approaches, it is worth noting that both borrow important elements from each other. The main difference between them is the level of resources spent on targeting drug traffickers and crop eradication, compared to investing in "education, prevention, treatment and harm reduction" (Roberts, Trace, and Axel, 2004, p. 1).

Supply Reduction

The supply-reduction approach has its roots in the early twentieth century. It emerged as a response to the Chinese opium "epidemic," and proved successful in containing and even reducing (but never eliminating) the demand for that drug, as well as others late on (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2008). According to UNODC, the illegal drug trade worldwide has remained stable since the 1990s. Given that the population has continued to grow, this means that the illegal drug trade is still very much an expanding business, both in Mexico and worldwide. If this is the case, then it is also possible to argue that the supply-reduction approach is not completely useless; however, it is important to recognize that the supply-reduction approach can also be said to have reached its structural limit. That is, it is not actually reducing supply; at best, it is simply containing it.

Even if the supply-reduction approach can be credited with stabilizing, although not reducing, supply (and this is a subject of ongoing debate), emphasis on attacking the production and distribution side of the illegal drug trade clearly fails to attach sufficient importance to addressing the source of the problem demand. As a result, simply going after the supply has not been, and never will lead to the elimination of the market for illegal drugs because the demand that drives the market remains in place (Buxton, 2006). In addition to the limitations inherent in the supply-reduction approach to combating illegal drugs, the illegal drug trade also brings with it a range of negative effects, or "unintended consequences" ("Effective drug law enforcement," 2009, p. 2).

The most obvious of these unintended consequences is the development and growth of black markets created to feed the demand for illegal drugs. In turn, these black markets are controlled by the organized crime groups that are the main sources of the violence related to the illegal drug trade. In addition, police action against these groups often triggers a violent response (Wilson and Stevens, 2008). Another unintended consequence is the "balloon effect," which refers to the fact that successful police actions in particular areas or against particular links in the illegal drug trade push the trade and its problems to other areas. The classic example of this is the way in which successful U.S. interdiction of cocaine coming into the United States via Caribbean routes simply pushed the cocaine trade to develop routes via Mexico. Or, as has also been seen, the successful eradication of coca in one region or country encourages an increase in coca growing in another region or country.

A third unintended consequence of the supply-reduction approach is "policy displacing." This refers to the high costs of implementing supply-reduction policies, which result in the lack of resources available to be invested in programs that might help address the root causes of the illegal drug trade. Finally, and related to this last problem, the supply-reduction approach tends to margi-

nalize drug users. Therefore, it became more difficult to develop effective rehabilitation programs. For example, Adriana Martínez, the manager of a government-based drug rehabilitation program, has pointed out that one of the obstacles to opening new drug rehabilitation centers is the opposition by communities to having addicts near their homes (qtd. in R. Rodríguez, 2009). It is important to also note that these unintended consequences can be found taking effect from the local level up through the international level.

Harm Reduction

As mentioned previously, the harm-reduction approach does recognize the importance of supply-reduction actions. However, the harm-reduction approach tends to incorporate a more realistic vision of the illegal drug trade, in that it accepts the fact that a world without illegal drugs is impossible to achieve, regardless of the amount of resources applied to such a project. The harm-reduction approach sees drug supply reduction as simply one of several "means of reducing drug-related harm, and not as an end in itself" (Trace, Roberts, and Klein, 2004, p. 2). Another important difference between the supply- and harm-reduction approaches is in the way that each approach evaluates progress. The supply-reduction approach tends to evaluate the progress of an anti-drug policy in terms of amounts of illegal drugs seized, the number of drug dealers captured, and/or the number of successful interdiction operations carried out over a given period of time. The harm-reduction approach, by contrast, does not draw a direct link between the supply-reduction measures cited above and the reduction of harm related to illegal drugs. For example, the spread of illness through the exchange of infected needles by drug users is not just a matter of the number of drug users. It also reflects hygiene measures that drug users might or might not take (Trace et al.). Therefore, what the harm-reduction approach first seeks is to identify the main ways in which harm occurs, and then measure progress based on the reduction of harm ("What is harm reduction?" 2006).

Although each country might identify particular types of drug harm differently, Robert MacCoun and Peter Reuter establish four categories of harm: "health, social and economic functioning, safety and public order, and criminal justice" (qtd. in Roberts, Klein, and Trace, 2004, p. 9). Ironically, law enforcement, as has already been suggested, can be a source of harm in various ways. For instance, law enforcement can have a negative impact on those local economies that rely on the illegal drug trade (Poret, 2009). The classification system outlined by MacCoun and Reuter allows governments to develop policies that encourage the use of all the means of the state working in concert. Also, having an anti-drug policy that is based on clear goals that will result in harm-reduction allows governments to adapt or drop those programs that are not contributing to these goals. For example, if the main priority is to reduce the violence related to the illegal drug trade, but the actions carried out by the government are not achieving that goal, then maybe they need to be altered or eliminated, or at least improved.

Who is Winning the "War on Drugs" in Mexico?

Even though the Mexican National Development Plan 2006–2012 includes harm-reduction as part of its overall strategy to address the illegal drug trade, the way that the resources provided by the Merida Plan (U.S. counter-drug assistance) will be expended, makes clear that Mexico is a practitioner of the supply-reduction approach to the "war on drugs" (HOR, 2009; United States Department of State [DOS], 2009). As a matter of fact, the term "war on drugs"

is widely used in Mexico in reference to the current government's actions against the illegal drug trade, in particular against the drug cartels. However, the concept of war implies a victory; therefore, winners and losers are to be expected. Perhaps not surprisingly, the violence related to the battle with and within the drug cartels is regularly used in Mexico by those who oppose the current strategy to argue that the Mexican government is losing its war on drugs (Carrasco Araizaga, 2009). In contrast, the Mexican government maintains that the surge of violence related to the drug cartels is, instead, a sign of desperation by the drug cartels given the effectiveness of government efforts (Martínez, 2009). However, neither side in this debate is in a position to substantiate its claims, because neither party has established what the victory in the war on drugs should look like.

The main problem that the Mexican authorities face in making a convincing defense of their achievements is that they have not outlined clear objectives. It is worth noting that, even though the illegal drug trade is considered a national security threat, there is no overall anti-drug strategy per se in Mexico (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Presidencia de la República [Presidencia de la República], 2009a; PGR, 2009b). According to the President's office, the illegal drug trade in Mexico is just one of several manifestations of organized crime; therefore, each institution in charge of preserving the rule of law in Mexico (e.g. the PGR and the Secretariat of Public Security [SSP]), as well as the armed forces have to align its institutional goals with the approach to organized crime set out in the National Development Plan 2006–2012 (Presidencia de la República, 2009b). Consequently, Mexico's goals for its war on drugs can be found dispersed in the various plans of those institutions responsible for preserving the rule of law in Mexico. However, it is not quite that simple.

According to the SSP, the goals that have to be achieved to declare victory in the war on drugs can be found in the Institutional Program of Public Security 2007–2012 and in the National Program of Public Security 2008–2012 (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Secretaría de Seguridad Pública [SSP], 2009b); yet, nowhere in these documents can any form of measurement be found that would show whether the government was having any success in the war on drugs (SSP, 2008b). In addition, in its institutional program the PGR has combined all types of organized crime into one category, without making any distinctions among the wide range of activities or types of organized criminal activity that take place in Mexico (PGR, 2008). Therefore, the main institutions in charge of public security in Mexico are not in a position to determine whether the Mexican government's actions are achieving genuine results in the war on drugs.

In addition to the SSP and PGR, the Mexican armed forces also have a prominent role in the war on drugs. In fact, the Ministry of Defense (SEDENA) is probably the only institution in Mexico which has set specific goals related to the illegal drug trade. However, the way it measures success presents some problems (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional [SEDENA], 2007). For example, in 2007, SEDENA's goals were to carry out "28 high-impact eradication operations per year" and "reduce by 70%" the total surface area of illegal crops planted in Mexico (SEDENA, 2007, p. 16). However, according to SEDENA itself, the total surface area of illegal crops in Mexico is unknown (SEDENA, 2009b). Therefore, the size of the marijuana and poppy crops destroyed can be measured, but cannot be compared to an overall total as that figure is unknown. Furthermore, fluctuations in the amounts of crops destroyed over time raise several ques-

tions (Fig. 1). For example, if the Mexican army had the capacity to eradicate 28,050 hectares of marijuana in 2006, why in 2008 were they only capable of eradicating 18,394 hectares? Was this the result of fewer hectares of marijuana being harvested in Mexico? Or was it the result of fewer eradication operations?

	2006	**2007**	**2008**
Eradicated hectares of marijuana	28,050	22,953	18,394
Eradicated hectares of poppy	15,644	11,377	13,189

Figure One. Hectares of Illegal Crops Eradicated by SEDENA 2006–2008 (From SEDENA, 2009b)

Finally, even though all the institutions in charge of preserving the rule of law in Mexico agree on the relationship between social factors and criminal conduct, SEDESOL, which is one of several institutions in charge of addressing social issues, is not part of the National Council of Public Security (CNSP), which is the entity responsible for the coordination of all the efforts made by the Mexican government in terms of public security (SSP, 2008a). Thus, by using the "war on drugs" approach, the Mexican government may be denying itself the use of other powerful support "weapons" in its current war on drugs.

A Frontal Attack on the Drug Cartels

As mentioned before, counter-drug operations are framed as part of more general counter-crime strategies. Therefore, current counter-drug deployments in Mexico are being designed based on the security program of the SSP (2007). The security program includes initiatives to improve the performance of law enforcement institutions, and strengthen the links between law enforcement institutions and Mexican society. In addition, the security program encourages the development of social programs in other state institutions. Nevertheless, the program mainly focuses on interdiction operations and the development of new technologies to address and curtail criminal activity in Mexico. Therefore, it has not been able to address issues such as reducing violence and the operation of local illegal drug markets, or reducing the capacity of the drug cartels to recruit people. Finally, it has had no impact on reversing people's preference to remain neutral in this conflict despite frequent requests for information and cooperation by authorities.

Violence and the Local Illegal Drug Market

Mexico's approach to address the surge of drug-related violence has been the deployment of large contingents of federal police and military units into cities and towns, where the surge in violence has overwhelmed local authorities, or where there is evidence that drug cartels have infiltrated those authorities. Usually, these deployments are able to diminish the violence for short periods of time (A. Cano, 2009c), until the criminals learn from government tactics and adapt their own. The capacity of the drug cartels to adapt has made this approach very inefficient in terms of cost-benefits, to the point that it is unsustainable (L. Cano, 2009b).

However, the foregoing does not mean that the Mexican authorities have not been able to arrest some illegal crop farmers, or drug cartel members. To the contrary, it is worth noting that federal police and military units on the ground have made huge strides in following the strategy proposed, and have bravely stood up and sustained significant

casualties. For instance, in 2008 the Mexican government detained more than 20,000 people in relation to illegal drug trafficking offenses (PGR, 2009a). More than three hundred of these individuals were key members of the major drug cartels (Otero, 2009b). In addition, more than eight hundred police officers at all jurisdictional levels have been arrested on corruption charges, among them a former commissioner of the PFP (Ordaz, 2008).

However, as previously mentioned, the numbers of arrests, do not, on their own, translate into results, particularly if the main goal is the reduction of violence. In fact, the use of the number of arrests and drug seizures as an indicator of success can create competition among law enforcement institutions, thereby increasing violence and undermining ongoing investigations. An emphasis on arrests and drug seizures puts pressure on commanders on the ground to hunt for targets of opportunity, despite ongoing investigations or without taking into account what the secondary effects of the arrest might be. In addition, experience has shown that the incarceration of drug traffickers has limited impact on the illegal drug market (Bewley-Taylor, Hallam, and Allen, 2009). It is worth noting that, without targeting the roots of each particular illegal market, every arrest creates a vacuum that is going to be filled almost immediately, at the same time it can generate an increase in violence as new players step forward to replace those arrested. Therefore, state intervention might be indirectly acting as "a major contributor or cause of urban violence" (Stevens, Bewley-Taylor, and Dreyfus, 2009, p. 10).

According to Genaro García Luna, the Mexican Secretary of Public Security, the rise in violence is a result of the fight to control the growing internal illegal drug market that has doubled in the last four years ("México duplicó consumo," 2009). His assertion is supported by the high number of retail drug dealers killed over the last several years. In Tijuana, they represent 90% of the total number of people killed in drug-related violence ("Narcomenudistas el blanco," 2009; Castillo García, 2009b). It is worth noting that more than 50% of the final retail cost of illegal drugs is said to reflect the cost of the risks involved in selling to users at the street level (Wilson and Stevens, 2008). Again, current government actions and inter-cartel violence might make the business more risky, but also more lucrative. In other words, higher risks are directly related to higher revenues, which might in turn make the illegal drug selling business even more attractive.

At present, Mexico's illegal drug market consumes a total of five hundred tons of illegal drugs, which represents a yearly profit of $400 million (Otero, 2009a). Tijuana alone has a potential illegal drug market of 100,000 to 200,000 addicts. Most of them come from and/or live in the poorest neighborhoods of the city. Eighty-five percent of them are "Crystal" (methamphetamine) users who require at least three doses each day, easily found in one of the 4,000 "narcotienditas" (drug dealing corner shops) in the city, which, it is estimated, can provide the Tijuana cartel (or whoever controls the plaza) with gross revenues of almost $2 million every day (Garduño, 2009).

It is worth noting that the large and growing internal drug market, such as the one in Tijuana, is not just a security problem given drug-related crime, but it is also a public health problem. Patricia Case et al. (2008) concluded that Tijuana is already experiencing a "methamphetamine outbreak . . . with the concomitant consequences already experienced (earlier) in the United States" (p.30). Most of the crystal addicts in Tijuana use needles to inject the drug (IDUs) and thus engage in needle sharing, dramatically increasing the risk of serious diseases such

as HIV/AIDS. Simon D. W. Frost et al. (2006) found that the prevalence of hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and syphilis among drug addicts in Tijuana was 96%, 2%, and 13%, respectively in 2006.

Even though the rising demand for illegal drugs in Mexico helps explain the current surge of violence, as the Secretary of Public Security has pointed out, it is only part of the explanation. It is clear that the drug cartels are fighting each other for greater control over a lucrative and growing illegal drug market. However, what is encouraging people to work for or join the drug cartels in the first place? As Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza (2002) noted several years ago, there is a direct link between social inequality and violent crimes. Even though high-level government employees and business people have been arrested for their links to the drug cartels, most of the people who work in the illegal drug trade are from poor backgrounds. Therefore, high levels of inequality and poverty in Mexico might be playing an important role in the surge of drug-related violence because drug cartels offer an attractive source of work that has remained unaffected by the current economic crisis (Gómez, 2009a).

Joining the "Dark Side"

According to SEDENA, there are at least 500,000 people directly involved at some stage of the illegal drug supply chain; 300,000 are producers, 160,000 are distributors, retail drug dealers and informants, and 40,000 are part of the chain of command of the various drug cartels (Merlos, 2008). It is important to make a distinction between these three groups because of the way in which the illegal drug trade influences communities, and the way in which it draws people into the business differs. In small, poor communities in the sierra (mountains), the choice for peasants between growing illegal or legal crops might be made in terms of survival. On the other hand, in places where distribution is the main activity, where revenues are greater, and where a clear sense of relative deprivation and/or drug addiction can play a major role in the recruitment of youngsters by the drug cartels, most but not all are from poor backgrounds.

In Mexico, just living in an area where illegal crop production is widespread does not lead to prosperity. People from Sinaloa's sierra have said that illegal crops were the main or only source of income that they had; consequently, as a result of the Mexican army's eradication efforts, they lost their jobs, and had not received any government support either (A. Cano, 2009a). This is supported by INEGI's statistics that indicate that 68% of the communities in Sinaloa's sierra live in impoverished circumstances (A. Cano, 2009a). In Guerrero, the situation is quite similar. Seventy percent of the indigenous people live in severe poverty and jobs are scarce. Thus, poppy-growing represents a major, if not the only option for survival (Gómez Durán, 2009). Poppy growing, which usually involves all family members, nets between one and one and a half dollar for every gram of opium gum produced, in contrast to the $30 or $70 that one gram of heroin sells for on the streets of Mexico City (Gómez Durán, 2009).

Once the drugs leave the sierra and the distribution starts, the dynamics between the illegal drug trade and the communities change. According to Victoria Malkin (2001), the distribution of illegal drugs has reshaped the traditional patronage system in rural areas. In particular, a group of new rich has emerged who tend to provide more assistance to their local communities than the old rich used to do. As a result, they become role models for some people. In addition, James H. McDonald (2005) found that the illegal drug trade has put additional stress on

existing social inequalities in small rural towns. For example, he mentions that brand name clothing stores, and spas are starting to emerge, and that these stores and commodities are out of the reach of regular ranchers and their families. He also mentions that narco-money has increased the price of land; therefore, people not in the illegal drug trade tend to see their chances of acquiring their own ranches by legal means reduced.

In urban areas, where growing consumption and distribution of illegal drugs meet, the illegal drug trade has become the fast track to wealth and power. According to Julian Leyzaola, director of public security in Tijuana, the drug dealers obtain a wage of $20 for each hundred doses of methamphetamines sold, and some of them ask for drugs rather than money as payment (qtd. in "Narcomenudistas el blanco," 2009). Even though this may not seem like a particularly high wage given the risks involved, when compared to other low-skill jobs, the rewards are high. For example, the wages earned by a retail drug dealer represent more than five times what a construction worker might earn ("Salarios mínimos," 2009). These high wages allow drug dealers, most of whom are young boys, to buy cars, nice clothes, and also to help their families with daily expenses; such things make them look successful in their communities at the same time their image reinforces the sense of relative deprivation felt by other youngsters in the community.

For some youngsters, then, joining a drug cartel has obvious and immediate economic benefits, at the same time that membership also provides them with a sense of power. As Rosalío Reta, a 20-year-old drug cartel killer who started his career at the age of 13, told a court when referring to one of his 20 assassinations, "It made me feel like Superman" (qtd. in Osorno, 2009, p. 23). According to the SSP, it takes just three months for a youngster to move up in the organization from being a drug dealer or informant to becoming a killer or medium-level leader with an income of $3,000 per month (Benavides, 2009), in contrast with the monthly salary of $750 that a policeman in Ciudad Juarez receives (A. Cano, 2009b).

The fast promotion rate within the drug cartels can be explained in two ways: one, the illegal drug trade is an expanding business that requires the same rapid staffing as any burgeoning organizational structure; and two, as a result of the high rate of deaths and arrests of cartel members, the cartels are in constant need of new recruits to replace those killed or incarcerated. Against the backdrop of these two complementary explanations, it is also worth highlighting that the risks associated with the government's ongoing targeting of the traffickers have not deterred young people from joining the drug cartels, and the fast promotion rate might even be making the drug cartels more attractive as employers.

Choosing Sides

One of the problems that the Mexican government is facing in its frontal attack on the drug cartels is the lack of information about drug cartels' operations. This lack of information is the result of the poor performance of the intelligence services, but also and maybe more significantly, it reveals the lack of trust by citizens in the authorities.

In an attempt to overcome the continued lack of information, Mexican authorities have launched a rewards campaign and lectured communities about their responsibility to help the authorities in their current efforts (González, 2009). Yet, although most Mexicans support counter-drug efforts, the rewards campaign has not been as effective as the authorities would have liked (Castillo García, 2009c). The failure of the rewards campaign can be partially explained because the Mexican drug cartels have built up a network of social support (both voluntary

and involuntary) that extends well beyond the immediate members of the organization. Communities, in general, are unwilling to cooperate with the government against the cartels out of fear and/or because of the income that they derive directly or indirectly from the illegal drug trade.

Unfortunately, drug cartels have built a "credible" reputation among the general population. This is because, when they issue a threat, they are usually able to carry it out. They have even been able to compel several police directors to resign their positions ("Renuncia el Secretario de Seguridad," 2009). They have killed senior government authorities, journalists, and opponents in a cruel manner, and have assaulted small rural towns ("Grupo armado toma poblado," 2009). There is also a feeling in those cities and towns where drug cartels operate that they have eyes and ears everywhere, and urban legends about their atrocities are widespread, reinforcing people's unwillingness to aid the authorities against them (Castillo García, 2009a). Meanwhile, Monte Alejandro Rubido García, director of the National System of Public Security, has declared that this is a fight between the drug cartels and authorities (Castillo Garcia, 2009b). One way to interpret this is that there is thus no reason for the common citizen to put himself in the middle of this fight.

But it is also a fact that narco-money has long had an important impact on local economies and beyond. The drug cartels invest their money in "legitimate businesses" to launder the revenues coming from the illegal drug trade, which in turn creates jobs (Serrano, 2008). According to press publications and academic researchers, the involvement of narco-money in some local economies accounts for 40% to 80% of all economic activity in certain parts of the country (Castillo García, 2009d; Ravelo, 2009). With this level of linkage to local economies, it is obvious that successful counter-drug operations would have a negative impact on local economies. At the end of 2008, a car dealer in Culiacan complained that car sales had gone down as a result of the ratcheting up of the government's counter-drug campaign (Wilkinson, 2008). In addition and as mentioned previously, in some communities people involved in the illegal drug trade make regular donations to their communities and also "protect" them from the incursions of rival drug cartels (Maerker, 2009).

In contrast to the drug cartels' reputation, many members of the police and law enforcement agencies, as well as government authorities generally, have low credibility because of their poor performance and corruption (SSP, 2008a). It is worth noting that in Mexico 94% of the crimes committed are regular (non-federal) crimes that directly impact the common citizen, such as robberies and rapes. However, just 21% of the victims report these crimes (SSP). In some cases, people's decisions to report a crime are related to other issues, such as insurance claims, rather than to any expectation of having the crime solved by the authorities. Mexico City's police department, for instance, solves only one in 10 cases that are reported (Cruz Flores, 2009).

This poor level of performance in the realm of public security has been the result of years of delay in not just modernizating the police, but the entire legal system in Mexico (Benítez Manaut, 2009). Although law enforcement agencies at the federal level are not immune to infiltration by drug cartels or corruption, they have been improving in their performance and recruitment mechanisms, and have been slowly winning public trust over the last few years (SSP, 2008a). However, county police departments have shown that they are far from being a reliable force, and this is particularly true in the poorest counties.

The ineffectiveness of county-level authorities has had an important negative im-

pact on the current campaign against the drug cartels. In a conflict that has international reach but local origins, police departments at the local level should be playing a major role. The police on the street should be the ones leading this fight, with the support of the federal government. Instead, local police have become just one more enemy of the federal government's counterdrug campaign, and sometimes the only thing that distinguishes a county police officer from a drug cartel member is his uniform (Gómez, 2009b). Of course, it has to be recognized that, for a weak police department in a small county, there is usually not much space to maneuver when its members are approached by a drug cartel. A high-ranking government official with an armed escort, an armored vehicle, and a good salary has a choice with regard to standing up to the drug cartels. But, for a policeman who has to walk to his home in a shantytown without a weapon to defend himself, it is not so simple (Tapia, 2009).

Conclusion

The dubious results of the supply-reduction approach are a clear signal that the current anti-drug policy in Mexico has reached its limits and that major revision is necessary. The Mexican government and governments all over the world should move beyond thinking that a frontal assault on the production and trafficking of illegal drugs is the right approach. It is well past time for the Mexican authorities to evaluate the results that the supply-reduction approach have had in Mexico over the last century, and to rethink Mexico's anti-drug policy. The Mexican authorities' bold efforts against the drug cartels cannot succeed unless the roots of the illegal drug trade in Mexico are attacked. Only by addressing the social roots of the illegal drug trade will major results be achieved. A new integrated approach to the illegal drug trade in Mexico might someday make it possible to talk seriously about "victory" in the "war on drugs."

Part IV: Security and Stability: An Integrated Approach to the Illegal Drug Trade in Mexico

As we have seen, the Mexican government has been fighting the illegal drug trade in almost the same manner since the start of the last century. This has involved focusing primarily on the drug trafficking organizations and paying little attention to the impetuses behind the illegal drug trade. However, after decades of drug prohibition policies, it might be time for Mexican authorities to reevaluate the utility of prohibition, much as U.S. authorities did with alcohol over half a century ago. In the context of revising and reorienting its anti-drug policy it is also necessary that the Mexican government clearly define its anti-drug goals. The current approach of addressing all organized crime in the same manner has made authorities lose sight of what an anti-drug policy is for. The Mexican government's main concern should be reducing the harmful effects of illegal drugs. This does not mean that the Mexican government has to dishonor international cooperation related to the illegal drug trade. However, the main focus should be on protecting Mexican society from harmful social effects of illegal drugs, including systemic violence.

The Mexican government must also bear in mind that it is always better and cheaper to encourage preventive programs instead of reactive programs. Unless the Mexican government is able to understand and defuse the recruitment mechanisms of the drug cartels, the latter are going to be able to continue to

survive and prosper, despite all the best efforts of the Mexican authorities. In order to be able to defuse the recruitment "pull," the Mexican government needs to address the social grievances and inequalities that have made and continue to make people resort to criminal activity to satisfy their basic needs. This approach will require rebuilding the social contract in Mexico.

Splitting the Problem: the Regularization of Marijuana

One of the main questions that often come up in discussions about the illegal drug trade is whether the illegal drug trade and its negative effects would exist if some drugs had not been prohibited in the first place. The best answer to this question is to point to the example of alcohol prohibition in the 1920s in the United States (prohibition has been tried or advocated in numerous countries around the world in the twentieth century). Even though alcoholics exist in the United States today, very few people believe that prohibition should be encouraged again because the negative effects of doing so proved to be greater than the benefits from regulating and taxing the sale and consumption of alcohol.

After years of limited results in their fight against the illegal drug trade, some countries are trying to find the optimal balance between prohibition, decriminalization, depenalization, regulation, and taxation. Countries around the globe, including the United States, are slowly adopting harm-reduction strategies that focus on the social aspects of the drug problem (*International Drug Policy Consortium [IDPC]*, 2009; "US House of Representatives vote," 2009). These strategies range from the total decriminalization of possession and consumption of certain illegal drugs to distinguish between soft and hard drugs, with a much higher level of tolerance for the distribution and consumption of the former in relation to the latter ("A toker's guide," 2009).

Fortunately, Mexico is not the exception. Just a few months ago, a new law was passed that identifies and increases the size of the maximum quantity of drugs that can be carried by one individual without that individual being considered to have committed a crime. This law also establishes that drug treatment is "mandatory" (there are no fines for non-compliance with this rule) for those who get caught carrying the maximum dose three or more times ("Aprueba el Senado dosis," 2009). In addition, the new law allows local police departments to prosecute narcotrafficking offenses that used to be considered under the jurisdiction of the federal police only ("Aprueba el Senado dosis"). It is worth noting that at the end of his administration, former Mexican president Fox vetoed a similar law, due to pressure from the United States government (Enriquez, 2006a; Enriquez, 2006b). The passage of Mexico's new possessive law some three years later, and the relatively slight opposition voiced by the United States this time, may be evidence that even the United States is not immune to the trend of finding a better way to address the illegal drugs issue. Indeed, President Obama's administration is moving away from the "war on drugs" concept (Brooks, 2009), and is starting to pay more attention to addressing the drug demand side of the illegal drug trade, and to encourage other countries like Mexico to do so as well (Olivares Alonso, 2009).

Although the new law is considered an important initiative, specialists on the illegal drug trade have suggested that Mexico should go one step further and regulate marijuana in the same way that alcohol and tobacco are currently managed in an attempt to reduce the illegal drug trade in Mexico and keep most of the Mexican drug users away from criminal networks (Arvizu, 2009). The decision to focus on the regulari-

zation of marijuana over other drugs seems to have been made on a cost-benefit basis. Although marijuana cannot be considered an innocuous drug (there is no wholly innocuous drug), it is certainly the least harmful of all the current illegal drugs (Feilding et al., 2008). In addition, removing marijuana from the illegal drug trade would have a major impact on the Mexican drug cartels' finances and would reduce their share of the domestic illegal drugs market because marijuana is currently considered responsible for over 61% of the Mexican drug cartels' incomes (E. Mendéz, 2009). In addition, discussions over the convenience of regulating marijuana are taking place around the world. Thus, it is clearly not an initiative that is, or will be, considered out of step with the times.

Even though it is clear that the regularization of marijuana would not fix the illegal drug trade in Mexico, according to Astorga Almanza (personal communication, August 25, 2009) one of the main benefits that can be obtained with the regularization of marijuana is that Mexican authorities would be allowed to narrow their focus on the drug cartels, making better use of the considerable resources currently directed towards eradication of marijuana operations. He also notes that research on marijuana could once again be carried out in Mexico, which prohibition has helped inhibit. Among the other benefits of marijuana's regularization would be the implementation of government control over the whole marijuana trade. This change would lead to the reinstatement of the legal status of all those marijuana farmers who have not committed any other major crimes such as murders, which would, in turn, reduce the social harm that results from law enforcement and improve the government's image in those areas that have reduced working opportunities. At the same time, Astorga Almanza points out that the negative effects of marijuana's regulation would not be much different from those Mexico already experiences.

The argument that favors regulation of illegal drugs in lieu of prohibition has been strengthened based on accumulated evidence worldwide over the last century. In this context the decision to maintain the current prohibition approach seems to have a political basis. The political reasons for maintaining a prohibition approach were evidenced when a group of former Latin American presidents (including Mexico's former president Zedillo), academics, and intellectuals submitted a paper proposing a shift from a supply-reduction approach to a harm-reduction approach, including a revision of strategies against the cultivation of illicit drugs (Gaviria et al., 2009). The former presidents did not have to respond to the pressure of constituencies or worry about foreign policy issues when they made their statement.

Over the last century, the public has been educated on the assumption that all illegal drugs are equally bad and that the best way to deal with the illegal drug trade is a full prohibition approach. For example, when the law against illegal drug retail sales and maximum doses was put into effect in Mexico, the public was split between those who saw the law as a good initiative and those who believed that the law was a terrible mistake made by the Mexican government (Mejía, 2009). In addition, the United States and the United Nations have been pressuring Mexico to maintain the prohibition on all illegal drugs. Therefore, shifting the paradigm any further than it has already been shifted, is not an easy decision for the Mexican government.

Even though, and as previously mentioned, there is enough evidence to conclude that the current supply-reduction approach has reached its structural limits, politicians might be cautious about making drastic changes because introducing new policies could be interpreted as a sign of weakness

and defeat. In April 2009, during the first debate in the Mexican Congress about the regularization of marijuana, most of the politicians, regardless of their political party, did not support the regulation of marijuana, and 11 out of 18 candidates to state governments made clear their opposition to the proposal ("¿Legalizar mariguana?," 2009; E. Mendéz, 2009).

However, if the Mexican government wants to reduce the economic power of the drug cartels and their ability to maneuver, as well as lower the harm done by law enforcement in rural communities, the regularization of marijuana is an option worth trying. In order to lower the political cost of trying it, the Mexican government could encourage more public debates about marijuana's regularization and call for a plebiscite after that. The plebiscite would not only help lower the political costs of regularization or legalization unilaterally; it would also armor the decision against foreign pressure. Even in the event that the majority voted against the regulation of marijuana, the plebiscite would help re-energize the counterdrug campaign and provide a catalyst for what has to be an ongoing debate. Only with an ongoing debate can we expect some movement towards a new and/or more integrated anti-drug strategy down the track.

An Integrated Anti-Drug Strategy

As mentioned in Part III, the main issue that Mexican authorities face in addressing the illegal drug trade is the lack of an anti-drug strategy per se. Even though the illegal drug trade is one of several expressions of organized crime and the drug cartels in Mexico have engaged in other organized crime activities, such as kidnappings, blackmail, piracy, and prostitution, the illegal drug trade remains the main criminal activity of the drug cartels and has peculiarities that make it stand out from other organized criminal activities. Consequently, the goals of an anti-drug strategy are quite different from those designed to address other criminal activities. Thus, having a general strategy against organized crime has neither allowed Mexican authorities to monitor their achievements against the illegal drug trade nor measure their success against other manifestations of organized crime.

In addition, Mexico has stopped being just a transit and producer country for the United States' illegal drug market and has become a major consumer country itself. Thus, the illegal drug trade is not simply a public security issue. The illegal drug trade also affects social relations, and it is threatening to become a major public health problem in those communities where it has a strong presence (Malkin, 2001; McDonald, 2005; Case et al., 2008). It should not be up to law enforcement agencies only to design Mexico's anti-drug policy. Mexico cannot afford for those ministries in charge of social and public health programs to remain low-profile players in the overall anti-drug strategy. If the illegal drug trade is a national security threat, then it has to be treated as one. All the resources that the state owns should be used in an integrated manner to defuse the threat.

The current indicators that the Mexican government is making progress in its war on drugs, are based on a supply approach, are confusing, and reflect several limitations. Mike Trace, Marcus Roberts, and Axel Klein (2004) from the Beckley Foundation, have proposed a series of objectives based on a social harm-reduction approach that might help guide the development of an anti-drug policy for Mexico (pp. 3–5):

- Reduce the levels of crime and public nuisance associated with the production, supply, purchase, and use of drugs.

- Reduce the number of deaths that result directly from the production, supply, purchase, and use of drugs.

- Reduce the number of people suffering physical health problems as a result of the use of drugs, particularly HIV and hepatitis infections.

- Reduce the number of people suffering mental health problems and addiction as a result of their use of drugs.

- Reduce the social cost of drug use, including the impact on families and children and the numbers of people failing in education and employment as a result of their use of drugs.

- Reduce the damage to the environment caused as a result of the production, supply, purchase, and use of drugs.

Whatever objectives Mexico decides to use, according to Trace, Roberts, and Klein (2004), they have to be designed following clear and effective rules. The objectives of an anti-drug strategy have to be precise while at the same time avoiding strict numeric values and due dates. Mexico has been fighting the illegal drug trade in one way or another for almost a century, and there is no reason to believe that the trade is going to totally disappear in the near future. Therefore, the policy must include long- and short-term objectives; but, most importantly, those objectives have to be developed via political consensus across political parties in order to survive changes in administrations. And, finally, it has to be made clear to all the people involved that an anti-drug policy requires adjustments based on outcomes, while nothing will better help develop the required adjustments than making the evaluation methods and data accessible and transparent so that the widest range of communities can take part in the overall effort.

Reducing Social Harm Related to the Illegal Drug Trade

The main objective of every anti-drug policy, whatever approach is used, should be to reduce the harm that the illegal drug trade imposes on society. According to Sylvaine Poret (2009), the total harm that the illegal drug trade imposes on a society is the result of several factors added together. However, it is possible to synthesize the social harm under two main headings: crime and health.

Drug-Related Crime

The surge in violence related to the turf wars between drug cartels has caused Mexican authorities to focus their efforts on law enforcement to deal with the issue. However, that is not the only category of drug-related crime. According to Goldstein (qtd. in Resignato, 2000), drug-related crime can be divided into three categories: the "systemic violence" that is directly linked with black markets and organized crime, for example, the thousands of killings in Mexico as a result of turf wars; the "economic compulsion" that results from all the criminal activities committed by drug users (most of them hard users) in order to obtain money to buy illegal drugs; and, finally, the "psychopharmacological" results of criminal and/or socially harmful offenses committed by people under the influence of drugs, for example, car accidents (pp. 681-682). It is worth noting that studies have shown that marijuana users are not predisposed to violent crime and that most drug-related crimes can be attributed to systemic violence related to struggles over market control between rival organizations (Resignato). In order to properly address drug-related crime in Mexico, it is imperative for the Mexican authorities to identify what category of drug-related crime they are dealing with.

Mexican authorities have to have a clear understanding of what is happening in

communities in order to choose the best approach to deal with each category of drug-related crime. That is, while the "best" way to deal with systemic violence is by law enforcement, the best way to address economic compulsion or desperation is to provide rehabilitation programs (Trace et al., 2004). At present, federal authorities have not developed enough data to identify which category of drug-related crime they are facing (PGR, 2009b; Estados Unidos Mexicanos Secretaría de Salud [SS], 2009; SSP, 2009a). Thus, Mexican authorities typically use the same strategy to address all categories of drug-related crime.

It is a fact that the most evident drug-related crimes in Mexico grow out of rivalry over market control. But systemic violence is inherent to the illegal drug trade. Thus, neither a "frontal attack" on the drug cartels nor the arrest or killing of drug cartel leaders is going to end the violence. The question of how much systemic violence is "acceptable" is difficult to answer. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a rate of cero to five murders per 100,000 inhabitants is normal, from five to eight is grave, and above eight is considered an epidemic (Kliksberg, 2007).

However, the PAHO does not make any distinctions between the causes of the murders. Therefore, PAHO's criminality index might not be helpful for establishing the "acceptable" level of systemic violence. For example, a comment made by Eduardo Medina Mora, the Mexican attorney general, in which he highlighted a decline in the murder rate, still made him a target for severe criticism in Mexico. According to Medina Mora, the security situation in Mexico is better now than it was fifteen years ago, when the murder rate was 18 per 100,000 inhabitants; it was 10.7 in 2008 (qtd. in J. Rodríguez, 2009) Perhaps not uncoincidentally, according to Blancornelas (2002), the surge in the violence between drug cartels started during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Consequently, it is not clear whether reducing the number of murders related to systemic drug-related violence from thousands to hundreds would be more acceptable to Mexicans or whether reaching a murder rate below eight by reducing the number of "violent" murders would make any difference to perception about the level of violence. More research needs to be done in order to better understand how systemic violence impacts Mexican society.

Even though it is not clear how much systemic drug-related violence would be "acceptable" in Mexico, it is certainly a fact that less would be better. Ric Curtis and Travis Wendel (qtd. in Stevens et al., 2009) have suggested that illegal drug markets respond quickly to police activities. Therefore, authorities might shape the behavior of the drug cartels by sending the right signals. For example, if there are turfs wars between cartels, government actions might encourage each organization to remain in its "traditional" territory. This does not mean that Mexican authorities should constrain themselves from attacking the drug cartels; on the contrary, the Mexican government has to strengthen its local authorities to be able to act as strong "referees," thereby maintaining territorial pressure on the drug cartels. However, Mexican authorities should do this wisely and as part of a coordinated strategy to reduce the violence, not simply destroy criminal organizations, which then creates a vacuum that invariably leads to new turf wars. However, this kind of strategy requires close interagency coordination and the constant evaluation of targets; unilateral operations would be the exception, not the rule.

It is important to bear in mind that once an individual joins a drug cartel, there is not much that the Mexican authorities can do to reverse that individual's overall path in life, or those around him. Members of the drug cartels, like members of guerrilla organiza-

tions, obtain their resources and live among the population. Most of the people that drug cartels recruit come from disadvantaged sectors of Mexican society (in urban environments street gangs are a major conduit for recruitment) and many recruits get their start as young as 13, and sometimes even younger (Díaz, 2008). Bernardo Kliksberg (2007) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2006) have noted that crime prevention programs supported by law enforcement have worked better at reducing crime in Latin America than those approaches that emphasize law enforcement. Thus, Mexican authorities need to pay more attention to addressing the causes that drag people into criminal conduct while, at the same time, opening up more options for those who may be looking for a way to get out of a life of crime. This may require programs that do not rely on people giving up the names of other members of their former organization, along the lines of a witness protection program. Unless the Mexican authorities understand and develop the right mechanisms to address the causes of why gang members (Fig. 2) and other people join the drug cartels, systemic violence is not going to be reduced in Mexico.

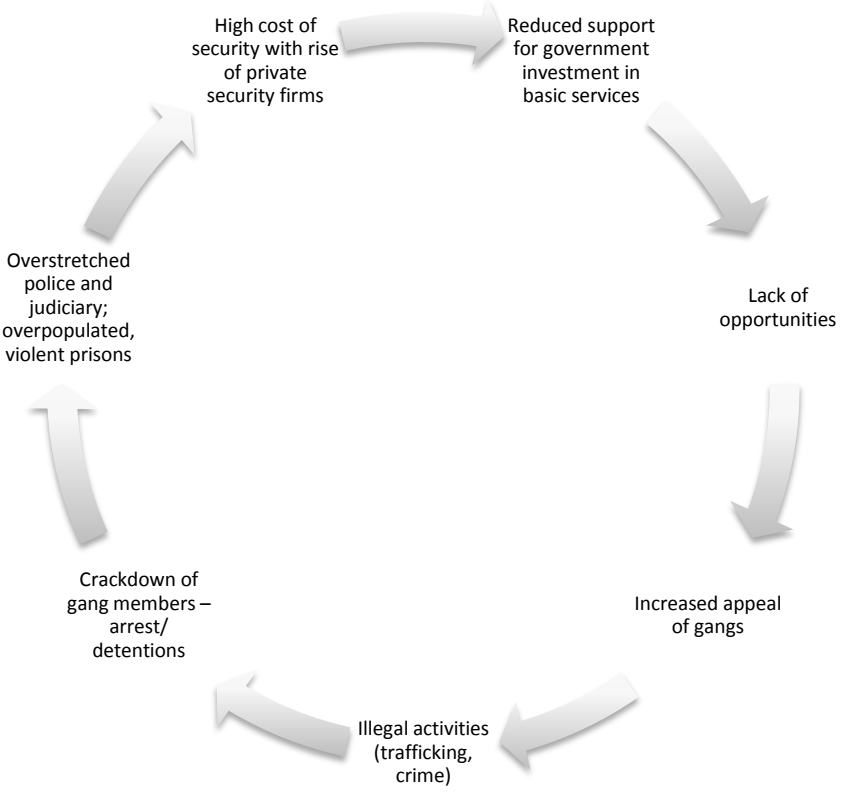

Figure Two. The Vicious Cycle of Central American and Mexican Gangs (From USAID, 2006, p. 13)

With regard to the other two categories of drug-related crime, "economic compulsion" and "psychopharmacological," studies have shown that prevention and rehabilitation programs offer the most cost-effective methods for addressing these categories (Rydell, Caulkins, and Everingham, 1996; Stevens, Trace and Bewley-Taylor, 2005). Even though rehabilitation programs cannot, by themselves, eliminate drug-related crime (they need to be supported by social and law enforcement programs), they are less expen-

sive to implement than supply-reduction approaches and can achieve better results in reducing consumption by heavy users who are most predisposed to carry on economic-compulsion types of criminal behavior (Rydell et al.).

To put this in perspective, it is worth mentioning that in 2008 the Mexican government was able to start the construction of 300 rehabilitation centers with an investment of $50 million that came from the biggest drug-related cash seizure in the world ($205 million) (R. Rodríguez, 2008). In contrast, an airplane for maritime patrolling, that Mexico plans to buy with U.S. funds provided by the Merida Plan, will cost $60 million (Gomora, 2009). Arguably, 300 rehabilitation centers would have a far greater impact on containing the negative results of the illegal drug trade than one airplane aimed at interdiction. For example, Mary Layne et al. (2001) conclude that interdiction operations have limited outcomes due to the high adaptation capacity of the traffickers. As such an example makes clear, a shift away from supply-reduction and interdiction toward addressing the social costs and consequences of the illegal drug trade would not only prove more effective, but would not necessarily be a significant drain on government resources, particularly given the long-term social benefits.

Health

As mentioned previously, prevention and rehabilitation programs in Mexico have never been top priorities for the Mexican government. In a country with limited resources, as Mexico is, this might represent a classic instance of a policy displacement effect. According to José Ángel Córdova Villalobos (qtd. in R. Rodríguez, 2008), the Mexican minister of public health, it was not until Mexico netted $50 million in illegal drug trade cash that it was able to reorganize the federal prevention and rehabilitation programs. At the state level, things are not much different. According to Víctor Valencia de los Santos (qtd. in L. Cano, 2009a), the minister of public security from the northern state of Chihuahua (Ciudad Juarez is located -in Chihuahua State), the number of addicts in his state is a grave public health issue that has not been addressed in a proper manner.

The systemic violence and the supply-reduction approach have relegated prevention and rehabilitation programs to a secondary role in Mexico's anti-drug policies over the years. Yet, at the end of the day, drug users on both sides of the U.S.–Mexican border are the ones who are driving the illegal drug trade. That is, drug cartels might be able to coerce some Mexican authorities, kill their rivals, and so on, but they do all this in order to reach their clients, the drug users. Ironically, drug users are not coerced to use illegal drugs. The Mexican authorities need to recognize that the reason for the turf wars between drug cartels is over local markets ("México duplicó consumo," 2009). While the United States needs to focus on its citizens' drug demands in order to reduce the strength of the Mexican drug cartels ("Consumo en EU," 2009). Mexican authorities need to fight the growing drug demand in Mexico with the same intensity that it displays when fighting the drug cartels (and it should at least be hoped that someday the United States will switch from a futile preoccupation with stopping supply and focus on the social problems related to the demand for illegal drugs). Further, addressing drug demand helps address a public health issue, as described above. Indeed, it is especially important to treat drug demand as a public health issue in order to destigmatize drug users and make their access to treatment easier (O'Loughlin, 2007).

As with other public health issues, drug demand has to be addressed at all stages in order to reduce the social harms of illegal

drug use. In 2007, the Mexican government launched the prevention program "Escuela Segura" (Safe School) to reduce violence and the use of illegal drugs among basic-level students ("Escuela segura," 2008). Escuela Segura is probably the most important prevention program yet implemented by the Mexican government because it recognizes for the first time that there is a high risk of drug addiction among students in Mexico (Solera, 2009). However, two years after being launched there has been severe criticism even within the Mexican government regarding implementation of this program ("Cobija Escuela Segura," 2008; Solera). Even though the program is too new to evaluate its impact on drug demand, the indicators used to evaluate the performance of the program have not been of much help. For example, the number of schools in the program grew from 1,715 in 2007 to more than 15,000 in 2009 (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 2009). However, having more schools in the program does not show improvements per se. Thus, the Mexican government must find other ways to evaluate the program and make adjustments in order to ensure it works as was planned.

According to the Mexican Institute for the Prevention and Addictions Attention, if people avoid acquiring a drug addiction between the ages of 14 and 18, the risk of developing a drug habit diminishes by about 80% (qtd. in Solera, 2009). However, Mexican authorities have to take into account that addiction is not the only harm that drug users are exposed to. HIV, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases are also associated with unsafe illegal drug use. Thus, ways to avoid contagious diseases should be part of the drug prevention program's curricula.

Although abstention is the best way to avoid drug harm, the facts indicate that abstention is not always possible (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Consejo Nacional Contra las Adicciones [CONADIC], 2003). Although some people satisfy their curiosity about drugs and then quit using them, there are people who keep using drugs until they get trapped by addiction. Therefore, rehabilitation programs are as important as prevention programs. According to Colin Mangham (2007), prevention and rehabilitation programs are the two pillars of drug-demand reduction.

Drug addiction is not exclusive to poor people by any means. However, there are some studies that suggest that poverty can help trigger drug abuse among both young people and adults (Reyes Morales et al., 2009). Harsh living conditions and a lack of opportunities lead some people to turn to drugs to escape, or to at least forget, their desperate social circumstances for a few hours ("Niños de la Calle," 2006). If, meanwhile, public rehabilitation programs are absent, the odds of poor people spending money for rehabilitation instead of food or drugs is unlikely. This, in turn, might lead these people to lose their jobs because of their drug addiction, and then a vicious, downward cycle starts.

In a country like Mexico, with almost 50% of the population living in conditions of poverty or social marginalization (Gutiérrez, 2009), public drug rehabilitation programs should be as important as other social and public health programs. However, nowadays in cities such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, which have very high rates of drug-related crime, rehabilitation programs reach only 20% of estimated drug-users (Case et al., 2008).

As previously mentioned, the social harm associated with illegal drug use does not stop with drug addiction. The risk of contagious diseases and the spread of various illnesses are high among drug users, especially among injecting drug users (IDU). Therefore, proponents of harm reduction

recommend that needle exchange programs (NEP) and other harm-reduction programs, such as drug injection facilities, need to be considered part of an integrated anti-drug policy (O'Loughlin, 2007). In Mexico the position of the public health institutions is that harm-reduction policies are necessary to ameliorate Mexico's HIV/AIDS epidemic (CONADIC, 2003).

However, harm-reduction programs have not received enough support in Mexico. According to the Mexican government, harm-reduction programs reach only 24% of the IDU population, and most of the efforts are being made by NGOs (Estados Unidos Mexicanos Centro Nacional para la Prevención y Control de VIH/SIDA [CENSIDA], 2009). In addition, the ways in which these programs are evaluated are based on the number of needles provided, and there is no data about the impact of these programs on Mexico's HIV/AIDS epidemic and other blood-related illnesses. Therefore, it is important that the Mexican government devote more attention to harm-reduction programs and sponsor more research about how these programs can be adapted and improved. In addition, more aggressive methods of engaging drug users directly, such as trough methadone programs for heroin addicts, might be worth testing in Mexico. The impact on the health and well-being of the population that reducing drug demand might have should not be underestimated.

Mexican Authorities

None of the measures proposed thus far will work, unless there is strong encouragement at and by all three levels of government. Today, discussion in Mexico is focused on the police departments and the judiciary system. Even though it is clear that the Mexican government needs to build strong police forces at the local level to keep drug cartels under control, for Astorga Almanza (personal communication, August 25, 2009) and Guillermo Garduño Valero (personal communication, August 26, 2009) the former will not be possible until the Mexican political system changes and allows the development of independent police and judiciary systems. Therefore, in order to see improvements in policing, the political system must first improve.

Nor is the current way in which police and military units deploy against the drug cartels helpful for reestablishing the link between the population and the authorities. As a matter of fact, authorities might be sending the wrong message to the population through simple actions, such as law enforcement officers wearing balaclavas to hide their identity. If the authorities demonstrate that they are afraid of retaliation by the drug cartels, then what can the common citizen expect? A new model based on community policing, in which units have an area of responsibility and the community knows who their authorities are, would go a long way to build, or rebuild, trust between authorities and the public (Felbab-Brown, 2009).

It also has to be borne in mind that police officials in those small counties where drug cartels have a strong presence are caught between two fights. On the one hand, there are the drug cartels with their death threats. On the other hand, there are the federal authorities looking for information and/or assistance. Although threats by drug traffickers should not be an excuse for a police officer to avoid doing his job, it is a fact that for a county policeman, it is difficult not to comply with the drug cartels' demands when his family's safety is being threatened (Tapia, 2009). Therefore, it might be helpful for federal authorities to bear this in mind when they deploy to these counties. This means that it is necessary to develop mechanisms to offer an option (not a pardon) to those police officers who were coerced by the drug cartels and now want to stop coope-

rating with them. This may include recruiting police officers as informants and protecting their families.

A number of years ago, Layne et al. (2001) found out that fear of informants is of particular concern in criminal organizations and for most drug traffickers is the most feared way of getting caught by authorities. Ironically, in Mexico drug cartels have overcome this fear by bribing authorities. However, Mexican authorities can use this in their favor. They can establish an information campaign in every police department to recruit police officers as informants, or even lie at the end of a successful operation by attributing the outcome to a police informant instead of a police investigation. This might reduce the number of police officers who are coerced.

Even though it is not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate the current police structures in Mexico, it is a fact that the Mexican authorities need to reevaluate the current police model and its relation with the political structure in order to build an independent and strong police force. Whatever police model the Mexican government decides to adopt, strong local police departments are as important as the federal police in the current fight against the drug cartels. However, Mexican authorities must also be aware that the willingness of citizens to follow the rule of law in a democratic system is based on recognizing that the social contract is working. This is only achieved when citizens and government are tied together by strong links in a "common framework of social order, political representation, and political action" (Davis, 2006, p. 80).

This concept of the social contract is tied closely to the performance of the whole government. If people do not feel that their most basic needs are being satisfied, there is probably no reason for them to follow the rule of law. The same applies when people believe that government officials are corrupt and that they are being protected by political parties. The Mexican government at all levels must take a step back from the "war on drugs" and reevaluate its performance in order to strengthen the social contract. The Mexican government must be aware that every vacuum left due to its poor performance, can potentially be filled by criminal organizations (Aranda, 2009; Ramos Pérez, 2009).

Conclusion

The drug cartels have adapted very well to counterdrug efforts in Mexico, thanks in part to the lack of innovation in the way the Mexican authorities have fought them. Almost a century has passed since Mexico decided to prohibit marijuana and other drugs, without being able to foresee the consequences. Today, the world has a better understanding about the effects of drug markets and about the social harm related to the use of illegal drugs. Therefore, Mexico should act to reduce the size of the illegal drug trade by methods other than a direct attack on organized crime. It is time for the Mexican authorities to move forward and test new approaches in order to find the correct balance between social harm reduction (demand) and supply reduction.

In order to do this, the Mexican government must define an anti-drug strategy that is a well-coordinated effort, making use of the still limited resources that the Mexican state has available. Mexico's authorities have to look at the past and review what authorities did to reduce the homicide rate fifteen years ago. According to Medina Mora, that shift was "the result of managing well social conflicts in regions with high rates of violence" (qtd. in Aranda, 2009, ¶ 6). The actors and events today might seem different; however, the need to address the roots of the problem remains the same. In the Mexican case, the grievances and inequalities in Mexican society that push people into

criminal behavior, as well as towards drug use, need to be addressed in order to reduce drug-related crime. Certainly there will always be organized crime groups. However, in a more egalitarian society where people are able to satisfy their basic necessities by legal means, fewer people would be willing to engage in criminal activities.

Part V: Conclusion

Almost a century has passed since Mexico joined an uneven, but increasingly international effort to eradicate the use of certain drugs for recreational purposes; however, the outcome has not been as expected. Despite the fact that the world was able to stop the opium epidemic of the early twentieth century (UNODC, 2008), arguably by using a supply-reduction approach, the world has been unable to eradicate the illegal drug trade by applying this approach. Eighty years ago the world did not know what the consequences of drug prohibition would be; or, more precisely, the world did not want to pay attention to the lessons learned from alcohol prohibition. Mexico was no exception, and thanks to traditionally low levels of illegal drug consumption among Mexicans, it was easy for authorities to focus on supply-reduction policies to help other countries to address "their" drug demand problem. This did not help the Mexican government prepare itself for the possibility of the demand for illegal drugs growing dramatically in Mexico.

Today, Mexico faces a dilemma: keep following the same anti-drug strategy that has proven ineffective since its implementation, or make the adjustments necessary to overcome the current social harm that flows from rising domestic illegal drug use. It is not just a matter of putting more resources into, or generating a greater willingness towards carrying out counterdrug operations. The supply-reduction approach has proven to have structural limits that have now been reached. The best example of the limits inherent in the supply-reduction approach is the failure of the United States' anti-drug policy. If the contemporary global hegemonic power, and the most powerful state in the history of humankind (Brzezinski, 1997), a country which has also been the main proponent and practitioner of the supply-reduction approach for decades, has not been able to stop smuggling, production, or transnational criminal networks, or more importantly, stop illegal drug consumption on its own soil, something is clearly wrong with the current anti-drug strategy. Mexico should not only keep this in mind, but re-evaluate its current counter-drug campaign in order to develop an anti-drug strategy that balances supply-reduction and harm-reduction approaches.

In order to develop a new anti-drug strategy, Mexico first has to clearly define what its goals are, and then develop a well-coordinated effort using all the resources that the state has available to achieve those goals. Law enforcement efforts aimed at attacking the drug cartels, support from social and crime prevention programs aimed to defuse the recruitment capacity of the drug cartels, will continue to fail. The same fate will to continue to befall law enforcement if drug demand is not addressed properly there are always going to be people willing to challenge the authorities and organize new drug cartels if there is a growing illegal drug demand to satisfy.

As mentioned previously, the Mexican government needs to look beyond the drug cartels and attack the roots of the illegal drug problem. Although this thesis has argued that the cartels are an important component of the illegal drug trade, they are more of a symptom than an illness. The real

illness about which the Mexican government has to do something is all those social situations that drag people into the clutches of the drug cartels, whether for employment or as users of illegal drugs. Poverty, inequality, lack of opportunity, lack of development, and local drug demand, are among the things that should be addressed in order to reduce drug-related crime in Mexico. Again, this does not mean that the Mexican government should stop fighting the drug cartels; however, addressing the social and demand-side aspects just mentioned should be considered just as important as law enforcement.

It is a fact that none of these recommendations can be implemented without a strong state presence at the local level. Regardless of how strong the federal law enforcement authorities are, or can be made to be, they are never going to be able to cover the whole country. Thus, strengthening local police departments should be considered a top priority. The current violence with which the drug cartels have targeted elements of police departments has to be used by the federal and local authorities to rally local police departments to fight back against the cartels. This might work if the Mexican authorities grant options to local policemen; without options the local policemen will continue to decide to succumb to the threatening influence of the drug cartels rather than respond to the directives of the federal authorities.

Finally, the Mexican government should keep in mind that a strong state presence is not achieved just through law enforcement. True, effective law enforcement helps to achieve a strong state presence. However, projecting a strong state presence just through law enforcement can lead to an artificial feeling of stability. The Mexican government should seek to strengthen its presence by providing public services, education, new employment opportunities, and even taxation. That is, the Mexican state has to improve its performance at all levels and in all areas of state responsibility: nothing short of a revitalization of the social contract is going to change the current situation. Failure to improve the effectiveness of the state and failure to build or rebuild the social contract will lead to power vacuums that will continue to be filled by new or revitalized criminal organizations.

This thesis has argued that the Mexican government has to switch its focus from attacking the surface (supply-side) of the illegal drug trade to addressing its social roots. There is still time to build on the momentum produced through the courageous law enforcement efforts being taken against the drug cartels by making the right adjustments to the current anti-drug policy. The adjustments to Mexico's current anti-drug strategy proposed in this thesis are all open to debate and refinement. However, the main objective has been to show that there are many more options available to the Mexican authorities that are worth trying in an effort to win the war on drugs. Mexico does not have anything to lose by trying new anti-drug strategies. At the same time, it has a lot to lose by maintaining an anti-drug policy that has already proven to be ineffective both in reducing supply and, more importantly, in preventing an explosion in social harm associated with the illegal drug trade. Winning the war on drugs will not be easy, but movement towards an integrated approach represents a critical first step.

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