

Abstract:

In order to prove the United State's primary role in this escalation of drug related violence in Mexico, the essay first addresses the history of drug prohibition in the United States, which resulted in a demand for illegal drugs from foreign sources. Then, it explores the economic liberalization policies of the 1980s that led to Mexico becoming the main supplier of drugs to the US. It continues by describing the current drug organizations menacing Mexico, the cartels, and the history of their evolution. This is followed by an analysis of the US participation in the drug trade through its avid demand of drugs and supply of arms in return, a dynamics that contributes to and perpetuates the violence affecting Mexico. The essay then proceeds to address the role of police and military corruption in Mexico's current drug related violence. And, it describes the warring amongst Mexican drug cartels, and Pres. Felipe Calderon's recent measures to control the violence perpetuated by these organizations. This essay closes with personal reflections on how best to address the problem of drug cartels and their progressive destruction of the fabric of Mexican society.

## Introduction

This essay seeks to demonstrate the horrific impact of the United States' demand for drugs from Mexico. Such demand has propelled the supply of drugs from the US's southern neighbor, Mexico, resulting in the establishment of dangerous cartels and an astounding escalation of violence in the last three decades. Mexico is currently a dangerous state due to the fighting for power, territory and supply lines amongst the cartels.

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Drug Addiction and Drug Usage

Naturally occurring drugs such as opium, cannabis, and coca leaves have existed and been used since the third century B.C. The drugs were used universally for common, quotidian activities. Cannabis and opium were consumed as medication for pain relief; coca as a physical stimulant for those engaged in arduous employment. But these drugs were also used for relaxation and cultivated for food as well as for a means of exchange. The widespread consumption of these drugs for quotidian activities demonstrates their universal importance.

Drugs have also been used to aid humans escape reality, and this is where they become dangerous and addictive. It was not until the nineteenth century that drug addiction was perceived as a problem, and this resulted in the beginnings of enforcing drug control (Buxton 35-50).

#### History of Drug Control and Regulation

The drug trade in Mexico, located in the Western Hemisphere, is the focus of this essay; therefore, the history of prohibition analyzed will be that of the Western World. The idea of drug restriction and prohibition did not arise formally in the developed nations of Western Europe and the United States until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this, drug usage was never considered a problem, much less an international one because it wasn't regarded as an affliction. In the United States and Great Britain, the leading pharmaceutical companies such as E. MERCK AND COMPANY and Bayer, legally and openly sold cocaine, cannabis, and opiates as medication to help treat depression and anxiety. But by the end of the nineteenth century, drug addiction in the United States had escalated to more than 300,000 users. Two-thirds of them were women. Women were perceived as inferior to men and as a result less important; therefore, their problems were not considered important to society and the government did not attempt to ameliorate the situation. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical companies selling the drugs and making profits demonstrated leverage in Congress and prevented interventions to curtail drug sales from occurring (120).

It was not until the Hague Conference of 1911 that the ideas of drug regulation and prohibition arose internationally. This conference was the first manifestation of international co-operation among countries to regulate the trade in dangerous and addictive substances, and had as its aim the creation of an international system of drug control. From 1915 until 1936, the countries of Western Europe and the United States participated in these conferences to limit drug usage. As a result of these international conferences, the involved countries did start reducing the production of opiates, cocaine and other drugs by limiting the drugs sold legally by the pharmaceutical companies (121-122).

International conferences declined after 1936 because Europe and the United States dissented on how to deal with drug addiction. The US sought harsh criminal sanctions for people who used drugs, whereas Western Europe contrastingly took a rehabilitation approach and emphasized the need for facilities to support people with drug-related problems. This sharp distinction in policy has remained a divider between these geographical areas in terms of how to deal with drugs. The new prohibition policies in the United States did not reduce consumption of illegal drugs; rather, they created a demand for internationally-acquired drugs. The United States, due to its unforgiving policy and harsh sanctions as well as dwindling drug resources, has propelled consumers to look for other suppliers outside of the United States (122).

#### Foreign Drug Sources in the United States

At the turn of the twentieth century, when the demand for drugs such as marijuana and heroin sprouted in the United States, Mexico smuggled them north. During the Prohibition era, Americans would go south to Mexico to obtain alcohol or drugs, and Mexican rumrunners smuggled the goods north. After the abolishment of Prohibition, Mexico continued supplying only marijuana to the United States until the

1960s, when drug counterculture arrived; initiating a demand for a wide variety of illegal drugs (O'Neill 68).

From the 1960s to 1980s, the years when drug consumption and trafficking began to be a serious National concern, the Caribbean was one of the main drug sources for the United States. Some Caribbean countries, primarily Cuba and Jamaica, realized that great profits could be made in supplying the drugs to the United States and as a result established a system. Furthermore, their geographic proximity to the United States made it advantageous for them to easily transport the drugs to the United States (Brophy 249).

However, the 1980s saw a change in the main supplier of drugs to the United States from the Caribbean to Mexico due to the trade liberalization that was occurring in this last nation. In addition, because Mexico was the next door neighbor of the United States and was not separated by ocean water, the supply of drugs to the United States was even easier than from the Caribbean.

#### Trade Liberalization in Mexico

From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, Mexico underwent economic reforms to become an appealing candidate to NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. The aim of this agreement was to remove trade barriers and tariffs between Mexico and the United States. The prime economic reforms transformed Mexico's economy from a closed one, with a huge government sector, to a relatively open one, attracting foreign investment, and with a much smaller government sector. Mexico was propelled to join NAFTA by the debt crises that struck the country in the late 1980s which caused unemployment to surge. The government hoped that by joining NAFTA, Mexico would be able to ameliorate its economy (Andreas 125-128).

During the same period, the United States promoted free market reforms and liberalization of trade with its neighbor, Mexico, to facilitate trade between the two countries. The free-market reform of neoliberal economics advocates that countries become more interconnected through trade. The advantage of trade is that a country can focus on the creation of commodities that it produces easily and trade those commodities for foreign commodities. Therefore, each country can become productive by simply making the goods where it has an advantage, instead of having to use all of its resources to produce every commodity, which is disadvantageous economically (129).

NAFTA was passed in 1994. Due to NAFTA, trade has increased tremendously between Mexico and the United States. It has been advantageous for Mexico not only because it can ship agricultural goods to the United States without tariffs and receive American products without tariffs, but also because it has alleviated the surge of unemployment of the 1980s by encouraging the hiring of Mexican workers in maquiladoras. NAFTA has attracted a huge influx of foreign investment and as a result implanted maquiladoras in the Mexican border towns. Maquiladoras are internationally owned factories producing assembly line manufactured products predominantly owned by American, Japanese and European companies that settle in Mexico because they are attracted to the low wages of the local labor force. Currently, there are more than 3,000 maquiladoras on the Mexican border.

Although free-market reforms can ameliorate the economic situation of developing nations, they may also help promote the movement of illicit commodities across borders. Because of sheer volume, it becomes hard to control the movement of certain goods, including illegal substances such as drugs, because they can easily be hidden within the shipments of legal commodities. As a result, since the passage of NAFTA, law enforcement has had a greater difficulty in minimizing the traffic of drugs from Mexico into the United States (135).

Mexico's Comparative Advantage in the Supply of Drugs

Developing nations such as Mexico, have exhibited a significant comparative advantage in the international economy of drug production, processing and transportation. These countries will spend more resources and capital in creating the same product than developed nations like the United States will in the industrial, mechanical and electrical industries, and so they are at a disadvantage in such areas. In the case of Mexico, it cannot rival its developed competitor, the United States. On the other hand, the cultivation of drugs requires land and unskilled labor, both abundant in Mexico. In comparison to the United States, labor is significantly cheaper in Mexico because there is no national minimum wage like in the United States. Each Mexican state sets its own wage. Also there is more unused land to grow drugs in Mexico than in the United States. Hence, Mexico can easily and cheaply produce and transport drugs to the United States (139).

#### Mexico's Cartels

A cartel is a combination of independent organizations that agree to work under the direction of specific leaders and bosses. Therefore, cartels are hierarchical as well as compartmentalized organizations. They remain compartmentalized not only to maintain order, but also to aid the entire organization so that it's not compromised and collapsed if one of its elements is caught. At the top is the leader, whose name is well associated with the cartel he manages. Sometimes, the cartel leader's name is more widely recognized than the cartel he heads. At this level, the leadership is very inflexible within a cartel, and normally remains in the hands of the one person or his family, as in the Arellano-Félix family who heads the Tijuana Cartel. Cartel leaders are also the least expendable because their position is usually inherited, and so there is almost no turnover in this position. Most leaders have obtained this position due to family connections, like in the Arellano-Félix family. The second in command are the lieutenants or division heads, who specialize in the logistics of transportation of the drugs and work independently of

the other bosses, just in case the Cartel heads are compromised. Beneath them are the gatekeepers, who actually oversee the shipment of drugs into the United States. Then there are the “enforcers,” whose role is eliminating the cartels’ enemies. These men, normally recruited from street gangs on the U.S border or from the police forces in Mexico, are attracted to the higher wages and prestige associated with becoming cartel members. Under the “enforcers,” are the actual drug smugglers, who are easily replaceable because they are numerous. At the bottom of the cartel’s totem pole, are the growers, who are also easily replaceable and also the furthest away from the consumer (Alvarez 19-22).

Although the “enforcers” and smugglers are the most expendable and most often replaced in cartels due to the dangers associated with their position- the high risk of death and incarceration- the two positions are still an appealing option to many young men due to the prestige associated with being gang members. Gang membership provides the lure of fancy cars, luxurious lifestyles and women, not to mention the benefits of employment. The majority of young men recruited from both sides of the US-Mexico border are attracted by money; they come from destitute families and lack an educational background, which limits their job opportunities. These jobs are dangerous, but due to a lack of alternatives, young men readily join the Mexican cartels.

The cartels are aware of these young men’s vulnerability and prey on them. Various Mexican cartels, among them the Zetas, the military branch of the Gulf Cartel, are notorious for their avid recruitment of young men from both sides of the border. The Zetas place their recruitment scouts in some of the most popular discothèques on the Mexican side, such as in Nuevo Laredo, where they know many young Americans who aren’t of legal age in the United States frequent. Although the Zetas recruit young men from both sides of the border, their primary target in the clubs are the Americans. As the young men drink and flirt with women, the scouts lurk about, finding subjects to court into joining their cartel.

Cartels have recruited adolescents as young as thirteen years of age, as in the case of Rosalio Reta. Reta came from a poor, single-mother household on the American side of the border. Becoming a



gang member appealed to Reta because of the lure of the fancy lifestyle, the fancy cars and women he was promised. Like many other young men who were recruited, Reta attended a training combat camp for six months in an undisclosed location in Mexico. Some of his instructors were Israeli mercenaries who not only taught young men to shoot, but also to engage in hand-to-hand combat. After Retas's intensive six-month training and subsequent work as an "enforcer," he immediately reaped the benefits of the trade, living in a fancy house in Texas with other gang members while on call to fight. Reta does not remember the exact number of men he killed while being an "enforcer", but he estimates it to be greater than 100. He assassinated rivaling drug gangs in the "turf wars" as well as innocent men in the crossfire. He served for the Zetas six years up until nineteen years of age, when he was caught and imprisoned. He is currently serving 70 years in jail in Texas for the murders he committed during his employment for the Zetas. (Mckinley 2-4).

According to the Mexican government, there are seven cartels in Mexico since 2007. The four largest cartels are the Gulf Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, the Sinaloa Federation Cartel and the Tijuana Cartel. The Tijuana cartel used to be the most powerful cartel in the 1980s and early 1990s due to its strong connection with the Colombian cartels of Cali and Medellin in the transportation of cocaine to the United States, but is currently losing power and influence because of the recent imprisonment of some of its leaders. This has forced the Tijuana Cartel to focus its energy on protecting its trafficking routes by corrupting Mexican police officers and implementing intimidation measures, including kidnappings, torture and murders (Cook 9).

The Tijuana Cartel controls the Mexican region of Baja California and its base city is Tijuana, the Mexican border town to San Diego. The Gulf Cartel has a presence in 13 states in Mexico and its center of operations is in the northern state of Tamaulipas, which borders southeastern Texas. The Juárez cartel is located in 21 Mexican states and its principal base is the city of Ciudad Juárez, the border town to El Paso, Texas. The Sinaloa cartel has a presence in 17 states and is located in the northwestern state of Sinaloa (1).

The three smaller cartels are the Colima cartel, located in seven states and based in the state of Colima; the Oaxaca cartel, present in 13 states, with its center of operations in the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas; and lastly, the Valencia cartel, present in 13 states with a base in the central state of Michoacán. As one can see, the cartels with the greatest influence in Mexico are located on the Mexican-American border, where there is the easiest access to transport drugs into the United States. (4).

The Gulf Cartel, with its center of operations in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, is considered to be Mexico's most violent and powerful cartel. Under its leader, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, it was the first cartel to organize a military group, the Zetas, its fighting force. The only other cartel to have a military group is the Sinaloa Cartel, with its Negros, but they are not nearly as large or powerful as the Zetas. Not only do the Zetas act as the army for the Gulf Cartel, but they also traffic arms, kidnap and collect payments for the cartel (11).

The Cartels, although independent organizations, have started creating alliances. There are multiple drug wars occurring in Mexico, one of which is the war between the cartels fighting for territory and the other, the war between President Calderon and the cartels. Within this context, the Gulf Cartel has made an alliance with the Tijuana Cartel, with both groups promising not to imprison each other's leaders. The Sinaloa, Juárez and Valencia Cartels have made an alliance named the "Federation," by which they have also promised not to imprison the leaders of their allies (4). Such alliances strengthen the involved cartels and make them less vulnerable.

As the four main cartels grow in power and influence, they are beginning to infiltrate themselves in other organizations as well. They are starting to become involved in human and arms smuggling and kidnappings. They have currently only been found to smuggle humans acting as drug mules, but have not been found to partake in large-scale human trafficking due to the fear of compromising their drug routes by putting attention on themselves. The arms smuggling operations transport weapons from the United States into Mexico; the arms have the reverse trajectory of drugs because they are traded for drugs. Once

in Mexico, they are used by cartels in fighting to retain their power vis-à-vis rival cartels and the governments (9).

The cartels throughout Mexico have become government-like entities due to the leverage and power they have, and the fear they produce over their citizens. Like governments, cartels collect taxes from anyone who wishes to cross through their territory, or use their territory to ship drugs. People do not question the payments out of fear of being victimized by cartels. This demonstrates the sovereignty of cartels within Mexico because they completely rule their territories; the Mexican government can do nothing to prevent the tax collections. The taxes help cartels finance their operations. The Gulf Cartel, for example, collects taxes from anyone wishing to run drugs, weapons, illegal immigrants or any illicit contraband into the US from the points of Mexico under its control. (Brophy 254).

#### Mexican Cartels' Growth and Influence

The Mexican cartels have grown in influence in the last ten years due to their increasing independence from the Colombian cartels. The Gulf cartel, for instance, used to be one of the Colombian cartels' middlemen in the 1970's and 1980's, when the Colombian-Caribbean route used to be strong. By the early 1990's, U.S Drug Enforcement Agencies were heavily researching the Colombian-Caribbean drug connection, and this caused a reduction in drugs entering the United States from the Caribbean. Such limitation prompted the Colombian cartels to rely more heavily on the Mexican cartels that were not under the US DEA's radar. As a result, the Mexican cartels started demanding more than half the share of profits from their Colombian partners. This caused a change in the power dynamics between the two nations' cartels. Now, the Colombian cartels needed the partnership of the Mexican cartels to bring the drugs into the United States. This led to the increase in size of the Mexican cartels, and the growth of the Mexican cartels prompted the progressive dissolution of power, threat and influence of the Colombian cartels (249).

## History of the Advent of the Drug Trade in Mexico

Since the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1929 until recently, in 2000, the ruling political party of Mexico was the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). This party was known for its widespread corruption and for controlling and crushing its opposition. It granted monopolies to private-sector businesses and provided national recognition for loyal intellectuals, artists and journalists to subdue political dissent (O'Neill 70). As a result, the PRI shaped and produced the rich and ruling class of today, and enhanced the disparity between the poor and rich in Mexico. Furthermore, it stunted the growth of a strong middle class in Mexico.

By the end of World War II, drug organizations existed in Mexico. These organizations remained small and not cohesive until the 1980s. They situated themselves near the Mexico-US border to facilitate the supply of heroin and marijuana to the United States. In the 1960s, these drug organizations gained power and leverage because the demand for drugs increased in the United States. The drug organizations responded by supplying more marijuana to the United States, and as a result, profitability increased, allowing the organizations to expand. These drug organizations solidified their power by creating patron-client relationships between the political leaders of Mexico and themselves. Essentially, most political leaders would turn a blind eye to the doings of the drug organizations, and some would even go as far as supporting and aiding the sale of drugs to the United States as an exchange for monetary compensation. This did limit violence in Mexico because the drug organizations were appeased and not obstructed from conducting their business. The corrupt high ranking political leaders also protected the high ranking officials from court investigations, resulting in the growth of power and influence of their cartels since the cartel leaders had free-reign in Mexico (70).

However, the groups were stemmed from growing in size and power because Colombian cartels had the monopoly in the supply of drugs. As a result, the drug organizations did not begin their

transformation into the modern day cartels until the 1980s, when the Colombian cartels lost their control of drug trafficking into the United States and drug demand simultaneously increased in this last country. The demand for drugs was growing in the 1980s, and with the decline of the Colombian cartels, the emerging Mexican cartels realized it was the opportune moment to infiltrate the drug market into the United States.

In 1981, the American government under the Reagan administration intentionally and yet secretly encouraged the consumption of drugs in the country. The administration needed 19.9 million dollars to donate guns to the Nicaraguan Contras in order to defeat the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, and take away their political power. However, Congress disapproved of this scheme and refused to grant the money needed for the mission. Reagan still hoping to defeat the Sandinistas, looked for another method of raising these funds. He put George H.W. Bush, the then Vice President and former head of the CIA, in charge of the plan. Bush's plan was to authorize the Tijuana cartel to sell crack in the poor areas of Los Angeles, where the demand was high. The administration would reap some of the profits of this drug exchange in order to finance its war (Fernández Menendez 91-92).

The drugs now entered the United States via two principal routes, the Caribbean and Mexico, the crack and cocaine originating from Colombia. The first route was organized by the general Manuel Noriega in Panamá, who then worked for the CIA. His smugglers exchanged arms for drugs previously delivered by boat from Colombia to the Contras in Costa Rica, The Contras then transported the arms to Nicaragua by land; the drugs obtained from Colombia through the Contras were transported by Noriega's smugglers via the Caribbean route and entered the United States through Miami (92).

The second route was more direct and involved Mexico. This route was organized by Marcos Aguado, an official of the Salvadoran Air Forces, and CIA agent Félix Rodríguez. The drugs came from Colombia to Ilopongo, El Salvador, where the organizers of the scheme were located. From Ilopongo the drugs were shipped to Honduras, where they were exchanged for arms coming from the United States. In

Honduras, the groups responsible for transporting the drugs into the United States via Tijuana and bringing the arms south to Honduras and then Nicaragua, were Mexican drug networks employed by the American government (92-94). During this period in which the CIA funded the Nicaraguan war, the Mexican drug trafficking networks solidified their power and strength by becoming an essential element in the transportation of illegal arms to Central America. And the Tijuana Cartel specifically gained leverage, prestige and money from providing the drugs targeted for consumption in Los Angeles by the CIA. This cartel is currently one of Mexico's most powerful cartels.

Today, Colombia and Mexico have a direct exchange of cocaine for arms. Cocaine, which cannot be grown on Mexican land, is cultivated in the Andes, and is exchanged in Mexico for arms originating from the United States and easily accessible due to America's open arms policy. The drugs leave Colombia by boat or plane via the Pacific Ocean and arrive in Mexico through different routes. One of the routes has the drugs entering through Guatemala at the Chiapas border. With the second, more popular route, the drugs enter Mexico through the states of Michoacán and Colima. Once in Mexico, the drugs are transported north to the border states of Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua and Sonora, from where they enter into the United States. The arms going to Colombia originating from the United States have the exact opposite trajectory and are exchanged for the drugs at the U.S.-Mexico border. (Fernandez Menéndez 83-87).

Interestingly, The FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, has had a great influence on the Mexican drug trafficking organizations that transport drugs into the United States. The FARC is a guerilla military force born in 1964 as part of an agrarian movement for the defense of farmers. During the 1950s in Colombia, poor farmers were displaced from their lands by the government in order to provide wealthy landowners with property. As a result, the farmers started the FARC as a socialist organization to protect themselves from the government. The farmers resettled in the Amazon in the late 1950s and quickly discovered that coca was profitable because it was easy to grow and transport. The farmers reaped huge earnings quickly from selling coca, and were able to begin a guerilla movement

or rather a “narcoguerrilla” to defend themselves from the Colombian army. This guerrilla became powerful and dangerous to the Colombian government due to its need to protect the profits from cocaine. Within its territory, the FARC established schools, a judicial system, and collected taxes, making itself autonomous and sovereign from the Colombian state, which was not able to control its doings (20-21). The FARC was the most powerful and dangerous international drug organization until March 1, 2008, when an international military operation organized by the governments of Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela bombed its territory in the Colombian mountains. As a result, the FARC was no longer able to sustain control of its territory and dissolved (24). Currently, the FARC has lost its influence in Colombia.

In 2001, the FARC opened offices in Mexico City and Tijuana (49). Being in closer proximity to the Mexican cartels facilitated communication between the local drug organizations and the FARC. The cartels understood the importance of creating autonomous territories in Mexico, like the FARC did in Colombia in order to become independent from the government. As a result, certain cartels copied the guerrilla tactics of the FARC by creating the Zetas and Negros, and also collecting taxes for revenue. Not only did the FARC influence the cartels with practical ideas and ideology, but it also worked directly since 1998 with the Arellano-Fénix family, head of the Tijuana Cartel, by providing cocaine to be exchanged from the FARC for arms from the United States (68). The FARC is in close proximity to the Mexican drug organizations, allowed for an efficient transfer of models and ideas which the Mexican drug organizations copied, and which led to these organizations becoming today’s cartels.

Not only were the drug organizations aided by the declines of the Colombian cartels and the FARC, but Mexico’s corrupt political history also invited their growth. Not only was there a lack of government policy to stem and obstruct their presence; there was encouragement from the PRI for the drug organizations to conduct business if they bribed the PRI’s corrupt political leaders. Later, in the 1980s, the Colombian cartels decline permitted the Mexican drug organizations to grow much more extensively as they filled their niche and obtained its consumers. Furthermore, the increasing demand in

the United States for drugs augmented profitability for the Mexican drug cartels, lending them to grow even further in power and geographical breadth as well as creating guerilla forces. Finally, police corruption in Mexico in the last 20 years, has contributed to the expansion of violence, and also has helped increase violence by unraveling rivalry and jealousy amongst cartels for police cooperation.

### The U.S. Participation in the Mexican Drug Trade

The United States is the main demander of Mexican drugs; therefore, it keeps the supply of Mexican drugs flowing in order to satiate its wants. A basic economic principle states that as long as there is a demand for goods, suppliers will find a way to sell their products, even if they are illegal. If there were no demand for illegal drugs in the US, then there would be no supply from Mexico.

Mexico provides drugs to the United States, and it desires American guns in exchange. The arms manufactured in the United States and supplied to Mexico are the same guns that have been killing Mexican citizens in the drug wars. According to the study of Cook, Cukier and Krause entitled *The Illicit Firearms Trade in North America*, “Mexico would not be the center of cartel activity or be experiencing this level of violence, were the United States not the largest consumer of illicit drugs and the main supplier of weapons to the cartels” (266). The United States is then involved in the Mexican drug wars by creating the problem, demanding drugs, and supplying Mexico with guns to kill.

The U.S. currently supplies 90% of guns in Mexico (O’Neill 14). It is a low-cost supplier of guns due to its unrestricted gun laws and the large number of guns circulating in private hands. Currently in the United States, there are about 250 million guns in private hands, enough for every adult to own one, although only one quarter of American adults possess a firearm.



There are also more than 56,000 licensed commercial dealers of firearms in the United States. All of this attests to the facility of obtaining guns in the US (Cook, Cukier and Krause 268).

Interestingly, the states with the least restrictive gun laws within the United States are those closest to Mexico: Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. These three states are exactly on the Mexican-American border, in itself an advantageous location for Mexican arms buyers. The gun shows in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas are popular amongst Mexican weapons consumers because they do not require background checks. As a result, they are where the majority of guns in the United States are bought. Furthermore, Arizona gun shows do not require driver's licenses in order for individuals to purchase guns, making it the most popular arms selling state within the United States. The Texan-Mexican border is also notorious for its numerous gun shops. There are more gun shops than gasoline stations by the border, a fact that demonstrates the easy availability of firearms for the buyers, and also that the market caters to the Mexican consumer (268).

In contrast to the United States, Mexico has restrictive gun laws. There are no private gun shops in this country; weapons can only be purchased from the Arms and Ammunition Marketing Division of the Mexican Armed Forces, and this in order to limit the guns in the hands of civilians. Restricting the availability and sale of guns limits the supply and increases the price of firearms. In response, a black market for guns exists in Mexico, but the prices here are still three times those of the United States, making it an unappealing option when set against its nearby neighbor (271).

Aside from the obvious human cost of violence due to guns, weapon use makes a society less productive due to the killing of its working citizens. Since the beginnings of the killings and surge of violence perpetrated by the Mexican drug cartels, life expectancy has decreased by .6

years for Mexican citizens. As a result, GDP has decreased moderately in Mexico because the life-span of productive workers has been reduced (278). This demonstrates the huge negative impact on Mexico's economy from the sale of American guns to the Mexican criminals.

### Police and Military Corruption

Law enforcement corruption in Mexico is another contributing factor to the growing power of cartels and the resulting violence in Mexico. In fighting with the cartels, the Mexican military and police are stuck in a battle with limited resources. Both entities are underequipped and underpaid to fight the cartels (Danelo 44). This invites corruption: police and army personnel are lured by the cartels into making extra cash. Thus, the organizations hired and paid to fight the cartels end up aiding them, which further exemplifies the monetary power that cartels exercise in Mexico. Not only can they lure Mexican citizens of meager earnings into joining them; they also attract members of law enforcement, who either turn a blind eye or actually become involved in the organizations' illegal activities.

Corruption amongst the armed forces works on multiple levels. One of the ways that it exists is through "arreglos." "Arreglos" refer to the bribes by cartel members to soldiers to permit the first to transport the drugs into the United States without hindrance. This is connected to the fact that the only vehicles not stopped at the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border are those cleared by high-ranking military officers or military vehicles themselves. The Mexican army, particularly Mexico's 8<sup>th</sup> Military Zone, has been involved in transporting such drugs to the United States in their military vehicles (O'Day 284). The military's aid of certain cartels has created rivalry and jealousy amongst the latter, resulting in increased fighting and violence at the border (284).

Not only has the Mexican army been involved in helping cartels transport drugs into the United States, but the Mexican police has also been active in the kidnappings of citizens, one of the intimidation and money-making tactics of cartels. The Nuevo Laredo Municipal Police has ties with the Gulf Cartel. Members of the police force have kidnapped competitors of the Gulf Cartel and handed them over to the Zetas, the military branch of the Gulf Cartel, for torture. The Zetas torture them to obtain information about their drug connections (Cook 12). In addition, some agents of Mexico's Federal Investigative Agency are believed to work as "enforcers," the violent members of cartels whose role is to eliminate their enemies, for the Sinaloa Cartel. This proves the widespread police corruption ailing Mexico and obstructing its eradication of the drug problem. And such conception has contributed significantly to the recent spread of drug-related violence throughout the nation.

"Turf Wars"

Violence and bloodshed have increased in Mexico since the early 2000s because of the war for territory amongst the cartels. This is a war for power fueled by the desire to control land; the more terrain a cartel has the stronger it is. In the fighting, the cartels are not only murdering each other, but are also killing innocent bystanders caught in the midst of the gunfire. In addition, death threats from the cartels have led law enforcement and government officials to resign out of fear. The violence is so pronounced today that the Mexican state is currently characterized by bloodshed and fear.

Since the 1990s, when the cartels coalesced into their present-day organizations, the majority of the violence has occurred along the US-Mexico border, the location of the major cartels of Mexico: the Tijuana, Gulf, Juárez and Sinaloa cartels. These organizations strategically

positioned themselves in close proximity to the United States, the consumer of their products. But the competition for border territory and the presence of law enforcement has caused jealousy and rivalry amongst the cartels, which has resulted in intense fighting and bloodshed.

In the early 1990s, the two most competitive cartels, Tijuana and Sinaloa, fought one another for control of the border crossing to San Diego. The violence not only engulfed the city of Tijuana, but the entire country. In connection to the fighting, Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo, a Catholic archbishop, was shot at the Guadalajara airport in 1993 because he was mistaken for being the rival cartel's drug lord (Constatine). Also, the assassinations alerted the United States to strengthen its border with Mexico. The warring between the two cartels did not end until 1997, when the Tijuana cartel established control over the city of Tijuana, border town to San Diego (O'Neill 9).

Right after the violence decreased in Tijuana in 1997, Juárez cartel leader, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, passed away while undergoing plastic surgery to modify his appearance. Both the Tijuana and Sinaloa cartels saw this as an opportune time to take control of his territory, and so fighting ensued among the three groups. The aim was to take over drug trafficking in Juárez, the Mexican border town to El Paso, TX. The general bloodshed in Mexico subsided for a short while in 1999, when Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, Amado's brother, regained control of Juárez (9).

But violence increased once again in the 2000s, after the incarcerations of Benjamín Arellano Felix, head of the Tijuana Cartel in 2002, and Osiel Cárdenas, Gulf Cartel leader in 2003. They were imprisoned together and created an alliance against the Sinaloa Cartel. In response, the Sinaloa cartel created an alliance with the Juárez cartel. Now two main cartel groups exist, the Gulf and the Sinaloa. They are battling each other for territory throughout

Mexico, but the violence has been most strongly present in Nuevo Laredo, Michoacán and Guerrero (Cook 15).

Nuevo Laredo, a U.S.-Mexico border town under the Gulf cartel's reign, has been severely afflicted with violence since 2003, the year of Cárdenas imprisonment. The Sinaloa cartel saw the incarceration as an opportune time to gain control of Nuevo Laredo. As a result, both cartels have been heavily competing for the influence of law enforcement in this territory by bribing or intimidating its members with death threats. Because of this, Nuevo Laredo has not had a police chief since 2007, when the acting one was murdered. So the policemen fear the cartels and allow them to have free reign in this city. Gun battles occur daily on the streets, and Nuevo Laredo has become a war zone (14).

Guerrero, located in central Mexico, and Michoacán, in southern Mexico, have also experienced increased terror. In Guerrero, the city of Acapulco, a highly contested area due to its strategic port, has seen an escalation in violence because the Gulf Cartel is challenging the Sinaloa's ownership of this territory. On April 28, 2006, the police chief was murdered, demonstrating the leverage the cartels have over law enforcement. Recently, on March 15, 2010, 17 people were killed in Acapulco due to drug-related violence. Eleven of these were tourists in Acapulco celebrating Spring Break and the other six were police officers patrolling the city at night (Strange). The state of Michoacán, on the other hand, has four cartels: the Gulf, Juárez, Millenium and Colima. Michoacán has historically been ruled by the Colima Cartel, but it has been weakened by the arrest of its leaders. In response, the neighboring cartel of Millenium gained control of Michoacán. The "Familia," a Gulf Cartel enforcer gang trained by the Zetas, the military branch of the Gulf Cartel, also has a presence in Michoacán and has executed many

citizens in the state. The Gulf and Juárez cartels are also fighting for control of this state due to its strategic location on the Pacific Ocean. (Cook 15).

The recent competitive struggles for territory amongst the cartels have escalated violence in Mexico to an unprecedented level. The two large cartel blocks, the Gulf and Sinaloa, fight one another continuously to gain territory, resulting in the innocent killings of citizens throughout Mexico. As observed in the dynamics described here, the terror spikes when there is a weakening of one cartel due to the death or incarceration of its leaders, causing the other cartels to attempt to capture the debilitated cartel's zone.

#### Changing Politics and Government Action Since 2000

The corruption of the PRI-led Mexican government continued strongly until the late 1980s, when the party began losing power in Mexico. In 1989, the PRI lost its governorship in Baja California to the National Action Party (PAN). As a result of a decline in corruption connected with the loss of power of the PRI, violence surged in Baja California because the new political leaders could not be bought by the drug organizations. Later, in 1998, the PRI lost its stronghold to the PAN party, which led to increased bloodshed in that city. After the immediate change in political power from the PRI to PAN in Ciudad Juarez, more than 30 people were killed in the first month due to drug violence. In both Baja California and Juarez, the cartels were no longer appeased by corrupt officials and hindered from conducting their drug operations, and so they began to kill people to ascertain their domination and continue with their trafficking (O'Neill 4).

In 2000, the PRI's reign ended in Mexico with the inauguration of President Vicente Fox, a member of the PAN party. Drug organizations saw this change in political power as a time of

weakness in Mexico and an opportune time to gain full autonomy from the government because it was weaker due to the political changes transition taking place. The government was initially not focused on the scale and power of the drug cartels. During this period of transition of political change, the cartels focused on re-defining their territories in Mexico through the collection of taxes, creation of armies and borders, and accumulation of land. Furthermore, since the corruption of high-level political leaders was limited within the PAN party, the cartels now turned to corrupting or frightening local policemen and low level government officials in their territories in order to ensure the safe transit of the drugs into the United States (O'Neill 2).

### Calderon's Drug War

Since his inauguration in December of 2006, the current president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, has been zealously combating the drug cartels in Mexico. Both he and President Fox were elected primarily by the growing middle classes. Calderón has taken a hard approach in combating the drug cartels in order to appease his constituents, the middle class, because it is in favor of eliminating corruption and narco-traffickers in Mexico. As a result, he has initiated a drug war against the cartels, even at the expense of his own citizens, since drug-related violence has escalated tremendously since his arrival power (O'Neill 4).

Combating the drug cartels has been the main priority of Calderón's administration. He has called increasing drug violence a threat to Mexico, leading in the immediate mandate of 45,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border areas of Nuevo León, Guerrero, Michoacán and Tijuana to fight the cartels in December of 2006 (O'Neill 2). He also increased the salaries of the troops combating the cartels by 50% in order to increase their incentive to fight the cartels (Cook 17).

In dealing with the United States, Calderón has been the most cooperative Mexican leader. In 2007, Calderon created a two-year plan to eradicate the cartels by involving the

Mexican military in warfare against the cartels, hoping that by 2009 the situation would ameliorate. Since 2007, he has asked the United States numerous times for more help in this fight, but the United States has been responding weakly by not granting troops or money. The United States' actions have amounted to the improvement in surveillance of cars and trucks leaving the United States for Mexico by implementing more border patrol agents and x-ray machines on the Mexican side of the US border to monitor arms leaving the United States for Mexico (Kulisch 10-12).

In the last five years, the Mexican government has also been trying to address the problem of corruption in the Mexican police and military. The PAN administrations have been working to eliminate corruption amongst the armed forces by not only reprimanding them, but also by promoting professionalism through orientations on proper law enforcement behavior (12). In addition, the Fox administration launched Operation Secure Mexico in June of 2005 to combat drug violence and police corruption in cities in the border region. At the end of that month, the operation had uncovered 44 citizens kidnapped by the Mexican police and handed over to the Zetas for torture. In that same year, and in response to evidence that Federal Investigation Agency (AFI) members were working as "enforcers" for the Sinaloa Cartel, the government investigated nearly 1700 of the AFI's 7000 members. After the investigation, 457 were proven guilty of corruption and were sentenced to imprisonment (12).

In addition, since 2006, Calderón's administration has implemented checkpoints of police weapons in areas known for police corruption, and by April 2007, over 100 policemen were suspended for corruption due to the screening of their arms for overuse. Later in June of 2007, 84 high-ranking military commanders were imprisoned after positive results of their polygraph and drug tests came out. These commanders have been replaced by new commanders who had to



undergo financial checks, drug tests, and psychological and polygraph tests to ensure they were clean. These tests have now become the basis to hire anyone wishing to join the military in combating the cartels in Mexico (13).

As part of his efforts to eliminate drug gang violence in Mexico, since August of 2009, Calderón has taken a new approach to reducing drug usage in Mexico. He has decided to attack drug possession and use from a rehabilitation, not criminalization stance, because he believes that this would reduce drug consumption and the resulting violence. People caught with drugs who are not selling them, are sent to new rehabilitation centers in order to correct their addiction. Legalizing drugs, according to this approach, would also diminish drug consumption because drugs would lose their illegal appeal. Calderón hopes the United States will follow suit with the legalization of drugs because demand for Mexican drugs would then decline (Danelo 44) and the drug problem would substantially decrease on both sides of the border. The United States still has not adopted this approach because it has historically believed that drug legalization would promote their consumption. The United States' intelligence has also been reluctant to work with Mexican military and intelligence in combating the drug cartels for fear of them releasing secret information to the drug cartels due to the historic, widespread corruption of Mexican law enforcement (O'Day 280).

The PAN party has been the only government party to attempt to combat the cartels in Mexico through an aggressive mean, fighting, and a peaceful one, the legalization of drugs. However, this still has not improved the violent situation in Mexico. Bloodshed has rather escalated since the PAN came to power.

Solutions to the Mexican Drug Trade

To appropriately target the violence due to the drug trade in Mexico, several problems must be addressed. First, the demand for illegal drugs coming from this country into the United States must be diminished. The supply of drugs responds to its demand, but the demand never follows its supply. This demonstrates the key role that demand has in market transactions. The former Mexican drug organizations and current drug cartels are responding to the already existing and potent American desires for their product, which have lured them into internationally supplying drugs. They are alive and booming because the American consumer is relentlessly trading its American dollars and guns for the drugs.

The American user feeds the violence from the drug wars by permitting the drug cartels to earn enormous profits from their sales. The profits the cartels earn allow them to expand their territories geographically, and grow in strength via the creation of military groups and the corruption of law-enforcement. Essentially, the profits solidify and perpetuate the present-day violent and dangerous cartels. Hence, a reduction in drug sales in the US for Mexican drugs would result in a decline in profits for the cartels, and this would ultimately lead to a decline in power of the cartels in Mexico and the steady dissolution of the cartels. Like in Colombia in the late 1980s, when the United States' demand for its drugs subsided, the Mexican cartels will lose their power and influence, and violence will decrease in the country.

The reduction in demand for Mexican illegal drugs can occur in two ways; it can first be achieved through a boycott of drugs from Mexico by the American public, and secondly, through the legalization of drugs in the United States, similar to what has been done in the Netherlands. The first would require a conscientious and educated public aware of the horror of drug violence in Mexico, and humanitarian enough to be able to forego the drugs, or perhaps attempt to become more self-sufficient by home growing them in order to boycott the cartels. As hopeful as

it is to think that people would cease their usage for the sake and lives of others, those innocently getting killed in the crossfire in Mexico, this is highly improbable. Users of drugs, specifically hard drugs, tend to disregard the effects of their choices; therefore, limiting drug usage is likely a futile solution.

A better option would be the legalization of drugs in the United States, as this would immediately reduce the demand for Mexican drugs. Through legalization, the U.S. would become more self-sufficient and would not have to rely on Mexico for drugs because it would be able to grow its own drugs. However, the United States has been historically opposed to the legalization of drugs because it has believed it would promote the consumption since its last international conference on drugs in 1936. The United States has demonstrated a no-tolerance approach for drug users by promoting harsh criminal sanctions, yet it alone consumes more than 50% of the world's cannabis, to name one specific drug (Leuw 235). Since the main supplier of cannabis to the United States is Mexico, the United States is dependent on its neighbor for drugs and therefore complicit in the Mexican drug problem.

Counter to what US policy has denied, the legalization of drugs does not increase drug consumption, and here the case of Netherlands is pertinent. The Netherlands has had a pragmatic approach to the drug problem; it recognizes the existence of illegal drugs as inevitable in modern society and understands that drug reprimands are not only costly to society, but harmful as well, since they can encourage consumption. They believe that rigorous and repressive law-enforcement of drug usage is likely to breed a violent and subterranean illicit drug market and to marginalize drug users (Leuw 230). Through the Opium Act of 1976, the Netherlands revised its drug policy completely to legalize soft drugs (hashish and marijuana) for usage and growth, and allow the sale of 30 grams or less of each of these (232). Hard drugs, such as heroin and cocaine,

were not criminalized; rather, they were presented as a health problem that required appropriate treatment. Since 1976, people found to be consuming hard drugs are referred to rehabilitation centers to correct their addiction, instead of being sent to prison. Drug consumption is no longer a felony in the Netherlands, and law enforcement plays a restricted and secondary role to the health programs counseling drug addiction (230).

By legalizing drugs, the Dutch have adhered to the international drug policies on the importation, exportation and transportation of drugs, that stipulates and condones the international exchange of drugs between borders, since most of the soft drugs smoked in the Netherlands are grown in country (232). From 1974 to 1980, the number of hard drug users in the country increased, but then leveled off in 1980. Since 1980, the consumption of hard drugs has decreased, which refutes the idea that legalization promotes the consumption of drugs (236). Clearly the younger generations of drug users today are not touching the hard drugs as readily as their predecessors. For soft drugs such as marijuana, there has been an increase in consumption since its legalization, and analysts argue that the numbers are higher now because sales can be monitored, especially in the Amsterdam coffee shops (235). However, the current proportional consumption of both soft and hard drugs in the Netherlands is still significantly less than that of the United States (237).

The case of the Netherlands proves that it is advantageous to legalize drugs because the home country can better monitor and control its consumption since the transactions and use occur in the open and not through a subterranean market. Furthermore, the country can earn some extra revenue from taxing these products.

If the United States were to legalize drugs, its dependence on its southern neighbor, would be eliminated, and this would result in less violence in Mexico. The cartels power and

influence would decline because their drugs would no longer be bought. As a result, they would have less leverage and revenue, and their allure for young, poor men would fizzle because cartels would no longer be able to offer them substantial financial rewards.

A simultaneous way to reduce the attraction of cartel employment would be offering more jobs with higher wages throughout Mexico. This would be complicated, because wages remain low due to the conditions of the Mexican economy as it has evolved after NAFTA and free trade policies. In fact, the Mexican government has promoted the implementation of maquiladoras in the last three decades on the basis that Mexico is abundant in low wage workers. If foreign factories, such as the maquiladoras, were to increase their wages as a result of pressure from the Mexican government, this would help stimulate the economy and raise earnings in other non-foreign sectors. Higher pay would offer more desirable options of employment for young men prone to working in the cartels today.

With the loss of power of the cartels, there would no longer exist a great part of the mechanism feeding police and military corruption. This would in itself reduce violence because competition amongst the cartels for the influence of the police and military would cease. And law enforcement would become more serious, since it would no longer have the availability of generous bribes from the cartels. The police and military would once again become autonomous and would be able to appropriately perform their law enforcement duties.

The legalization of drugs in the US, and new economic approaches put into effect by the Mexican government would allow Mexico to return to its former, relatively peaceful state and allow its GDP to grow because it would no longer be hindered by violence.

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