

Drug Wars: It Is Not All Quiet On The Mexican Front

by

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Abstract:

This is a full scale drug war raging in Mexico for the past few years. The acts of narcoterrorism caused by the Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations have cost thousands of lives in what has degenerated into an armed insurrection in many parts of Mexico. Political officials, police, and innocent people have been assassinated or caught in the crossfire as the Mexican DTO's battle for drug turf in an increasingly fierce battle to see who will control the drug manufacturing, drug trafficking, and human trafficking trades in Mexico. Alliances have been formed with gangs in the United States. Mexican President Felipe Calderon has committed thousands of troops from the Mexican Army to join the counter-narcotics operations of the Mexican law enforcement forces. This paper examines the current narco-conflict in Mexico for causes, trends, and possible solutions. Recent incursions into the United States by Mexican DTO's have increased concerns by law enforcement officials.

Introduction

What in the world is going on in Mexico? There are daily reports of killings, mutilations, rapes, and other violence that staggers that imagination. Parts of Mexico look like a war zone. The population and the government is under siege. Brennen (2008) observed that: " A full-scale civil war is raging in Mexico—and few are paying attention. Drug cartels seeking to keep control over huge swatches of Mexico have been on a rampage." Brennen went on to say that: "The engagements between cartels and the authorities are getting more grisly by the day." Luhnnow and De Cordoba (2009) speculated that: "With drug-fueled violence and corruption escalating sharply, many fear drug cartels have grown too powerful for Mexico to control." The Mexican government of Felipe Calderon has deployed almost all of the resources of the Mexican Armed Forces into the fight against the drug cartels. They are joining Mexican law enforcement in this endeavor.(Quinones, 2009) Is this a replay of the Mexican Civil War of 1910-1923? What is happening? How did we get

there? Where is this going? This study attempts to come up with some answers for those questions and perhaps look to possible solutions for what is happening “on the Mexican Front” of the Drug Wars.

The DEA (2008) observed that: Mexican DTOs have reinforced their position as the dominant illicit drug transporters and distributors in the West Central Region. They exploit well-established trafficking networks and a sophisticated distribution system that reaches from sources of supply in Mexico and southwestern states to regional distribution hubs in Denver, Kansas City and St. Louis (MO), Omaha, and Salt Lake City. Mexican DTOs are expanding their distribution operations in metropolitan areas within Missouri, where they had previously maintained a limited presence. These traffickers provide wholesale and midlevel distributors with a consistent source for cocaine, Mexican ice, methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana.

The National Drug Intelligence Center (2008) in their National Drug Threat Assessment 2009 report stated that:

“Mexican DTOs are the greatest drug trafficking threat to the United States; they control most of the U.S. drug market and have established varied transportation routes, advanced communications capabilities, and strong affiliations with gangs in the United States. Mexican DTOs control a greater portion of drug production, transportation, and distribution than any other criminal group or DTO. Their extensive drug trafficking activities in the United States generate billions of dollars in illicit proceeds annually. Law enforcement reporting indicates that Mexican DTOs maintain drug distribution networks or supply drugs to distributors in at least 230 U.S. cities. Mexican drug traffickers transport multi-ton quantities of drugs from Mexico into the United States annually using overland, maritime, and air conveyances. The use of varied conveyances enables Mexican drug traffickers to consistently deliver illicit drugs from Mexico to warehouse locations in the United States for subsequent distribution.”

The Problem in Mexico

There have always been smugglers and banditos in Mexico. The trade in drugs, humans, guns and other goods is an old one. During Prohibition, the traffic was in illegal liquor. (Martinez, 1996) Corruption of government officials in Mexico was legendary and smuggling was often somewhat tolerated by the government as a sort of back door way to get foreign currency into Mexico from the United States. Williams (2009) felt that the changes in the Mexican government in the past ten years have contributed to the situation that has developed there. Luhnnow and Cordoba (2009) agreed and reported that:

“Several new factors in the past few years added to the violence, however. In 2000, Mexicans voted out the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which had ruled for 71 years. The end of a one party state loosened authoritarian control and broke old alliances cemented through corruption

that kept a check on drug-related violence.”

One of the platforms that the newly elected Mexican president ran on was ending the government corruption and banditry in Mexico. The Fox government, followed by the Calderon government has made legitimate attempts to clean up the Mexican government and clamp down on the drug traffickers. Bloomberg (2006) observed that, “President Calderon is using the military to escalate Mexico’s drug war and make good on his campaign promise to reinforce the rule of law.” The Mexican government has even began to extradite fugitives who had committed crimes in the U.S. back from Mexico back to the United States to face trial (this was a major shift in policy). After the attacks on the United States on 9/11, the United States began to tighten up some of its borders. This had the effect of shifting some smuggling operations, such as cocaine from Columbia, to the more loosely guarded Mexican border.

This has resulted in a change in strategy for the Mexican DTO’s. O’Neil (2009) found that:

“With the election of Vincente Fox, the PAN candidate, as president in 2000, the old model—dependent on PRI dominance—was truly broken. Drug trafficking organizations took advantage of the political opening to gain autonomy, ending their subordination to the government. They focused instead on buying off or intimidating local authorities in order to ensure the safe transit of their goods.”

There was a lot of money to be made supplying the U.S. drug market and several Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations were already participating in smuggling operations. Luhnnow and Cordoba (2009) found that:

“Drawn by the opportunity to supply the U.S. drug market, powerful trafficking groups have emerged on Mexico’s Pacific coast, its Gulf coast, in the northern desert state of Chihuahua and in the state of Sinaloa, home to most of Mexico’s original trafficking families. These groups, notorious fro their shifting alliances and backstabbing ways, have fought for years for control of trafficking routes. Personal hatreds have marked fights over market share with barbaric violence.”

Contributing to the problem for law enforcement is the availability of drug money makes the narco-traffickers often better equipped than the anti-drug forces facing them. The National Drug Intelligence Center (2008) observed that :

”Mexico- and U.S.-based Mexican drug traffickers employ advanced communication technology and techniques to coordinate their illicit drug trafficking activities. Law enforcement reporting indicates that several Mexican DTOs maintain cross-border communication centers in Mexico near the U.S.-Mexico border to facilitate coordinated cross-border smuggling operations. These centers are staffed by DTO members who use an array of communication methods, such as Voice over Internet Protocol, satellite technology (broadband satellite instant messaging), encrypted messaging, cell phone technology, two-way radios, scanner devices, and text messaging, to communicate with members. In some cases DTO members use

high-frequency radios with encryption and rolling codes to communicate during cross-border operations.”

Implications of 2010 to the Mexicans

The year 2010 has many implications for the Mexican people. The Mexican revolution against Spain began in 1810. The Mexican civil war began in 1910. Attacks and revolutions have historically occurred on important dates in Mexico. According to Padgett and Mascarenas (2009), high-profile celebrations in Mexico are often used as places for narco-terror. Will 2010 be the start of the 2nd Mexican civil war? Political observers are openly speculating.

How Much Drugs Does Mexico Produce?

Mexico is a major producer of Opium, Marijuana, Methamphetamine, and Ecstasy. Cocaine is not produced in Mexico, but the Mexican DTO's transship it from Columbia via Mexico into the United States. The shift in the drug trade from marijuana to harder drugs has occurred over the last thirty years. The CIA Factbook provides some idea of the scale of drug production currently going on in Mexico. Roth (2010) noted that Mexico became the largest exporter of heroin in the 1970's, supplanting traditional Asian and Middle Eastern suppliers of opiates after the Turkish government banned the growing of opium in 1973. According to the CIA (2009):

“Mexican cultivation of opium poppy in 2007 rose to 6,900 hectares yielding a potential production of 18 metric tons of pure heroin, or 50 metric tons of “black tar” heroin, the dominant form of Mexican heroin in the western United States.”

Mexico has always been a major producer of marijuana for the United States drug markets. By the 1970's most of the marijuana imported into the United States came from Mexico. (Roth, 2010) However, their marijuana production is increasing. According to the CIA (2009):

“Marijuana cultivation increased to 8,900 hectares in 2007 and yielded a potential production of 15,800 metric tons; The Mexican government conducts the largest independent illicit-crop eradication program in the world.”

Quoting the Mexican defense minister, Bloomberg (2006) reported that in December, 2006:

“A Mexican military assault on marihuana farms in the state of Michoacan destroyed 2,116 growing operations in a week.”

Assaults on marijuana production facilities in Mexico by the Mexican government working with the DEA, have prompted the Mexican DTO's to move some marijuana growing operations north of the border into the United States. Mexican DTO's have set up marijuana farms in California, Oregon, Washington and are even moving some operations to the United States east coast. (Cook, 2007)

Major methamphetamine production sites have been developed in the state of Sinaloa. According to the CIA (2009), Mexico is the largest foreign supplier of methamphetamine to the US market and produced Ecstasy for export to the U.S. .

In fact, Mexican methamphetamine has supplanted domestic production of Methamphetamine in the United States. and become the dominant form of Meth available in the U.S. Some estimates say as much as 85% of the methamphetamine in the U.S. market now come from Mexico.(Viano, Magallanes & Bridel, 2003; Kelly, Maghan & Serio, 2005).

Alliances between Columbian Drug Cartels and Mexican DTO's have resulted in a change in the drug trafficking patterns of cocaine to the United States in the past few years. According to the CIA (2009) Mexico continues as the primary transshipment country for US-bound cocaine from South America, with an estimated 90% of annual cocaine movements toward the US stopping in Mexico; major drug syndicates control the majority of drug trafficking throughout the country.

Smuggler's Blues and the Bandito Culture

Smuggling is a long standing tradition on the border between Mexico and the United States. Thus as Paternostro (1995) observed about Abrego (one of the founders of the Gulf Cartel):

“Being a contrabanista, a smuggler, is a tradition in families that live along the border. Powerful and influential families, like Garcia Abrego's, pass their networks from generation to generation.“

The Social Bandit Tradition

In Mexico, the social bandit tradition is strong. Many bandits and smugglers are viewed as “Robin Hood” type of characters that steal from the rich and give to the poor. The criminals often try and live up to this image and donate money, food, jobs, medical care, education and other benefits to the people in the areas that they operate in. This does not preclude them from exploiting, terrorizing, or killing anybody they choose, but the myth survives. This image buys the criminals support against government forces and people will not inform on them to the police. (Botsch, 2008)

This narco-bandito culture can be observed in the marketplace and in attacks on social institutions in Mexican cities. Pendants with images of an AK-47 assault rifle and the Virgin of Guadalupe are seen at a market in the border city of Ciudad Juarez .Ball caps and t-shirts with pictures of guns, drug saints and violence are common. Mexican drug traffickers fighting a brutal turf war are attacking priests and preachers who denounce cartel violence, shattering clerics' untouchable aura and breaking honor codes in the world's second-biggest Catholic country. (Bringas, 2009).

What is being smuggled to us?

The basic products being smuggled into the United States by the Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations include: drugs and people (Human Trafficking). The smugglers use a wide variety of methods to smuggle in their illicit goods. Aircraft , vehicles, and simply walking into the country are used. Many unique methods are employed including ultralight aircraft and tunnels under the U.S./

Mexican border (Bazar, 2009). While we have always had smuggling, a significant shift in patterns has occurred because of law enforcement actions on the part of the U.S. government. Aguilar-Millan, Foltz, Jackson, and Oberg (2008) observed that:

“In a continuing engagement of action and reaction, governments have pursued strategies that have shaped the contemporary organizations. During the Miami Vice days, drug contraband was shipped from Columbia to the United States through the Caribbean Islands. As a result of successful enforcement actions by the United States, the drug cartels moved transshipment avenues west. Successful aerial interdiction by the U.S. Customs Service mad direct smuggling flights into the United States untenable. Consequently, Columbian traffickers began to contract with emerging organization in northern Mexico.

Initially, these organizations specialized in border transshipment, taking custody of the client’s narcotics in Mexico and delivering them to the client’s agents in the United States. In the process, the locus of power shifted from the Columbian cartels to the Mexican cartels. The Mexican cartels also developed sophisticated money-laundering operations to realize their profits.”

The next stage involves distribution. Burton and West (2008) found that:

“Once the narcotics are moved into the United States, drug distributors use networks of safe houses, which are sometimes operated by people with direct connections to Mexican cartels, sometimes by local or regional gang members , and sometimes by individual entrepreneurs. North of the border, distributors still must maneuver around checkpoints, either by avoiding them or bribing officials who work there. While these checkpoints certainly result in seizures, they can only slow or reroute the flow of drugs. Hub cities like Atlanta service a large region of smaller dealers who act as individual couriers in delivering small amounts of narcotics to their customers.”

What are we smuggling to Mexico?

The most annoying thing we smuggle into Mexico (from the Mexican viewpoint) is guns. Mexico has strict gun control laws and most of the smuggled guns find their way to the drug cartels. Semi-automatic assault type weapons (AR-15’s, AK 47’s, etc.) are preferred (O’Neil, 2009; Stewart & Burton, 2009). The smugglers that smuggle guns into Mexico from the United States are called “Ants”. (Weiner & Thompson, 2001) An example of this was the seizure by Mexican authorities of 540 rifles, 185 grenades, 500,000 rounds of ammunition and 14 sticks of TNT that were taken in a single raid against members of the Gulf cartel (Castillo, 2008). Most of the grenades and rocket launchers come from Central America, however most of the guns come from the United States. Serrano (2008) found that:

“ More than 90% of guns seized at the border or after raids and shootings in Mexico have been traced to the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Last year, 2,455 weapons

traces requested by Mexico showed that guns had been purchased in the United States, according to the ATF. Texas, Arizona and California accounted for 1,805 of those traced weapons”.

Another thing we are smuggling into Mexico is stolen cars. American street gangs like the Brownsville Crew (operating in Kansas, Louisiana, and Texas) have a long history of stealing cars and taking them to Mexico where they were sold for drugs to the cartels. It is estimated that over 200,000 cars that are stolen in the United States go south of the border each year. (Easton, 2004) Many of the cartels, such as La Familia Michoacana (FM), run used car lots as a part of their businesses and as a way to launder money.

We are also smuggling massive amount of drug money into Mexico. O’Neil (2009) cited estimates that \$25 Billion dollars a year in drug money was going from the United States into the pockets of the Mexican DTO’s. This acts as a destabilizing effect on the Mexican society buying corruption, paying for drug cartels, and presenting a very visible view that there are other than legitimate means to achieve perceived success.

Money Laundering

The massive amount of money smuggled into Mexico as a result of the drug trade is laundered and put to use by the cartels. Casa De Cambios are a money exchange that operates in Mexico and other countries. They have been a frequent source for money laundering drug monies according to South Florida Police Investigator and consultant Michael Hearn (2009) . Wilkinson’s (2008) investigation found that:

“Banking controls are notoriously lax in Mexico, making it easier for money to be wired or deposited into accounts, then spent on goods and services. All-cash transactions are common, especially for big-ticket items such as mansions, and Hummers and armored BMWs, and to pay the legions who work for the drug mafias. The money is increasingly being sunk into artwork, gold, and commodities.”

Narcocorrido Music and the Mexican DTO’s

A corrido is a ballad in Mexican music. Narcocorrido is a ballad that sings about drug trafficking, Mexican DTO operations, Human Trafficking, and other types of violence or smuggling. Narcocorrido music glamorizes the gangster lifestyle south of the border. Cartel leaders and players sometimes commission narcocorridos to sing about their exploits. This falls within the social bandit tradition. The Los Tigres Del Norte is among the bands that sing Narcocorrido music. They say that they are storey tellers, singing about life and what is happening in Mexico. What is happening currently are the narco-wars.

A Drug/Death Cult Religion For Dopers?

Desperate people often turn to religion for spiritual guidance. Saint Death or La Santa Muerte is a long standing tradition in Mexico that pre-dates the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. Rituals invoking that intervention of the saint ask for protection or favorers for the postulant. Many of the rituals mimic those of the Roman Catholic Church, but some are more like Santeria rites practiced by other Hispanic cultures. Luhnnow and De Cordoba (2009) found that:

“ Mexican drug gangs even have an unofficial religion. They worship La Santa Muerte, a Mexican version of the Grim Reaper.”

Another interesting practice that is common, especially for those from Sinaloa, is the offering of prayers to the spirit of Jesus Malverde. Malverde was a bandit in Sinaloa, Mexico who was executed by the Mexican government in 1909. Malverde was a social bandit and contributed some of his takings to the poor of the region. He was a folk hero to the people and an enemy of the powerful. People who are involved in the local drug trade have seized on his image building shrines in Sinaloa, making statues, icons and marketing clothing etc. with his picture. There is even a Malverde beer. Hawley (2008) found that:

“The beer’s maker, the small Minerva Brewery in Guadalajara, donates 1% of its profits to a chapel dedicated to Malverde in the city of Culiacán. The company says the beer is not meant to glamorize the drug trade. “We’re just trying to honor a Mexican legend, that’s all,” said Jesús Briseño, the brewery’s general manager.”

When studying Malverde and the imagery involved in the Mexican drug culture Botsch (2008) found this prayer used by drug traffickers asking spiritual protection from law enforcement:

“Lord Malverde, give your voluntary help to my people in the name of god. Defend me from justice and the jails of those powerful ones. Listen to my prayer and fill my heart with happiness. For you shall make me fortunate.”

Violence Is Seen As A Legitimate Tactic

If anything characterizes this conflict, it is the extreme violence being used by the cartels against each other, the government forces and the population. The cartel sicarios or enforcers roam almost at will. Not only killings, but beheadings of cartel victims are becoming commonplace. (Brennan, 2008, Luhnnow and Cordoba, 2009) Williams (2009) observed that:

“ In Mexico the violence has centered around the control of drug routes and strategic warehouses on the Mexico-United States border as well as control of local retail markets.”

As the narco-conflict in Mexico escalates, O’Neil (2009) observed that with the assassinations, kidnappings and intimidation by drug lords it has begun to resemble Columbia in the 1990’s. He stated that:

“Drug cartels have begun using guerrilla-style tactics: sending heavily armed battalions to attack police stations and assassinating police officers, government officials, and journalists. And they have adopted innovative

public relations strategies to recruit supporters and intimidate their enemies: displaying narcomantas—banners hung by drug traffickers—in public places and uploading videos of gruesome beheadings to YouTube.”

Massive Drug War Casualties on All Sides

In recent years, drug trafficking gangs have resorted to decapitations and dismemberments against their foes in northern and southern Mexico. Hitmen often leave notes on the bodies indicating it was a drug-related assassination. In an incident in Merida in Yucatan, 11 decapitated male bodies were discovered on 08/29/08 . A 12th headless body was discovered about 45 miles away in Buctzotz. (AFP, 2008)

According to the LA Times (2009) there have been 7,337 drug war related deaths between 01/01/07 and 02/21/09 in Mexico. Some estimates run as high as 17,000 killed between 2006-2009. Thousands more have been wounded. Tens of thousands are refugees or have had their lives affected.

Police, Governmental, Military Officials and Their Families Murdered

The Mexican government’s campaign against the drug cartels has not been without sacrifice. Hundreds of Mexican police and government officials have been murdered by the DTO’s since the mid-1990’s. (Roth, 2010) Assassinations of police and government officials are commonplace. The murder on May 8, 2008 of Mexico’s National Police Chief Edgar Eusebio Millán Gómez by agents of the Sinaloa cartel was part of a series of such killings. Weapons were recovered at the scene that were marked FEDA meaning Arturo’s Special Forces in Spanish which referred to Arturo Beltrán Leyva (now a leader of the Beltron Leyva cartel) whose brother Alfredo had been captured by government forces a few days before. (Roig-Franzia, 2008)

Another example, occurred in Ciudad Jurez, on 02/09/09 an ambulance carrying a police plainclothes commander who had been wounded in a shootout was stopped by DTO killers and the officer murdered (Bringas, 2009).

Spillover Violence in the United States

The violence of the Mexican drug wars has spilled over into the United States. This has occurred not only in border towns but in many areas of the county such as Atlanta, Georgia and Columbiana, Alabama (Arrillaga, 2009). Burton and Stewart (2009) observed that:

“The spillover of violence from Mexico began some time ago in border towns like Laredo and El Paso, Texas, where merchants and wealthy families face extortion and kidnapping threats from Mexican gangs, and where drug dealers who refuse to pay “taxes” to Mexican cartel bosses are gunned down. But now, the threat posed by Mexican criminals is beginning to spread north from the U.S. –Mexican border. On location that has felt this expanding threat most acutely is Phoenix, some 185 miles north of the border. Some sensational cases have highlighted the increased threat in Phoenix, such as a June, 2008 armed assault in which a group of heavily armed cartel gunmen

dressed like a Phoenix Police Department tactical team fired more than 100 rounds into a residence during the targeted killing of a Jamaican drug dealer who had double-crossed a Mexican cartel. We have also observed cartel violence in places like Dallas and Austin, Texas. But Phoenix has been the hardest hit.”

Caldwell (2009) interviewed David Cuthbertson who is the SAC in the FBI office in El Paso, Texas. Stating that the violence follows the drugs, he said that:

“ The violence takes many forms: Drug customers who owe money are kidnapped until they pay up, Cartel Employees who don’t deliver the goods or turn over the profits are disciplined through beatings, kidnapped or worse. And drug smugglers kidnap illegal immigrants in clashes with human smugglers over the use of secret routes from Mexico”

Caldwell (2009) went on to cite two other instances of spill over violence that had occurred in the United States saying:

“In an apartment in Columbiana, Ala., police found five men with their throats slit in August. They had apparently been tortured with electric shocks before being killed in a murder-for-hire orchestrated by a Mexican drug organization over a drug debt of about \$400,000.....Last summer, Atlanta-area police found a Dominican man who had been beaten, bound, gagged and chained to a wall in a quiet, middle class neighborhood in Lilburn, Ga. The 31-year-old Rhode Island resident owed \$300,000 to Mexico’s Gulf Cartel,...”

The Murders of the Narcocorrido Musicians

In a strange twist, at least 20 Narcocorrido musicians were murdered between May , 2006 and February, 2008 in separate incidents. Singing the praises of the wrong side has its’ hazards. For example, Sergio Gomez, lead singer of the band K-Paz de la Sierra was murdered 12/04/07 in the Michoacan capitol of Morella after a concert.

The “Stew Maker”

On 01/23/09, Mexican drug suspect Santiago Meza, known as “El pozolero” (The Stew Maker), was arrested. Meza confessed to dissolving the bodies of 300 rivals with corrosive chemicals near the U.S. border, in a shocking claim even by the standards of Mexico’s brutal drug war. According to Alex Alvarez (2009):

“Meza had admitted to stuffed bodies into barrels of lye on behalf of drug cartels. A helpful sort of fellow, he is. According to Meza, his process for disposing of bodies included filling a barrel with water and bags of lye, lighting a fire underneath, and bringing the liquid to a boil before dumping a body into the bubbling mixture. After 24 hours, he would dump the remains in a pit and set them on fire. Because the resulting pink liquid resembles ‘pozole,’ Meza referred to his job as ‘making stew.’ His activities went

unreported because, in the words of a neighboring pig farmer, 'It's best to be ignorant of such diabolical things.' El Pozolero apparently liquified bodies for lieutenants of the Arellano Felix drug cartel, which is thought to be responsible for thousands of deaths and missing people in the area. “

The Cartels

One of the first things that you notice about Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations is that they are a family affair. Fathers, sons, uncles, cousins are all in it together.

Arellano-Felix Drug Cartel aka “Tijuana Cartel”

The Arellano-Felix cartel began as an off shoot of the Guadalajara cartel led by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. With the arrest of Gallarado and isolation in a high security prison after he was found to be still running the cartel via mobile phone from prison, the business passed to his nephews (the Arellano Félix brothers) in the 1990's. The Arellano Felix family had seven brothers and four sisters.

It is one of the most violent of the gangs from Mexico. Ramon Arellao Felix was killed in a shootout with police in 2002. Francisco Javier Arello Felix was arrested and convicted of drug and weapon charges. He was in custody from 1993-2008 and now is back in Mexico. Francisco Javier Arellano Félix was captured by the USCG in 2006 and remains in U.S. custody. Edwardo Arellano-Félix aka “the doctor” was arrested 10/26/08 after a shootout with Mexican police and remains in custody. (Noticieros Televisa, 2008) Benjamin Arellano –Felix was the leader and was arrested in 2002 by Mexican authorities, Carlos Arellano-Felix was captured by Mexican authorities, Sisters Alicia and Enedina were also involved in the cartels operations. Luis Fernando Sanchez Arellano Felix is Enedina's son and the current leader.

The cartel supplies methamphetamine to distributors in U.S. cities such as San Ysidro and San Diego. They operate on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border and smuggle between 50 and 100 pounds of methamphetamine into the United States monthly. (DEA, 2008) .They are present in at least 15 Mexican States with most active areas of operations in Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate, Esenda (Baja California) and Sinaloa (Cook, 2007). The groups is headquartered in Tijuana. They are enemies with the Gulf cartel.

Amando Carrillo-Fuentes Organization aka “Juárez Cartel”

The Amando-Carrillo-Fuentes Organization was founded in the 1970's by Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Rafael Aguilar Guajardo (died ,1993) and was based in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. At one time it was the most powerful drug group in Mexico. It operates from Hermosillo in the west across the border to Arizona and from Juarez into Texas. A seizure in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in 1995 of 315 kilograms of methamphetamine was tied to the CARRILLO-Fuentes organization.

At least parts of this shipment were destined for Washington, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Georgia. (DEA, 2008)

Amado Carrillo-Fuentes (1956-1997) was head of the AFO after assuming leadership from his uncle, Ernesto in 1993 after the death of Rafael in 1993 (Roth, 2010). He was known as “Lord of the Skies” for his use of air transport of drugs. Forged alliances with Gulf and Cali cartels. He died during a botched plastic surgery in 1997 in an attempt to change his appearance and avoid capture by the government. (Viano, Magallanes, and Bridel, 2003) He was a social bandit in the true tradition of the phrase. He gave away money, cars and cattle to peasants in his area of operations. He even built a church in one village. His funeral was almost a state occasion in Guamuchilito, Sinaloa.

The Juarez cartel is active in 21 Mexican states. Their main bases are in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. Their headquarters is in Juarez (Cook, 2007). The cartel is powerful enough to have forced the recent resignation of the police chief in Juarez.

Vincente Carrelo Leyva was arrested 04/02/09 by Mexican Federal Police in Mexico D.F. . Carrelo Leyva is the son of the late Amado Carrillo Fuentes . He became 2nd in command on his father’s death in 1997 (Castillo, 2009).

Amezcuca-Contreras Organization aka Colima Cartel

The Amezcuca-Contreras Organization was formed in 1988 by brothers: Luis Amezcuca (arrested, 1998), Jose de Jesus Amezcuca (arrested, 1998) and Adan Amezcuca-Contreras in Guadalajara and Jalisco.. They are the largest known importer of ephedrine into Mexico and across the U.S. border. (Roth, 2010) The cartel imports ephedrine (a essential precursor in methamphetamine production) from India and Thailand. The Colima cartel manufactures methamphetamine. The cartel also transships cocaine for the Columbians and engages in human trafficking. Methamphetamine smuggling operations by this group extend into the United States and Europe. They are enemies of FM.

They operate primarily out of Guadalajara, but, through agreements with other Mexican gangs, the group has extended its trafficking operations all along the border. It controls methamphetamine laboratories in Guadalajara and Tijuana and employs associates across the border in ephedrine and methamphetamine trafficking, especially in Southern California. (DEA, 2008) Since the arrest of the founding brother , they also operate under the name of the Colima Cartel.

Beltran-Leyva Cartel

The Beltran-Leyva cartel was formed by Beltran-Leyva brothers, Auturo (killed 12/16/09), Carlos (captured 01/02/10), Mario Alfredo aka “El Mochomo” (Captured 01/21/08) , Hector aka “El General”, Marcos (current leader) , that were formerly with the Sinaloan Cartel’s Los Negros. They broke with the Sinaloan cartel after the arrest of Alfredo. Auturo was allegedly involved in the retaliatory murder of the Mexican Nation Police Chief Gomez and the assassination of Joaquin

“Chapo” Guzmán’s son Édgar Guzmán López that occurred after the arrest of Alfredo. Aururo blamed El Chapo for not doing enough to prevent the arrest of Alfredo.

The Beltran-Leyva cartel has allied with the Juarez cartel, the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas. They are also allied with the Norte Valle cartel in Columbia. They are currently enemies with the Sinaolan Cartel and El Chapo . They are noted for their violence. In Acapulco , on 06/07/09, 18 people were killed in a firefight between Beltran Leyva cartel members and police/military forces trying to rescue 4 kidnapped policemen. Cartel members used AK-47 rifles and hand grenades to combat government forces (Torres, 2009).

On December 16, 2009, Auturo and Hector were killed in a shootout with over 200 Mexican Marines and Beltron-Leyva gunmen that lasted over two hours. One of the marines, was killed. On December 22, 2009 after the funeral of the slain marine, gunmen from the Beltron-Leyva cartel broke into the family home and killed the marine’s mother and three other relatives in retaliation. Brother Carlo was captured by Mexican government forces on 01/02/10. With the death or capture of most of the brothers, it is unknown how much longer that this cartel will be an effective player in the drug wars.

Caro-Quintero Organization

Beginning as a marijuana growing operation, the Caro-Quintero Major is a transporter of cocaine, heroin and marijuana into the United States from Mexico. They have expanded to methamphetamine trafficking. Miguel Caro-Quintero founded this group in the 1980’s (arrested, 2001). Bother Rafael is in prison for the murder of DEA Special Agent Kiki Camarena in 1985. (Frontline, 1997)

The group operates from Hermosillo, Agua Prieta, Guadalajara, and Culiacan as well as the Mexican states of San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, and Sonora. Its smuggling routes extend into California, Arizona, Texas, and Nevada and it is responsible for trafficking hundred-pound quantities through Arizona ports of entry. Aligning with the ARELLANO-Felix organization (DEA, 2008).

Gulf Cartel

The Gulf Cartel was founded in the 1970’s by Juan Neopomuceno Gurra Cardenasc (1915-2001), a long time smuggler of firearms, liquor and heavy equipment out of Matamoros. (Paternostro, 1995) He went into the drug smuggling business with his nephew Jaun Garcia Abrego. Abrego is known for expanding the drug smuggling operations of the Gulf both horizontally and vertically. Smugglers were turned into suppliers. In the 1980’s he cut deals with Columbian Cali Cartel to transship cocaine through Mexico into the U.S. He was arrested on January 14, 1996 on a ranch outside Monterrey. Abrego was extradited to the United States. He was convicted and is currently serving 11 life terms in Federal custody.

Oscar Malherbe De León became the head of the Gulf cartel after the arrest of Abrego. He forged alliances with AFO and the Cali Cartels to transship cocaine from

Columbia. After the death of AFO's Fuentes, The Gulf Cartel became the most powerful cartel in the east of Mexico sharing trafficking with the Federation in Western Mexico. De Leon was arrested latter in 1996 and was replaced by Salvador "El Chava" Gómez . Gomez was murdered latter that year. Osiel Cardenas Guillen became chief of the gulf Cartel. Guillen was captured 2003 in Mexico by DEA , FBI, ICE and Mexican authorities in Operation Golden Grips. However, he continues to run the cartel from prison.

The Gulf Cartel deals in cocaine, marijuana and human trafficking. They are allied with Columbian OC , Los Zetas, and the Beltran-Leyva Cartel . Their enemies include the: Sinaloa Cartel, Juarez Cartel, and Tijuana Cartel . The Gulf Cartel is present in 13 Mexican States. Their main areas of operation include: Nuevo Laredo, Miguel Aleman, Reynosa and Matamoros in Tamaulipas. Monterrey in Nuevo Leon and Morelia in Michoacan (Cook, 2007).

Los Zetas

Los Zetas were created in the late 1990's by 30 Lieutenant's from the Grupo Aeromovil de Fueras Especiales GAFES who decided to switch sides in the drug wars (Cook, 2007). The former Mexican anti-drug commandos that have now entered the drug trade in support of Mexican DTO's. The group now includes many former law enforcement personnel. Former soldier Heribero Lazcano aka Z3 is the current leader of Los Zetas. (Emmott, 2008) Mateo Diaz Lopez is the alleged leader of the Zetas in Tabasco (Ramirez, 2006). The Los Zetas main enemies are the Sinaloa cartel and their main allies are the Gulf cartel, La 18, and sometimes MS-13.

Los Zetas originally worked for the Gulf Cartel. According to Cook (2007) The Zetas act as assassins for the Gulf Cartel. They traffic in arms, kidnap and collect payments for the cartel on its drug routes. They are extremely violent, well trained, well equipped, and well organized. They have been aggressively recruiting among Mexican Military and Law Enforcement personnel. Emmott (2008) observed that:

"A flyer posted on a monument reads: 'The Zetas want you, soldier or former soldier. We offer good salary, food and family care. Don't go hungry any longer.' In one of its most audacious acts yet, Mexico's Gulf cartel drug gang this week openly advertised for government troops to desert their ranks."

An example of a Los Zetas' operation occurred on 05/17/09. Twenty armed men dressed in Mexican Federal Police Uniforms arrived in a convoy of SUV's with federal police markings raided Cieneguillas Prison in Zacatecas freeing 53 prisoners. The raiders were alleged to have been members of the Zetas who had threatened the prison for months. Alejandro Rojas Chalico, the public security minister of Zacatecas resigned as a result of this incident. Security cameras show armed inmates and guards standing idly by as the inmates leave (AAP, 2009). The ability to conduct platoon level paramilitary operations gives a whole new level of difficulty for the Mexican military and law enforcement personnel that oppose them.

La Familia Michoacana (FM)

La Familia Michoacana was formed in 2006 in the state of Michoacan as a splinter group of the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas by Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (En Mas Loco). Gonzalez carries a “bible” of his own sayings and preaches that his followers have a “divine right” to conduct their activities. The FM does not want its followers using drugs, but they are perfectly willing to sell drugs. (Rosenberg & Rama, 2009) The FM leaders refer to their assassinations and beheadings as “divine justice.” Tactics used by this group are extremely violent. Beheadings of FM enemies are common. The bodies of victims are often left with notes explaining their demise. Internet videos and narco-banners are also used to spread the FM message. FM is so bold that they have taken out newspaper advertisements explaining their position and their deeds. (Grayson, 2009) FM is heavily involved in the corruption of government officials especially in the state of Michoacan. (Wilkinson, 2009)

La Familia Michoacana has an estimated 4,000 members. Its area of operations includes: The Mexican states of Michoacan, Baja California, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Mexico City, Nuevo Leon, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. In the United States, FM is active in Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Texas. They count as allies the Tijuana Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel. Their enemies include : Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, and Beltran-Leyva Cartel. FM is involved in: drug trafficking, counterfeiting, extortion, kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution and car dealerships.

La Familia Director of Operations Arnoldo Rueda was captured by Mexican Federal authorities on 07/11/09. Retaliation for the arrest of Rueda was swift. According to Watson (2009):

“Within minutes of the weekend arrest of the La Familia drug cartel’s operations chief, the gang launched deadly attacks in President Felipe Calderon’s home state. In the worst, 12 federal agents were killed execution-style, their tortured bodies piled along a roadside as a warning for all to see. Near the bloodied bodies of the 12 agents dumped in a heap Monday off a mountain highway near La Huacana was a message: “Let’s see if you try to arrest another one.”

The attacks spread to 10 cities. A total of 18 federal agents were killed, 24 wounded.

Sinaloa Cartel aka Pacific Cartel

The Sinaloa cartel was founded in the 1990’s after the breakup of the Guadalajara cartel, and was led by Hector Luis Palma Salazar. Joaquin «El Chapo» Guzmán Loera is the current leader. (Roth, 2010) He escaped from the maximum security Puente Grande prison in 1993 and remains at large. The cartel dominates the methamphetamine trade to the United States in both production and transport.

According to the DEA (2009): “The Sinaloa Cartel is responsible for bringing multi-ton quantities of narcotics, including cocaine and marijuana, from Mexico into the United States through an enterprise of distribution cells in the United States and Canada. The Sinaloa Cartel is also believed to be responsible for

laundering millions of dollars in criminal proceeds from illegal drug trafficking activities.” In Operation Xcellerator the DEA acting with local and Mexican authorities, seized over 23 tons of narcotics, seized over \$59 million dollars in drug money and arrested over 750 suspects in Mexico, California, Minnesota, and Maryland.

The Sinaloa cartel is active in 17 Mexican States. They have a presence in Mexico City, Tepic, Nayarit, Toluca and Cuautitlan. They are currently headquartered in Sinaloa. They are sometimes allied with the Colima cartel, La Familia Michocana, the Mexican Mafia and MS-13. They are currently enemies with: Beltran-Leyva cartel, Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, Tijuana cartel, and the Juarez cartel. The cartel operates on both sides of the border.

Los Negros and Pelones

The Negros and Pelones are enforcer gangs and paramilitary organizations that work for the Sinaloa Cartel. (Cook, 2007) According to a article in La Tribuna (2008) Edgard Valdez Villareal, alias “La Barbie” is the current head of the Negros. The Negros battle the Zetas for control in Nuevo Leon and other places. Sometimes they are allied with the Mexican Mafia & MS-13.

The Federation

Although it has been weakened by arrests in its leadership, the DEA still lists the Federation as a major player in the drug trade in Mexico. The Federation evolved from the Guadalajara cartel, which was formed in the 1980’s by Rafael CARO-Quintero and Miguel FELIX-Gallardo in order to ship heroin and marijuana to the United States. Currently, its leadership consists of Chapo GUZMAN of the Sinaloa Cartel, Hector PALMA-Salazar and Amado CARRILLO-Fuentes, (now the dominant force). The ARELLANO-Felix brothers - laying claim to FELIX-Gallardo’s former leadership position and by virtue of their control over smuggling in Sonora - also are battling for influence. (DEA, 2008) Representatives from the Sinaloa, Juarez and Valencia cartels work together but remain independent organizations (Cook, 2007).

Cartel heads make the major decisions, broker security with corrupt officials, and negotiate at the international level. They retain overall authority over land, sea, and air movement of all drugs, liaise with the influential political families, establish major front operations, and generally facilitate cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and now methamphetamine movement to major U.S. markets. Division chiefs, the working arm of the Federation, are responsible for all stages of smuggling into the United States. It is this level on down that law enforcement confronts directly through investigations, seizures, and arrests.

Gatekeepers, who control major ports of entry, facilitate trafficking on both sides of the border. Although they may owe allegiance to a certain division chief or cartel head, they will move drugs for other gangs at a price. Family syndicates, small time brokers at the bottom of this informal structure, operate along the border and in

the United States and are employed to off-load, transport, store, and distribute drugs (DEA, 2008).

Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional, EZLN

In the state of Chiapas about 3,000 insurgents belong to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN which is descended from the Zapatista movement. The EZLN historically has not dealt in drugs on a large scale, if at all. Signs are posted in ELZN territories that state planting in or dealing drugs is officially prohibited. This is an anarchist and socialist group that fights the Mexican Government.

However, a recent cache of weapons destined for EZLN was intercepted by Mexican government authorities. The weapons were being sent by Los Zetas. It is unclear whether the weapons were sold to EZLN, being sent as payment for drugs, payment for passage through EZLN territory, or this could signal a possible new alliance between Los Zetas and EZLN.

Valencia Cartel

Valencia cartel is in the state of Michoacan. Its primary business is the transshipment of cocaine from the Columbian cartels to the United States. Cartel leader, Elias Valencia was arrested in Aguililla, Michoacan on 12/17/06. His father Armando Valencia was arrested in 2003. They have ties with Columbian cartels. Their allies include the Sinaloa cartel, and they are active in the Federation. They count as enemies the Gulf Cartel. Crippled by arrests, they are not as big a player as they once were (Grillo, 2006; Cook, 2007).

Alliances With American Street Gangs

In a disturbing trend, Mexican DTO's have begun to ally themselves with American Street gangs, outlaw motorcycle clubs, and prison gangs. The National Drug Intelligence Center (2008) found that:

“Mexican DTOs continue to strengthen their relationships with U.S.-based street gangs, prison gangs, and OMGs for the purpose of expanding their influence over domestic drug distribution. Although gangs do not appear to be part of any formal Mexican DTO structure, several Mexican DTOs use U.S.-based gangs to smuggle and distribute drugs, collect drug proceeds, and act as enforcers. Mexican DTOs' use of gang members for these illegal activities insulates DTO cell members from law enforcement detection. Members of most Mexican Cartels--Sinaloa, Gulf, Juárez, and Tijuana maintain working relationships with many street gangs and OMGs. “

Mexican DTO's have recently allied with two American Hispanic gangs, MS-13 and La 18. They are using gang members as soldiers in the drug wars, Gang members are used as transport to smuggle drugs and illegal immigrants into the U.S. .Gang members smuggle stolen autos and handguns into Mexico for the cartels.

Other U.S. outlaw motorcycle clubs, street and prison gangs assist the Mexican DTO's with transport and distribution of illicit drugs across the United States. The gangs are involved in various levels, sometimes acting in conjunction with the cartels, sometimes acting as agents and transporting the drugs for the cartels. The prison gangs also have people on the outside and assist cartel members captured on the inside of the walls. American gangs that are involved in this relationship include: Bandidos (OMC), Barrio Azteca (Prison Gang), Bilby Street Crips (Street Gang), La 18 (Street Gang), Latin Kings (Street Gang), Mongols (OMC), Mexican Mafia (Prison Gang), MS-13 (Street Gang), Nortenos (Street Gang), South Family Bloods (Street Gang), Southside Posse Bloods (Street Gang), Surenos 13 (Street Gang), Texas Syndicate (Prison Gang), and West Coast Crips (Street Gang) (Burton & West, 2009).

Counter-Drug/Counter Insurgency Operations

Massive Military and Police Deployments

The Mexican government has deployed almost their entire police and military into the fight against the drug cartels. The LA Times (2009) stated that President Felipe Calderon had deployed 45,000 troops from the Mexican Army and another 5,000 federal police in 18 states to fight the Mexican DTO's. This places a huge economic burden on the Mexican economy to pay for these operations.

Meiners and Burton (2009) observed that the Mexican military was being used in some duties traditionally performed by Mexican law enforcement authorities. These areas include: drug-crop eradication, meth-lab seizures, immigration and customs inspections at point of entry and exist, raids and arrests of high value cartel targets, and general public safety and law enforcement duties. They state that this has caused civil rights concerns among many in the Mexican population. However, they note that the Mexican military has been very effective in some of these roles.

Army Not Popular

The involvement of the Mexican military in civil law enforcement is not popular in some segments of the Mexican population. They remember the Mexican Civil War of 1910-1923 and the previous role of the military in Mexico. Sometimes the DTO's have paid sympathizers annoy or delay the soldiers. Confirming this, Monterrey state prosecutor and head of public security, Mr. Fasci told Luhnnow and Decordoba (2009) that:

“Mr. Fasci says the protests are organized by drug gangs, who go to barrios like Independencia and pay \$30 to each person to block traffic, hold up signs like ‘no military repression’. Mr. Fasci thinks the gangs are trying to goad the police into a crackdown that would generate antipathy for the authorities and the army. “We’re not going to fall for it,” he says.”

Other times ordinary citizens take to the streets in protest of the involvement of the military in what they view a police or civil matter.

Corruption Problems

The tradition of *mordida* or a bribe is long standing in Mexico. The Mexican Police and Military forces have had a history of corruption problems stemming from low pay, lack of equipment and lack of determined leadership. In some cases, federal police have been fired upon by local police in the employ of the cartels (Cook, 2007). Examining this phenomenon, Luhnnow and De Cordoba (2009) spoke with a veteran Mexican cop and reported:

“Jorge, clean cut and with an infectious smile has been a state cop for more than 20 years. He earns some 6,000 pesos--\$450—a month. It is an old saw in Mexico the police here don’t make enough money to either resist being corrupted by the criminal or care enough to risk their lives going after them. In fact, corruption extends throughout the police forces. A senior state official said privately that he doesn’t trust a single local police commander. The states former head of public security resigned amid allegations that he was in league with the Sinaloa cartel.”

The Calderon government is making a concerted effort to root out corruption in Mexico and has had some major successes. However problem seems to be massive in scale. Stevenson (2008) cited an effort by the Mexican government to examine the background and security clearances for Mexican law enforcement officials. He noted that nationwide almost half failed and in the state of Baja the failure rate was 9 out of 10 officers.

Recruiting and Retaining Police is Hard

In addition to low pay and the everyday fact you can get killed, Mexican police have to deal with threats and retaliation against their families. Enticements from DTO’s have caused many to switch sides and work for the drug dealers. Low morale, bad pay, mediocre leadership causes a high turnover rate among the local police. Police retention is further harmed by fears by the police for their physical safety. Grayson (2009) cites the example of 18 of the 32 police officers in the Tepalcatepec area resigning after receiving death threats from La Familia Michoacan. Quinones observed that:

“Constant turnover breeds incompetence, improvisation, and corruption. Local cops are poorly paid, trained, and equipped. They have to ration bullets and gas and are easily given to bribery. Their morale stinks. So what should be the first line of defense against criminal gangs is instead anemic and easily compromised.”

The Mexican Government is Working To Solve The Problems

Between 2000-2007 the Mexican government arrested over 89,000 people on charge related to drug trafficking. Many were low level dealers, but many were cartel leaders or employees. (Cook, 2007) The Mexican government has rejected offers by the cartels and FM cartel leader Servando “La Tuta” Gomez to call a truce or make a deal in the drug war. (Stevenson, 2009) The Calderon government has begun to

extradite wanted felons to the U.S. The Mexican government has adopted the DEA's kingpin strategy to combat the drug cartels and is going after the leaders with some major successes.

The Mexican government is striving to eliminate corruption and establish quality law enforcement and the rule of law in Mexico. The old Policia Judicial Federal (PJF) was disbanded in 2002 due to corruption problems. It has been replaced by forces such as the Policia Federal Preventiva (PFP). The force, created in 1999, works together with the military to fight the drug cartels (Time,2009).

American Efforts to Assist

US Aid to Mexico

In the Merida Initiative the US is providing Mexico \$400 million to pay for helicopters, surveillance aircraft, non-intrusive inspection equipment, K-9 units, ion scanners, communications systems, case tracking software and other items to assist the Mexican Police (ABP, 2009) Other assistance to Mexico is funneled through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement account (INCLE). Mexico is one of the largest recipients of American anti-drug aid (Cook, 2007).

President Obama's Visit To Mexico

President Obama visited Mexico in April, 2009. During the trip he promised the Mexican government more aid in the war against the drug cartels. He also promised the more efforts would be forthcoming on the United States side of the border to combat the traffic in guns and in the areas of drug demand reduction (BBC, 2009).

Possible Solutions : The Border, Demand Reduction and Other Efforts

Victory or even survival in the drug wars will take efforts on both sides of the border. The solutions are going to require efforts on both parts and include demand reduction in the United States. Cook (2007) observed that:

“The Mexican government has become increasingly critical of U.S. counternarcotics efforts. It contends that its counternarcotics efforts will fail without more U.S. support to: reduce arms trafficking into Mexico; stop the trafficking of drug earnings into Mexico; and reduce American demands for illicit drugs. Requesting assistance from the United States is a sensitive issue in Mexico, a country that traditionally has been wary of U.S. intervention. U.S. criticism of drug trafficking and crime in Mexico is perceived by many to be unfair because most of the drugs being trafficked through Mexican territory are for consumption in the United States. Recent criticisms of the United States by President Calderon and other Mexican officials likely seek to address these concerns and to frame the drug trafficking issue as one of shared responsibility between the United States and Mexico.”

Summary

What Has Happened

There is a serious organized crime problem in Mexico. The extent of which threatens the rule of law in Mexico. Often government officials are either assassinated, bribed or frightened into inaction (Birns & Sanchez, 2008). The corruption and drug related violence prevent development and discourage foreign investment. There is a real danger that the Mexican government could be destabilized by these narco-conflicts. There have been incidents of “spillover” violence into the United States that authorities fear will increase. (Quinones, 2009; Caldwell, 2009; Burton & Stewart, 2009) The Mexican drug trafficking organizations have spread their operations all through Central and South America (Llorca & Bajak, 2009).

Mexican DTO’s are involved in the manufacture of Heroin, Marijuana, and Methamphetamine. They are involved in the transport of cocaine from the Columbian Cartels. Mexican DTO’s also engage in Human Trafficking. The Mexican DTO’s are fighting the efforts of the Mexican government to bring them under control and each other for control of the drug trade. They are a very dangerous OC organization on our southern border. To combat the threat posed by the Mexican DTO’s, the Mexican government has deployed a massive military and police response. The Calderon government is giving its all to this fight.

What could Happen

There is a fear expressed by many, including the U.S. Joint Forces Command’s Joint Operating Environment 2008 report that Mexico’s government could collapse under the weight of this narco-conflict and become a failed state. (O’Neil, 2009) Fears include the conflict spilling over into the United States and masses of refugees fleeing into the United States to avoid the violence. In a worst case scenario there could be a repeat of the 1910-1923 Mexican Civil War. This would result in even more death and destruction inside Mexico and a real danger of spreading into the United States. Mexico is a valuable trading partner and ally. Any major disruptions or civil unrest could have economic, military, law enforcement and political repercussions in the United States. Messing and Rohrhoff (2008) observed that:

“ The prospect that a collapsing Mexican government could have U.S. soldiers rushing to the border for a conflict that they could drive to on a single tank of gas, is looming in the distance. If the United States continues to neglect the severity of issues in Mexico, Americans could be looking at active warfare and a refugee nightmare a mere two-hour drive from Phoenix. The United States must ratchet up its support for Mexico in its fight. “

In A Perfect World

Last year, the Heineken Brewing Company ran a commercial intended for the Mexican Beer market, that simply said: “In a perfect world”. It showed a map of

Mexico with the pre-1835 boundaries when Mexico covered a large portion of the Southwestern United States and then a bottle of their beer. It was intended to be funny and the Mexicans loved it. There was a storm of protest in the United States and the advertisement was withdrawn. But what it does show is there exist some very different views of what is a good thing on both sides of the border.

In order to be successful in the fight against drugs and the drug cartels it is going to take massive efforts on both sides of the border. The problem is not Mexico's alone. The contention by the Mexican government that the United States must undertake a demand reduction effort for drug consumption in the United States is essential to the overall success of any anti-drug efforts in Mexico. In that perfect world, the Mexican cartels would have no customers for their drugs and therefore would not produce them.

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