

# **Is the Narco-violence in Mexico an Insurgency?**

**A Monograph  
by  
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**AY 2011**

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| <b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>Form Approved<br/>OMB No. 0704-0188</b>                  |                                                                          |
| <small>Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.</small> |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b><br>18-05-2011                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | <b>2. REPORT TYPE</b><br>SAMS Monograph |                                              | <b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b><br>July 2010 - May 2011 |                                                                          |
| <b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b><br>Is the Narco-violence in Mexico an Insurgency?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>                                  |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>                                     |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>                           |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>                                   |                                                                          |
| <b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b><br>CW4 Michael G. Rogan<br>U.S. Army                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>                                      |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>                                 |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b><br>School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS)<br>250 Gibbon Avenue<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION<br/>REPORT NUMBER</b>         |                                                                          |
| <b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b><br>U.S. Army Command and General Staff College<br>ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>                     |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              | <b>11. SPONSORING/MONITORING<br/>AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>   |                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b><br>Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>14. ABSTRACT</b><br>See Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b><br>Mexico, Insurgency, Transnational Criminal Organization, Drug Trafficking Organization, Drug Cartel, Organized Crime, Narcotrafficking, Narco-terrorism, Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas, Colombia, FARC, Medellin Cartel, Cali Cartel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                           |                                         |                                              |                                                             |                                                                          |
| <b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                           |                                         | <b>17. LIMITATION OF<br/>ABSTRACT</b><br>(U) | <b>18. NUMBER<br/>OF PAGES</b><br>53                        | <b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b><br>Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., COL, IN |
| <b>a. REPORT</b><br>(U)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>b. ABSTRACT</b><br>(U) | <b>c. THIS PAGE</b><br>(U)              |                                              |                                                             | <b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b><br>913-758-3302         |

# **SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES**

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## **Abstract**

Is the Narco-violence in Mexico an Insurgency? by CW4 Michael G. Rogan, U.S. Army, 53 pages.

Since Mexican President Felipe Calderón declared war on the drug cartels in December 2006, more than 35,000 Mexicans have died due to narco-violence.

This monograph examines whether the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations are insurgents or organized criminal elements. Mexican narco-violence and its affiliated gang violence have spread across Mexico's southern border into Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Additionally, the narco-violence is already responsible for the deaths of American citizens on both sides of the United States – Mexico border, and the potential for increased spillover violence is a major concern.

This monograph argues that the Mexican drug cartels are transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that pose a national security threat to the regional state actors; however, they are not an insurgency for four reasons. First, none of the cartels have the political aim or capability to overthrow the Mexican government. Second, the various TCOs are competing criminal organizations with approximately 90 percent of the violence being cartel on cartel. For example, the violence in the city of Juárez is largely the result of the fighting between the local Juárez cartel and the Sinaloa cartel for control of one of the primary smuggling routes into the United States. Third, the cartels' use of violence and coercion has turned popular support against them thus denying them legitimacy. Fourth, although the cartels do control zones of impunity within their areas of influence, the Mexican government has captured, killed, and extradited kingpins from every major TCO.

The monograph also examines the violence that has taken place in Colombia as a case study comparison for the current narco-violence in Mexico. The Colombian government battled and defeated both the Medellín and Cali drug cartels in the 1990s. It also has made significant progress against two leftist insurgent groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The Colombian government also reached agreement with the right-wing United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) who officially disbanded in April 2006.

The primary implication of this monograph is that it is the responsibility of the leadership of the Mexican government, its law enforcement institutions, its judicial system, and the military to defeat the TCOs. The case study of Colombia provides strong evidence of the importance of competent political, judicial, law enforcement, and military leadership. It is also clear that the United States provided valuable assistance, but it was the Colombians' efforts that reduced violence, secured the population, and marginalized the insurgents.

The conclusion of this monograph is that the TCOs have a weak case for being an insurgency due to their lack of legitimacy because violence has been excessively cruel and lacking in purpose in the eyes of the Mexican people.

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*Narco-state* noun

An area that has been taken over and is controlled by drug cartels and where law enforcement is effectively nonexistent

—Gary “Rusty” Fleming, *Drug Wars: Narco-warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

The “war on drugs” is nonsense. If there was a war on drugs, you would have a general in charge. There would be a clear end to the campaign. For five years I said stop using this metaphor “the war on drugs”- if it was a war we would use surprise and violence and deception and mass firepower, in a blitzkrieg campaign, and we would solve the problem and then we’d move on to something else. I think a more useful metaphor is a cancer, a cancer affecting American communities. I said this is not a war to be fought and won; this is equivalent of a cancer affecting American communities.

—General (retired) Barry McCaffrey<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Since Mexican President Felipe Calderón declared war on the drug cartels in December 2006, more than 35,000 Mexicans have died due to narco-violence. On September 8, 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the situation in Mexico: “We face an increasing threat from a well-organized, drug-trafficking threat that is, in some cases, morphing into, or making common cause with what we would consider an insurgency.”<sup>2</sup>

This monograph will examine whether the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations are insurgents or organized criminal elements. Mexican narco-violence and its affiliated gang violence have spread across Mexico’s southern border into the nations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Additionally, the narco-violence is already responsible for the deaths of American citizens on both sides of the United States – Mexico border, and the potential for increased spillover violence is a major concern.

This monograph argues that the Mexican drug cartels are transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that pose a national security threat to the regional state actors; however, they are not an insurgency for four reasons. First, none of the cartels have the political aim or capability to overthrow the Mexican government. Second, the various TCOs are competing criminal organizations with

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<sup>1</sup>Gary “Rusty” Fleming, *Drug Wars: Narco Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Gary “Rusty” Fleming, 2008), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Hillary Clinton, “A Conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton,” Council on Foreign Relations, September 8, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/diplomacy/conversation-us-secretary-state-hillary-rodham-clinton/p22896> (accessed January 27, 2011).

approximately 90 percent of the violence being cartel on cartel.<sup>3</sup> For example, the violence in the city of Juárez is largely the result of the fighting between the local Juárez cartel and the Sinaloa cartel for control of one of the primary smuggling routes into the United States. Third, the cartels' use of violence and coercion has turned popular support against them thus denying them legitimacy. Fourth, although the cartels do control zones of impunity within their areas of influence, the Mexican government has captured, killed, and extradited kingpins from every major TCO. The lesson is that it is only a matter of time before the rest of the kingpins will suffer the same fate.

When Secretary Clinton discussed Mexico as morphing into an insurgency, she was making a comparison to the Colombian narco-violence in the 1990s caused by the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. Clinton was also referring to the use of car bombs as a method to intimidate the Colombian government and its people.<sup>4</sup> Colombia's situation in the 1990s was in many respects worse than Mexico today. The homicide rate in Medellín in the 1990s was three times the current rate in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, where Juárez is located.<sup>5</sup> However, the Colombian drug lords, like Pablo Escobar, were wealthy outlaws, but not insurgents. They were fighting the Colombian government to preserve their illicit economic interests and to protest the threat of extradition to the United States. While the Colombian government was battling the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, it was also dealing with two left-wing guerrilla groups, the FARC and the ELN. With assistance from the United States, the Colombian government defeated first the Medellín cartel, then the Cali cartel using a strategy of disrupt and dismantle.<sup>6</sup> With the defeat of the two cartels and United States assistance in the form of Plan Colombia starting in 1998, the Colombian government has also made significant progress in defeating the FARC and the ELN.

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<sup>3</sup> David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001–2009." January 2010 (Trans-Border Institute: San Diego, CA, 2010), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations, September 8, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2010), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," 42.

Strategic Forecasting, Inc., more commonly known as STRATFOR, describes the narco-violence in Mexico as three wars. The three wars are the war between the cartels, the war between the government and the cartels, and the war being waged against citizens and businesses by criminals.<sup>7</sup>

### **Why Is Mexico Important?**

The targeting and death of US citizens inside Mexico could trigger a demand for the United States government to act more aggressively to protect its citizens in Mexico and near the border. On March 13, 2009, two American citizens and one United States government employee were targeted and killed in Juarez, Mexico. The separate but apparently coordinated attacks took place in daylight as the three were leaving a U.S. Consulate's children's party.<sup>8</sup> The second high profile incident was the shooting death of United States citizen David Hartley on September 30, 2010, on Falcon Lake that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border. The murder was committed by mistake by a low level member of one of Mexico's most dangerous TCOs, Los Zetas.<sup>9</sup> Then, in February 2011 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent Jaime Zapata was killed and another agent injured when they were ambushed on a highway in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí.<sup>10</sup> Since 2004, more than 200 American citizens have been killed in Mexico making it the third most dangerous place in the world for Americans after Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> However, the United States must proceed with caution because a visible military presence south of the border would be perceived badly by the Mexican people as an infringement on their sovereignty and

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Stewart, "Mexico's Gun Supply and the 90 Percent Myth," February 10, 2011, STRATFOR, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110209-mexicos-gun-supply-and-90-percent-myth> (accessed February 21, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> John McCormick, "Investigation into Killings of Americans in Mexico Spans Border," <http://www.star-telegram.com/2010/03/15/2041974/investigation-into-killings-of.html>, posted March 15, 2010 (accessed 15 March, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Scott Stewart, "The Falcon Lake Murder and Mexico's Drug War," October 21, 2010, STRATFOR, [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101020\\_falcon\\_lake\\_murder\\_and\\_mexicos\\_drug\\_wars](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101020_falcon_lake_murder_and_mexicos_drug_wars) (accessed December 20, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> CNN Wire Staff, "ATF: Weapon Used in Attack on ICE Agent Came from U.S." CNN, March 1, 2011, [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-03-01/world/mexico.agent.killed\\_1\\_atf-weapons-firearms?s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-03-01/world/mexico.agent.killed_1_atf-weapons-firearms?s=PM:WORLD) (accessed March 20, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Kan and Phil Williams, "Afterword: Criminal Violence in Mexico – A Dissenting Analysis," in *Narcos Over the Border*, ed. Robert Bunker. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 222.

could be counterproductive. Mexicans do not forget that the United States invaded Mexico during the Mexican War of 1846 and have taken approximately half of Mexico's territory in the last two centuries.

The drug war in Mexico is already having a spillover effect in the United States. Phoenix, Arizona, is second in the world for kidnappings after Mexico City because of narco-violence spilling into the United States. A report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre released in March 2011 indicates that approximately 230,000 people have been displaced in Mexico because of drug violence, and half of them have taken refuge in the United States. Almost 23 percent of the homes in Ciudad Juárez were abandoned and almost one-third of the houses in Reynosa were unoccupied.<sup>12</sup>

The influence and presence that Mexican TCOs have inside of the United States is evident by operations conducted by U.S. law enforcement. On October 22, 2009, U.S. federal officials conducted Project Coronado resulting in the arrests of more than 300 people in raids that targeted one of Mexico's most violent TCOs, La Familia Michoacana, who dominate the methamphetamine drug trade. The arrests took place in 38 cities and 19 states across the United States.<sup>13</sup> On February 24–25, 2011, United States federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies conducted coordinated raids on Mexican cartel safe houses in more than 150 different locations throughout the United States. Law enforcement officials seized at least \$10 million in currency, more than 16 tons of marijuana, hundreds of kilograms of cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, and an estimated 300 firearms. They also arrested 500 suspects with ties to Mexican TCOs. Additionally, officials in Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Brazil, and El Salvador conducted similar raids. The raids appear to be a reaction to the killing of ICE agent Jaime Zapata and the wounding of a second agent on February 15, 2011 in San Luis Potosí, Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Stevenson, "Report: 230,000 Displaced by Mexico's Drug War," Associated Press, [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110325/ap\\_on\\_re\\_la\\_am\\_ca/lt\\_drug\\_war\\_mexico](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110325/ap_on_re_la_am_ca/lt_drug_war_mexico) (accessed March 25 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Associated Press, "300-Plus Arrests Made in 'Project Coronado' Drug Cartel Raids," October 22, 2009, [http://foxnews.com/printer\\_friendly\\_story/0,3566,569131,00.html](http://foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,569131,00.html) (accessed October 22, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> STRATFOR, "The Mexican Cartel Response to U.S. Raids," February 25, 2011, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20110225-mexican-cartel-response-u.s.-raids> (accessed February 28, 2011).

## Literature Review

### The Case for the Mexican TCOs as an Insurgency

John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus have written extensively about the Mexican TCOs as a “criminal insurgency.” They state, “Mexico is currently battling a series of interlocking criminal insurgencies. This stark reality challenges the orthodox definitions held by traditional area specialists to whom drug violence is merely a low-level nuisance, and to counterinsurgency specialists who fail to see the evolving political aims of the drug gangs.” They also use La Familia, a criminal organization from the state of Michoacán, as an example of a TCO using political subversion, military style tactics, and evolving political aims in providing social services and infrastructure protection.<sup>15</sup> While Sullivan and Elkus make a compelling case, there is no hard evidence of the TCOs having political aims beyond preserving their business interests.

In May 2009 Hal Brands wrote a Strategic Studies Institute monograph titled, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Effort.” Brands argued that Mexico is experiencing a “narco-insurgency.” He states, “As part of what might be described as a multi-sided narco-insurgency, well-financed cartels are doing battle with the government and one another for control of the drug corridors into the United States. Narcotics driven corruption is rampant, government control is tenuous at best, and predictions that Mexico is on the way to becoming a failed state are frequent.”<sup>16</sup> Brands references John P. Sullivan in describing “larger, more complex, and more powerful than street gangs, third-generation gangs use violence and intimidation to weaken government institutions and corrode the authority of the state.”<sup>17</sup>

In September 2010, the Center for a New American Security published a study by Colonel (retired) Bob Killebrew and Jennifer Bernal, “Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels, and U.S. National Security.”

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<sup>15</sup> John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, “Mexican Crime Families: Political Aims and Social Plans,” 27 July 2009, <http://mexidata.info/id2344.html> (accessed December 9, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Hal Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2009), 4–5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.

Killebrew and Bernal argue that “criminal networks linking cartels and gangs are no longer a crime problem, but a threat that is metastasizing into a new form of widespread, networked criminal insurgency.”<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that the study was released in the same month that Secretary Clinton made her comments about the “indices of insurgency” in Mexico. Killebrew and Bernal also claim:

Indeed, the activities of criminal networks have in many places acquired the characteristics of insurgency. Many people, including some military experts and senior policymakers, misunderstand the word “insurgency” as an attempt to take over a government. This is not necessarily the case. An insurgency is actually an attempt to weaken or disrupt the functions of government, which accurately describes the actions of Colombia’s Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Mexican cartels and some transnational gangs.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Case Against the Mexican TCOs as an Insurgency**

In their essay “Afterword: Criminal Violence in Mexico – A Dissenting Analysis,” Paul Kan and Phil Williams argue against the case for the Mexican TCOs as an insurgency. They believe “that we are simply seeing brutal but not atypical competition among criminal organizations and some attacks on government forces in an attempt to maintain an operating space for the illicit drug business.” Kan and Williams also note that the Mexican situation has similarities to organized crime violence in Russia, Italy, and Albania.<sup>20</sup>

Vanda Felbab-Brown also makes an argument against drug trafficking organizations in general as not being insurgents or terrorist organizations. In her Brookings Policy Paper, “The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia,” she argues that the leadership and organization skills of insurgents and terrorists tend to be far greater than those of drug traffickers. A criminal organization can regenerate as long as the demand for the illicit drug exists.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bob Killebrew and Jennifer Bernal, “Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels, and U.S. National Security” (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, September 2010), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Killebrew, *Crime Wars*, 7–8.

<sup>20</sup> Kan and Williams, “Afterword,” 219.

<sup>21</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia.” Policy Paper, Number 12, March 2009. Foreign Policy at Brookings (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2009), 26.

United States Army Major Juan Nava wrote in his *Military Review* article, “Mexico: Failing State or Emerging Democracy,” that “the violence associated with drug crime in Mexico does not constitute an insurgency movement.” Nava argues that the Mexican people view the TCOs as opportunistic criminals.<sup>22</sup>

### **Defining Insurgency/Methodology**

The word “insurgency” has often been defined and interpreted arbitrarily due to the uniqueness of every insurgency. Additionally, as Bard O’Neill outlines in his book, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, “terms like insurgency, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and revolutionary have not only been defined in various ways but have often been used interchangeably.”<sup>23</sup> This section will review four definitions of insurgency to select criteria for evaluating the narco-violence in Mexico.

United States Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-24 *Counterinsurgency Operations* defines insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself.”<sup>24</sup>

United States Army Field Manual 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* uses the Joint Publication definition of insurgency. It also adds, “stated another way, an insurgency is an organized protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control.”<sup>25</sup>

Bard O’Neill defines insurgency as “a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group uses political resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspect of politics.”<sup>26</sup> O’Neill further states, “Legitimacy and illegitimacy are terms used

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<sup>22</sup> Juan Nava, “Mexico: Failing State or Emerging Democracy,” *Military Review*, March-April 2011, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Bard O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005),13.

<sup>24</sup> Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Department of Defense, October 5, 2009), I-1.

<sup>25</sup> Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (U.S. Army, 15 December 2006), 1-1.

<sup>26</sup> O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, 15.

to determine whether existing aspects of politics are considered moral or immoral –right or wrong – by the population or selected elements thereof.”<sup>27</sup>

The most comprehensive definition of insurgency is in the Central Intelligence Agency “Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency” that was approved for release on January 5, 2009. It defines insurgency:

Insurgency is a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity—including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization, for example, propaganda, recruitment, front and covert party organization, and international activity—is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy. The common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country.

Using the four definitions above, this monograph will use the following four criteria to evaluate the Mexican narco-violence: political mobilization, the use of violence, legitimacy, and the ability to control an area.

## **The Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations**

This section will provide an overview of the major Mexican TCOs that are also referred to as drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). The terms TCOs, DTOs, cartels, and organized crime groups are all used in describing these criminal organizations. While they all apply to aspects of the criminal organizations’ activities, TCOs is most accurate due to the international nature of their criminal activities. Today’s TCOs are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, murder for hire, robbery, prostitution, and extortion.

Mexican drug traffickers were cultivating marijuana and smaller amounts of heroin throughout the twentieth century before South American cocaine became popular in the United States in the late 1970s. Before 1984 almost no cocaine was smuggled through Mexico into the United States. The vast majority of illegal drugs came through the Bahamas or directly from Colombia to Florida on propeller

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<sup>27</sup> O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, 15.

planes. This changed in the 1990s after the United States shut down the direct flow of cocaine into southern Florida and the Bahamas. Due to the increasing difficulty in smuggling large amounts of cocaine through the Caribbean, the Colombian cartels began to forge a relationship with Mexican trafficking organizations in 1984.<sup>28</sup>

Within a few years between 80 to 90 percent of the cocaine being smuggled into the United States was moving through Mexico. As revenues increased, the Gulf, Juarez, Sinaloa, and Tijuana cartels began to emerge.<sup>29</sup> As the Colombian DTOs fractionalized and imploded in the late 1980s and 1990s, Mexico emerged as the hub of drug trafficking into the United States market.<sup>30</sup> Also, the role of the Mexican cartels began to change from acting primarily as transporters to eventually creating their own distribution networks within the United States. Over the past two decades, these organizations have diversified their networks globally and added methamphetamine as one of their drugs.<sup>31</sup>

Mexico had a single political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), with a monopoly on power in Mexico from 1930 to 2000. Mexico's power structure was extremely centralized and hierarchical, which had important implications in the development of official corruption. The PRI was also influential in providing protection to the Mexican TCOs by establishing territories and rules.<sup>32</sup> This had the effect of maintaining a level of control on the violence and competition between the various cartels. The 1997 defeat of the PRI in the federal legislature and the 2000 election of President Vicente Fox, a candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), altered the system from one of cooperation to one of competition and conflict.<sup>33</sup> The 2000 election of President Fox was the first peaceful transition of power from one political party to another in Mexico's history.<sup>34</sup> In a sign of emerging democracy, the political

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<sup>28</sup> Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," 36.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, "Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S. - Mexican Context," in *Shared Responsibility*, Ed. Eric L. Olsen, David A. Shirk, and Andrew Selee, October 2010, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," 37.

<sup>32</sup> Astorga and Shirk, "Drug Trafficking," 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon James Knowles, "Threat Analysis: Organized Crime and Narco-Terrorism in Northern Mexico," *Military Review*, January-February 2008, 75.

change in Mexico has provided an impetus to promote transparency, good governance, and a tougher approach against drug traffickers. Upon his inauguration to the presidency in 2006, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón declared that his administration's main goal was to establish rule of law by confronting organized crime and corruption.<sup>35</sup>

The dynamics of the Mexican TCOs are constantly evolving in a fluid landscape as drug cartels struggle among themselves for lucrative turf and also against the government. The current TCOs evolved from the criminal group headed by Félix "El Padrino" (The Godfather) Gallardo that was rooted in Sinaloa state, then later was known as the Guadalajara Organized Crime Group (OCG). The organization of Gallardo split up in the late 1980s due to increased law enforcement pressure after the 1985 murder of United States DEA agent Enrique (Kiki) Camarena.<sup>36</sup> The network that Félix Gallardo cultivated includes many of Mexico's most notorious drug traffickers, most of them from Sinaloa state: members of the Arellano Félix family, Rafael Caro Quintero, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza, Ernesto Fonseca, Joaquín Guzmán Loera, Hector "El Guero" Palma, Manuel Salcido, and Ismael Zambada.<sup>37</sup> This following section will provide a brief summary of the seven major TCOs.

**Sinaloa Federation:** The Sinaloa Federation is, as its name implies, a true cartel comprised of several different criminal organizations that all report to the head of the federation, Joaquín "El Chapo" (Shorty) Guzmán Loera.<sup>38</sup> Born in 1957 in Sinaloa state, Guzmán is Mexico's most wanted man.<sup>39</sup> The United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) offers a \$5 million reward for information leading to the whereabouts of Guzmán. In 2009 was listed in *Forbes* magazine in its annual list of billionaires. Then later in the year *Forbes* listed Guzmán as number forty-one on its list of the sixty-

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<sup>35</sup> Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," 40.

<sup>36</sup> Eric L. Olson and Miguel R. Salazar, "A Profile of Mexico's Major Organized Crime Groups," Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, February 17, 2011, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Astorga and Shirk, "Drug Trafficking Organizations," 35.

<sup>38</sup> STRATFOR, "Mexican Drug Wars: Bloodiest Year to Date - Cartel Report 2010." December 20, 2010. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20101218-mexican-drug-wars-bloodiest-year-date> (accessed December 28, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Beith, *The Last Narco: Inside the Hunt for El Chapo, The World's Most Wanted Drug Lord* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2010), ix.

seven most powerful people in the world. Guzmán was arrested in 1993 on homicide and drug charges, and in 2001 he escaped prison reportedly through the laundry to reassume control of the Sinaloa Federation. Guzmán is considered the last of the narcos in the mold of Gallardo where the purpose of violence is purely business, unlike the thugs of today who desecrate bodies and kill in public.<sup>40</sup> Guzmán's senior subordinates are Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García and Juan "El Azul" Esparragoza Moreno, who both run their own independent trafficking network.<sup>41</sup> The Sinaloa Federation is considered the largest and most powerful in Mexico. It has expanded operations throughout Latin America. It is believed that the Sinaloa Federation is the largest purchaser of Peruvian cocaine.<sup>42</sup> Since 2008, the Sinaloa organization has been in a battle with the Vicente Carrillo Fuentes (VCF) Organization/Juárez Cartel for control of the Ciudad Juárez plaza, or territory. The conflict is centered on Ciudad Juárez that has become the most deadly city in the world by most estimates. The Calderón administration scored one of its greatest victories against the drug cartels this year when members of the Mexican military shot and killed Sinaloa Federation Number 3 Ignacio "El Nacho" Coronel Villareal on July 29, 2010, in his home in Guadalajara, Jalisco state. The Sinaloa Cartel formed alliances with its former rival, the Gulf cartel, and La Familia Michoacana in 2010 in an effort to wrest control of plazas from Los Zetas.<sup>43</sup> The death of Coronel and the dismantlement of his network, along with continued focus on the conflict in Juárez, have forced the Sinaloa Federation to pull back from other commitments, such as operations against Los Zetas.<sup>44</sup>

Gulf Cartel: The Gulf cartel was led by Juan García Abrego, who forged ties with Colombia's Cali cartel in the 1980s. In 1996 Abrego was arrested and extradited to the United States. Osiel Cárdenas Guillén was the eventual replacement of Abrego after an internal battle for power. Cárdenas began recruiting Mexican military special forces personnel in 2001 who eventually became the known as Los

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<sup>40</sup> Beith, *Last Narco*, xvi–xviii.

<sup>41</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Olson, "Profile," 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

Zetas.<sup>45</sup> In the first half of the decade, the Gulf cartel was among the most powerful criminal organizations in Mexico and served as an effective counterbalance in the east to the Sinaloa Federation that dominated the western coast of Mexico. However, after the arrest of charismatic Gulf leader Odiel Cárdenas Guillén in 2003, the group found itself on the decline while its enforcement wing, Los Zetas, gradually became the dominant player in their relationship.<sup>46</sup> The two organizations eventually split and an all out war between the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas erupted in February 2010. The Gulf cartel then reached out to its main rivals in Mexico: the Sinaloa Federation and La Familia Michoacoana. On November 5, 2010, Mexican security forces launched an assault resulting in a three-hour firefight that killed key Gulf enforcement leader Tony Tormenta and several of his top lieutenants.

Los Zetas: The former Mexican Army special forces soldiers were originally recruited to provide protection for Gulf Leader, Cardenas, and to provide enforcement. The original Zetas numbered 31 and were led by Lieutenant Arturo Guzmán Decena whose military call sign was “Z1.” In 2005, Los Zetas began to recruit Guatemalan special forces known as Kaibíles.<sup>47</sup> Los Zetas have a number of training camps in Mexico and Guatemala. The training is consistent with the military training of the original Zetas. After training is completed, some of the Zetas are branded with the letter “Z.”<sup>48</sup> The conflict between Los Zetas and their former parent organization, the Gulf cartel, escalated into all-out war in February 2010. The break between the Gulf cartel and Los Zetas was allegedly over the killing of a Gulf leader by Los Zetas henchmen.<sup>49</sup> Los Zetas are operationally more effective than the Gulf cartel thus forcing the Gulf cartel to reach out to the Sinaloa Federation and La Familia Michoacana. In 2010 Los Zetas were pushed out of their traditional stronghold of Reynosa, Tamaulipas state, and were forced to retreat to other strongholds such as Nuevo Laredo and Monterrey, Nuevo León state. Los Zetas are

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<sup>45</sup> Astorga and Shirk, “Drug Trafficking,” 39. Los Zetas were recruited from the Mexican Army unit, Grupo Aeromoviles de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFES), that translates as Special Forces Airmobile Group.

<sup>46</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Lisa J. Campbell, “Los Zetas: Operational Assessment,” in *Narcos Over the Border*. ed. Robert Bunker (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 56.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell, “Los Zetas,” 68–9.

<sup>49</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 9.

penetrating deeper into Central America, South America, and Europe. The leader of Los Zetas is Heriberto “El Lazca” Lazcano followed by his number two leader, Miguel “Z-40” Treviño Morales.<sup>50</sup>

La Familia Michoacana (LFM): La Familia emerged in the 1980s as an anti-crime and vigilante group. LFM is known for its cultish mystique based on a quasi-fundamentalist ideology. LFM initially opposed the use of narcotics. LFM is now Mexico’s largest producer and exporter of methamphetamines.<sup>51</sup> LFM burst onto the scene on September 6, 2006, when gunmen entered a nightclub in Uruapan, Michoacan, fired shots in the air, then lobbed five human heads onto the dance floor. The gunmen left a note claiming that it was “divine justice.”<sup>52</sup> On December 10, 2010, the spiritual leader of LFM, Nazario “El Más Loco” Moreno Gonzalez, was killed by federal police in Michoacán. Some of Moreno’s followers responded to his death by walking in peace marches in his hometown of Apatzingán.<sup>53</sup>

Arellano Félix Organization: The AFO, also known as the Tijuana cartel, traces its origin back to the Guadalajara OCG. The group is named for the five founding Arellano Félix brothers who were nephews of Félix “El Padrino” Gallardo. The AFO broke off from the Guadalajara OCG in 1989. When the break up occurred, the AFO was allied with the Gulf organization and was a rival to the Sinaloa organization.<sup>54</sup> In the 1990s the AFO developed links to law enforcement and government officials allegedly paying out \$1 million a week in bribes.<sup>55</sup> The AFO was responsible for supplying an estimated 40 percent of the cocaine consumed in the United States during its prime years. After the arrest of Eduardo Arellano Félix in 2007, Fernando “El Ingeniero” Sanchez Arellano and Eduardo Teodoro “El Teo” García Simental battled for leadership of AFO. Eventually, García left the organization to create his

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<sup>50</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 10.

<sup>52</sup> George A. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 197.

<sup>53</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Astorga and Shirk, “Drug Trafficking,” 37.

own which he aligned with the Sinaloa Federation.<sup>56</sup> The AFO is currently led by “El Ingeniero” Sanchez, who is a nephew of the founding Arellano Félix brothers. This organization has suffered numerous setbacks in recent years, including a major split and vicious factional infighting. For the past two years the “El Teo” García faction of the AFO was the Sinaloa proxy fighting for control of the Tijuana smuggling corridor against the AFO faction led by Sanchez.<sup>57</sup>

Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization/Juárez Cartel: Amado Carrillo Fuentes earned the nickname, “Lord of the Skies,” while working for Félix Gallardo for pioneering the use of large airborne shipments from Colombia to the United States. Carrillo Fuentes became Mexico’s wealthiest drug trafficker in the 1990s by controlling the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez corridor. Carrillo Fuentes enjoyed protection from numerous government officials including Mexico’s drug czar, General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, who was arrested for corruption in February 1997. Carrillo Fuentes died in July 1997 during plastic surgery. Vicente Carrillo Fuentes took over after his brother’s death, and the organization is now named after him.<sup>58</sup> In the early 2000s the VCF formed a loose alliance with the Sinaloa that became known as the “federation.” The alliance ended in 2008 when the Sinaloa Federation attempted to seize control of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez corridor from the VCF. The VCF recently allied itself with Los Zetas to defend itself against the Sinaloa Federation.<sup>59</sup> The organization is headed by its namesake, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, and has remained functional largely because of the group’s operational leader, Juan “El JL” Luis Ledezma, who also heads the VCF enforcement wing, La Linea. The VCF has been able to remain relevant in the greater Juarez area because of the relationship it has with the local street gang, Los Aztecas, who serve as the primary enforcers on the streets of Juarez.<sup>60</sup> The other significant gang that works for VCF is La Linea. It is believed that La Linea started out as a gang of corrupt state police officers from Juárez and Chihuahua.<sup>61</sup> La Linea lieutenants ordered the March 2010 murders of

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<sup>56</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 8.

<sup>57</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Astorga and Shirk, “Drug Trafficking Organizations,” 38.

<sup>59</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 7.

<sup>60</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 7.

United States Consulate worker Leslie Enriquez and her husband because she was believed to have supplied visas to members of the Sinaloa Federation while denying visas for people associated with VCF. On July 15, 2010, La Linea became the first modern-day Mexican criminal organization to successfully deploy an improvised explosive device (IED). The blast killed four people and wounded several more people to include all first responders.<sup>62</sup>

Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO): The BLO was founded by four brothers: Marcos Arturo, Carlos, Alfredo, and Héctor. The brothers were originally poppy farmers in Sinaloa state before becoming enforcers for Joaquin Guzmán. The Beltrán Leyva brothers recruited United States born Edgar “La Barbie” Valdez Villareal to serve as one of its enforcers in response to the Gulf cartel creating Los Zetas.<sup>63</sup> After Alfredo was arrested in January 2008, the brothers accused Sinaloa Federation leader Guzmán of tipping off Mexican authorities to Alfredo’s location. The BLO subsequently broke away from Sinaloa to launch a bloody war against their former partners. The BLO even went as far as to kill one of Guzmán’s sons in a brazen assassination in the parking lot of a grocery store in Culiacán, Sinaloa state, where gunmen allegedly fired more than 200 rounds of ammunition and used rocket-propelled grenades. The organization quickly aligned itself with Los Zetas in an effort to gain military reinforcement. Their combined resources helped the BLO and Los Zetas to become one of the most formidable criminal organizations in Mexico. On December 16, 2009, Mexican marines stormed a luxury apartment complex in Cuernavaca, Morelos state, and killed the BLO’s leader, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, along with several of his bodyguards. His brother Carlos was arrested on December 30, 2009, in Culiacán, leaving Héctor as the only brother at large. The BLO was then divided into two factions. Héctor would control one faction, and Arturo’s right-hand man, Edgar “La Barbie” Valdez Villareal would control the other faction.<sup>64</sup>

Héctor Beltrán Leyva Faction/Cartel Pacifico Sur: After the BLO split, most of the BLO operatives and networks sided with Hector Beltrán Leyva and his deputy and top enforcer, Sergio “El

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<sup>62</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 12.

<sup>64</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

Grande” Villareal Barragan. The group rebranded itself as Cartel Pacifico Sur (CPS), and it pursued an alliance with Los Zetas and VCF.<sup>65</sup> The CPS with the help of the Los Zetas, is currently engaged in an offensive against LFM in the southern portions of Michoacán, as the CPS attempts to push beyond its traditional operating territory in Acapulco, Guerrero state, and farther up the west coast toward the port of Lázaro Cárdenas.

Edgar Valdez Villareal Faction: The Valdez faction found itself fighting an uphill battle for control of the BLO after the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva in December 2009. While the Valdez faction was very capable and quite potent, it simply did not have the resources to mount a successful campaign to take over the BLO. Mexican Federal Police arrested Valdez on August 30, 2010, under conflicting reports. After the arrest of Valdez, Carlos Montemayor took the reins of the Valdez faction. On November 24, 2010, Montemayor was arrested, essentially decapitating the leadership of the organization.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Olson, “Profile,” 12.

<sup>66</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

## AREAS OF CARTEL INFLUENCES IN MEXICO



Figure 1. TCO Areas of Influence<sup>67</sup>

### The Mexican Government Strategy

President Calderón campaigned for the presidency promising to confront the TCOs. After his inauguration, Calderón's Public Safety Secretary Genaro García Luna articulated the strategy to break up the four major TCOs at that time into fifty smaller entities and take away their firepower and huge financial resources. Calderón has also greatly increased the tool of extradition to the United States. Another important aspect of the strategy is the modernization of the Mexican justice system. Calderón launched a campaign known as "Limpiemos Mexico" to clean up Mexico.<sup>68</sup> However, by the end of 2010

<sup>67</sup> Used with permission from STRATFOR, Inc. (CGSC Copyright Registration #11-331 C/E).

<sup>68</sup> Barry McCaffery, "After Action Report – Visit Mexico – 5–7 December 2008," 8.

the Mexican government had 45,000 soldiers deployed as part of the drug war, and yet 98.5 percent of crimes still went unpunished.<sup>69</sup>

### **Mérida Initiative**

President George W. Bush and President Calderón met in Mérida, Mexico, in March 2007 to draft a plan toward genuine cooperation and potential partnership between the two nations. The Mérida Initiative was announced in Congress in October 2007 and signed into law in June 2008. The Mérida Initiative is the largest and most comprehensive package of assistance for the Western Hemisphere since Plan Colombia was begun in 1999. It also provided for assistance to Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, although the preponderance of aid was to Mexico. The three-year program provided for \$1.4 billion in assistance and was premised “on a partnership between our countries and recognition that the multifaceted problems associated with these criminal organizations remain a shared responsibility whose solution requires a coordinated response.”<sup>70</sup>

Critics of the Mérida Initiative feel that it was too focused on assistance to military and law enforcement. Over half of the Mérida Initiative budget was assigned to the acquisition of 20 airplanes and helicopters. Other big ticket items included 26 armored vehicles, 30 ion scanners, and five X-ray vans.<sup>71</sup> Another issue was the slow disbursement of the funds for the Mérida Initiative. As of September 30, 2009, only two-thirds of the money had been obligated, and only 2 percent, or \$26 million, had been expended.<sup>72</sup>

The Obama Administration followed the strategy set out by the Mérida Initiative, and it requested funding to take the Mérida Initiative beyond 2010 in the fiscal year budget request for 2011. The

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<sup>69</sup> Kevin Casas-Zamora, “Mexico’s Forever War,” *Foreign Policy*, December 22, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/22/mexico\\_s\\_forever\\_war](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/22/mexico_s_forever_war) (accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Testimony of Thomas Shannon, Assistant Secretary of State, The Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, May 8, 2008, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/sha050808.htm> (accessed March 30, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Ray Walser, “U.S. Strategy Against Mexican Drug Cartels: Flawed and Uncertain,” *Backgrounder*, No. 2407, April 26, 2010, The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/04/US-Strategy-Against-Mexican-Drug-Cartels-Flawed-and-Uncertain> (accessed January 2, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, “Status of Funds for the Merida Initiative,” December 3, 2009, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10253r.pdf> (accessed March 29, 2011).

“Beyond Mérida” strategy is built around four pillars, two of which are a refinement of previous efforts and two new ones. The four pillars are disrupting and dismantling criminal organizations; institutionalizing the rule of law; building a 21<sup>st</sup> century border; and building strong and resilient communities.<sup>73</sup>

### **Are the TCOs insurgents?**

This section will examine the TCOs to determine if they are insurgents or organized criminal elements based on the criteria of political mobilization, the use of violence, legitimacy, and the ability to control an area. First, it will examine the TCOs to determine the extent of their political aims. Second, it will look at the Mexican drug violence to determine the nature and purpose of it. Third, it will examine the level of popular support and legitimacy of the TCOs. Last, it will determine the ability of the TCOs to control territory.

### **Political Mobilization**

First, this monograph examines the TCOs to determine their level of political mobilization. Daniel Byman, in his RAND Study “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies,” claims that a would-be insurgent movement must create a politically relevant identity and attach this identity to a cause that has widespread appeal. It is a difficult task.<sup>74</sup> Of the Mexican TCOs, La Familia is the only one with an actual ideology in which it vows to protect the people of Michoacán from outsiders. Initially, La Familia carried out a campaign of “psychological warfare” in order to win social legitimacy in a state plagued by violence. However, over time its use of brutality and violence to include decapitations and the widespread trafficking of amphetamines makes La Familia the equivalent of the other TCOs that it rivals.<sup>75</sup>

Another aspect of determining a would-be insurgent is to determine if the TCOs are primarily motivated by economics or political ideology, also known as the motivation of greed or grievance. While

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<sup>73</sup> Eric L. Olson and Christopher E. Wilson, “Beyond Mérida: The Evolving Approach to Security Cooperation,” Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 2010, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/Beyond%20Merida.pdf> (accessed 2 October 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Byman, “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies,” RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 3 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 11.

<sup>75</sup> Grayson, *Mexico*, 201.

it is difficult to obtain accurate information on illicit drug trafficking, official estimates of the amount of money flowing into Mexico from the sales of narcotics run from \$25 billion to \$40 billion a year.

Unofficial estimates place the amount much higher.<sup>76</sup> The profit margin on drugs is enormously high because the inherent cost of the commodity is extremely low. Marijuana needs no processing, and the processing costs on heroin and cocaine are insignificant. A reasonable and even conservative estimate for the profit margin on narcotics is 90 percent, which means that the \$40 billion from the illegal trade generates a profit of about \$36 billion.<sup>77</sup> The evidence is overwhelming that the TCOs are motivated by greed. Most TCO members accept that arrest or death is almost inevitable.

While the TCOs do not want to overthrow and take on the role of government, they do bribe politicians and other government officials in an effort to maximize profit and avoid capture. While this was more common during the era of PRI rule, the TCOs are still quite powerful at the state and municipal level for co-opting and intimidating government officials.

Since terrorism is also common as an insurgent method, the same comparison of greed or grievance can be made. Michael Kenney, in his 2007 book *From Pablo to Osama*, compares and contrasts terrorist networks with trafficking groups. “Trafficking enterprises are business organizations: they exist to smuggle illegal drugs that enjoy strong demand among consumers in the United States and other countries. Terrorist networks, in contrast, are political organizations: they exist to terrorize target audiences through violence and intimidation undertaken in pursuit of political aims.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Nature and Type of Violence**

The second criterion for determining if the TCOs are insurgents is to examine the nature and type of violence.<sup>79</sup> By definition, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and insurgencies are steeped in violence. While

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<sup>76</sup> George Friedman, *The Next Decade* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2011), 207.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama: Trafficking and Terrorist Networks, Government Bureaucracies, and Competitive Adaptation* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>79</sup> Byman, “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies,” 7.

violence may inspire and intimidate, it can also be counterproductive. Generally speaking few people support violence.<sup>80</sup>

In January 2010 the Trans-Border Institute analyzed the casualties of drug-related violence from 2001 to 2009. Overall, the odds of being the victim of a drug-related killing in 2009 were fairly low (around 1 in 16,300). The vast majority of the violence occurred between organized crime groups. Roughly 90 percent of drug-related killings involve ranking members and foot soldiers of the TCOs. The soldiers and security forces that accounted for all drug-related killings was 7 percent. Innocent bystanders accounted for less than 3 percent.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the majority of narco-violence is caused by the TCOs competing over the plazas, or drug corridors.

In February 2011 the Trans-Border Institute published a follow up report, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2010.” Violence has increased sharply since the inauguration of Mexican President Felipe Calderón. Since December 2006, approximately 34,550 killings have been officially linked to organized crime, a dramatic increase from the previous administration of President Vicente Fox (2000–2006) when 8,901 cases were identified. Over all, the drug-related violence is localized. 56 percent of all homicides from organized crime in 2010 occurred in just four of Mexico’s 32 states (Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, and Guerrero). Most other states have had much lower levels of violence, and several states have been virtually untouched by violence (Baja California Sur, Campeche, Querétaro, Tlaxcala, and Yucatán). The top five most violent municipalities in 2010 were Ciudad Juárez (2,738 cases), Culiacán (587), Tijuana (472), Chihuahua (670), and Acapulco (370), which together accounted for 32% of all the drug-related homicides in 2010.<sup>82</sup>

STRATFOR provides additional information for 2010 that confirms the data from the Trans-Border Institute. The drug-related homicides in 2010 passed the 11,000 mark, a 60 to 70 percent increase from 2009. The high levels of violence reflect the fight between the Sinaloa Federation and the VCF for

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<sup>80</sup> Byman, “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies,” 8–9.

<sup>81</sup> David A. Shirk, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001–2009,” January 2010, Trans-Border Institute, San Diego, CA, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Viridiana Ríos and David A. Shirk, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2010,” January 2010, Trans-Border Institute, San Diego, CA, 1.

control of the Juárez smuggling corridor. It also reflects the bloody turf war between Los Zetas and their former partners the Gulf cartel in the Tamaulipas border region. The larger battle between the Sinaloa Federation and Los Zetas spread to states like Nuevo León, Hidalgo, and Tabasco.<sup>83</sup>

Analyzing this evidence indicates that the vast majority of the violence is cartel network versus cartel network intended for the purpose of control of the drug smuggling corridors into the United States. The evidence from the statistics on violence indicate that it is not politically motivated, but intended to eliminate criminal rivals and to intimidate government officials and the civilian population. A trend in Mexico is that the violence has become more extreme and widely targeted over time. The violence includes beheadings, dismemberment, torture, and other acts of cruelty.<sup>84</sup> In April 2011 the Mexican government blamed Los Zetas for 116 corpses found in mass graves in San Fernando, Tamaulipas state.<sup>85</sup> The cartels have also targeted mayors, police chiefs, and government officials within Mexico; however, this violence is usually intended to protect their business interests. The violence has so far remained south of the border. The cartels understand that spill over violence would trigger a response, thus threatening their business interests.

### **Legitimacy**

Third, insurgent groups typically aim to attain a level of legitimacy by gaining popular support for their cause. It is difficult to obtain reliable data to determine the levels of support for the Mexican government and the various cartels. When President Felipe Calderón was elected in July 2006, he won by less than a half percentage point over the second place candidate. He only received 35.89 percent of the total vote. After Calderón declared war on the drug cartels in December 2006, he did have popular support that has waned over time. It is tough to assess how much of that loss of support is directly due to the escalating drug violence. In the 2009 legislative election the PRI received 48 percent of the vote, the

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<sup>83</sup> STRATFOR, Cartel Report 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Ríos and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico," 13.

<sup>85</sup> BBC, "Mexico: Zetas Cartel Blamed Over Mass Graves," April 12, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-13044944> (accessed April 13, 2011).

PAN 29.4 percent, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) 14.4 percent.<sup>86</sup> The Mexican president may only serve one six-year term, so Calderón is not eligible to seek reelection in 2012.

In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in Mexico in the Spring of 2010, fully 80 percent of Mexicans supported the use of the military to fight the TCOs, essentially unchanged from 83 percent in 2009. Just over half (55 percent) said that the military was making progress against the TCOs.<sup>87</sup> In November 2010 a Mitofsky polling agency survey showed that 49 percent of respondents considered President Calderón's offensive against the TCOs a failure, compared with just 33 percent from the previous survey. The association, Mexicans United Against Violence, sponsored the survey.<sup>88</sup>

While public support for the Mexican drug war drops, the Mexican population has even less support for organized crime. A July 2009 poll in Mexico reported that 47 percent viewed organized crime as the principal threat against Mexican national security.<sup>89</sup> A September 2009 poll indicated that 81 percent of Mexican respondents viewed crime as a very big problem.<sup>90</sup> On March 24, 2011, many of Mexico's leading news organizations agreed not to glorify drug traffickers. It was in response to the fact that 20 journalists that have been killed in narco-violence since 2006. The media signed an agreement that stated it will not allow itself to transmit propaganda that makes narcos appear to be "victims or heroes."<sup>91</sup>

While the TCOs do not have any real legitimacy among the Mexican people, they do provide employment for both the cultivators of marijuana and poppy as well as the distribution networks. An

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<sup>86</sup> Election Results Organization, "Election Resources on the Internet: Federal Elections in Mexico – Results Lookup, <http://electionresources.org/mx/deputies.php?election=2009> (accessed February 21, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Richard Wike, "Mexicans Continue Support for Drug War," Pew Research Center, August 12, 2010, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1698/mexico-support-drug-war-less-supportive-of-american-involvement> (accessed 28 March 2011).

<sup>88</sup> Associated Press, "Poll: 49 Percent of Mexicans Think Drug War a Failure," Fox News, November 23, 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/11/23/poll-pct-mexicans-think-drug-war-failure/#> (accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Rodrigo Ai Camp, "Armed Forces and Drugs: Public Perceptions and Institutional Challenges," *Shared Responsibility*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, (October 2010), 294.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>91</sup> BBC News Latin America and Caribbean, "Mexico Media Agree Drug War Reporting Guidelines," March 24, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12855300> (accessed March 27, 2011).

organized crime group cannot exist without an extensive peripheral business network. Organized crime networks involve bankers, politicians, and police. While Colombian drug lords like Pablo Escobar were responsible for the construction of public facilities, the Mexican TCOs tend to maintain a lower profile. Other than providing employment and bribes, the Mexican TCOs do not really provide any form of legitimate social services. However, the narcos do conduct an effective information operations campaign normally intended to recruit, intimidate, or glorify the narco lifestyle. The various TCOs use *narcomantas* (banners), viral internet videos, and even popular ballads known as *narcocorridos* to broadcast their messages.<sup>92</sup> Although a degree of popular support is required, this does not mean that the population condones the violence. The cartels intimidate and coerce the population to tolerate activity and allow business to go on as usual.<sup>93</sup> The cartel use of coercion has been referred to as “*plata o plomo*” meaning “take the bribe or take the bullet.”

### **Area Control**

The fourth and final criterion is the ability for a would-be insurgent to control an area. In Mexico the term “zone of impunity” is used to describe areas where crime is largely uncontrolled. In early 2009 the Mexican government admitted the existence of 233 zones of impunity. The government also noted that the number had decreased from 2,204 the previous year. George Grayson estimates that these areas included (1) the Tierra Caliente, a mountainous region contiguous to Michoacán, Guerrero, Colima, and Mexico state; (2) the “Golden Triangle,” a drug-growing area where the states of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango converge in the Sierra Madre mountains; (3) the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the southeast; (4) neighborhoods in cities such as Ciudad Juárez and Reynosa along the U.S.-Mexico border; (5)

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<sup>92</sup> Ríos and Shirk, “Drug Violence,” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Reva Bhalla. “Dispatch: Organized Crime vs. Terrorism,” STRATFOR, December 21, 2010, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20101221-dispatch-organized-crime-vs-terrorism> (accessed December 23, 2010).

metropolitan areas around Mexico City; and (6) the porous border between the Chiapas state and Guatemala.<sup>94</sup>

Kevin Casas-Zamora believes that the reality is that the zones of impunity are more a penetration of public institutions than territorial control.<sup>95</sup> Since President Calderón declared war on the TCOs in December 2010, every major TCO has suffered setbacks at the hands of the government. Some of the other TCOs, particularly the BLO, have voiced their outrage over a perceived protection of Joaquín Guzmán and the Sinaloa Federation by Calderón's Public Security Secretary Genaro García. Eduardo Buscaglia, an expert on drug war economics at the Autonomous Institute of Mexico (ITAM), stated, "One necessarily has to come to the conclusion that the Mexican government is applying this strategy so it can negotiate with (Guzmán) and achieve peace prior to the 2012 elections."<sup>96</sup> However, the Mexican government captured three notable narcos from the Sinaloa Federation in 2010: José "El Jabalí" Vázquez Villagrana, Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, and Margarito "El Tigre" Soto Reyes.<sup>97</sup>

This section has examined the Mexican TCOs using the criteria of political mobilization, the use of violence, legitimacy, and the ability to control an area. The evidence indicates that the Mexican TCOs are not insurgents, but organized criminal elements.

## **Colombia Case Study Comparison**

"Colombia has been the most successful nation-building exercise by the United States in this century." United States Ambassador William Brownsfield<sup>98</sup>

This section will examine the violence that has taken place in Colombia as a case study comparison for the current narco-violence in Mexico. Colombia is relevant because Secretary of State

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<sup>94</sup> George Grayson, "Mexico Today and the Fight against Vicious Drug Cartels," Mexidata.info, May 3, 2010, <http://mexidata.info/id2647.html> (accessed March 31, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Kevin Casas-Zamora, "Mexico's Forever War."

<sup>96</sup> John Ross, "Who's Who in Mexico's Narco Wars?" *Counterpunch*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.counterpunch.org/ross02022010.html> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>97</sup> Ríos and Shirk, "Drug Violence," 19.

<sup>98</sup> Max Boot and Richard Bennet, "The Colombian Miracle," *The Weekly Standard*, December 14, 2009, Vol. 15, No. 13 <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/017/301nyrut.asp> (accessed December 21, 2010).

Clinton compared the current narco-violence in Mexico to Colombia in her reply to a question at the Council of Foreign Relations in September 2010:

So it's becoming -- it's looking more and more like Colombia looked 20 years ago, where the narcotraffickers control, you know, certain parts of the country -- not -- significant parts; in Colombia, it got to the point where, you know, more than a third of the country - - nearly 40 percent of the country at one time or another was controlled by the insurgents, by FARC.<sup>99</sup>

It is also relevant because in 1992 the Mexican TCOs replaced the Colombian drug cartels as the most powerful in the world. Colombia is an evolving democracy that has dealt with violent internal conflict since approximately 1948 against both insurgents and violent drug cartels. It is complex because the narcotraffickers at times provided social services to the local population and supported the government against the leftist guerrillas. Also, the insurgents participated in the drug trade to raise money to support its cause. Last, the United States assistance program to assist Mexico in its counternarcotics efforts, the Mérida Initiative, has been nicknamed “Plan Mexico” because of the similarity to Plan Colombia implemented in 2000. This monograph argues that the Medellín and Cali cartels were organized criminal elements, not insurgents. On the other hand, groups like the 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement (M-19), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) were insurgents who were motivated by ideology, not profit. The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) are an umbrella group of Colombian right-wing groups that were organized to oppose the FARC. The FARC, the ELN, and the AUC are all on the United States Department of State list of foreign terrorist organizations.<sup>100</sup>

### **The Colombian Drug Cartels**

Colombian drug production and trafficking has existed since the 1950s. Colombian traffickers used labs in Medellín to process heroin, cocaine, and morphine. These drugs were transported to Cuba for distribution to Miami as well as Mexico to enter into other parts of the United States. Additionally,

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<sup>99</sup> Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations, September 8, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> US Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2008, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122449.htm> (accessed March 20, 2011).

Colombians cultivated marijuana in the north near the Caribbean coast.<sup>101</sup> Due to United States drug suppression efforts in Mexico and Jamaica, Colombians increased their marijuana production. Also, the Colombians decided to eliminate their connections and traffic drugs directly into the United States. By the end of the 1970s, Colombian cartels were the leading traffickers of marijuana into the United States. As the United States made efforts to interdict the flow of marijuana from Colombia, the traffickers began to switch their focus to cocaine, which was more difficult to detect and more profitable.<sup>102</sup>

Initially, the Colombian drug traffickers obtained most of their cocaine from Bolivia and Peru. Colombians then began to cultivate coca leaf in the southern plains and jungles of Colombia because it was more profitable than other crops. It also grew more easily in poor-quality soil than other crops. The amount of coca cultivated in Colombia increased by almost 500 percent between 1978 and 2001.<sup>103</sup>

The Medellín and Cali cartels emerged in the 1980s as the most powerful criminal organizations in Colombia. Headed by drug lords, or narco-jefes, these traffickers established large processing laboratories, smuggled the drugs overseas, organized distribution in the United States, and developed sophisticated money-laundering methods. The Colombian drug traffickers also sought to build popular support by investing in social projects and organizing social services. For example, Pablo Escobar built sports facilities, hospitals, and schools.<sup>104</sup>

The Medellín cartel was initially headed by six capos: Jorge Ochoa Vazquez and his brothers Fabio and Juan, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Carlos Lehder Rivas, and José Rodríguez Gacha. Due to the arrests of his co-founders, Pablo Escobar was the clear leader of the cartel by the end of the decade. The Medellín cartel was the originator of the policy of “plata o plomo” (money or lead) in the mid-1980s. Pablo Escobar bribed and threatened government officials while moving about openly in Medellín without

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<sup>101</sup> Vanda Felhab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 72–3.

fear.<sup>105</sup> Escobar even offered to turn himself into the Colombian authorities if they agreed not to extradite him to the United States. When the government refused, Escobar formed “the Extraditables.” On August 18, 1989, Escobar had one of his *sicarios* assassinate Liberal Party presidential candidate, Luis Galán, with an Uzi submachine gun as he made a campaign speech because Galán had vowed to rid Colombia of drug traffickers.<sup>106</sup> A few months later his men planted a bomb on an Avianca plane intending to kill Galán’s successor candidate, César Gaviria. While one hundred and ten people were killed including two Americans, Gaviria was not on the plane.<sup>107</sup> In 1989, Colombia’s Pablo Escobar was ranked the seventh richest man in the world, with an estimated wealth of twenty-five billion dollars.<sup>108</sup> From 1989 to December 1993 Pablo Escobar waged a bloody war against the Colombian government in which Escobar’s men assassinated and kidnapped government officials and unleashed several car bombs in the capital of Bogotá. Colombian National Police Colonel Hugo Martínez and his Search Bloc using signal intelligence finally located and killed Escobar in an operation in Medellín on December 2, 1993.<sup>109</sup> Upon Escobar’s death, the Medellín cartel had been dismantled.

The Cali cartel was the rival to the Medellín cartel as the most powerful and profitable drug cartel in Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s. Led by the brothers, Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez, and José Santacruz, the Cali cartel operated in a more business-like manner and less flashy than their Medellín counterparts.<sup>110</sup> In 1991 the Cali cartel was featured in a *Time* magazine article that estimated that the cartel was responsible for seventy percent of the cocaine that entered the United States and ninety percent

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<sup>105</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World’s Greatest Outlaw* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2001), 50.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 58–9.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Gibbs, “Mexican Drug Lord on Rich List,” *BBC News*, 12 Mar 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7938904.stm> (accessed March 18, 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 249.

<sup>110</sup> PBS Frontline: “Drug Wars,” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/business/inside/colombian.html> (accessed March 18, 2011).

of the cocaine that entered Europe.<sup>111</sup> The Cali cartel provided informants to Colombian authorities to assist in the targeting of Pablo Escobar. They formed “Los Pepes” (People Against Pablo Escobar) that waged a violent campaign of car bombs and ambushes on Escobar and his inner circle.<sup>112</sup> After the killing of Escobar, the Colombian authorities focused their efforts on the Cali cartel. The Colombian National Police, led by General José Serrano, were able to penetrate the Cali cartel with confidential informants. Within a two-month period in from June to August of 1995, six of the top seven leaders of the Cali cartel were either captured or surrendered to Colombian authorities. On June 9, 1995, Gilberto Rodríguez, the “Chess Player,” was captured in his home without a shot being fired.<sup>113</sup> The Colombian National Police captured José Santacruz at a restaurant in northern Bogotá on July 4, 1995.<sup>114</sup> On August 4, 1995, the Colombian National Police and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration personnel conducted a raid that captured Miguel Rodríguez.<sup>115</sup> Rodríguez would eventually be extradited to the United States in 2004.<sup>116</sup> The dismantling of the Cali cartel led to a power struggle resulting in 400 murders in Cali within a few months after the capture of Miguel Rodríguez. The turf war also resulted in violence in New York City where the bodies of twenty high-level Colombian drug traffickers were found.<sup>117</sup>

While the Cali cartel had no political aims of governing, it did attempt to influence political leaders. After Liberal Party candidate Ernesto Samper defeated Conservative Andrés Pastrana in the 1994 presidential election, accusations emerged that Samper had accepted over \$6 million in campaigns from the Cali cartel. Under pressure, Samper admitted that his campaign operatives had accepted drug money, but it was without his personal knowledge. The Colombian congress investigated the accusation thus

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<sup>111</sup> *Time*, “The Cali Cartel: The New Kings of Coke,” July 1, 1991, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,973285,00.html> (accessed March 18, 2011).

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

<sup>113</sup> Ron Chespiuk, *Drug Lords: The Rise and Fall of the Cali Cartel* (Wrea Green, United Kingdom: Milo Books, 2007), 232–3.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

making Samper the first Colombian president subject to possible impeachment. The Colombian congress eventually voted 111 to 43 to discontinue the investigation.<sup>118</sup> As a result, Samper's administration lacked credibility and public confidence in their elected officials plummeted. In an effort to appear strong against the Cali cartel, the Colombian government increased its efforts against the Cali cartel resulting in their defeat in the summer of 1995. The United States "decertified" Colombia for inadequate efforts in the fight against drugs. It also revoked President Samper's visa for travel to the United States.<sup>119</sup>

The Colombian government used a "kingpin strategy" to defeat the Medellín and Cali cartels. The tactic of identify, locate, and capture used by the Colombian National Police resembles the United States military's use of find, fix, and finish. The Colombian government targeted the cartels by "disrupting their flows of money and weapons, their ability to acquire drugs and precursor chemicals, and their distribution networks."<sup>120</sup> The Colombian National Police, with assistance from the United States military and other federal agencies, effectively used both human and signal intelligence. The Colombians relied heavily on its national police, not its military, in defeating two of the world's most powerful criminal organizations. Furthermore, the extradition of drug kingpins to the United States was a valuable tool for the Colombian government because cartel members had been able to live comfortably even while in jail in Colombia.<sup>121</sup>

On the negative side, while the defeat of the Medellín and Cali cartels reduced high-profile violence in Colombia, it did not have much impact on the overall drug trade in the 1990s. The post-cartel drug industry in Colombia became even more decentralized to fill the vacuum left by the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. As new networks developed, the left-wing FARC and the right-wing AUC increased their involvement in the drug trade. Both organizations became more directly involved in the production

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<sup>118</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 251.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Bonner, "Battling Mexico's Drug Cartels," 53.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 54.

and distribution process. The involvement of the FARC and AUC in the drug trade led to the creation of the terms “narco-guerrilla” and “narco-terrorist.”<sup>122</sup>

### **The Insurgents and Paramilitaries**

The roots of the ongoing struggle between right-wing and left-wing elements in Colombia began on April 9, 1948, with the assassination of populist Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The assassination sparked a civil war between Liberal and Conservative forces that lasted until late 1957 known as *La Violencia* (The Violence).<sup>123</sup> *La Violencia* resulted in the death of between 200,000 and 300,000 people.<sup>124</sup> In 1957 the two sides agreed to a power-sharing agreement known as the National Front. As part of the agreement, the Conservatives and Liberals would alternate the presidency every four years and equally divide the important political appointments.<sup>125</sup> The legacy of the *La Violencia* includes the creation of several guerrilla movements that emerged from peasant self-defense organizations formed during the civil war: the M-19, the ELN, and the FARC.<sup>126</sup> All three of these groups were socialist in ideology during the height of the Cold War.

### **The M-19**

The April 19<sup>th</sup> Movement, or M-19, acquired its name from the date of the disputed 1970 presidential election in Colombia. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla ran for president from the National Action Party (ANAPO) espousing a credo of “Socialism on Christian bases in the Colombian manner.”<sup>127</sup> Many Colombians expected Rojas Pinilla to win. On election, the government did not declare the results. On the next day, the Colombian government declared Conservative Misael Pastrana the winner. M-19 originated as a radical splinter group of ANAPO, urban in origin, and heavily influenced by the

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<sup>122</sup> Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama*, 90.

<sup>123</sup> Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: US Policy Toward Colombia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2008), 49.

<sup>124</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 77.

<sup>125</sup> Crandall, *Driven by Drugs*, 50.

<sup>126</sup> Felbab-Brown, 77.

<sup>127</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 244.

Montoneros in Argentina and the Tupamaros in Uruguay.<sup>128</sup> The first symbolic act of the M-19 was to steal the sword of Simón Bolívar from a Bogotá museum as a gesture of continuing his cause.<sup>129</sup> In 1980 the M-19 seized the embassy of the Dominican Republic and held hostages. On November 6, 1985, the M-19 seized the Ministry of Justice in Bogotá. The military responded with an assault on the palace leading to the death of twelve justices of the Supreme Court and all forty-one guerrillas involved, and many lawyers and innocent civilians.<sup>130</sup>

By the late 1970s, the M-19 was struggling due to pressure from the Colombian Army and due to the arrests of its members. The M-19 decided to use kidnapping to extort money from the narco-jefes. Although unsuccessful in its attempt to kidnap Medellín kingpin, Carlos Lehder, it did kidnap three children of Carlos Jader Álvarez and the sister of Medellín trafficker Juan David Ochoa. Pablo Escobar responded by forming MAS (Muerte a Secuestradores, or Death to Kidnappers) which started a systematic campaign to hunt down, torture and kill M-19 members. The MAS was successful in cutting M-19's membership in half. It is disputed in Colombia if the M-19 had struck a deal with MAS prior to the seizure of the Palace of Justice because the Supreme Court of Colombia was scheduled to rule on the extradition of a number of prominent drug traffickers on that date. The M-19 later denounced accusations of acting on behalf of the drug traffickers. Regardless, the M-19 had been dealt a near deathblow. In 1989 its members struck a deal with the Colombian government and demobilized. It returned the sword of Simón Bolívar and transformed into a political party, the Democratic Alliance M-19.<sup>131</sup>

## **The ELN**

The ELN was created in 1963 by university students, Catholic radicals, and left-wing intellectuals hoping to emulate Fidel Castro's communist revolution in Cuba.<sup>132</sup> The group was also inspired by Christian liberation theology. The group's leaders sought to end the economic exploitation of the lower

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<sup>128</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 245.

<sup>129</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 90.

<sup>130</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 245.

<sup>131</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 90–1.

<sup>132</sup> Stephanie Hanson, "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerrillas," Council of Foreign Relations, August 19, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/colombia/farc-eln-colombias-left-wing-guerrillas/p9272> (accessed March 20, 2011).

classes in Colombia.<sup>133</sup> The ELN's initial areas of operation were the northern departments of Bolívar, Antioquia, and Santander. The ELN extended its operations in the late 1960s; however, it was almost decisively defeated in 1973.<sup>134</sup> As distress mounted among *campesinos* (peasant farmers), the ELN regrouped under the leadership of guerrilla priest Manuel Pérez in the mid-1980s. The ELN resorted to extortion of the large oil companies in northern Colombia as its primary source of income.<sup>135</sup> The ELN kidnapped oil executives and held them for ransom to earn between \$150,000 and \$200,000 annually in the early and mid-1990s. During this period, the ELN membership increased from less than 500 guerrillas in 1979 to between 3,000 and 5,000 in 1998.<sup>136</sup> The ELN also periodically attacked oil pipelines to protest the theft of Colombia's resources by foreigners.<sup>137</sup>

Due to its religious roots, the ELN initially refused to participate in the drug trade. When Pérez died in 1997, the ELN reconsidered its decision to participate in the drug trade. The ELN had been at a disadvantage to the FARC and AUC who were both heavily involved in the drug trade. Within a few years, the ELN was generating about 20 percent of its income from illicit drugs.<sup>138</sup> After the election of President Álvaro Uribe in 2002, the Colombian government increased its counterinsurgency efforts. The combination of pressure from the government and competition from the FARC and AUC have reduced the ELN from approximately 5,000 combatants in 2000 to perhaps 2,500 combatants in 2010.<sup>139</sup> The Colombian government has negotiated with the ELN leadership to demobilize and disarm with no conclusive results yet.<sup>140</sup>

## **The FARC**

The FARC emerged in the mid-1960s with roots in communist-led agitation dating back to the 1920s. It has a largely agrarian focus. The FARC's founder, Manuel Marulanda, earned his nickname of

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<sup>133</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 92.

<sup>134</sup> Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 244.

<sup>135</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 92.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>140</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 93.

“Tirofijo” (Sureshot) during the FARC’s early years.<sup>141</sup> Tirofijo began his career as a guerrilla fighting for the poor farmers during La Violencia. The FARC originally sought to establish socialism, empower the lower classes, redistribute land, and bring economic development to the countryside.<sup>142</sup> Its goal was a Marxist-Leninist insurgency using People’s War doctrine to advance on multiple lines of effort with the ultimate goal of seizing power.<sup>143</sup> In the mid-1960s, the FARC’s operations consisted mainly of isolated ambushes on small military units and raids on farms. The FARC was not a serious threat to the Colombian government in the 1960s and 1970s when it was hardly more than a remote band of peasant fighters.<sup>144</sup>

The FARC initially opposed the cultivation of illicit crops as counterrevolutionary because it enriched capitalist drug traffickers. However, upon realizing that the cultivation of these illicit crops was critical to the peasant farmers, the FARC decided to embrace the illicit economy. The FARC’s Seventh Planning Conference in 1982 laid out plans to protect coca production, tax traffickers, and recruit from low-level workers in the drug trade. The FARC imposed a 15 percent tax on coca farmers and a 20 percent fee from traffickers for use of the territory under their control.<sup>145</sup> Former United States ambassador to Colombia, Lewis Tambs, coined the term “narco-guerrilla” to describe how the FARC extorted money from coca farmers to fund its insurgency against the Colombian state. Colombian officials quickly adopted the term themselves.<sup>146</sup> By the early 1990s, the FARC was acquiring its own plots and processing coca leaf into cocaine.<sup>147</sup> As the FARC acquired economic leverage through its alliances with narco-traffickers, the FARC expanded its numbers from 3,6000 insurgents in 1986 to about

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<sup>141</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 244.

<sup>142</sup> Felbab-Brown, 78.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Marks, “Colombia: Learning Institutions Enable Integrated Response,” *Prism* Vol. 1, No. 4, September 2010, 130.

<sup>144</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 78.

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

<sup>146</sup> Mario A. Murillo, *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>147</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 79.

7,000 in 1995 and as many as 15,000 to 20,000 by 2000.<sup>148</sup> In the late 1990s the FARC attacked military installations and police stations throughout the country causing numerous Colombian military casualties and embarrassment as well. The FARC was also able to capture dozens of soldiers and police officials in these operations.<sup>149</sup>

In 1998 Andrés Pastrana of the Conservative Party won the Colombian presidential election. In search of peace and reconciliation, Pastrana created a *zona de despeje*, or demilitarized zone (DMZ), by withdrawing army units from the southwestern part of Colombia. Pastrana also opened up negotiations with the FARC.<sup>150</sup> The Colombian government had not exercised any real control of the area covering 42,000 square kilometers that became a de facto FARC state, the size of Switzerland.<sup>151</sup> The FARC used the DMZ to facilitate an intensification of the conflict via main force warfare while it continued to conduct terror and guerrilla actions.<sup>152</sup> Although talks dragged on, no significant progress occurred. In September 2001 the FARC murdered the wife of the attorney general. The woman was a public figure herself, a former Minister of Culture. The FARC also blocked efforts to resume negotiations. The FARC's failure over time to negotiate in good faith led to a negative perception of it in the eyes of the Colombian urban population and the international press.<sup>153</sup> In February 2002 Pastrana responded by ordering military units to retake the DMZ.<sup>154</sup> The FARC countered with attacks throughout the country to include a bomb attack at a disco in Bogotá.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 250.

<sup>149</sup> Murillo, *Colombia and the United States*, 70.

<sup>150</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 252.

<sup>151</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 88.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002–2006) vs FARC," *Military Review* (Special Edition Counterinsurgency Reader II), August 2008, 49.

<sup>153</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 88.

<sup>154</sup> Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 252.

<sup>155</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, 89.

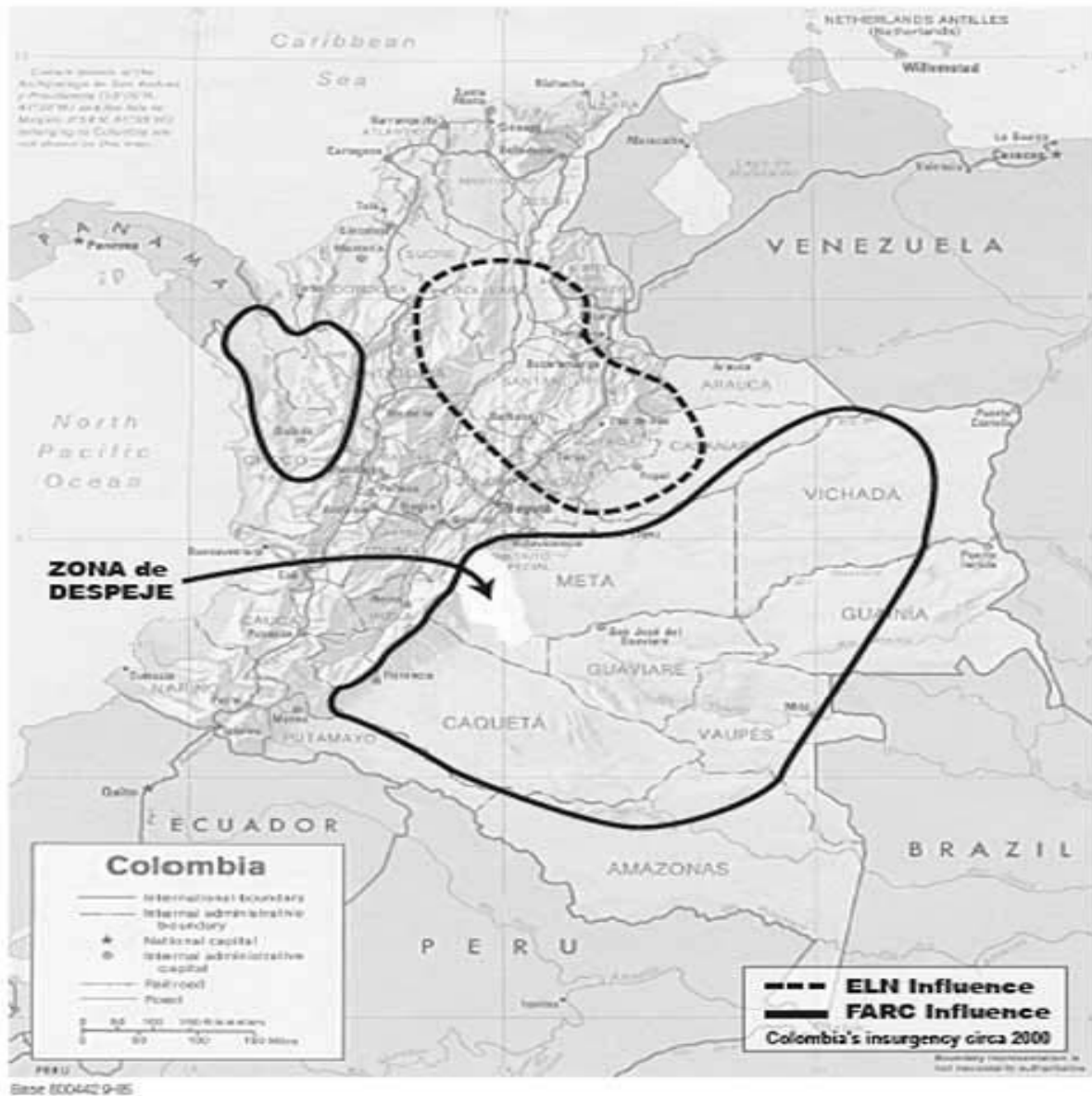


Figure 2. FARC and ELN Areas of Influence (circa 2000)<sup>156</sup>

In the 2002 presidential election, candidate Álvaro Uribe ran on a platform vowing to crush guerrilla movements with unyielding force. Uribe was a dissident liberal who ran as a third party candidate of the Colombia First party. Also, FARC guerrillas assassinated Uribe's father. Uribe was former mayor of Medellín and the former governor of Antioquia.<sup>157</sup> Uribe also had a law degree from

<sup>156</sup> Used with permission from Thomas Marks, "Model Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (Special Edition Counterinsurgency Reader II), August 2008, 42 (CGSC Copyright Registration #11-332 C/E).

<sup>157</sup> Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 252.

Colombia and later completed courses at Harvard University and Oxford University. After the terror attack on the United States in September 2001, the United States was more willing to provide support in support of allies who were tough on terrorist networks. President Bush was very supportive of President Uribe. In 2002 the United States Congress authorized the use of American counter-narcotics assistance to be used for counter-insurgency operations. In 2003 the United States provided approximately \$573 million in assistance Colombia.<sup>158</sup>

### **The AUC**

The roots of the AUC are in northwestern and central Colombia in the mid-1980s when it formed as an anti-kidnapping force with close ties to landowners, cattle ranchers and drug traffickers. Brothers Fidel and Carlos Castaño formed the group to avenge the kidnapping and murder of their father by the FARC.<sup>159</sup> The AUC's stated purpose was to provide regional protection from Marxist insurgents. Because the FARC and ELN were taxing landowners, the AUC was set up as an umbrella organization to coordinate various right-wing militias. The Castaño brothers had participated in "Los Pepes" which had assisted the Colombian government in the hunt for Pablo Escobar. The AUC essentially served as an adjunct to the Colombian military. However, due to its use of the drug trade for its funding and human rights abuses, the Colombian military ended its relationship to the AUC. As the Colombian government increased pressure against the FARC and AUC under President Uribe, the AUC officially disbanded on April 18, 2006. The AUC turned in 17,000 weapons to the Colombian government, although some AUC groups continue to operate.<sup>160</sup>

### **Plan Colombia and Counterinsurgency**

The United States has assisted Colombia in its fight against anti-government insurgent forces since the 1960s. Brigadier General William Yarborough visited Colombia in 1962 and helped to draft

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<sup>158</sup> Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 252.

<sup>159</sup> Steven Boraz, "Case Study: The Colombia-Venezuela Border," in *Ungoverned Territories*, Angel Rabasa et al. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 244–5.

<sup>160</sup> Troy J. Sacquety, "Forty Years of Insurgency: Colombia's Main Opposition Groups," *Veritas, Journal of Army Special Operations History*, PB 31-05-02, Vol. 2, No. 4, 50.

Plan Lazo. The plan consisted of national to community-level civic action as well as counterinsurgency support to the military and police. The final phase of the Plan Lazo intended to destroy an 800-square kilometer leftist enclave known as the Marquetalia Republic. The surviving rebels scattered and some became the initial supporters of the FARC and ELN.<sup>161</sup>

In 1998 President Pastrana implemented Plan Colombia: a six year plan intended to “combat narco-terrorism, spur economic recovery, strengthen democratic institutions with a respect for human rights, and provide humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons.”<sup>162</sup> In 2000 the U.S. Congress approved \$1.3 billion in military aid as part of Plan Colombia, a comprehensive aid agreement worked out between the administrations of President Pastrana and President Bill Clinton. The United States provided helicopters, equipment, and training, primarily from Army Special Forces.<sup>163</sup> The United States focused on counter-narcotics and set a limit of 500 on the number of military personnel allowed in Colombia. Additionally, the United States military could not train Colombian military personnel tied to human rights abuses. The United States also sprayed herbicide on coca crops.<sup>164</sup> The centerpiece of the United States contribution was the training and equipping of a Counternarcotics Brigade dedicated entirely to support eradication.<sup>165</sup>

The 9/11 terrorist attacks expanded the scope of the mission in Colombia from purely a counter-drug mission to a counter narco-terrorism (CNT) mission. National Security Directive 18 (November 2002) allowed greater authority for the United States military to provide intelligence and training support

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<sup>161</sup> Robert W. Jones, “Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota: The Evolution of Colombia’s National Strategy,” *Veritas, Journal of Special Operations History*, PB 31-05-2, Vol. 2, No. 4, 60.

<sup>162</sup> Donald C. Chipman, “How to Defeat the Drug Lords at Last,” *Hoover Digest*, 2010 No. 3 (July 2, 2010) Hoover Institution, Stanford University, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/35861> (accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>163</sup> Jones, “Plan Colombia,” 60.

<sup>164</sup> Max Boot, “The Colombian Miracle,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 14, 2009, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/017/301nyrut.asp> (accessed March 20, 2011).

<sup>165</sup> Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency,” 51.

to the Colombian military. Additionally, United States Special Forces could now assist their Colombian Special Operations Forces counterparts in training for operations against “narco-terrorists.”<sup>166</sup>

In 2002 with the inauguration of President Uribe, the Colombians planned a joint military operation known as *Plan Patriota* (Patriot Plan) that committed 18,000 troops to attack the FARC DMZ in order to kill or capture its main leaders. In Phase One, the Colombian Army attacked and secured the guerrilla controlled area. The Colombian National Police Junglas were brought in to make arrests and secure evidence. In Phase Two, the Colombian National Police Carabineros reestablished law and order to include the construction of a police station. In Phase Three, additional assets were brought in to consolidate the government’s control of the area.<sup>167</sup>

Plan Colombia had a goal of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent in six years (through 2006). Although the goal was not fully achieved, the Colombian government made major security advances.<sup>168</sup> The Colombians re-established a government presence in every one of the country’s municipalities by 2004. Between 2002 and 2007, the amount of homicides decreased by 37 percent, kidnappings by 78 percent, terrorist attacks by 63 percent, and attacks on the country’s infrastructure by 60 percent. The Colombian government also made progress on expanding international trade, reforming the judicial system, and reducing poverty.<sup>169</sup> Last, in March 2011 the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board removed Colombia from its “special observation list,” citing institutional improvements and a 50 percent reduction in coca cultivation in the past decade. However, Colombia continues to be the world’s largest cocaine producer signifying that much collaborative work remains to be done.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Jones, “Plan Colombia,” 63.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, “Plan Colombia,” Report to the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, October 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0971.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2011).

<sup>169</sup> Chipman, “How to Defeat the Drug Lords at Last.”

<sup>170</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, Press Releases, March 17, 2011, <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=229868> (accessed March 24, 2011).

## Operational Relevance of Colombia Case Study

Although there are numerous differences in the cases of narco-violence in Colombia and Mexico, there are concepts that were applied in Colombia that are operationally relevant for Mexico.

The leadership of President Uribe was critically important in legitimizing the efforts of the Colombian government while also providing a comprehensive and clear strategy known as the Democratic Security and Defense Policy:

The basic principle behind the strategy is to establish and reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect the population. The security strategy takes into account that this is not just a military matter. The policy's objective is to weaken illegal narco-terrorist groups through a variety of political, economic and military means and force a negotiated settlement that leads to a lasting and democratic peace. In order to ensure a State presence – that is, restoring law and order and regaining control over the entire Colombian territory, the Democratic Security Policy sets out to:

Consolidate State control throughout Colombia to deny sanctuary to terrorists and perpetrators of violence;

Protect the population through the increase of State presence and a reduction in violence;

Destroy the illegal drug trade in Colombia to eliminate the revenues which finance terrorism and generate corruption and crime;

Maintain a deterrent military capability as a long-term guarantee of democratic sustainability; and

Transparently and efficiently manage resources as a means to reform and improve the performance of government.<sup>171</sup>

The Colombian military effectively reformed itself. After suffering embarrassing defeats in the mid-90s, the Colombian Army began to reform itself in the late 90s under the Pastrana administration. First, it reformed the way it recruited thus changing from a largely draftee force to one-third volunteers, with elite units essentially fully professional soldiers. Second, the army reformed military schooling, assignment policies, and its organizational structure. Third, it made a concentrated effort to conduct after action reviews and implement lessons learned. Last, with U.S. assistance the Colombian military built a

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<sup>171</sup> Álvaro Uribe, The Uribe Administration's Democratic Security and Defense Policy, Embassy of Colombia, Washington, D.C. [http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita\\_bush/documentos/security.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita_bush/documentos/security.pdf) (accessed March 20, 2010).

joint and special operations capability. The military was in a position to reclaim the strategic initiative when President Uribe took office.<sup>172</sup>

The military also developed senior leadership that provided sound advice to the president and developing a Joint Command multi-year plan Plan Patriota to guide the military efforts against the FARC. The three Colombian Army commanders who made the greatest impact were Generals Fernando Tapias, Jorge Enrique Rangel, and Carlos Alberto Ospina. Their understanding of Colombia's war against the FARC was critical in addition to translating strategy into operational art.<sup>173</sup>

The Colombian National Police (CNP) grew in both their size and effectiveness. The CNP were responsible for the defeat of the Medellín and Cali cartels in the early to mid 1990s. They also have played an important role in the counterinsurgency effort against the FARC and ELN. The CNP is subordinate to the Ministry of Defense. The CNP developed an extremely professional commando force known as the Junglas to conduct direct action missions. Likewise, they have also developed a rural police capability known as the Carabineros to stabilize recently cleared areas. The police in Colombia have grown from 95,000 in 2000 to 136,000 in 2009. Also, the time to process average criminal case has fallen by 80 percent while the conviction rate has improved from 3 percent to 60 percent.<sup>174</sup>

The Colombians learned counterinsurgency. As Thomas Marks wrote in his article, "Colombia: Learning Institutions Enable Integrated Response," certain counterinsurgency principles still hold: "The strategic goal is legitimacy; the operational goal is the neutralization of the insurgent counterstate; the tactical goal is the domination of human terrain (that is, the security of the people)."<sup>175</sup>

The use of strategic communications plays an important role in Colombia's struggle against the FARC. The FARC effectively used strategic communications in its efforts to achieve legitimacy. The fact that the Pastrana administration ceded a portion of the state prior to negotiations legitimized the FARC to the international audience. The FARC has at times effectively portrayed itself as a champion of

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<sup>172</sup> Marks, "Model Counterinsurgency," 51.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>174</sup> Max Boot, "Colombian Miracle."

<sup>175</sup> Marks, "Colombia: Learning Institutions," 140.

the peasant farmers fighting against an oppressive state.<sup>176</sup> Under President Uribe, the Colombians have shifted the perception by portraying Colombia as a legitimate democracy being challenged by illegitimate terrorism lacking popular support and sustaining itself through criminal activity targeting the local population.<sup>177</sup>

Plan Colombia initially had too narrow a focus as the aid was targeted specifically for counternarcotics. The FARC, ELN, and AUC were all relying on the drug trade to further its ideological causes. Once Plan Colombia was expanded to counter narco-terrorism, it became part of a larger campaign plan.<sup>178</sup>

### **Analysis on Mexico**

In December 2008, the U.S. Joint Forces Command's Joint Operating Environment 2008, paired Mexico with Pakistan as "worst case scenarios" – states that are susceptible to a "rapid and sudden collapse." In January 2009, Michael Hayden, the departing Director of Central Intelligence, claimed that Mexico could become more problematic than Iraq.<sup>179</sup> However, most experts now agree that Mexico is not in danger of failing as a state. As Major Juan Nava wrote in his *Military Review* article, the democratically elected Mexican government is conducting aggressive counterdrug operations against the cartels on behalf of the Mexican people. Nava concluded that "while Mexico struggles to provide security in large areas of the country, it does apply the rule of law, enables its citizens to participate in free and fair elections, and provides essential services to the population."<sup>180</sup>

While it is extremely unlikely that Mexico will fail as a state, it is possible that Guatemala could fail. Los Zetas have entered into Guatemala where they have established a zone of impunity. Guatemala suffered through civil war from 1960 to 1996. The civil war violence between leftist guerrillas, right-

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<sup>176</sup> Marks, "Colombia: Learning Institutions," 129.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>178</sup> Boot, "Colombian Miracle."

<sup>179</sup> Shannon O'Neill, "The Real War in Mexico: How Democracy Can Defeat the Drug Cartels," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65155/shannon-oneil/the-real-war-in-mexico> (accessed August 22, 2009).

<sup>180</sup> Nava, "Mexico," 39.

wing death squads, and government forces took 200,000 lives out of a population of less than 10 million. Half of those deaths occurred between 1981 and 1983. The Guatemalan government does not have the same capacity as Mexico to deal with well-armed TCOs. Guatemala's weak institutions have been unable to contain the violence that has caused a significant erosion in the authority of the state.<sup>181</sup> Honduras and El Salvador also face serious problems with gangs and narco-violence. In 2010 each of the countries in Central America's "Northern Triangle" (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) had more murders than the entire European Union combined.<sup>182</sup>

The TCOs have developed a capability in weapons, training, and tactics that makes it difficult for Mexican law enforcement to be effective against them. The use of the Mexican military in a counter-narcotics role within Mexico threatens to hurt its credibility as one of the country's most respected institutions. On March 3, 2011, thirteen military members were arrested at a military checkpoint just south of Tijuana with more than one ton of methamphetamine. While corruption is rampant across Mexican law enforcement, the military has been less susceptible. The police at the state and municipal levels are not funded as well as federal police and the military.<sup>183</sup> They often do not have the resources to combat the cartels. Therefore, it is easier to take the money, not the bullet. It is essential for Mexico to develop sufficient law enforcement capacity. Mexican TCOs will continue to recruit military personnel to work for them in an enforcement role.

The worst-case scenario for the United States is the development of ties between the Mexican TCOs, gang members, and global terrorist organizations. On March 27, 2009, the *Washington Times* reported that the Iran-backed Lebanese group, Hezbollah, was using the same routes as Mexican drug kingpins to smuggle drugs and people into the United States, reaping money to finance its operations and

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<sup>181</sup> Hal Brands, "Crime, Violence, and the Crisis in Guatemala: A Case Study in the Erosion of the State" (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2010), v.

<sup>182</sup> Mauricio Cardenas, "Think Again: Latin America," *Foreign Policy*, March 17, 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/17/think\\_again\\_latin\\_america?page=0,3](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/17/think_again_latin_america?page=0,3) (accessed March 25, 2011).

<sup>183</sup> STRATFOR, Mexico Security Memo: March 8, 2011, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20110308-mexico-security-memo-march-8-2011> (accessed March 20, 2011).

threatening U.S. national security. In March 2009, then commander of U.S. Southern Command, Admiral James G. Stavridis, testified before the House Armed Forces Committee that the nexus between illicit drug trafficking and “Islamic radical terrorism” is a growing threat to the United States.<sup>184</sup>

It is best for the United States to continue with a whole of government approach in Mexico while continuing to build trust with the Mexican military at the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program level. The Mérida Initiative provides for improvements in equipment and other capabilities. The United States military assistance has focused on improving the capabilities of Mexican special operations units who execute the direct action missions targeting the narcojefes.<sup>185</sup> This resembles the strategy that worked in Colombia. Ray Walser recommends that the United States invite Mexico to join the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) that monitors air and sea approaches to the United States. While some would argue about operational security, the Canadians are already partners in NORAD.<sup>186</sup>

In February 2009 former President Cardoso of Brazil, former President Gaviria of Colombia, and former President Zedillo of Mexico wrote an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* declaring that the war on drugs has failed. It denounced United States inspired drug policies in Latin America. It proposed a shift in drug policies to reduce the harm caused by drugs, decrease drug consumption, and aggressively combat organized crime.<sup>187</sup>

The true insurgent groups of Mexico, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), have not been able to significantly penetrate the drug trade as the

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<sup>184</sup> Sara A. Carter, “Exclusive: Hezbollah Uses Mexican Drug Routes into U.S.,” *The Washington Times*, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/27/hezbollah-uses-mexican-drug-routes-into-us/> (accessed March 20, 2010).

<sup>185</sup> Graham Turbiville, “U.S. Military Engagement with Mexico: Uneasy Past and Challenging Future,” JSOU Report 10-2 (Hurlburt Field, FL: The JSOU Press, 2010), 46–7.

<sup>186</sup> Walser, “U.S. Strategy,” 15.

<sup>187</sup> Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Cesar Gaviria and Ernesto Zedillo, “The War on Drugs is a Failure,” *Wall Street Journal* (February 23, 2009) <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123535114271444981.html> (accessed February 21, 2011).

FARC and ELN did in Colombia.<sup>188</sup> The Zapatistas reside in Mexico's most neglected state in the south along the border with Guatemala. The EZLN took over the state capital of Chiapas on January 1994 on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect. The Mexican government quickly put down the rebellion forcing the EZLN to flee to the jungle.<sup>189</sup> Based on its strategic location near the Guatemalan border, the EZLN would pose a much greater threat with greater financial resources from the drug trade.

While 2010 was the most violent year yet of President Calderón's drug war, some believe that the country is ready to turn the corner. In 2010, the Mexican government either captured or killed at least 13 of the country's most wanted criminals including Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel (killed), Teodoro "El Teo" García Simental (arrested), Edgar "The Barbie" Valdez (arrested), Ezquiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén (arrested), and Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno (killed). The Mexican government has badly damaged the BLO, the LFM, and Los Zetas, adding to speculation that the government's strategy favors the Sinaloa Federation. While critics blame Calderón for a strategy that exacerbates the violence, the Calderon administration has remained steadfast in its goal to downsize the TCOs from a national security threat to a local security problem.<sup>190</sup>

## Conclusion

Although a compelling case can be made for labeling the Mexican drug cartels an insurgency, the cartels are more accurately non-state criminal actors whose motivation is survival, power, and profit. The primary implication of this monograph is that it is the responsibility of the leadership of the Mexican government, its law enforcement institutions, its judicial system, and the military to defeat the TCOs. The case study of Colombia provides strong evidence of the importance of competent political, law enforcement, and military leadership. It is also clear that the United States provided valuable assistance,

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<sup>188</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia," Policy Paper, Number 12 (March 2009) Foreign Policy at Brookings, 6.

<sup>189</sup> Steven Boraz, "Case Study: The Colombia-Venezuela Border," in *Ungoverned Territories*, Angel Rabasa et al. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 279.

<sup>190</sup> Ríos and Shirk, "Drug Violence," 18.

but it was the Colombians' efforts that reduced violence, secured the population, and marginalized the insurgents. The Colombians defeated the organized criminal elements of Medellín and Cali cartels in the 90s, and then it significantly weakened insurgent groups like the FARC and ELN since 2002. Although it will remain nearly impossible to stop the flow of drugs to the United States, the Mexican government can reduce the level of narco-violence to a level where the people feel safe.

Last, the question of whether the narco-violence in Mexico constitutes an insurgency is largely a question of defining insurgency. In a narrow sense the insurgents must have political aims of assuming the role of the central government. In a broader sense, the insurgents aim to have freedom of action to conduct their illicit activities in a manner where the ability of the government to maintain the rule of law has been marginalized. Secretary Clinton did not say that the Mexican TCOs were insurgents; she said that the TCOs were showing "more and more indices of insurgency" such as car bombs. The ability to declare zones of impunity where the government is not able to exert its influence is an index of insurgency. However, the Mexican TCOs have a weak case for being an insurgency due to their lack of legitimacy because violence has been excessively cruel and lacking in purpose in the eyes of the Mexican people.

## Appendix 1

Council on Foreign Relations

September 08, 2010, Washington D.C.

A Conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

Transcript:

Richard N. Haas: I'd like to turn to Carla Hills.

Carla Hills: Secretary Clinton, first of all, thank you for a really far-ranging, extraordinarily interesting talk.

You mentioned strategies that are regional, and I'd like you to just say a word more about this hemisphere. You gave a wonderful speech at the border of Mexico, where you asserted that we had responsibility for the drugs coming north and the guns going south. Talk a little bit about how we are implementing strategies to turn that around, and also to gain friendships that would be helpful throughout Latin America.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: Well, first, Carla, thank you for asking about this hemisphere, because it is very much on our minds. And we face an increasing threat from a well-organized network, drug-trafficking threat that is, in some cases, morphing into or making common cause with what we would consider an insurgency, in Mexico and in Central America.

And we are working very hard to assist the Mexicans in improving their law enforcement and their intelligence, their capacity to detain and prosecute those who they arrest. I give President Calderon very high marks for his courage and his commitment. This is a really tough challenge. And these drug cartels are now showing more and more indices of insurgency -- you know, all of a sudden car bombs show up, which weren't there before.

So it's becoming -- it's looking more and more like Colombia looked 20 years ago, where the narcotraffickers control, you know, certain parts of the country -- not -- significant parts; in Colombia, it got to the point where, you know, more than a third of the country -- nearly 40 percent of the country at

one time or another was controlled by the insurgents, by FARC.

But it's going to take a combination of improved institutional capacity and better law enforcement and, where appropriate, military support for that law enforcement, you know, married to political will, to be able to prevent this from spreading and to try to beat it back.

Mexico has capacity, and they're using that capacity, and they've been very willing to take advice. You know, they're wanting to do as much of it on their own as possible, but we stand ready to help them. But the small countries in Central America do not have that capacity, and the newly inaugurated president of Costa Rica, President Chinchilla, you know, said, we need help and we need a much more vigorous U.S. presence.

So we are working to try to enhance what we have in Central America. We hear the same thing from our Caribbean friends, so we have an initiative, the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. And our relationship is not all about drugs and violence and crime, but unfortunately that often gets the headlines. We're also working on more economic programs, we're working on Millennium Challenge grants, we're working on a lot of other ways of bolstering economies and governments to improve rule of law. But this is on the top of everyone's mind when they come to speak with us.

And I know that Plan Colombia was controversial. I was just in Colombia, and there were problems and there were mistakes, but it worked. And it was bipartisan, started, you know, in the Clinton administration, continued in the Bush administration. And I think President Santos will try to do everything he can to remedy the problems of the past while continuing to, you know, make progress against the insurgency.

And we need to figure out what are the equivalents for Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. And that's not easy, because these -- you know, you put your finger on it. I mean, those drugs come up through Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, through Central America, southern Mexico, to the border, and we consume them. And those guns -- you know, those guns, legal and illegal, keep flooding, along with all of the mayhem -- it's not only guns; it's weapons, it's arsenals of all kinds that come south. So I feel a real sense of responsibility to do everything we can. And again, we're working hard to come up with approaches that

will actually deliver.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations, September 8, 2010.

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