Chapter 8
México: Organized Crime Politics and Insecurity

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Abstract The text below characterizes the phenomenon of organized crime in Mexico, which is dominated by illegal drug trafficking organizations and provokes high levels of violence, and its relationship with the configuration of political power. In order to understand the dimensions of the problem, this contribution also explores the definitions that have been used to characterize organized crime. It also examines the available data on the illegal drug market to show inconsistencies and inadequacies that are often overlooked. Finally, it weighs the strategies that the Mexican government has deployed during the Calderón administration to combat drug trafficking and the widespread social dissatisfaction with the high levels of violence and the number of fatalities.

Introduction

Mexico is a society characterized by high levels of poverty, inequality, corruption and impunity; by recent and major changes in the fields of politics and drug trafficking and the links between them and their modalities; by the transit from a one-party-state to a system of competition between political parties alternating in power; and by the problem this creates when there is a weak civil society and the political class lacks a national vision and clearly does not contribute to the consolidation of democracy. This creates a fertile ground for the advancement of

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D. Siegel and H. van de Bunt (eds.), *Traditional Organized Crime in the Modern World*, Studies of Organized Crime 11, DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4614-3212-8_8,

power groups, legal and illegal, armed and unarmed and for an organized crime network that feeds primarily but not exclusively off the illegal drug trade.

According to the PGR, the Procuradoría General de la República (the Attorney General's Office):

> The concept of organized crime [was] incorporated in our country's legislation, by the decree of September 2nd 1993 that amends Articles 16, 17 and 119 and derogates Article 107 paragraph XVIII of the Constitution, published in the Official Journal of the Federation the 3rd day of the same month and year.[1]

According to Article 16 of the Constitution of the Mexican United States "organized crime is defined as an organization made up of three or more persons with the purpose of committing crimes in a permanent or repeated manner, in the terms of the law on the matter."[2] The Mexican Federal Law against Organized Crime was enacted on November 7, 1996. Article 2 defines the subject under consideration as follows:

> When three or more persons agree to organize themselves or to be organized to carry out, in an ongoing or repeated way, actions which themselves or related to others, have as a goal or result to commit one or more of the following crimes, they will be prosecuted for that very fact, as members of organized crime.[3]

The long list of crimes mentioned under the law includes terrorism, international terrorism, drug crimes, counterfeiting or the alteration of currency, transactions with funds of illegal origin, collection of arms and their trafficking, alien smuggling, corruption, pornography, pandering, sexual tourism and trafficking of persons who are under eighteen years of age or who are not able to understand the meaning of the act or to resist it, vehicle theft, human trafficking and abduction.

There may be many offenses that fall under the purview of this law, but to talk about organized crime in Mexico is to refer generally to criminal organizations whose income is obtained mainly if not exclusively from the trafficking of illegal drugs. The legal universe defined as "organized crime" includes drug offenses (or the trafficking of illegal drugs) as a subset. Historically and in practice, the field of drug trafficking has had a relatively greater weight in economic terms and in its capacity to impose its logic on others through the use of force. While not all drug trafficking organizations carry out other activities considered to be organized crime, they are in a position of dominance over other groups engaged in those activities and they are also in a position to expand their interests toward other types of crime if they so choose.

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[1] http://www.pgr.gob.mx/Combate%20a%20la%20Delincuencia/Delitos%20Federales/Delincuencia%20Organizada/Antecedentes.asp

[2] http://info4.juridicas.unam.mx/ijure/fed/9/17.htm?s=

[3] http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/101.pdf

These organizations are credited with the most violent murders in the country. They are the ones that have caused, and are causing, the biggest problems of governance and they are often of a transnational character. Based on federal government data, it is possible to affirm that about 70% of intentional homicides allegedly linked to drug trafficking are attributable to organizations led by drug dealers from the state of Sinaloa, who were previously part of a broad coalition. The rupture of the links between groups that were formerly associated has led to an extremely bloody fratricidal war. The remainder of the deaths are due to confrontations within the organizations themselves and within existing coalitions struggling for hegemony in the field of illegal drug trafficking.

It has become commonplace to designate illegal drug trafficking organizations as 'cartels' when in reality they are not. Since the early eighties the label 'cártel' or 'cartel', depending on the country, began to be used by prosecutors from South Florida and by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to refer to groups of Colombian traffickers engaged in violent and merciless competition with the Cubans in Florida for control of the cocaine distribution market. From the very beginning, the word has had the effect of a spell among those who adopted it to unify and symbolically capture through language these social organizations operating outside the law, including the media, who undertook its reproduction. Such has been the success of this nominal fiction that its use has spread to politicians and even to the academic world.

Strictly speaking, given the original meaning of 'cartel' in economics, the use of the word was inappropriate from the beginning. The Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) lists two definitions:

(1) the economic definition: "An agreement between several similar companies to avoid mutual competition and regulate the production, sale and prices in certain industrial fields", and
(2) a more recent definition: "An illegal organization linked to the trafficking of drugs and weapons".

No illegal drug trafficking organization, past or present, fits the economic definition but there are undoubtedly criminal organizations engaged in one or more of the activities identified by the law as 'organized crime'. Virtually all of the groups engaged in any or all of these activities, regardless of their size, fit the second definition given by the RAE. Journalists have had a hard time getting rid of this addictive linguistic fetish and they are not the only ones. But as if that were not enough, journalists and officials even speak of 'mini-cartels' and 'macro-cartels'. It would not be odd if they added the label of 'nano-cartels' to the list and it is perfectly possible that the list of erroneous and inconsistent labels will continue to expand.

There is no doubt that it is as difficult to capture in language the criminals that make up these organizations as it is to find the right words to account for their diverse and rapidly changing activities. In a very important, well-documented and large study of the world's illegal drug economy, Reuter and Trautmann state that "the illegal drug markets are largely competitive, not vertically integrated or

dominated by major dealers or cartels".[4] For those interested in the phenomenon this is an empirical and demystifying statement of great importance in the search for and the construction of more appropriate categories.

Recently, key figures such as Gil Kerlikowske, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), have been giving statements that challenge the appropriateness of the 'cartel' label. Gil Kerlikowske has said in reference to drug trafficking organizations:

> It is now very clear to me [that] we should not call them drug cartels, because they are involved in so many other things […]. They are multifaceted companies […]. If we continue to call them drug cartels, even though that still remains a large part of their profits, then we will continue to think we have to deal with them through some kind of drug legislation, regulation, and so on.[5]

Gil Kerlikowske did not seem to disagree with the use of the word 'cartel' previously, but he does not agree to use it to designate the current organizations that have expanded their criminal income. Even within the Mexican government there seems to be a greater awareness of the misuse of the 'cartel' label. The Ambassador of Mexico to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan, questioned the use of the term when he said that "a cartel colludes to agree on prices and on the control of the market. But this is the last thing that organized crime in Mexico is doing. That is why the violence has escalated."[6] In a text I wrote 20 years ago (published in 1995), I pointed out that it was an exaggeration to affix the word 'cartel' to every existing group, organized or not, that was engaged in illegal drug trafficking. I warned against the transformation of the language that pointed toward the creation of a universal semantic field whose main words were 'cartel' and the prefix 'narco'[7] (not all illegal drugs are narcotics). Both are fetish notions of the discourse on illegal drug trafficking. Therefore, I have never referred to drug trafficking organizations as 'cartels' or to the social agents involved as 'narcos'. This text is no exception. Instead, I will speak of organizations, coalitions and illegal drug traffickers.

How Is the Drug Trafficking Field Composed?

A document by the Ministry of National Defence (SEDENA) presented by its representative General Guillermo Galván to Congressmen and members of the National Defence Commission in September 2010, partially published in the weekly publication *Proceso*,[8] lists seven large trafficking organizations as the most

[4] A report by Reuter and Trautmann (2009), p. 13.

[5] See Díaz Briceño (2011).

[6] El Universal, May 18, 2011.

[7] Astorga (1995), p. 11.

[8] Cervantes (2011).

important and powerful in Mexico: Sinaloa ("Chapo" Guzman or Pacific), Arellano Félix (Tijuana), Beltran Leyva (South Pacific), Carrillo Fuentes (Juarez), La Familia Michoacana (Michoacan), Tamaulipas (Gulf of Mexico) and the Zetas. Besides the above mentioned, the document lists other smaller organizations that are associated in one way or the other to two of the larger coalitions, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas: Milenio, Diaz Parada, Unidos de Jalisco, la Resistencia, y la Sierra de Guerrero.

According to the Ministry of Defence, both the Sinaloa organization—which, according to the Ministry, is engaged in drug trafficking and not in kidnapping and extortion and has a linear and regionalized leadership—as well as the Tamaulipas organization have a 'traditional style' command structure and avoid confrontation with the armed forces. Sinaloa "systematically" avoids confrontation while Tamaulipas "generally" avoids it. On the other hand, the Zetas are also engaged in kidnapping and extortion, have a greater presence in the country, are responsible for most of the violence, deliberately attack the armed forces and are therefore seen as the criminal organization that poses the highest risk to internal security. The Ministry of Defence refers to the Zetas as "a military-style organization that enforces discipline within its members through violence." It points out that most attacks against the military, 264 of 805 (32.7%), have been carried out by that group. La Familia is characterized as a radical, fundamentalist organization that has succeeded in displacing the authorities in some municipalities of Michoacan. We must clarify that it is not the only one that has done so in its area of influence. The document published by the SEDENA does not specify whether the displacement has been deliberate or de facto through the inaction of the authorities. Nor does it state whether there have been agreements between criminal and political groups to achieve mutual benefits. About the organization's leader, Vicente Carrillo, the document says that he is violent, uncompromising and non-negotiating and that he recruits gang members from Ciudad Juarez for his own organization. On the Beltran Leyva organization it points out that besides drug trafficking it also carries out robberies, kidnappings and extortion and that it uses extreme violence. Regarding the Arellano organization it says that it is a family company that pays dues and is "the weakest" out of the seven.

General Galvan told legislators that: "[currently] there is no State in Mexico free of criminal manifestations derived from drug trafficking." He proceeded to present some scenarios that could reduce the violence caused by criminal organizations: 1. The coalition Gulf-Family-Sinaloa consolidates and manages to eliminate the Zetas, 2. Government action compels organizations to reach "agreed unification" so that they conduct their activities "without violence, and secretly." However, General Galvan did not venture to establish a time frame in which these hypothetical scenarios could be observed. The note in the weekly paper does not indicate whether the document raises other, less optimistic scenarios.

The leaders of the organizations Sinaloa, Tijuana, Juarez and Pacífico Sur all originated from the state of Sinaloa and until the late eighties they formed a hegemonic coalition in the field of drug trafficking in Mexico under the leadership

of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. Gallardo was arrested in 1989. The first to split from the Sinaloa organization were Joaquin Guzman and his partner Hector Palma in 1988. The second to split was the Arellano organization in the early nineties; the third one was the Carrillo organization, in 2004; and the fourth one, the Beltran Leyva organization, in 2008. The organization of Tamaulipas emerged powerfully during the Salinas administration (1988–1994) and became a competitor to the Sinaloa organization. In 1999, its leader, Osiel Cardenas, recruited a group of former elite military members who adopted the name "Zetas". Cardenas was captured in 2003 and extradited to the US in 2007. The Zetas split from the Tamaulipas organization in 2008, but there were no violent confrontations until 2010. The "La Familia" organization appeared publicly with that name in 2006 in the state of Michoacan, although some of its leaders already had previous contacts with the Sinaloa organization and the Zetas.[9] Currently, Mexican and US authorities have indicated the formation of new partnerships between the groups: on one side the Sinaloa, Tamaulipas and La Familia, and on the other Beltran, Carrillo and the Zetas. The Arellano organization had already started negotiations with the Sinaloa organization but apparently it did not want to become directly involved in the bloody struggle between the new coalitions.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Security of the federal government (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública) stated that after the death of the main leader of La Familia, Nazario Moreno, in December 2010, Enrique Plancarte y José de Jesús Méndez had become the new leaders of the organization. In early 2011, the differences between the two began and there was a split: Plancarte and Servando Gomez formed another group called "the Knights Templar" (Caballeros Templarios). Mendez remained as the leader of la Familia or of one faction of the organization formerly known as La Familia. According to the Ministry of Public Security (SSP), the arrest of 36 members from this organization by the Federal Police at the end of May 2011 has weakened the organization and it may seek support from other groups to face the Knights Templar.[10] Another source quoted in the press, allegedly from "federal intelligence" and without a date, indicated that the organizations of Sinaloa and el Golfo had sent a group of gunmen to Michoacán in late 2010 to eliminate seven of the people closest to Nazario Moreno.[11] This highlights the differences between the versions of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Public Security or, in other words, the lack of coordination between the two major institutions that the federal government relies on for its security strategy.

It can be said that the structure of the drug trafficking field in Mexico is predominantly oligopolistic instead of "cartelized" and that (as of the moment of writing this text) there is no group or coalition that has achieved hegemony. In just

[9] For more details see: Astorga (2005, 2007, 2011).

[10] See: SSP, Press Release Number 325, May 28, 2011.

[11] See: "Detecta reporte caza de capos", *Reforma*, May 28, 2011.

over two decades there has been a reconfiguration in the field—accelerated during the Calderón administration—where significant divisions can be observed that have led to new, more or less flexible criminal coalitions of uncertain duration and stability, especially in light of the fact that some of the new partners (for example, Sinaloa and el Golfo) were bitter enemies until a few years ago and the clashes between them were some of the bloodiest.

Political Reconfiguration and Insecurity

There are regions under the overall control of certain organizations and there are other regions where at least two organizations are vying for supremacy. These are, for example, ports or places along the coast that can be used to smuggle in chemicals for the manufacturing of methamphetamines or cocaine from South America; areas of production of marijuana or poppy; areas where there are laboratories producing methamphetamines; routes to the US-Mexico border; border crossings; and cities where illegal drug use is more prevalent and significant profits can be made by organizations in control the retail traffic. This mainly takes place in states and municipalities where power positions are occupied by members of various political parties. While President Felipe Calderón belongs to the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the data in May 2011 show a reconfiguration of the political field where most of the state governments (15 out of 32) and municipalities (921) are in the hands of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), or in the hands of the PRI in coalition with the Green Party of Mexico (PVEM), which represents four more governorships. The Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) governs in 6 states and 488 municipalities and in three more states with the coalition formed with the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), while the PRD rules in 4 states and 286 municipalities.

These days, there is political pluralism in Mexico but there are no joint efforts to improve the security of the nation. The federal government, every state and most municipalities have their own police unit, bringing their number up to 2,000. The training of police officers is uneven while the police and corruption agencies are highly uncoordinated as well as divided by partisan political differences. The police chiefs are appointed by local political authorities and they are given a budget for public safety. The government of Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) in October 2010 proposed an initiative to create a "single subsidiary state police authority", a police model that would be "flexible, decentralized and of a civil, non-militarized nature". In practice, there are only a few municipalities in certain states that have integrated the scheme of a state police with a single authority. The federal government's balance sheet shows the scale of the problem: "Only 12 of the 31 states have a police force in all municipalities and more than 400 municipalities in the country do not have their own public security force, while almost 90% of those who do have a police force, have less than 100 officers. The 25 largest police bodies account for 26% of the

current force strength."[12] The National Governors' Conference (CONAGO) agreed to hold their first joint police operation in the country on the 11th of July 2011, with the participation of 32 states and 310,000 policemen. The week-long police actions targeted kidnapping, extortion, theft of cars and homes, assault and arms trafficking, among others.[13] It was the first national attempt to coordinate public safety issues. Such coordination should be permanent and should go beyond the purpose of merely impressing the criminal organizations.

The party-state system, which lasted 71 years, during which time the PRI dominated the political life in Mexico, had relied since 1947 on a political police with extra-judicial powers. The Federal Directorate of Security (Dirección Federal de Seguridad) was first directly accountable to the President and later to the Interior Ministry. In addition, there was the Federal Judicial Police (Policía Judicial Federal), under the Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República). In a system where the federal executive branch predominated in an absolute manner over the legislative and the judiciary branches, both security institutions, especially the Federal Directorate of Security (DFS), played an important role in suppressing political opposition and in controlling and protecting criminal groups such as illegal drug traffickers. All the weight of the authoritarian state would fall on those social actors, political or criminal, that were designated as enemies. In this scheme, the traffickers had three options if they decided to not play by the rules: go out of business, go to jail or be eliminated. The DFS disappeared in 1985, as a result of political pressure from the US following the murder of a DEA agent in 1984 in which members of that institution had participated. The political changeover in states' governments began in 1989 when the PAN won the gubernatorial election in Baja California. In later years, the PRI continued to lose governorships and municipalities and in 1997 it lost for the first time its absolute majority in Congress. In 2000, the PRI was out of the presidency and replaced by the PAN candidate.

The reconfiguration of the political field is a relatively recent development which began to accelerate in the late eighties. In the political changeover, the central power faced a complex problem: the federal security institutions were corrupt and weakened, with thousands of local police officers being dependent on politicians of different parties. There was a political changeover, but a political pact to create a State security policy was missing. Short circuits on security issues were reproduced across the country and at all levels of government. Trafficking organizations as well as police bodies became more autonomous from the central political power. Faced with the economic power and the weaponry of the traffickers the political class had three alternatives: to do nothing and let the traffickers dominate, to establish relations of mutual convenience with the criminals, or make a political pact to develop and implement a State security policy. The first two have been observed in practice. The third exists only in the discourse of certain leaders.

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[12] See: SESNSP, "Iniciativa de mando único policial", http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnsp.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Iniciativa_de_Mando_Unico_Policial.

[13] Véase: M. Castillo, Notimex (2011a, b).

Markets

Estimates of the illegal drug market for which the Mexican trafficking organizations are competing vary according to the sources. The fact that these estimates come from official sources does not make them more reliable. The figures most often cited come from various agencies of the US government, but they are not derived from sound methodology. Generally speaking, these numbers are inventions, very rough estimations, or simply political statements rather than calculations based on scientific rigor. However, they are disseminated by the media as if they were revealed truth and are believed and accepted by many people who appear unwilling to make the slightest effort to maintain a critical detachment. Take, for example, the following US government figures. The ONDCP has estimated the amount spent by Americans on illegal drugs at $65 billion a year, an estimate from 1999 that still appears on the website of the DEA in 2011. In 2006, the ONDCP said that profits made by Mexican traffickers in the US amounted to nearly $14 billion; in 2008, the Department of Justice estimated wholesale sales by Mexican and Colombian organizations in the US to be in a range of $18–39 billion; in March 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in Monterrey, Mexico, that Mexican traffickers earnings amounted to $25 billion a year; in the same month and year another State Department official estimated the figure at a range of $17–38.3 billion; in May 2010, a State Department document on money laundering and financial crimes estimated the amount repatriated to Mexico from the US by drug trafficking organizations to be between $8 and $25 billion; and in June 2010, the Secretary of Homeland Security, Morton, estimated the amount introduced to Mexico by these organizations at somewhere between $19 and $29 billion. In other words, the US government has as many estimates as agencies with competence in drug issues. It does not have a unified estimate with verifiable and transparent sources, methodology or hypotheses. A study by RAND from 2010 that does meet these requirements, estimated the earnings by Mexican organizations from wholesale export to the US at $6.6 billion. These include marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine and Mexican and Colombian heroin. The authors present estimates of the US retail market, except for marijuana, which would be $55 billion.[14]

[14] Véase: National Drug Intelligence Center, US Department of Justice, *National Drug Threat Assessment*, 2008; "Cárteles reciben de EU 25 mmdd al año", *El Universal*, 27 March 2009; Johnson (2009, March, 18), Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Department of State, Statement before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes Country Database, May 2010; Informe "Estados Unidos-México: estudio binacional de bienes ilícitos", presentado por Morton, subsecretario estadunidense del Departamento de Seguridad Interna del Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE), citado en *La Jornada*, Jueves 3 June 2010; Kilmer (2010), p. 30; Appendixes, p. 47.

The Ministry of Public Security (SSP) of Mexico's federal government on the other hand made its own calculations and estimated the retail consumption of marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy and heroin in the US at just over $64 billion. According to the SSP its calculations are based on information from the 2009 World Drug Report of the UN (2009 WDR).[15] For Mexico, the calculation gives a figure in the retail market of $8.78 billion. The SSP calculated the marijuana market in Mexico based on an "estimated" price per gram slightly higher than the price established for Canada ($15), which is absurd. For methamphetamine and ecstasy there are no data for Mexico in the 2009 WDR, but the SSP said that it based its estimations on information from the Federal Police (PF). The SSP calculated the price of these drugs in Mexico at about half the maximum price in the US. While there is an obvious distortion in these estimates, there is no doubt that the illegal business generates a lot of money. There are people with large personal fortunes and a significant portion of their wealth is used to arm their private armies and to corrupt the authorities in charge of combating them. It is not known how much this business is worth or how it is distributed; all that is certain is that it fuels violence and lawlessness in many parts of the country.

Forbes magazine has made its own but no less fanciful calculations.[16] In this case, the calculations are based on the alleged fortune of Joaquin Guzman, the leader of the criminal organization of Sinaloa. In 2009, the magazine estimated his fortune at $1 billion. In 2011, he was still on the list, with the same amount. When discussing the estimates of illegal businesses or the income of criminals one cannot be precise or conclusive because of the very nature of these activities. To claim otherwise would amount to lying, either out of ignorance or deliberately. Forbes magazine estimated the fortune of Carlos Slim, the Mexican businessman who, according to Forbes, is the world's richest man, at $74 billion in 2011. Assuming that the Forbes figures are correct, the fortune of Guzman would be equivalent to 0.089% of Mexico's GDP ($1,114 billion in 2010), while Slim's fortune would represent 6.64%. If Guzman is supposed to be the richest among the drug traffickers, then the remaining 63 or 64 billion—depending on which figures are chosen, the calculations of the US government or those of the SSP—would be spread among a multitude of traffickers (Mexican citizens and other nationalities) who are selling in the US market, across the long chain of the illegal business. Politicians and the media often refer to various US government figures, but never choose the lower range; instead, they choose the higher range or the one they make up.

Estimates of the number of hectares planted with illegal crops and the number of people who make up the world of the drug trafficking business in Mexico suffer from the same uncertainty and are subject to the same statistical, political and media manipulations. For example, in 2008, the head of the Ministry of Defence

[15] See: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, presentation Genaro García Luna, January 2011.

[16] See: *Forbes*, March 2011: http://www.forbes.com/wealth/billionaires/list?country=224&industry=-1&state=.

(SEDENA), General Guillermo Galván, presented data to a group of congressmen on the number of people (in round numbers) involved in the entire chain of drug trafficking in Mexico, from growers to leaders of organizations, and came up with a total of 500,000. For his part, Johnson, from the U.S. State Department, said in 2009 that the figure was 450,000, of which 300,000 could be linked to marijuana cultivation. An official of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples estimated the number of indigenous people involved in the illegal business at 50,000. It is still a mystery how they were able to establish such accurate numbers, which always ended in zeros and were different from each other. Regarding the areas reserved for illegal crops, the UN World Drug Reports usually point to US government estimates instead of the estimates given by Mexico and in some of these reports they make it clear that the Mexican government does not recognize these calculations because the US has not made its methodology known. The Mexican government has no estimates on the hectares under cultivation, only on those that have been destroyed. This, however, has not been an obstacle for the president of the Superior Agrarian Court of Mexico, Ricardo Garcia Villalobos, who has made several fanciful statements on illegal crops in recent years. In 2006, García Villalobos said that the land used for illegal crops in Mexico, such as poppies and marijuana, comprised about 2 million ha, or approximately 20% of the arable land. In 2007, the figure rose to 6 million and in 2009 to 7 million ha or about 33% of the total arable land in the country. The UN 2009 World Drug Report estimated the total number of hectares used for illegal crops in the world (coca, poppy and cannabis) to be in the range of 624,700–1,066,500 ha. For Mexico, based on information from the US, the Report estimated that 6,900 ha were used for the cultivation of poppy; 15,000 ha in 2009, according to the State Department, which also estimated that 8,900 ha of cannabis were cultivated in 2008 and 12,000 ha in 2009. In other words, according to Garcia Villalobos, the area designated for illegal crops in Mexico would be more than 7 times the total area worldwide![17] Unfortunately, absurd and irresponsible statements like these are common among officials. By giving them space and credit, the media feed the ignorance and contribute to the making of myths.

Regarding the consumption of illegal drugs in Mexico it is not uncommon for officials to interpret the data incorrectly. For example, the head of the SSP, Genaro Garcia Luna, stated that in Mexico there were "more than 1.5 million cocaine users and 3 million people addicted to marijuana." The 2008 National Survey on Addictions (México 2008), which measured the frequency of consumption of legal and illegal drugs in a population of 12 to 65 years old (representing a total of 75,125,037 people), showed that 2.37% (1,780,463) reported having used cocaine (in the US more than 36 million in the same year), while 4.19% (3,147,739) reported having used marijuana *once in their lives* (over 102 million in the US). The latter cannot be considered regular users, let alone "addicts". The percentage of those who reported having used cocaine in the last

[17] See: Merlos (2008, 2009); Arreola (2009); UNODC (2009); Méndez (2007); Notimex (2009).

month was 0.27% (202.837 vs. more than 1.8 million in the US) and 0.67% for marijuana (503.337 vs. more than 15 million in the US). To start with, the name of the survey does not reflect what it measures. It only provides a picture to be used for comparison with previous surveys, provided that they followed similar methodologies, and to observe trends in the consumption of certain substances in the age groups mentioned. Regarding marijuana, Mexico (the third largest producer in the world) has a lower consumption rate—in terms of percentage of the total population of the age groups questioned in the survey—than Canada, the USA, Spain, Chile, Argentina, England and Wales, Portugal and Holland, among others. The same holds true for cocaine consumption in these countries (except for Portugal, where consumption is slightly lower) taking into account that, according to the DEA, between 90 and 95% of the cocaine consumed in the United States comes through Mexico. Regarding amphetamines, ecstasy and opiates, Mexico is also below those countries in terms of consumption, except for Chile, where the levels are similar to those of Mexico for the first two drugs mentioned (marijuana and cocaine).[18] Thus, in Mexico it can be observed that an exchange value is attached to the drugs instead of a consumption value. The value of these drugs in the US market is without a doubt what mainly fuels the criminal organizations and what determines the struggle to cover most of the supply to this market or to achieve a quasi-monopoly on this side of the border.

Violence and Political Power

What has shocked Mexican society and the international community the most in recent years has been the frequency, expansion, levels and modes of violence exercised by criminal organizations against each other, against the State security forces and against civil society. The database of the federal government states that between December 2006 and December 2010, 34,612 deaths have occurred "because of alleged criminal rivalry". Out of that number, 546 deaths have been classified as "aggression towards the authorities", 3153 as "fighting against the authorities and among criminals" and 30,913 as "intentional murders whose victims and/or perpetrators are presumably members of a criminal group", also classified as "violent death by execution".

Another document from a federal source, quoted in the press in October 2010, assessed the murders attributed to rivalries between criminal organizations. Out of a total of 22,701 murders, the struggle between the Sinaloa organization and the Carrillo Fuentes (Juarez) organization has caused 8236 deaths; the struggle between the Sinaloa organization against the Beltran Leyva organization has caused 5864 deaths; el Golfo and Sinaloa organizations against the Zetas, 3199; Sinaloa against Arellano Felix (Tijuana), 1798; La Familia against el Golfo

[18] See: SSP (2010); UNODC (2009); México (2008); USA (2008).

organization and the Zetas, 1744; el Golfo against the Zetas, 1328; la Familia against the Beltran Leyva organization, 56; and 476 are undetermined. That is, 15,898 or 70% of the deaths are attributed to a fratricidal war between organizations whose leaders all originate from the state of Sinaloa. Until the late eighties, these men were partners in the country's most powerful coalition.[19]

Out of the ten states with the highest number of killings allegedly linked to drug trafficking, five were ruled by the PRI through 2010 (Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, Tamaulipas, Estado de México), two by the PAN (Sonora and Jalisco), two by the PRD (Guerrero and Michoacan) and one (Sinaloa) that was lost by the PRI and is now governed by the coalition PAN-PRD-Convergencia, from January 2011 onwards. According to the document, Chihuahua has witnessed more than ten thousand murders and Sinaloa more than four thousand. Of the 80 municipalities with the most violence, 48 (60%) have governments headed by the PRI; 12 municipalities (15%) have governments headed by the coalition PRI/Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM); 12 (15%) by the PAN; and 8 (10%) by the PRD. For example, from December 2006 to December 2010, there were 6300 intentional murders in the town of Juarez (PRI), Chihuahua; 1809 in the municipality of Culiacán (PRI), Sinaloa; and 1559 in Tijuana (PRI/PVEM), Baja California. In summary, 7 of the 11 municipalities with the highest number of intentional killings (Juarez, Culiacan, Chihuahua, Gomez Palacio, Mazatlan, Torreon and Durango) were ruled by the PRI; 3 (Tijuana, Acapulco and Navolato) by the PRI/PVEM coalition and one (Nogales) by the PAN.[20]

It is important to observe the distribution of the positions of political power in the country and to relate them to the violent deaths and the organizations that are responsible for these murders and the regions where they are fighting for supremacy. The political parties that are in positions of power should be able to prevent a certain amount of crime and to enforce the law. They have not done so either because of a lack of interest, inability or complicity with the criminal groups. Those in power are potentially corruptible since they are the ones who can provide protection and immunity to the criminal groups. However, they cannot evade their responsibilities and neither can the federal government evade its responsibility regarding its strategy, objectives and results. There is a shared responsibility among the various actors but nobody is willing to bear the political cost of their mistakes. For example, the former mayor of Ciudad Juárez (2007–2010, PRI), Jose Reyes Ferriz, accused the former governor of Chihuahua (PRI) and the former prosecutor of that state of not cooperating with him and the federal government in trying to combat the criminal groups that have made Juárez the most violent city in the country. He stated as follows:

> The governor Jose Reyes Baeza mistook my request to the federal government for cooperation in combating drug trafficking as a political strategy to become governor, when

[19] See: Mosso (2010).

[20] See: http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/base-de-datos-de-fallecimientos/ and the official websites of Political Parties and States.

> that was not the case. In retaliation he never supported the Joint Operation Chihuahua (OCCH). He did not support the strategy financially and as if that was not enough, the state prosecutor, Patricia Gonzalez Rodriguez, released more than nine thousand five hundred criminals that we had put at their disposal.[21]

As for the PAN, a recording was released by electronic means of the then-candidate Fernandez, who was running for mayor of San Pedro Garza Garcia, speaking with his supporters. The recording showed that he had adapted his security plan to the needs of the Beltran Leyva organization. According to part of the transcript, Fernandez, a member of one of the country's richest families, said (original syntax):

> … We either assemble this security apparatus as a whole, which they are not against, because it is for their own families… in other words, what I'm going to try to do, so far I am realizing that is not as complicated as I imagined, because the Beltran Leyva agree…..[22]

In the PRD, Julio César Godoy Toscano, the brother of the governor of Michoacán, was elected as a congressman. The PGR accused him of having links with the La Familia organization. Members of his party managed to make it possible for him to take over as a congressman, but at a later stage recordings were released of his talks with one of the leaders of the said criminal organization. Julio Cesar Godoy Toscano was stripped of his immunity and is currently a fugitive of justice. Another case is that of the former governor of Nuevo Leon (1991–1996), Rizzo (PRI), who stated in a lecture at the Faculty of Law at the Autonomous University of Coahuila that during the time the PRI was in power:

> There was control and there was a strong State, a strong President, a strong Attorney's General Office and there was tight control by the Army. Somehow, they would tell them: 'You go through here, you go over there, but do not come into these places (…)' The old men talk of a time where there was control, the PRI government made sure that the drug trafficking would not disturb the social peace; somehow it had decided that drug trafficking should not create more problems.[23]

The latter example refers to forms of control that existed during the time of the State Party system, when the field of drug trafficking was subject to the political power.[24] The former examples reflect the current strategies of local authorities to interact with criminal organizations and with the central government in a phase of alternation of power and a reconfiguration of the political field. It is in this context of qualitative changes in the correlation of political forces, greater political diversity and autonomy but also the weakness of the local authorities to effectively

[21] See: Dávila (2010).

[22] See: Fernandez (2009).

[23] See: Rizzo (2011a, b).

[24] For a detailed analysis of this historical process see: Astorga (2003, 2005).

control their own police agencies, that the trafficking organizations—more economically powerful as a result of the growth and diversification of the market—saw an opportunity to become more autonomous from the political power and to dispute some of its powers through corruption and the force of arms.

The authoritarian security of the era of the State Party system has given way to the real insecurity inherent in the process of political alternation. In the field of drug trafficking there is a struggle for hegemony and a struggle for the monopoly on unlawful violence, while the armed confrontation between the criminal organizations and the security forces is threatening the monopoly of legitimate force by the State. Some groups, especially those that are characterized by organizational structures and activities of a mafia-paramilitary type, have gone from mere territorial presence to real or attempted control, not only in isolated rural regions but also in some urban centers.

Epilogue

In Mexico, drug trafficking gangs are engaged in ultra-violent warfare against each other and in the use of material and symbolic violence against the police, the military and the civil society. No illegal armed group operating in this way can be contained without the State resorting to the legitimate use of force. In a democratic state of law, the use of force should never be the only recourse but when the security agencies are unable to deter organizations from violently vying for dominance in their own criminal field, the reaction of the state—at least in the short term—can never be exclusively peaceful, unlike the attitude of the neutral observer waiting for the perpetrators of violence to kill each other off.

The predominantly punitive strategy of the Calderón's administration has been catastrophic in terms of deaths resulting from conflicts between traffickers, conflicts between traffickers and the security forces and the deaths of innocent people caught in the crossfire, deliberately or by mistake. Did the Calderón administration act without being fully informed when it decided to 'stir the hornets' nest'? I doubt it, although lately the authorities have partially adopted the discourse of the critics who claim that the authorities acted without knowing the size of the problem or the corrupting, predatory and destabilizing capabilities of the criminals. At the time, the amount of publicly available information on drug gangs was overwhelming and the confidential information would have had to be even more accurate. In the absence of resounding results in the short term, the authorities assumed that their failure is due to an alleged ignorance of the challenges involved in a frontal attack on the criminal organizations, thereby avoiding the need to focus the debate on the lack of agreement among the political parties on matters of state security and on the inefficiency and lack of coordination on the part of the institutions responsible. Others have argued that President Calderón only decided to fight the traffickers with the aid of the military and the police in order to legitimize his government after his narrow victory in the 2006 presidential election, as if he had invented an enemy overnight

and as if no politician has ever attempted to legitimize him- or herself before. The problems associated with drug gangs and the institutions responsible for combating traffickers, such as the Attorney General and the Ministry of Defense, are not new and the danger is not a recent invention. What has changed is the political system and its control mechanisms, the correlation of forces in the political and the drug trafficking fields, their mutual interactions and the global market for illegal drugs, while on the other hand some institutions with extra-legal powers dating from the era of the State Party system have disappeared, such as the Federal Security Directorate with its capacity to simultaneously contain and protect the traffickers. Nothing more and nothing less. It is no small deed.

No state fights all the criminal organizations at the same time, with the same intensity and the same strategy, and neither does it exercise repression in a perfectly balanced manner. It can only do so in its discourse. The Mexican government cannot and should not apply its force to all criminal gangs at the same time and implement the same measures, with or without US support. The Colombian government understood this and did not simultaneously attack Pablo Escobar and the Rodriguez Orejuela brothers. Such an all-out attack is not feasible in a young democracy with weak institutions, as it would be based on the assumption that there is a clear separation among politics, legal businesses and drug trafficking, and that therefore the actions of the government will not have uncontrollable multiplier effects in any of these fields. This is not the case; not in Mexico, Colombia or in any other country for that matter.

The public outcry for an end to the bloodshed in Mexico is understandable, and so is the demand that the federal, state and municipal authorities once and for all coordinate their actions against crime, prevent corruption and stop the security forces from violating human rights. We must also demand from the political class that it assumes its responsibility, that it acts less in terms of partisan and short-term electoral interests, that it legislates for the good of the country and that it acts fully as part of the State and not only during the distribution of the budget. The law must be applied to the criminals, they must be prevented from imposing their own law by means of terror and the force of arms and their actions should not be perceived as normal and natural.

In summary, in the context of the reconfiguration of the Mexican political landscape, all political parties, alone or in coalition, that hold positions of power have three options in the face of the drug gangs' increasing tendency to exercise paramilitary-mafia strategies:

(1) create a common front to enforce the law, which would imply the creation of a state security policy in which all parties take responsibility and join forces;
(2) establish mutually beneficial strategic relations between governing politicians and the leaders of criminal organizations;
(3) do nothing and allow the criminal organizations to impose their own laws.

The last two options involve the consolidation of authoritarian and corrupt relationships to the detriment of the society. There are no democratic criminal organizations and neither are there any immediate solutions to turn Mexico into a

strong democracy, to stop the military operations against organized crime, or to legalize currently prohibited drugs. This does not mean that there should be inaction or neglect toward these aspirations, just as the search for a more just and equal society with better living standards should not be abandoned. In the relationship with the United States, the government should continue to insist on US responsibility regarding the consumption of drugs and the smuggling of arms and money into Mexico. At the multilateral level, the government can take advantage of the loopholes in the drug conventions of the UN and try to change these conventions through the pressure of an organized and knowledgeable Mexican civil society that is able to induce its government to engage in smart and daring diplomacy in collaboration with countries that are less orthodox when it comes to drug-related matters and with the Global Commission on Drug Policy, which has shown a willingness to contribute to changing the international prohibitionist regime.

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