



JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
RICE UNIVERSITY

BINATIONAL RESEARCH PAPER

DEVELOPING THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER REGION
FOR A PROSPEROUS AND SECURE RELATIONSHIP:
SECURITY IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS:
THE CRISIS, THE FORCES AT WORK AND THE NEED
FOR HONEST ASSESSMENT AND ACTION

BY

JOAN NEUHAUS SCHAAN

FELLOW IN HOMELAND SECURITY AND TERRORISM
JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
RICE UNIVERSITY

MARCH 30, 2009

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

THESE PAPERS WERE WRITTEN BY A RESEARCHER (OR RESEARCHERS) WHO PARTICIPATED IN A BAKER INSTITUTE RESEARCH PROJECT. WHEREVER FEASIBLE, THESE PAPERS ARE REVIEWED BY OUTSIDE EXPERTS BEFORE THEY ARE RELEASED. HOWEVER, THE RESEARCH AND VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THESE PAPERS ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHER(S), AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY.

© 2009 BY THE JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY OF RICE UNIVERSITY

THIS MATERIAL MAY BE QUOTED OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION,
PROVIDED APPROPRIATE CREDIT IS GIVEN TO THE AUTHOR AND
THE JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY.

Abstract

The following paper focuses on security in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, particularly in Texas. In the last few years, violence in its many manifestations has escalated unabated, despite major initiatives by both countries. A multitude of factors have contributed to the situation: culture, economic forces, and criminal organizations. The violence and its perpetrators have had substantial impact on communities, children, the press, the courts, the political system, and law enforcement. The current security situation in Mexico and, increasingly, the United States is strategically critical to both countries. The first step in developing an effective response is to put the magnitude of problem into perspective for those outside of the borderlands. Only then can historic biases be set aside as both countries work toward the myriad solutions and initiatives that will likely be required.

Background

In its pursuit of a public policy synopsis on the U.S.–Mexico border, the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy has requested papers in one of three specific topic areas—immigration, security, and development. Funding was not provided for original studies or data collection, rather the policy papers were to be based on readily available data and information, as well as the author’s experience.

The following paper focuses on security in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, particularly Texas. In the last few years, violence has escalated unabated, despite major initiatives by both countries. Given the rapidly changing situation, this paper chooses to focus primarily on the period of time from January 2007 to August 2008.

Introduction

Violence on the U.S.-Mexico border is reaching a critical level, yet appears to be an intractable problem. Cultural differences, economic benefits and costs, mistrust, and fear from a wide

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

variety of constituencies have prevented the formation of a unified response to major issues, yet if the issues are not addressed, a tremendous price will be paid by both nations.

Many involved in the public policy of both nations prefer to avoid the topic of security because of the difficult realities involved and the implications for other policies, such as domestic crime, immigration, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), public corruption, health care, drug abuse, judicial system inadequacies, sovereignty, and human trafficking. Nevertheless, Mexico is a democracy at risk, and the threats that it is facing are increasingly threatening the United States. Soon a choice must be made: either the two nations stand together in a common defense, or they withdraw into their own borders. For the United States, the timing will be dependent upon the level of violence perpetrated upon the country's citizens reaching unacceptable levels, and the ability to come to an agreement with Mexico on a detailed joint action plan. If Mexico becomes effectively lost to the cycle of violence and corruption, the United States will be forced to defend itself and work to prevent intrusions of threatening elements.

Mexico is struggling to maintain civil authority against a potent adversary, and if not successful, the consequences will be dire. From the point of view of civil authorities, the criminal organizations outman and outgun law enforcement, have extremely effective intelligence gathering, brutal intimidation tactics, and deep pockets for bribery. In attempting to understand the prospects, the cycle of violence as experienced by other countries provides an example. As civil authorities struggle to maintain control and approach the brink of losing control, law enforcement officials, elected officials, and judges are assassinated; police stations are attacked; organized crime influences and then controls elected officials; and the press is silenced. Beyond the brink, the organizations control a community, and those that do not acquiesce to their activities must leave or face the consequences. In its most extreme form, civil authorities cede entire geographic regions, and the lawless organizations develop enclaves of autonomy, as has been the case in Colombia and Lebanon.

In recognizing the severity of the situation in Mexico, President Felipe Calderón is taking unprecedented measures to combat organized crime. The United States also is taking bold policy

stands. To be successful, measures at all levels of government and within all constituencies must be considered. It will be the sum of a large number of small measures that may well turn the tide for security.

The first step towards effective measures is an understanding of the magnitude of the situation by the populace and leadership of the United States and Mexico. Once the magnitude of the situation is understood, then historical attitudes and biases can be set aside and true progress can be made in improving security.

The Situation and Forces at Work

Violence in Mexico

The violence in Mexico may be difficult for U.S. citizens to comprehend, and clearly hard to envision occurring next door. From January 2007 to July 2008 there were 4313 deaths associated with drug trafficking in Mexico, with 2712 deaths recorded in 2007 and 1601 in the first seven months of 2008. This equates to approximately 24.9 deaths per million in 2007.¹ Separate sources indicate 2160 deaths have been linked to organized crime in general in the first seven months of 2008.² For April 2008 alone, the Mexican States Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) reported 1320 drug trafficking-related deaths, including those of 10 federal police officers, 39 municipal police officers, 10 state police officers, one judge, 34 soldiers, five civil servants, 12 lawyers, and an artist.³ Hit lists are often publicly posted, and the persons named systematically killed or abducted.⁴ For comparison, 4129 U. S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the inception of the conflict in March 2003 to August 1, 2008.⁵ At the peak of drug

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, <http://www.census.gov>

² *El Agora de Chihuahua*, July 17, 2008, <http://www.elagoradechihuahua.com/Presiona-IFAI-a-la-PGR,5852.html>; Contacto Hoy, July 15, 2008, <http://www.contactohoy.com.mx/hoy/urgentes/nar.html>. A distinction appears to be made between organized crime in general, and drug trafficking as the primary component of organized crime.

³ Juan Cruz, "Suman mil 320 ejecutados en el país hasta abril," *El Sol de Zacatecas*, April 30, 2008, <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldezacatecas/notas/n682125.htm>

⁴ Associated Press, "Ciudad Juárez police chief gunned down," May 10, 2008; Diana Washington Valdez, "Juárez police commander killed inside police station," *El Paso Times*, July 18, 2008; Alicia A. Caldwell, "Police: Mexican cartel hit list targets Americans," *Associated Press*, June 19, 2008; *Diario*, February 1, 2009, <http://www.diario.com>; *El Agora de Chihuahua*, August 14, 2009, <http://elagoradechihuahua.com>; *El Fronterizo*, May 31, 2008, <http://www.elfronterizo.com>

⁵ Department of Defense, August 2, 2008, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf>

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

violence in 1993, drug-related deaths in the United States totaled 5.7 per million.⁶ Tijuana is believed to suffer more kidnappings than any city in the world, other than Baghdad.⁷

Violence reflects organized crime efforts to expand and control territory. Not coincidentally, the bloodiest battlegrounds are the transportation routes and border towns with the greatest international traffic: Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; Juarez, Chihuahua; and Tijuana, Baja California. When an organized crime organization dominates a border town, it is said to have “control of the plaza.” Control of the plaza is highly lucrative because of the volume of drugs and persons that flow through each of these communities. While other border towns also have millions of legal crossings each year, the communities may not be serviced by well-developed transportation routes on both sides of the border, and therefore have more limited commercial trade. According to a report published in 2007 by the Border Counties Coalition, Texas has in excess of 115 million legal border crossings a year along its 1255 miles of border with Mexico. The number of legal crossings in Laredo from Nuevo Laredo is 19 million. The number of legal crossings in El Paso from Juarez is 38 million. San Diego County, California has 63 million border crossings along its 60 miles of border with Mexico.⁸ High volumes of legitimate commercial traffic provide cover for illegitimate activity.

The heavy commercial truck traffic through Nuevo Laredo makes the “plaza” particularly profitable. The escalation in violence first manifested itself in Nuevo Laredo as rival drug cartels attempted to take over the “plaza” from the Gulf Cartel. Nuevo Laredo is the commercial gateway to the United States, with 35,000 vehicles crossing its bridges each day. Approximately half of the vehicles crossing are tractor-trailer rigs. Tijuana has more vehicle crossings in total, but not the volume of commercial trucking. In this instance, the increased trade encouraged by NAFTA and subsequent commercial traffic has been a double-edged sword: Organized crime follows transportation routes.

⁶ “Drugs and Crime Facts, 1994” Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, “Drug use and crime 2007,” <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/dcfacts.pdf>; <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dcf/duc.htm#drug-related>; U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, <http://www.census.gov>

⁷ Marla Dickerson and Cecelia Sanchez, “Mexican police linked to rising kidnappings Mexican police linked to rising kidnappings,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 2008.

⁸ Border Counties Coalition and University of Arizona, “Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S.–Mexico Border Counties,” September 2007.

Cultural Factors

Cultural differences and economic forces have played an important historical role in the development of the current situation in Mexico. Mexico has long had a “patron” system and tolerated corrupting influences within reason. Extra payments to key persons have been considered “service fees” in exchange for having one’s interests expedited or to receive preferential treatment. A 2005 study concluded that 57 percent of Mexicans over the age of 30 had paid a bribe at least once.⁹ In addition, Mexico has long served as a source of contraband for American markets, with contraband flowing free from interference, as long as payments were made to key parties and those outside the trade were not harmed.¹⁰

In recent times, the forces at work and the rules have changed. Corruption has evolved into extortion and coercion, and attacks involving innocent civilians have become commonplace.¹¹ Whereas in times past businessmen may have used financial resources to protect their interests in collusion with certain civil authorities, violent organized crime has stepped in. Criminal elements are demanding extortion and/or kidnapping payments, and coercing civil authorities and businessmen to act on their behalf. Where once key persons and civil authorities accepted payments for acquiescing to the flow of contraband or protecting the flow of contraband under their control, organized crime groups moving the contraband (drugs and persons) now control the flow and set the rules. Payments still change hands, but the choice given the recipient is “plata o plomo,” silver or lead, riches or death. Organized crime not only demands passage for its operation, but demands intelligence, and will not tolerate any effort to combat their influence. The enforcers’ brutality leaves clear messages to all who try, and no real choice for those wishing to remain alive. The cycle has gone so far, organized crime has appeared to act with impunity.

⁹ *Economista*, August 11, 2005,

[http://www.economista.com.mx/online4.nsf/\(all\)/541CB55F7A4305960625705A004A43C2?OpenDocument](http://www.economista.com.mx/online4.nsf/(all)/541CB55F7A4305960625705A004A43C2?OpenDocument)

¹⁰ Monica Serrano, “Security on the U.S. Mexico Border” (presentation at Baker Institute for Public Policy, Houston, Texas, July 21, 2008).

¹¹ Reuters, “Mexico gunmen kill youths, take hostages,” Reuters, July 14, 2008; *Mexico Security Memo* Strategic Forecasting, August 18, 2008; Tracy Wilkinson, “Drug war mayhem instills a new fear,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2008.

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

The problem has become so critical, Calderón was compelled to draw up a 75-point memorandum in August 2008 with the Mexican Congress, state governors, and the mayor of Mexico City to set police standards and guidelines for corruption investigations. “The truth is we are all responsible,” Calderón told the National Conference on Security, Justice and Legality. “The proliferation of crime could not have happened without years of protection and impunity.” The objective, Calderón said, was to create police forces “that protect citizens—not the criminals.”¹²

The United States does not have the same “patron” tradition. This leads to a general level of distrust and misunderstanding of the Mexican system and Mexican authorities by those in the United States involved in combating the criminal organizations.

Economic Forces

In addition to cultural factors, economic forces have played a significant part in the reluctance to address smuggling organizations that are now perpetrating the violence. From the perspective of Mexico, remittances from illegal migrants and illicit activities are a major source of cash flow for the country. From the perspective of the illegal immigrant, the United States holds the hope of economic opportunity and an escape from violence and poverty.

Economic forces at three levels are supplanting efforts to stem the tide of illegal immigration and drug smuggling: the importance of remesas (or remittances) to the sender’s country of origin; the large profits earned by smugglers and those that assist them; and the peripheral economic development that occurs around the illicit activity. First, remesas sent by aliens back to their families in their country of origin have become a major source of income to those countries, and one that their governments do not wish to curtail.

¹² Dudley Althaus, “Officials reveal plan to clean up justice system,” *San Antonio Express News*, August 22, 2008, http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/mexico/Officials_reveal_plan_to_clean_up_justice_system.html

Second, according to several studies, alien smuggling profits are now approaching drug smuggling profits.¹³ Human smuggling not only involves undocumented workers, but increasingly includes the trafficking of persons subjected to forced labor and/or the sex-slave trade.¹⁴ The increased profitability has resulted in more professional and ruthless smuggling organizations that now resemble drug smuggling organizations and/or include drug smuggling organizations.¹⁵ For example, 80 gangs specializing in the trafficking of women and minors for the sex trade were estimated to operate in Tijuana in 2005; many operated other organized crime and/or drug operations as well.¹⁶ As the more ruthless organizations take over increasing portions of the smuggling trade, anecdotal evidence indicates the prices charged for crossing the border are rising. Rival human smuggling organizations are engaging in the same turf battles as drug smuggling operations, both in the United States and in Mexico.¹⁷

The third force is in some ways the most insidious.¹⁸ Along the smuggling routes, communities are seeing more smugglers and larger volumes of travelers pass through. Food, service, and lodging establishments benefit from the patronage or are forced into service, most notably in smaller communities.¹⁹ The patronage is not without a cost, however. The lucrative enterprise comes with high level of corruption and violence. Cash buys members of the civil authorities, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system. Refusal is summarily dealt with in a brutal

¹³ Notimex, April 27, 2006, quoting Evelyn Probst, U.N. Coordinator of the Consultancy, Education, and Companionship of Migrant Women Program, <http://www.notimex.com.mx/>; Diario, August 19, 2005, <http://www.diario.com>, quoting research by Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM).

¹⁴ Peter Landesman, “The Girls Next Door,” *New York Times*, January 25, 2004; Alejandro Suverza, “México, atractivo para migración sexual,” *El Universal*, August 16, 2005, <http://estadis.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/299683.html>; Fausto Ovalle, “Operan bandas de trata de blancas,” *Noticias*, April 4, 2005, <http://www.frontera.info/ediciononlinea/notas/noticias/20050404/67555.asp>; *Milenio*, March 14, 2005, <http://www.milenio.com>

¹⁵ Francisco Gómez, “Tráfico humano financia al narco,” *El Universal*, June 20, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/160356.html>

¹⁶ Ovalle, “Operan bandas.”

¹⁷ *El Universal*, “Reportan plagios entre ‘coyotes,’” January 8, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/156903.html>

¹⁸ Lapolaka.com, April 3, 2008; Norte, April 3, 2008; Luis Carlos Ortega. *La Jornada*, April 3, 2008; Victor Ballinas, *Proceso*, March 30, 2008; Antonio Aguilera, *La Jornada/Michoacan edition*, March 29, 2008; Jose Luis Diaz Perez, *El Sol de Morelia*, March 28, 2008.

¹⁹ Francisco Gómez, “Narco o pollero, el dilemma,” *El Universal*, May 30, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/428240.html>; *Milenio*, “Amagan pseudo zetas,” November 16, 2008, <http://www.milenio.com/edomex/milenio/nota.asp?id=131068>; *Novenet*, August 27, 2008, <http://www.novenet.com.mx/portada>; *Norte De Ciudad Juarez*, June 28, 2008, <http://www.nortedeciudadjuarez.com/>; Qintero, “Incendian 4 bares; asesinan a 7 más,” *El Diario*, June 20, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=0c22060600772f8b2b8597452fd0575a>; *El Universal*, “Queman en Juárez 3 comercios más,” June 16, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/160240.html>

fashion. Eventually, control of the geographic area by legitimate civil authorities is lost, and the community becomes hostage to organized crime.

The Plight of Children and Communities

The children of Mexico and Central America are surrounded by crime and violence in their towns, in their schools, and in their daily lives. In some areas, the drug dealers are idolized for their power and wealth.²⁰ Many children have been coerced or enticed into the web of crime, some through their gang affiliations or to earn a little money. In Juarez, children 6 to 14 years of age are regularly employed.²¹ In a study organized by the organization Conditions of Children in Extreme Conditions, children once working as street vendors have become well dressed, cell phone-carrying participants in organized crime.²² With the increase in cash, a major drug addiction problem has developed, with some drug traffickers becoming users.²³ In Nuevo Laredo, drug use has increased 300 percent in 2006, and children under 8 have begun using drugs.²⁴ While many point to U.S. demand as the source of Mexico's drug smuggling woes, Mexico is the third-largest per capita consumer of illicit drugs behind Brazil and Spain.²⁵

Fueling the violence and drug use is familial disintegration and the condition of children abandoned by their parents' migration.²⁶ The volume of workers migrating north for jobs is

²⁰ *Groenlinea*, July 27, 2007, <http://www.groenlinea.com/>

²¹ Sonia Isabel Aguilar, "Son estudiantes presa del 'narco,'" *Norte de Ciudad Juarez*, October 22, 2006, <http://www.nortedeciudadjuarez.com/especiales/espestudiantes/est1.html>

²² Gastón Monge, "Niños de la calle son reclutados por el narco en Tamaulipas," *El Universal*, December 10, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/66954.html>

²³ USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, Annex 4 Mexico, pg. 9, http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/mexico_profile.pdf; Exonline, "Confiesan narcos temor a ser adictos," July 16, 2008, http://www.exonline.com.mx/diario/noticia/primera/pulsonacional/confiesan_narcos_temor_a_ser_adictos/287088; Ken Ellingwood, "Mexico grapples with drug addiction," *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 2008, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-mexaddict15-2008oct15.0.4364637.story?track=rss>; La Jornada, July 24, 25 and 26, 2008; Karina Aviles, Laura Poy and Jorge Carrillo Olea, *El Universal*, July 23, 2008; Jorge Alejandro Medellin, *Agencia Reforma*, July 21, 2008; Karla Portugal, *Proceso/Apro*, July 2 and 6, 2008; Patricia Davila and editorial staff, *Lapolaka.com*, July 13, 2008; *El Diario de Juarez*, May 21, 2008, and June 19, 2008, via <http://frontera.nmsu.edu/> via <http://frontera.nmsu.edu/>

²⁴ Notimex, January 31, 2007, <http://www2.notimex.com.mx>, quoting report by Council of Citizen Participation and Public Security (*Consejo de Participación Ciudadana de Seguridad Pública municipal*) of Nuevo Laredo.

²⁵ Manuel J. Jáuregui, "Mexico Third Place in Drug Consumption Worldwide" (Medalla de bronce), *Reforma.com* Alert Notices, March 14, 2007; statistics from the Mexican government at <http://www.pgr.gob.mx>

²⁶ Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction, U.K., Overseas Development Institute, working paper, http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp171_a.pdf; USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, Annex 4 Mexico, http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/mexico_profile.pdf; pg. 10.

having a disastrous effect on the social fabric of their communities and countries. The highest price is paid by the children left behind. Entire rural areas are populated primarily by children, women, and the elderly.²⁷ Across the nation in rural communities, fathers have migrated north, and often the mothers have followed. In many cases these economic orphans are left with extended family or the elderly, and lack the sense of belonging to their own parents. There are two major consequences of early childhood without parental affection: limited emotional development (particularly the sense of empathy) and the undue influence of gangs, which become the surrogate family unit.²⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that there has been a dramatic growth in the number of gangs in Central America and Mexico.²⁹ Social workers and law enforcement regularly encounter the brutality of these gangs. Initiation rites for boys often involve killing another person or cutting off the ear or finger of a friend. Initiation rites for girls often involve sex with a large number of partners in a short amount of time.³⁰ Gangs fuel the violence of organized crime and fill its ranks.³¹ Gangs in general, and MS-13 in particular, have been designated the number one national security threat to Honduras; this gang has kidnapped and killed the Honduran president's son.³² Residents of northern Mexico border towns rightfully have great concern for future generations. Many have commented that the children have no role

²⁷ Notimex, February 5, 2007, quoting Bishop Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel of the San Cristóbal De Las Casas diocese, <http://www2.notimex.com>

²⁸ Houston–Harris County Regional Drug Policy Summit, Oct. 28, 2008; Envio No. 224, March 2000, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1409>; P. Adler, C. Ovando, C. and D. Hocevar, D. (1984). “Familiar correlates of gang membership: An exploratory study of Mexican–American youth.” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 6, 65-76; Morales, A.T. (1992). “Latino youth gangs: Causes and clinical intervention,” in L. S. Vargas & J. Koss-Chiono (Eds.). *Working with culture: Psychotherapeutic intervention with ethnic minority children and adolescents* (pp. 129-154). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

²⁹ *Periodico Norte de Ciudad Juárez*, “Pide Calderón a EU indagar a sus funcionarios corruptos,” <http://www.nortedeciudadjuarez.com/paginas/frontera/ftal.html>; *Milenio*, October 19, 2007, <http://www.milenio.com>; KPHO Television, *Agent: MS-13 Coming To Arizona*, September 9, 2008, *KPHO.com*; USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, Annex 4 Mexico, http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/mexico_profile.pdf; Rosario González Chay, “Maras violan a niña de 12 años,” March 26, 2007, <http://www.oem.com.mx/diariodelsur/notas/n217380.htm>; Luis C. Cano, “Detienen en Juárez a ‘mara’ acusado de 23 violaciones,” *El Universal*, August 9, 2005, <http://estadis.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/58325.html>

³⁰ City News Staff, “MS-13 Primer: ‘The Most Dangerous Gang’ In North America,” *City News*, June 5, 2008, http://www.citynews.ca/news/news_23489.aspx

³¹ USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, Annex 4 Mexico, http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/mexico_profile.pdf; Samuel Logan, “Mexico’s parallel power,” International Relations and Security Network, July 4, 2006, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=52086>

³² NPR, “The International Reach of the Mara Salvatrucha,” *All Things Considered*, March 17, 2005; *China Daily*, “Crackdown on gangs brings Mexico violence,” December 11, 2004, http://chinadaily.cn/en/doc/2003-12/11/content_289472.htm; Col. Anthony Cruz, “Can or could a terrorist organization use Central America as a platform to launch an attack against the United States?” <http://library.jid.org/en/mono46/Col%20Cruz.pdf>

model for the value of true public service free of corruption and organized crime, and this portends a dark future for the country as a whole.

Furthermore, the migration north is now affecting the economy of Mexico and opportunities for the next generation. Certain towns and regions have suffered significant depopulation. In the bread basket of Mexico, agricultural land is being abandoned.³³ Some areas, such as Puebla, saw a 40 percent drop in corn production in 2007 partially due to out-migration, according to Sonia Emilia Silva Gómez, a specialist from the Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP).³⁴ In Chihuahua, an organized crime battleground state, towns have become deserted, or occupied only by the elderly.³⁵ Following the depopulation, schools have closed for lack of students. In turn, some children are forgoing education, because they cannot travel the necessary distances. Such has been the case in Zacatecas.³⁶

Weapons: The U.S. Contribution to Mexico's Violence

While not of the magnitude of human and drug smuggling from south to north, weapons smuggling from north to south is a significant activity. Mexican laws do not provide for the general citizenry to be armed, as is the case in the United States. This provides a lucrative opportunity to procure weapons at a low price in the United States, and to sell those weapons at a significant profit in Mexico. While the United States plays a major role as source for guns, other

³³Notimex, February 5, 2007, quoting Bishop Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel of the San Cristóbal de las Casas diocese, <http://www2.notimex.com.mx/>

³⁴http://www2.notimex.com.mx/admin/descarga.php?nombre_producto=1724196&catalogo=nota

³⁵Cynthia Pérez Navejas, “Deja emigración pueblos en el abandono,” *El Pueblo*, July 30, 2007, <http://www.elpueblo.com/chihuahua/reportaje.cfm?num=300>

³⁶Juan Castro, “Dos municipios de Zacatecas en riesgo de convertirse en pueblos fantasmas,” *El Sol de Mexico*, December 31, 2007, <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldemexico/notas/n542471.htm>

countries are also sources for weapons, including guns, grenades, RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades), anti-tank missiles, and explosives.³⁷

Mexico is not effectively policing its own border and intercepting these weapons. Customs officials are not interdicting the weapons at ports of entry, and Mexico has no border patrol. The United States could pursue weapons trafficking charges against persons or organizations, but would need the serial numbers from weapons that are confiscated by the Mexican government. To date, the Mexican government has not systematically provided the necessary serial numbers, thus preventing U.S. agencies from identifying and prosecuting organizations involved in weapons trafficking in the United States.

Manifestations

The power of organized crime is most manifest in the corruption of civil authorities, kidnappings, the silencing of the press, and the assassination of community leaders and organizations attempting to formulate a defense against the violence.

Organized Crime

In recent decades, organized crime groups focused primarily on illicit drugs. The volume of illegal immigrants has now changed the circumstances and activities of these organizations. Approximately 1.2 million undocumented persons are apprehended annually by the United States, which would indicate an annual flow of at least five to 10 million persons. Of the \$16 billion in cash flowing between the United States to Mexico, the Mexican Attorney General has

³⁷ Alejandro Suverza, “Tianguis de armas, todo al alcance de la mano,” *El Universal*, August 8, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/441643.html>; Jorge Alejandro Medellín, “Inundan a México de armas por norte y sur,” *El Universal*, August 3, 2005, <http://estadis.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/297247.html>; Dudley Althaus, “U.S. officials vow crackdown on gunrunning to Mexico” *Houston Chronicle*, June 14, 2007; Silvia Otero, “Con arsenal decomisado se ‘armaría un ejército,’” *El Universal*, June 16, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/160232.html>; El Porvenir, “Asegura Ejército arsenal en Cerralvo,” June 4, 2008, http://www.elporvenir.com.mx/notas.asp?nota_id=222602; Edward L. Laurance and William H. Godnick, *Weapons Collection in Central America: El Salvador and Guatemala*, http://sand.miis.edu/research/2000/jan2000/bicc_elsgua.pdf; James C. McKinley Jr., “Mexico: Huge Weapons and Marijuana Seizure,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2008; Reforma, “Government identifies EPR cells in Chiapas,” October 7, 2007; *The Washington Times*, “U.S. intel center wary of terrorist attack,” November 25, 2007.

stated \$1 billion comes through money exchange businesses and \$10 billion cannot be accounted for by legal activity.³⁸

Over time, crime organizations have become increasingly sophisticated in operations, weapons, and tactics. As in a war zone, large paramilitary groups attack police officers and civilians with brutal force.³⁹ The similarity to military forces likely reflects the number of former military members in the ranks of organized crime; according to Mexican officials, 100,000 Mexican military members have deserted the ranks, and many are believed to have joined organized crime groups.⁴⁰ *Los Zetas*, the security detail for the Gulf Cartel and the source of its strength, are a prime example. *Los Zetas* deserted from the Mexican military's elite counter-narcotic operations in the 1990s. These highly trained forces have proved exceedingly effective against competitors and government forces alike. Other cartels have likewise worked to recruit members of the military, but their recruits have not been as effective.⁴¹ Drug cartels recruit openly. In Nuevo Laredo, *Los Zetas* hung a recruiting banner above a major thoroughfare, and in southern Mexico radio advertisements have targeted the recruitment of active and former military personnel.⁴²

The cartels also have begun to adopt the tactics of Colombia's FARC and insurgents in the Middle East. FARC has long standing ties to the Mexican cartels through the cocaine trade, and Mexican students were recently found to be fighting alongside FARC forces on the Colombian border.⁴³ The intimidation of civilian populations and resulting domination of geographic regions is typical of FARC strategy. For example, it is not uncommon for FARC units to have tens of heavily armed men enter a rural community, kill large numbers of persons, and/or abduct leading

³⁸ María de la Luz González, "Fluyen 10 mdd del narco al año entre México y EU: PGR," *El Universal*, October 31, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/155494.html>.

³⁹ James C. McKinley, Jr., "Mexico Hits Drug Gangs With Full Fury of War," *New York Times*, January 22, 2008.

⁴⁰ *El Universal*, "Reconoce sedena que narco ha reclutado ex militares," <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/476295.html>

⁴¹ Notimex, "PGJE Identifies Sonora Gunmen as Former Military Members," notimex.com, May 20, 2007.

⁴² "Crime and Security On the Texas Border: The Situation and the Consequences" (presentation, Baker Institute for Public Policy, May 13, 2008); Hoy, "Anuncios clasificados: 'Los Zetas' buscan contratar militares," April 13, 2008, [http://www.hoytamaulipas.net/?PHPSESSID=c8f923634e4085976ea0f300d33a1672&v1=notas&v2=41256&tit=Anuncios clasificados: "Los Zetas" buscan contratar militares](http://www.hoytamaulipas.net/?PHPSESSID=c8f923634e4085976ea0f300d33a1672&v1=notas&v2=41256&tit=Anuncios clasificados: 'Los Zetas' buscan contratar militares)

⁴³ Maggy Ayala Samaniego, "Aseguran que hubo 16 mexicanos en Ecuador," *El Universal*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/489612.html>; *The Houston Chronicle*, "Mexican students among the dead at Colombian rebel camp," March 6, 2008; Doris Gómora, "Ubica Colombia casas de las FARC en México," *El Universal*, March 5, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/157979.html>

members of that community. The same scenario is being played out in Mexico.⁴⁴ More recently, there have been bombings of the Mexican pipelines (a common occurrence in Colombia) and car bombs. The pipeline bombings were claimed by Mexico's revolutionary group, People's Revolutionary Army (EPR), at a time when EPR was believed to increasingly be working for or in criminal enterprises.⁴⁵

Increasingly, smuggling organizations have chosen to decapitate or mutilate victims, in several cases on videotape.⁴⁶ The torture method is used for intimidation, and the head then accompanies narco-messages or serves as a narco-message.⁴⁷ Sample messages read:

“Attorney General, don't play stupid, this will continue until you continue to protect the people of Héctor Huerta, Chapo Guzmán, and the fag La Barbie... specially you Rogelio Cerda! Until all your children fall, and also the people of El Chiva. P.S. This is just the beginning.”

“For you, the one still out there, from Las Locas. I failed with Sajarapulos, but I settled the score here. But you continue. I hope you receive my message, because the government is protecting you a lot.”

“Don't send federal (officers).”

“Long live the family.”

⁴⁴Noreste, June 29, 2008, http://www.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones.php?id=388264&id_seccion; James C. McKinley, Jr., “After a massacre, silence shrouds Mexican town,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 31, 2008.

⁴⁵ Strategic Forecasting, *Mexico: Examining Oil Infrastructure Bombings*, October 12, 2007; Nurit Martínez, “Ubican a Lucía como nexo de FARC en México,” *El Universal*, March 6, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/157996.html>; http://www.loc.gov/frd/pdf-files/OrgCrime_Mexico.pdf; Rohan Gunaratna and Graeme C.S. Steven, “CounterTerrorism,” pg.190–191.

⁴⁶ Noroeste, “Decapitan a un policía en Culiacán,” July 5, 2008, http://www.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones.php?id=373858&id_seccion=70; Laura Reyes, “Decapitan y queman a tres sujetos en Acapulco,” *El Universal*, October 9, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx:80/estados/66175.html>

⁴⁷ *El Diario*, “Decapitan a policía de Ignacio Zaragoza,” May 28, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaId=43321276d753c032118c652a84074bbb>; Novanet, “Hallan cabeza de policía levantado,” <http://www.aca-novenet.com.mx/estado/140907/13HALLAN.html>; *Associated Press*, “Body of Mexican Army Captain Found,” May 13, 2007; Luis Carlos Cano, “Ejecutan a 18 en las últimas 24 hrs en Ciudad Juárez,” *El Universal*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/529363.html>; Strategic Forecasting: Mexico Security Memo, July 7, 2008.

“You are going to die because of rats. General Escalera and Archila, you stole my cocaine. Attention: Celestino.”⁴⁸

Unfortunately, organized crime has become a “boom industry,” while legitimate businesses struggle against economic forces and violence. According to studies performed by the National Institute of Criminal Sciences in Mexico, salaries for hit men in Mexico have hovered around \$500 per month historically. In the past, hit men were usually 25 to 35 years old, but more recently, the salaries, age, and experience levels have all declined. Gang-aged young men 15 to 25 years old are now earning approximately \$600 per month. It is believed that the large number of killings and arrests is resulting in a less-skilled pool of recruits.⁴⁹ Economic forces would indicate that an oversupply of recruits is an equally plausible explanation.

At the local level, criminal organizations increasingly have acted with impunity. Not only have attacks been made on judges, legislators, police departments, and Mexico’s elite, but cartel personnel and copycat groups have extorted money from citizens and confiscated their vehicles and real property.⁵⁰ In response, the Mexican military leaders have deployed 25,000 to 30,000 troops who represent the only countervailing force against the violence.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping has become an industry in itself. Mexico has the highest kidnapping rate in the world, with three to four reported per day, and many more unreported. The rate has risen almost 10 percent from last year.⁵¹ The country’s elite have become accustomed to traveling with body guards in armored vehicles, to paying ransom without law enforcement notification, and to seeing acquaintances scarred or mutilated after kidnapping experiences. The victims are

⁴⁸ Noroeste, “Decapitan a otros dos,” July 7, 2008, http://www.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones.php?id=391242&id_seccion; La Jornada, “No cede la violencia ligada al narco; reportan 17 asesinatos en cinco estados,” July 7, 2008, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/07/07/index.php?section=politica&article=017n1pol>

⁴⁹ Francisco Gómez, “Van en picada los sueldos de sicarios, aseguran expertos,” March 11, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/158130.html>

⁵⁰ Reuters, “Drug Gangs Kill Mayor in Western Mexico,” June 2, 2008; Duncan Kennedy, “Police killed in Mexico drug raid,” May 27, 2008; Reforma, “Judges threatened by the organized crime,” August 24, 2008.

⁵¹ *El Universal*, “Ocupa México primer lugar en secuestros a nivel mundial: ONG,” August 14, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=a765af6086df845d3e7d32ef5060f02a>; *El Informador*, “Se dispara 9% el secuestro en este año: PGR,” <http://www.informador.com.mx/mexico/2008/30878/6/se-dispara-9-el-secuestro-en-este-ano-pgr.htm>

abducted from public locations and private clubs alike, and often not returned alive. Kidnapping may once have been a “cottage industry,” but now is increasingly undertaken by organized crime, with the kidnapers heavily armed. In some cases, drug organizations may be turning to kidnapping to supplement the decline of income or finance territorial expansions.⁵²

As with other industries, kidnapping strategy and tactics are evolving. “Express kidnappings” now regularly occur in which the family is notified of a kidnapping that did not occur or callers demonstrate the ability to kidnap, and the victim’s family pays the ransom, whether or not the victim has been taken.⁵³ Mexican legislator Mirna Rincón became a victim of an express kidnapping while seated on the floor of the Mexican legislature in 2007. An unidentified caller on her cellular telephone informed her that her son had been kidnapped.⁵⁴ The result of this booming industry is a citizenry living in constant fear.⁵⁵

Effects on Businesses

The smuggling trade and its violence have dramatically affected businesses along trafficking routes and Mexico’s economy strategically. Along the highly traveled routes, trade has developed to service the smugglers and immigrants. Vendors for food, water, and daily essentials see a steady business that had not existed before. At the same time, these businesses have made “a deal with the devil.” The criminals dominate the economy and then the people. As rivals challenge the control of drug routes, local citizens pay the price.⁵⁶ Currently, the situation is exemplified in Sasabe, Sonora, where the only businesses are human smuggling and drug smuggling.⁵⁷ It is the starting point of a three-day walk to Tucson, Arizona. Similarly, towns

⁵² *Mexico Security Memo*, Strategic Forecasting, July 28, 2008; *El Paso Times*, “Reyes relative kidnapped; U.S. helps secure release,” June 25, 2008; Duncan Kennedy, “Mexican fury grows at kidnappings,” *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7553633.stm>; Sandra Dibble, “Top officials vow to go after kidnapers,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 10, 2008.

⁵³ Rubén Fuentes Garciam, “Proponen hasta 50 años por secuestro exprés,” *El Porvenir*, June 17, 2008, http://www.elporvenir.com.mx/notas.asp?nota_id=225836; Marc Lacey, “Exploiting real fears with ‘virtual kidnappings,’” *New York Times*, April 29, 2008; *The Houston Chronicle*, “Phone extortion coming from behind bars in Mexico,” January 2, 2007; James Pinkerton, “Kidnappings on rise in south Texas,” *The Houston Chronicle*, December 18, 2006.

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, “Exploiting real fears with ‘virtual kidnappings,’” April 29, 2008.

⁵⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, “Tijuana’s elite flee to San Diego county to escape kidnappings and violence in Mexico,” June 7, 2008, <http://www.bajaenlinea.com/newsmanager/templates/nota.aspx?articleid=3084&zoneid=15>

⁵⁶ Laurence Iliff, “Cartel gunmen pursued after clash,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 17, 2007.

⁵⁷ “Francisco Gómez, “Narco o pollero, el dilema,” *El Universal*, May 30, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/428240.html>

dominated by one cartel often endure brutal attacks by rival cartels, as experienced by Cananea, Sonora, 60 miles southeast of Nogales.⁵⁸ The problem has become so commonplace that other criminal organizations not associated with the cartels are now using the same tactics to extort money from businesses.⁵⁹

The violence has dramatically affected legitimate commerce in border communities as well. Businesses and their owners are targeted by criminal groups, and tourism has plummeted. As a result, many businesses have closed and/or moved out of the country. From 2005 to 2007, Nuevo Laredo saw approximately 65 percent of the businesses in its commercial center close, while two or more businessmen a week were kidnapped. In Tijuana, 60 percent of the businesses on Avenida Revolucion closed due to the drop in tourism, while businessmen, professionals, and families fled the country to escape the violence in general and kidnapping in particular. In Juarez last June, ten businesses went up in flames; four burned within a few hours of each other.⁶⁰ Some business owners turned to YouTube to disseminate videos of confrontations with drug cartels, in hopes of gaining attention and relief.⁶¹ These Mexican communities stand to lose not only their investment capital, but their human capital as well.

Silencing the Opposition and the Press

Organized crime has prevented the organization of all forms of opposition at the local level. The level of intimidation currently in Mexico is so unprecedented that citizens, journalists, and politicians are eliminated for a critical comment or an attempt to organize a community. When violence reaches an extreme level and citizens feel the government is unable to protect them, a populace often turns to vigilantism, but these forces also have been thwarted. For example, in May 2008, ranchers in the state of Guerrero gathered to discuss strategies to prevent the drug cartels from confiscating their ranches at will. Heavily armed men arrived at the meeting and

⁵⁸ Cartel gunmen, Iliff; Notimex, “Police officers quit in Cananea,” May 18, 2007; Notimex, “Killed officers had possible links to organized crime in Sonora,” May 16, 2007; Notimex, “PGJE identifies Sonora gunmen as former military members,” May 20, 2007.

⁵⁹ Mileneo, “Amagan pseudo zetas,” November 16, 2008, <http://www.milenio.com/edomex/milenio/nota.asp?id=131068>

⁶⁰ Informador, “Asusta presencia militar en frontera norte,” <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/160240.html>; A. Quintero, “Incendian 4 bares; asesinan a 7 más,” *El Diario*, June 10, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=0c22060600772f8b2b8597452fd0575a>

⁶¹ *El Fronterizo*, June 19, 2008 and June 20, 2008, <http://www.elfronterizo.com>

shot 15 ranchers, nine fatally. A leader of the ranching group was absent from the meeting, so the following day a similar number of armed men found and killed him, along with another group of ranchers.⁶² In Tijuana, a prominent attorney who spoke out against the crime was forced to escape an assassination attempt at a moment's notice by fleeing the country. In Juarez last August, a pastor was leading a religious service at a drug rehabilitation center, when gunmen attacked and killed eight persons and wounded five.⁶³

Outside of Iraq, Mexico has been the most dangerous country in the world for journalists, according to Reporters Without Borders.⁶⁴ Journalists reporting on crime disappear or are killed on a regular basis, and in at least one instance, a politician's head was delivered to the local newspaper as a warning.⁶⁵ In the last five years at least 21 journalists have been killed and seven others are missing.⁶⁶ In Sonora, one newspaper was forced to temporarily close after attacks and threats.⁶⁷ In Juarez, messages from organized crime groups warned journalists and rescue personnel that venturing to the scene of fatalities could result in their death.⁶⁸ Journalists heeded the warnings and stopped reporting on organized crime; as a result, they were less frequently attacked.

Events in Nuevo Laredo offer a prime example of the silencing of reporters. Nuevo Laredo and Laredo garnered national headlines in 2005 after the Nuevo Laredo police chief was assassinated and his successor was killed several hours after being sworn in. Shortly thereafter, the Mexican federal government removed all local police officers from their positions. As federal personnel were arriving in the city, members of the former police force ambushed them. Soon after, the

⁶² BBC News, "Ranchers killed in Mexico attack," May 8, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7383559.stm>

⁶³ Daniel Burunda, "Attack at rehab center in Juarez leaves 8 dead," *El Paso Times*, August 15, 2008.

⁶⁴ Reporters Without Borders, Press Freedom Round-up 2006, December 31, 2006; Noticias, February 13, 2008, <http://www.noticias.com>

⁶⁵ *Associated Press*, "Top anti-narcotics official slain in Mexico City," May 2007; *Associated Press*, "Politician head left at Mexico newspaper office," May 27, 2007.

⁶⁶ *El Tiempo*, "Misión de sociedad interamericana de prensa (SIP) a México, por violencia de 'narcos,'" http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/home/mision-de-sociedad-interamericana-de-prensa-sip-a-mexico-por-violencia-de-narcos_4345391-1

⁶⁷ Lisa J. Adams, "Mexican newspaper to shut down temporarily amid ongoing attacks, threats by criminals," *Associated Press*, May 25, 2007.

⁶⁸ Luz del Carmen Sosa, "Amenazan a reporteros y paramédicos," *El Diario*, May 19, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaid=67c282ff0f55bda63921c5d6d4734bf0>

local newspaper was attacked, and journalists dropped all crime reporting.⁶⁹ In early 2008, the *San Antonio Express-News* and the *Dallas Morning News* also felt compelled to withdraw reporters from Laredo and Nuevo Laredo due to threats.⁷⁰ As a result, in May 2008, when the right hand man of Nuevo Laredo Mayor Ramon Garza Barrios was kidnapped, the local press did not report the news. The incident did make the news elsewhere in the country.⁷¹

Corruption of Public Servants and Impersonation

Corruption is so rife among public servants, whether by choice or coercion, that the general citizenry often feels left without a government it can trust. The problem is compounded by the inability of the general public to discern between true authorities and impersonators, because organized crime groups so often impersonate personnel from official governmental agencies.⁷² The uniforms of the Mexican Federal Investigative Agency (AFI) and other law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, have been recovered from many safe house raids across the country. In addition, the public has reported attacks by impersonators; some have been so bold as to issue and execute their own search warrants in official government uniforms.⁷³ The occurrence had become so common in Juarez that in April 2008, the Mexican government warned its citizens that members of the Juarez cartel were impersonating members of the Mexican military.⁷⁴

What's more, organized crime groups have now created their own official uniforms with their own logo, which appear to be government uniforms. For example, in August 2008, five bulletproof vests were found with the logo "FEM." While appearing to be government issued, FEM was the acronym for Fuerzas Especiales del Muletas. The uniforms belonged to men working for one of the key lieutenants of the Arellano Felix Cartel, Raybel Lopez Uriarte, aka El

⁶⁹ Mariano Castillo, "Nuevo Laredo media go silent on violence," *San Antonio Express-News*, Sept. 28, 2006.

⁷⁰ Strategic Forecasting, July 16, 2007.

⁷¹ La Región, "Ejecutan influyente politico y ex regidor de Nuevo Laredo," May 9, 2008, <http://www.laregiontam.com.mx/?op1=notas&op2=723>

⁷² David Alvidrez, "Roban a AFI Suburban con armas y uniformes," *El Diario*, January 22, 2008, <http://www.diario.com.mx/nota.php?notaId=4a3c1f71004de0de75f724338ac0aee0>; Reuters, "Mexico gunmen kill youths, take hostages," July 14, 2008; Belizario Reyes, "Se enfrentan policías y sicarios a 15 kilómetros de Mazatlán," August 15, 2008, http://www.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones.php?id=402184&id_seccion=185

⁷³ Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional, Article ID 1305, April 19, 2008; Silvia Otero, "Asegura ejército dinero y armas en domicilio de Apodaca, NL," *El Universal*, October 4, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/452950.html>

⁷⁴ Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional, Article ID 1305, April 9, 2008.

Muletas.⁷⁵ In the spring of 2008, similar uniforms bearing the initials “FEDA” were found in a cartel safe house. The acronym is believed to be a Spanish acronym for “Arturo's Special Forces,” referring to Arturo Beltran⁷⁶

The attempted infiltration of Mexico’s political system is particularly alarming. The head of Mexico’s intelligence services, Centro de Investigacion y Seguridad Nacional (CISEN), the Organization of American States, and others warn of organized crime attempting to assume control of the country through the nation’s democratic institutions.⁷⁷ Politicians have reported offers of cash by organized crime in return for votes and immunity from prosecution.⁷⁸ In March 2008, the Mexican Federal Election Commission pressed federal legislators to pass reforms automatically disqualifying a candidate who accepts funding from organized crime.⁷⁹ Civic organizations worry the extensive buying of votes will create apathy among honest voters.⁸⁰ Twenty of 113 municipalities in Michoacan are estimated to have leading elected officials controlled by drug cartels.⁸¹

Mexican Law Enforcement Officers in the Cross Hairs

Mexican law enforcement agencies are having a particularly difficult time and morale is low. Police officers are being targeted by rival cartels and investigated by federal agencies for ties to organized crime. They are underpaid, outmanned, outgunned, and underequipped.⁸² Mexican

⁷⁵ Manuel Cordero, “Aprehenden a dos sicarios del Cártel Arellano Félix,” *El Sol de Tijuana*, August 7, 2008, <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldetijuana/notas/n803419.htm>

⁷⁶ *Associated Press*, “Mexico captures 11 alleged hit men,” January 22, 2008.

⁷⁷ *Financial Times*, July 13, 2008, 17(10).

⁷⁸ Jonathan Tapia, “Me ofrecían cuanto dinero quisiera,” *El Universal*, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/160828.html>; *El Porvenir*, “Infiltra narco empresas y partidos,” October 12, 2007, http://www.elporvenir.com.mx/notas.asp?nota_id=166079; Juan Velez, “Se arraiga la narcopolítica en estados,” *El Universal*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/521136.html>

⁷⁹ *El Sol de Mexico*, “Pedirá IFE facultad para combatir a ‘narcocandidatos,’” March 20, 2008, <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldemexico/notas/n634887.htm>

⁸⁰ *Diario Tamaulipas*, October 29, 2007, quoting president of the president of Civic Citizen’s Advice in Victoria, Tamaulipas, <http://www.diariotamaulipas.com.mx/>

⁸¹ *Qroenlinea*, August 27, 2007, <http://www.qroenlinea.com/newsmanager/templates/nota.asp?articleid=1548&zoneid=11>

⁸² NPR, Morning Edition, June 28, 2008; Milenio, “Federales enviados a NL amagan con unirse al hampa,” November 18, 2008, <http://www.milenio.com/monterrey/milenio/nota.asp?id=626352>; James C. McKinley Jr., “Mexico questions police officials about ambush,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2007.

cartels are reportedly offering cash rewards for the killing of law enforcement officers,⁸³ and hit teams regularly attack police stations and prisons in order to assassinate police officials and free prisoners.⁸⁴ Hit teams armed with assault rifles, grenades, and SWAT gear attack with a large numerical advantage.⁸⁵ Often police officers are compelled to purchase necessary equipment on meager salaries. In July 2008, a Juarez police commander was assassinated by an armed commando team while inside the police station.⁸⁶

In several instances, entire police forces have threatened to quit or large portions have walked off the job. A number of police chiefs have fled the country and are seeking asylum in the United States.⁸⁷ In May 2008, the entire police force of Villa Ahumada, south of Juarez, fled the town after dozens of armed gunmen rolled into town, killing the police chief and several other officers, and abducting other citizens.⁸⁸ In August 2008, the new head of the public safety department for Villa Ahumada was gunned down hours after he was sworn in.

Effects in the United States

Violence Seeps Across the Border

The national border is the United States' defense against crime and violence, not only for American citizens, but for the untold numbers of Mexican citizens desperately seeking sanctuary in this country. But the violence rampant in Mexico does not stop at the border. The gun battles,

⁸³ Monsters and Critics, "Mexican drug gangs offer cash for killing police officers," May 23, 2008, http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/americas/news/article_1407245.php/Mexican_drug_gangs_offer_cash_for_killing_police_officers#ixzz09h5FFEQa

⁸⁴ *El Universal*, "Rescatan a plagiarios," <http://www.vozdemichoacan.com.mx/secciones/seguridad/seg000913.html>; Irma Mejía, "Muere jefe policial en ataque con granadas," June 17, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/515489.html>; Air Security International Situational Report, June 20, 2008; Jesus Amador Torres, "Ventas en la Zona Libre durante diciembre: Gasolina barata, imán," *Diario de Quintana Roo*, December 8, 2008, http://www.dqr.com.mx/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4317&Itemid=1; Reuters, "Gunmen kill 5 in attack on Mexico police," March 22, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN22281623>

⁸⁵ Laurence Iliff, "Cartel gunmen pursued after clash," *Dallas Morning News*, May 17, 2007.

⁸⁶ Diana Washington Valdez, "Juarez police commander killed inside police station," *El Paso Times*, July 19, 2008.

⁸⁷ *El Universal*, "Piden asilo a EU tres jefes de la policía Mexicana," May 14, 2008, <http://estadis.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/506659.html>; *Associated Press*, "10 dead in northern Mexico shootings," July 10, 2008; *El Universal*, "Renuncian 20 policías tras balacera en Durango," June 5, 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/512617.html>; Duncan Kennedy, "Police killed in Mexico drug raid," *BBC News*, May 27, 2008; *Associated Press*, "Violence in Mexico spills across U.S. border," May 14, 2008, <http://www.reforma.com/nacional/articulo/771705/>

⁸⁸ *International Herald Tribune*, "After a massacre, silence shrouds a town," May 31, 2008.

assassinations, kidnappings, intimidation tactics, corruption, and impersonation are increasingly prevalent on U.S. soil. In some cases, the violence involves Mexicans who have sought refuge in the United States and in other cases, U.S. citizens are the target. In August 2008, El Paso police warned that hit men were approved by cartels to cross from Mexico into the United States to conduct hits.⁸⁹ To many this was no surprise. In June 2008, a Mexican cartel hit list with the names of more than a dozen residents of Texas and New Mexico, including at least one New Mexico police officer, became public.⁹⁰ This incident was closely followed by the murder of a Phoenix, Arizona resident by a Mexican cartel hit squad.⁹¹ The eight-member assassination team—dressed in body armor, counterfeit Phoenix Police Department raid shirts, and Kevlar helmets—was equipped with AR-15 guns fitted with low-light vision equipment, and used military tactics. They approached the victim’s house as if they were serving a warrant.⁹² With regard to impersonation, a ring of “pseudo-cops” in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas was operating within a mile of a Border Patrol maritime base.

The Mexican drug cartels do not stop at the border, either. The cartels are estimated to be active in 195 U.S. cities, and are largely taking control of the drug trade from African American gangs.⁹³ In addition, kidnapping gangs have moved into U.S. territory, primarily preying upon the immigrant community, both legal and illegal. Kidnapping first increased in the borderlands, where kidnapers targeted Americans of Mexican descent who were visiting Mexico, and the Mexican relatives of Americans. The phenomenon then spread to Americans on U.S. soil along the border. The kidnappings now have moved from border communities to metropolitan areas of the U.S. border states. Many immigrants are reluctant to report abductions, so the severity of the situation cannot be fully understood. The extent of the problem will become more apparent if and when kidnapping gangs change their target to the non-immigrant community.

⁸⁹ *Associated Press*, “Border security tightened after Mexican cartel warning,” August 25, 2008.

⁹⁰ Alicia Caldwell, “Mexican cartel hit lists target Americans,” *Associated Press*, June 19, 2008.

⁹¹ National Terror Alert Response Center, “Were Mexican Army Members Involved In Phoenix Home Invasion and Murder?” June 25, 2008, <http://www.nationalterroralert.com/updates/2008/06/25/mexican-army-members-may-be-suspects-in-phoenix-home-invasion-and-murder-jd-hayworth-show/>; WorldNet Daily, “6 Mexicans dressed as cops kill Phoenix man,” June 25, 2008, <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=67963>

⁹² Strategic Forecasting, “Mexican Cartels and the Fallout from Phoenix,” July 2, 2008.

⁹³ Cox News Service, “Drug cartels from Mexico invading Middle America,” August 16, 2008.

Of the approximately 1.2 million illegal immigrants apprehended in 2006 and 2007, approximately 10 percent had known criminal records. This figure is likely significantly understated, in that criminal records from the immigrants' home country are only available on a very limited basis. In some Texas communities, illegal immigrants account for 50 percent of burglaries and 70 percent of auto thefts.⁹⁴ The United States has served as a destination for some criminals escaping law enforcement in their home countries, just as U.S. citizens have been known to flee the country when they are wanted for a crime.

Corruption has always presented challenges on both sides of the border, but as the stakes rise, the incidents of corruption on the U.S. side of the border are increasing, too.⁹⁵ In South Texas, corruption among politicians has been legendary. Corruption now is becoming more prevalent in school districts, municipal inspection departments, law enforcement agencies, and courtrooms.

Morale of U. S. Law Enforcement

Morale improved among U.S. border agencies with the mobilization of the National Guard to the border and the end to “catch-and-release” policies. These improvements aside, law enforcement must still contend with increased violence against their ranks, and the perceived shortcomings in criminal prosecution along the U.S.–Mexico border. Smuggling routes are well known and well protected with lookouts, snipers, and intelligence. In July 2008, Border Patrol Chief David Aguilar reported attacks against Border Patrol agents were up.⁹⁶ The flow of illegal immigrants continues to be of such proportions that it overwhelms immigration, law enforcement, and the criminal justice systems of border states and their communities.

Incursions by the Mexican military onto U.S. territory continue to be a difficult issue. Several hundred incursions have been documented; recently, a Mexican military unit surrounded and attacked U.S. Border Patrol on U.S. soil.⁹⁷ Testimony on these incursions was given in early 2005 during the hearings for the Kyl-Cornyn immigration reform bill, yet little official recognition has been given to these events. The refusal of elements in Washington to

⁹⁴ Proceedings of the Texas Lyceum Conference, “The Immigration Crisis,” August 8–10, 2008, McAllen, Texas.

⁹⁵ Randall C. Archibold and Andrew Becker, “Border Agents, Lured by the Other Side,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2008; James Pinkerton, “Bribe culture seeps into South Texas,” *The Houston Chronicle*, December 16, 2006.

⁹⁶ Strategic Forecasting, “Mexico Security Memo,” July 20, 2008.

⁹⁷ WorldNet Daily, “Mexican army invades U.S., holds border cop at gunpoint,” August 06, 2008.

acknowledge the activity has led many Americans along the border to wonder at the motivations of those in the U.S. federal government.

Policy Initiatives

Mixed Signals in Mexico Policy

While pushing the United States to assist with law enforcement and immigration reform, Calderón has attacked U. S. efforts to improve immigration enforcement and stem the tide of emigration north.⁹⁸ Many believe the failure of the Mexican government to provide adequate employment and services for its citizens has placed the United States in the position of being the Mexican government's safety valve for social pressures; many also believe the Mexican government has concerns about its ability to provide for its citizens living in the United States, as well as the loss of cash flow from remittances.

Mexico has made a number of moves that appear inconsistent with a goal of reducing smuggling activities and pressuring organized crime. For instance, the Mexican legislature has proposed and passed a law that decriminalizes illegal immigration, and simply fines and releases the perpetrator.⁹⁹ Mexico does not have the same mechanisms to detect and handle illegal entry as the United States, in that it does not have a border patrol. The Mexican military has served the function as a necessity, when directed to do so. In other instances, Mexico has undertaken operations to protect illegal immigrants from human smugglers, to house deported persons near the border, and to ease the transmittance of remesas, giving the impression the country endorses illicit activities.¹⁰⁰ The Office of Exterior Relations was ordered by Mexican Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI) to divulge information on U. S. Drug Enforcement Agency agents active in Mexico, thereby revoking a rule protecting the information from disclosure for 12 years.¹⁰¹ Representatives of the Mexican government have even gone so far as to travel to Arizona to protest laws that impose penalties on persons employing illegal immigrants.

⁹⁸ James C. McKinley, "Mexican president assails U.S. measures on migrants," *New York Times*, September 3, 2007.

⁹⁹ Notimex, "PRI Proposes Immigration Law Change," March 11, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ *Norte de Ciudad Juarez*, October 23, 2007, <http://www.nortedeciudadjuarez.com/paginas/seguridad/seg5.html>

¹⁰¹ Manatt Joines Strategies, News Briefs, "IFAI orders SRE to publish identities of DEA's agents in Mexico," March 3, 2008, Vol. V, No. 8., as reprinted from *Reforma*, February 20, 2008.

Mixed Signals in U.S. Policy

The United States also is sending mixed signals concerning its seriousness in confronting the issues of border security issues and drug-related violence. While the Department of Homeland Security has taken the problems very seriously, the Department of State was slow to issue a travel alert for Mexico, even though many American citizens had come in harm's way. Only several months after the state of Texas issued its own warning did the U.S. Department of State follow suit. Similarly, certain U.S. Attorneys within the Department of Justice have failed to prosecute illegal immigrants criminally until their sixth apprehension.¹⁰² In the first instance, the move was politically motivated, as Mexico considered any discussion of its crime problem unpalatable. In the second instance, the lack of prosecution likely derived from an overwhelmed legal system and inability to handle the volume of illegal immigrants.

Policy Suggestions

Organized crime is benefiting from the flow of illegal immigrants and the demand for illicit drugs. Policies must continue to work towards curtailing these flows. All remedies must be attempted against the potent forces of organized crime: reducing demand, effective interdiction, and continued enforcement.

Due to a greater familiarity with the U.S. political landscape and institutions, the policy suggestions focus on the U.S. initiatives.

Work Permits

Reducing illegal immigration requires reducing the demand for illegal workers and effectively preventing unlawful crossings. There are two parts to reducing the demand for illegal workers. First, the United States must have a thorough understanding of the number of immigrants required for a robust economy. Secondly, the United States should issue a realistic number of visas and work permits to meet demand, so that immigrants filling the jobs will be documented and in the United States legally.

¹⁰² Susan Carroll and Michael Hedges, "Illegal immigrants allowed at least five strikes," *The Houston Chronicle*, March 23, 2007.

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

Determining the number of excess jobs that are best filled by new immigrants will be a major challenge for the United States. However, with this number in hand, the U.S. government could determine appropriate number of work permits in any of the variety of forms such a “permit” might take. Many of the jobs may currently be filled with illegal workers, making the figure hard to ascertain. In the alternative, the U.S. government can begin raising the number of work permits while increasing enforcement, and economic forces should make the figure apparent over time. As a nation, the United States is not anti-immigrant per se, but the nation wants immigrants to be legal.

Improved Employee Verification Systems and Continued Sanctions

Jobs in the United States are a powerful draw for illegal immigrants. By reducing the number of jobs, the number of illegal immigrants will also drop. Most employers are not experts in document forgery and fraud, and do not seek to hire illegal immigrants. A reliable, timely, and cost-effective mechanism to verify an employee’s status is critical. Once this has been achieved, employers who do not use the verification mechanism should be sanctioned if found to hire illegal immigrants.

Border Security

Effectively controlling national borders is a fundamental right of sovereignty, as is determining what foreigners are within a nation’s boundaries. Experience has shown that many tools have a place in achieving a secure border. Technology, patrols, and walls continue to enhance security efforts. Significant attention has been given to the border wall, but less attention has been focused on its effectiveness where completed. Where implemented, there has been marked improvement. When the border wall was completed between San Diego and Tijuana, illegal crossings dropped by over 90 percent. The completion of the western Arizona wall saw a drop in illegal crossings in excess of 95 percent. Crime in both areas also declined. The United States’ goal is to have “secure borders, open doors.” Indeed, this is the theme of the Rice-Chertoff Initiative. The United States seeks to have open doors for those with a well-intentioned, legitimate cause to enter the country, but will prevent the entry of those who do not.

While modifications may be made in future years, at this time it is imperative the borders be secured. With secure borders, the nation can have a thoughtful, proactive debate about policy, and not be forced into reactionary measures.

Transportation

When assessing relations with Mexico with regard to security, there must be an understanding and acceptance that the increased flow of trade as the result of NAFTA has created ample opportunity for the flow of contraband and persons. The same NAFTA provisions that opened the borders to trade have also created more opportunities for the flow of contraband and persons. The problem is only growing worse as trade increases, and Mexican vehicles are allowed to come into the interior of the country. Consideration should be given to limiting the transit of vehicles from the border; vehicles and cargo entering the country must, in the interest of security, be more thoroughly inspected at the time of entry, as well as once they reach the interior.

Illicit Drug Demand Reduction and Interdiction

Over the decades, government at all levels in United States has worked to reduce the demand for illegal drugs. These educational and enforcement programs have proved to be effective, and demand is dropping nationwide, particularly among populations that have been traditional users.¹⁰³ Drug testing in the military and workplace appear to be a significant contributing factor. Funding of drug demand reduction programs in U.S., including drug courts, should continue at historical levels or greater, and assistance should be offered to Mexico to promote prevention and treatment strategies.

Interdiction efforts also have proved effective. As a result of a drop in sales and aggressive interdiction, drug organizations are diversifying into human smuggling and kidnapping, and are working to expand markets overseas. In addition, consumption is increasing in transit countries, such as Mexico.¹⁰⁴ Mexico, however, is not just a transit country, but also a producer. Mexico is

¹⁰³ Current State of Drug Policy: Successes and Challenges, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, March 2008; National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIDA Infofacts: High School and Youth Trends, <http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/HSYouthtrends.html>; <http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/nationtrends.html>

¹⁰⁴ Sergio Macedo González, “Rebasa narcomenudeo las fronteras,” *El Sol*, October 12, 2007, <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldetoluca/notas/n450761.htm>

third in the world in opium production behind Afghanistan and Myanmar, and a leading producer of cannabis.¹⁰⁵ Continued pressure on these producers is imperative.

Improved Enforcement of Weapons Trafficking

Tremendous strides can be achieved in dismantling and prosecuting weapons trafficking organizations, if the serial numbers of all weapons seized in Mexico were reported to U.S. law enforcement officials. In June 2008, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security joined with Mexico's Public Safety Secretariat in operation *Armas Cruzadas*, a joint effort to track and interdict smuggled weapons. The program has the potential to achieve this end, keeping in mind that building trust among law enforcement agencies will ultimately determine the operation's success.

Federal Assistance for Local Law Enforcement

The flow of illegal immigrants has overwhelmed local governments in the borderlands. From the local perspective, the high flow reflects a failure of the federal government and is beyond local control, but local governments must pay the price. In some cases, as much as 25 to 30 percent of local law enforcement budgets are expended on illegal immigrants in the criminal justice system. While the federal government provides some reimbursement under the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), the amount has declined significantly. For the five Texas counties receiving the bulk of the illegal immigrant flow, the SCAAP funding only reimburses approximately 3 percent of expenses.¹⁰⁶ These local communities deserve greater support.

Conclusion

The current conditions in Mexico must also be viewed as a significant national security threat to the United States, and bold policies must continue to protect the citizens of both nations. Calderón has acknowledged that violence in Mexico is both the cause and the symptom of the growing disintegration of government institutions. Fear and violence have created an urgent need for solutions. The consequences of spiraling crime are being felt in communities at all levels.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations World Drug Report 2008, 1.2.2 Production, Table 2 and pg. 97.

¹⁰⁶ Border Counties Coalition and University of Arizona, "Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S.–Mexico Border Counties," September 2007.

Security in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands

Mexican border communities are becoming economic wastelands as legitimate businesses flee, and longtime U.S. border residents move to escape potential danger. As with other insurgencies, the longer the crime continues, the more difficult it becomes to root out. The criminal enterprises become a self-sustaining culture, and criminals become wedded to their profession. Ultimately, the greatest costs are borne by the children.

Mexico is at a turning point. Citizens will either take control of the nation or the country will be lost to organized crime and violence. Mexico is a neighbor and friend, and the United States has every interest in assisting as appropriate. At the same time, the United States must take a defensive posture to protect its citizens. Consequently, any future actions by the United States will be determined by Mexico's own decisions and actions. Mexico's failure to stem the tide of crime and violence will ultimately influence policies on such major issues as immigration and NAFTA.