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Instability in the South: The Implications of Mexican State Failure on U.S. National Security

Shadd Allen Pease
University of Denver

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Instability in the South:
The Implications of Mexican State Failure on U.S. National Security

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of Josef Korbel School of International Studies
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Shadd A. Pease
June 2011
Advisor: Dr. Paul R. Viotti
Abstract

This thesis analyzes the implications of Mexican state failure on United States national security. The growing instability in Mexico due to the actions of the various drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), government corruption, possible human rights abuses and Mexican insurgent groups is examined in order to understand why the Mexican state may fail.

This thesis explores the implications of Mexican state failure on U.S. national security by providing possible scenarios such as continued operations into the United States by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, DTO relationships with American street gangs, regional instability, possible exploitation of the Mexican homeland by terrorist organizations, U.S. economic costs, Mexican refugee flow into the United States, and foreign state intervention into Mexico. This thesis concludes by focusing on American counter-drug policy in Latin America; the last section also provides policy recommendations for American officials.

The United States has delivered tremendous amounts of money and equipment to Mexico. The close proximity of Mexico with the United States, and the permeable border that the U.S. shares with Mexico makes this study relevant to the United States. A Mexican failed state scenario will have an adverse effect on the national security of the United States.
Acknowledgements

This Master’s Thesis would not have been possible without the help and guidance of several individuals. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Paul Viotti of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies. Dr. Paul Viotti is my thesis advisor, and he provided direction and assistance during the research and writing of this project; I’m grateful for his assistance. I would also like to convey my thanks to Dr. Lynn Holland of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies. Dr. Lynn Holland provided support and encouragement during the completion of this work. I also would like to articulate my gratitude to Dr. Andrew Goetz who is the Chair of the Department of Geography at the University of Denver. Dr. Andrew Goetz agreed to take the time to sit on my thesis defense board. Thank you all for your backing and support.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mexico finds itself in a precarious position. This is due in large part to the increasing violence perpetrated by drug cartels that control large swaths of the country. Horrendous acts of barbarism are inflicted on many Mexican citizens who either work with the drug organizations, or are caught in the cross-fire. Additionally, systemic corruption at all levels of the Mexican government and police forces, and accusations of military human rights violations further the growing problem. However, the violence that affects thousands of Mexican citizens is not limited to that country alone. Much of the violence spills into American border communities; if Mexico becomes a failed state it could have tremendous negative effects on the national security of America.

Mexican drug cartels are unleashing various types of violence on the people of Mexico as each group vies for control of the narcotics trade. Violence is strongly centered on the northern border cities of Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez; their close proximity to American cities is disturbing. According to United States Attorney General Eric Holder, “Drug trafficking cartels spread violence and lawlessness throughout our border region and reach into all of our communities, large and small.”¹ This statement by the U.S. Attorney General must be taken with great seriousness as the United States shares a

1,969 mile border with the country of Mexico; additionally, several major American cities are located in the vicinity of the Mexican border. Unfortunately, the nefarious situation brought about by narcotics drug trafficking is not a new phenomenon.

Narcotics and human trafficking from Mexico into the United States is not a new occurrence. In the past, organizations in Mexico who were involved in the drug trade primarily transported marijuana, as well as, heroin into the United States. The main Mexican drug smuggler, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, had consolidated several of the small time narcotics smugglers into one organization during the 1970s; this organization managed most of the drugs that flowed over the United States-Mexican border. This individual, and the Mexican smugglers that worked with him, were about to profit from the Colombian cartels that were the current focus of American counter-narcotics operations.

The dangerous cartels that operated in the state of Colombia in South America dominated much of the cocaine trafficking into the United States via the Caribbean. However, due to aggressive American counter-narcotics action, the Colombian cartels were forced to find alternate routes outside of the Caribbean; these cartels found a willing partner in the Mexican smuggler, Felix Gallardo. The expansive and porous border between the United States and Mexico offered the cartels ample opportunity to deliver their illegal products north into the United States as well as smuggle huge amounts of cash and weapons south back into Mexico. The new Mexican-Colombian cartel alliance

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3 Ibid
operated together through most of the 1980s, and became a formidable drug organization. Nevertheless, the United States became aware of the connection between the Mexican cartels and their Colombian counterparts. The U.S responded by focusing their anti-drug efforts on the Mexican-U.S. border and eventually the leader of the Mexican drug cartel, Felix Gallardo, was arrested.

The arrest of Felix Gallardo in 1989 caused dissension between the various ‘lieutenants’ who worked for him. Consequently, Gallardo directed his subordinates to focus on what they believed to be their real enemy, the United States, and to halt intra-organizational rivalries. Gallardo divided territorial corridors to his top individuals, and ordered them to work with each other peacefully. This division eventually led to the formation of the present day Mexican drug trafficking organizations that are plaguing the Mexican state: “(1) the Tijuana Cartel, (2) the Sinaloa-Sonora Cartel, (3) the Juarez Cartel, and (4) the Gulf Cartel. These are the same organizations that today move at least 70 percent of all the drugs that enter the United States.”

These various drug trafficking organizations operate throughout Mexico from Cancun in the south of the country, to Tijuana in the extreme northwest of the state. Recently, additional drug trafficking organizations have surfaced in an effort to gain from the drug trade. The more nascent as well as older drug trafficking organizations are expanding their violent tendencies. Narcotics trafficking from Mexico into the United States

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4} Ibid}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{5} Ibid}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 29.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 29.}\]
States may not be a new phenomenon; however, the scope of the violence that grips the state of Mexico at the present time is without precedent.

The violence is disconcerting for not only the people caught in the middle of the fighting, but also for those who live in the immediate vicinity of the Mexican-United States border region. The brutality intentionally inflicted by the various drug trafficking organizations on rival drug traffickers as well as government officials is startling. American policy officials must focus tremendous effort on combating the narcotics trafficking operations conducted into the United States. However, the actions of the Mexican cartels are only one part of the problem, albeit a serious one.

Corruption within the Mexican Government, discrepancies in equality, insurgent movements, and human rights violations must be addressed in order to suppress the situation in Mexico, and safeguard its security. The possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state has security implications for the Latin American region as well as the United States. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the possible implications that will affect the national security of the United States if Mexico declines further and becomes a failed state. The United States shares a long and permeable border with the state of Mexico; preventing Mexico from total collapse must be a primary mission of America’s policy officials. The remaining portion of this introduction chapter will cover my research question, importance and purpose of thesis, the thesis research design, and the organization of the thesis.
Research Question, Thesis Statement, and Purpose of Thesis

I have generated the following research question that will guide me in my research on the Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and their actions in the country of Mexico, the operations that they conduct into the United States, as well as the other sources that could contribute to a failed state in Mexico: How would the national security of the United States be affected if Mexico becomes a failed state? Accordingly, I have generated the following thesis statement: A failed state scenario in the country of Mexico due to the actions of the drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) that operate throughout the Mexican state, systemic government corruption, Mexican insurgent groups, and human rights violations will have an adverse effect on the national security of the United States.

The United States has invested tremendous amounts of money and equipment to the country of Mexico. Additionally, U.S. federal officials have worked tirelessly on assisting Mexico in their fight against the various drug trafficking organizations. Despite these investments, the violence in Mexico has increased in its viciousness. The close proximity of Mexico with the United States; the permeable border that the U.S. shares with Mexico; the effects of illicit narcotics on the citizens of America, and the connection the various drug trafficking cartels share with American street gangs makes this study relevant to United States security.

The issue of Mexico becoming a failed state is an extremely important topic; a topic that U.S. policy officials should consider and plan for accordingly. It is not my intention in writing this thesis to ascertain if or when the state of Mexico would become a failed state.
failed state. The purpose of this thesis is to identify possible reasons why Mexico could become a failed state, identify the key threats to American national security if this situation arises, and offer U.S. foreign policy prescriptions that may be implemented by American foreign policy officials. In order to operationalize the term, failed state, I will be using the definition that is provided by the organization, The Fund for Peace.

The Fund for Peace is an independent organization located in Washington, D.C. that advocates for the prevention of war and also endeavors to “alleviate the conditions that cause war. Since 1996, it has specialized primarily on reducing conflict stemming from weak and failing states.”

According to the Fund for Peace, a failed state is one which has the following attributes: “The loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force…erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.”

The possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state is not an isolated subject. This issue has caught the attention of the United States government. In the 2008 publication of the Joint Operating Environment, the U.S. Joint Forces Command presented the following statement:

In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico…The Mexican possibility may seem less likely, but the

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9 Ibid, par. 6.
government, its politicians, police and judicial infrastructure are all under sustained assault and pressure by criminal gangs and drug cartels.\textsuperscript{10}

The possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state will have adverse effects on the United States. It is of paramount importance that American policy officials recognize the threat of having a country, which shares a long and porous border with the United States, unable to prevent large scale violence and smuggling operations into the American heartland. The national security implications for the United States if Mexico can no longer function as a sovereign state must be a priority topic for the American administration.

**Thesis Research Design**

My approach to this important research will concentrate on qualitative methods. I will conduct literature reviews of relevant data, as well as, structured interviews with subject matter experts. I will attempt to contact and interview key members of the United States Joint Forces Command. These individuals have important insight in defense matters, and may be able to impart specific information on American responses to a Mexican failed state. Additionally, I will use my contacts in the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community. I will seek out specifically those who are members of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Special Forces Group (Airborne) to collect data on the possibility of an active role by the SOF community in assisting the Mexican military in their fight against the DTOs.

Additionally, I will conduct various interviews with those who are specialists in Latin American affairs.

I will identify and contact those within the academic community who are experts in Latin American affairs in order to acquire important insight from these individuals on the ramifications of American national security if the country of Mexico becomes a failed state. I will contact local law enforcement in order to verify reported connections between American street gangs and the assorted drug trafficking organizations that use them as their proxies. Lastly, I will attempt to contact and interview personnel in the offices of New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Texas Governor Rick Perry. The states these individuals represent border Mexico.

Some limitations may occur during the research period due to unavailability of key personnel. However, information gained from relevant literature reviews such as the 2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy produced by the Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book, literature provided by the United States Department of State, information provided by the working paper series on U.S.-Mexico security cooperation presented by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars the Mexico Institute, and The Joint Operating Environment produced by the United States Joint Forces Command will furnish important information on the subject.
Organization of Thesis

This thesis will investigate the effects of a Mexican failed state on the national security of the United States. The first chapter has thus far given an introduction to this body of work by providing the specific research question, thesis statement and the purpose of the thesis. The first chapter has also presented the thesis research design, and presently, the organization of the thesis. The second chapter of this thesis will provide possible reasons for a failed state in Mexico by expounding upon the drug trafficking organizations that operate throughout Mexico, government corruption to include the workings of the Mexican police forces at all levels and the military, possible human rights violations, and Mexican insurgent groups. The next chapter will explore the implications of Mexican state failure on U.S. national security by providing possible scenarios such as continued operations into the United States by drug trafficking organizations, DTO relationships with American street gangs, regional instability, exploitation of the Mexican homeland by foreign terrorist organizations, economic costs, Mexican refugee flow into the United States, American border state security implications, and foreign state intervention. Chapter four of this thesis will provide details on current U.S. foreign policy toward the state of Mexico and the region by highlighting specific regional policies to include Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative, the current border situation as well as provide insight into new American policy prescriptions. Chapter five will provide a conclusion of the overall work.
CHAPTER TWO: SOURCES FOR POSSIBLE MEXICAN STATE FAILURE

Drug Trafficking Organizations

The Mexican citizenry are caught in the middle of a dangerous power struggle between the Mexican government, and the drug trafficking organizations that are trying to protect their illicit revenue as well as their routes into the United States. Consequently, the most serious threat to the security of the Mexican state is the drug trafficking cartels.\(^{11}\) The DTOs that operate in Mexico have increasingly committed violent acts against the Mexican government, most notably the police and military forces. The actions by the Mexican DTOs are a result of rival cartels vying for control of the drug trade; the violence that has commenced has reached new levels over the past few years.\(^ {12}\)

In the ensuing section of this thesis, I will expound upon the actions of the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations, and their impact on the national security of the Mexican state.

The fierce fighting that is playing out in the streets of Mexico is due in large part to the aggressive policies of the Mexican President, Felipe Calderon. In December of 2006, Mexico inaugurated Felipe Calderon as their President. The new Mexican

\(^{11}\) Donald E. Schulz, *Between A Rock And A Hard Place The United States, Mexico, and the Agony of National Security* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 1997), 1.

\(^{12}\) Wolf Seiler, *The War on Drugs and the shaping of Hemispheric Policy United States Hegemonial Politics, Drug Trade and Social Forces in Colombia and Mexico* (Saarbrucken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 89.
President vowed to fight the drug cartels that were wreaking havoc on his country. To accomplish this task, Calderon has deployed a total of 45,000 army troops and police officers into areas controlled by the various drug cartels.\textsuperscript{13} Since the deployment of these troops and the subsequent fighting that has taken place approximately 28,000 people have died.\textsuperscript{14}  

**Table 1. Drug Related Deaths in Mexico.\textsuperscript{15}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>6,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010*</td>
<td>11,041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1. Map of Drug-Related Deaths in Mexico by Region\textsuperscript{16}

The President of Mexico believes that the violence perpetrated by the drug trafficking organizations is a threat to the state of Mexico.\textsuperscript{17} However, many past Mexican administrations chose to either ignore the problem, or were complicit in the DTOs activities. Consequently, the type and scope of the violence that is inflicting Mexican society on a daily basis was largely minimal in past years. This fact was due to the former Mexican administrations tolerance of the various drug trafficking organizations, and their nefarious deeds.

In the 1950s through to the 1980s, the Mexican state had a system of government which was extremely centralized in nature; this type of system, and the individuals who encompassed it, were both sympathetic to the drug cartels as well as protective of their various illicit activities.\textsuperscript{18} The actions by the former Mexican governments provided the various drug trafficking organizations with the opportunity to amass immense power over the areas that they would eventually entrench themselves in. The efforts exerted by the United States upon the cartels of Colombia also provided Mexican DTOs with the needed cover to garner more power in the illicit drug business. However, the changing institutional policies in Mexico resulted in complications between the drug trafficking organizations and the Mexican government. Mexico’s rise to democratic ideals and the political decentralization of power caused difficulties for the various drug trafficking organizations that heretofore had operated with government protection and


\textsuperscript{18} Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, \textit{Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context} (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 5.
acquiescence. Additionally, the strong and aggressive policies that President Calderon implemented by sending federal troops into Mexico’s most violent areas ignited a reaction that has seemingly became an additional catalyst for tremendous acts of violence throughout the Mexican state.

The ability of the assorted Mexican drug trafficking organizations to inflict violence on each other, as well as on innocent Mexican citizens, must not be overlooked as it signals the erosion of the state’s ability to monopolize violence. The extent that drug trafficking organizations will inflict violence in order to ensure their illicit business practices was highlighted in a 2007 United Nations report published by the National Institute of Justice on Mexico and the drug trafficking problem. According to the report:

Mexican drug trafficking groups engage in a significant degree of violence (ranked 10 on a scale of 1 to 10) in the areas of making use of violence generally, engaging in violent behavior within the group (i.e., discipline, power struggles, etc.), and using violence against other crime groups to settle disputes or compete for territory or markets. Mexican drug organizations also use violence as a means to remove officials who hinder their business. South of the U.S.-Mexico border, the violence used to achieve these objectives has been characterized as brazen and extreme, particularly among the chief drug trafficking organizations and in cities along the northern border including Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez.

The violent capacities of the drug trafficking organizations have elevated after the deployment of federal troops and police officers to the DTOs areas of operation. The Mexican government is attempting to disrupt the drug trafficking organization’s operations by targeting them directly. Additionally, the drug trafficking cartels are beginning to align themselves with each other. This alliance building tactic is used to

\[^{19}\] Ibid

better protect themselves from rival DTOs as well as the added ability to produce more arms and personnel to fight the Mexican government. This arrangement between the assorted DTOs creates increased pressure on the federal military forces and Mexican police.

Large swaths of Mexico are essentially controlled by the DTOs. Although a majority of the casualties of the violence are members of these violent organizations, or somehow related to drug trafficking, many ordinary Mexican citizens are affected by the violence and carnage. Additionally, the instability and insecurity of the Northern areas of Mexico have left many American cities at risk. In a March 2009 article released by The Brookings Institute, author Vanda Felbab-Brown states, “The number of kidnappings in Phoenix, Arizona, for example, tripled from 48 in 2004 to 241 in 2008. Drug turf wars among the drug trafficking organizations are beginning to occur in major cities in the U.S., such as Dallas, Texas.”21 This is an unnerving negative externality of the narcotics problem occurring along the U.S. southern border. Continued kidnappings and murders will persist until the DTOs operating in Mexico are brought under control.

As mentioned previously, the various drug trafficking organizations operate throughout the state of Mexico. Two of the largest DTOs, the Tijuana Cartel and the Juarez Cartel are in close proximity with two major American cities: San Diego, California and El Paso, Texas. Furthermore, many of the drug trafficking organizations

operate in conjunction with each other. The figure below provides the current areas of the major Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

**Figure 2: Drug Trafficking Organizations Areas of Influence**

The drug trafficking organizations pose a serious threat to the security of Mexico. This is due in large part to the blatant disregard many of the members of these organizations have for the government of Mexico and its citizenry. The Mexican government has implemented a tougher stance against the various DTOs by deploying military forces; however, the drug trafficking organizations are heavily entrenched into the society of the Mexican state.

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In a February 2009 article from The Wall Street Journal, the Mexican academic Edgardo Buscaglia “estimates there are 200 counties in Mexico-some 8% of the total-where drug gangs wield more influence behind the scenes than the authorities. With fearsome arsenals of rocket-propelled grenades, bazookas, and automatic weapons, cartels are often better armed than the police and even the soldiers they fight.” The type of arms that the various drug trafficking organizations own, the ability to control large areas of the Mexican state, and the cultural entrenchment of these organizations is disconcerting for the security of Mexico. In addition, the drug trafficking cartels are beginning to elevate their deadly attacks by implementing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) into their assaults.

On July 16, 2010 a car bomb exploded in the violent city of Ciudad Juarez. The assault, which evokes images of attacks in both Iraq and Afghanistan, is yet another reminder that the cartels are focusing their efforts against the Mexican government to ensure the survivability of their business. Most disconcerting for the security of the United States is the close proximity of Ciudad Juarez to the heavily populated city of El Paso, Texas. The availability of vehicle-borne IEDs and the technical means to build them so close to a major American city must be a focus for American security professionals.

The ease of movement that many Mexican drug trafficking organization members demonstrate when shuttling their drugs across the United States border, as well as, the arms that these individuals bring back to Mexico is troubling. This fact alone

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demonstrates how easy it would be for a DTO member to infiltrate and construct an IED on American territory. The more control the Mexican drug trafficking organizations possess in the state of Mexico, the more adverse the effects upon the United States will be. The difficult problem that the drug trafficking organizations pose on the Mexican state is one which has tremendous consequences. However, the state of Mexico also faces tribulations within the government establishment, most notably the civilian police forces. The next section of this thesis will cover corruption within the Mexican government.

**Mexican Government Corruption**

**The Mexican Police Forces**

The Mexican federal government, as well as local administrative institutions, has endured systemic corruption or allegations of corruption for many years. Most of the corruption that has enveloped the state of Mexico deals with bribes to government officials or to the police officers that are charged with protecting the Mexican citizenry. The actions that promote and sustain this type of behavior is due to many reasons, but primarily because of low wages paid to police officers and the simultaneous effort of drug trafficking organizations attempting to pay off government officials for their support or acquiescence. Furthermore, as Columbia University professor Claudio Lomnitz states in his 2001 book *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico An Anthropology of Nationalism*, commenting on the inability of Mexico to provide equally to all of its citizens “…Mexico
has never had a state that was strong enough to provide services universally. In this context, corruption and other market mechanisms easily emerge as selection criteria: if you pay money the bureaucrat will see you first.”

Additionally, and maybe even more troublesome, drug trafficking organizations have a wide range of influence within the Mexican government establishment as they have corrupted various Mexican institutions to include the Congress, the judicial system, state governors, the military and police.

Although all levels of the Mexican government have been affected by the works of corrupted officials, it is the police who are the most susceptible, particularly the police officers who work in local municipalities.

The current security situation in the country of Mexico is alarming; the role of the police officer, mainly protecting the citizenry, is of paramount importance. However, the Mexican society in general has little trust for those who perform the all-important law enforcement function. Many Mexican citizens believe that the police are part of the security problem rather than a force whose job is to provide solutions and protection.

This type of belief was reinforced in late August 2010 when six city police officers were arrested for the killing of the mayor of Monterrey.

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24 Claudio Lomnitz, Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico An Anthropology of Nationalism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 60.

25 Donald E. Schulz, Between A Rock And A Hard Place The United States, Mexico, and the Agony of National Security (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1997), 27.

26 Daniel Sabet, Police Reform in Mexico: Advances and Persistent Obstacles (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 3.
One of the police officers arrested in the murder of the Monterrey mayor included the police officer who was charged with guarding the mayor’s home.27 This type of action by those who are sworn to protect the citizens of Mexico undoubtedly cause insecurity and contribute to the debilitating situation in Mexico. Moreover, numerous Mexican citizens believe the police to be ineffective at their jobs. Many crimes that are committed throughout the state of Mexico go unreported, and a large percentage of the crimes that are reported remain unsolved; the much smaller percentage of crimes that are actually reported to officials are later unsuccessfully prosecuted.28 The size and scope of the police forces throughout the country of Mexico is another problem that must be addressed.

Currently, the state of Mexico has more than 1,661 independent police forces that operate throughout the state.29 Many of these police forces operate at the local level. In addition, it is common for the federal, state, and municipal police departments to not share critical information with each other. This action unquestionably hinders operational success and increases the opportunity for corruption as the various departments lack the sufficient insight into what investigations the other police agencies are currently conducting. Another problem with many of the police departments


28 Daniel Sabet, Police Reform in Mexico: Advances and Persistent Obstacles (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 6.

throughout the state of Mexico are the drastically limited incomes that police officers receive for the dangerous work that they perform.

Many members of the Mexican police forces conduct high-risk operations every day. These individuals risk their lives for the members of their country, only to receive extremely meager wages for their work. According to a New York Times article, “Money was the officers’ biggest complaint. The starting salary for the typical municipal police officer is less than $350 a month, better than a factory worker but less than the average cab driver.” The Mexican police officers are in an unstable position; a majority of the members of Mexican society distrusts them, and the work that they do is extremely limiting monetarily. Consequently, the Mexican police forces must be drastically reformed in order to battle the drug trafficking organizations, and compensate the police officers adequately.

The Calderon administration’s ability to institute drastic police reform will be a key ingredient in the fight against the violent drug trafficking organizations. This action will be difficult as the police in Mexico have limited themselves by the individuals that they typically recruit, and by the functions that the Mexican security apparatus typically performs. According to Genaro Barcia Luna, the Secretary of Public Safety in Mexico, the Mexican police have “had a corrupt, uneducated police force, without a budget, driving stolen vehicles, and basically decomposing for 40 years.”

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the Mexican administration recruits must be aggressively and regularly vetted, paid a competitive salary, and receive training that is better than the instruction currently provided.32 This type of action must take place in order to ensure that the recruit is both honest, and not an informant for the various DTOs that, in the past, have infiltrated many of the Mexican security organizations. Additionally, the police find themselves in an insecure position as the Mexican military has usurped many of the functions that are traditionally performed by uniformed police.

The Mexican Military

In stark contrast to the police forces, the Mexican military is viewed as a respected institution by many throughout Mexico. However, due to the militarization of numerous areas in the country, the low societal approval of the police forces, and the military’s new role in a law enforcement function, the police and the military have repeatedly confronted each other openly in the field.33 This type of activity by both the police forces and the military must be alleviated in order to quell the violent activities of the drug trafficking organizations. In addition, although the military is looked upon more respectfully than the police, their ranks have also been accused of corruption and human rights abuses by the Mexican citizenry in relation to their recent operations into various parts of Mexico.

32 Ibid

33 Roderic Ai Camp, *Armed Forces and Drugs: Public Perceptions and Institutional Challenges* (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 15.
This fact is all the more disconcerting regarding the military as the Mexican Army has traditionally held sway over the country’s political situation. “When the army was not plotting against the government, it was busy putting down armed insurgencies…”34 The President of Mexico must maintain strict control of the military in order to preserve the public trust as well as fight against the assorted drug trafficking organizations effectively. This, however, may be more difficult to ensure as the following section will expound upon the current situation in Mexico and the work of the military in the volatile regions of that state.

The Mexican military, by the request of President Calderon, embarked on the difficult job of providing security and interdicting drug trafficking organizational members; this type of activity has traditionally been a police function. However, due to the enormous scope of the problem in Mexico and the police’s notorious reputation, the military has had to assume this responsibility. This type of operation has left the military open to allegations of corruption and abuse by many members of Mexican society. The issue of human rights abuses by the military will be covered later in this thesis.

This accusation is not unusual. Many members of the Mexican armed forces are not trained in police enforcement, and they may use excessive force when apprehending suspected drug trafficking cartel members or when they are dealing with ordinary members of the Mexican citizenry. A recent report from Human Rights Watch stated that, “While engaging in law enforcement activities, Mexico’s armed forces have committed serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, killings,

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torture, rapes, and arbitrary detentions.” This statement must be taken seriously in order for the Mexican military to maintain their respected status, and continue to serve the people of Mexico.

Many members of the Mexican armed forces believe police enforcement to be a less honorable profession than the one they have chosen to pursue. This feeling is probably typical of most state’s armed forces as the individuals who enlist into the military establishment have a distinctly different mentality than those who are recruited into the various police forces. Furthermore, this type of sentiment may exacerbate the situation between the Mexican armed forces and the assorted police officers.

In order for mission success, the Mexican military must believe in the operations that they are conducting. Moreover, the Mexican administration must have confidence, along with the citizens of Mexico, in the military forces as well as the police that operate in their areas. However, this behavior may be insurmountable as many believe the police are incapable of doing their jobs, and the military is beginning to become a well-armed version of the tarnished police forces.

Human Rights Violations

The tremendous violence that has engulfed the country of Mexico has forced the Mexican government to react in a decisive and forceful manner. The Mexican government has deployed thousands of soldiers and police into the most troublesome

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areas of Mexico in order to engage the various drug trafficking organizations. This move by the Mexican administration has noticeably placed Mexican soldiers into law enforcement type roles. Consequently, many of the soldiers filling the void left by corrupt police have been accused of human rights abuses. This situation may have arisen because many soldiers that deployed to the most volatile regions of the state were not properly trained in law enforcement tactics, and the rules of engagement that the soldiers were provided may have been ambiguous enough to allow such action to take place. The following section of this thesis will give further details about human rights violations in the state of Mexico, and how this phenomenon could be a possible catalyst into Mexican state failure.

Deploying military forces into any portion of one’s state with the intentions of performing law enforcement duties may be a cause for concern when the soldiers in question are executing tasks outside their scope of training. This may be the case for the Mexican military as issues of human rights abuses have marred their credibility. According to author Wolf Seiler, who completed a book on the Latin American drug trade, “The overall human rights record of the Mexican military in the context of their counter-drug involvement paints a disturbing picture.”

Various citizens of Mexico have reported cases where the military have performed their duties in a harsh and unprofessional manner. In 2009, the organization Human Rights Watch conducted a report that highlighted 17 cases of apparent military

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36Wolf Seiler, The War on Drugs and the shaping of Hemispheric Policy United States Hegemonic Politics, Drug Trade and Social Forces in Colombia and Mexico (Saarbrucken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 87.
abuse. In the report, Human Rights Watch stated that one of the described abuses dealt with the ambushing of a Mexican military unit and the subsequent actions of that unit.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Mexican military conducted a raid in the state of Michoacán where they detained 36 individuals, some of them minors. According to the report, the soldiers ‘repeatedly beat the detainees, tied their hands with tape or rope, and in some cases covered their heads with a plastic bag or cloth. One of the detainees had burns on his skin, and another reported that the soldiers had pushed his head into a container with water…’\(^\text{37}\) The same report also highlighted the testimony of four girls under the age of 18 who stated under oath that they were held for over twenty hours by the soldiers.

During their confinement the girls alleged that the soldiers “repeatedly beat, sexually abused, and raped them with the purpose of obtaining information about their supposed links with armed groups and drug traffickers.”\(^\text{38}\) The reported actions of these soldiers are distressing. The Mexican government must be vigilant in order to secure order and discipline within the military ranks. Additionally, the apparent warning signs of military abuse on a civilian population are cogently described by Laurie Freeman who is currently a foreign affairs officer with the U.S. Department of State and a former associate with the Washington offices on Latin America specializing in Mexico and security policy.


\(^{38}\) Ibid
Laurie Freeman identifies five patterns of human rights abuses: (1) illegal arrests (the military has no authority to arrest people on pure suspicion), (2) torture (including rape) to intimidate detainees and to extract intelligence, (3) prosecution of detainees based on evidence illegally gathered by the military, (4) conviction of people detained by the military and based on evidence obtained through human rights abuses, and (5) extrajudicial executions committed by the military.\textsuperscript{39}

These abovementioned actions, and the warning signs attributed to these acts, must be a focus of the Mexican government. Currently, the citizens of Mexico view the military institution in high regard.\textsuperscript{40} This fact is all the more reason to ensure that Mexican soldiers maintain their professionalism when conducting themselves amongst the civilian population. However, “Establishing this concept of professionalism that eschews intervention in politics has proven to be particularly problematic in newly industrializing and economically less developed societies in which the military is often times one of the strongest institutions.”\textsuperscript{41} In order for the government to prevent deterioration of the Mexican military’s status, and with this deterioration the further erosion of public trust, the military command must enforce tighter control over the soldiers and the tactics that they deploy. However, using the military for counter-drug missions might not be the preferable strategy in the future for Mexico’s security apparatus.

The situation unfolding in Mexico concerning the ongoing battles with the drug trafficking organizations forced the government to deploy thousands throughout the

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid

\textsuperscript{40} Roderic Ai Camp, \textit{Armed Forces and Drugs: Public Perceptions and Institutional Challenges} (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 17.

country. However, some believe that this tactic should not be the one utilized.

According to Seiler, “making military efforts the centerpiece of anti-drug policies contributes to the escalation of violence, [and] complicates alternative problem-solving approaches…⁴² Seiler may disagree with the use of the Mexican military in a counter-drug role; yet, the Mexican administration seemed to have little choice.

The various police forces throughout Mexico are ill-equipped to handle the enormous task of fighting the various drug trafficking organizations. Furthermore, as described earlier in this thesis, the erosion of public confidence in the police forces and the systemic corruption therein limited the Mexican government’s options in this important mission. The various drug trafficking cartels have acquired sophisticated weaponry, and employ military style tactics during their engagements with government forces.

These facts alone demonstrate that the Mexican government’s choice to deploy military forces was not only the correct one, but the only one. Nonetheless, the deployment of military forces must bring with it keen civilian oversight. This process is not easy. “Maintaining a positive balance in civil-military relations that supports democratic institutions and processes is never automatic, even in countries with long-standing traditions against military interventions in politics.”⁴³ Stemming the tide of additional human rights abuses by various members of the Mexican military must be a

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⁴² Wolf Seiler, The War on Drugs and the shaping of Hemispheric Policy United States Hegemonial Politics, Drug Trade and Social Forces in Colombia and Mexico (Saarbrucken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 91.

focus of the Calderon administration to guarantee the security and trust of the Mexican
people. The next section of this thesis will explore Mexican insurgent groups.

**Mexican Insurgent Groups**

The possibility of Mexican insurgent groups gaining control of large swaths of the
country is thus far limited; however, the various groups that have or are currently
working in the state of Mexico must be examined as a possible reason for Mexican state
failure. There are numerous Mexican insurgent groups that have conducted operations in
the state of Mexico. The most notable of these groups is the Zapatista Army of National
Liberation also known by the acronym, EZLN. This group became active in the South of
the country as a reaction to globalization and the plight of Mexican indigenous
communities that were adversely affected by this phenomenon.\(^{44}\) This group made itself
known in the early 1990s in its opposition to the newly signed North American Free
Trade Agreement which many in the impoverished state of Chiapas, the most Southern
state of Mexico, believed to be unfair and exploitive.

The Chiapas Rebellion that began on 1 January 1994 was an armed uprising that
occurred in the Southern Mexican state of Chiapas. One major factor leading to the
uprising that occurred that year deals with changes in the Mexican constitution,
specifically changes to Article 27, which put an end to land distribution. Article 27 was
initially put in place in order to “grant property rights to the ejidal sector. The reform put

\(^{44}\) Grace Livingstone, *America’s Back Yard The United States & Latin America From The Monroe Doctrine
To The War On Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 122.
The ejido system in Mexico promoted the use of communal land, and was an important land reform program for farmers in Mexico who did not own land for themselves. This issue, along with other social grievances, produced the uprising that was launched by indigenous peoples who were angry and resentful of the new North American Free Trade Agreement which many native forces believed infringed on their culture and values. This uprising placed the Zapatista movement into a perpetual state of war with the Mexican government, although the rebellion ended within two weeks with a ceasefire established between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government. The Mexican military breached the agreement a little over a year later and reclaimed some of the land still held by the EZLN. Many of the Zapatista members fled into the mountains.

The Zapatista movement has thus proclaimed to become non-violent and wishes to draw attention to the plight of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, the ongoing conflicts with the various drug trafficking organizations and the extreme inequalities between the native peoples in the South of the country may invoke more instability in the state of Mexico that could lead to collapse or at the very least continued instability. The Zapatista movement is one of the more well-known insurgent groups in the state of Mexico; even so, other groups have emerged.


The Mexican government has had to contend with both the extremely violent drug trafficking organizations that have predominately wreaked havoc in the northern part of the country as well as various insurgent groups that have operated throughout their borders. A few of these include the Clandestine Revolutionary Workers Party-Union of the People-Party of the Poor (PROCUP-PDLP), Broad Front for the Construction of a National Liberation Movement (FAC-MLN), and The Revolutionary People’s Army (EPR). Many of these groups espouse leftist ideology, and some have recently resorted to acts of violence. One of the groups that have recently carried out such attacks is The Revolutionary People’s Army.

The Revolutionary People’s Army conducted several attacks against oil facilities located in Mexico in 2007. In reaction to this, the Calderon government dispatched several thousand soldiers to protect energy facilities and other important sites. In relation to these attacks and the ideology that this group espouses the “EPR remains at the top of the list of internal rebel groups that may threaten the Mexican government.” The greatest threat to Mexican security at the current time is the various drug trafficking organizations. However, the danger of various Mexican insurgent groups that operate mostly in the Southern portion of the country also require attention.

The Mexican government is in a perilous situation. Throughout the country a variety of drug trafficking organizations are conducting operations to protect their illicit drug trade; the Mexican administration is dealing with systemic corruption in all levels of government.


48 Ibid
the police forces and growing reports of human rights violations leveraged against the revered Mexican military. Lastly, Mexican insurgent groups, although unlikely to cause a collapse in the Mexican state, still openly operate throughout the country. The situation is bleak; nonetheless, it is not the opinion of this author that Mexico will become a failed state anytime soon. However, the current situation in Mexico does call for a serious look at the implications of Mexican state failure on the national security of the United States. The next chapter of this thesis will expound upon these various implications.
CHAPTER THREE: IMPLICATIONS OF MEXICAN STATE FAILURE ON U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

The security situation in Mexico is an extremely important issue for both the American policymakers and average citizens alike. The United States shares a vast border with the Mexican state. The routine breaches of the nearly 2,000 mile Mexico-U.S. border by assorted drug trafficking organizations and others, puts the United States in a precarious position. The U.S. is presently fighting two wars in the Middle East, and has national assets spread across the globe for the purpose of promoting American national security. However, the threat that the United States faces south of its border is one that must not be taken lightly. A failed Mexican state would undoubtedly affect the national security of the United States. The following chapter of this thesis will explore the possible implications of Mexican state failure on American security.

This chapter is divided into the subsequent sections. First, the continued operations by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, and their effects on American security will be detailed; second, this chapter will investigate the relationship between Mexican DTOs and American street gangs; third, regional instability because of a failed Mexican state will be explored, fourth, the possibility of exploitation by foreign terrorist organizations on Mexican soil will be investigated and how this issue affects American security; fifth, the economic costs of Mexican state failure will be analyzed; sixth, the possibility of massive refugee flow into the United States will be expounded upon;
seventh, the possible operations on Mexican territory by various countries unfriendly to the United States will be investigated; and eighth, the repercussions on American Border States will be examined. The foreign policy of the United States towards Mexico must take into account the possibility of Mexican state failure due to the various reasons elaborated upon earlier in this thesis. The following section will illustrate the operations of the various drug trafficking organizations and detail their effects on American national security.

**Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations Effects on U.S. National Security**

The violent operations that the various DTOs are conducting in the state of Mexico are destabilizing for the Mexican security apparatus; however, these operations also pose a serious threat to the sovereignty of the United States. According to Donald Schulz of the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, “Mexican drug organizations already operate deep inside the United States, and there is mounting evidence of their corrupting effect on U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies all along the Rio Grande, should drug violence in Mexico escalate, we will not be immune.”

The continued violence in Mexico and its destabilizing effects will result in a deepening sense of American insecurity. Regrettably, the violence that is occurring on the border between the United States and Mexico has already begun to ‘spill over’ into areas in the U.S.; consequently, the “crime and violence in Mexico feed[s] into crime and

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violence in the United States.”⁵⁰ The narcotics and the organizations that deliver these illicit products will continue to be an American national security threat.⁵¹ As a result, the work of the various drug trafficking organizations will become more aggressive if Mexico cannot function as a sovereign state. The members of these organizations will continue to cross over the vast border that separates the United States from Mexico. This border is largely unguarded and extremely porous. As Mort Zuckerman, the editor-in-chief and publisher of the U.S. News and World Report aptly describes,

This is not [the violence and destabilization in Mexico] just a Mexican matter. The drug gangs are described by the Justice Department as ‘the biggest organized crime threat to the U.S.’ Crimes connected to these cartels are spreading across the Southwest, especially in Phoenix, where most of [the] murders and kidnappings are believed to be linked to the drug trade. The cartels are also increasing their relationship with prison and street gangs in the United States to facilitate drug trafficking, according to a congressional report. This cooperation enables the traffickers to excavate cross-border tunnels and install ramp-assisted smuggling roads over the border fence between the countries, in order to get their cargoes in the United States.⁵²

The various drug trafficking organizations in Mexico pose a distinct threat to the security of the United States. Unfortunately, the long and permeable border that the United States shares with the country of Mexico provides many of these individuals with a clear avenue


⁵¹ Wolf Seiler, The War on Drugs and the shaping of Hemispheric Policy United States Hegemonial Politics, Drug Trade and Social Forces in Colombia and Mexico (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 92.

into the American homeland. These groups are able to utilize the vast desert and sparsely populated areas, as well as, the lightly defended border to gain access into the Southwestern Border States. Below is a detailed map that illustrates the large U.S. and Mexico border.

**Figure 3: The United States and Mexico Border**

![United States - Mexico Border](image)

As the figure illustrates, the border between the United States and Mexico is vast. Due to this fact, drug trafficking organizations are able to make their way across the border with relative ease. This issue is disconcerting for a number of reasons; however, one source of concern deals with members of various drug trafficking organizations making direct threats to American law enforcement officers. The police chief of

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Nogales, Arizona recently confirmed that his officers have received threats from individuals working for Mexican DTOs. The officers that were threatened were working in an off-duty capacity as they seized narcotics from the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

As the instability in Mexico increases due to the ongoing battle with the DTOs, more instances where American law enforcement officers are threatened with bodily harm will most likely occur. In addition, the wanton disregard for the safety of law enforcement officers, those who protect and serve the public, is also a clear indication into how the various drug trafficking organizations would treat those citizens who do not work in a law enforcement capacity. Furthermore, the increasing instability in the state of Mexico could lead to swaths of areas throughout Mexico that would become lawless and ungovernable; these areas could possibly be used as training grounds for the various drug trafficking organizations as well as areas to produce additional quantities of illicit drugs. Furthermore, as Peter Brookes of The Heritage Foundation points out,

If the cartels were to seize tracts of Mexican territory, it could lead to the establishment of lawless, ungoverned spaces, which are favored by bad actors such as terrorists… Terrorists could certainly exploit successful drug smuggling routes to bring people and explosives or even weapons of mass destruction across the border into the U.S.


The dangerous combination of drug trafficking organizations controlling areas in the state of Mexico as well as the possibility of foreign terrorist groups using these corridors as infiltration routes should be a key concern for all American citizens.

The main thrust of the violence occurring in the state of Mexico is focused on the vast northern border. “The most violent conflict [between competing drug trafficking organizations] is concentrated in, but not limited to, the Juarez Plaza.” This area could possibly become increasingly volatile if the state is unable to provide adequate security for the people of Mexico. The members of the various drug trafficking organizations could use these areas to promote their illicit activities and violate the sovereignty of the United States. Moreover, these areas could be used by foreign terrorist organizations in conjunction with the DTOs. This would provide an additional security threat to the people of the United States as individuals linked to terrorist organizations could smuggle people and weapons across the border easily.

This issue has the attention of the United States’ top military leadership. According to Brigadier General Benjamin R. Mixon’s testimony before Congress on 21 April 2004, “We at U.S. Southern Command view drugs and its movement into the United States as a weapon of mass destruction, and we treat it accordingly.” This strong language directed towards the various drug trafficking organizations highlights the importance of targeting the assorted DTOs as well as any foreign terrorist organizations.


who wish to use corridors within Mexico in order to infiltrate into the United States. The topic of foreign terrorist organizations and their ability to use Mexico will be explored more thoroughly later in this thesis. Another topic of concern is the drug trafficking organization’s influences that are already in place throughout the United States.

The possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state is concerning for both the Mexican population but also the American citizenry. The drug trafficking organizations that operate in Mexico have individuals that live and promote their business in the United States. Additionally Tom Tancredo, a former Congressman from Colorado, stated in a recent book he had written that Mexican DTOs were actively purchasing legitimate businesses in some areas in southern California. According to Tancredo,

"The Tijuana-based Felix drug cartel and the Juarez-based Fuentes cartel began buying legitimate business in small towns in Los Angeles County in the early 1990s…One of their purposes was to use these businesses for money-laundering operations. Once established in their community, these cartel-financed business owners ran for city council and other local offices."

The ability of the leadership in the Mexican DTOs to buy and run legitimate businesses in the United States and then subsequently influence the public offices of these areas is concerning. The disregard for American sovereignty by the DTOs will become more evident if the Mexican state is no longer able to control the totality of their country. Members of these organizations will continually attempt to circumvent the American legal system in order to deliver their illicit products.

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This phenomenon may become increasingly troublesome if the cartels are able to move more freely through the Mexican state and into the U.S. as result of continuing Mexican instability. The capability to influence American officials may result in corruption and further hamper the abilities of local law enforcement officers in relation to their duties: the individuals that hold public office are typically in charge of public safety as well. In addition to their foray and investment into legitimate business, Mexican drug trafficking organizations have established sites in the United States for the purpose of cultivating marijuana; this activity can only negatively affect the national security of the United States.

Areas within the United States are currently used as cultivating farms for various drug trafficking organizations. These secluded patches of land are utilized for the purpose of growing and selling millions of dollars worth of Marijuana. For example, a 2009 California wildfire “was sparked by a cooking fire started by the hirelings of a Mexican drug cartel which was growing thousands of marijuana plants in the remote canyons.” According to John Walters, the director of the National Drug Control Policy, the individuals who are involved in this illicit activity are “willing to kill anybody who gets in their way. They’re taking money back to those who kill prosecutors, judges and law enforcement.” The disregard for the sovereignty of the United States by Mexican drug trafficking organizations is of concern.

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The possibility of continued use and further cultivation in other locations in America will put additional American citizens at risk of potential harm. This is yet another component of the Mexican DTOs effects on the national security of the United States. Citizens of these locations will need to move about cautiously in these areas as members of the Mexican DTOs are looking over their products and will undoubtedly protect these illicit goods from possible compromise. This issue also has the potential of causing harm to law enforcement officers who must protect the citizens of their jurisdictions and apprehend members of these organizations.

In many cases, members of law enforcement agencies are woefully mismatched against well-armed DTOs who have military backgrounds and experience in launching raids and ambushes against police and Mexican military personnel. Moreover, the Mexican DTOs are actively positioning scouts in the hills of Arizona to identify movements and patterns of law enforcement officials. Consequently, the actions of the various DTOs have become overly aggressive and dangerous for American law enforcement officials; according to American federal border agents the border “situation is more dangerous for them than ever now that the cartels have such a strong position on the American side of the border.” The continued slide in security south of the American border may encourage further expansion into the United States by the Mexican DTOs. The probability of armed conflict between American federal border officials and Mexican drug trafficking organizations is great as many of these members are


62 Ibid
transporting automatic weapons from the U.S. and protecting their illicit drug routes into the United States.

The cultivation and protection of various marijuana fields on the sovereign land of the United States, as well as, the use of scouts by DTOs may become heightened due to continued Mexican instability and possible state failure. This issue will continue to be a national security threat to the U.S. and affect, at the very least, the local American municipalities and possibly the U.S. as a whole. The issue of violations of American control over large tracts of land is disconcerting; however, the possibility of the Mexican military being subjugated by the various drug trafficking organizations due to possible Mexican state failure would have implications on the national security of the United States.

The attacks occurring in Mexico are providing the drug trafficking organization with substantial battlefield experience. Many of the individuals who belong to the assorted DTOs are former members of the Mexican military, and they bring their expertise to their work in deadly effects. One such group, The Zetas, are former Mexican special operations forces who turned their backs on the Mexican state in order to work for the drug trafficking organizations. These individuals have substantial military training and they have been particularly brutal to those they have targeted. For example, in late 2010 members of the Zetas drug trafficking organization “rolled into the isolated village of Tierras Coloradas and burned it down, leaving more than 150 people, mostly children, homeless in the raw mountain winter.”

The members who belong to this drug trafficking organization could become extremely important as their military training may be utilized in order to target rival drug trafficking organizations, as well as, American citizens. According to Ray Walser, a senior policy analyst for Latin America in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, “The founding members of the Zetas are believed to be a small group of junior officers who deserted from a Mexican military elite unit in the late 1990s. The Zetas have brought dangerous sophistication in heavy weapons, communications, and intelligence collection to the killing fields of the cartels.” The Zetas organization was formerly aligned with the larger organization known as the Gulf Cartel. However, these two groups became hostile towards one another. This rift between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel ignited further violence that claimed the lives of many Mexican citizens. Consequently, the hostility that these two organizations hold for each other will be the source of continued violence and instability that may affect parts of the American homeland. The anticipated antagonism these two groups hold against each other will also most likely continue into 2011. The possibility of these military-trained Mexican DTOs freely moving across the border into the United States is a viable threat to United States national security.

The continued instability in Mexico and the possible state failure that may result will put the Mexican security forces at risk. Consequently, some members of these forces

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could provide the drug trafficking organizations with protection and, more disconcerting, the individuals with military training could move across the southern border into the adjoining American states to further the protection of their drug routes. The weapons that the DTOs currently employ rival those in use by other countries’ militaries. Additionally, the battlefield experience that the members of the cartels are gaining may possibly cause further instability affecting the security of the United States. This scenario is less probable but one that must be taken in account due to the possibility of it occurring.

Promisingly, the importance of focusing efforts on the situation in the state of Mexico has been noticed by members of the United States Congress, as well as, prominent members of the Obama administration.

The United States House of Representatives have made concerted efforts regarding the situation in the state of Mexico. Consequently, among other notable items, the U.S. Congress highlighted the situation in Mexico in a 2009-2010 Bill Summary which focused on the ongoing situation in the state of Mexico. According to the summary, “…Increasing violence and criminality of drug trafficking organizations threaten the people of the United States and Mexico and is a ‘cross-border’ problem requiring close U.S.-Mexico cooperation; efforts by President Felipe Calderon and his government and the people of Mexico to confront the drug trafficking organizations should be supported.”

American policymakers is important. These individuals must, and have, focused a great deal of attention on the security threat building in Mexico.

The U.S. Department of State is attempting to make the situation in Mexico a key foreign policy objective. Members of the State Department have made trips to the country of Mexico in order to better understand the situation on the ground, as well as, dictate the best foreign policy route for the United States. The current circumstances in Mexico warrant constant attention by these officials in order to realize solutions, and update security postures. The American policymakers must be ever vigilant against the Mexican DTOs as they “represent the greatest organized crime threat to the United States.”\(^{67}\) Mexican drug trafficking organizations and their effects on the security of the United States has manifested itself as a very acute problem. The United States and Mexico are intertwined in many aspects; a fact that makes the security threat in Mexico all the more important.

The members of the various drug trafficking organizations are deeply entrenched in Mexican society, and they will continue to launch attacks against rival groups, and Mexican security forces. The possibility of Mexican state failure will embolden the DTOs in their use of attacks and possible infiltration into the United States to protect their drug corridors. American cities are already feeling the effects of these actions as cartel members are actively working within their borders. The main source of state failure for Mexico will relate to the drug trafficking organizations; these groups will continue to influence and intimidate the Mexican citizenry. Regrettably, the continuing

slide downward into further instability will affect the United States. The next section of this chapter will investigate the drug trafficking cartels ties to American street gangs, and how this relationship will affect the national security of the United States.

American Street Gangs and Ties to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations

American Street Gangs and Ties to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican drug trafficking organizations are currently working with various American street gangs in order to secure the illicit drug business and promote their activities in many areas of the United States. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, a variety of drug trafficking organizations are working with members of the Latin Kings, the Mexican Mafia, and MS-13 in order to distribute methamphetamine in the American southwest, as well as, other areas of the country.68 The work of many of these American gangs, and the drug trafficking organizations that use these groups as their proxies, are located throughout the country. Currently, various DTOs are operating in over 80 American cities from the southwest to New York and even areas in Alaska.69 According to a senior intelligence analyst with the Department of Justice who provided her personal opinion on the topic, the alliance between various DTOs and American street gangs “allows cartels to penetrate deep into the heartland of


the United States, not just the border states.”\textsuperscript{70} Additionally, the coalition between the gangs and DTOs provides the cartels with “established criminal networks already operating in the United States.”\textsuperscript{71} The DTOs who operate in these cities employ various street gangs for the purpose of securing the drug distribution business. Due to the actions of these gangs and the drug trafficking organizations that support them, the prospect of Mexican styled violence on American territory is probable.\textsuperscript{72}

The work of many of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations also influences powerful prison gangs located in the United States. Such groups as the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia, two groups that violently rival each other in confinement, are working together with various drug trafficking organizations in order to secure profits from the illegal drug trade.\textsuperscript{73} According to Herb Brown, a section chief with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s gang division, these groups are employing violence and intimidation tactics against those who attempt to subjugate their unlawful business interests.\textsuperscript{74} Additionally, the influential American prison gang known as Barrio Azteca manages illicit activity on both sides of the Mexican and American border.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{70} Anonymous, Interviewed by Shadd Pease, February 16, 2011, Lakewood, Colorado.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid

\textsuperscript{75} Anonymous, Interviewed by Shadd Pease, February 16, 2011, Lakewood, Colorado.
However, members of U.S. law enforcement agencies are actively seeking and disrupting the relationship between American gang members and Mexican DTOs.

Law enforcement agencies from local, state and federal departments in the United States are conducting operations to target American street gang members. These agencies are also attempting to suppress the working relationship between the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations and American street gangs. In early March 2011, several “US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents announced the results of Project Southern Tempest, their latest gang sweep in 168 American cities from Atlanta to South Salt Lake, Utah. The tally: 678 gang members with affiliations to 133 different gangs arrested during the past two weeks.”76 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel have done extremely important work in relation to targeting American street gangs. The Project known as Southern Tempest, which employs members from local, state, and federal agencies actively pursues those in American gangs who may have ties to international drug syndicates, to include the Mexican DTOs.77

Although over 160 American cities were targeted in the sweeps, the Southwest border region is primarily infiltrated by the DTOs, and the American street gangs.

“Mexican DTOs have reportedly increased their efforts to recruit gang members along the Southwest Border. Gang members who are U.S. citizens are a particularly valuable asset to Mexican DTOs because they can normally cross the U.S.-Mexico border with less law enforcement scrutiny and therefore are less likely to have illicit drug loads


77 Ibid
interdicted." This type of activity will most likely continue unless the American government, working in conjunction with Mexican authorities, continues to directly confront members of the American street gangs who operate on both sides of the border. This action will need to occur in order to lessen the services that these individuals offer to the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The table located below identifies some of the gangs that are currently working with various drug trafficking organizations in the United States.

**Table 2. Gangs Affiliated With the Sinaloa, Gulf, Juarez, or Tijuana Cartels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18th Street</th>
<th>Latin Kings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandidos</td>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrio Azteca</td>
<td>Mexican Mafia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Guerilla Family</td>
<td>Mexikanemi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bloods</td>
<td>Mongols</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crips</td>
<td>Nortenos</td>
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<td>Florencia 13</td>
<td>Surenos</td>
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<td>Gangster Disciples</td>
<td>Tango Blast</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hells Angels</td>
<td>Texas Syndicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos</td>
<td>Vagos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aryan Brotherhood</td>
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The idea of American street gangs colluding with drug trafficking organizations is a dangerous one. The members of these gangs are well suited to assist their Mexican counter-parts with housing, information on local law enforcement activities, and rival factions in their areas of operation. Additionally, the individuals working with the DTOs are able to influence impressionable members of their neighborhoods to conduct activities with the DTOs. These activities will affect local law enforcement efforts to apprehend and prosecute individual gang members. The individuals in the DTOs are intelligent enough to realize that they should limit their own actions inside the United States as efforts to extradite these members would be difficult once they are in Mexican custody. A complete failure of the Mexican state, although highly unlikely at this time, would also hamper actions against individual cartel members. The government of Mexico would be unable to secure and transport high-level members of the cartels into the United States. In addition, members of various street gangs in the United States are enlisting into the American armed forces in order to acquire military training that they later teach to fellow gang members, as well as, assist various Mexican drug trafficking organizations in military-styled operations.

According to the National Gang Intelligence Center, National Gang Threat Assessment of 2009, individuals in nearly all the major American street gangs have been identified on American military posts and bases both in the United States and overseas.\textsuperscript{80} These individuals are actively seeking military training which will pose a threat to both local law enforcement and federal officers. These individuals also pose a threat to the

\textsuperscript{80} National Gang Intelligence Center, U.S. Department of Justice, National Gang Threat Assessment 2009, January 2009 \url{http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs32/32146/military.htm} (accessed September 17, 2010).
soldiers that they serve alongside. The members of the various street gangs that have infiltrated into the military are loyal to their fellow gang members and not their fellow soldiers. This is extremely important as the United States is currently fighting two wars and has troops deployed in multiple locations throughout the globe. Additionally, the possibility of recruiting fellow soldiers into the various street gangs is another concern. These soldiers have skills that are valuable to the various gangs, as well as, the assorted Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Moreover, pay and benefits in the American military is not as lucrative as the compensation that these individuals would receive from the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This is an added incentive for military personnel to join a gang.

Some of the American street gangs “have developed regular working relationships with DTOs and other criminal organizations in Mexico, Central America, and Canada to develop sources of supply for wholesale quantities of illicit drugs and to facilitate other criminal activities.”

Members of Hispanic street gangs “obtain cocaine and marijuana from the DTOs and transport the drugs to primary U.S. drug market areas for further distribution.” Currently, it is unknown if any of these gang members serve enough time, and attend the requisite schooling in order to be promoted into leadership positions in the military.

The possibility of gang members in the military serving in leadership roles must be given appropriate attention as individuals whose allegiance is to their gang rather than

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82 Ibid
the United States and the soldiers they fight alongside should not have the responsibility or authority to lead troops in combat or non-combat roles. The level of threat that these individuals pose on the United States will depend on the nature of the training they receive while they are members of the American military. For example, if these gang members serve in combat units they will most likely pose a more serious problem as the likelihood of deployment in high-threat areas is greater, and the tactics that they learn while deployed out of the country or on training exercises will be a safety concern for both law enforcement officials, and the American public.

Members who serve in combat units receive extensive training in a wide range of weapons. Some of these weapons include handguns, automatic rifles, light and heavy machine guns, anti-tank munitions, anti-personnel mines, and fragmentation grenades. Additionally, these individuals receive broad training in urban combat. This type of training should be of particular concern, as it provides these individuals with the knowledge to operate in house-to-house styled fighting and it gives these individuals the knowledge necessary to understand possible Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) standard operating procedures. The table on the next page provides a list of American street gangs that are reported to have members who are military trained, and also have ties to Mexican drug trafficking organizations.
Table 3. Gangs Reported to Have Military-Trained Members and Ties to DTOs\textsuperscript{83}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18\textsuperscript{th} Street Gang</th>
<th>Aryan Brotherhood</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vagos</td>
<td>Bandidos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nortenos</td>
<td>Bloods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surenos</td>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crips</td>
<td>Florencia 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gangster Disciples</td>
<td>Hells Angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Kings</td>
<td>Mexican Mafia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mongols</td>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13)</td>
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</table>

The members of various American street gangs that actively participate with Mexican drug trafficking organizations pose a serious national security risk to the people of the United States. Many of these individuals have little regard for American law enforcement or average American citizens. These individuals provide the various DTOs with material support in order to conduct their business in the U.S. This activity violates the sovereignty of the United States. Additionally, members of street gangs who are militarily trained enhance the threat level to law enforcement. These individuals understand military tactics and procedures. They also have the ability to train their fellow gang members in these tactics in order to improve their effectiveness on the street. American policy-makers, law enforcement officials, and military leadership must understand the threat that these individuals pose on the national security of the United States.

States. Efforts must be made to stop recruitment of gang members into the armed forces, as well as, limit the capabilities of these individuals in assisting Mexican drug trafficking organizations in the United States. The next section of this thesis will explore the possibility of regional instability due to a failed Mexican state.

Regional Instability

The first two issues that this chapter dealt with, continued operations by Mexican drug trafficking organizations and stronger ties between the DTOs and American street gangs, are issues that may occur regardless of the security situation in Mexico. The Mexican government has little control over the operations that the various drug trafficking organizations conduct in the United States, or control over the American street gangs that act as their proxies. However, the next six topics that this thesis will investigate are issues that are directly tied to a failed state in Mexico. The following problems are possible due to a limited and constrained Mexican government that no longer has the capacity to combat, in a serious manner, the groups that have deteriorated that state’s security situation. The following topic, regional instability, is a broad overview of how a Mexican failed state scenario would destabilize the region as a whole and in effect reduce the national security of the United States. The following five implications in this thesis will address more specifically the destabilizing factors of the deteriorating situation in Mexico.

A possible failed state in the country of Mexico would accelerate instability in the surrounding region. The countries that surround the state of Mexico would be affected
by a sharp decrease in stability and security within the Mexican state. Mexican citizens will begin to move to other areas of their own country, as well as, other states in order to escape violence and disorder in their own towns and villages. Mexican internally displaced persons already exist primarily as the result of fighting in the state of Chiapas located in the extreme south of the country; however, movement resulting from land disputes, narcotics trafficking and religious intolerance has led to involuntary movement. According to the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) an estimated “115, 000 people have been forcibly displaced by Mexico’s drug violence…” Additional movements will inevitably cause instability both economic and security related not only to the United States, but to other Latin American states. This problem is elevated as the South American region is already ranked the “third most unstable region in the world in the post-war era.”

The declining capability of the Mexican security apparatus to thoroughly secure and protect the sovereignty of Mexico may encourage members of foreign terrorist organizations to infiltrate and conduct operations on Mexican soil with the purpose of entering the United States. This creation of safe havens or headquarters, along with the operations of the various drug trafficking organizations, is the highest threat to the


security of the United States if Mexico is no longer able to effectively secure its territory. The United States is currently conducting military operations in multiple areas of the world. Additionally, the U.S. devotes huge sums of money to foreign states such as Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to bolster their security and prevent terrorist organizations from establishing protected bases of operation. Although stabilizing the Mideast region by combating terrorist organizations is important for the United States, it is also important that United States foreign policymakers understand that a real threat exists with our neighbor to the south, and the ability of foreign terrorist organizations to possibly exploit a declining Mexican security apparatus.

The United States must identify and direct resources to the border region with Mexico in order to interdict any members of foreign terrorist groups. Members of the American border patrol as well as National Guard soldiers assigned to the border states may need to conduct additional patrols in order to secure the border region. The threat of foreign terrorists crossing the United States-Mexican border was addressed by FBI Director Robert Mueller in March of 2005. The director articulated that, “there are individuals from countries with known Al Qaeda connections who are changing their Islamic surnames to Hispanic-sounding names and obtaining false Hispanic identities, learning to speak Spanish and pretending to be Hispanic.”

The threat of foreign terrorists infiltrating into the United States for the purpose of conducting attacks will be investigated more thoroughly later in this thesis. A Mexican failed state would also destabilize the economic system throughout Latin America, and the United States.

Mexico is an important member of the economic community, particularly to the United States. The damage incurred by a failed state would affect the economic system of many countries throughout the Latin American region. The United States would be predominantly affected by a failed Mexican state with regards to the economic sector. This is evident as Mexico is “the largest Latin American trade partner, accounting for 58% of the region’s trade with the United States…by contrast, the rest of Latin America together makes up only 8.3% [of trade between those countries and the United States]…”88 Although not directly linked to the national security issue, the economy of the United States would be effected due to Mexico’s inability to carry on efficient trade with America. Moreover, an influx of individuals moving into the American Border States may hamper the local economic systems which could cause insecurity in the market regionally and nationally. This issue will be examined more methodically later in this thesis.

The issue of internally displaced persons in the state of Mexico would be a problem for the faltering Mexican state. However, the issue of refugees traveling into the United States due to weakening Mexican security is a great concern. Mexican refugees attempting to escape the violence and uncertainty of a failed state may affect the economy and the security of the United States. The Mexican refugees could strain the already stretched resources of U.S. law enforcement, health care, and education systems. Additionally, a massive flow of refugees into America could mask foreign terrorist members who attempt to merge into the wave of individuals entering into the United

States. The issue of Mexican refugees traveling into the United States is a serious concern both economically and in regards to American security.

The ability of foreign states to conduct operations inside the country of Mexico may be a concern if the Mexican government is no longer able to secure and promote stability throughout the Mexican state. Foreign states such as Iran and China have recently put more emphasis into the Latin American region. These states, particularly Iran, are unfriendly to the United States. Consequently, Iran has begun to deepen its ties to countries in Latin America; this deepening in relationship is to a certain extent based on shared aggression towards the United States.\(^8\)

Although the government of Iran seeks to enjoy regional hegemony in the Middle East, there is the possibility of members of the Iranian government actively seeking influence in a Mexican state that is unable to secure its borders or effectively govern the entire country. This type of action by Iran would elevate its authority in the Latin American region therefore providing better leverage between itself and the United States: this deed would be particularly important due to the ongoing nuclear talks that are extremely contentious between Iran and many Western states. This thesis will explore the possibility of foreign states such as Iran, China, and Russia actively exploiting the situation in Mexico in order to gain greater influence in the Latin American region in the subsequent sections.

A failed state scenario in Mexico poses many difficult problems on the security of the United States: The possibility of foreign terrorist organizations establishing bases of

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operation in order to facilitate infiltration into the United States; the hefty economic cost to the American state if a significant trading partner rapidly declines; massive Mexican refugee flows into the United States; possible exploitation of Mexico by unfriendly states such as Iran in order to garner greater regional influence; and the important border state implications in the Southwest of the United States. These topics will be explored in greater detail later in this thesis starting with the possible exploitation of Mexico by foreign terrorist organizations.

**Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Violations of Mexican State Sovereignty**

The possibility of foreign terrorist organizations using Mexico as a base of operations for future attacks on the United States would have major implication on U.S. national security. Foreign terrorist organizations, most likely linked to Al-Qaeda, would have greater freedom of movement in Mexico due to the lack of security in that country. Organizations such as Al-Qaeda seem to move from country to country preying on weak and chaotic states. The government of Mexico would be unable to sufficiently hamper the activities of terrorist organizations due to a failed state scenario. The Mexican military and police forces would have limited leadership from the federal government which is needed in order to confront terrorist organizations. The lack of security within the border of Mexico would provide terrorist organizations with the needed cover to plan, train, and conduct terrorist activities. This insecurity in Mexico is in stark contrast when compared to the United States neighbor to the north, Canada.
In comparison, Canada has a viable, professional, and proficient military, as well as, police apparatus that provide it with the necessary tools to combat against foreign terrorist organizations attempting to freely move within its borders. In addition, the Canadian state is not actively fighting a prolonged conflict with well-armed drug traffickers which hinder the Mexican military and police. Terrorist organizations may attempt to use Canada’s vast territory in order to plan and train for an American attack; however, the probability of success for the terrorist organizations when compared to using Mexican territory is extremely low. Additionally, the United States and Canada have a strong military history. Both countries participate in the “bi-national command responsible for aerospace warning, aerospace control, and maritime warning for Canada, Alaska and the continental United States.”90 In fact, a Canadian General was in control of NORAD on the morning of September 11th 2001. This Canadian General ordered the grounding of all commercial flights throughout the United States.

Terrorist have attempted to use Canada as a launching point, as will be described below, however the use of its land by a significant collection of individuals seeking to attack the United States is highly unlikely. Consequently, terrorists that wish to do the United States harm could seize the opportunity that may present itself in Mexico to plan and equip for future attacks in the United States. These organizations could use the porous border to infiltrate personnel and material into the Southwest of America in order to facilitate potential terrorist attacks. Terrorist organizations conducted these types of

infiltration activities before the devastating attacks on September 11, 2001 as well as afterwards.

On the eve of the millennium in 1999 an Algerian man, Ahmed Ressam, attempted to transport a trunk full of explosives over the British Columbia border in Canada into the United States in order to bomb the Los Angeles airport. However, quick thinking American border agent’s employed sound law enforcement procedures and arrested this individual before he was able to infiltrate successfully into the United States. Additionally, the subsequent questioning of Ressam also led to the appropriate handling of Richard Reid’s infamous shoe bomb that he attempted to use in order to destroy an American Airlines flight in December of 2001. The attempted infiltration by these terrorists should be a sign of concern for American policymakers and law enforcement officials. The motivation and expertise for many of these groups is apparent; however, the occurrence may seem to many observers as an anomaly. This assertion would have grave consequences for the American homeland as the infiltration of Mexico by an assortment of foreign terrorist organizations may have already begun.

According to Ray Walser, a contributor to The Heritage Foundation, a prominent member of Hezbollah who goes by the name of Jamel Nasr was recently arrested in the city of Tijuana. Tijuana is extremely close to the large metropolitan city of San Diego; additionally, Tijuana is inundated with drug trafficking smugglers who are engaged in

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92 Ibid

extreme acts of violence. According to the author Ray Walser, the Hezbollah organization would be interested in pursuing a relationship with the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Walser articulated in his article that, “If Hezbollah bag men can do business with Mexico’s cartels, so can its trained terrorists. In the fluid, globalized struggle based on the principles of asymmetric warfare, terrorists constantly seek out our vulnerabilities and soft targets.” Terrorist organizations could work unilaterally within a failed Mexican state or pair up with the various drug trafficking organizations in order to accomplish their nefarious operations inside the United States. One instance that draws attention to the unilateral aspect of the various terrorist organizations focuses on the Somali based Al Shabaab terrorist group.

The United States government designated Al Shabaab as a terrorist organization in 2008. This organization has aligned itself with the Al-Qaeda terrorist network; and stipulated that it intends to do harm to the United States. In early 2010, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued an alert to Texas authorities asking them to “keep their eyes open for a Somali man named Mohamed Ali who is believed to be in Mexico preparing to make the illegal crossing into Texas. Officials believe Ali has ties to Al Shabaab…” The long and porous border between the United States and Mexico is ideal for terrorists in their efforts to infiltrate the United States. This fact becomes

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94 Ibid

95 Ibid


97 Ibid

98 Ibid
amplified with a potential failed state scenario in the country of Mexico. Regrettably, the abovementioned situation is not the only instance where individuals linked to terrorist organizations have made attempts to infiltrate into the United States, or are interested in doing so.

According to the *New York Times* the former Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, Admiral James M. Loy, cited in written testimony, “intelligence that ‘strongly suggests’ that Al Qaeda operatives have considered using the Mexican border as an entry point…” into the United States.\(^9\) Additionally, Admiral Loy articulated that he had information which suggested that many key Al Qaeda members would be able to pay individuals in Mexico in order to infiltrate into the United States.\(^1\) The ability in which terrorists could infiltrate the country of Mexico, link up with various drug trafficking organizations, exchange money and move into the United States is disconcerting.

The assorted drug trafficking organizations are an illicit profit-focused organization. Ideology does not play a significant factor in their rationale. The DTOs would most likely facilitate the movement of terrorists into the United States as long as they were compensated for their efforts. The realization of this occurrence by American officials may impede the various drug trafficking organizations actions as they would not want retaliatory actions by the United States against their unlawful operations; however, the likelihood of American involvement in Mexico due to a failed state situation may bolster the assorted drug trafficking organizations to work with terrorist organizations

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10) Ibid
regardless of the consequences. Additionally, the mere assistance by the drug trafficking organizations is only part of the problem.

A failed state scenario in Mexico, one in which the Mexican security forces were unable to protect their sovereignty, may provide foreign terrorist organizations with the needed cover to establish terrorist training grounds where they could plan, train and initiate attacks against the United States. This scenario is not unlike the environment that now encompasses the failed state of Somalia. This situation is what sets our Northern border country, Canada, apart from Mexico. It is unlikely that foreign terrorist organizations could operate in Canada in the same capacity that a failed Mexican state would provide.

The rise of radical terrorist organizations throughout the world is a serious issue related to the national security of the United States. The numerous attacks targeted against the American homeland, as well as, United States interests abroad amplify the seriousness of the situation. The growing unrest in the country of Mexico may be exploited by various terrorist groups that wish to inflict harm on the United States. The government of Mexico would be severely hampered in its attempt to stymie not only the drug trafficking organizations of Mexico, but also any terrorist organizations that wish to violate the sovereignty of the Mexican state. Consequently, terrorist groups working in Mexico would have the opportunity to either work unilaterally or combine their efforts with the assorted DTOs in an attempt to smuggle personnel and/or material across the border into the United States. Regrettably, the material that terrorist organizations may smuggle into the United States could have devastating consequences if they are
successfully deployed within the country, namely nuclear, biological or radiological typed weapons.

In August of 2001, Osama Bin Laden and his second in command, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, conducted meetings with Pakistan’s former specialists in uranium enrichment, Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majeed.\textsuperscript{101} According to Mahmood, a former high-ranking member of the Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission, Bin Laden was extremely interested in acquiring nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{102} The acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by members of the Al-Qaeda organization would be a devastating prospect for the United States. As the attacks on September 11, 2001 demonstrate, the leadership of Al-Qaeda is seeking the destruction of the American state and are not hesitant in using weapons indiscriminately that will inflict heavy losses.

President Obama recently stated that if the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization obtained nuclear weapons they “would have no compunction at using them”.\textsuperscript{103} President Obama went on to state that “The single biggest threat to U.S. security, both short-term, medium-term and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon … [T]his is something that could change the security landscape in this country and around the world for years to come.”\textsuperscript{104} The issue of Al-Qaeda acquiring a nuclear weapon is a concerning one; however, more disconcerting than this assertion


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 23.


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid
relates to the relative ease members of this organization could smuggle this type of material into the United States for future attacks from the state of Mexico. The porous border between the United States and Mexico offers seclusion and cover to many drug trafficking smugglers as well as individuals who are transporting human beings. It is apparent that various terrorist organizations could use these same smuggling routes in order to infiltrate the United States with dangerous weapons of mass destruction type material.

An additional threat to the American homeland from terrorist organizations is attacks using radioactive material, more specifically, radiological dispersal devices also known as ‘dirty bombs.’ Terrorist organizations could smuggle rather easily radioactive material from a lawless Mexico into the United States for potential attacks. Radiological dispersal devices are used to disperse radioactive material into the environment by using some type of explosive device.\(^{105}\) The amount of material used in the bomb will determine how many casualties are affected as well as the area of contamination.\(^{106}\) The material used in these bombs can cause tissue damage, radiation poisoning, and cause mass panic within those who were targeted for this attack.\(^{107}\) Terrorist organizations would have the opportunity to use Mexico as a base for their operations; these operations may include smuggling personnel into the United States or smuggling WMD type weapons.


\(^{106}\) Ibid

\(^{107}\) Ibid
The possibility of terrorist organizations using personnel and material for attacks on the American homeland intensifies the importance that Mexico remain a viable partner for the United States, and that the Mexican government remains the sole coercive, sovereign power in all its relationships. Further security collapse by the Mexican state will only bolster foreign terrorist organizations in their anti-American objectives. These various groups could work with the drug trafficking organizations or work unilaterally in order to infiltrate the United States or set up terrorist training camps. This type of activity must be closely monitored by American policymakers and law enforcement officials. The next section of this chapter will deal with the economic costs to the United States if the country of Mexico can no longer function as a sovereign entity.

The Economic Costs to the United States Due to a Failed Mexican State

The United States and Mexico are important trading partners. In January of 1994, the United States and Mexico implemented the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in order to remove many barriers related to trade and investment.108 This agreement has helped integrate the agricultural sectors of the United States, Mexico and Canada; business within the free-trade zone has grown and the organizations that rely on the United States for agricultural contribution have developed.109 The United States and

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Mexico have benefited from the NAFTA agreement in many ways. This agreement has led to the dismantling of trade barriers which brought about market integration, has an average annual growth in the agricultural sector of $847 million, and has resulted in 258,000 American jobs in the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{110} However, the gains that both the United States and Mexico made in the last 15 years may crumble as a result of the growing instability in the Mexican state.

The security situation in Mexico may hamper trade relations with the United States. This unfortunate realization may hinder both job creation in America as well as affect United States national security. Many Americans rely on the economic success of both the United States and Mexico, and their respective comparative advantages. The possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state may jeopardize countless jobs within the American homeland; this would be due to Mexico’s inability to perform the necessary duties of a sovereign state and execute economic policy. This would affect trade between the United States and Mexico. As the author Peter Evans points out, “…the state lies at the center of solutions to the problem of order. Without the state, markets, the other master institution of modern society, cannot function.”\textsuperscript{111} America is a key destination for approximately 80% of Mexico’s exports.\textsuperscript{112} Mexico also exports cars, and electronic


\textsuperscript{112} U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Mexico,” May 14, 2010 \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm} (accessed December 5, 2010).
equipment to the United States.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, the country of Mexico is a key exporter of petroleum to the United States; Mexico exports approximately 1.3 million barrels of oil a day to its northern neighbor.\textsuperscript{114}

The oil imports that the United States receives from Mexico are significant. However, the government of Mexico would be unable to adequately secure the transfer of oil to the United States due to the decreased security in the country. The situation that may unfold in Mexico could reflect the same serious situation that Iraq faces with attacks on important pipelines which sabotsages oil production; the various drug trafficking organizations as well as terrorist organizations would most likely be the culprits of such attacks. In addition, the money that the state of Mexico generates from oil exports is significant; these exports constitute the largest source of revenue for the country. Mexico nationalized its oil production in 1938 under the national oil company, Pemex.\textsuperscript{115} This fact has significant consequences as private oil companies would be unable to assist the government of Mexico in any meaningful way. Falling oil revenues, lack of security for various oil pipelines and a continuation of economic decline in Mexico will have repercussions in the United States. Therefore, it is important that American policy-

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid


makers understand that “Mexico’s ongoing political stability and economic health are critical to the prosperity and national security of the United States.\textsuperscript{116}

The national security significance that the Mexican economy has on the United States must not be underestimated by American policymakers or regional leaders. The U.S. and Mexico are important trading partners. The possibility of a failed state scenario would have obvious deleterious effects on Mexico but it would undoubtedly affect the national security of America by disrupting the flow of goods into and out of Mexico. Additionally, the possibility of various drug trafficking organizations and terrorist groups sabotaging oil pipelines and other avenues of trade would be harmful. The loss of employment, reduced imports and exports as well as the all-important oil commodity would have lasting effects on the United States if Mexico deteriorated further. The next section of this chapter will deal with the potential of Mexican refugees crossing the United States border illegally, and their prospective effects on the United States.

\textbf{Mexican Refugee Flow into the United States}

Currently, many Mexican citizens are caught in the crossfire between the various drug trafficking organizations and the Mexican police and military forces. Many of these people have few avenues for compensation for their incurred losses of life and property. Resulting from this constant threat, the potential for countless Mexican citizens to flee their country and head north into the United States would increase and pose a serious

national security problem. The following section will focus on the ramifications on U.S. national security if an influx of Mexican refugees illegally crosses into the United States.

The rapid increase in violence that began in 2006 has forced many ordinary Mexican citizens to flee north into the United States. Officials from both the United States and Mexico recognize that numerous Mexican citizens have fled but neither will comment on the exact number. Unlike traditional illegal immigrants from Mexico who seek a better way of life by working in the United States, many of these individuals are leaving due to the austere situation in their country. The part of the Mexican citizenry who chooses to flee the state are trying to better their chances for survival. Several of these individuals attempting to flee from the violence have an education and are professionally employed; they are “business owners, law enforcement officers, journalists and other professionals-on the run from Mexico’s vicious drug wars.”

This type of activity, educated and professional workers illegally crossing into the United States, is a historical irregularity. However, the main catalyst for this situation is the escalating violence occurring in Mexico. According to University of Texas-El Paso anthropology professor, Howard Campbell, Mexico is suffering from “…the worst violence since the (Mexican) Revolution and the worst period of instability since the Revolution…People are giving up on the country, thinking it’s totally hopeless.”


The fighting between the DTOs and the federal forces has become so intense in recent years that whole population centers have fled; one instance where this occurred is in the town of Ciudad Mier across the border from the American city of Roma, Texas.\textsuperscript{120} The citizens of this particular municipality apparently believed that staying in their town was detrimental to their survival. The feeling amongst many individuals in Mexico of impending doom and despair undoubtedly raises the specter of a failed state. However, the notion that motivates so many individuals to cross over into the United States illegally will have grave consequences on the U.S. for many reasons, one in particularly is the terrorist threat that it imposes.

Individuals from organizations unfriendly to the United States are attempting to cross over the long and porous Mexico-United States border. This fact was highlighted earlier in this chapter. According to the American government,

125 individuals were apprehended along the border from fiscal year 2009 through April 20, 2010…These deportable aliens included two Syrians, seven Sudanese, and 17 Iranians. Federal authorities also track ‘special interest countries’ from which terrorism could be directed against America. Over the aforementioned period, 99 of those nations’ citizens also were nabbed on the border.\textsuperscript{121}

These same individuals would have the opportunity to traverse the expansive Southwest United States in order to plan and execute terrorist operations against populated city-centers; this is obviously a grave national security concern.


The terrorist issue that threatens American national security is an important subject; however, it is not the only concern. The mass movement of Mexican refugees into American communities would strain the local economies as well. Mexican refugees who smuggled themselves into the United States would need to find shelter, food, and medical attention for their families. Unfortunately, many of these individuals would be unable to pay for these expenses. The local American citizens that reside in the Southwestern border towns would become responsible monetarily for these individuals. While this issue does not pose a direct threat to the national security of the United States, it nonetheless creates a situation that is undesirable and problematic for many American citizens. In addition, the American Border States are currently not prepared for an influx in Mexican refugees. These states are already under dire economic tension due to state budget shortfalls. Tim Irwin stated that “he was unaware of any plans in Texas to prepare for an influx of Mexicans seeking refuge. Theoretically, Irwin said, a Mexican citizen could go to a border crossing and seek asylum based on fears of returning home and the ongoing drug wars.”

Irwin is a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

An influx in refugees into the American Southwest would have an assortment of adverse effects on United States national security. The most damaging matter relates to the added potential that terrorist organizations or states that are hostile to the U.S. would have in infiltrating their operatives into the country. Additionally, a sudden and rapid flood of Mexican refugees would hinder the local economies in the border region. This

would become apparent as social services became taxed with the overwhelming needs of the people. Regrettably, it seems that the states that border Mexico are ill-prepared in receiving hundreds if not thousands of Mexican citizens who are fleeing the violence in their home country. The next section of this chapter will cover the possible exploitation of Mexican sovereignty by foreign states.

**Exploitation of Mexican State Sovereignty by Foreign States**

The current situation in Mexico may lend itself to greater involvement by foreign states for the purpose of garnering greater influence in the Latin American region. Consequently, some of these states namely Iran, Russia and China may attempt to acquire control of the region in order to stymie American influence in the Western hemisphere. These states are in many aspects not friendly to the United States, and their actions in the American periphery would cause a problem. Thus, the following section will elaborate upon American national security implications if countries that are hostile to the United States attempt to exploit the crisis in Mexico. Therefore, this section will focus on the country of Iran first.

The state of Iran has developed a foreign policy that is antagonistic towards the United States. This situation is even more disheartening as this state has noticeable aspirations to acquire nuclear weapons despite the international community’s objections. The United States broke ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran after the 1979 overthrow of the Shah, and the subsequent takeover of the American embassy in Tehran. Currently, the state of Iran has attempted to acquire greater regional influence in the Middle East by
manipulating the situation in Lebanon and Iraq. The clear violation of Iraqi state sovereignty by Iranian operatives shows willingness on their part to counteract the actions and foreign policy of the United States. For that reason, the state of Iran may attempt to influence a weakened Mexican state in order to garner greater influence in the Western Hemisphere, thus challenging American primacy in the region. A failed Mexican state and a destabilized government would be limited in their actions to counter Iranian influence. Thus, the state of Iran is at present trying to gather support in other Latin American nations, and would be expected to continue this effort in Mexico.

Presently, the state of Iran is expanding diplomatic efforts in South America. In 2009 the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, visited the country of Brazil. Ahmadinejad was welcomed by the Brazilian President, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, where the two leaders exchanged views on the right of Iran to seek nuclear technology-technology solely for peaceful means according to Ahmadinejad- as well as the ongoing Israeli situation. Additionally, the state of Iran has ventured into other Latin American states such as Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Venezuela.

These diplomatic moves by the state of Iran, according to Farideh Farhi of the Woodrow Wilson Center, are an attempt by Iran to disrupt American efforts in Latin America or “…make a point” that Iran has the means to influence South American states. Accordingly, many of these states such as Bolivia and Venezuela have leaders who are hostile to the United States in general. The push by Iranian diplomats to further

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124 Ibid
isolate American interest in the Latin American region is aligned with these countries policies. Regrettably, Iran has used other than diplomatic means to influence their state’s policies. Iran has provided arms and assistance to anti-American forces in Lebanon and Iraq; this policy is most worrisome in relation to the situation in Mexico as Iran has shown it has the motivation necessary to use proxy forces against the United States on various occasions.

The Iranian military has given assistance to Shiite members that participated in the insurgency in the state of Iraq. According to American policymakers, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard specifically the Quds Force which is the intelligence wing of that organization, provided Shiite militias with explosively formed penetrators, rocket-propelled grenades and Katyusha rockets to use against American forces. These weapons were used to great effect in Iraq and caused the deaths of many brave American soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors. The participation by Iran in the American-Iraq war displays a willingness on their part to inflict actual physical harm on American citizens. Therefore, it is not a great leap in logic to suggest that this same Iranian regime would use similar force if given the opportunity in a failed Mexican state if it advances their foreign policy goals. This type of involvement would most likely take place under two specific circumstances: The Mexican government can no longer function as the sole sovereign power within their territory; and the United States decides to engage Iran militarily due to Iran’s non-compliance with the international community in relation to their nuclear ambitions.

It is unlikely that Iran would openly challenge the United States in the country of Mexico unless the two abovementioned scenarios played out. However, if the United States decided to engage Iran militarily it is likely that Iran would use the territory of a failed Mexico, which would have a limited ability to secure its borders, as a launching point for attacks against the United States. Iran has stated openly that it will use numerous individuals in suicide attacks against countries that target them militarily. According to Dr. Hassan Abbasi, who is the head of the Centre for Doctrinal Strategic Studies within the Revolutionary Guards unit in Iran, “We are ready to attack American and British sensitive points if they attack Iran’s nuclear Facilities.”

Abbasi also articulated that Iran has already identified 29 Western targets that may be attacked by a specialized unit referred to as the Special Unit of Martyr Seekers. The possibility that this same unit may target locations within the United States is concerning. Additionally, the use of Mexico by Iran as a launching point for attacks in the United States would be an advantage to the Iranian military.

A failed state scenario in Mexico would provide the Iranians with enough international cover to conduct such attacks. The Iranians past and present dealings with terrorist organizations also lends itself to the belief that this state may work with the various drug trafficking organizations operating in Mexico in order to facilitate their operations. The activities of Iran in the Middle East region as well as an increasing presence in Latin America should be a cause of concern for American policymakers as it

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127 Ibid
is likely that Iran would use Mexico in order to destabilize American interests. This section of the thesis will now focus on Russia and the likelihood that this country will attempt to garner more influence in the Western region by exploiting Mexican autonomy.

The Russian state has begun to take greater interest in Latin America. This became evident in 2008 when Russia offered the left-leaning government of Bolivia aid to help fight narcotics traffickers in that country.\(^1\) The country of Bolivia and the leftist President Evo Morales are attempting to garner more support from states other than America. This type of action is mirrored by the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Russia has attempted to strengthen its ties with Chavez and the Venezuelan state. This relationship is representative “of geopolitical forces rising to challenge U.S. leadership and influence. The Venezuelan-Russian duo wants to redistribute global power as expeditiously as possible. In pursuit of this world without the West…”\(^2\) However, the actions of Russia in a failed Mexican state would differ significantly from activities performed by other states, such as Iran. Russia is unlikely to engage in nefarious actions that directly target the United States; nevertheless, Russia may try to acquire greater influence in the country of Mexico once that state becomes more destabilized. This activity would most likely take place due to Russia’s drive for recognition as a global power. The fall of the Soviet Union as a hegemonic power in the early 1990s had a lasting effect on many Russians. The attempt to garner greater influence in the Western

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Hemisphere by the Russian state may display a willingness to retrieve this loss of status and prestige.

A realistic concern for Russian involvement in Mexico deals with the economy. Russia may attempt to establish itself as an economic entity in Mexico in order to secure possible contracts and dealings during and after a revival of the Mexican state. Russia has become a more than willing participant in selling weapons to various states throughout the years. This issue is clearly evident with Russia’s arms deal with the Venezuelan state that encompassed 2.2 billion in a line of credit: “this deal is about one quarter the size- to take one comparison- of all of Britain’s arms sales in 2008.”

This past activity involving large sales of military equipment may become apparent in a country that is seeking any assistance it can receive due to its dire security circumstances. Although both Iran and Russia will most likely seek to profit from an ailing Mexican state, the country of China will also attempt to strengthen its position in Latin America, particularly in Mexico.

The Chinese government has expanded its influence in many parts of the world recently. Officials from China have traveled to numerous African states for the purpose of becoming an important creditor and donor; thus, expanding their influence and prestige. The Chinese economy has rapidly expanded, and this trend seems to be continuing. According to the Chinese Vice Commerce Minister, Fu Zinying, “China’s presence in Africa is becoming more and more market driven, the actors operating there

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are diverse, there are many models, and the areas they are in are broad.\textsuperscript{131} China’s aspiration to become a great economic power is evident; furthermore, their role as an emerging military power, one which may attempt to counter the military of the United States, is also an issue of concern. The Chinese role in Latin America is somewhat limited in its scope in comparison to that of Africa, but it is a role that American policy-makers must be aware of. Additionally, Chinese interest in Mexico may become a concern if that state collapses further and becomes a failed state.

The Chinese may take advantage of Mexico in order to expand their influence and natural resource pool in Latin America. Unlike Iran, who has extremely hostile intentions to the welfare of the United States, China will most likely attempt to provide economic assistance to the Mexican government in a fashion that is similar to that of Russia. Mexico would most likely accept most types of assistance from donor states in an attempt to revitalize their failing country. While the United States will lead the pack in this effort, it is likely that other nations will also try to expand their influence as well. This apparent issue poses a problem for American national security.

Chinese economic incentives to Mexico would hinder American influence in the region. The failing and desperate Mexican government may extend a warm welcome to the Chinese; this act could provide China with greater influence as they would potentially provide economic aid packages to Mexico, and would presumably expect some type of mutual reciprocity from the Mexican government. Additionally, China may attempt to further expand their influence in Latin American states other than Mexico which would

advance the prestige of many anti-American leaders. Two such leaders are Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. The Bolivarian leader as well as Venezuela’s President could claim to have attained a strong pact with an emerging economic and military power in order to advance their agendas, agendas that do not coincide with that of the United States. Furthermore, Chinese expansionism in Mexico may provide leverage for the Chinese positions on issues such as N. Korea and Taiwan as greater influence in the Western Hemisphere would provide China with greater power in these cases. This would undoubtedly place the United States at a disadvantage if China garnered greater authority with the Mexican state.

It is unlikely that China would attempt to promote any type of military advantage in Mexico to counter the United States. This is a scenario that the Chinese will most likely attempt to avoid. However, it must be taken into consideration that there are reports that Chinese weapons were provided to the Taliban in Afghanistan, thus resulting with the weapons use in direct attacks on British and American troops in the country. According to the report, “Afghan officials have also privately confirmed…that sophisticated Chinese weapons are now in the hands of the Taliban. They said these included Chinese-made surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft guns, landmines, rocket-propelled grenades and components for roadside bombs.” This finding gives credence to the possibility that the Chinese would intervene militarily in Latin America if they believed it was in their best interest, possibly not in direct military confrontation with the


133 Ibid
United States, but by providing military aid to those who will fight. The overall role of the Chinese in Mexico and Latin America, both economic and military related, must be reviewed for possible American national security implications.

The potential for foreign states to move in on Mexico once it becomes a failed state is vexing. Iran poses the greatest threat on the national security of the United States due to its relenting hostility and past actions that display Iranian willingness to inflict harm on American citizens. American policymakers and national security officials must counter Iran on all fronts in order to thwart any attempts by Iran to further their influence in the Western Hemisphere. Russia and China do not pose such a serious threat militarily to the United States; nonetheless, their role in a destabilized Mexico is a cause for concern. Their potential economic power in Mexico may hinder American influence in the region and promote further ire from leftist leaders throughout Latin America. The next section of this chapter will explore the American border and the implications on this area if Mexico becomes a failed state.

**Border State Implications**

The American border with Mexico is long and in many areas extremely porous. Additionally, there are numerous American urban centers that rest within a short distance of Mexico. Since the 2006 deployment of Mexican police and military forces into the volatile areas of Mexico, numerous reports of violence have occurred on the United States side. A failed state scenario for the state of Mexico is detrimental for the entire
United States; however, the border region in the Southwest of the country will be disproportionately affected.

The various drug trafficking organizations that work within Mexico have numerous routes that traverse into the Southwest of the United States. The members of these organizations have little regard for American laws or those who are sworn to protect American citizens. Additionally, the various topics that this thesis covered earlier—massive refugee flows, economic hardship, possible terrorist operations, and further intrusion by the Mexican DTOs—will first inflict the American Border States.

Additionally, the various drug trafficking organizations have numerous tunnels that cross into the United States from Mexico. “The number of tunnels extending from Mexico in the United States has increased, suggesting that DTOs consider these tunnels as useful investments to smuggle drugs into the United States.”

This activity disrupts and impedes on the sovereignty of the United States. Accordingly, several American Border States have put in place legislation over the last year in order to alleviate some of the pressure that they are facing. Arizona is one such state.

Arizona has attempted to assuage some of the stress on their communities by enforcing and implementing a tougher illegal immigration law throughout their state. According to Arizona Senate Bill 1070, “The provisions of this act are intended to work together to discourage and deter the unlawful entry and presence of aliens and economic

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activity by persons unlawfully present in the United States.”\textsuperscript{135} The proponents of this bill believe that it will assist law enforcement in their ongoing effort to curb illegal immigration, while the critics of this bill believe that it will be a catalyst for racial profiling. It is not the purpose of this thesis to argue either point, only to identify that there is an immense problem brewing on the Southwestern border of the United States, and if this dilemma goes unchecked it will have adverse consequences on American national security.

The United States has a critical situation unfolding in its own sphere of influence. This situation must be given the appropriate attention in order to secure and promote United States interests and its national security. American policymakers and national security officials have decided that the actions associated with terrorist organizations that are based thousands of miles from the American homeland are a concern for its national security; however, these same policymakers and officials must realize that the continuing situation in the state of Mexico will pose vast national security problems if left unchecked. A number of American states are attempting to strengthen their security posture; nonetheless, it will be up to the American federal government to ensure that the national security of the United States is protected against the various threats emanating from the South.

This chapter focused on the implications to United States national security if Mexico became a failed state. Accordingly, this chapter expounded upon the following situations: continued operations by the various drug trafficking organizations into the

United States, these activities have become more dangerous as members of these groups are beginning to work on the American side of the border; continued and strengthened ties between DTOs and American street gangs which poses a particular problem to both law enforcement and the United States military; regional instability; exploitation of Mexican state sovereignty by foreign terrorist organizations; economic costs to the United States; massive refugee flows into the United States; foreign state intervention into Mexico, particularly the state of Iran; and, American Border State implications. These preceding issues were covered in-depth in order to focus on the grave threat that a failed Mexican state would have upon the United States. The following chapter will expound upon the current United States foreign policy towards the country of Mexico, American counter-drug policy, and provide new policy prescriptions.
CHAPTER FOUR: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS MEXICO AND AMERICAN COUNTER-DRUG POLICY

The United States has directed vast amounts of money and equipment to the Mexican state in order to assist in the fight against the various drug trafficking organizations. This support has led to better equipped police forces and military units. However, the violence that is currently gripping the state of Mexico, and the serious national security implications that it poses for the United States, has not been resolved. The following section of this thesis will focus on the current United States foreign policy towards Mexico, with a large emphasis on the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Additionally, this chapter will elaborate upon American counter-drug policy. First, this chapter will focus on American strategy in combating narcotics traffickers in the state of Colombia; second, the current policy known as “The Merida Initiative,” will be investigated; and lastly, this chapter will elaborate upon future policy options and the American counter-drug policy. The following section will examine the strategy known as “Plan Colombia,” in order to better understand America’s approach to fighting narcotics trafficking in Latin America.
Plan Colombia

The United States made a concerted effort to assist the state of Colombia in eradicating their various drug trafficking organizations, as well as, left-wing militants in a policy known as “Plan Colombia.” Colombia, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, had a pervasive problem with DTOs that is somewhat analogous to the Mexican dilemma. The country’s ongoing battle with various drug traffickers had persisted for many years in Colombia; consequently, between 1997 and 1998, Colombia surpassed both Peru and Bolivia as a major source of coca production in Latin America. Additionally, the areas that were most susceptible to coca production were located in an area that the Colombian government did not control. These facts led to unprecedented acts of violence, persistent kidnappings, and over 1.5 million displaced persons throughout the country as drug traffickers predominantly the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, otherwise known as the FARC, attempted to control the vast illicit market.

The violent situation that existed in Colombia was a seemingly unending cycle. The money that the traffickers received from the illicit market fueled the FARC, the proclaimed guerilla group that received a great deal of its funding from the illicit market, which in turn attacked government forces. This action motivated various right-wing paramilitary groups to attack the FARC, and the process repeated itself. The Colombian paramilitary groups emerged due to the lack of security provided by Colombian federal forces; however, some members of these groups have been accused of human rights violations.

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136 Gabriel Marcella, Plan Colombia: The Strategic and Operational Imperatives (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2001), 1.

137 Ibid.
abuses. The theory behind Plan Colombia attempted to assuage this occurrence. “If the money going to the narcos is taken away, the guerrillas [FARC] cannot mount the attacks, they become less threatening, and the paramilitaries have less reason for being. The prospects for bringing the guerrillas and the paramilitaries to the table for serious peace negotiations are enhanced…”138 In effect, the plan that both the United State and Colombia embraced would limit the funds going to the drug trafficking organizations, primarily the FARC guerilla group, and bring both the paramilitaries and the FARC to the peace table. There would be enhanced security which would curtail the need for right-wing paramilitary groups.

Additionally, the policy in Colombia attempted to strengthen the security apparatus in Colombia; recuperate the faltering economy; control development of illegal crops in remote areas of Colombia; and, attempt to re-establish civil institutions.139 However, the plan itself would have difficulty establishing itself if the areas in Colombia were not controlled by federal Colombian forces. This situation is similar to Mexico’s as many areas in Mexico are essentially ruled by the various drug trafficking organizations.

The United States primary role in Plan Colombia dealt with increased monetary assistance as well as equipment issued to the Colombian government. According to an October 2008 report generated by the U.S. General Accounting Office,

Since fiscal year 2000, State and Defense provided nearly $4.9 billion to the Colombian military and National Police. Notably, U.S.-funded helicopters have provided the air mobility needed to rapidly move Colombian counternarcotics and

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138 Gabriel Marcella, Plan Colombia: The Strategic and Operational Imperatives (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2001), 7.

139 Gabriel Marcella and others, Plan Colombia Some Differing Perspectives (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2001), 3.
counterinsurgency forces. U.S. advisors, training, equipment, and intelligence assistance have also helped professionalize Colombia’s military and police forces… **140**

However, the policy known as “Plan Colombia” had a number of unintended consequences.

The implementation of the policy led to many Colombians emigrating to other states which began an unfortunate ‘brain drain’ in the country. **141** Additionally, rapid displacement of rural Colombian citizens due to the eradication efforts by the Colombian government, and damage from fighting between the FARC guerillas and government forces became unforeseen issues. **142** Although the execution of “Plan Colombia” curtailed some of the violence in the state of Colombia, and eradicated some of the drug smuggling in Latin America, large amounts of illicit narcotics still found their way into the United States.

This section of the thesis elaborated upon how the United States has typically dealt with the drug trafficking problem in South America. This section focused on the situation in Colombia, and expounded upon the policy known as “Plan Colombia.” As this section of the chapter stipulated, the United States focuses a great deal on the supply-side of the illicit market. Furthermore, it is apparent that United States policymakers attack the drug problem in both Colombia as well as the state of Mexico by providing


**142** Ibid
enormous amounts of money and expensive military equipment. This type of activity may alleviate the situation in the short-term, but a long-term approach that deals with both the supply-side and demand-side of the illicit market must be explored for any real progress. The next section in this chapter will deal with the current U.S. policy towards the state of Mexico, and the drug trafficking problem in that beleaguered state.

**The Merida Initiative**

The United States implemented the policy known as The Merida Initiative in an effort to curb the trafficking of narcotics or other illicit goods into America. According to Dr. Hal Brands of the Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College,

> On June 30, 2008, President George W. Bush signed into law the Merida Initiative, a 3-year $1.4 billion counterdrug assistance program for Mexico and Central America. The bulk of this money is destined for Mexico, where it will help fund counternarcotics operations against the powerful cartels that have recently turned much of that country into a war zone.  

This policy initiated by the United States followed the well-exercised standard practice of fighting the various drug trafficking organizations by providing Latin American countries with money and equipment; this same model was used in the implementation of Plan Colombia and discussed earlier; however, many proponents of this policy are hesitant in making comparisons between the policy in Colombia and The Merida Initiative in Mexico.

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143 Hal Brands, *Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2009).
The policy proposed and implemented by the United States intends to assist the struggling Mexican law enforcement and judicial branches of the government. As mentioned previously in this thesis, the Mexican police forces, and the Mexican judicial system are under heavy constraint due to rampant corruption and systemic inadequacies in training as well as the somewhat nonexistent vetting process that plagues many law enforcement organizations throughout Mexico. Many law enforcement officials in the federal government as well as the municipalities are working for the various drug trafficking organizations or they are purposefully ignoring smuggling and human rights abuses. The Merida Initiative policy will attempt to assist the Mexican government in restoring the civil institutions throughout the state of Mexico. However, critics of this policy suggest that the strategy focuses too much on the supply-side of the problem rather than looking at the source of the dilemma; “…the Merida Initiative pays comparatively little attention to the deeper structural problems that fuel the drug trade and the drug-related violence.”

The policy signed into law in the United States will assist the Mexican state and other Latin American countries in their fight against various drug trafficking organizations. A considerable amount of the money sent to Mexico will be used for equipment and civil-institution building. According to Ray Walser, “About 41 percent of Merida Initiative funding is slated for the purchase of helicopters (Bell 412 helicopters) and fixed-wing surveillance aircraft (Casa 245 twin-engine aircraft) to support

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interdiction activities and facilitate rapid response by Mexican law enforcement agencies.\textsuperscript{146} The United States believes that this assistance will alleviate some of the pressure on the Mexican government, and the policy implementation will also stem the tide of illicit smuggling operations. Additionally, the Merida Initiative demonstrates a shift in United States policy.

The policymakers of the United States as well as leading government officials in Mexico recognized that both countries share a significant interest in the defeat of the various drug trafficking organizations. Consequently, the Merida Initiative demonstrates that both countries share the responsibility in this effort.\textsuperscript{147} However, both states will need to address serious issues that exist in both countries: “erosion of national security, public order, and the quality of life in the U.S. and Mexico that is caused by the trade and consumption of illicit drugs.”\textsuperscript{148} In order to assist in the Mexican efforts to curb the violence and lessen the destructiveness of the drug trafficking organizations that operate throughout Mexico, the United States is providing training and advanced equipment to the Mexican state. On the next page is a table that describes the type of training that the Mexican government will receive as well as the equipment that is allocated for the Mexican administration.


\textsuperscript{147} Ibid

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid
Table 4. Selected Equipment and Training Pending Delivery to Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>218 Polygraph units April 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Railroad x-ray inspection units August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bell helicopters October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Black Hawk helicopters (SSP) October to December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile gamma radiation trucks 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Black Hawk helicopters (SEMAR) September 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CASA airplanes September to December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 Black Hawk helicopters (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional equipment for Mexican national data system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional equipment for Mexican Communication and Transportation Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bell helicopter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Drug demand reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial intelligence unit &amp; financial crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support for law schools and bar associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Institution building and rule of law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stand up robust internal controls</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As the table above illustrates, the policy towards Mexico and its rampant problem with the various drug trafficking organizations relies heavily on equipment transfers and the training of the assorted government offices in Mexico. However, this type of activity will need a substantial amount of commitment and perseverance by the Mexican government and others who share responsibility for the safety of Mexican citizens. The Merida Initiative is a bold move by the United States to assist the Mexican state in its

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fight against drug traffickers as well as to stem the tide of illicit products and violence making its way into the American heartland.

The two preceding sections, Plan Colombia and The Merida Initiative, were highlighted in this thesis in order to provide information on current United States policy towards Latin America and specifically the Mexican state. The next section in this chapter will focus on proposed policy options that the United States government may implement in order to curtail the operations that the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations are conducting as well as limit the possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state.

**Proposed United States Policy Options Directed at the State of Mexico**

The United States has an enormous stake in the security of Mexico. The violence and destructiveness that is occurring throughout America’s southern neighbor not only affects the border state region, but it also permeates in other regions of the United States. Previous American foreign policy towards Mexico dealt with primarily interdicting the various drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. This policy is extremely important for the national security of the United States. The Merida Initiative that was implemented in 2008 has broaden the policy options, and the language in the bill displays a willingness of American policymakers to realize that the violence that afflicts the state of Mexico at present is both the fault of Mexico as well as the United States. However, the Merida Initiative still heavily concentrates on the supply-side of the problem rather than the demand-side: American’s insatiable consumption for illicit narcotics. Therefore,
American policymakers must concentrate on both the interdiction of illegal products smuggled into the United States, and stymie the demand for such products. The following three policy prescriptions focus on both the supply-side of the problem as well as the demand side in the United States:

1. American policymakers should utilize its special operations forces, namely Special Forces, to train the Mexican military as well as Mexican police forces. American Special Forces are uniquely equipped and trained for these types of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions.

2. American policymakers should center on lessening the availability of American made weapons that are commonly used by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

3. American policymakers and legislators should focus greater efforts on diminishing the demand-side of the narcotics problem. The consumption by American citizens drives the illicit drug trade. This section focuses on the counter-drug issue.

The following section of this chapter will focus on the abovementioned policy options that American policymakers should implement in order to assuage the frequent drug flow into the United States, and lessen the probability that Mexico becomes a failed state. The policies described in this section center on the weakening of Mexico’s drug trafficking organizations; the availability of American weapons to Mexican DTOs; and lastly, illicit consumption by American citizens.
American Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) Teams to Train Mexican Military and Police Forces

The ability of the Mexican army and police to effectively fight the cartels and win is extremely important. Vast amounts of money from the United States have been allocated to accomplish this task. In many areas of Mexico, the drug trafficking organizations out-man, and out-gun the Mexican military and police. As it was previously mentioned in this thesis, the tactics that some of these DTOs, most notably the Zetas, use are extremely efficient and organized. Due to this fact, the first policy recommendation that American policymakers should utilize deals with deploying Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) teams into Mexico to help train and equip the Mexican military and police forces.

The current policy that is in place to combat against the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations does little to involve the American military. This fact relates to Mexico’s concerns over its sovereignty and past conflicts that the country of Mexico had with the United States.\(^{150}\) Currently, the only viable role that the American Defense Department is playing in Mexico regards the administering of “the procurement and delivery of Merida-funded equipment for Mexican security forces.”\(^{151}\) This is unfortunate, as the American military could play a more important role in the Mexican state by utilizing American Special Operations Forces, specifically the Special Forces also known as Green Berets.

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\(^{150}\) Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin M. Finklea, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: Merida Initiative and Beyond* (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 27.

\(^{151}\) Ibid
The American Special Forces teams are extremely well-trained in unconventional warfare, direct action, special reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, and foreign internal defense. Although the Mexican military and police forces receives monetary assistance from the United States, the members of these Special Forces teams would be able to train their counterparts in a myriad of techniques. This training would allow them to defeat the assorted drug trafficking organizations, and enhance their awareness of the Mexican citizens who are affected by the fighting. Many Mexican soldiers and police officers are ill-equipped to relate with the civilians that are caught in the middle of the fighting that occurs on the streets in Mexico. The Special Forces teams will impart their knowledge to the Mexican troops and police officers on how to conduct themselves in relation to civilians, but also how to fight and win against the various drug trafficking organizations that are plaguing the state of Mexico.

The members of 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the Group that would most likely be used for this operation, are specifically trained to operate in Latin America. The members of this Group are also proficient in the Spanish language. Additionally, the Green Berets operate in small, 12-man elements and are highly trained in certain areas. These areas include specialization in weapons and combat tactics, engineering and demolition, medical, and communications. Furthermore, the highly trained members of these teams also have an individual who specializes in the intelligence realm. These specialties provide these members with the expertise and knowledge to skillfully train and mentor the Mexican military and police forces. Furthermore, many of these members are combat veterans with multiple deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan.
The members of the Special Forces teams are specifically trained to operate and succeed in high-stress environments.

The Mexican military and police force’s ability to win the support of the civilian population will bolster their reputation. This support will hinder the ability of the DTOs to recruit from the population at large. The Obama and subsequent administrations should utilize these great assets, the Special Forces teams, to strengthen American foreign policy in Mexico, and help stabilize the beleaguered region. One aspect that will be of concern is Mexican state sovereignty.

The Mexican population is still weary of their country’s relations with the United States. For example, in March of 1996 the Mexican government had to assure the public that American troops would not be allowed on Mexican soil. This took place after the former Secretary of Defense, William Perry, announced joint military exercises between Mexico and the United States.\textsuperscript{152} The first official visit by an American Secretary of Defense did not take place until October of 1995 when William Perry made the inaugural trip to Mexico.\textsuperscript{153} This fact sheds light on how seriously the Mexican population takes their country’s sovereignty. Nevertheless, the scope of the violence that wreaks havoc on the Mexican state is at a level which is unprecedented. Consequently, the Mexican government will have to reevaluate their current security apparatus. This reevaluation undoubtedly forces the Mexican administration into making tough but necessary

\textsuperscript{152} Donald E. Schulz, \textit{Between A Rock And A Hard Place The United States, Mexico, and the Agony of National Security} (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 1997), 17-18.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, 18

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decisions regarding the future of their state. However, the United States must respect the sovereignty of Mexico and follow the following regulations.

It is imperative that the Special Forces soldiers who are deployed to Mexico train the Mexican soldiers and police forces on military installations. This action may protect America from accusations that they are violating the sovereignty of Mexico. Moreover, the Mexican government must focus their efforts on identifying those individuals who may have infiltrated the military and police forces on behalf of the assorted drug trafficking organizations. This is a daunting task however for Mexico as their vetting processes are virtually non-existent. Obviously, the United States does not want to train and equip personnel that will later use what they learned against the Mexican military and police forces. The proposed policy to allow American Special Forces soldiers to train and equip the Mexican military and police is an enormous undertaking for both the Mexican administration but also the American military. Nonetheless, the activity of American Special Forces soldiers training the police and military forces is currently underway in the Latin American country of Guatemala.

Members of American Special Forces are currently training Guatemalan troops in the North of the country. These training exercises are taking place deep in the Guatemalan jungle in order to “rid Guatemala of the violence and intimidation associated with the drug cartels that have become increasingly pervasive in the last 3 years.” The deployment of Special Forces teams to Latin America is a crucial element in the fight against the various drug trafficking organizations. The use of these units in Guatemala is

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a testament to their utility in this important task. American policymakers and the leadership of the Mexican government should seriously explore the option of allowing American Special Forces teams to train and equip the Mexican military and police forces as soon as possible. In addition, if the Mexican government feels that the deployment of American forces on their own soil is too politically dire, the potential of sending Mexican military leadership as well as police leadership to America for training is a further policy option. However, this is the least desirable option as the amount of members who receive hands-on training from the elite Green Berets will be greater if they are deployed to the state of Mexico. In addition, the cooperation between the Mexican government and the United States Department of Defense has grown. This relationship has strengthened due to a recent trip by Robert Gates, the current Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. According to Clare Seelke and Kristin Finklea,

Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen traveled to Mexico along with Secretary Clinton in March 2010 to offer increased military assistance and collaboration to their Mexican counterparts, Admiral James Winnefeld, the new NORTHCOM Commander, recently said that he sees a ‘tremendous opportunity’ to strengthen ties between the U.S. and Mexican militaries through training and intelligence-sharing. As an example, he said that the Mexican government has asked NORTHCOM to help it establish a joint intelligence center. DOD officials in Mexico City have predicted that while DOD is unlikely to provide Mexico with the same amount of funds it has provided to Colombia, the same variety of programs may be funded. Future training programs may focus on how to work with police forces, conduct anti-drug operations and investigations, and pursue DTO leaders.\textsuperscript{155}

Accordingly, the potential for the American military to assist the Mexican security forces in a more direct fashion is slowly presenting itself as a viable option. The American policymakers and officials must persuade the Mexican government to allow this type of activity to take place as it is not only the Mexican security situation that is currently compromised in large swaths of the country, but also the potential for the United States to be adversely effected if the security of Mexico continues to fall into the realm of a failed state.

The preceding policy option focused on sending American Special Forces teams to the besieged country of Mexico in order to assist in defeating the various drug trafficking organizations. This policy promotes using these elite teams to train and equip the Mexican military and police forces on military installations located in Mexico. American Special Forces teams are already in use in Latin America for the same purpose, and are extremely effective. This policy focused on the supply-side of the narcotics problem: the assorted Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The following policy option that this thesis will present also centers on the supply-side of the illicit drug issue. The assorted Mexican drug trafficking organizations utilize many weapons that are produced in the United States and then smuggle these weapons illegally into Mexico. This situation deserves specific attention in order to reduce the flow of these weapons to our southern neighbor.
Reducing the Flow of American Made Weapons to Mexico

Many of the weapons that end up in Mexico are obtained in the United States. Officials within the United States government estimate “that 90% of the firearms recovered from crime scenes in Mexico originated in the United States.”\(^{156}\) The various drug trafficking organizations that operate in Mexico locate individuals inside the United States who can legally purchase firearms at either local gun shows or assorted gun dealers; these transactions are known as “straw purchases” as the individual then transfers the automatic weapons to persons who belong in the DTOs.\(^ {157}\) It is of paramount importance that the United States targets the individuals working for the various drug trafficking organizations in order to limit their ability to obtain American made weapons. The large influx of weapons into Mexico from the United States aids to the destabilization of Mexico. However, the U.S. is making some progress in this area. According to Andrew Selee of Americas Quarterly, “Another emergency spending bill approved in February [2009], authorized $10 million to hire additional Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) inspectors under the agency’s Project Gunrunner, which tries to identify gun dealers who are intentionally selling arms to Mexican drug traffickers.”\(^ {158}\) This is an important step by the United States.

\(^{156}\) Clare Ribando Seelke, *Merida Initiative for Mexico and Central America: Funding and Policy Issues* (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 16.

\(^{157}\) Ibid

The operation known as Project Gunrunner materialized in 2004; since its inception 148 special agents from the ATF, and 59 industry operations investigators have “referred 882 cases for prosecution involving more than 1,838 defendants, including almost 415 cases for firearms trafficking involving more than 1,135 defendants and almost 13,382 guns.”\textsuperscript{159} Additionally, the conference known as the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials, attempts to disrupt illegal transactions of weapons.\textsuperscript{160}

The abovementioned convention recognizes the urgency for all countries, specifically those that manufacture weapons, to take precautions in order to “prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other related materials…”\textsuperscript{161} The United States became a signatory for this convention in November of 1997, but the U.S. Congress has not ratified the convention as of yet.\textsuperscript{162}

The United States government in conjunction with the state of Mexico as well as various Latin American countries has attempted to lessen the trafficking of dangerous automatic weapons from America which often find themselves in the hands of the various

\textsuperscript{159} Clare Ribando Seelke, Merida Initiative for Mexico and Central America: Funding and Policy Issues (San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute and the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 16.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid
drug trafficking organizations. The convention and the money allocated to the ATF are important endeavors that must be continued by the United States government in order to disrupt the flow of American made automatic weapons. However, the money given by the American federal government to provide for additional ATF employees seems quite meager with regards to the importance of the situation; moreover, the scope of the violence occurring in Mexico continues to demonstrate the expansive ability that the various drug trafficking organizations have in acquiring American made automatic weapons regardless of the convention or the additional ATF agents.

The control of American arms heading south into Mexico is an important issue that must be addressed; to leave this issue as a secondary objective will continue to give the assorted drug trafficking organizations the use of our weapons for their illegal, destabilizing, and deadly activities. As mentioned previously in this section, many of the laws that are currently in place in the United States are inadequate in providing suitable oversight into who is acquiring these weapons. According to Kindra Mohr of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, “Some U.S. states, such as New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona, do not place purchasing limits on assault weapons, magazines, or handguns. Moreover, background checks are not required for gun show sales…”163 This fact should be of concern to American policymakers as well as security officials. The relative ease in which automatic weapons can be purchased in the states that border Mexico is alarming. State Legislative members must take a closer look at the

laws currently in place, and find a balance between American’s 2nd amendment rights to bear arms and the security risk to the United States that these current regulations may put in place.

The United States should ratify the convention that took place in 1997 in order to demonstrate to the other signatories its determination to disrupt the flow of weapons to Mexico. Furthermore, the U.S. should hire additional ATF agents as well as border patrol officers. Presently, the American border patrol officers are guarding a vast and porous area that is dangerous and secluded with limited man-power and other resources. These officers should have adequate numbers as well as equipment to perform the all-important job of protecting the nation’s border. Many of these individuals are attacked by members of the DTOs as well as bandits who rob and murder Mexican citizens who traverse the area illegally. In December of 2010, border Patrol agent Brian A. Terry was murdered during a fire-fight with suspected Mexican bandits. This act by Mexican bandits that operate in the border region displays their contempt for American law enforcement officers and demonstrates the urgency for additional border patrol agents in the area. In order to assist the law enforcement officers who are working in the border region, further deployments of members of the National Guard should be implemented as soon as possible.

In the summer of 2010, President Obama ordered National Guard troops to the Southwestern border in order to stem the tide of illegal immigrants moving into the United States as well as curtail the movement of illicit narcotics. These same forces

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would also prove to be helpful in interdicting smuggled American made weapons. The Obama administration stated that 1200 National Guard soldiers would deploy to the states of Arizona, Texas, California, and New Mexico.\(^{165}\) Although the order to deploy the troops is admirable and productive, the number of soldiers that are presently on the border are not adequate. The President must reconsider the importance of border security and send additional troops. Individuals may critique the move as possible militarization of the border; however, the seriousness and destabilizing effect of massive weapons flows to Mexico, along with the bulk cash heading south and illicit narcotics heading north, makes the move extremely important. The Obama administration must make difficult decisions when considering the security of the American border with Mexico. Additional troops in that area will make it difficult for members of the drug trafficking organizations to smuggle American weapons back into Mexico.

This section of the chapter focused on the transfer of American made automatic weapons into the country of Mexico. The various drug trafficking organizations operating in Mexico use these weapons to devastating effect against the Mexican military and police forces. Regrettably, many of these weapons cause the death of hundreds of civilians caught in the fighting. The United States has attempted to lessen the flow of weapons by adding federal ATF agents, and deploying National Guard soldiers. Nevertheless, American policymakers should endeavor to hire additional federal agents and deploy more National Guard soldiers to the border in order to disrupt the flow of weapons. The first two sections in this chapter dealt primarily with the supply-side of the

problem. The next, and last policy option, will center on the demand-side. This issue receives less attention; yet, it is extremely important.

**American Consumption and the Illicit Narcotics Trade**

The United States must implement a policy that curbs the demand-side of the narcotics trade in a way that is comparable to the effort that the U.S. puts into interdiction. A robust and well-funded policy in this area will help curtail the narcotics flow into America: the smaller percentage of Americans that wants illicit narcotics will hinder the assorted drug trafficking organizations operations because of the dwindling demand. This aspect of the narcotics trade, the high demand, has received less attention in the United States. Although the U.S. has put efforts into treatment and prevention of the use of drugs, the money and time allocated for this effort is but a secondary issue to the interdiction policy that the United States implements.

Additional funds to anti-drug campaigns, education about the dangers of drugs, and counseling for those who are addicted to drugs should be vigorously pursued. The long history of America’s dilemma with illegal drug use focuses heavily on the demand-side of the problem. The focus on the demand-side of the narcotics problem is important; however, a strategy that focuses heavily on enforcement, as recent events have shown, will have limited success against established drug sellers in the United States.166 American policymakers should focus more attention on prevention and treatment. This

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activity may slow the flow of illicit narcotics into the United States. Additionally, treatment and prevention endeavors will be extremely cheaper than focusing heavily on enforcement practices.\textsuperscript{167}

The described American policies, Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative, largely focused on the interdiction aspects of the supply-side of narcotics. This is a noble and necessary endeavor. American legislative members, though, should put a great deal of emphasis on preventing future American drug use. Several options include increasing the number of drug rehabilitation clinics, making drug counseling sessions more available (cheaper and closer to home) for those who are already addicted, and increase spending on drug prevention programs (such as D.A.R.E.) aimed at younger citizens. These ideas are largely occurring within the United States; however, the funding for these initiatives are principally overshadowed by the moneys and man-power dedicated to interdiction. “In fiscal year 2003, for example, 53 percent of the president’s requested drug control budget was for enforcement, 29 percent for treatment, and 18 percent for prevention. The emphasis on enforcement is often pointed out by critics of prevailing spending priorities.”\textsuperscript{168} The spending priority of the U.S. government in relation to the drug problem in America has changed little since 2003. American policymakers should attempt to balance between the interdiction policies currently in-place with more emphasis on the demand-side of the narcotics problem by strengthening prevention and treatment policies already occurring. Limiting drug use in America will not only disrupt

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid

the flow of illicit narcotics from Mexico, but it will also assist the Mexican government in their attempt to prevent a failed state scenario.

This chapter focused on the current United States foreign policy towards the country of Mexico. First, the strategy known as Plan Colombia was introduced in order to examine American policy towards Latin America; Second, the current plan towards Mexico known as The Merida Initiative was elaborated upon; and Third, this chapter introduced three policy options that American officials should examine in order to ease the power of the assorted Mexican drug trafficking organizations, and strengthen civil society in the United States by preventing further drug consumption and treat those who are suffering from drug use.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The violence and uncertainty that many Mexican citizens face on a daily basis is comparable to the Mexican revolution that occurred early in the 20th century. The fierce circumstances that many in Mexico face today is primarily due to the ultra-violent Mexican drug trafficking organizations, and their desire to secure the illicit drug market and corridors into the United States. Additionally, the deployment of thousands of Mexican military and police have heightened the violence in many parts of Mexico. This situation led the United States Joint Forces command to articulate in their Joint Operating Environment (JOE) that Mexico has the potential for a “rapid and sudden collapse.”¹⁶⁹ This statement by the United States Department of Defense should elucidate tangible feelings within the whole of the United States government as well as every American citizen. The JOE that the Joint Forces Command released was not commenting on a destabilized country 7,000 miles away, but a country that rests on the doorstep of the American Southwest: a large country that has a porous border which encompasses almost 2,000 miles, and is adjacent to four American states. Due to this statement by the Joint Forces command, and the geographical relationship that the United States and Mexico share, this thesis was written in order to elaborate upon the potential adverse effects on

United States national security if Mexico became a failed state. As mentioned previously in this thesis, it is not the intention of this piece to present an argument that Mexico will become a failed state; only to provide a cogent articulation of the American national security implications if this event should occur.

The opening portion of this thesis elaborated upon the current situation in Mexico, the research question, thesis statement and the purpose of the thesis. Presently, I believe that it is important to restate both the research question as well as the thesis statement in order to focus on the purpose of the thesis. The research question for this thesis asks the following query: How would the national security of the United States be affected if Mexico becomes a failed state? Accordingly, I have generated the following thesis statement: A failed state scenario in the country of Mexico due to the actions of the drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) that operate throughout the Mexican state, systemic government corruption, Mexican insurgent groups, and human rights violations will have an adverse effect on the national security of the United States.

In order to establish the reasoning behind why Mexico may become a failed state, Chapter 2 in this thesis listed and elaborated upon four different sources. The first source for possible Mexican state failure would be due to the actions of the various Mexican drug trafficking organizations. These assorted DTOs are wreaking havoc upon many areas in the Mexican state; consequently, the actions of these groups are destabilizing the security of Mexico in a grave way. The next source dealt with the systemic Mexican government corruption that plagues many branches and departments. Overall, the Mexican police forces are the least trusted of government institutions; however, the
respect and esteem that the Mexican military has enjoyed over the country’s history has also been tarnished due to its expanded role in the fight against the various DTOs. The subsequent source in Chapter 2 dealt with possible human rights violations that many Mexican citizens accuse the police as well as the Mexican military in committing. Lastly, Chapter 2 of the thesis dealt with the diverse Mexican insurgent groups that operate in Mexico, primarily in the Southern section of the country. Although many of these groups have turned to peaceful, political means to accomplish their objectives, attacks on government, and private institutions still take place.  

These four areas are the sources of possible Mexican state failure that are listed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As mentioned previously, I have used the definition of a failed state as articulated by the organization, The Fund for Peace: This organization tracks and documents those states which are failing as well as those countries that are already labeled as failed states in its database known as the “Failed States Index.” The Fund for Peace defines a failed state as one that has a “… loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force…erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.” The next chapter in this thesis dealt with the implications of Mexican state failure on United States

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national security. This chapter is the focal point in the thesis; this chapter provides the basis for defending the thesis statement.

Chapter 3 provides the possible implications on American national security if Mexico becomes a failed state. The first implication deals with the continued operations of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. These groups are the main source of insecurity within Mexico due to the violence that they inflict upon the country and its citizens. Some of these groups are attempting to increase their influence in the United States by using American land for the cultivation of illicit drugs as well as conducting surveillance on American law enforcement on the United States side of the border. Additionally, there are reports that suggest that these groups have strong ties to several American street gangs; this issue is the next topic in the chapter. American street gangs are reportedly working with some of the DTOs in order to secure drug areas within the United States, and expand their influence. This action may become more destabilizing for the United States as members of these American gangs are also seeking military training and then teaching these techniques to fellow gang members. The next topic covered in this chapter deals with regional instability.

The section on regional instability provides a broad overview of the implications on American national security due to a Mexican failed state. The next issue in Chapter 3 deals with possible exploitation by foreign terrorist organizations on Mexican soil. The declaration of war on the United States in 1996 by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization is a clear threat to the American homeland. This organization, and possibly other hostile groups, may use an ungovernable lawless state to plan, train, and execute further attacks.
on the United States. The issue of a failed Mexican state, which will undoubtedly have less security, would be ideal for the operations of these types of groups. The next section in Chapter 3 deals with the possible economic costs on America if Mexico becomes a failed state.

The United States and Mexico are important trading partners. A large portion of the oil that the United States receives is exported by the Mexican state. Furthermore, the Mexican government controls the workings of the oil companies which adds to the seriousness of the situation. The following issue in this chapter explores the deleterious effects of massive refugee flows into the United States. Many Mexican citizens have fled their homes in order to escape the violence, and many of these individuals may attempt to enter the United States if the Mexican government can no longer ensure their safety. This action will have economic costs on the United States and could provide terrorist organizations possible cover in order to infiltrate their members into the United States. The last two issues dealt with in Chapter 3 include possible exploitation by foreign states, and American border state implications.

The possible exploitation by foreign states section in Chapter 3 includes Iran, Russia and China. These states are pursuing greater influence in the Latin American region, and these countries are tradionally allied against the interests of the United States. These states may seek to expand their influence in Mexico in order to exert some authority in the western hemisphere. Lastly, Chapter 3 elaborates upon the American states that border Mexico, and how these states may become effected if Mexico can no longer act as the sovereign power within their borders.
Chapter 4 in this thesis provided insight into American involvement in Latin America’s fight against drug trafficking by elaborating upon the operations in Colombia as well as the current policy known as The Merida Initiative in Mexico. Additionally, this chapter included a section on possible policy options that the American government may utilize toward Mexico. The policy options included deploying American Special Forces teams to Mexico in order to train the military and police; suggestions on how to lessen the availability of American weapons to the Mexican drug trafficking organizations; and lastly, a proposal to counter illicit drug consumption in the United States. The possibility of Mexican state failure, and the implications that this scenario has on the national security of the United States is an important issue. The likelihood of state failure occurring in Mexico at present seems low; however, American policymakers and security officials should ensure that every feasible course of action is examined in order to make certain the security and safety of the American citizenry.
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