

The End of Civil War, the Rise of Narcotrafficking and the Implementation of the Merida Initiative in Central America

In February 2007, three Salvadoran congressmen, including Congressman Eduardo D'Aubuisson—the son of Roberto D'Aubuisson—and the founder of the *Alianza Republicana Nactionalista* Party (ARENA), were murdered on a Guatemalan farm near the town of El Jocotillo.¹ At first, the killings appeared politically motivated, but later evidence indicated that the assassins tore apart the congressmen's car in a search for drugs and money. Two days after the killings, authorities arrested four Guatemalan police officers for the murders, after they confessed that they thought the congressmen were Colombian drug dealers carrying cash. Three days after their confession, an armed commando entered the maximum-security jail where the arrested officers were held and shot them dead.²

In the months that followed, the government prosecuted several high-ranking Guatemalans, including a congressman, state governor and at least twelve civilians and police officers in connection with the murders.³ The killings shocked Central America, but this type of violence was nothing new.

El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua suffered from decades of civil war, which spilled over into Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the backward socioeconomic situation and the lack of reform in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and even Honduras led to an escalation of their civil wars during the 1970s and 1980s. The conflicts became a part of the Cold War, further heightening Central American tensions, as both the United States and the Soviet Union vied for regional influence by providing military assistance to revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. The death tolls were high. In El Salvador, roughly 70,000 people lost their lives by the war's end in 1992. Nicaragua suffered 80,000 deaths by 1991, while Guatemala lost 200,000 people between 1954 and 1996.⁴

Central America's civil wars devastated a generation, but the murders of the Salvadorian congressmen revealed a new trend in its turbulent history. Cocaine, that lucrative but illegal commodity, displaced ideology as the basis for Central America's violence.

Histories about the War on Drugs in Central America have focused on individual countries or criminal elements involved in narcotrafficking.⁵ However, the research has not discussed the impact of Central America's civil wars and how they affected regional drug trafficking. How was Central America transformed into a hub for narcotrafficking during its civil wars? How did the post-civil war period influence Central America's ability to respond to narcotrafficking? How did drug-related violence in Central America come to resemble the violence witnessed during its civil wars?

Using newly acquired primary sources obtained through a U.S. Department of State declassification process, traditional open-source government documents and secondary sources, this paper attempts to show how Central America's civil wars and its weak political institutions left the region vulnerable to narcotrafficking syndicates and violent criminal gangs that threatened to destabilize the region as a whole. The emerging narcotrafficking/gang problem led to the development of radical responses and contentious international counternarcotics programs that sowed regional instability similar to that experienced during Central America's civil war era.

The Initial Colombian-Mexican Connection in Central America

During the 1980s, revolution in Central America facilitated the growth of regional narcotrafficking.⁶ Inconclusive allegations of drug trafficking were leveled against many of the participants, including the Contra organizations *Ailanza Revolucionaria Democrática* (ARDE) and the *Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense* (FDN). Allegations also targeted Honduran protection for international trafficker Juan Ramon Matta Ballesteros, the Sandinista *Dirección*

General de Seguridad del Estado (DGSE), and Cuba's *Dirección General de Información* (DGI) involvement with the Colombian guerrilla organization *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19). Authorities brought greater evidence against the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega (1983-1989) for his association with the Medellín cartel, which led to the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989. While much has been written on this subject matter elsewhere, mentioning it is important, because the Medellín cartel developed narcotrafficking ties with every interest listed above during the height of the region's civil wars.⁷

As the civil wars wound down in the early 1990s, a nexus between Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) emerged. U.S. efforts to slow drug traffic in the Caribbean during the late 1980s with Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) motivated Andean drug traffickers to shift their trafficking operations to the Pacific corridor, towards Central America and Mexico.⁸ Corruption and the porous U.S. southwest border enabled Colombian DTOs to create solid partnerships with Mexican syndicates, which the Colombians used to smuggle cocaine and heroin into the United States.⁹ The Deputy Attorney General of the PGR in charge of Mexico's anti-narcotics police, Javier Coello Trejo, succinctly described Mexico as a "trampoline for Colombian cocaine."¹⁰ By 1989, 70 percent of Colombian cocaine was moving into Mexico, often run through Central America, which was used as a storage and transshipment point.¹¹ For the Colombian and Mexican narcotraffickers, Central America offered an unchecked path to elude U.S. and Andean counternarcotics efforts.

The Medellín cartel formed the initial Mexican-Colombian relationship in the late 1980s. Honduran trafficker Ramon Matta Ballesteros arranged the first known contact between Mexican DTOs and the Medellín cartel. Ballesteros introduced Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo (a.k.a. *El Padrino*), the leader of the Guadalajara cartel and father of the Tijuana and Sinaloa cartels, to

Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, a founding member of the Medellín cartel. In 1986, the murder of DEA Agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena led to the break-up of the Guadalajara cartel, which ended with Felix Gallardo's arrest in 1989. From jail, Gallardo orchestrated the division of the Guadalajara cartel among its “second generation” associates.¹²

During this time, trafficker Arturo Eng Guerrero helped the Medellín cartel strengthen its ties with the Arellano Felix organization, which operated out of Tijuana.¹³ The initial Medellín-Tijuana cartel operation took advantage of Mexican smuggling routes along the U.S. border. The Colombians paid Mexican smugglers \$1,000 for each kilo of cocaine they moved into the U.S. The Medellín cartel reacquired the cocaine after it entered the country.¹⁴

By the early 1990s, pressure from Colombian authorities forced the Medellín cartel to modify its operations. As a result, they gave Mexican syndicates more responsibility over trafficking operations. Rather than paying Mexican DTOs to move cocaine into the United States, the Medellín cartel provided Mexican DTOs, such as the Arellano Felix cartel, with cocaine, and allowed them to set up their own distribution networks in the United States.¹⁵ The 1992 arrest of Javier Pardo Cardona, the Medellín cartel’s main contact with Mexican DTOs, signaled the decline of the Medellín's influence in Mexico. However, their rivals, the Cali cartel, had already filled the void.¹⁶

According to the Department of State, because of Colombia’s focus on the Medellín cartel, the Calí cartel took responsibility for most of the trafficking through Mexico as early as 1990.¹⁷ The U.S. State Department also reported that the Mexican government’s use of radar and its implementation of a shoot-down policy in 1990 caused the Cali cartel to put a moratorium on multi-aircraft drug convoys to Mexico. They shifted their aviation operations southward from northern Mexico into Guatemala and, sources suspect, El Salvador, in order to move the cocaine

through Mexico by surface vehicles to the U.S.¹⁸ Working together, the Mexican and Cali cartels moved their staging areas to southern Mexico and neighboring Central America.¹⁹

The Cali cartel differed from the flamboyant Medellín cartel, best exemplified by Pablo Escobar. They preferred to associate with subtler Mexican traffickers who worked within the Mexican system. The Cali cartel developed close ties with Juan García Ábrego, the leader of the Gulf cartel.²⁰ Ábrego offered to handle all the cocaine shipments into the United States in exchange for 50 percent of the profits.²¹ By 1994, the Gulf cartel was handling as much as one-third of all cocaine shipments into the U.S. from Cali cartel suppliers.²² In Guadalajara, Mexico, the Cali cartel established connections with the La Familia cartel, an anti-drug vigilante group in the state of Michoacan that evolved into a DTO affiliated with the Gulf cartel.²³

The Cali cartel also developed ties with Amado Carrillo Fuentes, who emerged as the undisputed leader of the Ciudad Juárez cartel by 1993. In January 1992, Cali cartel leader Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela met with Carrillo Fuentes in Guatemala, where they agreed that Carrillo Fuentes would fly 727 jets loaded with cocaine from Colombia to Mexico. Carrillo Fuentes' air trafficking operation earned him the nickname "Lord of the Skies."²⁴ The Cali cartel preferred to work with Fuentes because he maintained tight security and compartmentalized his organization. He influenced Mexican officials to look the other way, acting much like García Ábrego. For example, many believe Ábrego bribed Mario Ruiz Massieu, the Mexican Deputy Attorney General for Special Affairs, and Raul Salinas de Gortari to provide access to Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.²⁵

According to a convicted trafficker, the "Gulf cartel grew" with the "support of the corrupt political system." The Mexican police, the *Policía Judicial Federal Mexicana* (PJFM), "controlled 90 percent of the drug trafficking" because the cartels "control the PJFM."²⁶ The

rising power of the Mexican cartels led to increased trafficking throughout Central America.

The Rise of the Mexicans

As long as the Mexicans promised not to operate in the traditional Colombian strongholds of New York, Miami, and the rest of the U.S. eastern seaboard, the Mexicans and Colombians worked cooperatively.²⁷ The dismantling of the Medellín cartel in 1993 and the Cali cartel in 1996 gave rise to the appearance of an estimated three hundred mini-cartels in Colombia that organized themselves into small, decentralized groups that worked together.²⁸ As a result, the more dominant Mexican cartels replaced the Colombians as major international traffickers.

In 1996, Juarez cartel leader Carrillo Fuentes called for meetings across Central America between Colombian and Mexican traffickers. In those meetings, the Mexicans told the Colombians that they must give up their U.S. drug markets. The Colombians could transport cocaine from the Andean region, but could carry it only as far as Mexico, where the Mexicans paid them in cash. Carrillo Fuentes then controlled the transport and distribution of cocaine into the United States and assumed control over U.S. markets.²⁹ Reeling from the break-up of the Medellín and Cali cartels, the decentralized Colombian cartels were in no position to oppose the Mexicans and, in many respects, preferred to leave the responsibility of moving cocaine into the United States up to them.³⁰

As part of the Colombian cartel decentralization process, the Colombians gave distribution rights to the Mexican cartels, so that much of the cocaine that moved through Mexico transited through Central America.³¹ The Alejandro Bernal Madrigal and Armando Valencia operation exemplifies the new trafficking arrangement and demonstrates how decentralized Colombian cartels formed close associations with the Mexicans. Through Bernal Madrigal and Valencia, the Colombian mini-cartels, such as the Norte de Valle cartel—an

offshoot of the Cali cartel,—cut deals with the Juarez and Arellano-Felix cartels. Diego Montoya, a member of the Norte de Valle cartel, organized multi-ton shipments for Bernal and Valencia, who then shipped twenty-to-thirty metric tons of cocaine every month through Central America to Mexico.³²

Guatemala: The Step into Central America

From 1990, U.S.–Mexican drug interdiction efforts, including Mexican radar, led Andean drug traffickers to adjust their routes to southern Mexico and Central America.³³ This shift occurred as Guatemala’s 40-year civil war continued in its remote northern highlands. Traffickers, such as the Cali cartel, shifted their air trafficking operations to Guatemala.³⁴ By 1993, 165-to-275 tons of cocaine and heroin out of an estimated eleven hundred tons produced in all of South America, moved through Central America annually.³⁵ The cartels began transshipment operations using sea, land and air routes from Guatemala.³⁶ Traffickers concentrated their activities in three regions: the coastal Pacific plains of southwestern Guatemala, the river valleys and isolated jungle flatlands of the northern Petén region and the area around Lake Izabal in eastern Guatemala. They considered Guatemala an attractive transit location because it had hundreds of unmonitored landing strips and no radar.³⁷

According to the U.S. Department of State, traffickers offloaded or transshipped cocaine via ground transport, or loaded it aboard general aviation aircraft for transfer from Central America to transshipment points in Mexico. For example, traffickers brought cocaine through Guatemala on its way to Mexico that was often initially moved from Colombia to remote parts of Panama. They moved the cocaine in small airplanes in order to avoid Panamanian radar stations, and then reloaded it onto aircraft that mixed with legitimate air traffic.³⁸ They frequently airdropped drug cargos over land and sea, rather than risk landing in Guatemala. From

Guatemala, traffickers shipped narcotics to Mexico using traditional air transportation, cargo containers, tractor-trailers, automobiles and boats.³⁹ To give perspective to Guatemala's increased importance, the largest seizure in Guatemalan history occurred in 1991, when Guatemalan officials seized three-and-a-half tons of cocaine on March 6, 1991.⁴⁰

The rapid expansion of opium production in Guatemala during the late 1980s enhanced Guatemala's attractiveness to traffickers. Growers cultivated *ampola* (opium poppy) in areas along the Mexican border with intense guerrilla activity. Mexican traffickers supplied the seeds, financing, and market for Guatemala's opium acreage. They then smuggled the raw opium gum to laboratories across the border where they converted it into heroin.⁴¹ Most of the opium gum produced in Guatemala supplied Mexican heroin trafficking organizations operating in Chiapas. According to the Mexican Attorney General's Office, the *Procurador General de la República* (PGR), were Guatemalan traffickers who sold their illicit product to Mexican traffickers, who then resold their product to Mexican laboratory operators and financiers, due to the price differentials between the two borders. Moreover, because planting was safer in Guatemala, Mexican traffickers preferred to purchase cheaper Guatemalan opium. In 1990, the price for a kilogram of opium in Guatemala was between \$1,275-\$1,450, compared to \$6,550-\$7,275 in Mexico.⁴²

Throughout the early 1990s, the border between Mexico and Guatemala was considered a "sieve" because of the high concentration of weapons, guerrillas and narcotics.⁴³ The Guatemalan guerrilla organization *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) relied on weak border security along the Guatemalan-Mexican border, as they used Mexico as a location for weapons, rest, relaxation and training. Low-level Mexican officials, who seemed "more interested in extorting bribes...than halting the flow of illegal commodities," assisted the

narcotraffickers.

The U.S. Department of State expressed significant concern that Guatemala's back roads and illicit airfields facilitated drug activity and supplemented the Nicaraguan pipeline to the *Farabundo Martí Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) guerrilla movement in El Salvador.⁴⁴ When the Guatemalan government attempted to take the initiative against trafficking, the URNG guerrillas declared that the struggle against narcotics was a cover for U.S. counterinsurgency intervention.⁴⁵ Because of Guatemala's poor human rights record, the U.S. stated it would not provide assistance to its military. Nevertheless, in 1991, the United States initiated a joint U.S.-Guatemalan interdiction effort called Operation Cadence. The U.S. offered Guatemala an estimated \$48.1 million in land, sea and air radar assets, as well as the deployment of U.S. law enforcement agents to assist with aircraft interdiction.

Narcotrafficking Routes: The Expansion into Central America

By 1990, the effects of civil war had wrecked Central America. El Salvador reeled from its decade-long civil war that did not end until 1992. Honduras had been converted into militarized nation with one of the poorest populations on the earth. Hostilities in Nicaragua, which lasted from 1981-1990, devastated the country economically and politically. Costa Rica endured the presence of Contra and Sandinista forces along its porous border, which threatened its status as a neutral nation. The overthrow of Manuel Noriega in December 1989 left Panama in an unbalanced state seeking to form a new and stable democracy. The void caused by civil war enabled narcotraffickers to flourish throughout the region.

As early as 1987, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported that Colombians and Mexicans were forming operational bases for trafficking in El Salvador and Honduras.⁴⁶ As Central America's civil wars ended, a process of "Colombianization" began, which the region

was unprepared to address. According to the U.S. government, the Central American nations had “neither the resources nor the institutional capability to address the new drug trafficking modes.”⁴⁷ Traffickers who avoided Central America in the past because of armed insurrections now looked to Central America as a way to supplement their traditional transportation routes to the United States. Peace, accompanied by NAFTA's implementation on January 1, 1994, opened up Mexican and Central American borders.⁴⁸ According to the DEA, “the entire Central American isthmus” became “a trampoline” with a lot of “cooperation among traffickers from different countries.”⁴⁹

The Salvadorian government and the FMLN signed a peace accord on February 1, 1992. As FMLN guerrillas and Salvadorian government soldiers laid down their arms, a wave of crime and general lawlessness spread throughout the country. U.S. State Department sources predicted that of the “thousands of unskilled demobilized FMLN combatants and Salvadorian soldiers,” some would retain their arms and resort to banditry.⁵⁰

While the main source of crime came from banditry along El Salvador's roads, traffickers such as the *Perrones* and the *Cartel de Taxis*—the main conduits for Colombian cocaine through El Salvador during the 1990s and the 2000s—used the Inter-American Highway to move cocaine and heroin towards Guatemala and Mexico.⁵¹ El Salvador's President, Alfredo Christiani (1989-1994) oversaw the peace accords and expressed deep concern over the expansion of the drug trade in his country.⁵² Since Mexico tracked aircraft, Salvadorian authorities believed that traffickers were taking advantage of their lack of radar to land and offload drug-laden aircraft at remote airstrips that once served El Salvador's cotton fields along the Pacific coastline. Traffickers also moved narcotics via coastal smuggling, using El Salvador as a third-party transit route. To avoid scrutiny upon arriving in the United States, they changed the point of origin of

shipments from Colombia and Peru, by unloading them at the port of Acajulta.⁵³

Nicaragua became a favored spot for narcotrafficking due to its remote and sparsely populated coastline, easy access to the Inter-American Highway and limited government resources to combat trafficking activities.⁵⁴ Struggling to resolve its civil war beginning with the 1987 Esquipulas Peace Agreement, Nicaragua could not cope with the expanding drug trade. According to Fernando Caldera, a Nicaraguan police chief, “[D]uring the Contra War,” drug traffickers stayed away from Nicaragua’s coast because they would run into a “well-trained army backed by widespread radar and counterespionage in the interior.”⁵⁵ However, the Nicaraguan government of Violetta Chamorro (1990-1997), which supported United States counternarcotics programs, was unable to provide more than vocal assistance.⁵⁶ After reductions in the armed forces in 1991, coupled with severe cuts to the police budget, Nicaragua’s anti-drug police force consisted of no more than half a dozen full-time officers in Managua. This left the Atlantic coast wide open to Colombian and Mexican traffickers. According to the DEA, airdrops from low-lying aircraft to waiting speedboats frequently served as a shipment method along Nicaragua’s vast Miskito Coast, with its numerous inlets and estuaries.⁵⁷ The DEA reported that starting in May 1990, drug trafficking had substantially increased out of Puerto Cabezas and the Bluefields of the Miskito coast.⁵⁸ In 1991, Nicaraguan Vice Minister of the Interior Dr. Jose Pallais stated: “[N]arcotrafficking was becoming a problem for all Nicaraguans,” especially on the “Atlantic coast where trafficking was on the increase.”⁵⁹

Although Honduras did not suffer as heavily as its neighbors from the impact of civil war during the 1980s, it was an important transit route for cocaine entering the United States and Europe.⁶⁰ In the wake of Matta Ballesteros’ SETCO operation in the mid-1980s, Colombian DTOs continued to move cocaine through Honduras. The significant Colombian groups

responsible for moving narcotics into Honduras included the Colombian *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), and the *Norte de Valle del Cauca* cartel.

By the mid-1990s, Mexican DTOs, especially the Sinaloa cartel, took over the movement of Colombian cocaine through Honduras.⁶¹ Their predominant trafficking method was maritime smuggling, for which the fishing fleet provided excellent cover.⁶² Familial ties and a minimal government presence allowed the Bay Islands to serve as a transit center for Colombian and Mexican cocaine shipments.⁶³ The DTOs also smuggled narcotics out of Honduras and into Caribbean islands, such as the Cayman Islands, where they then transported the drugs in smaller loads to Florida.⁶⁴

Costa Rica grew as a transit zone during the early 1990s. Costa Rica's 1948 constitution outlawed a standing army. A scarcity of resources such as ships and aircraft and the lack of a professional police force hampered the country's narcotics control. During the Arias administration (1986-1990), Costa Rica looked at U.S. counternarcotics security assistance with suspicion.⁶⁵ Owing to the nature of the war in Nicaragua and the ARDE presence on the border, Arias was concerned that U.S. military aid might be perceived as violation of Costa Rican neutrality. As a result, the Costa Rican police received only light arms to use against sophisticated smuggling networks.⁶⁶ Costa Rica's weak police force left it vulnerable to penetration by criminal groups, narcotics traffickers from the Andean ridge and, potentially, international terrorists who sought to take advantage of Costa Rica's pluralist, pacifist society, which tolerated differing ethical viewpoints.⁶⁷

Following a trafficking pattern seen in other Central American nations, planes and large "mother" ships dropped off plastic bundles of cocaine for smaller speedboats to pick up and ferry

to the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. In one incident, fishermen found an empty barrel equipped with a radio transmitter floating offshore with three thousand kilograms of cocaine. Costa Rican Interior Minister Luis Fishman Zonzinski declared that Costa Rica was “wide open to cocaine smugglers.” He added, “[W]e have no army, no radar, no planes, no boats... [T]here’s very little we can do to stop the growing flow.”⁶⁸

Panama remained an important center for money laundering and trafficking following Operation Just Cause, the U.S. invasion of Panama, which took place between December 1989 and January 1990. U.S. officials were convinced that drug trafficking was increasing and that Panama had become a haven for money laundering, however, the DEA stated that Operation Just Cause only temporarily disrupted this activity.⁶⁹ Panamanian strongman General Manuel Noriega had tightly controlled who ran drugs through Panama; in his absence, Panama became a “free for all” for drug trafficking. As a result of Noriega’s authoritarian legacy, the Panamanian government limited its defense and police force strength, adding to the chaotic atmosphere.⁷⁰ With \$6 billion in foreign debt, a 14-16 percent unemployment rate between 1990 and 1992, and inadequate security, Panama's ability to deal with narcotrafficking looked worse than it was under the Noriega regime.⁷¹

Panama was a major transshipment point for cocaine from the Andean region. With 135 miles of impassible, dense rainforest in the Darien Gap on the Colombian border, seventeen hundred miles of coastline marked with coves suited for smuggling, and more than fifteen hundred offshore islands, Panama was a smuggler's dream.⁷² Smugglers sent drugs to Panama via sea and air, and then transferred them to larger ships in Panamanian waters or sent them out of the country via ports or airports.⁷³ In addition, by 1993, ninety-hectare coca fields started to appear in the Darien region. Panama’s law enforcement agencies were simply unable to patrol all

of the transshipment points around Panama.⁷⁴

The Guillermo Endara government (1989-1994) wanted to work closely with the United States, but was marred by scandal. In 1990, the Panamanian newspaper *El Siglo* reported that Endara was associated with Interbanco, a bank accused of money laundering. Endara had been a lawyer and director for Interbanco from its start in 1974. Guillermo Ronderos Durán, a Baranquilla financier who founded the bank, had close ties to members of the Medellín and Cali cartels, including Rodríguez Gacha, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela and the Ochoa brothers.⁷⁵ This revelation and the imprisonment of Dagoberto Franco, the reporter who uncovered this information, undermined U.S. support for Panama's anti-drug programs.⁷⁶

Money laundering in Panama was another major concern. For money launderers, the instability caused by the end of Noriega's regime had been "bad for business," but that soon changed following his overthrow. In 1991, bank deposits fueled by drug money reached \$21 billion, compared to the low of \$8.5 billion in 1989. Moreover, the total number of shell companies in Panama used as fronts fell to eight hundred a month in 1989, but climbed to more than thirteen hundred a month in 1991.⁷⁷ According to the DEA, the use of Panama as a money laundering center and Panama's "inability or unwillingness" to curb those operations was the biggest problem for international law enforcement in Panama.⁷⁸

The Panamanians approached the issue of money laundering only half-heartedly, because they feared that confronting it would destroy both the banking sector and the Colón Free Trade Zone.⁷⁹ Panama's effort to control narcotrafficking was failing on all fronts. In 1994, the United States did not certify Panama as cooperating with the United States or taking adequate measures to adhere to the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.⁸⁰

Post-Civil War Counternarcotics Policy in Central America

Some observers of U.S.-Central American relations have argued that the United States largely ignored the region in the aftermath of its civil wars.⁸¹ However, while U.S. military posturing decreased, the U.S. government did engage proactively with Central American governments to develop counternarcotics programs. As one 1990 State Department cable put it: “[A] well coordinated Central American counternarcotics strategy is desirable and worthy of pursuit.” It added, “[T]hough we must avoid overly ambitious goals which practically cannot be achieved, this does not mean that we should not try to get moving.”⁸²

The regional counternarcotics programs suffered from both a lack of resources and the Central American governments' myopic response to the need to implement a rigorous program to stop the Colombian and Mexican traffickers who worked with home-grown *contrabandistas*. According to a 1994 General Accounting Office report, “[N]one of the Central America countries had the resources necessary to purchase sophisticated equipment and to develop well-trained personnel to combat well-financed, creative and highly adaptable traffickers.”⁸³ To further illustrate this point, the State Department embassy in Panama observed in 1990 that “Central American countries need to understand better that they’re in it with the rest of us and so should take the problem seriously and pay more than lip service” to “just how serious the threat” was.⁸⁴

The post-war era presented hurdles to the establishment of effective counternarcotics programs in every country. Political questions surrounding demilitarization and professionalization ruled the debates regarding the creation of the new counternarcotics police forces. The Salvadorian and Guatemalan peace agreements put limitations on their creation. Both countries excluded active members of the military from counternarcotics forces in order to

prevent the military from influencing internal security. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas maintained that only the Contras had been involved in drug operations. The Chamorro government countered by stating that a counternarcotics program would remain “limited” as long as “the Ministry of Interior staff remained populated by Sandinista personnel.”⁸⁵ Moreover, the counternarcotics program stalled with the formation of criminal bands called the *Recontras*. Former Sandinista soldiers who called themselves *Recompas* joined them. According to the U.S. Department of State, “[P]reoccupation with rural insurgency” prevented “government officials from focusing on the narcotics problem.”⁸⁶

U.S. budgetary constraints reduced U.S. counternarcotics aid to Costa Rica from \$272,000 in 1993, to \$133,000 in 1995.⁸⁷ According to the U.S. Department of State, the “government of Costa Rica” was expected to shoulder “a greater share of the burden for its internal security.”⁸⁸ In Panama, the government hoped to achieve total demilitarization of the public security forces by eliminating all militarized aspects of the last twenty years. The fear of remilitarization gave rise to Panamanian reluctance to participate in any type of military effort to counter narcotrafficking.⁸⁹ By 2000, the U.S. embassy in Panama observed that heavy drug trafficking by Colombian FARC guerrillas and drugs gangs had saturated the Panamanian border. AUC paramilitaries clashed with the FARC in the border region and threatened to target the Panamanian National Police (PNP) for their alleged collaboration with the FARC in the Darien region—a relationship that dated back to the dictatorship of Omar Torrijos (1972-1981).⁹⁰ Moreover, the U.S. embassy noted that Colombian gangs colonized Panama’s slums to provide logistical bases to move drugs, people and cash to Central America and the U.S.⁹¹

Post-civil war narcotrafficking in Central America also contributed to institutional corruption. The demobilization of Central America’s military and guerrilla forces converted

many who participated in the civil wars into hired hands for Colombian and Mexican narcotraffickers.⁹² Observers of the War on Drugs alleged that the Central American militaries and their intelligence networks rented out their services to the cartels when they demobilized. In 1990, the Nicaraguan (Sandinista) police chief Rene Vivas claimed that the militaries in Central America—specifically those in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala—which were protected by the U.S., controlled narcotrafficking.⁹³

The editor of the newspaper *La Hora*, Oscar Clemente Marroquin, summed up the situation: “[W]hen the war stopped, the state apparatus kept operating the same way,” but now “it protects organized crime.”⁹⁴ In 2010, the United Nations claimed that many of the major busts involved connections to government officials, especially in the security and justice services.⁹⁵

Numerous examples exist to support the United Nations claim. In February 2002, Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004) abolished the *Departamento de Operaciones Antinarcóticas* (DOAN), created in 1994 to serve as Guatemala’s anti-narcotics force. Portillo’s decision occurred after sixteen DOAN agents killed two villagers and held residents from the village of Chocón hostage for three days while searching for narcotics being transshipped through Chocón. Behind the scenes, claims arose that the agents were in Chocón to steal the two tons of cocaine allegedly in the town.⁹⁶ In 2006, the Panamanian government expelled Major Oscar Herazo, the chief of police in the Santa Fe de Veraguas region of Panama, from the national police, because of his involvement with a criminal network that stole drugs from traffickers. Due to a lack of evidence, the Panamanian Supreme Court acquitted Herazo of his crime.⁹⁷ In 2008, El Salvador’s national police chief, Francisco Rovira, was forced to resign from his position after an investigation revealed that two of his aides ran a security-consulting firm that advised suspected drug traffickers and used police license plates without authorization.⁹⁸

The post-civil war integration of Central American police and military forces into counternarcotics forces made corruption inevitable. These few examples simply demonstrate the problem of narco-corruption and its potential to subvert Central American institutions from within.

The Gang Nexus

Nowhere did the post-war economic and political restructuring have a greater impact than on Central America's youth. Young people, defined as those between fifteen and twenty-four years old, comprised 21 percent of the total population and suffered from an unemployment rate of over 10 percent in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama between 1995 and 2005.⁹⁹ The gang problem began when displaced and uneducated youth turned to crime as a solution to the challenges of demobilization and reconstruction.¹⁰⁰

U.S. deportation of Central American gang members who belonged to the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the *Calle-18* (18th Street) also led to gang growth. Members of these gangs were children of refugees from El Salvador's civil war imprisoned in the U.S. following the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The deportation of gang members began in 1994 and increased in 1996, with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA).¹⁰¹ Upon arrival in Central America, the deportees organized youth gangs in El Salvador. They then spread to the rest of Central America, especially to Honduras and then Guatemala, after its peace accord in 1996.¹⁰² Within Central America, the *pandillas* (gangs) looked to replicate the U.S. *machismo* street gang culture and lifestyle. The gangs earned notoriety for acts of violence, assaults and robberies committed daily against innocent civilians. Many demobilized guerrillas who had fought with the FMLN were young, which made them susceptible to joining the Salvadorian gangs.¹⁰³

According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, “[C]ontrary to popular belief the gangs were highly structured and modeled” like a “guerrilla organization.”¹⁰⁴ The gang leaders were former Special Forces members from both sides of the civil wars, which enhanced gang discipline. Former Honduran, Nicaraguan, Guatemalan and Salvadorian soldiers and guerrillas trained MS-13 and Calle-18 members in weapons firing, hand-to-hand combat, explosives fabrication and leadership.¹⁰⁵ The military background of MS-13 and Calle-18 leaders allowed the gangs to take over urban territory and curtail police efforts to control gang activity.¹⁰⁶

Some gang members returned to the United States after their deportation, creating a revolving door phenomenon in which gang members started to move from north to south and south to north.¹⁰⁷ In the process of crossing borders, the MS-13 and Calle-18 gangs became guns for hire and developed international connections with Mexican *coyotes* (smugglers of illegal immigrants) and DTOs.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the MS-13 and the Calle-18 solidified their alliance with the *Mafia Mexicana* (EME) prison gang. This alliance formed during the early 1990s, when the Central American gangs agreed to become *sureños* and pay homage to the Mexican Mafia in the *tregua de sur* (truce of the south).¹⁰⁹ Assisted by the Central Americans, the EME, with its close association to Mexican DTOs, maintained control over a major portion of the U.S.-Mexican cross-border drug trade. In 2005, Hurricane Stan diminished the Mexican government’s border control resources. This enabled the MS-13 and Calle 18 to push into central Mexico, broadening their network.¹¹⁰

The gangs moved not only drugs, but also humans, which further extended their criminal enterprise. The Central American gang diaspora provided a well-connected criminal network that spread from Central America to the United States.¹¹¹ The U.S. government feared that the gangs and the cartels in association with the *coyotes* could move members of Hezbollah and al Qaeda

from Central America into Mexico and then the U.S.¹¹² While many critics doubted gang ties to Islamic terrorism, Juan Carlos Bonilla, the director of the Honduran police, argued that through Afghan nationals, al Qaeda had developed ties with the MS-13 in El Salvador and Honduras. He alleged that they provided the MS-13 with paramilitary training and financial support.¹¹³ According to Attorney General John Ashcroft, a Saudi Arabian al Qaeda cell leader named Adnan G. El Shukrijumah met with members of the MS-13 in Honduras to discuss alien smuggling into Mexico and the United States in July 2004.¹¹⁴

Mexican Cartel–Central American Gang Cooperation

Gang and cartel activity along the U.S.-Mexican border was related to trafficking drugs, people and weapons.¹¹⁵ Despite rivalries among the Mexican cartels (El Chapo's Sinaloa cartel, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén's Gulf cartel, the Arellano Félix's Tijuana cartel, and the Juárez cartel), pandillas such as the MS-13 and Calle-18, as well the *Aztecas* (who were allied to the EME and *Nuestra Familia* prison gangs), served the various cartels as guns for hire. They did so despite their differences over territory and control over local narcotics distribution.¹¹⁶ However, as the gangs' participation in the drug trade increased, the MS-13 and Calle-18 became directly tied to El Chapo Guzman's Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas—an offshoot of the Gulf cartel.

A group of thirty deserters from Mexico's Special Air Mobile Force Group (*Grupo Aeromovil de Fuerzas Especiales*, GAFES) formed the Zetas, a DTO initially employed as enforcers for the Gulf cartel. The Zetas were a powerful Mexican DTO that violently attempted to take control over Central American trafficking networks.¹¹⁷ They moved into Guatemala in 2007. The Guatemalan Mendozas and Lorenzanas cartels hired the Zetas to squeeze out a rival DTO called the Leones cartel. In 2008, the Zetas completed the destruction of the Leones. However, rather than leave Guatemala, the Zetas took over the Leones' territory and put pressure

on the Mendoza cartel, whose members fled to Belize.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the Zetas developed links to Guatemala's special operations unit called the Kabiles.

When the Zetas moved into El Salvador, they used the Kabiles to provide military training for Zetas recruits, including members of the MS-13 and Calle-18.¹¹⁹ The Zetas initially used the MS 13 and Calle 18 as security along the Guatemalan and Honduran borders. As the Zetas and the *mara* gangs grew together, the gangs began to take payment in cocaine. Cocaine payments became a major source of violence as the gangs fought over distribution rights.¹²⁰ The MS-13's increasing coordination with the Zetas also led Mara leaders to formalize coordination among *clickas* in El Salvador and the U.S.¹²¹ Significantly, the MS-13 developed a presence in Nuevo Laredo where gang members from El Salvador, Dallas and North Carolina coordinated with the Zetas.¹²²

In addition to the Zetas, their rivals, the Sinaloa cartel, led by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, also asserted its power in Central America, especially in Honduras, by establishing its own heavily armed enforcer gangs, the *Negros* and *Pelones*. According to Honduran intelligence, El Chapo went to Honduras to establish a school of assassins who would eliminate the cartel's rivals, including police officials. Between 2007 and 2008, El Chapo's assassins executed various heads of criminal organizations in Honduras.

After asserting its muscle, the Sinaloa cartel worked with an estimated twenty Honduran criminal families, including the MS-13 gangs, to move drugs provided by Colombian FARC guerrillas northwards.¹²³ During the June 2009 Honduran constitutional crisis, the Honduran military, on orders from the Supreme Court, removed President José Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009) from office. Honduran resources were diverted to maintain order, which strengthened the hand of traffickers such as El Chapo.¹²⁴ El Chapo took advantage of the turmoil. Intimidating the

Honduran government with the message “*plata o plomo*,” El Chapo coordinated the assassination of General Julian Gonzalez, the Honduran director of the Office for Combating Drug Trafficking, on December 8, 2009. Gonzalez alleged that the FARC was working with the Sinaloa cartel in Honduras. *Asesinos de moto* killed him, firing nine bullets into his utility vehicle.¹²⁵

By 2011, the Sinaloa cartel became the most influential Mexican cartel in Honduras. Protected by gang muscle from its base in Honduras, the Sinaloans consorted with the Guatemalan Lorenzana cartel (many of whom were arrested by the Guatemalan government, but operated from jail), and the Salvadorian Perrones cartel to move cocaine towards Mexico and the United States.¹²⁶

The Mano Dura

The gang nexus overwhelmed Central America’s governments. Gang aggression manifested in school burnings, murder, and rape. Sensationalist coverage of heavily tattooed men accused of massacring entire families, or sending anti-government messages with severed heads, led to public support for drastic measures against the gangs.¹²⁷ Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador implemented strict anti-gang laws, referred to as *mano dura* (heavy hand) policies. The Salvadorian government passed Decree 158, known as “the mano dura,” and Honduras passed legislation dubbed *la ley anti-mara* (anti-gang law) in 2003.¹²⁸ Both laws allowed for the arrest of people who appeared to be gang members and toughened laws for their incarceration. In 2004, the Guatemalan congress launched *Plan Escoba* (Clean Sweep), which enabled the police to detain youth suspected of being in maras on the basis of their dress, hair and tattoos.¹²⁹ In 2004, Salvadorian President Tony Saca’s Super Mano Dura anti-gang reforms led to over eleven thousand arrests. The Salvadorian maras adapted to the crackdown by directing their operations

from prison.¹³⁰

The mano dura law's critics claimed that they led to violations of *habeas corpus* and extra-judicial killings, similar to those that took place during the civil war period. Opposition party members and judges condemned the measures, claiming that their provisions violated international human rights standards.¹³¹ When the military assisted the police in El Salvador and Guatemala, critics also questioned the use of the army in domestic security issues.¹³² As a result, the courts were slow to back the mano dura policies. The mano dura laws intensified the violence, which led the gangs to respond by toughening their entry requirements, adopting a more conventional look and using heavier weaponry, such as AK-47s and hand grenades, which in turn increased the crackdown on the gangs.¹³³

The Merida Initiative

By 2008, two-thirds of all cocaine entering the United States passed through Central America into Mexico. The U.S. designated Panama, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala as major illicit drug producing and drug-transit countries.¹³⁴ The Mexican cartels earned roughly \$25 billion annually from the drug trade, compared to the regional GDP of \$107.7 billion for Central America as a whole. The cartels could therefore easily buy off the poorly paid police and judges in Central America.¹³⁵ With an inefficient legal system, get-tough tactics did not solve the narcotrafficking problem. Instead, murder rates in Central America spiked between 2000 and 2009.¹³⁶

The United States, Mexico and Central America responded to the crime wave by launching a regional counternarcotics program. On October 22, 2007, the United States announced a \$1.4 billion, three-year plan to help Mexico and Central America combat drug trafficking.¹³⁷ The Mexican program, known as the Merida Initiative, put pressure on Mexico's

borders and provided minor assistance to Central America.

Plan Colombia's continuation in 2008, as well as the Merida Initiative's implementation, pushed the narcotrafficking problem into Central America. In other words, counternarcotics policies in Mexico and South America augmented the importance of Central American links put in place many years before.¹³⁸ In order to draw attention to the needs of Central America as a distinct region and to strengthen the capacities of government institutions to address security challenges, the Merida Initiative for Central America was renamed the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) in 2010.¹³⁹

The CARSI program built upon the *Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana* (SICA) strategy, a 1991 Central American regional integration effort that included the coordination of counternarcotics activities.¹⁴⁰ CARSI's goal was to produce a secure region where criminal organizations no longer wielded the power to destabilize governments or threaten national and regional security, while simultaneously preventing the entry and spread of illicit drugs, violence and transnational threats.¹⁴¹ CARSI prioritized its efforts in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), where the U.S. considered crime and violence to be most severe.¹⁴² CARSI also envisioned an integration of security efforts to include the littoral waters of the Caribbean.¹⁴³

The 2009 initiative was divided into three pillars of activity: 1) counternarcotics, counterterrorism and border security; 2) public security and law enforcement and 3) institution building. Of the initial funding, \$16.6 million went to pillar one to pay for requests for training on aviation, port and document security, while \$34 million went to pillar two to provide support and community prevention activities to combat gangs.¹⁴⁴ The DEA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law

Enforcement Affairs (INL) vetted Central American unit programs that investigated money laundering; bulk cash smuggling and narcotics, firearms and human trafficking.¹⁴⁵ Pillar three received \$7.7 million for court management, prison management, community-policing programs and asset-forfeiture training.¹⁴⁶

CARSI was referred to as “Plan Colombia” for Central America, which was not meant as a compliment. Journalists, political observers and human rights activists, including the UN, criticized Plan Colombia for its emphasis on a military/police solution to Colombia’s narcotics production, trafficking and guerrilla insurgencies/paramilitaries, all of which were interrelated. Its critics faulted it for failing to address the socio-economic and political factors that drove Colombia’s drug war.¹⁴⁷ The enforcement aspect of the CARSI plan, like Plan Colombia, was rebuked for militarizing the drug war in Central America, because it gave Central America’s military and police forces the power to apply indiscriminate force to suppress narcotrafficking. According to the U.N., “heavy-handed crackdowns” only led to more violence.¹⁴⁸ Laura Chinchilla, Costa Rica's former Minister of Justice and current President (2010-present), stated that, “instead of opting for public security policies that focused on prevention and rehabilitation,” Central America had decided instead to take a “mano dura” or “every man for himself approach: hire private security, buy guns, etc.”¹⁴⁹

To provide an alternative to heavy-handed crackdowns, in March 2012, Salvadorian President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014) radically changed his country’s anti-gang approach by negotiating a truce with the MS-13 and Calle 18 gangs. In exchange for a reduction in homicides, the Salvadorian government transferred gang leaders to less secure prisons.¹⁵⁰

From the beginning, the truce was tenuous. The government was reluctant to negotiate with criminal groups and feared that the gangs were increasing their political legitimacy from

jail. Between March 2012 and May 2013, homicides in El Salvador declined from an average of twelve per day to five per day.¹⁵¹ However, as the truce continued, gang leaders claimed that death squads such as the *Sombra Negra* (Black Shadow) were targeting them.¹⁵² The November 2013 discovery of a mass grave with forty-four victims killed by the MS-13 and an increase in the murder rate between June 2013 and May 2014 to an average of 9.48 murders per day threw cold water on the truce. President Funes declared it a failure.¹⁵³ El Salvador's attempt to develop an alternative to heavy-handed tactics had an effect directly contrary to the government's intentions: criminal enfranchisement and death squads.

Between 2008 and 2011, the U.S. spent \$361.1 million on the CARSI program. It allocated 23 percent to Guatemala, 17 percent to El Salvador, 13 percent to Honduras, and 10 percent to Panama, while offering smaller amounts to the rest of Central America.¹⁵⁴ The Central American governments reproved CARSI, pointing out their countries received less aid, even though Central America was more violent than both Mexico and Colombia. Honduran Security Minister Óscar Álvarez called U.S. aid, "a drop in the bucket."¹⁵⁶

CARSI raised another concern: the root fire effect. Enforcement pressure in Mexico and Central America caused traffickers to pop up elsewhere, such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where few resources existed to cope with narco trafficking.¹⁵⁵ In May 2011, Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom (2008-2012) declared Guatemala's northern border to be in a state of siege, fueling further criticism of CARSI.

To counter claims that the CARSI program had failed, William Brownfield, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, asserted that U.S. policy was "not a 'war' on drugs," and that CARSI would take "not days, weeks, and months, but years." Brownfield added that at the "end of the day," CARSI's success would be

measured “through a variety of factors,” including: homicide, prosecution, poverty and education rates; air and maritime tracks; gang activity and gang truces.”¹⁵⁶ Despite the opposition, the U.S. commitment to CARSI continued. In 2013, the United States provided \$135 million for CARSI representing a 33 percent increase over 2011 funding.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Central America’s narcotrafficking problem began during its civil war period, as regional instability and Andean-Mexican counternarcotics efforts pushed narcotraffickers into the region. Reeling from decades of civil war, Central America was unprepared for peace. The persistence of long-standing socio-economic problems made it impossible for Central America to counter the Colombian and Mexican DTOs that were firmly entrenched by the time peace arrived.

The politicization of Central America’s post-war police reorganization hampered enforcement efforts and opened the door to corruption. At the same time, the appearance of Central American gang networks—a legacy of the civil war—strengthened the position of Mexican narcotraffickers. As the gangs entered the “narcosphere”, they extended their influence, as well as the influence of Mexican DTOs, from Central America to the United States.

Violence once associated with the Cold War exploded as Central America cracked down on the gangs and Mexican DTOs. Central American counternarcotics operations began to resemble the internal security policies employed during the civil war era. However, opposition to the mano dura policies, or military participation in counternarcotics programs such as CARSI, proved counterproductive, because it undermined the security efforts that countered the subverting influence of gangs and narcotraffickers. By 2010, the violence in Central America resembled the violence that existed there during the 1980s. Nothing had changed except that Central America’s Cold War violence and instability had metamorphosed into the War on Drugs.

Major questions persist. Is it too late to reverse narco-trafficking's subverting influence in Central America? Are get-tough measures the cause of continued instability? Would less proscriptive policies have better results if narcotics continue to be illegal? Should producer/transitory nations be forced to bear the burden of counternarcotics programs that they are unprepared to undertake, or should they share an international obligation to control narco-trafficking within their sovereign territory? Will the root-fire effect of increased enforcement lead to the opening of new smuggling routes? Will the fight against the gangs and cartels push them into a more dangerous alliance with Middle Eastern terrorists? Do lax immigration and weak border security policies contribute to the expansion of narco-trafficking networks in the U.S.?

The 2014 Central American child refugee crisis ties into the failure to respond effectively to narco-trafficking in the post-civil war era, and it begs the final question: Are U.S. programs such as CARSI too little, too late?

Endnotes

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⁷ William L. Marcy, *The Politics of Cocaine* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 83-133.

⁸ James Sutton, "U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Latin America: Good Intentions and Poor Results," *The Americas* 4, no. 1, October-November 1991, 6; and Nancy Nusser and Charles Holmes, "Colombian Drug Cartels Moving Into Central America," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 28, 1991, sec. A, p. 10.

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¹⁰ Brook Larmer, "Colombians Take Over Coke Trade in Mexico," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 9, 1989, p. 1. Authorities learned later that Coello Trejo took millions in bribes from Mexican cartels.

¹¹ Stephen Meiners, "Central America: An Emerging Role in the Drug Trade," *STRATFOR*, March 26, 2009, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090326_central_america_emerging_role_drug_trade; William Branigin, "Cocaine Flow Goes On; Cartel War, Seizures Have Little Effect," *The Washington Post*, November 21, 1989, sec. A, p. 1; American Embassy Mexico to DEA Headquarters Washington DC, "Monthly Narrative Report January 1990," Mexico 03560 141815Z, (February 1990), 2-5; and American Embassy Mexico to DEA Headquarters Washington DC, Drug Trafficking in Mexico – the Colombian Presence," Mexico 12050 091950Z (May 1990), 1-4.

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¹³ Maclom Beith, "On the Trail of El Chapo," *The Australian Magazine*, September 11, 2010, p. 12; and June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, August 3, 2012), 9-10; Douglas Farah and Molly Moore, "Mexican Drug Traffickers Eclipse Colombian Cartels; Onetime Underlings Extend Reach Into U.S.," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1997, sec. A, p. 1; and Jorge Alberto Cornejo, "Confirman la captura de El Turi, enlace de narcos en Tijuana y Medellín," *La Jornada*, 3 de diciembre de 1997, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1997/12/03/confirman.html>. Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo's organization included the Arellano Felix family of seven brothers and other DTO leaders, such as Miguel Caro Quintero (Sonora), Amado Carrillo Fuentes (Juárez Cartel) and Joaquín "el Chapo" Guzman (Sinaloa Cartel). The Arellano Felix's Tijuana cartel rivaled the Sinaloa cartel following the death of the Juarez cartel's leader, Amado Carrillo Fuentes in 1997. The killing of Ramón, one of the Arellano Felix brothers, and the arrest of another brother, Benjamin, in 2002 weakened the Arellano Felix organization. The vacuum created within the Arellano Felix organization led to its splintering and the predominance of the Sinaloa cartel. The Sinloans formed a federation with the Beltrán Leyva organization and the remnants of the Juárez cartel (most of which had been absorbed by the Sinaloa cartel), that lasted until 2008. Juan García Ábrego led the Gulf cartel, but authorities arrested him in 1996. Osiel Cardenas Guillen replaced him and ran the Gulf cartel until his arrest in 2003. Guillen then ran the Gulf cartel from prison until 2007, when authorities extradited him to the U.S. The Gulf cartel formed a temporary alliance with the Arellano Felix cartel between 2004 and 2005 to defend against the Sinaloa and Juarez cartel merger. Guillen terminated this alliance and sent the Los Zetas, the Gulf cartel's mercenaries, to take over Tijuana in 2005. In 2010, the cartels broke into two alliances: the Juárez, Tijuana, Los Zetas and Beltrán-Leyva cartels, against the Gulf, Sinaloa and La Familia cartels. See: Samuel Logan, "The Reality of a Mexican Cartel," 8, <http://www.samuellogan.com/>.

¹⁴ Douglas Farah and Molly Moore, "Mexican Drug Traffickers," sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense LIC698, *Narcomercantilists: Assessing the Rise of Colombian Heroin Trafficking*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, August 1992), no page number. Washington DC: The National Security Archive, Narcotics Collection, Colombia: Documents from FOIA, box 32; and Douglas Farah, "Drug Lords' Influence Pervading Mexico; Neighbor, Last Line of Defense for U.S., Now Likened to Colombia," *The Washington Post*, April 4, 1995, sec. A, p. 1. Instead of \$1,000 a kilo, the Mexicans could sell cocaine for up to \$15,000 a kilo.

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²¹ Insight Crime, "Gulf Cartel," Insight Crime (no date), <http://www.insightcrime.com/groups-mexico/gulf-cartel> (accessed January 23, 2013).

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²³ American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington DC, "MFJP Seizes Major Shipment of Cali Cocaine and Arrests Two Traffickers," Mexico 07061 201550Z, (March 1990), 2. The La Familia cartel specialized in methamphetamine production and trafficking marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Amado Carrillo Fuentes' uncle was Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, considered responsible for the 1985 murder of DEA agent Enrique Kiki Camarena.

²⁴ Douglas Farah and Molly Moore, "Mexican Drug Traffickers," sec. A, p. 1.

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³⁵ Douglas Farah and Tod Robberson, "Drug Traffickers Build a New Central American Route to the U.S." *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1993, sec. A, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 14.

³⁸ American Embassy Mexico to DEA Headquarters Washington DC, "Drug Trafficking Through Southeastern Mexico," Mexico 13075 032150Z (June 1993), 1-4. Planes flew at thirty thousand feet along with commercial aircraft. When they reached their predetermined drop zones, they dove to one thousand feet, dropped their loads and then returned to thirty thousand feet.

³⁹ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 14.

⁴⁰ American Embassy Mexico to DEA Headquarters Washington DC, "Drug Trafficking in Mexico," Mexico 10460 032111Z (May 1991), 3-4.

⁴¹ American Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Across the Mexican Border: Guns, Drugs, and Guerrillas," Guatemala 02162 212358Z (February 1990), 3.

⁴² American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Opium Poppy Cultivation Along the Mexican-Guatemalan Border in Chiapas," Mexico 08852 051820Z (April 1990), 2-3.

⁴³ American Embassy Guatemala, "Subject: Across the Mexican Border," 1.

⁴⁴ American Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: The Guatemala-Mexican Border and Support for Guerrillas and Drug Traffickers," Guatemala 08886 191715Z (July 1990), 2.

⁴⁵ American Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State Washington DC, "URNG Public Declaration Claims Anti Drug Operations are Cover for U.S. Military Intervention in Guatemala," Guatemala 09465 092237Z (August 1989), 1-2.

⁴⁶ American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Annual Narcotics Status Report (ANSR) for 1986," San Salvador 04089 302240Z (March 1987), 2.

⁴⁷ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 5-6.

⁴⁸ United States General Accounting Office, *The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control in Panama* (Washington DC: General Accounting Office, July 1991), 1; and James R. Richards, *Transnational Criminal Organizations, Cybercrime and Money Laundering: A Handbook for Law Enforcement Officers, Auditors and Financial Investigators* (London: CRC Press, 1999), 49; American Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Guatemala -1996/1997," Guatemala 00378 221546Z (January 1997), 2; American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: 1997/1998 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," San Salvador 04990 052115Z (December 1997), 2; and Douglas Farah and Tod Robberson, "U.S. Style Gangs Build Free Trade in Crime," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1995, sec. A, p. 1.

⁴⁹ David R. Dye, "Nicaraguan Cocaine Bust Reveals New Cartel Route," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 26, 1994, sec. "The World," p. 1.

⁵⁰ American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Monthly Status Report - February 1992," San Salvador 02475 042010Z (March 1992), 1-2.

⁵¹ No author, "Perrones Cartel," *Insight Crime*, no date, <http://www.insightcrime.org/groups-el-salvador/perrones>; and no author, "Taxis Cartel," *Insight Crime*, no date, <http://www.insightcrime.org/groups-el-salvador/taxis-cartel>. The Perrones started as a contraband-running organization that became involved in narcotics in the 1990s. The Cartel de Taxis was another contraband organization that had close ties to people within the government, since it owned many legitimate enterprises.

⁵² Alfredo Chrisitani, "El Salvador: Chrisitani on Cooperation Against Drug Trafficking, Use of Army Against Crime," Radio YSKL, San Salvador - "BBC Summary of World Broadcasts," February 11, 1993.

⁵³ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 22. Inter-American Highway smugglers in El Salvador were quite ingenious. In one instance, traffickers hollowed out pallets of dry-wall sheets and filled the middle of the pallets with cocaine.

⁵⁴ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 23.

⁵⁵ Dye, "Nicaraguan," sec. "The World," p. 1.

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- ⁵⁶ American Embassy Managua to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Narcotics Control Strategy: Nicaragua," Managua 02535 041451Z (May 1990), 1.
- ⁵⁷ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction*, 23.
- ⁵⁸ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: {redaction} On Arms and Drug Trafficking in Nicaragua," Panama 10035 252203Z (October 1991), 1.
- ⁵⁹ American Embassy Managua to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Details Regarding Nicaraguan Seizure of Large Cocaine Shipment," Managua 03492 072324Z (June 1990), 1.
- ⁶⁰ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 17.
- ⁶¹ James Bosworth, "Honduras: Organized Crime Gaining Amid Political Crisis: Working Paper Series on Crime in Central America," Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for International Scholars (December 2010), 11-2.
- ⁶² American Embassy Tegucigalpa to American Embassy Rome, "1996 Narcotics Workplan for Honduras," Tegucigalpa 02009 262228Z (April 1996), 1.
- ⁶³ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 17.
- ⁶⁴ David Adams, "Drug Running Pirates Tarnish Caribbean Paradise," *The London Times*, February 5, 1994, "Overseas" section, no page number.
- ⁶⁵ American Embassy San Jose to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Costa Rican National Security and Security Assistance (Mission Reporting Plan Submission)," San Jose 06589 130459Z (June 1987), 3.
- ⁶⁶ American Embassy San Jose to Secretary of State Washington DC "Subject: FY1993 Security Assistance Reporting Requirements," San Jose 05437 212120Z (May 1991), 3.
- ⁶⁷ American Embassy San Jose to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: FY 1996 Request for Promoting Peace Regional Peace and Security – Costa Rica," San Jose 05136 292224Z (July 1994), 2-3.
- ⁶⁸ David Clark Scott, "With Few Weapons Costa Rica's War on Drugs Goes Badly," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 4, 1991, p. 11.
- ⁶⁹ United States General Accounting Office, *The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control in Panama* (Washington DC: General Accounting Office, July 1991), 1. United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 24.
- ⁷⁰ Joseph B. Treaster, "Cocaine is Again Surging Out of Panama," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1991, sec. A, p. 1.
- ⁷¹ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Panama One Year After," Panama 10665 271539Z (November 1990), 2; and the World Bank Indicators, "Indicators: Panama Unemployment Total Percentage of the Labor Force," Washington DC, The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?page=4>; and American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: FY 95 Panama Budget Submission," Panama 03448 232305Z (April 1993), 2.
- ⁷² Joseph B. Treaster, "Cocaine is Again Surging Out of Panama," sec. A, p. 1.
- ⁷³ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "1994 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Panama," Panama 07995 191505Z (December 1994), 17.
- ⁷⁴ United States General Accounting Office, *The War on Drugs*, 3.
- ⁷⁵ James S. Henry, "Panama: Dirty Business as Usual; Noriega is Gone, But the Drug Traffic and Corruption Live On," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1991, sec. C, p. 1.
- ⁷⁶ American Embassy Panama, "Subject: Panama One Year After," 4.
- ⁷⁷ James S. Henry, "Panama: Dirty Business," sec. C, p. 1.
- ⁷⁸ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 24.
- ⁷⁹ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Proposal: Regional Counternarcotics Strategy for Panama, Mexico, and Central America," Panama 05361 082123Z, (June 1992), 2.
- ⁸⁰ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 25.
- ⁸¹ Mark B. Rosenberg and Luis G. Solis, *The United States and Central America: Geopolitical Realities and Regional Fragility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 38.
- ⁸² American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Central American Counternarcotics Strategy," Panama 11409 181444Z (December 1990), 2-3.
- ⁸³ United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 7.
- ⁸⁴ American Embassy Panama, "Subject: Central American Counternarcotics," 2-3.
- ⁸⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2002 Country Reports on Human Rights and Labor: Guatemala*, U.S. Department of State, March 31, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18333.htm>; American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: GOES Anti-Narcotics Unit –

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⁸⁶ American Embassy Managua to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Subject: FY 92 Narcotics Control Budget,” Managua 02388 201417Z (March 1992), 1.

⁸⁷ American Embassy San Jose to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Subject: FY 1996 Request for Promoting Peace,” San Jose 05136 292224Z (July 1994), 2; United States General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts*, 8; and Just the Facts, “Grant U.S. Aid Listed By Country, Counternarcotics Programs, All Grant Aid-All Types Central America 1996-2000,” Foundation Open Society Institute, http://justf.org/All_Grants_Country?year1=1996&year2=2013&funding=Counter-Narcotics+Programs&subregion=Central+America&x=46&y=8.

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⁸⁹ American Embassy Panama, “Subject: Proposal: Regional Counternarcotics Strategy for Panama,” 1.

⁹⁰ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of Defense Washington DC, “Panama Facing Colombian Spill-Over Troubles,” Panama 04324 271956Z (October 1989), 4.

⁹¹ American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Colombian Narcoguerrillas,” Panama 002849 212152Z, (July 2000), 3.

⁹² Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Committee on International Relations, “The Illicit Drug Transit Zone in Central America,” 109th Congress, 1st session, November 9, 2005, 4.

⁹³ American Embassy Managua to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Police Chief Accuses U.S. of Protecting Military Drug Traffickers,” Managua 07414 270033Z (October 1990), 1.

⁹⁴ James C. McKinley Jr. “Lawlessness in Guatemala Touches Neighbor: Role of Police Drawing Scrutiny,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2007, sec. A, p. 2.

⁹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Crime and Development in Central America*, 45.

⁹⁶ Rob Fischer, “Tracing an Invisible Line: How Guatemalan Security Forces Have Taken Over the Drug Trade,” *Mesoamerica*, vol. 25 no. 1, January 2006, 1-2.

⁹⁷ Don Winner, “Police Major in Veraguas Arrested for Drug Charges,” *Panama Guide*, February 18, 2007, <http://www.panama-guide.com/article.php/20070218063919937>.

⁹⁸ No Author, “El Salvador’s Police Chief Resigns Over Corruption Claims,” *Reuters*, August 24, 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-08-24/el-salvadors-police-chief-resigns-over-corruption/486578>.

⁹⁹ International Labor Organization, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, *2007 Labor Overview, Latin America and the Caribbean* (Geneva Switzerland: International Labor Organization), <http://www.oit.org.pe>; and Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Seelke, *Central American Regional Security Initiative*: 20. Guatemala had no estimates, but many believed that youth comprised 45 percent of the unemployed.

¹⁰⁰ Hal Brands, *Crime, Violence and the Crisis in Guatemala: A Case Study in the Erosion of the State*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2010), 25.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Bruneau, Lucia Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 93; and Mary Helen Johnson, “National Policies and the Rise of Transnational Gangs,” Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, (April 2006), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=394>.

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¹⁰³ American Embassy Tegucigalpa to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Subject: A Permanent Tattoo: The Systematic Failure to Squelch the Proliferation of Gangs in Honduras,” Tegucigalpa 001843 192253Z (August 2004), 1.

¹⁰⁴ American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Subject: El Salvador: Gangs Threaten Mission’s Goals,” San Salvador 002232 041830Z (August 2004), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Organization of American States, *Pandillas Delictivas*, 030210 (Washington DC: Organization of American States, January 28, 2012), <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2010/CP23778S.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ American Embassy San Salvador, “Subject: El Salvador: Gangs,” 12.

¹⁰⁷ USAID, *Central American and Mexican Gang Assessment: Annex 4: Southern and Northern Borders of Mexico Profile* (Washington DC: USAID Bureau for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs Office of Regional Sustainable Development, April 2006), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Thelma Mejía, “Central America: Soaring Violent Crime,” 2; and Hal Brands, *Crime, Violence*, 26.

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- ¹⁰⁹ USAID, *Central American and Mexican Gang Assessment*, 7.
- ¹¹⁰ American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Mexico's Southern Border: Border Security Equals National Security – Sound Familiar?" Mexico 007191 302111Z, (November 2005), 5.
- ¹¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Crime and Development in Central America*, 45-6.
- ¹¹² Hiltha Prabhakar, "Organized Retail Crime Goes Global," *Financial Times*, December 8, 2011, <http://www.ftpress.com/articles/article.aspx?p=1768313&seqNum=5>; and American Embassy Belmopan to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering, Possible Terrorist Ties," Belmopan 000192 042156Z (April 2008), 1.
- ¹¹³ Organization of American States, *Pandillas Delictivas*, 030210 Washington DC; Organization of American States, January 28, 2012, <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2010/CP23778S.pdf>, accessed April 13, 2013.
- ¹¹⁴ *The Washington Times*, "Al Qaeda Seeks Ties to Local Gangs," *The Washington Times*, September 28, 2008, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/sep/28/20040928-123346-3928r/>.
- ¹¹⁵ USAID, *Central American and Mexican Gang Assessment*, 7; and American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: Evaluation of the Second International Forum of Citizen Participation and Crime, Drugs and Gang Prevention Tracker # 20697," Mexico 005489 152025Z, (July 2004), 2.
- ¹¹⁶ Organization of American States, *Pandillas Delictivas*, <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2010/CP23778S.pdf>. One argument postulates that gang members and drug dealers represented different interests because a distinction existed among *pandilleros* (street gang members), *banderos* (members of organized crime groups) and *transeros* (drug traffickers). Relations among these groupings varied. See: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Crime and Development in Central America*, 45-6.
- ¹¹⁷ Douglas Farah, *Central American Gangs*, 14; Colleen W. Cook, *Mexico Drug Cartels, Report RL34215* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, February 25, 2008), 10; Wikileaks Document Release, February 2, 2009, <http://wikileaks.org/wiki/CRS-RL34215>; and American Consul Nuevo Laredo to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: 2004 Starts With a Flurry in the Desert," Nuevo Laredo 3761AA 292113Z (June 2004), 4. Thirty lieutenants and sub-lieutenants from GAFES founded the group. The Zetas initially operated "as a private army under the orders of Osiel Cárdenas' Gulf cartel," like a "paramilitary" organization.
- ¹¹⁸ Etiquetas: Noticias, "Ejecutan Juan José León Ardon Supuesto Narco," *Narcos Chapines*, March 26, 2008, <http://narcoschapines.blogspot.com/2008/03/ejecutan-juan-jose-leon-ardon-supuesto.html>; K. Mennem, "Guatemala and the Drug War," U.S. Open Borders, January 24, 2012, <http://usopenborders.com/2012/01/guatemala-the-drug-war/>; and Julie López, "The Decline of Guatemala's Drug Dynasty," *Plaza Publica*, December 7, 2011, <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/decline-guatemalas-drug-dynasty>. The Leones were considered "tumbadores," or bandits who stole shipments from other organizations. See: No author, "Guatemala Drug Trafficking and Violence," Latin America Report Number 39, *International Crisis Group*, October 11, 2011, 4.
- ¹¹⁹ Tim Johnson, "Drug Gangs Muscle into New Territory: Central America," *McClatchy Washington Bureau*, April 21, 2011 (no page number).
- ¹²⁰ George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan, *The Executioner's Men*, (London: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 163-166. Mara is the Salvadorian slang for the word for gang: pandilla.
- ¹²¹ Douglas Farah, "Transnational Criminal Threats in El Salvador: New Trends and Lessons from Colombia," September 7, 2011, <http://www.strategycenter.net>.
- ¹²² American Consul Nuevo Laredo to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Subject: 2004 Starts With a Flurry in the Desert," Nuevo Laredo 3761AA 292113Z (June 2004), 5. *Clicka* refers to a gang sub-group.
- ¹²³ "La Barbie formó escuela de sicarios en Honduras," January 9, 2010, *La Presna.hn/Internacionales*, Honduras, <http://archivo.laprensa.hn/Internacionales/Ediciones/2010/09/01/Noticias/La-Barbie-formo-escuela-de-sicarios-en-Honduras>; and no author, "Cártel de Sinaloa ordenó muerte de zar antidrogas," *El Siglo de Torreón*, June 16, 2010, Editora de la Laguna, Av. Matamoros 1056 Pte., Col. Centro, Torreón Coah., México, C.P. 27000, <http://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/532610.cartel-de-sinaloa-ordeno-muerte-de-zar-antidrogas.html>.
- ¹²⁴ United Nations, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), 19.
- ¹²⁵ Mariano Castillo, "Anti-Drug Chief Killed in Honduras" CNN, December 8, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/12/08/honduras.drug.chief.slain/index.html>. *Plata o plomo* is translated as "money," or "the bullet." *Asesinos de moto* is translated as "assassins by motorcycle." Gonzalez also alleged that Venezuela had helped the FARC smuggle narcotics into Honduras and President Manuel Zelaya was under investigation for his possible involvement in cocaine smuggling.

¹²⁶ José Meléndez, “Honduras presa de la violencia y del narco,” *El Universal* (Mexico), March 18, 2012, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/836559.html>; and Elizabeth Romero, “Acecho narco en el limite,” *La Prensa* (Nicaragua), December 5, 2013, <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2013/12/05/reportajes-especiales/173060-acecho-narco-limite>; Press Center, “Treasury Designates Lorenzana Family Members and Businesses Allied with the Sinaloa Cartel,” U.S. Department of Treasury, November 14, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1767.aspx>; and Julie López, “Guatemala: la cambiante cara del narco,” *Plaza Pública* (July 18, 2013), <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/guatemala-la-cambiante-cara-del-narco>.

¹²⁷ American Embassy Tegucigalpa, “Subject: A Permanent Tattoo,” 1. United States Congress, House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *Violence in Central America*, **No. 110–78**, 110th Congress, 1st session, 40. Testimony of Lainie Reisman.

¹²⁸ Sonja Wolf, “Mano Dura: Gang Suppression in El Salvador,” Oxford Research Group: *Sustainable Security*, (March 2011), <http://sustainablesecurity.org/2011/03/01/mano-dura-gang-suppression-in-el-salvador/>; and American Embassy Tegucigalpa, “Subject: A Permanent Tattoo,” 4.

¹²⁹ USAID, *Central American and Mexican Gang Assessment*, 79.

¹³⁰ American Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Subject: El Salvador Updated Assessment of Central American Security Requirements,” San Salvador 002402 132134Z (December 2007), 5. Saca was President of El Salvador from 2004-2009.

¹³¹ Claire M. Ribando Seelke, *Gangs in Central America* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, March 27, 2008), 9.

¹³² American Embassy San Salvador to ACLA Collective, “Subject: More on Salvadorian Gangs,” San Salvador 01849 102117Z, (March 1995), 3. In 2003, authorities jailed some 2,582 Guatemalan maras.

¹³³ American Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Security Profile Questionnaire Spring 2009,” Guatemala 000384 221849Z (April 2009), 3; and Sonja Wolf, “Mano Dura,” available from: <http://sustainablesecurity.org/2011/03/01/mano-dura-gang-suppression-in-el-salvador/>.

¹³⁴ Thelma Mejía, “Central America: Soaring Violent Crime Threatens Democracy,” *Inter Press Service News Agency*, Tegucigalpa (September 22, 2008), 2.

¹³⁵ United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, *2009 International Control Strategy Report Vol. I*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, March 2009), <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2009/vol1/html/62108.htm>.

¹³⁶ United Nations, *Transnational Organized Crime*, 15.

¹³⁷ Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership,” United States Department of State, (August 5, 2010), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

¹³⁸ United Nations, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America*, 18.

¹³⁹ United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, “Central America and the Merida Initiative,” 110th Congress, 2nd Session, May 8, 2008, 9; and William R. Brownfield, “Remarks at the Council of Americas,” Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment, March 22, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rm/2013/207231.htm>, and Secretary of State Washington DC to American Embassy Guatemala, “Central America Regional Security Initiative CARS – The New Name for Merida Central America,” State 028360 231801Z (March 2010), 2.

¹⁴⁰ United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, “The Merida Initiative: Examining United States Efforts to Combat Transnational Criminal Organizations,” 110th Congress, 2nd Session, June 5, 2008, 8.

¹⁴¹ Colleen W. Cook, *Mexico Drug Cartels*, Report RL34215, <http://wikileaks.org/wiki/CRS-RL34215>.

¹⁴² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs of the House Appropriations Committee, “Security Challenges to Latin America,” 112th Congress, 2nd Session, March 29, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rm/187097.htm>, statement by William Brownfield.

¹⁴³ Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

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¹⁴⁵ Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Seelke, *Central American Regional Security Initiative*, 26.

¹⁴⁶ Claire Ribando Seelke, “Background for a Hearing on Central America and the Merida Initiative,” Washington DC, Congressional Research Service, May 1, 2008, 7.

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “Plan Colombia: Fact Sheet,” Washington DC, U.S. Department of State, March 14, 2001, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2001/1042.htm>;

and Uri Friedman, "A Brief History of Plan Colombia," *Foreign Policy*, October 28, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/27/plan_colombia_a_brief_history.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations News Service, "Development in Central America Stymied by Crime and Drugs, UN Warns," New York, United Nations, May 23, 2007, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Thelma Mejía, "Central America: Soaring Violent Crime," 2.

¹⁵⁰ Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Seelke, "Central American Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress," Washington DC, Congressional Research Service, May 7, 2013, 14. Gang leaders also pledged not to recruit children into their ranks forcibly and to turn in weapons.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 14; James Bargent, "MS-13 Use of Guns in Guatemala Shows Modus Operandi," Washington DC: *Insight Crime*, May 8, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/ms-13-used-just-32-guns-to-kill-over-200-people-in-guatemala>; and San Salvador, *La Prensa Libre*, May 8, 2013. http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/Pandilla-uso-armas-homicidios_0_915508466.html, accessed May 13, 2013.

¹⁵² USAID, *Central American and Mexican Gang Assessment* (Washington DC: USAID Bureau for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs Office of Regional Sustainable Development, April 2006), 20; and Roberto Valencia, "La Sombra Negra," *El Faro.net* (San Salvador), April 26, 2014, <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201404/bitacora/15308/>; and Maguerite Cawley, "El Salvador's Gangs Call on New Government to Revive Truce," *Insight Crime*, June 6, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-gangs-call-on-new-government-to-revive-truce>. The Sombra Negra was an organization of rogue police and military personnel that existed between 1989 and 1995. It allegedly reappeared during the truce as a vigilante organization to eliminate gang leadership.

¹⁵³ Lorena Baires, "El Salvador: Macabro hallazgo de fosa común," *Infosur Hoy*, December 31, 2013, http://infosurhoy.com/es/articles/saii/features/main/2013/12/31/feature-01?change_locale=true; and Carlos Martínez y José Luis Sanz, "Gobierno dismantela la tregua y los homicidio alcanzan 30 en un día," *El Faro*, May 24, 2014, <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201405/cronicas/15432/>.

¹⁵⁴ Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Seelke, *Central American Regional Security Initiative*, 23. Costa Rica received 6 percent, and Belize and Nicaragua combined received only 4 percent. An additional 23.1 percent was committed to regional programs for multiple countries.

¹⁵⁵ United States Congress, House of Representatives, "Central America and the Merida Initiative," 9. The term "root fire" is more accurate than the commonly used term, "balloon effect." When someone squeezes a balloon, it pops and all of the air escapes. It does not imply a spread to anywhere else. However, a fire can be doused in one location, but then spread elsewhere due to a root fire. As a consequence, the term root fire more accurately depicts what happens with drug trafficking as a result of enforcement efforts.

¹⁵⁶ William R. Brownfield, "Remarks at the Council of Americas," <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rm/2013/207231.htm>.

¹⁵⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: United States Support for Central American Citizen Security," *The White House*, May 4, 2013. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/04/fact-sheet-united-states-support-central-american-citizen-security>.