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The Illegal Drug Trade and Global Security

Hanna Samir Kassab
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Introduction

Abstract

- Trends in drug trafficking.
- Levels of Analysis (individual, the state, and the international system).
- Realism—Hard power (military and national interests).
- Liberalism (Neoliberal Institutionalists talk about the need to work together. Work with institutions like the United Nations, etc.).
- Constructivism (securitization): social construction, speech acts.
- Marxism: exploitation and underdevelopment.
- Overview of the Book: chapter summary.

Keywords Drug trafficking networks · States · Theories · Levels of analysis · Realism · Liberalism · Marxism · Constructivism · Supply and demand

This book discusses trends in drug trafficking and organized crime as a threat to international security and stability. These networks control vast swaths of territory in Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Africa, Benin, and other fragile states. Some of these groups pose a significant challenge to state sovereignty, operating freely in zones within these countries. Further, criminal actors in some of these aforementioned

states operate as de facto authorities and implement their own rules, often referred to as criminal governance. Regardless of efforts by major states like the United States and members of the European Union, some drug trafficking networks boast a global presence. Drug traffickers are thus free to operate, and their wealth allows them to possess military power that sometimes rivals states. This presents a clear and present danger to the security of many states in the international system.

This book offers students of international security the opportunity to study drug trafficking from the lens of international relations theory. Theories are lenses that help explain and understand global phenomena. Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, and Social constructivism all aim to provide clarity to global problems. One theory alone cannot make sense of organized crime and drug trafficking, and how states respond to these security threats. Together, however, these theories provide students with clearer vision, acting as lenses to view the world. Understanding drug trafficking and organized crime requires one to focus on levels of analysis and utilize different theoretical perspectives.¹

This book serves as a primer, introducing students, undergraduate and graduate alike, to various trends in drug trafficking and organized crime. It focuses on understanding the evolution of drug trafficking and organized crime. It provides textboxes to help tell the story of real people and their lives in this illegal business. The chapters summarize trends by creating several graphs and maps to help the readers visualize the changes over time. Indeed, organized crime has only gotten worse with time. The global demand for drugs has increased since President Richard Nixon declared the “war on drugs” in 1971.² Drugs are now cheaper and more addictive than the 1970s. It is approximately a trillion dollars in size amounting to an estimated 1.5% of global gross domestic product (GDP).³ These trillions of dollars go toward weapons that challenge the sovereignty of the state. In 2019, for example, heavily armed gunmen forced the government to release the son of Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán, Ovidio Guzmán, who was accused of drug trafficking and captured by the Mexican national guard. The cartel forces outmanned and outgunned the newly minted national guard. They captured 30 national guard soldiers and held them captive until Ovidio Guzmán was freed.⁴ The cartel also attacked the city, signaling their power to citizens and governments alike. The Sinaloa cartel controls large swaths of territory in Mexico and operates as a de facto authority.

This introductory chapter summarizes major theories⁵ and themes. This foundational chapter explains some of the theories as well as their limitations. This chapter and the subsequent ones will examine “traditional” security problems, such as drug trafficking and organized crime through different theoretical perspectives.

The book seeks for students to develop an appreciation for theory. Some students find theory a joyless exercise. They prefer to focus on what is going on rather than asking why. Following a story is fun and interesting, but it does not provide an explanation as to why something happened. Theories and frameworks are used to explain, understand, and may even hold power to predict events. We theorize about everything, even everyday things, to connect data, or evidence, with different facets of life. Theories bring life to data by answering *why questions* and helps us to connect pieces of data into a story far more interesting than following a chronology of events.

The theories summarized in this introduction will be applied in the following chapters. The goal is for this section to help students acquire a firm grasp of this chapter before moving forward. Questions to consider are provided after the summary of the major theories.

THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE IN GLOBAL SECURITY: THEORIES, TRAITS, AND TRENDS

The cartels that make up international organized crime networks are powerful because these groups have the ability to challenge state authorities. In the previous example involving Ovidio Guzmán, the state could not bring someone deemed a criminal to justice. Further, there is an international consensus that selling drugs is an illegal enterprise. This section will discuss the negative impact of drug trafficking on security by providing concise descriptions of theory and applying it to trends in international drug trafficking.

To understand the theories of international security, we must first understand levels of analysis. Levels of analysis is a way of saying who or what is at the center of your examination.⁶ It is like a microscope: you see different things using different lenses. A smaller lens brings out a different picture than a bigger lens. There are three levels of analysis going up in size and scope: the individual, the state, and the international system. The individual is the person on the street, the drug dealer, or the drug user. The safety and security of many people are impacted by the

drug trade. Some people traffic drugs, while other individuals function as enforcers and try to survive in this dangerous business (Fig. 1.1).

The second level of analysis is the state. A state, or country, is an independent unit of territory that has sovereignty and authority over said territory. A state has military power and uses diplomacy to protect its national interests. Anything that undermines national interests, autonomy, and territorial sovereignty, undermines national security. Drug trafficking networks could be stronger than the state and might be able to effectively capture it through force or corruption. In some instances, the state cannot maintain law and order over specific parts of the state. Such a state is considered a weak or fragile state. Failed states are those that authorities have lost complete control over. The state may be penetrated by organized crime groups.

Sometimes states cooperate to achieve their security goals, but sometimes they do not. This depends on whether they are enemies or partners. Cooperation is contingent on the third level of analysis: the international system. Unlike states, there is no international government that might regulate behavior between states. Laws are not always enforced internationally. Indeed, there are international laws and the United Nations, but international law cannot be enforced since there is no world government or police force; there is no international 9/11 hotline that a state can call if it is being attacked.⁷ Hence, states must help themselves to

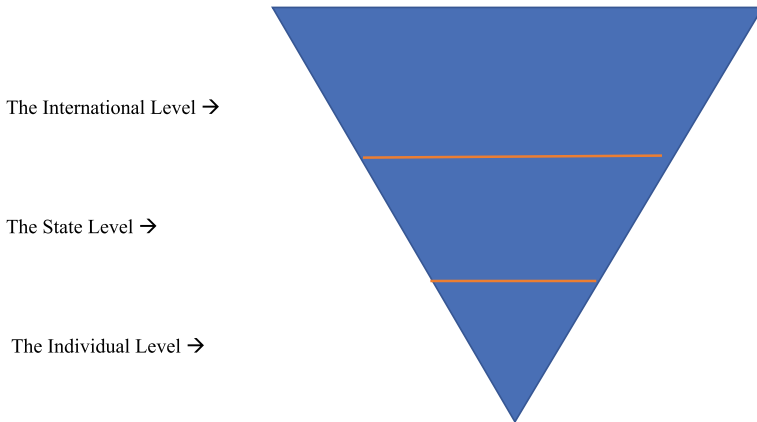


Fig. 1.1 Levels of analysis summarized (*Source* Created by authors)

achieve security. This requires having a strong military to deal with threats and challenges. There are times when states are enemies because they have competing national interests. National interests help provide security to the state. One national interest is maintaining control over territory. Sometimes, as seen in the case of Colombia, criminal actors can conduct cross-border raids from a neighboring sponsor state like Venezuela.⁸ This inhibits the sovereignty of both states. There are also those networks with global influence. Chapter 5 will discuss the global power of Hezbollah as a terrorist group with an organized criminal element. The wealthier they become, the more of an impact they will have on the international system as they continue to capture already weak states like Lebanon.

Drug trafficking is a significant threat to international security and the three levels of analysis. Chapter two will discuss the historical evolution of organized criminal networks, but it is worth pursuing an overview alongside international security theories. Each theory will discuss a level of analysis as it relates to the topic. The theories present a different world view. Imagine putting on different colored glasses. Each pair brings out a different aspect. Rose colored glasses will help us see the world differently than those of other tints. It can help us see things in a different light. Consequently, theories help us understand different aspects of the world. Like different tools in a toolbox, they help us do different things.

REALISM: POWER POLITICS

When we talk about realism, we are talking about hard power.⁹ Power is about control. It is about one actor forcing others to behave in ways that serve its interests at the expense of the compelled. Great powers utilize their power to influence other less powerful states to comply with security strategies. There are many variants of realism that explain power politics: like classical or human nature realism as well as defensive and offensive realism. For classical realists, evil and selfish human nature drives conflict. States are selfish and since there is no government, states will seek power to defend themselves and their interests. Defensive and offensive realists argue that human nature is hard to define, and thus focus on the lack of a world government. Since there is no world government, states must protect themselves from dangers. Defensive realists believe that states seek enough power to defend themselves, while offensive realists believe there is no such thing as enough power. Both defensive and offensive theories are structural in nature.¹⁰ Human nature does not drive state security

behavior; rather, the anarchical structure of the international system drives state security behavior. The absence of world government, or anarchy, forces states to protect themselves, and sometimes, go to war to neutralize threats.

The realist schools of thought do have one main tenant in common: states seek security by protecting interests. Interests are important to state survival in a world without a central government. If a state feels threatened by another state, it will use its power to maintain its independence. States must help themselves to remain secure and independent by always preparing for a multiplicity of challenges. Security challenges are anything that undermines the power and authority of the state. This includes other states but also terrorist networks and organized criminal violence. If the state fails to protect itself against these threats, it will ultimately collapse. The state will *fail*, essentially ceasing to exist as an independent actor. Sometimes, organized criminal networks take over the state bringing further disorder to the international system.

Critics of realism contend that realism has its limitations, as realists focus on the state as the unit of analysis.¹¹ The focus on great power politics and states failed to explain other important security threats. Drug trafficking and organized crime are carried out by non-state actors.¹² However, realism can be applied to analyze the importance of drug trafficking networks because they shape, threaten, and challenge state power.¹³ Drug trafficking networks defy government authority by breaking laws. It corrupts the state as networks bribe their way to their own security and prosperity at the expense of the state and citizens. The accumulation of wealth may be accompanied by sharp influx of weapons, murder, and disorder. The state often begins to fall apart as it loses its territory to these groups. Sometimes, disorder spills over into other states, fueling terrorist networks, and corruption. Afghanistan, Lebanon, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Syria, and Venezuela are all examples of states inflicted with drug trafficking and organized crime, which has impacted both state and regional security. Great powers seek to intervene (e.g., foreign aid and security cooperation) to prevent drugs from being smuggled into their country. Great powers expending power in this way leads to a transformation of the security agenda of the international system. The United States presence in Colombia during the 1990s, Mexico and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, and their coordination of anti-drug efforts around the world signal the importance of narcotics and organized crime for American national security. In summary, since

drug trafficking networks force states to secure themselves as part of their interests, these are significant to realism.

LIBERALISM

Structural realism, or neo-realism, is a theory of state security behavior. States, power, and their security behavior, are the central focus. Structural realists worry that if states cooperate with others that they will gain less while their partner states will gain more. They argue that states only care about relative gains. This is called a zero-sum world. Liberal scholars disagree and argue that states will gain more absolutely with cooperation than without. Since drug trafficking is a global problem, states need to work together to solve the problem. No one state can do it on its own. Hence, states will trade and pursue peace as they care more about absolute gains (i.e., their total gain). Like classical realism, classical liberalism bases this notion on good human nature. People are naturally kindhearted and will vote antiwar people to government.

Liberalism builds on realist assumptions with a slight twist: states cooperate. Neoliberal institutionalism builds on this, but not using human nature.¹⁴ Instead, it theorizes about the gains from cooperation. States have much to gain by working together through international institutions like the United Nations as opposed to “going it alone.” National security can be achieved through continued cooperation. Capitalism is a positive force as the more states trade, the more interdependent they will become.

Like realism, liberalism is a state-centric theory. It cares about threats to security but sees cooperation, not power, as the central focus. Unlike realism, liberalism argues that states can work together to defeat organized criminal networks. For instance, liberals argue that states that demand illicit narcotics are driving global supply chains creating insecurity in producing states. Countries have signed international treaties and worked through international organizations to address drug trafficking, which is a transnational threat impacting producing, transit, and consuming countries.

Yet there are criticisms of neoliberal institutionalism. Some scholars contend that institutions are a forum of great power politics, and there are issues with free riders. Critics also contend that many of these international institutions and laws lack enforcement power.¹⁵ While some countries will sign treaties saying that they will combat drug trafficking, some states have structural problems with corruption and have had high

level government officials involved in organized crime, as seen in various cases examined in this book.

MARXISM: BEYOND CLASS WARFARE

Marxism departs from the political international system as a unit of analysis and focuses on the individual level and state level, specifically global exploitation that makes states poor. It also sees the international system as not simply political, but also economic. The most important issue is the political ramifications of economic underdevelopment. Economic underdevelopment is a product of exploitation and global capitalism. Individuals are paid little to work long hours for the sake of wealthier states. This leads to feelings of alienation, as people are disconnected to their work and their lives. Poverty is fueled by this exploitation as wealth is taken from the poor and given to the wealthy. They maintain that individuals must change the world by organizing and demanding better working conditions—sometimes seeking to overthrow the system. The focus, therefore, is the exploitation factor. There are two main theories or perspectives. The first is dependency theory: poor countries produce basic goods (minerals and basic resources and other light manufacturing like clothes) that have low profit margins, yet they export technically advanced items (computers and cars) with high profit margins. Poor countries are expected to stay the course until they somehow “catch-up” to wealthy states. World-systems theory argues that poor, peripheral states are locked into a system of exploitation because it serves the interests of core states. Core states will use power to coerce peripheral states to stay within this system. It is the reason why China and the United States give large loans to developing states: debt controls poor states.¹⁶

Drugs are often produced in developing countries like Colombia, Mexico, and Afghanistan. Drugs move through poor transit countries (Central Asia and Africa) into wealthier consumer countries. Lack of opportunity, poverty, and exploitation could push some individuals to consider a life of crime. Why make minimum wage in a factory or out in the field when you can make thousands of dollars in one night? Such social and economic circumstances might lead to narcotics production and trafficking. The illegal nature of the business is a major reason for its profitability. Profits provide the incentive for any business, and the illegal trade is no different. Drug trafficking networks lure people away from legitimate businesses. The result is destabilization of the state and its economic

system because these groups challenge the status quo (states and their laws). In many ways, violent non-state political actors like terrorist groups such as the Islamic State produce these drugs to fuel their specific political goals including financing and training other violent non-state political actors. This exports violence and narcotics trafficking and destabilizes regional security. In summary, Marxist theories thus provide a unique perspective, as the book seeks to uncover individual and local level push factors that may lead to drug trafficking.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM: IDEAS MATTER

Social constructivism goes beyond our physical world and examines the meanings and ideas behind it. Threats are more than just objective facts, but our understandings of those facts. Social constructivism advances a multi-level of analysis role: it determines who is doing the talking. This includes states that may perceive a friend or an enemy. Social constructivism is a theoretical framework that describes international politics as a product of mutually agreed upon ideas and identities.¹⁷ Material forces are secondary to ideas. In other words, “the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”¹⁸ Primarily, Social constructivism forwards an explanation of how certain actors, whether states or non-state actors, get their identities by examining the evolution of ideas surrounding those identities. This includes states like the United States and non-state issues like narcotics, organized criminal networks, and other violent non-state actors like terrorism. A Social constructivist question may be *why are drugs illegal in the first place?* It was not long ago that Prohibition made alcohol illegal. Alcohol was seen as a danger to society. A decade later, alcohol was made legal. What forces made alcohol go from legal to illegal to legal again? Understanding these social mechanisms forms the backbone of securitization theory.

Like Social constructivism, securitization theory posits that threats are based on ideas, identities, and perceptions. Threats are based on language which is then based on the perspectives of states and peoples. If states see drugs as a security threat, they will make a case to the public by making persuasive arguments. President Richard Nixon and President Ronald Reagan argued that drugs were tearing families apart. They contended that drug trafficking fuel drug addiction and had serious negative ramifications on US national security.¹⁹ It is here that these leaders made staunch

speeches (i.e., a speech act) against drugs. The United States launched a war on drugs, vowing to combat the supply of drugs. In addition, the US war on drugs has led to non-violent drug offenders being incarcerated. Today, the United States jails more people than any country in the world.²⁰

Securitization may also work in reverse. There has been a push for de-securitization (legalization and decriminalization) since many scholars and analysts have argued that the war on drugs has failed. Decriminalization and legalization require a speech act to reverse the existential danger once pronounced by world leaders. Essentially, some governments no longer feel that marijuana is harmful and a security issue in countries like Portugal, Canada, and The Netherlands. Some states do not imprison people for using (decriminalization) and even allow selling with a permit (legalization). By studying social perspectives, we may better understand our world. We are now seeing that drugs like marijuana are becoming legal and decriminalized. This reversal is an interesting aspect of state policies.²¹

In summary, the theories used here will explain the centrality of organized criminal networks and drug trafficking to international security and stability. Table 1.1 summarizes the theories alongside the levels of analysis.

The core here is the study of security: individual or human security, state security, and security of the international system. Security, in this sense, is a contested concept as scholars argue who/what should be the central focus. As you read the following chapters, please recall Table 1.1, keeping track of the terms and concepts.

Have you ever wondered how drugs make it to the United States from South America? The following is an interview with Juan David Ochoa, a member of the Medellín cartel. Note the global scale of the supply chain:

Interviewer: Can you describe the details that make the business work? You had distributors on one end, and you had producers....

The business worked in the following way. The supply people would bring it initially from Peru and Bolivia, and they would process it in labs here in Colombia. From there, you would buy the cocaine and you would contract it with someone to send it to the United States. Maybe it was through air or perhaps some maritime way, and

Table 1.1 Summary of theory and levels of analysis

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Level of analysis</i>	<i>Security</i>	<i>Drug trafficking as a threat</i>
Realism	Power politics	The state and the international system	The state and its military (territorial integrity)	Challenges to the state, international stability
Liberalism	Cooperation	The state	Multi-dimensional: includes state and economy	Cooperation and law enforcement
Marxism	Class warfare	The state, class warfare, and the global political-economic system	Individual (freedom from exploitation)	Development and human security
Constructivism	Social meanings	The individual, the state, and the international system	Multi-dimensional (military, economy, society)	Based on social construction (securitization or desecuritization)

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there someone would receive it. It's this person who would receive it. That agent would be in charge of sending it other clients, from California, from New York, from different states [sic]. The person in the United States would be in charge of receiving the money and sending it back to Colombia. That's the way it would work.

Interviewer: What part of that business did you own outright, and what part did you have to contract with others for?

I had several ways of doing this. One was to buy the cocaine and to send it the way I explained, and my partner would sell it there. The other way would be to have your own lab where you would process it. You'd have your own way of transporting it, a plane or a boat or something like that. You send it at your own cost. Another way, you'd end up having to subcontract with other people to do the different stages, like processing, transport, and the transfer of sales to the person that you had contracted in the United States.

Interviewer: How much profit was there in the business along the way? You bought it for a certain amount, and sold it for another amount?

At the beginning, let's say that it cost 800–1,000,000 pesos a kilo, and you would sell it for \$30,000–\$40,000. Add to that the cost of transportation—around \$10,000—and a few other expenses. That would leave a profit of about 50%. But that was only depending on the demand, and of course, on the supply. At the beginning that was the way it was. After some time ... there was still demand, and the profit was a lot less, because there were a lot of people dedicated to this business.

From “Interview with Juan David Ochoa,” *PBS Frontline*, 2000.

For more interviews, see PBS Frontline

CHAPTER OUTLINE

International relations theories have limitations in their explanatory power of illicit markets at the international and regional level. Chapter 2 starts by detailing the evolution of drug trafficking networks in corrupt, underdeveloped states with weak political institutions. Understanding the nature of the drug trade requires analyzing the political science literature regarding the role of the state. A functioning democracy requires the implementation of the rule of law, transparency, and accountability.

Chapter 2 builds on the previous academic literature on weak states, corruption, and crime. Corruption and underdevelopment create the conditions for illicit trafficking as people with few legitimate opportunities seek to better their lives. One of the main arguments of this book is that the state determines the nature of organized crime. Organized crime groups seek to penetrate the state apparatus. The more corrupt the state, the better it is for drug traffickers. Organized criminal actors desire to bribe police officers, judges, and public officials to increase their profits and operate with impunity. This argument will serve as the framework for the regional case studies. Various historical examples will help illustrate this point. Focusing on individuals and actors in the criminal underworld like Pablo Escobar and his Medellín cartel help highlight the concepts that are posited in this work.

Chapter 3 analyzes Central America as a major transit zone for drugs coming from South America. High levels of poverty as well as state fragility have enabled drug traffickers to penetrate the state apparatus of Central American governments. For example, the brother of the former Honduran President, Tony Hernández, has been convicted and sentenced

by the Southern District of New York for trafficking drugs from Honduras to the United States. Despite various cooperation efforts, the Northern Triangle countries have been plagued by gangs, drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime groups, which have contributed to the high levels of violence impacting the region.

Chapter 4 focuses on Latin America as a drug supply center. This chapter begins with an examination of drug trafficking and organized crime in Colombia, which has been at the epicenter of the US war on drugs. In 2001, for instance, Colombia received more US foreign aid than any country in the world, except Egypt and Israel.²² The United States government continued to prioritize Colombia on the national security agenda and invested \$10 billion in counter-narcotics policies in Colombia through a program known as Plan Colombia. There are realist, liberal, and constructivist explanations for understanding Plan Colombia and drug trafficking and organized crime. The chapter will also examine recent trends in drug trafficking in Mexico. The United States and Mexico have increased cooperation through programs like the Mérida Initiative, which sought to combat drug trafficking and organized crime as well as strengthen border security. In Mexico, the Felipe Calderón administration “securitized” the problem of drug trafficking and organized crime, making it the top national security threat. President Calderón also deployed the military to combat the drug kingpins. The consequence of the militarization of the war on drugs in Mexico has been a fragmentation of organized crime and increasing levels of violence. Mexico has also become an important transit country for other opioids, including Fentanyl. This chapter examines the China-Mexico connections and analyzes how drugs are moved through Mexico *en route* to the United States.

Chapter 5 discusses terrorism and narcotics trafficking across Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Terrorism and organized crime are clearly connected as terrorist networks produce and distribute narcotics to raise money. This money is then used to finance the group’s political goals. The Middle East, a region long plagued by terrorism, sits at the crossroads between Asia, Africa, and Europe making it the ideal transshipment point linking supply countries to demand countries. The chapter begins with trends in drug trafficking and organized crime in the Middle East. It focuses on the role of Afghanistan and opium production. It explains how Afghanistan produces 95% of the world’s opium supply. From Afghanistan, drugs flow through several fragile states such

as Iraq, Syria, and finally to Lebanon. There, Hezbollah ships it to North and West Africa and other ports.²³ Chapter 5 also examines the role of external actors like the United States and their international security interests. The United States not only occupied Afghanistan for decades attempting to combat terrorism, but USAID has invested millions of dollars each year in programs to curb opium production. Furthermore, this chapter will apply the concepts of realism, to explain US foreign policy. In addition, it maintains that a constructivist approach helps to explain the elevation of the problem on the security agenda of countries like the United States.

Finally, the concluding chapter describes the future of drug trafficking and summarizes the main trends examined in this book. It provides debates about alternative policies (legalization) and focuses on policy solutions. It utilizes a constructivist approach to show how there has been a change among many policymakers about the “war on drugs” rhetoric. Some current and former presidents around the world have called for an end to the war on drugs and have emphasized the need for harm reduction policies. Other presidents have stressed the need to implement tough on crime policies to combat crime, drug trafficking, and violence by whatever means necessary. Finally, this chapter addresses the concept of “whole of government” approaches (e.g., international and regional cooperation) to reduce drug trafficking.

CONCLUSION

The theories explored here will tell a story about the development of international drug trafficking. Levels of analysis help to explain who is affected most and sheds light on the costs associated with drug trafficking. Realism sees the power of the state and the international system as central to its understanding of international security. States cannot accept any undermining of their authority as they alone provide stability and security. Anything or anyone that undermines this security is a threat and must be neutralized. Liberalism seeks cooperation with other states as these problems transcend borders. Working through bodies like the United Nations is key to facilitate information and resource sharing. Marxism understands the reasoning behind the drug trade as people seek to enhance their position. International capitalism is based on exploitation, and some actors prefer to seek wealth through the drug trade. Finally, constructivist approaches seek to understand why threats are understood as threats at

all. Securitization and speech acts help us trace the development of the illegality of drugs as a social construction exercise.

Ultimately, the goal of this book is to provide students with an overview of the drug trade as it relates to international security. The theories examined in this book will provide a nuanced approach to the trends and traits that describe illicit markets. It serves as a foundation for learning.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do theories help us understand the spread of drug trafficking networks?
- Why have drug networks become so powerful?
- Will demand for drugs create its own supply?
- Why have states failed to stop cartels from selling drugs?
- What might states do to stop the supply and demand of drugs?

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The History of Drug Trafficking

Abstract

- Drug traffickers are non-state actors.
- Realism focuses on state threats, but we need to understand the relationship between state security and drug trafficking.
- Organized Crime penetrates the state apparatus.
- Defines weak, fragile, and failed states.
- Weak, fragile, and failed state provides linkage to human insecurity.
- Analyzes the impact of human insecurity and underdevelopment on crime.
- The chapter incorporates history and case study and applies theory to historical cases.

Keywords Weak/fragile/failed states · Corruption · Non-state actors · Poverty · Structural violence · Underdevelopment · Organized crime · Human Development Index (HDI)

Drug trafficking is a non-state national security threat that effects individuals, the state, and other states in the international system. At these levels of analysis, there is theoretical applicability as discussed in the introduction. First, this chapter will define the state and explain why drug trafficking is a national security threat, focusing on two aspects: coercion

or military power, and consent or economic power. Organized criminal networks eat away at the state's authority and inhibits its autonomy and sovereignty. This chapter applies realist and liberal frameworks as it shows the difficulty of states to achieve their security and development goals. It is also here that the terms weak, fragile, and failed states will be defined. These concepts are important to link to the second section. This chapter then relates this weakness to human security, specifically the power of poverty to push people into drug trafficking. This means applying Marxist theoretical approaches. People take these risks despite the prospect of imprisonment or death. To summarize, this chapter traces the history and development of drug trafficking through theoretical lenses.

THE STATE AND ORGANIZED CRIME

The state is the central authority that uses power. Max Weber defines the state as an organization that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence over a territory.¹ This means it is the only political entity that has the authority to use force in a specific area. It has sovereignty over an area, meaning it has the capability to do whatever it wants within that territory regardless of the demands of citizens or other states. It consists of a government: the people that run the state and make its policies. This government can be defined by a regime that could be democratic or authoritarian. India, for example, is a state because it has an independent foreign policy and pursues relations with whomever it wants. It also makes its own domestic laws regardless of the desires of Pakistan or China. It has a government that is chosen through democratic processes. Because of these attributes, India is a sovereign state. Like India, Venezuela is also a state because it has its own foreign and domestic policies independent of others. Yet it is more authoritarian than democratic and has been plagued by drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence.²

Drug trafficking is illegal in states across the globe. The United Nations' General Assembly has gone so far to pass resolution 66/183, which notes that "despite continuing increased efforts by States, relevant organizations, civil society and non-governmental organizations, the world drug problem... undermines socio-economic and political stability and sustainable development."³ This means that despite states having the monopoly of force and outlawing drug trafficking, it still exists and has even flourished. To understand the evolution of drug trafficking and organized crime, it is important to analyze its history.

Once there is a demand for any product and service, there will be those who supply those materials. If people demand cars, there will be a ready supply of cars. The same goes for any illegal substance or service. In 1920, the Prohibition movement finally succeeded in making alcohol illegal in the United States. Many joined this movement because of the destructive nature of alcohol addiction and domestic abuse. The problem was people still wanted to drink; they demanded alcohol and were unafraid of the source. Mafia groups in the United States began to supply this demand, brewing bathtub liquor and smuggling from Canada, the Bahamas, and other places. As long as there was demand, organized criminal groups met the need. As legendary gangster Al Capone, boss of a Chicago crime family would say: “somebody had to throw some liquor on that thirst!”⁴ Other substances, once prohibited, become a business opportunity for organized criminals. The wealthier they become, the more powerful they become. The more powerful, the more likely that their business expands, even becoming global in size and scope. To protect itself, organized criminals often rely on two factors: an impoverished society and corruption.

The first factor that will be discussed is an impoverished society. A World Bank working paper published by the United Nations defines poverty as any “proportion of the population below the international poverty line”: people living below \$1.90 a day in 2011 prices.⁵ There are stark differences between advanced and developed democracies like Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia and poor, underdeveloped states like Somalia, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Tajikistan. Developed states are those that have a high income defined by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is the total production of goods and services in an economy in a year. They also boast a high Human Development Index (HDI).

The HDI measures quality of life as a combination of expected years of education, life expectancy, and income in one convenient index. The higher the score, the better the quality of life, while the lower the score, the lower the quality of life (see Table 2.1). States with lower human development tend to be poorer states. Underdeveloped states are lower-income countries. The question is: why are underdeveloped states underdeveloped?

Underdeveloped states are in the process of developing. This means that they are trying to increase the size of their economy’s GDP and lift people out of poverty. In many cases, developing countries are recently

Table 2.1 The relationship between corruption and poverty

<i>Country</i>	<i>Corruption rank</i>	<i>Human Development Index</i>
New Zealand	Lowest	Highest (0.931)
Denmark	Lowest	Highest (0.940)
Singapore	Lowest	Highest (0.938)
United States	Low	Highest (0.962)
Chile	Low	High (0.851)
Venezuela	Highly	Middle 0.711
Equatorial Guinea	Highly	Low 0.582
Lebanon	Highly	Middle 0.744
Afghanistan	Highly	Lowest 0.511

Source The Corruptions Perceptions Index (2020), <https://www.transparency.org> and Human Development Index (2019), <http://hrd.undp.org>

independent. They suffer from legacies of colonialism and imperialism. During the decolonization process to independence, colonial powers would draw up arbitrary boundaries dividing tribes and ethnic societies from one another. This led to border conflicts and war. On other occasions, multiethnic societies like Nigeria—a state with over 200 ethnic groups—struggled over who had control of government.⁶ These states had little to no experience with democratic institutions. This would only increase conflict resulting in civil wars. Civil wars made countries poorer, as people have little incentive to invest in a business and hire people. Other times, governments would oppress their people by demanding bribes to provide public services. This type of corruption is institutionalized, meaning that it is part of the ordinary function of that state and society.

States plagued with high levels of corruption are often poor but are also penetrated by crime and criminal violence. Corruption is like an insurance policy that criminals take out to protect their business. Bribing public officials will help you stay out of jail (or may help you break out of jail). It

can also get goods from country A to country B. Hence, corruption helps organized criminal groups the freedom to operate their illegal business without fear of punishment.

Corruption has a major impact on economic development. Indeed, every state has some degree of corruption. However, there are differences in developed states and underdeveloped states when it comes to levels of corruption. The least corrupt states are advanced and developed and punish corrupt officials quickly (i.e., they implement the rule of law). Norway, Australia, and Finland, for instance, are developed states with little corruption. Most corrupt states like Lebanon, Somalia, and Haiti are characterized by underdeveloped and weak institutions. Table 2.1 underscores this relationship.

Corruption is a significant factor explaining impoverished, underdeveloped societies. It punishes the poorest people of their wealth. One Afghan citizen describes the role of corruption in poverty:

There are people known as Employed on Commission in front of each government building...They approach people saying that they can solve any kind of issue in a short time and then they quote the price. For example, if you need a passport or driving license or paying taxes and customs duties they can give you the final receipt which has been processed through all official channels in matter of days which takes usually weeks. Then he takes money and of course he will distribute it with those who are sitting inside offices.⁷

There is an interdependent relationship between corruption and development. This means one does not necessarily cause the other but rather the relationship is interrelated. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index notes that "corruption leads to an unequal distribution of power in society which, in turn, translates into an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity."⁸ Combining underdevelopment and corruption together results in a state that cannot secure itself from threats. The following section will define weak, fragile, and failed states as they relate to drug trafficking and organized crime.

WEAK, FRAGILE, AND FAILED STATES

Power is the central aspect of countries. There are states with varying levels of power. There are great powers that set the agenda for the international system.⁹ The United States, for instance, can assist other states with their security problems. There are also middle powers. France and Canada, for example, find it best to ally themselves with a great power and work with them to achieve their goals. Then there are weak states. These states are understood as those countries that often cannot survive on their own because they simply do not have the capability. Furthermore, these states are exposed to external shocks outside of their control. These shocks can be economic, environmental, political, or military.¹⁰ Political shocks pose challenges to the internal governance of the state.

Weak states are weak because they are susceptible to threats outside of their control. Fragile states are in a more precarious position than weak states because their governance is under attack. Fragile states are those states that do not have complete control over their territorial space. Weak states may be holding on to these areas, but under the right circumstances may collapse at any time. Thus, fragile states are on the edge of collapsing under the weight of various threats to their survival as an independent state.¹¹ Organized criminal groups may be one of those challenges, especially if the group threatens the sovereignty of the state.

This book defines fragility using the Fragile State Index (FSI) to understand the impact on drug trafficking networks. The FSI uses cohesion, economic, political, and social indicators to illustrate a state's internal weakness. The following indicators describe manifestations of weakness that may worsen if nothing is done to alleviate the source of vulnerability or threat:

Cohesion Indicators

- Security Apparatus: examines threats to state security such as terrorism, paramilitaries, civilian control over armed forces
- Factionalized Elites: fragmentation of the state along lines: ethnic, religious, economic (inequality)
- Group Grievance: ethnic hatreds

Economic Indicators

- Economic Decline: public debt and finances, economic diversification, economic conditions and business climate
- Uneven Economic Development: economic inequality, poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity
- Human Flight and Brain Drain: lack of educated human resources, weak middle class, remittance dependence

Political Indicators

- State Legitimacy: political violence, corrupt/unfair electoral process, no confidence
- Public Services: little to no education, health care, crumbling infrastructure, shelter access
- Human Rights and Rule of Law: regular violations of civil rights, freedoms, justice

Social Indicators

- Demographic Pressures: state of health, food/water supply, natural disasters, resources
- Refugees and IDPs: influx, safety
- External Intervention: border insecurity

Source The Fragile State Index, fragilestateindex.org.

These indicators are all interrelated and tell a story about a state. Cohesion factors describe states that are territorially divided. There may be factions (e.g., ethnic, religious, and class) controlling parts of a state that others, even government representatives, cannot enter. The economic indicators describe underdevelopment. Underdevelopment signals a lack of resources or finances to deal with such threats. A country may become further impoverished if people leave or if certain political indicators do not allow for the smooth functioning of a domestic economy. Corruption and political violence hinder economic development as the socio-political conditions hinder progress. The final indicator is social and is potentially a powder keg of violence. Border insecurity allows for the trafficking of drugs and people, especially if those people are themselves vulnerable (e.g., refugees). Both weak and fragile states may suffer from a variety of these issues, but fragile states are more likely to collapse and become failed states.

Failed states are in a worse position than fragile states. Failed states are those that lost large swaths of territory to non-state actors. They lack the sovereignty over territory. Unlike weak and fragile states that may have little autonomy to act as an independent actor, failed states have no such ability. They cannot provide protection to their citizens, possess little to no infrastructure, suffer from massive corruption, and ultimately cannot defend their borders. Essentially, failed states are those that “provide opportunities for actors outside the government—whether religious fundamentalists, disaffected citizens, or merely opportunists seeking power—to attempt to seize the state apparatus by violent means.”¹² These states need assistance from other states to neutralize threats to their existence. They lack the resilience to fight and thus surrender territory to non-state actors like organized criminal and terrorist networks.¹³ This resilience is because of their incapability, in many cases due to their inherent problems: corruption and underdevelopment.

Failed states host organized criminal groups and allow them to flourish. Peter Lupsha describes three categories of organized criminal networks as they relate to the state and its political institutions: predatory, parasitical, and symbiotic.¹⁴ Predatory criminal groups are weak relative to the state. The state might be able to destroy the criminal group. The more powerful the criminal group, the more likely it can compete with the state. If allowed to grow and power, the criminal group might come to challenge the state. This points to the state’s weakness and growing fragility. This is the parasitical stage, the second stage in the process. The criminal group might be able to dominate large parts of the state’s territory. It operates on equal terms with the state. There are areas that the state may no longer control. Sovereignty and autonomy are reduced greatly as the state is no longer able to operate without considering the needs of the organized criminal group. The final state is the symbiotic stage where the state is absorbed into the organized criminal group. The state becomes an extension of the criminal enterprise. It operates freely in the state and can carry out foreign policy. Corruption is a major part of this process. The wealthier and more powerful the organized criminal group, the more likely it can penetrate governmental institutions through corruption.

The Akasha brothers' international drug trafficking network: from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. The network comprised of fragile and failed states that allowed drugs to travel from producer to consumer markets. Assistance from developed states and cooperation was necessary to bring traffickers to justice.

Pablo Escobar and Felix Angel Gallardo with “Narcos”, Frank Lucas with “American Gangster”, Joaquin Guzman with “El Chapo”—these are just a few examples of the many TV series and movies that have been based on real life famous drug traffickers, all available on a major streaming platform. Another story that could be the base for a captivating TV show would be the Akasha brothers' story.

Baktash Akasha and his brother, Ibrahim Akasha, were the leaders of a sophisticated international drug trafficking network based in Kenya, responsible for tons of narcotics shipments throughout the world. For over twenty years, they manufactured and distributed drugs, sometimes using violence against those who posed a threat to their enterprise. When the brothers encountered legal interference, they tried to bribe officials—including judges, prosecutors, and police officers—to avoid extradition to the United States.

In 2014, the brothers were arrested along with two associates in Mombasa, Kenya, by Kenyan Anti-Narcotics Unit officers, after providing 99 kilograms of heroin and two kilograms of methamphetamine to US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) informants posing as drug traffickers of a South American drug cartel. Following the arrests and pending extradition proceedings, the Akasha brothers continued criminal operations, using profits to bribe corrupt officials.

Their bribery scheme ended in 2017 when the brothers were expelled from Kenya, and DEA agents brought them to the United States for prosecution.

On 24 October 2018, Baktash and Ibrahim Akasha pleaded guilty in a United States Federal Court to conspiracy to import and importation of heroin and methamphetamine, conspiring to use and carry machine guns and destructive devices in connection with their drug-trafficking activities, and obstruction to justice. In August 2019, Baktash was convicted to 25 years in prison, and in January 2020, his brother Ibrahim received a sentence of 23 years.

Organized crime does not respect national borders, and effectively responding to it requires States to act together. The United Nations

Convention against Transnational Organized Crime provides States with the tools to cooperate with each other to effectively prevent and combat organized crime. With its 190 parties, the Convention has nearly universal ratification and provides States with tools for international cooperation such as extradition, mutual legal assistance, joint investigations and law enforcement cooperation.

Source United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “The Akasha Brothers’ International Drug Trafficking Network,” *United Nations*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/untoc20/tru-crimestories/akasha-brothers.html>, accessed October 20, 2021

When the state reaches its symbiotic stage, the state has failed. This then presents a serious challenge for the international system.

It is important to define organized crime. The Oyster Bay Conference on Organized Crime states that it is:

the product of a self-perpetuating criminal conspiracy to wring exorbitant profits from our society by any means – fair or foul, legal and illegal. It survives on fear and corruption. By other means, it obtains a high degree of immunity from the law. It is totalitarian in organization. A way of life, it imposes rigid discipline on underlings who do the dirty work while the top men of organized crime are generally insulated from the criminal act and the consequent danger of prosecution.¹⁵

This definition highlights one key aspect: organized crime challenges the state and the way it defines law and order. Allowing such a challenge to exist will eventually undermine, and then destroy, the state. When a state collapses in the face of drug trafficking networks, the international system becomes destabilized. States plagued by drug trafficking and organized crime may now allow safe passage for other drug trafficking groups. It may protect terrorist groups like in Somalia. The danger then becomes clear to developed states. Somalia is now a threat to international shipping, as pirates hijack container ships and kill civilians.¹⁶ In Lebanon, the terrorist group Hezbollah traffics drugs into Europe and the United States—an act that only increases its wealth and power at the expense of the country. Mexico is another example, as cartels operate freely in many parts of the country. They traffic drugs into the United States across the border, even bribing customs agents, decreasing the security of the

United States. In summary, these actors present challenges for regional and international security.

To understand how weak, fragile, and failed states promote drug trafficking and destabilize the international system, it is important to understand the evolution of drug trafficking as they relate to the destruction of the state. The following section will trace the creation of modern drug trafficking networks. Starting with the opium trade in China, the invention of cocaine, and ending with the invention of methamphetamine and fentanyl, it will show the relationship between underdevelopment, corruption, and state weakness. Drug trafficking creates insecurity as a result. Tracing history like this will help make sense of the theories used in this book as it effects every level of analysis: from the individual to the state, to the international system.

DRUG TRAFFICKING AND THE STATE: THE HISTORY OF DRUG TRAFFICKING

Drug trafficking has its beginning in the nineteenth century. However, unlike today, non-state actors were not doing the trafficking, but rather entities sponsored by colonial powers were. Great Britain was buying tea and other commodities from China in vast amounts. China was not buying as much from Great Britain, and this led to a significant trade imbalance that had to be corrected. A trade imbalance results in money leaving one country and entering another. However, since the international monetary system utilized the silver standard, this meant that Great Britain had to expend large amounts of silver to defend the value of the British Pound. Great Britain had to figure out a way to get China to import more so that it could avoid spending its silver. Opium was that product. Opium is a narcotic that depresses the body. The more you consume, the more addicted you become. Without opium, a person enters withdrawals like the flu. Thus, people need more and more. Hence, getting Chinese people addicted to opium became the solution for correcting any imbalances in trade. Soon enough, China had the imbalance.

The Chinese government saw that opium addiction was destroying the people. It made opium illegal. Smuggling began in full force as British companies selling opium hired people to get product to the Chinese market. Frustrated with the influx of opium into the country, government official Lin Zexu penned an open letter to Great Britain's Queen

Victoria, stating: “I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries—how much less to China!”¹⁷ The Chinese government began to crack down on opium use and sale. Any ship coming into China was seized and searched. If opium was found, it was destroyed. Following these actions, war was soon declared when Chinese warships began to attack British merchant ships. This marked the beginning of the First Opium War.

The First Opium War’s aim was to compel China into new trading agreements. The more technologically advanced Great Britain won. Great Britain made China sign the Treaty of Nanjing which forced China to surrender territory to Great Britain and pay reparations. The opium trade into China continued. The Second Opium War saw another victory against China. This time, other European powers were involved including France and Russia. European states exacted further reparations on China and more territory was ceded. Opium was also legalized. The opium wars quickly increased opium imports into China, going from approximately 3,000 metric tons before the war to almost 7,000 metric tons by 1880.¹⁸ The opium trade continued and expanded, not just in China but internationally.

The nineteenth century saw increased immigration into the United States. This was also true in China, as people began to settle along the west coast and in New York. They brought with them many unique aspects of their culture and life including opium. Opium dens sprang up *en masse* throughout the United States, especially in urban areas. This had some added benefits as people discovered that opium numbs physical pain. Medical breakthroughs were made as painkillers like morphine were developed. This had a tremendous effect during the American Civil War. However, many people became addicted to the drug. It even became more potent as heroin. Hence, opium was among the first drugs to be abused in recent history.¹⁹

Another potent drug to be studied is cocaine. It is derived from the coca plant. The indigenous peoples living in the Andean region chew the leaves for energy and to combat altitude sickness. Karl Koller discovered that refining the coca leaf helps to extract the cocaine alkaloid. Like opium, the product was useful as an analgesic. People also began to use it regularly like vitamins. Sigmund Freud, for example, used cocaine for

many years. By the 1910s, there was a serious backlash against any drugs. By the 1920s, the Prohibition movement managed to not only outlaw alcohol, but some hard drugs. The Harrison Act (1914) closely regulated and taxed the production, distribution, and sale of opiates and coca products. However, regardless of the laws of prohibition or regulation, people did not stop producing drugs and alcohol illegally.²⁰ Organized criminal behavior exploded as people still demanded these products. Prohibition helped organized criminal groups gain the wealth they needed to expand their enterprise.

The end of Prohibition made alcohol legal, but drugs were still illegal. Organized criminal groups turned to other sources of income like gambling, prostitution, extortion, and drugs. Other parts of the world like Japan and the Netherlands continued to demand cocaine. Peru enjoyed increased exports of coca leaves and benefited economically. This drug business began to blossom in the 1960s but exploded in the 1970s and 1980s.

Cocaine remained illegal and did not take off as a recreational drug until the 1960s. The “hippie” movement encouraged the use of all drugs, most famous of them all marijuana, and consumption rose dramatically. South American producers began exporting both drugs and millions of dollars flowed into the hands of illegal enterprises. Many South American states were impoverished, corrupt, and seeking development. Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia were also among those exporting drugs.²¹ The more people used, the wealthier and more powerful criminal networks became. Drug traffickers readily exploited the local populations desperate for work; this included men and women. Among these groups were the Ochoa family from Medellín, Colombia. This network became known as the Medellín cartel. It was only in the 1970s that the United States focused on the illegal drugs coming from Colombia.²²

The Colombian government also understood the national security threat posed by these organized criminal groups but did little to stop them. The reasons are twofold stemming from the government’s lack of power and influence. First, these criminal groups operated freely because they bribed government officials to turn a blind eye. The second is through violence: if a government official chose to pursue charges against any trafficker, then that official would be assassinated. Drug traffickers had direct connections to government officials. Drug traffickers understood that their penetration of the judicial system would mean a symbiotic relationship with the state (i.e., they would become intertwined with

government officials). The key to success was a successful absorption of Colombia into their criminal network and they would kill anyone who stood in their way. To put this in perspective, between 1979 and 1991, more than 100 judges were killed.²³ This figure includes the instance when M-19 guerrillas, hired by Pablo Escobar, attacked the Supreme Court of Justice.²⁴ Drug trafficking organizations and networks were a national security risk to states. The more these entities were allowed to grow, the more danger they posed to a society. If Colombia succumbed to organized criminal violence, then networks would have a free hand to operate. This free hand would mean more drugs entering the United States. American Border control and immigration would become compromised as drug traffickers could increase levels of crime and violence in US cities. The spread of corruption and the destruction of a state's sovereignty by criminals is part of the supply chain to get products from producer states to consumer states. Drug networks are present, a challenge for regional and international security.

Today, drug trafficking extends to every part of the globe. Drugs are smuggled into prisons. Even some maximum-security prisons are laden with illegal substances. Of course, there have been some important victories along the way, especially for Colombia. With the help of the United States, Colombian cartels were dealt a serious blow. The kingpin strategy, targeted killings, and imprisonment of heads of cartels, managed to take out Pablo Escobar as well as Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán and the Arellano Félix brothers in Mexico. Plan Colombia in Colombia and the Merida Initiative are other, more detailed strategies that sought to counter drug trafficking and organized criminal networks. These will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, but the idea is for partnering states to fight narcotics production. Plan Colombia increased law enforcement hiring, training, and funding creating a more potent anti-drug force.

Yet just because there were some victories against Colombian cartels, does not mean drug trafficking ceased to exist. The supply chain moved to Mexico into areas that are not completely controlled by federal government forces. In response, the Mérida Initiative hoped to deal with production transit, corruption, and provide weapons and equipment to fight drug trafficking. Other states in Central America like Honduras and El Salvador have gangs like MS-13. The problem has proved quite resilient and overtime. Many states have also failed to quell the consumption of drugs globally.

Over time, drugs have become more powerful and potent. Opium is a more potent in its purer form heroin. Cocaine is also purer. In the 1970s, sellers used to “cut” it with other ingredients. To make the product cheaper, sellers came up with crack cocaine. Crack is cocaine mixed with baking soda, making the high more intense but shorter. This makes it more addicting. People also mix cocaine and heroin, creating what is known as an 8-ball.

Drug trafficking networks have also expanded the line of products available to the public. Synthetic drugs like methamphetamine have impacted the Midwest and rustbelts of the United States. When people can no longer be prescribed legal painkillers like oxycodone, they often turn to these drugs, which are readily available. There are LSD and other psychedelics, depressives like xanax, disassociatives like PCP and ketamine, and other prescription stimulants like Adderall. Used improperly, prescription drugs can be just as damaging to the brain and body. This impacts the individual level of analysis.

Ever wonder how weapons from the United States get into the hands of Mexican Cartels? The following is an interview of a cartel hitman. He describes how.

In the cartel, what was your job? What did you do?

Bodyguard and things like that. Kill people, kidnap, all kind of stuff like that.

Were you ever involved in the procurement of weapons?

Not directly, but I saw little things of how they introduced the weapons in the country, into Mexico.

How did it work?

The same person that works for the organization here in the United States, they get the weapons and they carry them to Mexico ... They never had any problems to cross them into Mexico at the border. Sometimes they use secret compartments to hide the weapons, but not all the time. The principal way was crossing the river or by the international bridges.

Who would buy the weapons?

I’m not sure about that because I never was there. But the same people that work for the organization here in the U.S., I don’t know how to explain in English, they have to be U.S. citizens to buy the weapons. They get some people to buy the weapons, every kind of them, and then pay them for it The people who was working here

in U.S. selling the drugs, they were the same that get the weapons. It was people who was working directly for my boss, so he said “don’t bring me money, bring me weapons.”

Where did you get the military weapons?

We received hand grenades all the time... And some grenade launchers, Just the grenade launcher, that you can put on the guard-hand to the rifle. That kind of grenade launcher.

Was everybody armed better than the local police or the military?

Yeah, but a lot of, for the first thing, we got uniforms. The local police didn’t have uniforms. Many times, they couldn’t afford them. We had better vehicles. Better radio communications, and much better weapons because we had automatic and the same weapons and we had ammo in it. Sometimes we cuff some cops and take their weapons and they don’t have ammo. I remember one time we took a pistol from a guy who tried to stop us, so when we take the weapon, I show it to my boss and I told him, he has no ammo and he tried to stop us. What is he thinking about? The most times, we were better armed than the local police. Not the army, just the local police.

For the complete interview see: Todd Bensman, “Interview with a Hitman” in the *Global Post*, May 8, 2010.

Moreover, corruption and violence hinder individuals from achieving their full potential. Bribing officials takes money out of their hands, and violence inhibits companies from expanding and reinvesting into the community. This leads to less tax revenue and ultimately a weaker government. If the government cannot function effectively, then the state itself has lost the ability to be sovereign. States can succumb to the penetration of organized criminal entities. This leads to further international destabilization (the international level of analysis) and the problem spreads across the international system. Drugs can be found in every part of the globe. Hence, the history of drug trafficking describes insecurity across the levels of analysis. The individual, the state, and the international system are made more insecure from organized crime. Theories of international security are needed to further illustrate the impact of drug trafficking networks on security.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS AND THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE: APPLYING THEORIES TO THE HISTORY

The previous historical section was a brief summary of drug trafficking, organized criminal networks and their evolution. This next section will apply the theories outlined in Chapter 1 to this history. It is important to note the various levels of analysis discussed. Connecting theory to the level of analysis will help shed light on the significance of theories to explain and understand the world. These theories are like different types of glasses highlighting various colors and tones to help us gain a better understanding of the world. Since each theory highlights something different, governments can better adapt appropriate policies to fight against drugs and drug traffickers.

REALISM, LIBERALISM, AND CONSTRUCTIVISM: THE STATE AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Realism

Realism describes an anarchical world meaning that there is no world police to keep states in line. States must be able to protect themselves and their interests against other states. In the opium wars, Great Britain understood the impact of their demand for tea on the economy, specifically the balance of payments. The more tea they bought, the more Chinese currency it had to buy and the more silver they had to spend to do it. Spending silver in such a manner weakened the country. It had to correct the balance of payments by making China buy more British products. Selling opium was seen as a means to do it. By getting Chinese individuals hooked on opium, the British were able to correct the imbalance, but also make Great Britain wealthier. Said differently, British national interests were predicated on the defense of maintaining a strong trade position in the international system. If Britain allowed the trade deficit to continue, it would become weaker and China stronger. By correcting the trade imbalance, the Britain could surpass China in wealth and power. If China was wealthier and more powerful than Britain, then China could effectively dictate terms of trade and other policies to Britain. This happened in the nineteenth century when Great Britain was a major world power after the Napoleonic Wars. In essence, Britain could not accept a secondary

position; it had to make sure that China was indebted to it, and opium addiction was the solution.

Realism submits that states will pursue power and may go to war to defend those interests defined in terms of power. This means that war is simply a political tool used to defend itself and its position. China understood that Great Britain was selling opium in its country and perceived that as an attack. Chinese leaders tried to petition the British government to stop selling opium. When that did not work, Chinese warships attacked British commercial ships carrying opium. This use of power is an act of war, but one designed to protect its interests and sovereignty. Thus, in international relations, power is perceived as necessary to neutralize threats to national security.

More recently, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the issue of security remains to be a priority for states in the international system. Realism tends to focus on great powers, specifically the structure of the system whether bipolar, unipolar, or multipolar. However, weak states also seek security from threats to their survival.²⁵ The more underdeveloped the state, the weaker it is. In terms of power, weakness means little capability. Unlike great powers who might be able to neutralize internal threats like organized crime, weak states simply cannot and may fall victim to much more powerful non-state actors. Weakness thus conveys the idea of vulnerability, meaning that survival might be compromised if threats are large and more powerful than the state itself. Power helps states to secure themselves from threats. If the state meets a foe with a power equal or more powerful in size, then that state may become fragile and ultimately fail. Without power, a state may not survive against a threat like organized crime. Furthermore, states that demand narcotics, great powers and developed states such as the United States and many European Union countries act to reduce the supply of drugs coming into their respective countries. This means that great powers perceive drug trafficking as a clear threat to their state. As organized criminal networks increase their power in weak states, the threat to the great power increases over time. Cooperation may be needed to decrease the supply of drugs and so liberalism may be used to better understand the processes of collaboration in the international system.

Liberalism

Liberalism focuses on cooperation. States have more to gain through negotiation than not working together. Cooperation is difficult because it involves states fighting to protect their interests. Inserting drug trafficking into a liberal analysis is especially helpful. One could argue that international politics is no longer dominated by states but by other actors such as international companies like Apple and General Motors. Countries must negotiate how these companies can behave through rules and regulations. Similarly, in many states, drug trafficking networks exist in many countries just like legitimate companies. The Sinaloa cartel, for instance, is a sophisticated network operating not just in Mexico but in dozens of countries, including the United States. States have a common interest to neutralize these threats. Since a state can only freely act in their own territory, states need to cooperate with other states. Plan Colombia (Colombia and the United States) and the Mérida Initiative (Mexico and the United States) are two prime examples of state cooperation. Since Mexico and Colombia have been impacted by drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence, they sought assistance from the United States government. The United States saw it in their interest to assist Mexico and Colombia because drugs were going across its border into the country. As a major demand market, it is important for the United States to try to reduce the supply of narcotics by helping with law enforcement and providing alternatives—other legitimate means for employment.

Liberal perspectives also include the role of major international organizations like the United Nations. One branch, the United Nations Organization on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), hopes “to contribute to global peace and security, human rights and development by making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism.”²⁶ This institution seeks to help increase state cooperation by providing necessary assistance to states through education, communication, and resource sharing. The UNODC also provides transparency and financial partnerships to fight corruption, money laundering, and other crimes. Through cooperation, international organizations hope to circumvent power politics to help stop international crime.

Liberal perspectives try to advance cooperation between states by looking at absolute benefits to all actors. If states used their power together to reduce drug trafficking, success is to be expected. The UNODC reports that there have been a range of successes including

increased seizures at international borders, improved information sharing, coca eradication, enhanced capacity building in underdeveloped states in Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as the continued promotion of synergies between countries.²⁷ Cooperation thus helps weak and underdeveloped states with the internal security issues. Great powers have much to gain as well given drops in the supply of narcotics in their countries.

There are clear benefits to cooperation. However, cooperation can be difficult especially since states, especially great powers, may compete with one another. In 2022, Russia is at war with Ukraine eliciting criticism from the United States and the European Union. China is in conflict with the United States over Taiwan and the South China Sea. In this environment, the possibility of cooperation is greatly reduced; if countries are fighting, they will not be meeting to discuss drug trafficking and organized crime. Of great concern is the amount of fentanyl being produced in China being exported into the United States. The trick is to find a way to cooperate within the anarchical environment. This does not mean that the United States and China do not cooperate. In 2018, Chinese police acting on American information, managed to seize a fentanyl lab, confiscating 26 pounds of the substance and 42 pounds of other drugs.²⁸ Advocates of cooperation would argue that hopefully China and the United States will continue to cooperate regardless of their geopolitical conflict as China remains the primary source of fentanyl entering the United States, including precursor chemicals. This is particularly important because 108,000 people were killed in the United States in 2021; and that number has been steadily growing.²⁹ Thus, while it may seem natural and good for states to cooperate, such cooperation is sometimes very difficult given the international proclivity toward competition, mistrust, and conflict.

Liberal theories see state cooperation as a helpful way for independent states to solve problems. States cannot destroy organized crime going it alone, but rather they must cooperate since threats are transnational in nature. Cooperation may encourage states to cooperate on other issues as well, as partners see that there is more to gain by working together.

Constructivism

Social constructivism asks why threats are considered threats. How did drugs become a major national security threat to many countries around the globe? It is because state governments and the public have determined that it is indeed a danger. Social understandings create our world and its

policies. One of the first major leaders to proclaim drugs an existential threat was President Richard Nixon, who declared the war on drugs in 1971:

To more effectively meet the narcotic and dangerous drug problems at the Federal level, the Attorney General is forwarding to the Congress a comprehensive legislative proposal to control these drugs. This measure will place in a single statute, a revised and modern plan for control. Current laws in this field are inadequate and outdated. I consider the legislative proposal a fair, rational and necessary approach to the total drug problem. It will tighten the regulatory controls and protect the public against illicit diversion of many of these drugs from legitimate channels. It will insure greater accountability and better record-keeping. It will give law enforcement stronger and better tools that are sorely needed so that those charged with enforcing these laws can do so more effectively. Further, this proposal creates a more flexible mechanism which will allow quicker control of new dangerous drugs before their misuse and abuse reach epidemic proportions.³⁰

A speech act allows a government to move quickly on an issue by issuing statements to a receiving public. Once that public accepts the message as true, the public will be more likely to accept policies coming from the government even if said policy infringes on their rights and freedoms. The policies coming from Nixon's war on drugs were accepted by the community because they saw the dangers brought by drugs and drug trafficking. Addiction rates increased across the United States and many families were torn apart. In the 1980s and 1990s, some politicians focused on the crack epidemic impacted inner cities as gang violence in South Central Los Angeles, Miami, and New York City and the impact on community safety.³¹ Prisons were filled as people caught with small amounts of marijuana were given serious sentences. These results have been incredibly harmful for society as prohibition of narcotics has led to increased profits for organized criminals at the expense of low-level dealers. The product itself has only gotten more potent over time as criminals must get people addicted to drugs to protect their bottom line.

Regarding marijuana, it seems that governments and the public are gradually changing their minds, as the substance is now legal in many countries. Many no longer see it as that harmful and many states are beginning to decriminalize (not legal but no penalty for possession) and legalize the substance. This process is called de-securitization, the reversal

of securitizing a threat. Like alcohol in the 1930s, marijuana went from being illegal to not. Leaders maintain that tough on crime policies have not been effective and that marijuana is not as serious a drug as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamine. Consumption of marijuana is no longer a crime in many states, but it is considered a personal health issue. Marijuana use may have some adverse health effects especially on mental health. The Center for Disease Control has stated the following:

People who use marijuana are more likely to develop temporary psychosis (not knowing what is real, hallucinations, and paranoia) and long-lasting mental disorders, including schizophrenia (a type of mental illness where people might see or hear things that are not really there). The association between marijuana and schizophrenia is stronger in people who start using marijuana at an earlier age and use marijuana more frequently. Marijuana use has also been linked to depression; social anxiety; and thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts, and suicide.³²

Essentially then, marijuana in some countries has moved from the realm of extreme measures such as incarceration and illegality to the realm of health and health politics. Social constructivism, specifically securitization and speech acts alter our perception of an issue, which be applied to drug trafficking.

MARXIST PERSPECTIVES

Marxism describes state behavior as defined by wealthier countries illustrated by the core-periphery dynamic. Whatever the core demands, the periphery will supply. Periphery states might produce primary goods like food, resources, and minerals. However, if there is a lot of competition, then the price for these goods will be low. This means people cannot feed their families. For example, a man growing coca leaves for cocaine once remarked: “A guy, a peasant in Colombia, if he grows oranges, he can’t sell the oranges because they rot...but if somebody comes and asks him... ‘Can you grow some coca leaves for us, and we pay you for whatever you produce,’ well the guy is going to do it...He doesn’t care what it is, what he’s growing.”³³ Growing produce has its risks, but coca does not since it is a good in demand. Since Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia can grow coca efficiently, and there is a demand for such goods, then these states will grow coca. Like legitimate goods, if there is demand for an

illegal product, and people are desperate enough, drug traffickers will be there to profit. Since these states suffer from serious poverty, then there will be people ready to produce drugs regardless of the risks associated with that type of business.

Marxism looks at the structure of the world economic system as a system of exploitation. Drug trafficking networks, like any legitimate enterprise, will exploit poor individuals. This is particularly true for women. Drug mules smuggle contraband in body cavities. Drugs are sometimes placed into balloons which are then swallowed and stored in the stomach. Other times, they are forced into the anal and vaginal cavities. If at any time the balloon were to burst, then the woman's life would be endangered. One woman, DJ, describes the ordeal:

When the traffickers got to know that I held an American passport, they realized that they could use me to mule illicit drugs into the United States of America. I was instructed to swallow drugs and board a plane.

We went to the airport and there I met other victims. I just wanted to scream and run and tell people, but my master was right next to me and he continued to say that if I said anything he'd kill me.

I was forced to swallow 86 balloons and taken to the airport. At the airport, one of the victims became very ill. She said to me that a balloon containing the drugs had popped in her body. She collapsed right there. It all happened so fast.

I watched the innocent girl die, it was painful and especially when you have drugs inside you. I was crying and didn't know whom to turn to for help. The flight attendants were unhelpful because they thought I was drunk, so I had no choice but to keep shut. I went through a lot of pain and torture. I was petrified.³⁴

The understanding of the drug trade changes quickly when considering the impact of underdevelopment on the lives of individuals. The state is no longer our level of analysis, but the individual is. In doing so, scholars can imagine a new, safer world. By creating a better world with human being as a central focus, it is possible to create a better world for everyone.

CONCLUSION

This chapter shows the impact of weak, fragile, and failed states on international security. Considering levels of analysis, some individuals suffer from lack of opportunity due to underdevelopment and a corrupt state.

The state is subject to disorder and worsening political environment may cause the state to collapse. Organized criminal groups will take advantage of this and use the state as a base for their global operations. The history of drug trafficking reflects this. For instance, even though the opium trade in China was illegal, there was interference from European powers looking to satisfy their state goals. The opium trade quickly spread throughout the United States and the world. The theoretical section widens this analysis by applying theories and frameworks to help us explain the development of drug trafficking networks. The next chapter will illustrate more contemporary narcotics trafficking by emphasizing how porous border stemming from already fragile states help export drugs globally.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using one level of analysis, discuss the impact of corruption on security.

Why are weak states weak?

How does human insecurity shape drug trafficking?

Choose a failed state and describe the connection to drug trafficking.

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Production Centers

Abstract

- This chapter analyzes the trends in drug trafficking and organized crime in Latin America.
- It focuses on the nature of cocaine production and trafficking.
- It analyzes counter-narcotics initiatives like Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative.

Keywords Colombia · Mexico · Cocaine · Plan Colombia · Border Security

In October 2021, the Colombian armed forces captured the most wanted person in the country: Dairo Antonio Úsuga, known as Otoniel. Úsuga led the Clan del Golfo, a powerful drug trafficking organization. Colombian President Iván Duque argued that “[t]his is the heaviest blow that has been dealt to drug trafficking in this century in our country.” He continued: “This blow is comparable only to the fall of Pablo Escobar in the 1990s.”¹ The arrest of Úsuga represented a significant victory given this individual and his cartels involvement in trafficking of tons of cocaine to the United States. Úsuga has also been involved in the killing of civic leaders, soldiers, and police officers.² Yet experts warned that the capture of a major kingpin will not end drug trafficking. Paul J.

Angelo of the Council of Foreign Relations emphasized that while this is a victory for the Colombian government, there could be a fragmentation of organized crime. Angelo contended, “His arrest also represents a major victory for Colombia’s security forces, which are confronting growing public mistrust over allegations of human rights abuses, soaring coca cultivation, and rising crime and violence.” Vanda Felbab-Brown of the Brookings Institution echoed this point, stating: “Is it going to end the drug trade from Colombia? Definitely not.”³ The capture of this leader could lead to infighting between rivals, perhaps even resulting in higher levels of violence.⁴

This chapter analyzes the trends in drug trafficking and organized crime in Latin America, focusing on the cases of Colombia and Mexico. It looks at both Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative, which were designed to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. It also examines the consequences of the militarization of the war on drugs and the impact that these policies have had on drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence. It then turns to the fentanyl trade and the connection between China, Mexico, and the United States. Finally, the chapter applies international relations theory to understand the drug trade in Latin America and the response of states as they fight drug trafficking and organized crime.

THE EVOLUTION OF DRUG PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING

Coca is the key ingredient used to make cocaine. For thousands of years, indigenous peoples living in the Andean region and Amazon rainforest have chewed cocaine, which helps to relieve altitude sickness. In the 1850s, scientists in Europe isolated cocaine from coca leaves.⁵ In 1886, Coca-Cola was founded. This drink consisted of sugary syrup and cocaine.⁶ The United States government later outlawed the sale and use of cocaine with the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914.⁷

There are three countries that produce coca: Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. Peru and Bolivia constituted the principal producers of coca leaves and cocaine to the United States between the middle of the nineteenth century until the mid-1980s.⁸ The United States government implemented a series of counter-narcotics policies to combat coca cultivation and drug trafficking. For example, the United States supported coca crop eradication programs in Bolivia and Peru. Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori also stopped the “air bridge” between coca regions in

Peru and drug laboratories in Colombia.⁹ Consequently, Colombian coca cultivation spiked. By 2000, Colombia cultivated approximately 90% of the global coca leaf supply.¹⁰

Today, coca continues to be cultivated in the Andean countries. Colombia remains the major coca cultivator and cocaine producer in the world. In 2019, for instance, Colombia cultivated 212,000 hectares of coca and produced 936 metric tons of pure cocaine. Meanwhile, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia had 326,180 hectares of coca cultivation and an estimated 1,886 metric tons of pure cocaine production in 2019.¹¹

While little cocaine production occurs in Brazil, this country has become a major player in the cocaine trade between South America and Europe. Powerful criminal organizations take advantage of shipping centers like the Port of Santos.¹² Cocaine is moved through Brazil and is trafficked through West Africa to Europe. African states like Guinea-Bissau are ideal locations for drug trafficking.¹³ This state is plagued by poverty, corruption, and lack of transparency. Its geographic location as well as state fragility have contributed to this country being a transit zone for Brazilian cocaine.

Opium production, however, has a different history. Drug trafficking in Mexico dates to the early twentieth century. During this period, Mexican smugglers moved opiates and marijuana. Individuals like Enrique Fernández Puerta, who was often referred to as the Al Capone of Ciudad Juárez, was involved in counterfeiting, bootlegging, and drug trafficking. Scholars note that he helped pave the way for drug trafficking into the United States.¹⁴ Yet drug trafficking did not constitute a top consideration for foreign relations between Mexico and the United States until the 1970s. Diplomatic tensions increased after DEA agent Enrique Camarena was killed in 1985. It was alleged that a doctor helped keep Camarena alive while criminals tortured him. The involvement of drug traffickers in this incident increased the tensions between the United States and Mexican governments.¹⁵

Enrique (Kiki) S. Camarena was born on July 26, 1947, in Mexicali, Mexico. He graduated from Calexico High School in Calexico,

California in 1966, and in 1968 he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. After serving in the Marine Corps for two years, Kiki was a Calexico fireman, Calexico police officer, and an Imperial County Deputy Sheriff. Kiki joined the Drug Enforcement Administration in June of 1974. His first assignment as a Special Agent with DEA was in a familiar place—Calexico, California.

In 1977, after three years in Calexico, he was reassigned to the Fresno District Office in Northern California. Four years later, Kiki received transfer orders to Mexico, where he would work out of the Guadalajara Resident Office. For more than four years in Mexico, Kiki remained on the trail of the country's biggest marijuana and cocaine traffickers. In early 1985, he was extremely close to unlocking a multi-billion dollar drug pipeline. However, before he was able to expose the drug trafficking operations to the public, he was kidnapped on February 7, 1985. On that fateful day, while headed to a luncheon with his wife, Mika, Kiki was surrounded by five armed men who threw him into a car and sped away. That was the last time anyone but his kidnapers would see him alive.

It is believed that Special Agent Camarena's death actually occurred two days later, but his body was not discovered until March 5, 1985. He was 37 years old and was survived by his wife Mika and their three children—Enrique, Daniel, and Erik. During his 11 years with DEA, Kiki received two Sustained Superior Performance Awards, a Special Achievement Award and, posthumously, the Administrator's Award of Honor, the highest award granted by DEA.

Source Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), "The History of Red Ribbon Week: The Enrique (Kiki) S. Camarena Story," DEA, <https://www.dea.gov/red-ribbon/kiki-red-ribbon-history>.

As will be discussed in more detail in the sections below, organized crime in Mexico began to evolve over time. Globalization, increasing interconnectedness, and the fragmentation of organized crime have created a complex criminal landscape consisting of a diverse number of groups involved in drug trafficking.¹⁶

DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN COLOMBIA

Colombia has been at the epicenter of the drug war, given its involvement in all aspects of the drug supply chain. Drug trafficking, crime, and violence in Colombia can impact regional security. The country is also only a several-hour flight from South Florida. The United States government worked with its Colombian counterparts to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence in Colombia.

Pablo Escobar, the leader of the Medellín cartel, represented a national security threat to the Colombian state. The Medellín cartel was making nearly \$22 billion per year. In 1989, Escobar was ranked as the seventh richest person in the world, according to the *Forbes*' list.¹⁷ This drug kingpin penetrated the state apparatus through his silver or lead strategy. Police officers, judges, and politicians could either accept bribes or face the consequences.

Pablo Escobar continued his penetration of the political system by serving as an alternate in Congress. Anti-corruption crusaders were embarrassed that a drug baron was directly involved in Colombian politics. Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla had Escobar removed from Congress. Escobar responded by having Bonilla killed as well as Guillermo Cano, the publisher of the media outlet that published the story about Escobar and his ill-gotten gains. Bonilla's stance against organized crime and corruption in the halls of Congress led to his death. Other politicians made the decision to accept the bribes and avoid the potential ramifications of going after Escobar.¹⁸

Escobar continued to expand his Medellín cartel empire. His biggest fear was to be extradited, as he could not control his drug operations from behind bars if incarcerated in the United States. The 1991 Constitution reinstated the extradition treaty. This resulted in Escobar negotiating with the Colombian government and subsequently built his own prison known as the Cathedral. While this represented a farce for many individuals, it enabled the authorities to keep tabs on Escobar. He held lavish parties while behind bars and continued to run his billion-dollar enterprise until the Colombian government sought to transfer him to a more secure facility. Ultimately, Escobar escaped from the Cathedral in July 1992.¹⁹

The DEA worked closely with the Colombian National Police to capture Escobar. The drug kingpin made a phone call to his son in 1993, and the DEA was able to track his location. Escobar was shot and killed on

a rooftop in Medellín. The demise of Escobar resulted in the collapse of the Medellín cartel and had several consequences for the organized crime landscape. The death of Escobar led to a fragmentation of organized crime, as three hundred smaller cartels emerged in Colombia and took advantage of the downfall of the Cali and Medellín cartels. Other actors, like the left-wing guerilla organizations, also expanded their operations in the drug trade.²⁰

In 1998, President Andrés Pastrana sought peace by negotiating with the largest guerilla organization: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC). He wanted the FARC to trust the Colombian government and gave them control of a swath of land the size of Switzerland. The FARC moved into this zone and continued their operations unabated. This strategy by the Colombian government decreased their control of the state over its territory and resulted in insecurity increasing. The FARC had already increased in power, as they took advantage of the collapse of the Medellín and Cali cartels and moved further into the drug trade.²¹

By the end of the 1990s, Colombia experienced not only a security crisis but also economic troubles. Experts worried that decreasing security in Colombia could impact not only regional security but US national security. President Pastrana believed that the drug war could not be separated from the internal armed conflict. He maintained that Colombia needed a plan akin to the Marshall Plan in Europe. The goal was for this international plan to solve the underlying structural issues that helped fuel the decades-long internal armed conflict. President Pastrana desired for his version of Plan Colombia to be an international plan. Yet the European countries disagreed with the re-orientation of Plan Colombia.²²

General Barry McCaffrey, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy during the Bill Clinton administration, played an important role in helping to re-orient Plan Colombia. McCaffrey focused on the need to combat drug trafficking and organized crime in Colombia. Subsequently, the Clinton administration became less interested in becoming involved in the internal armed conflict in Colombia and more focused on combating drug trafficking.²³

The goals of Plan Colombia shifted over time. President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) vowed to combat drug trafficking and the left-wing guerilla movements. He refused to negotiate with the guerillas like his predecessor and desired to expand the presence of the state throughout the country. President Uribe also recognized that the foreign policy goals of

the United States shifted after the events of September 11, 2001. The Bush administration launched its Global War on Terror (GWOT), and Uribe understood that he had to re-cast the framing of the problem in Colombia for Washington to prioritize Colombia on its security agenda.²⁴ Uribe maintained that Colombia did not have an internal armed conflict, but rather a narco-terrorist problem, as the FARC participated in organized crime activities to finance their political goals. The discourse of Uribe reflects the shifting focus of Plan Colombia. In March 2007, President Bush and Uribe held a joint press conference at the Casa de Nariño in Bogotá, Colombia. President Uribe asserted:

I would like you to know, Mr. President, that our commitment is the full defeat of terrorism, and the total recovery of justice and of democratic institutions. We are working with a model of state. We are not dismantling the state, as has been done in many Latin American countries throughout the '90s, nor are we proposing a state-dominated government. We do not accept dismantling of the state or state monopolies. What we are building is trust for private investment in Colombia, and at the same time, we are demanding social responsibilities. We see in trust a way of investing in our country. In investment we see a development tool, and in growth we see a possibility of overcoming poverty and building equity.²⁵

The Bush administration bought into the shifting priorities and doubled down on Plan Colombia. The reframing of the problem by Uribe helped to convince President Bush that Colombia was a worthy recipient of foreign aid to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, and narco-terrorism in the region. The Bush administration responded by increasing US foreign aid to Colombia from \$224 million in 2001 to \$505 million in 2002. In 2003, US aid increased to \$606 million in military and police assistance and \$137 million in economic and institutional assistance.²⁶

The Bush administration also vowed to combat the production of coca through aerial eradication programs. While there have been some “partial victories” in the drug war, as coca decreased in certain departments, aerial eradication initiatives overall were ineffective. Critics of these programs indicate that not only are they not effective but spraying herbicides from airplanes has had health and environmental consequences. International institutions like the World Health Organization have even contended that spraying herbicides causes cancer.²⁷

Subsequent Colombian leaders changed their discourses on the war on drugs, crime, and violence. President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018)

maintained that the war on drugs has been a failure. He equated the drug war to peddling on a stationary bicycle. In 2011, he contended:

I would talk about legalising marijuana and more than just marijuana. If the world thinks that this is the correct approach, because for example in our case we used to be exporters, but we were replaced by the producers of California. And there even was a referendum in California to legalise it and they lost it but they could have won. I ask myself how would you explain marijuana being legalised in California and cocaine consumption being penalised in Idaho? It's a contradiction. So it's a difficult problem where you set the limits. It's a difficult decision. For example, I would never legalise very hard drugs like morphine or heroin because in fact they are suicidal drugs. I might consider legalising cocaine if there is a world consensus because this drug has affected us most here in Colombia. I don't know what is more harmful, cocaine or marijuana. That's a health discussion. But again, only if there is a consensus.²⁸

The above statement reflects how President Santos recognized the need to discuss de-securitizing the drug war in Colombia.

Furthermore, President Santos, who was the defense minister during the Uribe government, angered his predecessor when he decided to negotiate with the left-wing guerillas during his presidency. After two years of secrete negotiations and four years of public negotiations in Cuba, with the support of international actors, a peace accord was reached between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2016.²⁹ The peace process represented a watershed moment, as the country sought to end more than five decades of internal armed conflict. While President Santos won the Nobel Peace Prize, he left office highly unpopular. Many Colombians feared that security would increase. Many citizens did not trust the FARC, who have been involved in a litany of crimes, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion.³⁰

In 2018, voters elected Iván Duque, who was the candidate that former President Uribe supported. President Duque was opposed to the peace process in Colombia, rejecting the policies of the Santos administration. The Duque government also vowed to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. Critics contended that Duque's security strategies constituted a return to the drug war.³¹

President Duque received pressure from the Donald Trump administration to combat coca cultivation. Despite counter-narcotics initiatives, Colombia continued to traffic 90% of the cocaine arriving in the United

States. The Colombian government stopped aerial spraying initiatives at the end of the Santos administration. This led to coca cultivation increasing to an all-time high, as more than 170,000 hectares were cultivated in 2018.³² President Trump argued that the Colombians must return to aerial spraying. In 2019, Trump told reporters, “I’ll tell you something: Colombia, you have your new president of Colombia, really good guy. I’ve met him, we had him at the White House. He said how he was going to stop drugs. More drugs are coming out of Colombia right now than before he was president—so he has done nothing for us.”³³ In March 2020, Trump contended: “Well, you’re going to have to spray. If you don’t spray, you’re not going to get rid of them. So you have to spray, with regard to the drugs in Colombia.”³⁴

The Trump administration’s rhetoric indicated that the government was reverting to hardline drug policies and using the power of the United States to pressure the Colombian government to combat drug production and trafficking. The Trump government was also less concerned about cooperation and working with other countries to address the underlying problems contributing to drug trafficking and organized crime in Colombia. Instead, it focused on combating the supply of cocaine.

STATE FRAGILITY: CONTINUED COLLUSION BETWEEN ORGANIZED CRIME, POLITICIANS, AND SECURITY FORCES IN COLOMBIA

Combating drug trafficking requires addressing issues of state weakness. Colombia has witnessed many scandals involving politicians having intricate relationships with organized crime groups, which only increased the levels of distrust in political parties and the government. Ten of the 32 governors elected in 2015 likely received political support from organized crime. The list includes Luis C. Álvarez, Dilan F. Toro, Edwin Besaile, Didier Tavera, William Villamizar, Rosa Cotes, Oneida Pinto, Nebio Echeverry, Caros González, and Dumek Turbay.³⁵ Criminal organizations have helped finance political campaigns, as they sought favors in return for their financial support. These cases, however, are only some of the scandals that demonstrate the relationship between the state and organized crime—a relationship which continues to evolve.

There is also a complex relationship between the Colombian security apparatus and organized crime. Despite reforms to the institution, the

Colombian police have continued to be inundated by corruption and have had linkages to organized crime. In 2016, the national police force, which has 180,000 members, witnessed the firing of over 1,400 officers in just over one month. This effort occurred because of an initiative to purge the police of corruption. Police officers have been dismissed for a variety of reasons, including partaking in drug trafficking, and accepting bribes.³⁶ The same year also witnessed the resignation of the director of the Colombian National Police because of his alleged involvement with a prostitution operation that existed within the police force. The former director of the police also had allegations levied against him because of his involvement in other illicit activities.³⁷

By 2018, the number of police officers under investigation climbed to 2,488, demonstrating the high levels of corruption afflicting the institution.³⁸ Police corruption in Colombia is not a few bad officers who have partaken in drug trafficking, money laundering, and other criminal activities, but rather corruption is an institutional problem that requires reforms within the entire agency. The increasing number of criminal groups and the new generation of drug traffickers need a corrupt state apparatus to survive. The continued penetration of the police forces will only help organized criminal groups diversify their criminal activities and seek to avoid arrest and persecution by law enforcement.

DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN MEXICO

Like the Colombian case, the nature of drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico has evolved over time. Mexico, which shares a nearly 2,000-mile border with the United States, has become the center of debates among US policymakers about drug trafficking, organized crime, illegal immigration, and border security. Understanding how drug trafficking has evolved in Mexico requires not only analyzing US security policy but the nature of the Mexican state.

For 71 years, a single-authoritarian party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional—PRI), dominated the political system. Mexico has a federal system of government (federal, state, and local). The PRI was a political machine characterized by corruption. There were fewer organized crime groups operating in Mexico during this period, and politicians made deals with drug traffickers for control of strategic trafficking locations. While Mexico could not be classified as a democracy during this period—a democracy requires more than

one party to win—the corrupt practices of the PRI kept violence under control.³⁹

The PRI did not lose power at the federal level until 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional—PAN). The transition to democracy in Mexico represented a watershed moment. Yet Mexican institutions were still plagued by the same weak institutions prior to the transition to democracy. Corruption, impunity, and lack of transparency continued unabated over time. More than two decades after the transition, Mexico still is seeking to combat institutional weakness and reduce the high levels of corruption inflicting the state apparatus.

Drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico have also evolved because of the government's failed drug war strategies. Felipe Calderón of the PAN won the presidency in a highly controversial election and assumed office in 2006. He focused on combating drug trafficking and organized crime through tough on crime policies. President Calderón deployed the armed forces throughout the country to combat drug trafficking, resulting in critics contending that he was militarizing the security policies. Calderón utilized the military because he did not have trust in the police given the high levels of corruption plaguing the institution. The military, whose area of responsibility is defending against foreign threats, was utilized to combat the biggest perceived security threats in Mexico: drug trafficking and organized crime.⁴⁰

The Calderón government also received support from the United States government through the Mérida Initiative, which was originally called Plan Mexico. The name later changed to disassociate it from Plan Colombia. While there are differences between the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia, both initiatives focused on combating drug trafficking and organized crime. The Mérida Initiative focused on four pillars: disrupting organized criminal groups, institutionalizing the rule of law, creating a border for the twenty-first century, and building strong and resilient communities. Ultimately, the first pillar was the top priority for the Calderón administration and the United States government.⁴¹

The successor of President Calderón, Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI, continued the drug war strategies. President Peña Nieto sought to de-securitize the drug war, at least in terms of discourse. He focused on the need to reform the energy and education sectors and downplayed the drug war rhetoric. Despite the differences in rhetoric, the Peña Nieto

government deployed the military and continued many of the same strategies utilized by the Calderón administration.⁴² In 2012, President Peña Nieto compiled a list of 122 criminals that the government wanted to capture. By the end of his presidency, 110 of the 122 criminals on the list had been “neutralized.” Ninety-six individuals on the list were arrested, while 14 were killed.⁴³

The Peña Nieto government captured Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, the leader of the Sinaloa cartel. He was arrested in February 2014 but later escaped from a maximum-security prison nearly a year and a half after his imprisonment. The United States government wanted Guzmán to be extradited, but the Mexican government said that they would extradite him in several hundred years after he served his time in a Mexican prison. Guzmán was later captured in 2016 and was extradited to the United States in 2017.⁴⁴

During the court proceeding in New York, it was alleged that President Peña Nieto received millions of dollars in bribes from “El Chapo” Guzmán. Alex Cifuentes, a Colombian drug lord and associate of Guzmán, made this claim in court in New York. Cifuentes stated that Peña Nieto had “reached out” to Guzmán in 2012 after the former Governor of the State of Mexico was elected to the presidency. Peña Nieto said that he would end the search for the drug lord in exchange for \$250 million. According to Cifuentes, Guzmán offered Peña Nieto \$100 million. These allegations led people to question the relationship between the state and organized crime at the highest levels of government.⁴⁵

Joaquin Archivaldo Guzman Loera, known by various aliases, including “El Chapo” and “El Rapido,” was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Brian M. Cogan to a life term of imprisonment plus 30 years to run consecutive to the life sentence for being a principal leader of a continuing criminal enterprise—the Mexican organized crime syndicate known as the Sinaloa Cartel—a charge that includes 26 drug-related violations and one murder conspiracy. The Court also ordered Guzman Loera to pay \$12.6 billion in forfeiture. The evidence at trial established that Guzman Loera was a principal leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, a Mexico-based international drug trafficking organization responsible for importing and distributing more than a million kilograms of cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine and heroin in the United States. The evidence included testimony

from 14 cooperating witnesses, including Sinaloa Cartel members Rey and Vicente Zambada, Miguel Martinez, Tirso Martinez, Damaso Lopez and Alex Cifuentes; narcotics seizures totaling over 130,000 kilograms of cocaine and heroin; weapons, including AK-47s and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher; ledgers; text messages; videos; photographs and intercepted recordings that detailed the drug trafficking activity of Guzman Loera and his co-conspirators over a 25-year period from January 1989 until December 2014.

From the mid-1980s until his arrest in Mexico in 1993, Guzman Loera was a mid-level operative of the Sinaloa Cartel, earning a name for himself and the nickname “El Rapido” for how quickly he transported drugs from Mexico to the United States for the Colombian cartels. After he escaped from a Mexican prison in 2001 by hiding in a laundry cart, Guzman Loera formed an alliance with fugitive co-defendant Ismael Zambada Garcia and, together, they became the preeminent leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel. Guzman Loera enforced his will and maintained control of his drug empire through an army of lethal bodyguards and a sophisticated communications network. The trial highlighted the methods Guzman Loera and his organization used to transport the cartel’s multi-ton shipments of narcotics into the United States, including fishing boats, submarines, carbon fiber airplanes, trains with secret compartments and transnational underground tunnels. Once the narcotics were in the United States, they were sold to wholesale distributors in New York, Miami, Atlanta, Chicago, Arizona, Los Angeles and elsewhere. Guzman Loera then used various methods to launder billions of dollars of drug proceeds, including bulk cash smuggling from the United States to Mexico, U.S.-based insurance companies, reloadable debit cards and numerous shell companies, including a juice company and a fish flour company.

Source: Department of Justice (DOJ), “Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, Sinaloa Cartel Leader, Sentenced to Life in Prison Plus 30 Years,” *DOJ*, July 17, 2019.

Moreover, there has been a fragmentation of organized crime as result of the capturing of kingpins and the militarization of the drug war in Mexico. In 2006, Mexico had six major drug trafficking organizations. The number of organizations increased to 12 in 2010.⁴⁶ In 2012, the Attorney General of Mexico contended that there were 80 drug cartels.⁴⁷

Sinaloa Cartel. Formerly led by Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, Sinaloa is one of Mexico’s oldest and most influential drug trafficking groups. With strongholds in the northwest and along Mexico’s Pacific coast, it has a larger international footprint than any of its Mexican rivals. In 2017, Mexican authorities extradited Guzman to the United States, where he is serving a life sentence for multiple drug-related charges.

Jalisco New Generation Cartel. Also known as CJNG, Jalisco splintered from Sinaloa in 2010 and is among Mexico’s swiftest-growing cartels, with operations in more than two-thirds of Mexico’s states. According to the DEA, the “rapid expansion of its drug trafficking activities is characterized by the organization’s willingness to engage in violent confrontations” with authorities and other cartels. U.S. officials link the cartel to more than one-third of the drugs in the United States.

Juarez Cartel. A long-standing rival of Sinaloa, Juarez has its stronghold in the north-central state of Chihuahua, across the border from New Mexico and Texas.

Gulf Cartel. Its base of power is in the northeast, especially the state of Tamaulipas. In the past decade, Gulf has splintered into various factions, diluting its strength as it battles for territory with Los Zetas. Los Zetas. Originally a paramilitary enforcement arm for the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas was singled out by the DEA in 2007 as the country’s most “technologically advanced, sophisticated, and violent” group of its kind. It splintered from Gulf in 2010 and held sway over swaths of eastern, central, and southern Mexico. However, it has lost power in recent years and fractured into rival wings.

Beltran-Leyva Organization. The group formed when the Beltran-Leyva brothers split from Sinaloa in 2008. Since then, all four brothers have been arrested or killed, but their loyalists operate throughout Mexico. The organization’s splinter groups have become more autonomous and powerful, maintaining ties to Jalisco, Juarez, and Los Zetas.

Source CFR.org Editors, “Mexico’s Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Last updated February 26, 2021.

Another consequence of the drug war in Mexico has been increasing levels of violence. Both the Calderón and Peña Nieto administrations ended with more than 100,000 drug-related deaths. Drug trafficking

organizations fought not only among each other but with the government. Some experts contend that deploying the military is akin to hitting a hornet's nest with a baseball bat—the hornets will strike back.⁴⁸

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, assumed the Mexican presidency in 2018, inheriting a country that was the most violent that it had been in decades.⁴⁹ This constituted his third run for president. During his presidential campaign, he vowed to end the war on drugs. He criticized the previous governments for the failed drug war strategies. In essence, he sought to de-securitize the war on drugs. He argued that one of the principal problems in Mexico is corruption. AMLO railed against political mafias in Mexico and vowed to fight corruption.

Despite his rhetoric, AMLO has continued many of the same security strategies of his predecessors. For instance, he created a national guard, a militarized unit that has been deployed to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. Critics contend that AMLO is militarizing the drug war, which has not been effective. Maureen Meyer of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), argues: “While López Obrador had affirmed that soldiers should not be in charge of public security operations, his creation of the National Guard and his efforts to expand the role of the armed forces in public security tasks are a significant move away from his campaign promises to return soldiers to their barracks and strengthen civilian police forces.”⁵⁰

President López Obrador faces many security challenges, including not only high levels of violence but also a diverse array of criminal actors operating in the criminal underworld. Moreover, the United States has pressured the Mexican government to combat the flow of illegal drugs, including fentanyl.

MEXICAN CARTELS, DRUG SMUGGLING, AND FENTANYL

Most drugs trafficked from Mexico are smuggled into the United States and seized at official ports of entry; more than 91% of the heroin seized in the United States in FY 2020 was captured at ports of entry. Drug traffickers have diversified the number of strategies to bring drugs into the United States. These strategies include smuggling drugs through tunnels, driving them across the border and hiding them in vehicles, and flying them through aircraft.⁵¹

Currently, the United States is suffering from a devastating opioid epidemic. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 80–100 times stronger

than morphine. It is designed to be used as a pain treatment. This drug has been abused and is also mixed with other drugs, such as heroin.⁵² Mexican cartels are meeting the demand for this potent opioid.

Transnational organized crime groups in Mexico utilize several methods of trafficking opioids. There are a variety of criminal organizations involved in the fentanyl supply chain (i.e., processing, storing, and shipping): the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) dominate the transportation of this lucrative commodity to the United States. These criminal organizations take advantage of globalization and improvements in infrastructure to traffic fentanyl. The large maritime ports in Mexico like Lázaro Cárdenas and Manzanillo are used to move large quantities of international trade. The ports in Mexico are utilized to “absorb” fentanyl as well as fentanyl precursors. These goods are then moved to various strategic locations around Mexico, including Mexico City and Sinaloa. Pure fentanyl is then laced with prescription pills. An estimated 75% of the fake pills and fentanyl is then transported across the Tijuana-San Diego border via trucks, cars, and drug mules.⁵³ Given the large number of cars legally passing between the borders each day, it becomes an impossible task to randomly inspect each vehicle.

The US authorities have continued to seize fentanyl coming from Mexico. In October 2021, for example, US Customs and Border Protection officials in Arizona seized tens of thousands of pills suspected to be fentanyl. The pills were stockpiled in a compartment in a pickup truck.⁵⁴ The DEA noted that more than 9.5 million fake pills laced with methamphetamine and fentanyl were seized between January and September 2021. This represented a more than 400% increase in seizures compared to 2019 data.⁵⁵

Criminal organizations like the Sinaloa cartel are responding to increasing demand in the United States. In 2020, a year defined by COVID-19 and economic hardship,⁵⁶ more than 93,000 drug-related overdoses occurred in the United States.⁵⁷ Social distancing practices aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 increased the levels of isolation and impacted the mental health and well-being of many Americans.⁵⁸ In summary, criminal organizations are diversifying their illicit portfolios and seeking to meet the increasing demand, fueled by the opioid epidemic.

Mexican criminal drug networks are mass-producing illicit fentanyl and fentanyl-laced fake pills, using chemicals sourced largely from China, and are distributing these pills through U.S. criminal networks. These fake pills are designed to appear nearly identical to legitimate prescriptions such as Oxycontin[®], Percocet[®], Vicodin[®], Adderall[®], Xanax[®] and other medicines. Criminal drug networks are selling these pills through social media, e-commerce, the dark web and existing distribution networks. As a result, these fake pills are widely available. The Department of Justice will continue to collaborate closely with its international partners, within Mexico and around the world, to aggressively investigate and prosecute the members of these drug networks.

These fake pills are more lethal than ever. DEA laboratory testing reveals that today, four out of 10 fentanyl-laced fake pills contain a potentially lethal dose. Moreover, the number of fake pills containing fentanyl has jumped nearly 430% since 2019.

On Aug. 3, DEA launched a nationwide law enforcement effort to address the alarming increase in the availability and lethality of fentanyl-laced fake pills. Fentanyl—in powder and pill form—is a significant U.S. public health threat that is killing tens of thousands of Americans. Over the past two months, working in concert with federal, state and local law enforcement partners, DEA seized 1.8 million fentanyl-laced fake pills and arrested 810 drug traffickers in cities, suburbs and rural communities spanning the United States. The amount of deadly fentanyl-laced fake pills seized by DEA since Aug. 3 is enough to kill more than 700,000 Americans. These recent seizures add to the more than 9.5 million potentially deadly fake pills that DEA seized in the past year, which is more than the last two years combined.

During the two-month law enforcement surge targeting fake pills, DEA also seized 712 kilograms of fentanyl powder: enough to make tens of millions of lethal pills. DEA seized 158 weapons and many of the enforcement actions are tied to violence and overdose deaths. Additionally, DEA seized 4,011 kilograms of methamphetamine and 653 kilograms of cocaine.

DEA issued a Public Safety Alert on Monday, Sept. 27, warning the American public about the increasing availability of fake pills that are more deadly than ever before, and that are easy to purchase, widely available, and often contain deadly doses of fentanyl. DEA

also launched the One Pill Can Kill campaign to inform the American public of the dangers of fake prescription pills. The only safe medications are ones prescribed by a trusted medical professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacist. Any pills that do not meet this standard are unsafe and potentially deadly.

Source Department of Justice (DOJ), “Department of Justice Announces DEA Seizures of Historic Amounts of Deadly Fentanyl-Laced Fake Pills in Public Safety Surge to Protect U.S. Communities,” *DOJ*, September 30, 2021.

THEORETICAL APPROACH AND APPLICATION

How does international relations theory help explain drug trafficking in Latin America? Realism does not explain the nature of drug trafficking, as structural realists focus on states as the unit of analysis. Drug traffickers, by definition, are non-state actors. Realism, however, does explain how states have combated drug trafficking in countries like Colombia and Mexico. The regional hegemon, the United States, is interested in Colombia because of security interests. Events that transpire in Colombia impact US national security: 90% of the cocaine arriving to the United States is from Colombia.⁵⁹ Government officials have focused on combating the intricate web of organized crime groups involved in the supply chain.

Realism explains how the regional hegemon, the United States, used its power to re-orient Plan Colombia. The United States Congress passed Plan Colombia and President Clinton signed it into law in 2000. Critics maintain that Plan Colombia became a militarized plan, as the majority of resources went toward helping the Colombian military and police. The United States government invested fewer resources in helping the Colombian government strengthen institutions and solving underlying structural issues through alternative development programs. In summary, the United States government focused on its principal interests first when designing counter-narcotic programs like Plan Colombia. The Bush administration doubled down on its support for Colombia to combat the FARC, which they deemed as narco-terrorists who earned profits from drug trafficking and organized crime. This strategy fit into the larger agenda of the Bush government, which focused on combating terrorism around the globe.

There are also elements of realism that help explain why the Bush administration—and subsequent presidents—was interested in Mexico because of the nature of the threat and the proximity of the country to the United States. Bush, who was the governor of Texas, had a more intimate relationship with the Mexican government—a relationship that he touted when experts criticized him during his presidential campaign because of his perceived lack of knowledge about foreign policy and world leaders. The Bush administration believed that drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence could impact security in the United States. The saying countries do not have friends but rather interests apply to this case study. The Bush administration was less interested in funding judicial reform and more concerned with combating drug trafficking by interdicting drugs and helping the Mexican government capture the leaders of the numerous criminal organizations operating in the country.

Yet liberals would argue that realists underestimate the nature of cooperation between states. One country alone cannot solve drug trafficking and organized crime. This is because states like Mexico and Colombia have high levels of state fragility and are challenged by a growing threat that these networks pose. These networks weaken the state apparatus through corrupt acts. Since the United States sees it in its best interest to address organized crime in Latin America and other production countries, it is important to cooperate with states plagued with these issues. Cooperation is required not only between states where drug production and drug trafficking occur, but also countries with high levels of consumption.⁶⁰

A liberal perspective would focus on the intricate ties between countries like Colombia and Mexico with the United States. This approach would emphasize the immense level of cooperation through Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative. The United States assisted both countries in interdiction programs. The United States government, for instance, participated in training programs with military and law enforcement entities. Working groups and meetings occurred with top-level officials, as efforts to increase cooperation and strengthen partnerships. Hence, liberal perspectives help us understand the kinds of policies needed by states to reduce the threats posed by international organized criminal groups.

Cooperation is also needed to explain the dynamics posed by supply and demand for illegal commodities. The focus has often been on supply-side strategies aimed at reducing the production and trafficking of drugs. Decreasing the supply is important, but it does not address the high levels

of demand in consuming countries like the United States. The laws of economics also indicate that decreases in supply could raise the price of drugs given the high levels of demand. Americans are among the most important consumers of drugs coming from Latin America and through Central America. If Americans continue to use drugs, then these networks will continue to exist and thrive. Production can also shift quickly to other areas of the world. Said differently, focusing on the supply-side alone fails to address the appetite for drugs in countries like the United States. Ultimately, traffickers respond to this demand.

In many ways, we should ask why the United States and other wealthy countries emphasize supply-side solutions over demand-side. This may reflect a wider issue: ignoring impacts on the lives of the poorest in society. The Marxist perspective sheds lights on the notion of exploitation. It is important to note the reasons why people produce these drugs: poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment, among other factors, could lure people into the informal economy. People can be exploited by organized criminal groups because of these issues and could be lured into a life of crime. Women, for instance, are targeted due to their already vulnerable position in many Latin American countries, and have been involved in micro-trafficking, often out of necessity. There are also cases of women being trafficked and forced to do the most difficult and life-threatening jobs.⁶¹ A Marxist could argue that this exploitation is part of the wider international system's tendency to ignore the source of the problem and focus on the impact on wealthier states. If the world seeks to combat the drug trade, more emphasis on assisting the most vulnerable must be addressed.

Furthermore, a constructivist perspective sheds light on the definition of the problems as well as the concept of success. Government officials, particularly during the Bush administration, viewed the drug trade as a problem of supply. If the United States government could help to reduce coca cultivation, then cocaine trafficking would decrease. Government officials focused on the number of hectares of coca sprayed. Critics analyzing the problem through a constructivist lens would ask security for what and for whom. The securitization literature⁶² helps to explain how the United States elevated the need to combat the root problem (i.e., coca production) on the national security agenda. Increases in coca production effects the United States because cocaine is trafficked from Colombia to the streets of New York City—and other cities around the country.

The constructivist approach also helps analysts to understand the importance of defining the security problem,⁶³ which impacts the policy approach that will be utilized by governments. Constructivism helps to explain how the Felipe Calderón administration securitized the drug war. President Calderón, who was a weak president given the controversial elections, wanted to show the Mexican public that he was in control and serious about combating drug trafficking and organized crime. He focused on capturing the leaders of drug cartels. The Calderón government marketed the drug war victories to the public by parading the captured kingpins in front of the media, often with soldiers behind the arrested trafficker. This marketing was designed to signal to the public that Mexico was “winning” the war on drugs.

CONCLUSION

Drug trafficking and organized crime have continued to flourish in Latin America. The United States government has focused on its national security interests and has concentrated on combating the supply of drugs. This chapter has examined drug trafficking in Colombia and Mexico and utilized international relations theory to understand Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative. Liberalism helps to explain cooperation between the United States and the Mexican and Colombian governments. Realists concentrate on the self-interest of the United States, while liberals stress the need to work together and cooperate to solve international problems.

The security studies literature helps to explain how the agendas have changed over time. This chapter has focused on how the war on drugs has been elevated on the security agenda of some countries. Yet other leaders have focused on the need to de-securitize the drug war and focus on treatment, education, and prevention. There is a discrepancy between some leaders who have concentrated on changing the discourse of the drug war, while at the same time militarizing the conflict (e.g., the case of AMLO in Mexico).

The cases of Colombia and Mexico also demonstrate how drug trafficking and organized crime have evolved over time. Governments have militarized the drug war, which has led to a fragmentation of organized crime. While the Bush administration has touted Plan Colombia as a success, drug trafficking continues unabated. Today, Colombia supplies 90% of the cocaine coming to the United States. The focus on exporting the Colombia security model to Mexico has been criticized by many

academics and policy analysts.⁶⁴ The Calderón and Peña Nieto governments and their failed war on drug policies resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of individuals and major human rights abuses.

Ultimately, drug trafficking and organized crime groups will continue to flourish unless states can strengthen institutions. Both Mexico and Colombia have had many campaigns to combat corruption and impunity. Yet corruption and impunity are commonplace. There has been a plethora of cases of top-level officials on the payroll of high-level traffickers. International relations theory alone does not help to explain the domestic politics and the need to strengthen the state apparatus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where does cocaine come from?
2. How is cocaine produced?
3. How has drug trafficking evolved in Colombia?
4. What is the role of Mexico in the drug trade?
5. Have US-funded strategies been effective? Why or why not?

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Transit Centers

Abstract

- This chapter analyzes the nature of drug trafficking in transit countries.
- It focuses on the role of gangs and other criminal actors in the organized crime landscape in Central America.
- It highlights the intricate linkages between the state and organized crime.

Keywords MS-13 · Gangs · El Salvador · Honduras · Corruption

In 2021, court documents reveal that President Juan Orlando Hernández of Honduras alleged that he desired to “shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos.” President Hernández wanted the US Drug Enforcement Administration to believe that Honduras was a strategic ally in counter-narcotics operations. The Honduran government, particularly the security forces, have received millions of dollars in aid from the United States as part of efforts to combat drug trafficking, gangs, and organized crime. The former Honduran president sought to eliminate extradition to the United States. Hernández was listed by the Southern District of New York as co-conspirator number four. It is also alleged that he received more than \$1 million from Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, the former

leader of the Sinaloa cartel.¹ In April 2022, Juan Orlando Hernández was extradited to the United States. He has been charged with conspiring to traffic cocaine in the United States, among other charges. If convicted, he faces the possibility of being sentenced to life in prison.²

This chapter will examine organized crime in Central America, specifically its use as a transit hub for trafficking drugs. It focuses on applying international relations theory to better understand drug trafficking and how states have sought to combat drugs, crime, and violence. Some countries in Northern Central America are ideal places for criminal actors given the high levels of corruption and impunity, which is the exemption of punishment. Drug trafficking and organized crime seek to penetrate the state apparatus, not destroy it. Criminal actors can thrive in locations where state weakness prevails, enabling them to bribe police officers, judges, and politicians. Consequently, the response of many governments has been to securitize the drug war and implement tough on crime policies, even though these strategies have often not been effective.³

Geography, coupled with high levels of corruption, impunity, and state fragility have made Northern Central America a drug trafficking and transit epicenter.⁴ Countries like Honduras have seen spikes in drug trafficking and the number of criminal actors. The United States government estimates that 120 metric tons of cocaine coming from South America first stopped in Honduras via sea or air.⁵ During the first seven months of 2020, the Honduran authorities seized more drugs than during the entire previous year. La Mosquitia, a jungle region located on the Caribbean coast of Honduras, has become a major transit route for cocaine coming from South America.⁶ Countries like Honduras and El Salvador have a variety of criminal groups that help transport drugs to the United States. Honduras is home to the Atlantic cartel, the Valley family, and Los Cachiros. In El Salvador, the Taxis Cartel and Los Perrones have played important roles in the drug trade.⁷ The sections below will analyze how criminal actors have penetrated the state apparatus to traffic drugs with impunity.

GANGS, DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND CORRUPTION: THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR

El Salvador is home to some of the most violent gangs in the world. This section seeks to explain the nature of drug trafficking, gangs, and organized crime in El Salvador. Drug trafficking and the role of gangs have been elevated on the security agenda of the United States in recent years, particularly during the Donald Trump administration. Some of the

rhetoric and discourse has failed to understand the complex nature and history of Central American street gangs.

Gangs are a product of El Salvador's violent past. The country had a more than 10-year civil war during the 1980s. The Salvadoran civil war led to the death of more than 75,000 people as well as massive human rights abuses. Many El Salvadorans fled the civil war and relocated to Southern California.⁸ Young El Salvadorans were often bullied for not speaking English or for their accents in Spanish. El Salvadoran youth formed Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, not only for friendship but also protection.⁹

MS-13 began to evolve over time, and the number of gang members being arrested and incarcerated in the prison system in California increased. The United States government passed the Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996. After serving time in the prison system, individuals would be arrested again and taken to deportation hearings. A judge in Immigration Court would hear the pending cases.¹⁰ Deportations led to many MS-13 members being sent back to their home countries, often after years of living in the United States.

The United States and Central American governments failed to share information, resulting in unintended consequences. The lack of cooperation and information sharing led to gang members being deported to El Salvador without prison records. Gang members returned to their home countries, which were—and remain—plagued by corruption, impunity, and high levels of poverty. The MS-13 gang members returned to what they knew best: being gang soldiers. In essence, they imported the gang culture to Central America and the gang began to balloon. According to the United States Southern Command, there are an estimated 70,000 gangs in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Yet other estimates place the number of gang members in El Salvador alone at around 70,000.¹¹

Various Salvadoran governments—with support from the United States—have implemented tough on crime strategies designed to combat crime and violence. President Francisco Flores (1994–2004) of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista—ARENA) party launched iron fist (*mano dura*) strategies to elevate gangs and gang-related crime on the security agenda. President Flores utilized language that demonized the gangs and their participation in the criminal underworld. Because of the success of President Flores, President Tony Saca later doubled down on these policies. During his campaign for president, he understood that the population was tired of crime and violence

and desired the implementation of security policies. Consequently, President Sacá launched what became known as *super mano dura* policies with the goal of increasing security.¹²

The tough on crime policies led to an increase in the number of gang members arrested in El Salvador. The prison population began to proliferate. The government separated gang members within the prison system, as they feared that putting MS-13 members in the same sector or cells with rival gangs could lead to more violence. Consequently, prisons became the lifeline for gang and gang-related activities.¹³ These criminal organizations were able to better organize behind the prison gates, as gang members from cliques coordinated their operations. In essence, the prison system served as a school of crime.

While MS-13 is involved in drug trafficking, this organization is not a multi-billion-dollar enterprise like the Sinaloa cartel. The gang sells drugs at the neighborhood level and is less sophisticated than powerful transnational organized crime groups, which have diversified their criminal activities and participate in a variety of illicit markets, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and white-collar crime.¹⁴

The goal of MS-13 and its archrival, the 18th Street (*Barrio 18*) gang is to expand territory and control neighborhoods. Gangs operating in El Salvador demarcate gang control in the neighborhood through graffiti. One can walk through a gang neighborhood and see MS graffiti on the wall. This lets individuals know who controls this territory. People living within the territory are often forced to pay rent (i.e., an extortion fee) to the gang. Thus, someone operating a small business or passing through the territory will have to pay a tax to the gang. People who do not pay the extortion fees are often tortured or killed.¹⁵

MS-13 has created strategic alliances with other criminal organizations such as Los Perrones, a cartel that operates as a network of smugglers that traffic contraband from neighboring countries. This criminal organization is divided into two groups: Los Perrones Orientales and Los Perrones Occidentales. Los Perrones Orientales are involved in smuggling migrants, cocaine, and arms from the west of El Salvador into neighboring Guatemala, while Los Perrones Orientales help transit cocaine coming from South America through El Salvador¹⁶ and onto Honduras.¹⁷ Los Perrones have worked with both MS-13 and the 18th Street to traffic contraband. This criminal organization often uses the maras as enforcers and subcontractors. The relative peace between the

maras and Los Perrones is because of different spheres of influence, as the latter group primarily operates in peripheral cities.¹⁸

Los Perrones have been able to use their power and influence to penetrate the state apparatus. In 2005, Ricardo Mauricio Menesses, the Director of the National Civil Police, appeared in a rodeo along with Jose Natividad Luna Pereira, known as “Chepe Luna,” a leader of Los Perrones. Journalist Héctor Silva Ávalos argues, “Nearly four years later, the name of the first police academy graduate to rise to become a PNC director returned to the public spotlight. On July 20, 2009, the Inspector General’s Office opened an investigation into Menesses for his ties with Chepe Luna, based on 2005 reports that he had attended the rodeo alongside the trafficker.”¹⁹ This case demonstrates the relationship between the state and organized crime at the highest level. It also led to criticisms of the corruption plaguing the police. Finally, this case reveals how leaders of organized crime groups have close ties to the very institutions that are supposed to arrest criminals.

RECENT TRENDS IN SALVADORAN STATE CORRUPTION AND COLLUSION WITH CRIMINAL GROUPS: THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND ORGANIZED CRIME AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF OFFICE

Compounding El Salvador’s security problems is the fact that the state apparatus is plagued by high levels of corruption and lack of transparency. When studying state fragility in El Salvador, it is important to note that corruption starts at the top levels of government. Former President Tony Saca, for instance, stole more than \$300 million from the public coffers of El Salvador. President Mauricio Funes also robbed more than \$350 million from the state. He later fled the country and became a Nicaraguan citizen to avoid extradition back to El Salvador. Thus, despite politicians vowing to combat corruption, there have not only been intricate relationships between the state and criminal actors, but also the highest public officials have pillaged hundreds of millions of dollars from the state’s coffers.²⁰

The police and military have also been involved in human rights abuses, which has impacted the levels of confidence in the institution. In 2017, investigative reports emerged of the police used Facebook and WhatsApp

to organize and operate death squads. Experts maintain that the police celebrated the deaths of alleged gang members in these group chats and used them as a mechanism for coordinating among the officers.²¹ Critics have argued that law enforcement has killed suspected gang members with impunity. In 2013, for instance, the military and police killed 39 suspected gang members. The number of suspected gang members killed increased to 320 in 2015 and then to 373 in 2016. Such actions are in part a response to efforts by the government to combat transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, and violence through tough on crime strategies.²²

PRESSURE TO COMBAT DRUG TRAFFICKING AND GANGS: SECURITIZING MS-13

President Donald Trump contended that the United States needed to combat MS-13 by rounding them up and deporting gang members back to El Salvador. The Trump administration viewed the *maras* as an issue that the El Salvadoran government has created and must solve. Many policy analysts have been critical of the Trump administrations elevation of immigration and border security to one of the top national security threats. While there were some surges in 2019 of individuals from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala fleeing their countries of origins because of poverty, gangs, and violence, many of these individuals are women and children seeking asylum in the United States. The Trump administration characterized these individuals as hardened drug traffickers and organized crime groups. Yet 0.11% of the people who have been captured crossing the border have been members of MS-13, which was one of Donald Trump's favorite groups to highlight when discussing the need for border security to combat gangs, drug trafficking, and organized crime. David Bier notes, "But according to statistics from Border Patrol, the government made arrests of just 275 MS-13 gang members at the border so far in 2018—that's just 0.11 percent of the 252,187 apprehensions in this year. That's hardly any different from prior years. Apprehensions of individuals in any gang made up just 0.2 percent of all Border Patrol arrests in 2018, meaning that 99.8 percent of all arrests were not gang members."²³ In summary, most MS-13 members are already living in the United States.

The Trump administration elevated the MS-13 threat on the US security agenda, even charging the highest-ranking leaders with terrorism on January 14, 2021. The Department of Justice revealed that 14 of the

leaders of MS-13 from Long Island, New York, where charged with terrorism. Acting US Attorney Seth D. DuCharme contended, “MS-13 is responsible for a wave of death and violence that has terrorized communities, leaving neighborhoods on Long Island and throughout the Eastern District of New York awash in bloodshed.” He continued, “Even when incarcerated, the Ranfla Nacional continued to direct MS-13’s global operations, recruit new members, including children, into MS-13, and orchestrate murder and mayhem around the world. Today’s ground-breaking indictment seeks to demolish MS-13 by targeting its command and control structure and holding MS-13’s Board of Directors accountable for their terroristic actions.”²⁴ These statements reveal how the United States government during the Trump administration raised MS-13 on the national security agenda, even classifying them as terrorists. This signaled to the public the dangers of this gang, which is involved in drug trafficking, extortion, and other criminal activities in Central America and the United States.

Earlier today, an indictment was unsealed in Central Islip, New York charging 14 of the world’s highest-ranking MS-13 leaders who are known today as the Ranfla Nacional, which operated as the Organization’s Board of Directors, and directed MS-13’s violence and criminal activity around the world for almost two decades.

Specifically, the indictment charges the defendants with conspiracy to provide and conceal material support to terrorists, conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries, conspiracy to finance terrorism and narco-terrorism conspiracy in connection with the defendants’ leadership of the transnational criminal organization over the past two decades from El Salvador, the United States, Mexico, and elsewhere.

Defendant Borrromeo Enrique Henriquez, aka “Diablito de Hollywood,” is widely recognized as the most powerful member of the Ranfla Nacional. Three of the indicted defendants, Freddy Ivan Jandres-Parada, aka “Lucky de Park View” and “Lucky de Park View,” Cesar Humberto Lopez-Larios, aka “El Grenas de Stoners” and “Oso de Stoners,” and Hugo Armando Quinteros-Mineros, aka “Flaco de Francis,” remain at large and should be considered armed and dangerous.

Acting Attorney General Jeffrey A. Rosen, Acting U.S. Attorney Seth D. DuCharme for the Eastern District of New York (EDNY),

Director of Joint Task Force Vulcan (JTJV) John J. Durham, FBI Director Christopher A. Wray, and Executive Associate Director Derek Benner of HSI, announced the unsealing of the indictment. Acting Attorney General Rosen said, “The indictment announced today is the highest-reaching and most sweeping indictment targeting MS-13 and its command and control structure in U.S. history. When Attorney General Barr announced the creation of JTJV in August 2019, he envisioned a whole-of-government approach that would combine proven prosecution tools from the past with innovative strategies designed specifically to eliminate MS-13 leadership’s ability to operate the gang and direct its terrorist activity. This indictment reflects an important step toward achieving that goal. By working side-by-side with our U.S. law enforcement partners and with our partners in El Salvador, we have charged MS-13’s highest-ranking leaders with operating a transnational criminal organization that utilizes terror to impose their will on neighborhoods, businesses and innocent civilians across the United States and Central America.”

Source Department of Justice, “MS-13’s Highest-Ranking Leaders Charged with Terrorism Offenses in the United States,” *DOJ*, January 14, 2021.

DRUG TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND VIOLENCE IN HONDURAS

Drug trafficking and organized crime have evolved in Honduras over time. Corruption and crime in Honduras increased during the 1990s. State fragility as well as the country’s geographic location make it an ideal place to traffic drugs.²⁵ While Honduras has had a civilian government in place since 1982, the armed forces have played an important role. In 2009, the country experienced a coup which ousted Manuel Zelaya. This represented the first coup in Central America since the end of the Cold War. Soldiers placed the president on an airplane destined to Costa Rica. President Zelaya had aligned himself with Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez. President Barack Obama denounced the coup, stating: “Any existing tensions and disputes must be resolved peacefully through dialogue free from any outside interference.”²⁶ The aftermath of the coup was that state fragility in Honduras increased, making it an ideal place for criminal actors involved in the drug trade.

Crime, violence, and corruption continued in Honduras over time and paved the way for tough on crime presidents. Juan Orlando Hernández won the presidential elections in 2013, vowing to implement tough on crime policies to combat crime and violence. He sought to securitize the gang and respond to the growing desire among the public to decrease the high levels of violence plaguing Honduras. In 2012, Honduras had a homicide rate of 85.5 per 100,000 inhabitants, making it the most violent non-warring country in the world.²⁷ Hernández implemented tough on crime policies, focusing on the use of the military. In 2014, President Hernández created an Inter-Institutional Security Force known as FUSINA, which consists of judicial, police, and military personnel.²⁸

President Hernández touted the success of his security measures, as the homicide rate decreased to 59.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016. United States government officials praised the Honduran government's efforts to combat drug trafficking. In 2015, for instance, General John Kelly, the commander of the US Southern Command, stated that Honduras has made "incredible" efforts to combat drug trafficking. He also applauded the cooperation between the two countries, stating: "Since President Hernandez took office, we have had very good collaboration on all fronts."²⁹ This, in turn, enabled Hernández to justify US assistance. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the United States government provided \$183.1 million in foreign aid to Honduras. This number included \$93 million in development assistance as well as \$4.5 million in foreign military financing. The Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) financing was more than \$84 million, while International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement provided \$49.3 million in foreign assistance.³⁰

The increasing use of the military to perform law enforcement operations has occurred because of the high levels of corruption among the Honduran police force.³¹ The Honduran police are not trusted by the citizens and have been involved in many corruption scandals.³² In 2016, Honduras created a police reform commission. Between 2016 and 2019, the commission dismissed more than 5,700 police officers.³³ In September 2016, an internal investigation revealed that more than 80 police officers allegedly worked for a leader of the MS-13 gang. The investigation also alleged that the police participated in the killing of 12 people that occurred at a pool hall.³⁴ Thus, despite these attempts at reform, the Honduran police have been plagued by corruption and have been involved in human rights abuses.

While President Hernández vowed to combat and arrest certain criminal organizations, it is alleged that the Honduran president had intricate relations with other criminal actors. In October 2019, a jury convicted Tony Hernández, a former member of Congress and the brother of President Juan Orlando Hernández, in a New York federal court for drug trafficking. During the trial, a witness alleged that Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, the former leader of the Sinaloa cartel, paid \$1 million to Tony Hernández. The star witness for the United States government was a former mayor who indicated that he worked with Tony Hernández and trafficked 30–40 tons of cocaine as well as funneled millions of dollars in bribes to Juan Orlando and Porfirio Lobo, a former president.³⁵ Jason A. Richman, the assistant United States Attorney, said: “Mayors, congressmen, military generals, police chiefs—they all protected the defendant.” He also contended: “And most importantly, the defendant was protected by and had access to his brother, the current sitting president of Honduras, a man who himself has received millions of dollars in drug money bribes.”³⁶

President Hernández was listed as co-conspirator number four in court documents. The president was later named 58 times in a March 16 filing by the Southern District of New York. It has been alleged by federal prosecutors that the Valle brothers as well as other actors obtained protection from President Hernández, enabling them to traffic cocaine through Honduras with impunity.³⁷ Ultimately, the intricate relationship between the government and organized crime could lead one to argue that Honduras has become a quintessential narco-state.

Tony Hernandez, along with his brother Juan Orlando Hernandez, played a leadership role in a violent, state-sponsored drug trafficking conspiracy. Over a 15-year period, Tony Hernandez manufactured and distributed at least 185,000 kilograms of cocaine that was imported into the United States. Tony Hernandez commanded heavily armed members of the Honduran military and Honduran National Police; he sold machine guns and ammunition to drug traffickers, some of which he obtained from the Honduran military; he controlled cocaine laboratories in Colombia and Honduras; he secured millions of dollars of drug proceeds for Honduras’s National Party campaigns in connection with presidential elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017; and he helped cause at least two murders. Tony

Hernandez made at least \$138.5 million through his drug trafficking activities, money he was ordered to forfeit in connection with today's sentencing.

Tony Hernandez's drug trafficking career started in about 2004 when he began providing sensitive law enforcement and military information to major Honduran drug traffickers Victor Hugo Diaz Morales, aka "El Rojo," and Hector Emilio Fernandez Rosa, aka "Don H." Tony Hernandez provided Diaz Morales with information about, among other things, operations of the Honduran Navy; efforts by the United States to train Honduran Air Force pilots to fly at night to conduct anti-narcotics operations; military radar capabilities so that cocaine plane shipments could avoid detection; and interdiction efforts by certain Honduran National Police officials. Over the course of their relationship, Tony Hernandez helped Fernandez Rosa and Diaz Morales distribute approximately 140,000 kilograms of cocaine.

By 2008, Tony Hernandez's narcotics trafficking had expanded, and he was also manufacturing his own cocaine in a laboratory he controlled near El Aceitico, Colombia. Tony Hernandez told his co-conspirators that some of the cocaine manufactured at his laboratory was stamped with his initials "TH," and a photograph of a kilogram of "TH" stamped cocaine was intercepted during the course of the investigation. Tony Hernandez supplied his co-conspirators with tons of cocaine that was produced at his laboratory.

Source Direct Quote from Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), "Former Honduran Congressman Tony Hernández Sentenced for Distributing Tons of Cocaine, Other Crimes," *DEA*, March 30, 2021.

The high levels of corruption have enabled criminal actors to flourish. There are numerous criminal actors vying for control of territory in Honduras, which has fueled crime and violence. MS-13 and the 18th Street operate as a de facto form of governance in zones throughout the country. MS-13's Saliros Locos Salvatruchos Clique, for instance, has moved to South Intibucá in Honduras. Experts note that the leader of the gang, José Isaías Barahona, who is known as "Isa" or "Slow," leads a group of gang members that have been involved in an estimated 40 murders between 2016 and 2019. The gang is also involved in arms trafficking. Moreover, this gang demands \$100 per month or a single payment for \$800 for people receiving remittance payments.³⁸ MS-13

relies heavily on the revenue earned from selling drugs at the local level. The gang's archrival, the 18th Street, is attempting to expand control of its activities in the criminal underworld. Competition among gangs has led to violence between the rival gangs.³⁹

In November 2021, the arrest of Yulan Andony Archaga Carías, an alleged leader of MS-13 in Honduras, led to questions about the expansion of MS-13 into drug trafficking. Reports indicate that MS-13 has sought to expand its role in the drug trade and has played a role in the distribution of "Krispy," a synthetic type of marijuana.⁴⁰ While MS-13 does not currently act as a major player in the international drug trafficking landscape, some experts note that the death, arrest, and extradition of several key leaders in the drug trade from Honduras could provide an opportunity for the gang to increase its illicit activities.⁴¹

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, Yulan Andony Archaga Carías is MS-13's highest-ranking member in Honduras, responsible for trafficking multi-ton shipments of cocaine into the U.S. and ordering and overseeing the multiple violent acts carried out to make those shipments happen. These allegedly included numerous murders of rivals. David Campbell was, until his capture, allegedly one of Archaga Carías's major suppliers of drugs and guns, and he planned and coordinated violent acts with Archaga Carías. Campbell is in custody, and now a reward is offered for information leading to the arrest of Archaga Carías."

JTFV Director John J. Durham said: "MS-13 violence, fueled by drug trafficking and firearms, has a devastating impact across the United States and Central America. The indictment unsealed today, which charges the highest ranking leader of MS-13 in Honduras and one of MS-13's alleged main drug suppliers in Honduras, shows that no leader of MS-13 is beyond the reach of the Department of Justice and United States law enforcement. JTFV gratefully appreciates its partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, and will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to dismantle MS-13's command and control structure throughout the Western Hemisphere."

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said: "For decades, MS-13 has been synonymous with extreme violence and brutality. The only way to weaken and disrupt criminal organizations that wreak havoc on our communities is to attack them at their core – their leadership and

suppliers. DEA's successful investigation leading to today's charges, along with the addition of Archaga Carías to the DEA and FBI most wanted lists, represent a significant stride in our efforts to stop the devastating effects of MS-13's violent drug trafficking activities that endanger the safety and health of Americans."

Mara Salvatrucha, commonly known as MS-13, is a transnational criminal organization that engages in acts of violence, including murders, kidnapping, assaults, extortion, and large-scale drug importation and distribution throughout Central America and the United States. ARCHAGA CARÍAS is the highest-ranking member of MS-13 in Honduras. As the leader and highest-ranking member of MS-13 in Honduras, ARCHAGA CARÍAS is in charge of, among other things, the gang's drug trafficking operations, ordering and coordinating acts of violence, including numerous murders, and the laundering of drug proceeds. MS-13's drug trafficking operations led by ARCHAGA CARÍAS include the processing, receiving, transporting, and distributing of multi-ton loads of cocaine shipped through Honduras and into the United States.

Source Sections are direct quotes from Department of Justice (DOJ), "Leader of MS-13 in Honduras and Drug Supplier for MS-13 Charged IN Manhattan Federal Court with Racketeering, Narcotics Trafficking, And Firearms Offenses," *DOJ*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/leader-ms-13-honduras-and-drug-supplier-ms-13-charged-manhattan-federal-court>, accessed May 25, 2022.

Moreover, Honduras has groups that specialize in the transportation of drugs. At the height of their power, Los Cachiros were a powerful criminal organization that had a net worth of around \$1 billion. In the late 1990s or early 2000s, the Rivera Maradiaga brothers started to work with Jorge Anibal Echeverria Ramos, known as "El Coque." The Rivera Maradiaga clan and El Coque had various feuds, and El Coque was killed after being incarcerated. Los Cachiros became more involved in the criminal underworld moving drugs for both Mexican and Colombian organized crime groups. This criminal organization also worked with gangs to transport drugs.⁴² In 2015, the leaders of Los Cachiros, Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga and Javier Eriberto Rivera Maradiaga, turned themselves in and started cooperating with the US Drug Enforcement Administration.⁴³

In addition to street gangs and Los Cachiros, Los Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel have had operations in Honduras. Los Zetas were former US-trained special forces who worked as enforcers for the Gulf cartel. They are known for their ruthless violence. In 2010, for instance, Los Zetas killed more than 70 migrants and buried their bodies in Tamaulipas, Mexico. The organization is also known for its narco-messages designed to send signals to its enemies and intimidate citizens.⁴⁴ In April 2011, the security minister in Honduras recognized that Los Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel had a presence in Colon, Copan, Atlantida, and Ocotepeque.⁴⁵ Authorities discovered a cocaine processing lab in Honduras, which was operated by the Sinaloa cartel.⁴⁶ In 2013, the defense minister of Honduras, stated that “[t]here are various organizations, not only Honduran, but also with people infiltrated from other countries, Mexican cartels which have relationships with Honduran criminals and Colombian cartels, which also have relationships with criminals here.”⁴⁷ These powerful transnational organized crime groups present not only a security threat to Honduras but could also impact regional security.

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND APPLICATIONS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, drug trafficking and organized crime has been a top security concern in the Central American region for the United States. While the United States government has assisted Central American countries through various programs, including counter-narcotics cooperation, the realist lens best explains US involvement in Central America. The realist proposition is that the United States government has—and continues—to focus on combating drugs, crime, and violence because these issues impact US national security. Central America is a transit zone for drugs bound for the United States. Crime and violence can also cause migration waves.

Gangs and organized crime have contributed to the high levels of violence plaguing Central America. In 2012, Honduras was the most violent country in the world. By 2015, El Salvador surpassed Honduras with a homicide rate of 100 per 100,000 inhabitants.⁴⁸ The United States has assisted Central American countries combat drugs and crime through programs like the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), which has been in effect since 2008. Between FY 2008 and FY 2015, the United States government has allocated more than \$1.15 billion to Central American governments through CARSI.⁴⁹ Liberal theorists

would argue that this program demonstrates the United States' interest in cooperating with partner countries in the region. Indeed, there are shared security interests between the United States and Central American states, making it logical for states to cooperate. Liberal scholars maintain that the only way to combat a transnational problem like drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence is for states to work together and utilize institutions. The United States, for instance, has assisted Central American countries in security cooperation, police training, and interdiction programs. By fighting corruption and underdevelopment by creating economic opportunities and governmental reforms, fragile states can strengthen institutions and address the underlying structural issues fomenting drug trafficking and organized crime.

Realists would counter that the United States sets the funding agenda. Governments have often focused on combating the supply of drugs passing through Central America. To combat drug trafficking, various US administrations have concentrated more on strengthening the militaries and police forces in Central America. This, however, does not always address the underlying issues of corruption and underdevelopment that may be driving insecurity.

Both liberalism and realism, therefore, help explain why the United States government provides foreign aid to countries like Honduras despite the corruption and human rights concerns. Insecurity in Honduras could impact regional security. Realists focus on interests and the need for security. Liberals, on the other hand, contend that security is best obtained through cooperation. According to this perspective, the United States government must work with its partners to solve these problems, which, by definition, are international in nature.

Constructivists fill in the gaps of liberal and realist perspectives by focusing on the factors that describe the discourse or language that influences the construction of these security threats. As MS-13 has continued to evolve over time, there have been conceptual debates about how to classify this organization.⁵⁰ Constructivists talk about securitization and security for what and for whom. The United States government has re-defined the conceptualization of MS-13. In 2011, the Barack Obama White House released a report titled, "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security." In this report, the administration defined transnational organized crime as:

[T]hose self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate transnationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of corruption and/ or violence, or while protecting their illegal activities through a transnational organizational structure and the exploitation of transnational commerce or communication mechanisms. There is no single structure under which transnational organized criminals operate; they vary from hierarchies to clans, networks, and cells, and may evolve to other structures. The crimes they commit also vary.⁵¹

The administration maintained that transnational organized crime consists of the following characteristics:

- In at least part of their activities, they commit violence or other acts which are likely to intimidate, or make actual or implicit threats to do so;
- They exploit differences between countries to further their objectives, enriching their organization, expanding its power, and/or avoiding detection/apprehension;
- They attempt to gain influence in government, politics, and commerce through corrupt as well as legitimate means;
- They have economic gain as their primary goal, not only from patently illegal activities but also from investment in legitimate businesses; and
- They attempt to insulate both their leadership and membership from detection, sanction, and/or prosecution through their organizational structure.⁵²

The US Treasury Department began to sanction criminal organizations in 2011 as President Obama's Executive Order 13581 granted this agency the power to do so.⁵³ MS-13 also appeared on the Treasury Department's list of transnational criminal organizations in 2012.

The Donald Trump administration was less precise in its characterization of MS-13, often conflating this organization with a drug cartel. On November 17, 2017, President Trump tweeted: "Together, we're going to restore safety to our streets and peace to our communities, and we're going to destroy the vile criminal cartel, #MS13, and many other

gangs....”⁵⁴ A month earlier, Attorney General Jess Sessions spoke to the International Association of Chiefs of Police and stated:

But this work is not finished. I am announcing today that I have designated MS-13 as a priority for our Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces. These task forces bring together a broad coalition of our federal prosecutors, DEA, FBI, ATF, ICE, HSI, the IRS, the Department of Labor Inspector General, the Postal Service Inspectors, the Secret Service, the Marshals Service, and the Coast Guard. And they all have one mission: to go after drug criminals and traffickers at the highest levels.⁵⁵

These statements reveal that the Trump administration elevated MS-13 on the security agenda by calling for border security and the need to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. This discussion shows the concepts of security for what and for whom and have created debates among experts, who maintain that the Trump administration mischaracterized the security threat that gangs like MS-13 pose to the United States.

Gangs like MS-13 do not meet the definition of a drug cartel. Experts note that MS-13 is less adept at selling drugs. Steven Dudley, a gang expert, contends: “One reason MS-13 has failed so roundly at becoming a drug cartel is that it is more of a social club than a lucrative criminal enterprise. Its members benefit from the camaraderie and support that comes with membership – not the heaping monetary rewards that never arrive.”⁵⁶ MS-13 consists of youth who participate in illicit activities, but the organization is not as sophisticated or as well organized as the Sinaloa cartel.

Other experts maintain that MS-13 meets the classic definition of a street gang developed in the criminological research. In 2017, researchers at Florida International University (FIU) led a study on MS-13 and the 18th Street gangs. They conducted in-depth interviews with 24 former gang members in churches and rehabilitation centers and surveyed nearly 1,200 gang members in various prisons, jails, and rehabilitation centers in El Salvador.⁵⁷ While some of the top gang leaders are older, the results of the survey demonstrate that MS-13 and 18th Street organizations remain a youth phenomenon. The survey revealed that 43.8% of the members were between 18 and 25 years old. Moreover, 15.4% of the survey population was between the ages of 13 and 17, while 29% were between 26 and 35 years old. Only 11.8% of the survey population was between the

ages of 36 and 56.⁵⁸ The 2017 FIU study also reveals that 39.5% of the gang members surveyed joined between the ages of 13 and 15, while 19.6% joined at 12 or younger. Only 10.3% of the survey joined at 21 or older.⁵⁹

In summary, constructivism helps shed light on how different key actors have used discourse to securitize certain criminal groups. The elevation of groups like MS-13 to be defined as a drug cartel is counter to the academic literature. Yet these efforts help signal to the public that politicians are elevating these groups on the security agenda. These strategies are used by politicians to request more resources to fund initiatives designed to combat the perceived threats.

CONCLUSION

Central America is home to numerous criminal actors, such as Mexican transnational organized crime groups and gangs like MS-13 and the 18th Street, which partake in extortion and drug trafficking. Central America's geographic location has made it an ideal location for the transportation of drugs and other illicit products. Along with its geography, criminal actors have also been able to take advantage of the high levels of state fragility and have penetrated the state apparatus. Some countries in the region have a symbiotic relationship between the state and organized crime, as seen in the case of Honduras, where the brother of the former president has been sentenced to life in prison for trafficking cocaine.

Insecurity in Central America has become a major concern for great powers like the United States. The United States is interested in Central America primarily because of insecurity. Organized crime, drug trafficking, and violence not only impacts regional security but can also impact the security of the United States.

Some administrations in the United States, like the Donald Trump government, have elevated the threat of MS-13 on the national security agenda. Trump conflated drug trafficking, border security, and illegal migration. Other administrations, such as the Obama administration, have focused on addressing the underlying root causes of drug trafficking and illegal migration. They have sought to cooperate with Central American governments, while the Trump administration viewed the problem in zero-sum terms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the role of gangs in drug trafficking and extortion?
- How has organized crime evolved in Central America?
- How have drug traffickers penetrated the state apparatus?
- What theoretical perspectives shed light on the nature of drug trafficking in this region?

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Terrorism and Organized Crime

Abstract

- Highlights trends in drug trafficking and terrorist networks in the Middle East and Central Asia.
- Examines the routes geographically.
- Highlights the case of Afghanistan as a failed state.
- Highlights state fragility in Lebanon, Western Africa, and Latin America.
- Theoretical approach: Marxist underdevelopment and opium production.
- Theoretical approach: US intervention in the Middle East (realist strategies).
- Theoretical approach: Cooperation (liberal strategies).
- Syria and the case of Captagon (Focus on the role of ISIS).
- Drug routes and trends in North Africa.

Keywords Terrorism · Intervention · Democratic peace theory · Hegemony · Global war on terror · Consent versus coercion · Tri-Border Area · Captagon · Opium · Heroin

What do The Taliban in Afghanistan, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda in Mali all have in common? First, these are all terrorist groups. Second, they

are all involved in organized crime and narcotics trafficking.¹ Since drug trafficking is incredibly profitable, terrorist networks sell drugs to raise finances. This money is then used to purchase weapons, equipment, bribe officials, pay fighters, and anything related to their wider struggle.

As demonstrated in the chapters throughout this book, drug trafficking is an extremely profitable business. Organized criminals are motivated by money. The more money, the more powerful groups become. Power is then used to protect the illegal business: to buy off law enforcement and to enforce contracts by hiring hitmen and enforcers to punish customers who do not pay. Organized criminals are in a category of their own because of their specific behavior (selling illicit substances) and motivation (profit). Terrorist actors are very different, as they have their own political goals and use violence against civilians to inspire fear and achieve those political goals. However, this does not mean they do not also sell narcotics. In summary, the divide between organized criminals and terrorist actors is motivation and goals.

Terrorism has been a significant problem for many states since rapid decolonization after World War II. Most famous of these were the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). PLO tactics such as hijacking and bombing served to inspire fear to illicit policy changes. The 1972 attack against the Israeli Olympic Team was designed to help promote the Palestinian cause. However, the attack damaged the Palestinian plight as people sympathized with Israel. Hatred for Israel also led to the creation of Hezbollah as well as Al Qaeda which birthed the Islamic State. Other groups like the Taliban use terrorism for their own purposes as well. These terrorist actors sell narcotics as part of their drive to achieve specific political goals. Drug trafficking, therefore, is not the core of their motivation, but it does provide the finances necessary to pursue their specific strategy.

This chapter departs from previous chapters, as it focuses on terrorist groups use of narcotics as a means to finance goals and wider struggles against those perceived as enemies. The first part defines terrorism to get a better sense of what motivates these movements. The second task is to highlight instances of drug trafficking and cooperation between the various actors. For instance, Afghan opium is sold to Hezbollah who then traffics it to West Africa; Hezbollah agents there transport these goods to Latin America for American consumption.² The third and final part examines these issues through the theoretical framework utilized throughout this book. This will help us understand the issue in a clear way providing the ability to make policy recommendations.

THE TERRORIST-ORGANIZED CRIME CONNECTION

Terrorists and organized criminal networks thrive in weak, fragile, and failed states. This is because the government is not strong enough to stop production or transit. The supply chains that move drugs from production centers to consumption centers exist because these states have large power vacuums. From Afghanistan to Western Africa to Latin America, weak states allow non-state actors to not only survive but also thrive.

Chapter 2 defined organized crime as those entities that produce, traffic, and sell illicit products. Terrorist networks sell illicit products as well, but their motivations are fundamentally different. Terrorist networks are those entities that seek to destroy the political status quo in favor of an imagined reality. Whether on the extreme left (Shining Path in Peru or the FARC in Colombia) or the extreme right (Islamic State or Al Qaeda), terrorist groups use violence to inspire fear in citizens and governments to force political aims or goals.

Some policymakers and experts maintain that there is a strong link between organized crime and terrorism. In a 2003 US Senate hearing, Orrin G. Hatch, a Senator from the state of Utah highlighted this, contending: “Narco-terrorists participate directly or indirectly in the cultivation, manufacture, transportation and/or distribution of controlled substances. Several terrorist groups provide security for drug traffickers transporting their products through territories under the control of terrorist organizations or their supporters.”³ Thus, either terrorist groups sell narcotics directly or do business with organized criminal groups.

Terrorist organizations need money to recruit and to fight. To understand recruitment, it is important to focus on the individual level of analysis. Terrorists tend to operate freely in weak, fragile, and failed states. This is because the government cannot provide security and there is often relative poverty widely distributed across the population. Terrorist groups target the poorest in society to fight. In many instances, terrorist groups pay more than what a regular business might pay in wages or salaries. Hezbollah, for example, pays their fighters a regular monthly salary, support for housing, education, and medical needs. Citizens benefit from much of Hezbollah’s policies in the areas that they control. They boast a generous welfare program.

Hezbollah is a Shi’a Muslim terrorist group operating freely from their base in Lebanon to hubs and branches around the world. They occupy significant parts of Eastern and South Lebanon and maintain a

military force in those areas. The Lebanese army are ill-equipped when compared to Hezbollah. The Lebanese military is armed by the already weak Lebanese state, while Hezbollah is trained and funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran, a significant regional power, and a Shi'a Muslim state. As a state within a state, Hezbollah has an independent foreign policy in opposition to the central Lebanese government. They have fought wars with neighboring Israel such as the war of 2006.

There is also the added difficulty of Hezbollah forming part of the Lebanese government. In this regard, Hezbollah maintains a political hold on the state; some of the citizenry approve of Hezbollah's actions regardless of their terrorist behavior. If the fighter dies, then Hezbollah would continue support with an added pension of \$350 a month going to the family.⁴ This support is much better than joining the Lebanese army (\$84 a month).⁵ Millions of dollars are needed to raise the capital needed to recruit, arm, and provide social programs necessary to keep the movement alive.

Hamas has similar recruitment programs and reach out to children with their TV programming with "colorful" characters.⁶ These programs require income and since there is a significant demand for drugs, it serves terrorist interests to traffic narcotics. Terrorists cannot operate openly in legitimate markets and must rely on the black market for financing. Like any product, once there is a demand there will be people ready to supply said products for profit. The goods will have a higher profit margin than other enterprises because of the risk associated with drug trafficking. Goods can be confiscated, and people imprisoned.

The next sections will track the movement of drugs from Afghanistan into Europe and the United States using fragile states along the way as major transshipment hubs. Porous borders serve as the conduit for trafficking; there is little in terms of border security for many of these states and thus drugs can freely move across states and their borders. Weak, fragile, and failed states have great difficulty controlling their territory—this includes borders.

FROM AFGHANISTAN TO THE UNITED STATES: FROM PRODUCER TO TRANSIT AND CONSUMER

Afghanistan has long been a fragile state. The Taliban are an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist group, formed by the Afghan mujahideen, which were supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight against

occupying Soviet forces.⁷ The Taliban successfully neutralized competing groups after the Soviet withdrawal and imposed Islamic rule across the country. They were ousted from power during the 2001 US-led invasion after 9/11 due to their protection of Osama bin Laden and other members of Al Qaeda. Since then, the Taliban have waged war against the United States until the American withdrawal in 2021.

Even before the Taliban takeover in 2021, the United States had little control over what went on inside Afghanistan. Opium crops are prolific in many parts of the country. Even former President Hamid Karzai's own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, was involved in the drug trade.⁸ Opium growers enjoyed Taliban protection, and, on many occasions, had their own autonomy. Afghanistan is the largest producer of opium, responsible for the majority of the world's supply.⁹ Every year since 2018, the country has produced between 7,500 tons and 10,000 tons. Opium comes from the poppy plant and poppy production grew significantly under the protection of the Taliban since 1998. There was a significant drop after the American invasion in 2001 with less than 2,000 tons, but it has only grown since then regardless of American and the North American Treaty Organization Allies (NATO) presence. In a survey of 41 opium growers, 26 said they grew opium to earn money.¹⁰ The opium industry is prolific because of Afghanistan's poverty, underdevelopment, and corruption; and unlike more legitimate crops like oranges, the climate is ideal for poppy farming. Even before the Taliban takeover, the Afghan government had little control over what goes on in its own borders. This fact, alongside the perfect growing conditions for the product, presents considerable economic reasons for the industry. This is made even more advantageous given Afghanistan's porous borders. This gives the traffickers the ability to pass on product to third parties like Hezbollah.

Hezbollah maintains ties to Afghanistan, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. Hezbollah and its partners traffic opium, heroin, cocaine, and other illicit products across continents by acting as couriers. For instance, cocaine from South America is shipped to West Africa where it goes to local Lebanese populations. These products are then held until they are moved to Europe and Russia. One Lebanese, Maroun Saade, became infamous for his work with Hezbollah. He conspired with members of the Taliban to store and then transport tons of Afghan grown heroin through West Africa to the United States and other countries.¹¹

The Saade case illustrates the power of Hezbollah throughout the world. Hezbollah has organized a sophisticated criminal enterprise that

connects producer markets with consumer markets. The fragility of Lebanon, Afghanistan, and the states in West Africa and South America allows these actors the ability to operate freely. Corruption is a significant factor in this enterprise because it allows illicit actors to achieve any goal possible such as money laundering. In another example, two Lebanese exchange houses were moving payment throughout this process. One of these exchange houses, Halawi Exchange Company, helped move money through the purchase of used cars in the United States to export to West Africa, specifically the state of Benin. In Benin, money launderers there would wire money to US car suppliers. Much of this money was profit from the drug market.¹²

Hezbollah is represented in many parts of the world because of the prolific nature of the Lebanese global diaspora. According to some security analysts, there is one region of the world that is particularly significant: the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. This area operates in a power vacuum, a so-called law-less region according to the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Research.¹³ The TBA region has operated free of state intervention for many years. In 2003, a report by the US Library of Congress describes how several terrorist groups including Hezbollah, Hamas, and even Al Qaeda have a presence in the area:

With lax border controls and more than 100 hidden airstrips in the region, the TBA has long been popular with contraband smugglers, gunrunners, and drug traffickers. A large number of small airplanes take off from clandestine airstrips in Paraguayan territory and enter Brazilian air space. Many of them also cross Argentina's Misiones Province. The TBA is reportedly a conduit for the smuggling of some drugs through Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, which serve as transit countries for Andean cocaine.¹⁴

The TBA states have very little control over this area making them fragile states. Indeed, this area is used for several reasons including fund-raising, recruitment, and planning.¹⁵ Related to the fund-raising aspect is the trafficking of narcotics, arms dealing, money laundering, and piracy.¹⁶ It is estimated that these groups make between \$300 and \$500 million from these products and services which they send to their terrorist comrades abroad through laundering channels.

Furthermore, there are high levels of cooperation between terrorist actors, even those that are ideologically and religiously different. Sunni groups like Al Qaeda freely work together with Shia groups like

Hezbollah.¹⁷ Organized criminals from around the world such as the Chinese Triads and Tai Chen Saninh, the Japanese Yakuza and the Big Circle Boys, the Russians, and Colombians as well as several local groups appear to cooperate on their businesses.

Lebanon, Afghanistan, and the aforementioned mentioned regions are chronically underdeveloped with significant corruption, and this is a major driver of the drug trade. However, for many people, it remains a significant income stream. Production remains resilient in the face of clampdowns from the United States. Interestingly, even though the United States occupied Afghanistan for 20 years, there was little it could do to stop the almost free flow of narcotics. Afghanistan remains the world's principal source for opium and heroin and is a top producer of marijuana and cannabis resin colloquially known as hashish.¹⁸ It is estimated that the Taliban earn between \$100 and \$155 million every year from the drug trade—just over 25% of the Taliban's total funds. These funds are then used as part of the Taliban's grand strategy, especially recruitment. The United States and NATO have tried to help the Afghan people move away from cultivating opium poppy. This means helping with the growth of alternative crops. Programs to help farmers with licit seeds, fertilizer, farming equipment and technology, and loans successfully moved 314,268 hectares of poppy cultivation to legitimate crops. There has been further success as 190,000 full-time jobs were created.¹⁹

Yet heroin production is still very profitable. The Taliban are also expanding their business, looking at the production of methamphetamine. Taliban traffickers describe methamphetamine as a new source of income. One anonymous official remarked: "They will send you in 100 kilograms of heroin and add 5 kilos of meth for free—there you go, give it a go. Just to get that user base started, and then they will start swamping you."²⁰ If the Taliban continues to increase their methamphetamine production, Afghanistan will quickly become one of the most prominent narcotics states in the world. By diversifying their sources of income, the Taliban will become more powerful. Furthermore, since the Taliban controls Afghanistan, and have already established routes, they can easily get their new product into their existing consumer markets in Australia, Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa.

The Taliban appears to be diversifying their sources of drug income, producing both heroin and methamphetamine. And there is another new drug that is taking the world by storm: Captagon. Captagon is mostly

produced in Syria, a state still mired in a bloody civil war. Many businessmen are moving away from legitimate enterprise due to the profit margin and the fact that the government has little control over specific parts of Syria. Captagon profits are so large it rivals the current Syrian GDP. One could argue that Syria is becoming a narcotics capital.²¹ It is an amphetamine that is made of fenethylline hydrochloride. It is chemically produced, and it stimulates the central nervous system, increasing concentration, and euphoria. Militants fighting the civil war in Syria consume the drug to fight.²² Captagon moves quickly through Syria and into Lebanon and then Saudi Arabia and anywhere in the world.²³ It is estimated that Captagon exports from Syria is worth \$3.46 billion, but others place the amount much higher. Hezbollah is also producing the drug, opening up another drug-related income stream as they themselves are “[f]acing extreme financial pressures because of US sanctions, the coronavirus pandemic and Lebanon’s economic collapse, Hezbollah appears to be growing increasingly reliant on criminal enterprises, including drug smuggling, to finance its operations.”²⁴ These networks need a corrupt and underdeveloped state to thrive and to move products to consumer markets.

A Short History of Hezbollah: A State within the Lebanese State
 The Beqaa valley is outlaw territory, long known as a haven for terrorists, counterfeiting and drug smuggling. Syrian soldiers—who intervened in Lebanon’s civil war years ago and never left—still dominate the region. Accompanied by a local Lebanese reporter, Hikmat Sharif, who works for Agence France-Presse, Lewis enters the town of Baalbek, a Hezbollah stronghold. Posters of Hezbollah “martyrs,” or suicide bombers, line the streets of the city. A souvenir store sells videos of Hezbollah guerrillas attacking Israeli soldiers, alongside shelves of Hezbollah hats and postcards. They even market a Hezbollah scent called “perfume of the martyrs.”
 Founded in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah—“Party of God” in Arabic—based its ideology on the 1979 Iranian revolution and the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. Lewis spots the old castle where Iranian Revolutionary Guards came in 1981 and later trained Hezbollah recruits. He also sees where Hezbollah held Western hostages they kidnapped in the 1980s during Lebanon’s long civil war. He even spots a notorious airplane hijacker who is living quietly in Baalbek.

Hijackings, bombings, a brutal civil war between Christians and Muslims—that’s what Lebanon was known for in the 1970s and 1980s, especially the capital, Beirut, which was reduced to rubble. But Lewis discovers that Beirut is largely peaceful today and much restored, eager to reclaim its old reputation as “the Paris of the Middle East.” He sees American fast food restaurants, fancy cafes, belly dancers, even a luxury car show hosted by Miss Lebanon and prosperous businessmen seeking to attract foreign investment.

Hezbollah is so entrenched in Lebanon’s political system that few Lebanese dare to criticize it openly. But attorney and human rights activist Muhammad Mugarbi tells Lewis that Hezbollah’s presence “is a recipe for trouble for Lebanon ...They are not subject to the rule of law.” Hezbollah is “untouchable” because Syria—with 20,000 troops in Lebanon—still backs Hezbollah and holds sway over Lebanon’s President Emile Lahoud.

Heading south to Lebanon’s border with Israel, Lewis enters an area where the Lebanese army has little authority—this is Hezbollah country, in which Hezbollah acts as a surrogate army for its patrons, Iran and Syria. A thin blue line of U.N. peacekeepers stands guard along the border, but here Hezbollah claims its greatest triumph—compelling Israeli soldiers to withdraw from Southern Lebanon in 2000.

Source “Lebanon: The Story,” *PBS Frontline*, May 2003.

Consumer markets like the United States are in many ways considered the enemy of the terrorist group. Terrorist groups care little about the lives impacted by drug addiction. However, it is a considerable source of income. State fragility is a significant driving factor as there are very few options to make money due to underdevelopment and corruption. For this reason, terrorist groups that control large swaths of territory in these states enjoy a firm foothold. These issues must be analyzed further by using the theoretical tools of international security. The following section will discuss Marxism, constructivism, realism, and liberalism as they relate to drug trafficking and terrorism.

THEORETICAL APPLICATION: MARXIST UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

A Marxist perspective would argue that underdevelopment and the demand for drugs generates the supply of illicit commodities. States like Afghanistan and Lebanon are all underdeveloped—albeit to different degrees—due to years of war, civil conflict, and corruption. These fragile states are dependent on core states for aid and trade, but also cannot regulate or monitor illicit activity in every part of the country. This might be because of incapability, but also because criminal actors or terrorist groups control large zones within states. States are just not willing or able to challenge the terrorist actor because it is simply just too powerful.

A Marxist approach can help understand the formulation of terrorist networks. The Middle East suffered for years under colonialism, imperialism, and foreign interference. For example, in 1953, Iranian citizens voted for a leftist government that swore to nationalize the oil industry. The oil industry was dominated by foreign powers, most importantly was the United States and the United Kingdom. Nationalizing the oil industries would return the profit to the people of Iran. To protect their interests, the United States and the United Kingdom formulated a coup ousting the democratically elected government for authoritarian rule. The coup benefited elites at the expense of the poorest of Iranian society. It allowed the great powers to keep their oil wealth and left the ruling Iranian regime dependent on the great powers for security. Marxism explains that capitalist powers use their military power to protect their wealth and power at the expense of poor states and their citizens.

The Marxist dynamic in the Middle East follows a basic formula: a Western backed government is overthrown by those fighting against Western dependency. This was true in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Lebanon. Lebanon is an interesting case: the state underwent a civil war between forces on the political right who wanted to maintain the system and forces on the left who preferred to overthrow it.²⁵ Forces of the political left sought to remove the dependency networks to win true emancipation and self-rule.

Marxist approaches to international security underscore the impact of global capitalism and exploitation of people. Any violent reaction therefore is a consequence of the forces of global capitalism. Marxists writing after the attacks on 9/11 generally saw terrorism as a violent response to globalization.²⁶ In many ways, terrorism was part of a wider resistance to

European colonialism after end of the Ottoman Empire and continued American political and economic domination of the Middle East during the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War, American culture exploded onto the global scene so much so that it led to a fundamental rejection by more conservative cultures such as in the Middle East. According to a Marxist approach, great powers must destroy terrorism and maintain the status quo to protect the capitalist order. This requires continued expansion of the globalization project, further exploitation of poorer states, and the consolidation of American power.

The Marxist approach to the study of the nexus of terrorism and organized crime requires the adoption of an ideological framework. This means deconstructing the ideas that feed into more consensual, not coercive, forms of power. Power is getting others to do what they would normally not do. People may be compelled by force to join a terrorist group, but they might also consent or agree to join out of shared ideas and generally agreed identities. Consent means they agree or accept to do something. It, therefore, is necessary to move beyond Marxism into a social constructivist understanding of the world. The aim is to create a new world based on alternative norms and laws. Terrorism is a violent manifestation of this struggle. Terrorists utilize ideas to help recruit individuals to the cause.

Terrorist movements bring in a counter-hegemonic perspective, meaning they advocate for the destruction of the old, dominant order and the creation of a new world order. In many respects, terrorism latches on to perceived injustices to persuade others to follow. Terrorism is any act of violence against a civilian population for a specific political goal. Thus, a terrorist attack is not simply any act of spontaneous violence. There must be a political purpose to it, and this is an act of communication with the desired aim of convincing another party of some political idea.

The following is an interview of an Afghan woman poppy farmer.

QUESTION: Why do you cultivate poppy, knowing that it is an illicit crop?

ANSWER: Well, this is a normal business here and I cultivate it to support my big family...In general, it is the only means of survival for thousands of women-headed households, women, and children in our village whose men are either jobless or were killed during the war.

Q: Aren't you afraid that you will be punished for cultivating an illegal crop?

A: Well, I know the government has announced the eradication of poppy fields but if they come to my land I will show them my bare-foot orphan grandchildren and widowed daughters who have no one to support them and bring them food and medicine. Just today, the government eradication teams came to our village and they did not destroy my field when I told them I was a widow and had children. However they eradicated 50 percent of other people's poppy fields.

Q: What is your annual revenue and what do you do with that money?

A: It varies. This year I expect to harvest over six kilos of opium poppy, which will be around \$3,000. I have to dig a deep well of my own and get a diesel water pump for next year's season, while I still have to take into consideration the requirements of my 20-member family's expenses for one year, which is more than my income from poppy.

Q: What will you cultivate as an alternative crop or alternative choice if the government completely bans poppy cultivation?

A: I don't think any plant can work as a suitable alternative to poppy. Due to drought, people cannot cultivate large portions of land with wheat or other crops to make a living. Poppy needs just a small piece of land with not too much water. And most of the people have very small pieces of land from which they can never earn a good income if anything else is cultivated except poppy.

Q: Are you aware of the risks of poppy, which threatens millions of people in the world?

A: Yes, my brother-in-law become addicted in Peshawar and parted from his family and nice children. But I should say that poverty is a more serious threat to millions of already vulnerable people like us. If we have a good road, electricity, water, and food then we would not cultivate poppy.

Source Payvand News, "AFGHANISTAN: Interview with Female Opium Farmer," Payvand News, September 14, 2004.

Terrorist networks reject dominant ideas and seek to replace these ideas with what they think is good. Constructivism posits that politics is grounded in perceptions based on social interactions repeated through history. If states and individuals send the right signals, other states will not be threatened. However, if states and individuals send messages of violence especially through terrorist attacks, there will be war and conflict. Above all, Social constructivism sees communication as important. This forms the backbone of securitization theory.

The constructivist approach discusses the motivations of terrorist actors by exploring recruitment factors. It is not simply an economic question, but one that discusses ideas and perceptions. One Islamic State recruit summarized this idea succinctly when he said: “An Islamic State has been established and it is thus obligatory upon every able-bodied male and female to migrate there...Muslims have been crushed under foot for too long. ... This nation is openly against Islam and Muslims. ... I do not want my progeny to be raised in a filthy environment like this.”²⁷ There are two major conclusions to derive from this: first, that Muslims are being killed and second, Muslims need to rise up and join the Islamic State to fight against the enemy. This is similar to Marxist movements of the nineteenth century that worked toward revolution. These two frameworks, when combined, may further illuminate factors that push people into a life of terrorism. Further interviewing of Islamic terrorist recruits uncover the reasons for joining the Islamic State:

- *Status seekers*: Intent on improving “their social standing” these people are driven primarily by money “and a certain recognition by others around them.”
- *Identity seekers*: Prone to feeling isolated or alienated, these individuals “often feel like outsiders in their initial unfamiliar/unintelligible environment and seek to identify with another group.” Islam, for many of these provides “a pre-packaged transnational identity.”
- *Revenge seekers*: They consider themselves part of a group that is being repressed by the West or someone else.
- *Redemption seekers*: They joined ISIS because they believe it vindicates them, or ameliorates previous sinfulness.
- *Responsibility seekers*: Basically, people who have joined or support ISIS because it provides some material or financial support for their family.
- *Thrill seekers*: Joined ISIS for adventure.

- *Ideology seekers*: These want to impose their view of Islam on others.
- *Justice seekers*: They respond to what they perceive as injustice. “The justice seekers’ ‘raison d’être’ ceases to exist once the perceived injustice stops,” the report says.
- *Death seekers*: These people “have most probably suffered from a significant trauma/loss in their lives and consider death as the only way out with a reputation of martyr instead of someone who has committed suicide.”²⁸

These reasons are inherently social in nature, meaning they dwell in the realm of ideas, perceptions, identities, and other societal reasons. Terrorists are inspired by specific ideas that seek to overturn and destroy the status quo.

In sum, Marxist and constructivist ideas as fundamental to our understandings of terrorism. Drug trafficking is an important part of raising money for the fight, but ideas must also be examined. Even though selling drugs fuels addiction, terrorist groups are not considering this as they seek to attain justice through violence. The next section will discuss the liberal approach to these groups through the creation of democracies in autocratic states. Through the process of exporting democracy, governments like the George W. Bush administration hoped that the entire world system would be made secure. Fighting terrorism in all areas is a significant part of this process.

LIBERAL THEORETICAL APPROACH: DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY AND THE REALIST CRITIQUE

The year 2001 was a turning point for US foreign policy. On the morning of September 11, two commercial aircraft slammed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Another plane crashed into the Pentagon and another, Flight 93, crashed into a Pennsylvania field. President George W. Bush was reading to a class of children when he heard the news. His father, previous President George H. W. Bush, took an interest in Middle Eastern security by directing the First Gulf War against Saddam Hussein after Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990.²⁹ This intervention borrows from the realist strategy, as the United States wanted to preserve the sovereignty of Kuwait and protect the status quo in the Middle East. The United States stationed troops in Saudi Arabia to accomplish this goal.

This greatly upset extremist Muslims because there was a belief that no non-Muslim should ever live in the holy lands of Saudi Arabia (the land of Mecca and Medina, the two most holy sites in Islam). Osama Bin Laden swore that he would destroy the United States to remove it from these lands. This was the logic behind 9/11 and it failed.

After 9/11, the Bush administration vowed to combat terrorism around the globe. The idea was to destroy terrorist groups to make the United States safer and more secure. The United States took a more active role in the world. It started underwriting democracies around the world by destroying autocracies wherever they are. As George W. Bush would argue, “some...question whether the spread of democracy in the Middle East should be any concern of ours...America always is more secure when freedom is on the march.”³⁰ The idea that the more democracies in the world, the safer the world would be, began to take hold. The Bush administration argued that it is the responsibility of the free world to intervene in the affairs of other countries plagued by national security threats like terrorism, even though many academics and policymakers criticized the notion of exporting democracy and interventionist policies.³¹

The “more democracies, the fewer wars idea” is not a particularly new one. This harkens back to liberal thought, specifically democratic peace theory. Democratic peace theory simply states that countries that have free and fair elections, free speech and press, and rule of law (those states that are democracies) do not go to war with one another. The more democracies in the world system, the safer and more secure the international order. This increases international stability. This is because citizens fight and die in wars and, therefore, will not elect to go to war.³² Autocracies are the root of war because they cannot be trusted. Throughout history, autocracies have waged war for the personal glory of the leader. Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, the Argentinian military junta, and Kaiser Wilhelm II were all aggressive and picked fights with other states. However, and herein lies a paradox: democracies at times go to war with autocracies to feel safer. These “crusades” are to overturn violent autocracies in a preventive move to gain security. Linking this idea to terrorism, Bush blamed autocratic states like Iraq for the attack on 9/11, even though Saddam Hussein was not involved in this tragic event. His focus was Iraq, as Hussein supported terrorist groups like the PLO before. Bush’s focus was not Afghanistan, but he saw a clear link between Bin Laden and Hussein’s regime. As George W. Bush said: “From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as

a hostile regime. Our nation has been put on notice, we're not immune from attack. We will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans."³³ The global war on terror had begun and autocratic states were on the list of states to be "made" into democracies. Iran and North Korea were also on the radar, as Bush labeled these states "the Axis of Evil."³⁴

Spreading democracy was an essential part of American foreign policy. By destroying autocratic states and replacing them with democratic states, it was thought that terrorism and associated organized criminal networks could be curtailed and even destroyed altogether. The United States and other allies might also try to provide security and economic opportunity to those states to assist in the effective state's success. Plan Colombia and the American involvement in Afghanistan were all attempts at providing security and development assistance as part of a simultaneous war on drugs and terrorism. However, these problems still exist, and terrorism and organized crime proves a resilient force in the international system. In the case of Iraq, while Hussein's regime was indeed destroyed, democratic institutions have failed to provide a safe, secure, and prosperous country for the Iraqi people. The Islamic State took over large swaths of ungoverned territory and part of their success was the way they raised money from narcotics.

The Islamic State was funded by developing a complex trafficking network.³⁵ Undermining these groups requires states to cooperate through information sharing and mutual border security. Some liberal theorists argued that states can work with countries and cooperate to reduce organized crime and terrorist threats given the international nature of the problem.

Cooperation is the central theme of liberal theories. Realism is a critique of liberalism. States suffering from terrorism are responsible for their own affairs. Realism is about power, and states are supposed to use power to defend themselves. The notion of self-help drives actors to act rationally and protect themselves from threats. Power is used to protect states and their interests. Anything that challenges the state is a direct threat to that state's security. Anything that destroys state sovereignty is a threat, regardless of if they are states or non-state actors. States have an interest in destroying both terrorist and organized criminal networks because these groups destabilize the international system. As violent non-state actors, terrorists, and organized crime groups are undermining the international order because they are defying the rules of the international

order. This presents a threat to international order and stability. The more powerful the organization becomes, the more likely it could take over a state. If successful, the state may then attempt to transform the entire system into its own image. Consequently, terrorist and organized criminal actors should be part of a state focus. However, realists would also question whether states without major security interests should get involved with the problems of other states. This marks a major departure point between realists and liberals.

To examine the realist perspective further, it is necessary to remember what interests are. Interests are anything necessary to further the power of a state in terms of its survival. If a state is building up forces on one's border, then governments may attack preemptively to neutralize that threat. Regarding terrorism, the fight is far away from major powers. The United States is protected by vast oceans. Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan are even further away from the United States. The argument could be made that these terror states are problems for neighboring states. Terrorist attacks may occur in the United States, but these attacks might be anomalous and not comparable to the number or intensity of attacks in other states in closer proximity. Some realists argue that the United States wastes billions of dollars and manpower to provide security for others.³⁶ States could become dependent on the United States and may not be able to solve their own affairs. They would point to the recent withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. The United States pulled troops out and the Taliban quickly took over. So even though the Afghan forces were trained and funded by the United States, they simply could not fight to preserve their own state's security and sovereignty. The United States has lost the fight in Afghanistan. A realist would expect this eventuality and maintain that liberal policies will fail.

CONCLUSION

In recent history, terrorist networks have developed resilient means of raising money through narcotics trafficking. While there are efforts to help increase economic development and defeat corruption, the fact is people still demand drugs. The following chapter will discuss ways to curb consumption and demand for drugs. The hope is that demand reduction will eventually lead to the end of production, as it is no longer profitable to supply drugs. Demand reduction will thus pay dividends as organized criminal networks and terrorist groups will no longer have the

funds necessary to continue operations. This could contribute to a safer and more stable international political system.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What role do failed states play in terrorism and organized crime?
- What rule should the United States play in fighting terrorism and organized crime?
- Is terrorism a significant threat to international peace and security when compared to states like China?
- Is fixing failed states part of the war on terror? If not, should it be?
- Does underdevelopment lead to terrorism?
- Why are fragile states like Lebanon so susceptible to terrorism?
- Should the United States intervene in foreign conflicts?

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Conclusion

Abstract

- This chapter highlights the limitations of international relations theory.
- The chapter discusses the lessons learned.
- It examines the potential migration challenges resulting from drug trafficking and organized crime.

Keywords Migrations · Lessons learned · Decriminalization · International relations theory

This book has examined trends in the drug war. This work is designed to be a primer for students, as opposed to an exhaustive volume. It has also attempted to shed light on how different international relations theories can be utilized to understand drug trafficking and organized crime. The chapters have shown that traditional theories like realism and liberalism have explanatory power, but there are also major limitations. Structural realists, for example, focus on the state as the unit of analysis. They argue that the international system is defined by anarchy and states seek power to survive. Yet the focus of this book is drug trafficking. Drug traffickers, by definition, are non-state actors. Many realists like Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Robert Jervis have spent their careers studying great

power politics, balance of power, and threats like nuclear weapons. For these realist scholars, drug trafficking is not on their scholarly agenda in terms of security threats. However, since these non-state actors directly challenge the state, limiting their ability to act independently, organized criminal groups must now be considered part of the international system and a serious part of the realist literature.

Even though neo-realists focus on states as the unit of analysis, realism has explanatory power, particularly in terms of foreign policy. Realist theory helps explain how countries like the United States and Colombian sought to counter drug trafficking and organized crime. The United States government during the Clinton administration, for instance, changed the goals of counter-narcotic plans like Plan Colombia to focus on the principal security threats for the United States, as opposed to alternative development and institutional strengthening.

Liberal theorists maintain that solving international problems requires cooperation. Drug trafficking and organized crime occurs around the globe. Countries must work together and work through institutions. Yet critics contend that there often is no political will. Moreover, countries do not always trust each other. Some leaders have been corrupted by organized crime, as seen in the case of Honduras. President Juan Orlando Hernández cooperated with the United States on counternarcotics and was praised for being a terrific partner. Yet his brother was sentenced to life in prison in the United States for drug trafficking, and Juan Orlando Hernández was extradited to the United States.¹

It is important to recognize that international relations theories have limitations in explaining drug trafficking and organized crime. These theories fail to understand the role of domestic politics as well as institutions. Comparative politics scholars debate the nature of institutions and state fragility in regions like Latin America. This book argues that understanding state fragility is vital when analyzing drug trafficking and organized crime. Criminal actors flourish because of their ability to penetrate the state apparatus.

THEORIES, DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND ORGANIZED CRIME: EXAMINING LIMITATIONS

This book has focused on the application of theories described in the introduction. Realism, liberalism, marxism, and constructivism all add intricacies and detail to the phenomenon of drug trafficking and organized crime. Theories are meant to examine the problem by explaining the relationship between variables like underdevelopment and corruption

to crime and political instability. This goes beyond repeating a historical narrative. Theories bring history to life, providing ways to think about issues with the purpose of developing policy options. These policy options might help manage the problems associated with drugs and crime.

One major insight resulting from this study is the importance of combating corruption. But how do already corrupt states fight corruption? Expecting already corrupt states to fight corruption is similar to this particular situation. The question then becomes how to increase transparency so that corrupt officials might be exposed and brought to justice. Transparency allows the citizenry to see the details of scandals so that opposition groups—if they exist—might be brought to power. By monitoring and policing government officials, the state attempts to reduce corruption. Groups like *Transparency International* are non-governmental institutions are dedicated to exposing corruption.

Understanding that the problem of organized crime and violence is extremely urgent, it will take time and effort for states to deal with corruption. Reforming institutions is a long-term process. Scandinavian states, the least corrupt states in the international system, did not create the institutions necessary to slow corruption overnight. It also took the United States many years to control the Italian Mafia and yet the Italian Mafia continues to operate within the United States. Yet many countries do not have the luxury of waiting. A multi-pronged approach must be adopted. International assistance in the form of international cooperation should ultimately be on the international agenda.

Cooperation between states is needed to manage drug trafficking because the problem goes beyond the control of weak states in the system. As discussed in this book, organized criminal groups are sometimes more powerful than the state. The state is weak due to underdevelopment but also from corruption. Plagued by corruption due to organized crime, the state's borders become porous, and the problem could spread to other states. As a result, cooperation is needed to help the weak state in question but also neighboring states to prevent the problem from spreading. For this to work, the governments of entire regions need to be mobilized. Further, a whole of government effort is needed meaning that at all levels, from the federal to local, must be geared toward the neutralization of corruption that exacerbates underdevelopment, which, in turn, contributes to organized crime.

Liberal theories that posit the importance of cooperation provide a unique framework for understanding the policy options available to

states. However, there are many limitations to this idea all stemming from the refusal to cooperate. First, theories of cooperation understate the difficulties of getting states to cooperate. The first and most obvious is that corrupt states will resist reforming themselves. An already corrupt state might promise to make reforms, but they are slow to change, seeking to protect the status quo, protecting themselves and the way they profit from corruption. Guatemala, for instance, kicked out the *International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala* (CICIG) because the government wanted to protect officials and other elites from possibly being investigated for serious crimes involved in drug trafficking, corruption, and money laundering.² Hence, if the state is controlled by corruption and organized crime, the more likely anti-corruption efforts could fail. Once an agreement is made, states may simply avoid their responsibilities or defect altogether. Drug traffickers might also assassinate those willing to make changes, or offer them a bribe they simply cannot refuse. Between 2016 and 2019, for example, 90 anti-corruption politicians were murdered in South Africa. The then ruling coalition refused to investigate the murders.³

Another problem is the “who pays?” question. Who pays for the transparency structures needed to create accountability? In many instances, the United Nations might be able to assist. In other instances, involved states must foot the bill. States tend to pass the responsibility to other states. Many underdeveloped states lament that they do not have the funds available to deal with these issues and so reach out to wealthier states. Others prefer to remain isolated, not taking part in any regime dedicated to fighting drug trafficking. The reason for this isolation may be related to the state being fundamental to the production and trafficking of organized crime. So, while some states spend resources trying to fight drug trafficking, other states simply benefit without doing any work. This is called the “free rider problem.”

Corruption thus inhibits states from doing their part in the cooperation effort to end organized crime. In many ways as well, corrupt practices are simply part of the country’s political culture. In the Middle East, the idea of Baksheesh is prominent. For instance, in the United States, it is common to leave a “tip” at a restaurant for excellent service. In many areas in the Middle East and Central Asia, Baksheesh is a tip, but not for a restaurant. It acts as an insurance policy so that a case being handled by a government official might be resolved quickly and efficiently. In essence, it is a bribe that punishes the poorest people to the benefit of

the wealthier. In Latin America and Africa, nepotism, giving prominent positions in government to family and friends, remains a serious problem. Hence, the challenge for state cooperation is then trying to figure out how to reduce this very specific political-cultural source of corruption.

These are just three major challenges to cooperation. Solving organized crime is thus easier said than done. Consequently, there are serious limitations to the theory of liberalism and its efforts to end organized crime through cooperation. However, this does not mean that fighting organized crime this way is not worth the effort: far from it. States must continue to work through these problems. Weak states help organized crime thrive due to underdevelopment and corruption. By acknowledging these limitations, countries can combat the power of organized crime.

While the previous discussion might provide some hope, it is also important to acknowledge the difficulty managing the drug trafficking threat. States may never be able to fully destroy organized criminal networks completely. Drug trafficking and the associated violence might always exist. This is due to the demand for these goods. As long as demand for heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine exist, there will be those individuals seeking to profit. Supply is almost guaranteed making it a business opportunity for those who perceive their lives as limited by their environment. People in poor, already corrupt states may take solace in these groups. As a result, states might only be able to manage the problem of drug trafficking. Like playing a very long game of whack-a-mole, governments often only hope to manage the problem through a constant whacking of networks.

One problem that might be solved is inhibiting these organized criminal networks from destroying the state. If the state is developed and less corrupt, it is possible to achieve some level of security needed to keep organized criminal networks from taking over the state. It might also reduce levels of violence as actors are relegated to the shadows. This will also impact terrorist actors as their ability to do business can successfully be curtailed. Governments will be perceived as legitimate which could further reduce political violence stemming from separatist groups. Thus, dealing a serious blow to organized crime will have successive spill-over effects and can enhance international stability.

In summary, this book discussed the major theories of the field of international security by applying them to the problem of organized crime and drug trafficking. The purpose of this was to explain and understand the governing mechanics of drug trafficking as well as to get students

to think about potential policy recommendations. Theories are useful in as much as they explain something and hence, we believe their application to be a central part of solving various problems posed by drug trafficking. By reflecting on theory, we might be better prepared to deal with these important issues. Indeed, this is only a primer text and unfortunately many stones have been left unturned. However, the further reading recommendations should give readers more food for thought.

LEARNING FROM FAILED POLICIES

Combating drug trafficking and organized crime requires governments to learn from past failures. While there have been countless studies that have focused on drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence, politicians do not always heed the recommendations of academics and policy analysts. Politicians do not live in a vacuum and will respond to public opinion. Tough on crime policies in the United States were popular for decades—and remain popular among some segments of society. In Latin America, there has been a race to the bottom of who is tougher on crime, despite the failure of the war on drugs.⁴

Empirical research should drive policies. This book has argued that some programs (e.g., aerial spraying) have not only been ineffective, but they have been counterproductive. Aerial spraying has damaged the environment in Colombia and has had major health consequences. Yet administrations have continued this strategy despite the negative externalities.

MIGRATION CRISIS, STATE FRAGILITY, AND US COOPERATION IN LATIN AMERICA

What are the consequences of drug-related crime and violence in Latin America? The threats of drugs, crime, and violence often lead people to flee countries like Honduras and El Salvador and seek asylum in the United States, often by applying for asylum based on the Convention against Torture (CAT).⁵ Young males living in gang neighborhoods can be asked to join gangs and contend that they will be physically harmed or threatened for their rejection of the *maras*. People who refuse the request to join the gang might also suffer other consequences, such as threats to harm their families, physically or financially. The number of cases of gangs

extorting families and local business owners have been well-documented. The CAT defines torture as:

For the purposes of this Convention, the term “torture” means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.⁶

During the Trump administration, the US Attorney General⁷ made it more difficult for people seeking asylum by contending that fleeing organized crime and violence should not be accepted. The United States government seeks to pressure immigrants to go to court as quickly as possible without an attorney to make it easier for the prosecutor to win the case.

The Trump administration also decreased US foreign aid to Central American countries in April 2019. In Fiscal Year (2016), the United States provided Central American countries with \$750 million. The aid continued to decline over Trump’s presidency. In FY 2019, the United States allocated \$527.6 million to Central America (Fig. 6.1).

Critics of such policies have contended that US aid to Central American countries can help address some of the underlying issues that are causing individuals to flee their homes and seek asylum in other countries. Advocates of the theory of liberalism, for instance, emphasize the need for countries to cooperate. Insecurity in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala not only impacts regional security, but it can also directly impact US national security. Solving these problems requires working together and with international institutions. The State Department and USAID have worked on programs to prevent crime and violence and strengthen communities. Adriana Beltrán and Adeline Hite note that US funding helps support programs that:

- Establish municipal-level committees that bring together local groups, churches, social services, and local government agencies.

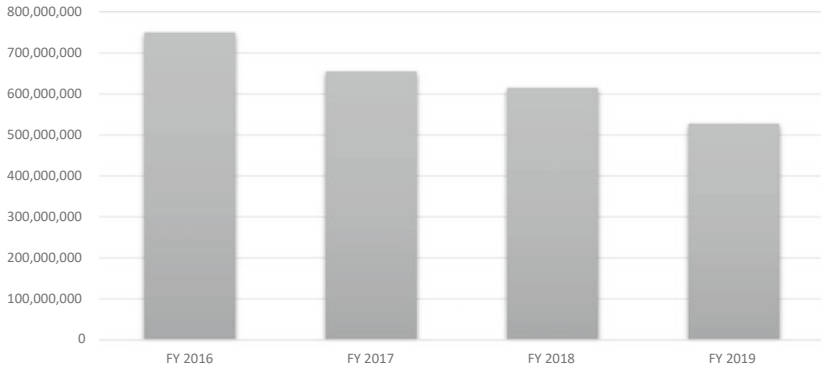


Fig. 6.1 Congressional appropriations to Central America (*Source* Created by author with data from Adriana Beltrán and Adeline Hite, “Stopping U.S. Assistance to Central America Is Counterproductive and Misinformed,” *Washington Office on Latin America*, April 9, 2019)

- Support initiatives to improve public spaces. Partner with local governments to implement community policing and other strategies to curb high crime rates.
- Work with at-risk communities by providing safe spaces for vulnerable youth, skills training, workforce development, and mentorships.⁸

In El Salvador, USAID has many projects addressing citizens’ security, governance, and other job-related projects, some of which include:

- Crime and Violence Prevention (\$39.8 million).
- Bridges for Employment (\$42.2 million).
- Imagina: El País que Queremos (\$12 million).
- Education and Coexistence for Schools and Communities Free of Violence (\$10 million).
- Protection and Quality of Care for Children Project (\$4.9 million).
- Justice Sector Strengthening (\$31.4 million).
- Government Integrity (\$20.3 million).
- Rights and Dignity (\$15 million).
- Return and Reintegration in the Northern Triangle Program (\$16.8 million).⁹

Advocates of such programs contend that they have had successes in addressing some of the underlying problems contributing to organized crime and violence. For instance, homicides in El Salvador decreased by 61% between 2017 and 2018. El Salvador also witnessed the creation of 22,000 new jobs between 2011 and 2016. USAID credits the creation of new jobs in part to their assistance to small and medium enterprises.¹⁰

It is possible that the United States witnesses an increase in the number of people fleeing violence from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador as transnational organized crime groups flourish and extort local populations. The number of family units and unaccompanied minors from El Salvador have increased. For instance, the number of unaccompanied minors from El Salvador apprehended on the Southwest border of the United States spiked from 4,949 in FY 2018 to 6,109 by April 2019. In addition, the number of apprehensions of family units from El Salvador, defined as a child below 18 years old and a parent or legal guardian, increased from 13,669 in FY 2018 to 24,488 in April FY 2019.¹¹

DEMAND REDUCTION: LEGALIZATION AND DECRIMINALIZATION

Countries around the globe have taken different policies to reduce the demand for drugs. In 2013, President José “Pepe” Mujica signed a bill legalizing marijuana. Interestingly, President Mujica did this as a top-down measure. In Portugal, the government decriminalized drugs in 2001. Decriminalization means that drugs remain illegal, but someone will not serve decades in prison for drug consumption.¹²

In the United States, states have legalized marijuana, beginning with Colorado and Washington in 2012. This was a bottom-up initiative where voters placed drug legalization on the ballot box. Research indicated that the legalization of marijuana in Washington and Colorado would significantly decrease the profits of the Mexican drug cartels. The legalization of marijuana in Colorado was predicted to decrease the profits of the Mexican drug cartels by \$1.42 billion, while the legalization of marijuana in Washington was predicted to decrease the profits of the cartels by an estimated \$1.37 billion.¹³

More states began to legalize marijuana for both recreational and medical uses. The United States government faces challenges as drugs remain illegal at the federal level. According to US law, federal law trumps state law. Thus, someone can be arrested for smoking marijuana in

Colorado. This could eventually lead to a Supreme Court case, forcing the US courts to rule on this issue. Finally, if marijuana was legal in the United States tomorrow, the country would violate many of the international treaties that this country pushed so hard for.

Some individuals, particularly some Libertarians, argue that all drugs should be legalized. Libertarians believe that the government should stay out of the private lives of individuals, and people should have the freedom to do whatever they want. Ron Paul, a former Republican Representative from Texas, argues:

I think the federal war on drugs is a total failure. You can at least let sick people have marijuana because it's helpful, but compassionate conservatives say, well, we can't do this--the federal government's going in there and overriding state laws and putting people like that in prison. Why don't we handle the drugs like we handle alcohol? Alcohol is a deadly drug. The real deadly drugs are the prescription drugs. They kill a lot more people than the illegal drugs. The drug war is out of control. I fear the drug war because it undermines our civil liberties. It magnifies our problems on the borders. We spent, over the last 40 years, \$1 trillion on this war. And believe me, the kids can still get the drugs. It just hasn't worked.¹⁴

Libertarians argue that people are capable of making their own decisions and have been critical of the war on drugs.

Yet legalizing all drugs is a difficult sell. A politician desiring to legalize hard drugs could be portrayed as a radical and could be voted out of office. Instead, a more practical position is arguably decriminalization. The United States locks up people who are addicted to drugs for decades behind bars. This is not only costly, but someone who is suffering from addiction will have a felony record. This makes it harder to find employment upon being released from prison. Moreover, ex-felons face many limitations and are often stigmatized by society. Advocates of decriminalization maintain that these individuals could be re-routed to treatment and rehabilitation. Unless people receive the necessary treatment to address their drug usage, which is often linked to trauma, they will continue to struggle with addiction. The prison system becomes a revolving door and there are often not adequate programs to address addiction while inmates are behind bars.

CONCLUSION

This work has examined international relations theory and the drug trade. Theories are a lens that can help explain the nature of this complex phenomenon. It, however, is important to recognize the limitations of international relations theory. Traditional theories like realism focus on great power politics. As the discipline has evolved, scholars have created new theories and revised existing ones. The theory utilized should depend on your research question.

Drug trafficking and organized crime will continue to evolve over time. Organized crime groups have been able to penetrate the state apparatus in countries plagued by corruption and impunity. Combating organized crime requires solving many of the structural issues. Simply focusing on interdicting drugs and capturing kingpins alone will not solve the long-term problems. In this work, we maintain that corruption is one of the key drivers that enables criminal organizations to prosper. Drug trafficking and organized crime are not a national security threat in every country. The nature of the state can determine the organized crime dynamic and helps drug traffickers continue their operations unabated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the limitations of international relations theory?
- What are the lesson learned from drug trafficking and organized crime?
- What can be done to combat drug trafficking and organized crime?
- What policies should be changed?
- What are the potential negative ramifications of drug trafficking, organized crime, and violence?

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