

**Forum:** International Security Council  
**Issue:** International solutions to drug cartels  
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## ***Introduction***

Drug cartels are criminal organizations whose primary purposes are to control and promote drug traffic. Most of them are organized following a hierarchy like transnational organizations, whose motive is profit rather than ideology: each year, billions of dollars in profits are made by the cartels. But this has a cost, as their actions usually breed violence and leave deaths behind them in their countries of operation.

## ***Definition of Key Terms***

Originally the term of cartel is used for the association of independent firms or individuals in the purpose of exerting some form of restrictive or monopolistic influence on the production or sale of commodity or group of commodity. Members of cartels tend to keep their separate identities and financial independence while engaging in common policies.

The term of 'drug cartels' was used to characterize the mutual agreements among various drug traffickers in order to coordinate production and distribution of drugs; however since most of them have grown more independent of one another or have split up, agreements have been broken up so that there are not any proper drug cartels now.

The term is commonly used as a reference to the most popular drug cartels (and not especially to the independent groups). It contains many different operating groups with specific actions such as: the drug suppliers and distributors or the financiers and money launderers.

As previously stated, the criminal organizations have a hierarchy. In order to understand their way of acting, one may use the example of a basic structure of drug cartels provided below:

- **Falcons:** They are responsible for supervising and reporting to the leader the action and/or hypothetic actions of the military and their rival groups as well as the people employed by the organization.
- **Hitmen:** Unlike the Falcon, they are armed groups that are actively responsible in the maintain of the order. They usually carry out thefts, assassinations, kidnappings, extortion targeted against military forces and rival groups.
- **Lieutenants:** They are responsible for the supervision the Falcons and the Hitmen within their territories.
- **Drug lords:** It is the highest position; they are responsible for the whole supervision, for the alliances and for the planning of high profile executions.

## ***Background information***

With globalization, the power and influence of the cartels has gone through a pronounced increase since the 1990's. Before, the groups were much smaller as the actions were mostly regional or national.

Nowadays the situation has gotten much more complicated as the drug cartels are no longer divided between receiving land and producer land; there are also transit lands, which makes it even more difficult to track them.

Drug cartels are one of the biggest worldwide problems as it has an influence on the economy, the politics and the social field. Cartels are a part of the economy and they tend to establish a high degree of price stability but the constant threat of conflicts of interest among its members may lead to violent price fluctuation. In politics, many governments of Less Developed Countries or Developing countries have to deal with the corruption within their institutions. And last but not least, as previously stated drug cartels are like international companies, they employ an enormous amount of people: Many citizens have had to rely on the financial support provided by cartels through positions in the organization and jobs provided by the cartels.

Nowadays, cartels have started to act in coordination with other types of criminal organizations (such as national mafias) in order to get arms or to organize the traffic.

## ***Major Countries and Organizations involved***

Latin American nations, like Mexico and Colombia, have become nuclei for cartel operations and violence. Latin America is deeply affected by the cartels: 80% of all processed cocaine comes from Colombia, Peru is also the world's largest producer of coca leaves. While many are willing to accept help from the US many more are still very weary of the US and their imperialist past.

### **Mexico**

The origin of all Mexican drug cartels is traced to former Mexican Judicial Federal Police agent Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo ("The Godfather"), who founded the Guadalajara Cartel in 1980 and controlled all illegal drug trade in Mexico and the trafficking corridors across the Mexico-USA border throughout the 1980s (first with marijuana and opium). He was the first Mexican drug chief to link up with Colombia's cocaine cartels in the 1980s.

As a major drug producing and transit country and main supplier of cannabis and methamphetamines to the USA, the problem of cartels has nowadays taken much more importance with "The Mexican Drug War": it is an ongoing armed conflict between rival drug cartels fighting each other for regional control and against the Mexican government forces. The government's principal goal has been to put down the drug-related violence that was going on between different drug cartels before any military intervention was made. Moreover, the Mexican government has claimed that their primary focus is on dismantling the powerful drug cartels, rather than on trafficking prevention, which is left to U.S. functionaries.



## Columbia

Colombia's role in the international drug trade has evolved in the last decades; it shifted from a grower and exporter of marijuana in the 1970s to a processor and shipper of cocaine in the 1980s to a major grower and processor of coca and heroin today. The government (even if it is a democracy) is deeply affected by their presence through bribery, threats and murder. Since the early 1980s, drug traffickers, together with landowners and local military commanders, have formed paramilitary organizations to "clean" their territory of guerrillas and alleged guerrilla sympathizers and to protect land, cattle, and cocaine laboratories and strategic shipping routes.

Guerrilla groups such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) have grown active in areas of increasing coca cultivation and have started to finance their activities by taxing coca crops and by protecting drug processing labs and other illicit installations. Therefore the situation in Colombia is one of the hardest to solve as it is a two front war.

## United States of America

The USA has spent more than a billion dollars in attacking the Latin American drug cartels. Due to its geographical closeness, many US cities have become hubs for drug cartels. The government has chosen to act directly to the source (outside its border) in order to stop (or at least decrease) the traffic. As an example, it supplies technical, monetary and operational assistance to some countries such as Mexico.

## Timeline of Events

**1971:** U.S. President Richard Nixon declares a war on drugs and says drug abuse is the country's biggest threat.

**1973:** Nixon sets up the Drug Enforcement Administration, or DEA.

**1975:** Drug gangs kill 40 people in one weekend in the Colombian city of Medellin after police seize 1,320 pounds (600 kgs) of cocaine in one of the first ever big drug hauls.

**1976:** Foundation of the Medellin Cartel in Columbia

**1999:** Plan Columbia is published (aid from the US government)

**2000:** U.S. President Bill Clinton gives Colombia \$1.3 billion in aid under Plan Colombia.

**2001:** Joaquin "Shorty" Guzman Mexico's most wanted drug lord escapes from a Mexican prison in a laundry van. He then builds a coalition of drug gangs from the western state of Sinaloa and vows to take control of Mexico's vast drug trade.

**2003:** After a confrontation between troops and gunmen in the border city of Matamoros, Mexican soldiers capture Osiel Cardenas, leader of the Gulf cartel.

**2004:** Trying to take advantage of Cardenas' arrest, Guzman sends well-armed enforcers to border cities south of Texas to take over Gulf cartel smuggling routes. Heavy fighting breaks out before Guzman's fighters are sent back.

**2005:** Guzman seeks control of the border city of Tijuana and trafficking routes into California. Violence escalates across Mexico and about 1,500 people are killed over the year.

**2006:** Killings spread to the resort of Acapulco, the industrial city of Monterrey and to Michoacan in western Mexico, the home state of Felipe Calderon, troops and federal police are immediately sent to stem the violence. Drug gang killings rise to 2,300 and atrocities like beheadings and torture increase.

**2007:** Calderon extradites Gulf cartel leader Cardenas to the United States and makes a historic 23-tonne cocaine seizure. US President George W. Bush pledges \$1.4 billion in drug-fighting gear and training for Mexico and Central America. Violence escalates and more than 3,000 are killed in the year.

**2008:** Drug violence kills around 6,300 people across Mexico in the year.

**2009:** Calderon sends 10,000 more troops to Ciudad Juarez but killings continue. Violence spills over the border into Arizona. During his visit in Mexico, U.S. President Barack Obama vows to clamp down on smuggled guns but the annual drug war death toll soars above 7,000. In December, an elite navy squad tracks down and kills drug lord Arturo Beltran Leyva, head of the cartel of the same name and one of Mexico's most-wanted traffickers.

2010 Three people linked to the U.S. consulate are killed in Ciudad Juarez. Cartel murders soar to unprecedented levels, exceeding 5,000 by mid-June, as mass killings at drug rehabilitation centers and parties become common. On July 29, top trafficker Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, No. 3 in Guzman's Sinaloa cartel, dies as soldiers try to arrest him near Guadalajara, the first big win of the year for Calderon.

**2012:** Nearly 50 bodies were found on a local highway between the US-Mexican border and Monterrey has led to the arrests of 4 high-ranking Mexican military officials.

### ***Relevant UN treaties and events***

In 1997, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** was created in order to fight against illegal drugs, money laundering, corruption, and many other forms of crime related to drug cartels.

UNODC passed the three following treaties in order to curb drug traffic:

-The **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs** of 1961

-the **Convention on Psychotropic Substances** of 1971

-the **United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances** of 1988.

These treaties “ensure the availability of narcotic and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, and prevent their diversion into illicit channels.”

Moreover, resolutions such as the 2010 CND resolutions 53/3 and 53/8 in order to focus on “strengthening to power of nations to dispose of confiscated items and strengthening international cooperation in countering the world drug problem focusing on illicit drug trafficking...”.

**E/RES/2003/35** regarding the prevention and suppression of the drug trade, was passed by UNODC in 2003. It also proposes that nations implement “broad policies to eliminate illicit drug crops and of the implementation of legislation, in particular legislation to facilitate the interdiction of illicit drug shipments ... alternative development and strong law enforcement efforts at reducing the supply of illicit drugs.” The resolution also calls for “States to adopt effective measures to strengthen international cooperation projects aimed at the prohibition and control of drug trafficking.”

## ***Previous Attempts to solve the issue***

### **Mexico**

Since Felipe Calderon’s election as Mexican President in December 2006, the Mexican government focused on killing and capturing the heads of cartels by trying to first identify all of the country’s 60 to 80 small- and medium-sized drug trafficking gangs. In its last public evaluation of the strength of Mexico’s cartels, the Calderón administration issued a report in August naming only eight large organizations. However, this strategy has shown its limits through the significant rise of kidnappings and crimes over the last six years. The former secretary of the interior, Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, launched the critique of Calderón’s strategy by telling a meeting of Mexico’s national Security Council on Monday that while financial resources dedicated to security had more than doubled, crime had increased, and with the capture of dozens of drug *capos*, cartels had splintered and become more dangerous.

Calderón repeatedly emphasized before leaving office that his forces had captured 25 of Mexico’s 37 most-wanted drug lords – a strategy backed by the US government with hundreds of millions in funding and close co-operation with American law enforcement, military and intelligence agencies. As of 2011, Mexico’s military captured 11,544 people who were believed to have been involved with the cartels and organized crime.

### **Colombia**

In 1999 the Plan Columbia was created, providing financial and military support to Columbia in order to fight drug cartels.

## ***Possible Solutions***

The first step to finding a solution is to define a clear and efficient strategy. First, improve the communications between countries in order to provide a greater

operational clarity by limiting and defining the goal to the destruction of the cartels, rather than stopping the production and movement of drugs. Then, target one cartel at a time until it is completely destroyed as a multi-front war costs more and is less effective. Take out all key leaders in order to diminish the organization and the power of the cartel. Also refocus on the gun control effort in order to increase the cost of such operations and decrease the cartels profit margin. Finally, increase the use of high tech surveillance to pressure on the cartels' ability to operate.

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## ***Appendices***

You will find here the name of the most important drug cartels in the major countries involved:

### **USA**

- Texas Syndicate
- Mexican Mafia
- Mara Salvatrucha
- Nuestra Familia
- Logan Heights Gang
- 18th Street gang
- Sureños 13
- Norteños 14
- Mexicanemi
- American Mafia
- Aryan Brotherhood
- Black Guerilla Family

### **Mexico**

- La Familia Cartel
- Gulf Cartel
- Juárez Cartel
- La Línea
- Los Negros
- Los Zetas
- Sinaloa Cartel

- Gente Nueva
- South Pacific Cartel
- Tijuana Cartel
- Los Caballeros Templarios
- La Resistencia

### Columbia

- Cali Cartel
- Medellín Cartel
- Norte del Valle Cartel

You will also find a table of casualties and losses related to the Mexican War on Drugs

Casualties and losses	
1,000+ Police and prosecutors killed	121,199 cartel members detained
138 Army soldiers killed	8,500 convicted
14 Marines killed	
318 Federal Police killed	
58 reporters killed	
~1,000 children killed	
62 killed in 2006	
2,837 killed in 2007	
6,844 killed in 2008	
11,753 killed in 2009	
19,546 killed in 2010	
24,068 killed in 2011	
18,061 killed by 31 October 2012	
Total estimate of deaths (varies): 60,000–100,000	
Total displaced: 1.6 million	