THE HYDRA: THE STRATEGIC PARADOX OF HUMAN SECURITY IN MEXICO

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Foreword

It is my great pleasure to present another issue of The Wright Flyer Papers. Through this series, Air Command and Staff College presents a sampling of exemplary research produced by our resident and distance-learning students. This series has long showcased the kind of visionary thinking that drove the aspirations and activities of the earliest aviation pioneers. This year's selection of essays admirably extends that tradition. As the series title indicates, these papers aim to present cutting-edge, actionable knowledge—research that addresses some of the most complex security and defense challenges facing us today.

Recently, The Wright Flyer Papers transitioned to an exclusively electronic publication format. It is our hope that our migration from print editions to an electronic-only format will foster even greater intellectual debate among Airmen and fellow members of the profession of arms as the series reaches a growing global audience. By publishing these papers via the Air University Press website, ACSC hopes not only to reach more readers, but also to support Air Force–wide efforts to conserve resources. In this spirit, we invite you to peruse past and current issues of The Wright Flyer Papers at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/Wright-Flyers/.

Thank you for supporting The Wright Flyer Papers and our efforts to disseminate outstanding ACSC student research for the benefit of our Air Force and war fighters everywhere. We trust that what follows will stimulate thinking, invite debate, and further encourage today's air, space, and cyber war fighters in their continuing search for innovative and improved ways to defend our nation and way of life.

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Abstract

Cartels in Mexico produce significant levels of violence and criminality in Mexico through their illicit narcotics trade. The effects of cartel activity spill over into the United States through immigration issues and narcotics deaths. In 2006, the Mexican government applied a counternetwork decapitation strategy to eliminate cartel leadership and thereby reduce criminality in an attempt to ease pressure from both sides of the border. The US supported the Mexican strategy through the Mérida Initiative to build security capacity. However, from 2006 to 2018 homicide rates per 100,000 residents increased in Mexico by 248 percent, while illicit narcotics trafficking and indicators of corruption, extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking rose. I have shown, using secondary source material and analytical and qualitative methods, the nature of the illicit-narcotics problem and explain why past strategies failed. The problem facing the US and Mexico consists of deficient human security fueled by an illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic rooted in societal issues and economic underdevelopment. Cartels take advantage of this shortfall. Because the Mexican government misdiagnosed the threat, it applied incoherent and unproductive measures more suited for a Clausewitzian war paradigm strategy. Finally, I identify a paradox in the narcotics legalization argument that harbors significant challenges to successful implementation and holds the potential for transforming a human security problem into an insurgency.

Context

In mid-October 2018, an exodus of over 7,000 people from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador began moving toward the US border in search of safety from endemic crime and economic privation.[1] Dubbed the Caravan, the group of migrants made their way north, crossing into Mexico, a country facing significant challenges to its internal security, including a high rate of homicides and assassinations of political candidates.[2] Mexico is the primary US source of illicit narcotics, including heroin, methamphetamines, fentanyl, and other synthetic opioids.[3] According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, drug poisoning deaths remain the leading source of injury death in the US, causing 52,404 deaths in 2015 alone, more than the deaths caused by firearms and motor vehicle accidents.[4]

Whether granted legal entry or asylum or not, the members of the Caravan found themselves tied to US domestic concerns over illegal immigration. The Department of Homeland Security noted a vast surge of illegal immigration in 2018, a 325 percent increase in unaccompanied children and 435 percent increase in family units compared to 2017, equating to over 50,000 illegal entries per month.[5] As individuals within the Caravan enter the US, some may contribute to criminal activity around the country, where domestic attention on gang-related violence by groups such as MS-13 remains high. In 2017, US Border Patrol agents arrested 536 gang-affiliated illegal aliens, 40 percent of whom were affiliated with MS-13.[6] Taken in sum, these problems pose a major threat to US national security.

Introduction, Thesis, and Methodology

In his seminal work, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz scribed a profound dictum for strategists: "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive."[7]

History demonstrates the consequences of overlooking this fundamental task when states decide to go to war. During the Vietnam War, the United States approached its national objective for a stable, noncommunist South Vietnam as a traditional conflict, gradually escalating air attacks and covert raids to coerce the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to withdraw its support for the Vietcong insurgency. The Tet Offensive of 1968 provided clear evidence that US statesmen and commanders did not understand the character of the conflict in Vietnam, which resulted in strategic defeat.

Similarly, in 2003, after Saddam Hussein's defeat, the character of the conflict in Iraq changed from traditional to irregular warfare. It took statesmen and commanders several years to grasp the kind of war they now faced. A grueling, bloody, and protracted war ensued that undermines US strategic objectives in the region to this day.

Closer to the US homeland, a different threat looms south of the border, and both the US and Mexico remain locked in a war against a common enemy that neither the statesmen nor the commanders understand. Because of this, US national security suffers.

This paper seeks to judge the nature of the threat and the character of the enemy to determine the kind of conflict the US and Mexico face. Clausewitz's definition of war provides the foundation for my argument: "War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will. . . . Force is the means of war; to impose our will on the enemy is the object of war. . . . To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare." Clausewitz further defines war as a "paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity . . . the play of chance and probability . . . and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone." War is a political instrument, a device by which political discourse is continued when other means of communication are ineffective.[8]

The first argument of this paper posits that the nature of the mutual threat and of the enemy precludes a war against the United States and Mexico because the enemy remains unbound by Clausewitz's paradigm. The threat con-

sists of deficient human security fueled by an illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic. The enemy is made up of organizations exploiting this shortfall. Derek Reveron and Kathleen Mahoney-Norris state that human security consists of the "people-centered approach focused on individual human beings and their rights and needs," and is one of the prerequisites for achieving national security.[9] The organizations exploiting the lack of human security are known by many names: violent drug trafficking organizations, transnational criminal organizations, narcos, insurgents, cartels, and criminals.

The human security threat that cartels propagate resembles the mythological Hydra: immortal, multiheaded, regenerative, and poisonous. States cannot wage war, as traditionally conceived, against such a threat. To frame this first argument, this paper will analyze the characteristics of this human security Hydra and the cartels to show how they do not fit any current models of traditional or irregular warfare.

Second, this paper will argue that because the US and Mexico misunderstand the threat, they apply incoherent, unproductive, and untenable strategies as a solution. A review of the US containment and building partner capacity (BPC) strategy and the Mexican counternetwork decapitation strategy,[10] as well as a review of these strategies' negative consequences on both human security and national security, will support this argument.

Third, this paper argues that the policy measures necessary to solve this human security problem introduce a strategic paradox that inhibits their adoption in the US and Mexico. Sweeping domestic policy reforms to legalize narcotics within the US and Mexico can end the illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic fueling deficient human security. Such reforms will prove politically difficult to implement within states, produce public health challenges, and require multilateral cooperation. More importantly, a legalization strategy creates a duality of interests between the state and cartels over natural and man-made resources, which sets the conditions for widespread economic grievances that can stimulate an insurgency and transform a human security problem into a war.

Argument 1: The State Misunderstands the Nature of the Human Security Threat

The threat to both the US and Mexico consists of human insecurity, and the enemy consists of cartels exploiting this insecurity. Cartels exist at the substate level, primarily to maximize profits from the drug trade. They focus violence mostly against each other to expand control over a competitive illicit market and rely on corruption to undermine the state and preclude interfer-

ence in their activities. To frame this first argument, this section analyzes the human security threat and the characteristics of the cartels to demonstrate how they do not fit any current models of traditional or irregular warfare.

Two key elements underscore the nature of the human security threat: societal issues and economic underdevelopment. The societal issues boil down to high US demand for illicit narcotics. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated there are 41.33 million cannabis, opioid, and opiate users in North America, as well as 5.99 million cocaine, amphetamine, and ecstasy users, plus 1.78 million users who inject drugs.[11] The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) identifies Mexican criminal organizations as the main source of narcotics for users in the US.[12] Cartels supply a variety of narcotics to fulfill this demand and profit from human psychological and biological addiction vulnerabilities. Cartels do not grow, manufacture, distribute, and sell narcotics to destroy or undermine an enemy for political ends. Rather, they do so to gain profits for personal use within the licit economy and for status and power within the illicit economy.

Economic underdevelopment in areas throughout Mexico, Latin America, and South America provides the incentive for individuals to supply narcotics. In November 2017, the Mexican government increased the minimum wage to the equivalent of $5.26 per day (not per hour).[13] By comparison, drug sales reap profit margins as high as 1,600 percent for each kg of heroin or 58,000 percent for each kg of pure fentanyl, netting up to $1.92 million from a $3,300 investment.[14] The DEA valued drug sales in the US in 2017 at $64 billion, totaling 21 percent of the $300 billion in illicit revenue from criminal activity in the US.[15] The enormous profits offered on the supply end of the illicit economy clearly outweigh the meager living standard available to many people.

Societal issues of psychological and biological addiction create demand for illicit narcotics, and economic underdevelopment incentivizes participation in its supply—creating a dynamic producing numerous human security issues. When governments fail to address these underlying problems, the human security Hydra demonstrates its immortal and regenerative capacity.

The Nature of Cartels

Cartel behavior differs from rational policy and thus demonstrates its critical departure from Clausewitz's paradigm of war. Dr. Paul Kan identified five fundamental behaviors resulting from the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic. First, cartels act to fill drug demand in a hypercompetitive market to maximize profits.[16] Second, they use purposeful and directed violence to increase market share in the highly profitable drug trade, enforce loyalty within their organiza-

tion, and move up within the group hierarchy. Third, cartels corrupt state agents through bribery and intimidation to facilitate their profit-driven business. Fourth, they develop and employ soft power to maintain cohesion within the organization. Fifth, they cultivate community support or acquiescence to prevent interruption of their illicit business activities.[17] This support isn't to help cartels gain power through governance or to solve any social, economic, racial, or religious grievance. Instead, cartels aim to limit both public and government interference in their pursuit of maximizing profits.

The nature of the human security threat and the enemy's behavior it drives represent a fundamental departure from Clausewitz's paradigm of war for two reasons, the first being that cartels do not seek to defeat the state; they rely on the services and infrastructure ensured by the government's survival. Cartel members still require access to food, running water, sanitation, residential property, roads, railways, and cell towers that the continued operation of the state provides. The threat of violence and the actual violence employed against the state do not target its downfall but rather its acquiescence. Clausewitz notes two objectives in war: "to overthrow the enemy—to render him politically helpless or militarily impotent, thus forcing him to sign whatever peace we please; or merely to occupy some of his frontier-districts so that we can annex them or use them for bargaining at the peace negotiation."[18] Cartels do not pursue these objectives because they do not seek to bargain toward an end state of peace. Instead, they seek to operate in parallel with the state to pursue their illicit business. Additionally, the lack of a political, economic, or social grievance to motivate the narcotics supply-demand dynamic means that the state lacks a coherent entity to negotiate with toward its own objectives. Likewise, because individual cartels do not hold authority over this dynamic, the state cannot bargain with them to end it. To do so would be akin to attempting negotiations with a force of nature.

Second, there is no polarity between the objectives of the state and those of cartels. In defining war, Clausewitz noted the principle of polarity between the opposing sides: "the principle of polarity is valid only in relation to one and the same object, in which positive and negative interests exactly cancel one another out."[19] Cartels engaged in the hypercompetitive illicit economy exist at the substate level and seek to maximize profits and market share. The polarity necessary for war demands that the state's objective focus also on maximizing its profits and market share while proportionally reducing the profits and market share of criminal organizations. However, the state does not seek control of the illicit market but rather to enforce law and order. If cartels sought to govern and enforce their own law and order in competition with the state, then this would produce a polarity of interests. Clausewitz's

paradigm of war does not apply because of this lack of polarity, the nature of cartel objectives, and the absence of a coherent use of force against the state to pursue these objectives.

The nature of the human security threat also drives behaviors in cartels that mirror elements of Clausewitz's paradigm of war. Clausewitz posits that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" and "the act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[20] To maximize profits and increase market share, cartels either bargain or employ directed force against one another. To limit state interference, cartels also use force to resist active operations against cartel assets or to coerce acquiescence through fear. Cartels rely primarily on bribery and intimidation over the use of force against the state to pursue their objective of noninterference. As a result, most violence occurs between and within cartels, not against the state or its law-abiding citizens. According to the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, of the 5,700 drug-related homicides documented by mid-2010, security forces suffered 395 losses, less than 7 percent of the total.[21] Limiting state interference through violence proves counterproductive because the government can employ significant resources to overwhelm the cartels and because of the high likelihood the government will not back down until it establishes law and order. Corruption through bribery and intimidation is far more effective than the use of violence and involves lower risk. Nevertheless, it remains clear that cartels do in fact use the act of force to continue their policy of government noninterference by other means. The slang phrase, "*Plata o plomo,*" which means silver or lead, characterizes this relationship: either take the bribe in exchange for noninterference, or take the act of force.

The human security dilemma from the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic displays additional beguiling similarities to war. It contributes to a level and type of violence comparable to modern irregular warfare. While most of the violence occurs between cartels, violence still spills over into mainstream society. The press freedom organization Article 19 lists Mexico as the second most dangerous country for journalists behind Syria.[22] The recent federal, state, and municipal elections in 2018 witnessed targeted killings of politicians in 22 of 31 states, claiming the lives of 48 candidates.[23] Violence also frequently claims the lives of innocent bystanders not involved with cartel activity. In April 2018, six bystanders died in the crossfire between two cartels. Three civilians died in March 2017 as they drove through a firefight between Mexican security forces and gunmen.[24] In 2018, Mexico had 29,168 homicides, equating to 22.5 per 100,000 residents, nearly five times the homicide rate in the US. Between 2006 and 2018, the number of homicides in Mexico reached 256,428.[25] This number includes all homicides, not just those related

to violent cartel activity, and incorporates the deaths of government officials, security forces, journalists, innocent bystanders, and cartel members. By comparison, statistics show that civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan during this same period totaled 164,739 and 19,349 respectively, or, 184,088 in total.[26] While this statistic measures slightly different metrics from different sources compared to Mexico, the significance of this comparison remains that the level of intentional homicides in Mexico resulting from dismal human security proves comparable to the combined level of civilian casualties in two contemporary wars.

Cartels also demonstrate capabilities akin to trained paramilitary forces. In 1997, 31 members of the Mexican army's elite airborne special forces group defected and formed the core enforcement arm for the Gulf Cartel (*Cártel del Golfo*). This group later split from the Gulf Cartel to form The Z's (*Los Zetas*) and demonstrated sophisticated tactics by integrating intelligence operations with deliberate mission planning to conduct attacks using state-of-the-art weaponry and communication systems to rival the capabilities of Mexican security forces.[27] In 2015, the Jalisco Cartel New Generation (*Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*, CJNG) managed to kill 15 police officers in a coordinated ambush and shoot down an army helicopter with a rocket propelled grenade, killing five soldiers.[28] The high level of violence and the paramilitary capabilities of some cartels draw easy comparisons with modern irregular warfare.

Some of the violence enacted by cartels displays a level of anomie that bears resemblance to terrorist tactics. Anomic violence relates to purposeless and gruesome acts of aggression in complete contravention of societal norms and values. For example, in April 2011, cartel gunmen raided an apartment and executed an entire family, including a 22-month old toddler, to incite fear in the populace and rivals.[29] Mexico's attorney general's office reported 1,303 beheadings between 2007 and 2012 as part of a campaign to instill fear and demonstrate dominance.[30] Cartels typically leave the heads and decapitated bodies in view of the public. Some beheadings are posted on the internet to intimidate rivals and the populace to acquiesce to illicit activity. Other anomic violence behaviors include the use torture, car bombs, marking corpses with targeted messages, dismemberment, assassinations, the use of mass graves, and kidnapping. A November 2018 report by Amnesty International puts the number of unsolved kidnappings in Mexico at 35,410, a low estimate assuming the prevalence of under-reporting due to fear of reprisal.[31] Homicides against other cartels enables access to a greater market share of the illicit narcotics economy. Anomic violence facilitates the acquiescence of state agents and the local community through fear. In this regard, the presence of anomic

violence resembles the tactics employed by nonstate terrorist organizations like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or al-Qaeda.

Cartels rely primarily on corruption practices to undermine the ability of state institutions to interfere with their illicit economy and enable their freedom of action to conduct violent and nonviolent crimes with impunity. Corruption practices between cartels and state institutions derive from 71 years of political dominance by Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional,* PRI) from 1929 to 2000. During this time, the PRI engaged in a complex scheme of bribery with cartels at the federal, state, and municipal levels and in turn protected the illicit narcotics trade along specific trafficking corridors, or *plazas*, that traversed territory under their jurisdiction. This practice extended to local, state, and federal police units as well as to the military and judiciary. This arrangement contributed to lower levels of violence (11.8 per 100,000 people in 2000).[32] But the stable system collapsed in 2000 when the PRI lost political power to the democratically elected National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional,* PAN) under the new president, Vicente Fox. The change heralded a steady rise of violence in Mexico. As new PAN members took office at federal, state, and municipal levels, they destabilized long-standing corruption schemes used by cartels to route illicit narcotics through *plazas* into the US. PAN proved unable to resist the cartels' corruption practices.

National leaders' frequent focus on anticorruption campaigns, surveys from Mexican citizens on perceptions of corruption, and the high impunity rate for crimes seem to indicate the presence of deeply institutionalized corruption within Mexico. In 2010, a Department of Public Security report found that the majority of municipal officers received an income of $310 per month, making them susceptible to corruption.[33] The Associated Press estimated that cartels pay out $100 million per month to municipal police to maintain freedom of action in their illicit economy.[34] In response, President Calderón launched a "new police model" to mitigate the high level of corruption at the municipal level by centralizing them into a state-level organization.[35] The Peña Nieto administration launched a police-wide vetting campaign in 2012.[36] The current Obrador administration is considering appointing an intermediary to oversee federal-to-state money transfers to combat graft and selecting an autonomous attorney general to pursue corruption cases without restriction.[37]

In 2018, the global corruption perception index ranked Mexico 138th out of 180 countries in the world for corruption, tying it with Russia.[38] The amount of money used to bribe federal and state police, military units, political figures, and other institutions remains unknown, but the level of impunity for crime implies a high number. According to data from the National Institute of Statis-

tics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografic*), there were 154,557 murders in Mexico between 2010 and 2016, and 94.8 percent were never convicted.[39] Article 19 reported a 99.6 percent impunity rate for crimes against journalists.[40] The causes behind this enormous shortfall extend beyond corruption to a lack of police training, inefficient use of federal funds, a shortage of police officers (Mexico's 0.8 officers per 100,000 residents falls short of the international average of 1.8), and the lack of homicide prosecutors.[41] Attorney general agents earn a monthly average salary of $1,165; police officers, $265 per month; police detectives, $740 per month.[42] The low pay compared to the enormous revenue generated by the sale of illicit narcotics creates a vector for corruption to take hold and contribute to criminal impunity.

High levels of violence and institutionalized corruption contribute to the presence of clientelism and ungoverned spaces in Mexico. Citizens have more incentive to support cartels than to oppose them: lack of economic opportunity and welfare from the licit economy reduce the opportunity cost. For individuals who do not actively participate in supporting the illicit drug trade, cartels use a combination of fear, bribery, and, in some areas, social services to establish a form of clientelism to minimize interference. This enables cartels to engage in widespread extortion, criminal theft and black-market resale of oil, film piracy, money laundering, and human trafficking.

The presence of clientelism demonstrates a breakdown of the Mexican government's ability to monopolize the use of force and provide law and order for citizens in exchange for regular taxes. The states of Michoacán and Guerro experienced such a high level of extortion by Los Zetas, *La Familia Michoacán* (LFM), and the Knights Templar Cartel (*Los Cabelleros Templarios*) cartels that *autodefensas* (rural militias) grew in prominence to fight the cartels' influence.[43] The presence of clientelism and ungoverned spaces share similarities with an insurgency, where opposition groups hold legitimate authority and influence over a population in the absence of the government.

To varying degrees, cartels operate through a networked structure. Some cartels fulfill only a few functions of the illicit narcotics business and rely on relationships with other cartels to carry out other necessary tasks such as cultivation, manufacturing, transport, distribution, sales, and enforcement. These arrangements typically require cartels to pay a *cuota*, or tax, to those cartels who maintain territorial control over trafficking *plazas*, but they allow for greater specialization within each task and limit the need to conduct widespread violence against other cartels.

Many cartels possess flat organizational structures and compartmentalize information, enabling the organization to conduct business in the absence of the core leaders, to create resilience against targeting by state security forces.[44]

Some cartels conduct business along a more hierarchal and territorial model, whereby a clear chain of command exists to manage illicit operations across a larger range of functions. Large cartels like Sinaloa and CJNG possess the resources to carry out all aspects of their operations, with less reliance on relations with other cartels. However, in exerting influence or outright control over a large territorial area, these cartels supplant state authority and disrupt society to a high degree, which makes them principal targets for crackdown by state security forces. These large, territorial-based cartels represent warlordism in all but name. Cartels also engage in significant transnational activity that extends their destabilizing influence well beyond North America. Cartels exert influence over populations or maintain relationships with other organizations in Central and South America and transport illicit narcotics along the tenth degree of latitude (Highway 10) toward West Africa, where narcotics find their way into Europe.

Figure 1. Regional influence of DTOs in Mexico[45]

As of 2018, the landscape of bad actors in Mexico includes nine major cartels and over 200 local cells.[46] Perpetual cartel infighting plus state security forces' operations affect the number of cartels, their size and relative power and resources, and their territorial influence or control, thus the exact number and

composition of cartels in Mexico changes too frequently to warrant a focus on individual groups. Instead, grouping cartels into types and regions provides a more usable foundation for analysis and discussion. Stratfor Global Intelligence mapped cartels according to three geographic areas: Tamaulipas state, Sinaloa state, and Tierra Caliente (see fig. 1, Regional Influence of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) in Mexico).[47] Mexican political scientist Eduardo Guerrero-Gutierrez developed a typology to group cartels by their level of activity, denoting national cartels, regional cartels, toll-collector cartels, and drug trafficking cells (see fig. 2, Mexican DTO Typology).[48] Both Stratfor's regional map of influence and Guerrero-Gutierrez's typology will change frequently as cartels fight among themselves or bear the brunt of state targeting.

Table 1. Mexican DTO typology[49]

Category	Organizations
National Cartels These DTOs control or maintain presence on numerous drug routes, including points of entry and exit along the northern and southern borders. Also, they operate major international routes to and from the country. Reardless of their wide territorial presence, they actively seek to expand control over new routes that lead to the north. These organizations have sought to buid upon the profits they receive from drug trafficking to diversify their illegal portfolios mainly toward oil theft, a highly lucrative and low-risk activity.	• Jalisco-Nueva Generación • Los Zetas • Sinaloa
Regional Cartels These DTOs keep limited control over segments of drug trafficking routes passing through their territory. They play a secondary role in the drug trading business because they receive relatively smaller profits from it. However, these DTOs have aggressively diversified toward other criminal activities, such as extortion, kidnapping, oil theft, smuggling of goods and people, and vehicle theft.	• Golfo • La Familia Michoacana • Los Caballeros Temparios • Pacífico Sur (Beltrán Leyva)
Toll-Collector Cartels These are DTOs whose main income comes from toll fees received from other organizations that convey drug shipments through their controlled municipalities along the northern border. Given that these cartels are largely confined to some border municipalities, they cannot diversify their illegal activities as actively as other DTOs. If these DTOs eventually lose control of their respective border areas, they probably will disappear.	• Juárez (Carrillo Fuentes) • Tijuana (Arellano Félix)
Drug Trafficking Cells These DTOs are mostly disbanded cells from larger organizations. They are locally based; however, their range of operations can extend from a few contiguous localities to several states. Their business activities are mainly focused on small-scale drug distribution. In some cases, they have extended their illegal business toward extortion, kidnapping, and vehicle theft.	In total, 202 mafia cells have been identified. The states with the highest number of mafia cells are Tamaulipas (42), Guerrero (25), and Distrito Federal (24)

Source: Eduardo Guerrero-Gutiérrez, June 2015.

Notes: Information provided by Eduardo Guerrero-Gutiérrez to CRS on July 14, 2015. Spanish names used in this table are translated as Jalisco-Nueva Generación = Jalisco Cartel-New Generation; Golfo = Gulf; Los Caballeros Templarios = Knights Templar.

US Department of Defense joint doctrine provides a baseline to assert that the nature of the human security threat and the character of cartels do not conform to any model of warfare. Joint Publication 1 defines traditional warfare as a violent struggle between nation-states in pursuit of national interests. These conflicts focus military operations on the adversary's armed forces, war-making capabilities, or the seizure of territory through maneuver and firepower. These trends also apply to irregular warfare, defined in joint doctrine as a "violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)."[50] As described previously, cartels exist as substate and transnational actors and use violence to obtain legitimacy and influence over a population in an effort not to govern, but rather to subvert state sovereignty, law, and order, to pursue illicit profits without interference. The population's acquiescence toward illicit activities remain one of the key objectives of cartels. Thus, neither traditional nor irregular warfare provides a guide for dealing with this threat.

Attempts to counter cartels under a paradigm of war will inevitably fall short. A state may prove capable of dismantling an individual cartel though force, yet these efforts will only temporarily degrade the human security threat. Force alone cannot counter the dynamic of societal issues of psychological and biological addiction that creates demand for illicit narcotics and the economic underdevelopment that reward participation in its supply. This supply-demand dynamic does not possess a will that force can overwhelm or an ideology among the population to counter.

The behaviors of cartels that undermine state sovereignty and governance extend the problem well beyond crime and do not adequately frame the human security threat they exploit. Cartels engage in many illicit activities to produce a level of violence, corruption, and instability that exceeds the norms of criminal behavior. Some characteristics of cartels resemble elements of war, such as the use of violence to pursue profit objectives by other means than corruption (*plata o plomo*), widespread territorial control that resembles an insurgency, the deliberate use of terror tactics to instill fear and coerce government and population acquiescence, and the use of violence that resembles a civil war between cartels. The portfolio of cartel activity outside of the narcotics business expands into torture, extortion, kidnapping, theft, human trafficking, and corruption—suggesting their transcendence beyond criminality into something far more dangerous. Attempts to counter cartels using a crime paradigm will fall short for the same reason a war paradigm does: it does not solve the supply-demand dynamic underpinning the human security problems that cartels exploit. Law enforcement does not solve economic underdevelopment or treat drug addiction. The supply-demand dynamic cre-

ates an inexhaustible supply of recruits for cartels and a tremendous profit surplus to facilitate transnational corruption. A crime paradigm thus does not offer a tangible solution or end to the human security threat.

The human insecurity exploited by cartels requires its own paradigm separate from war and crime to conceptually understand. This modern Hydra derives from elemental human needs, whether they are psychological and biological addiction, or the need for financial resources for basic subsistence and status, or the need for belonging apart from the resources offered by family or religion. Reveron and Mahoney-Norris differentiate human security from national security in noting that in the former, individuals, not states, constitute the primary actors and the threats derive from nonstate entities and illegally armed groups to produce disease, poverty, and crime across transnational borders.[51] In this lens, cartels contribute to all these pathologies, not as a means to profit maximization or an end in itself but rather as unintended spillover effects from corrupting civil institutions, undermining governance, and committing violence in pursuit of their illicit narcotics business. These differences underline the reason why a crime or warfare approach alone will not suffice as a solution. Reveron and Mahoney-Norris explicitly note that "military forces largely lack the capabilities, doctrine, and culture to confront these transnational security challenges."[52] This observation also extends to law enforcement institutions that do not possess the means or mandate to solve wide-ranging human security problems. The use of warfare or crime paradigms to combat human security fundamentally cannot address the causes of deficient human security.

Argument 2: War Strategy Fails to Solve Human Security

The US and Mexico failed to understand the nature of the human security threat. As a result, they applied the wrong strategies in their attempts at a solution. A review of the US containment and BPC strategy, Mexican counter-network decapitation strategy, and their negative consequences for both human security and national security will support this argument.

Both the US and Mexico misidentified the nature of the problem. Carl von Clausewitz provided a prescient warning for strategists embarking on a military campaign: "So long as no acceptable theory, no intelligence analysis of war exists, routine methods will tend to take over even at the highest level."[53] The failure to properly identify the nature of the human security threat led the Mexican government to apply routine methods common to a war paradigm through a counternetwork decapitation strategy. Meanwhile, the US appears to support this paradigm while pursuing a strategy of containment and lim-

ited security force assistance. Between 2006 and 2018, these strategies proved insufficient and counterproductive. Illicit narcotics trafficking and violence increased over this 12-year period by 248 percent, along with other indicators of human insecurity (corruption, extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking).[54] Now both nations face an increasing national security threat from the underlying human security problem.

Mexico has applied a war paradigm to execute a counternetwork decapitation strategy that spans across three federal administrations. The government reactively deploys centrally controlled national military units to arrest cartel leadership, disrupt cartel command and control, break their capacity to operate, and placate public demand for action in a fast and visible manner. Military units do not deploy as part of a proactive security campaign but as a reaction to significant public and political demands and media attention for government intervention. The principal metric to measure the strategy's effectiveness is the homicide rate, despite the fact that of the 43 internationally determined indicators to obtain accurate homicide data, state authorities across Mexico comply with an average of 14.8.[55] The counternetwork decapitation strategy does not exist in any open-source national security literature from the Mexican government. The approach described above instead derives from a study of government actions and behaviors since 2006.

Part of the reason for this absence of a national security strategy for tackling dismal human security and the cartels that exploit it comes from the underdeveloped state of the Mexican institutions responsible for national security policy formulation. Dedicated national security policy institutions and formulations did not exist until 2005. At that time, a confluence of increased human security issues within Mexico since the 1980s, the democratic transition away from single-party rule under the PRI, and the growing awareness of national security in the Mexican defense department and intelligence apparatus created the impetus for institutional change.[56] The Vicente Fox administration secured passage of the National Security Law in 2005, which mandated the creation of a National Security Council to formulate a security police and the publishing of a periodic National Security Program and clarified roles for Mexico's national intelligence service, the Center for Intelligence and National Security (CISEN). Four years later, during the Calderón administration, the 2009 National Security Program identified drug trafficking as a threat yet did not stipulate any end state or means to counter the problem. A biannual public survey by the *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas*, a Mexican university and think-tank, revealed in both 2008 and 2010 that fighting drug trafficking and organized crime constituted the primary na-

tional interest among Mexican residents—yet a government strategy to address these threats never materialized.[57]

The administration of President Felipe Calderón (2006–12) inherited an undefined national security strategy amid rampant institutional corruption and violence. In response, Calderón enacted a sporadic application of a counternetwork decapitation strategy to topple the most visibly violent and destabilizing cartels in Mexico. This approach only served to increase violence and balkanize cartels into greater numbers of smaller organizations. At the outset of his term, four major cartels existed: Arellano Félix Organization (*Cártel de Tijuana*, AFO), Sinaloa Federation, Vicente Carillo Fuentes Organization (*Cártel de Juárez*, CFO), and Gulf Cartel. These groups contributed to a homicide rate of 9.9 per 100,000 residents in January 2006. By the end of Calderón's term six years later in January 2012, seven major cartels operated in Mexico and the homicide rate rose to 22.2 per 100,000 people.[58] The AFO, CFO, Sinaloa Federation, and Gulf Cartel still operated but with lower capabilities because of the internal fracturing that occurred after the loss of their leadership cadres under the decapitation strategy. These fractured elements gave rise to new cartels: Cartel Pacífico Sur, Los Zetas, and LFM. The Calderón administration primarily relied upon military means to enact its counternetwork decapitation strategy in the belief that targeting cartel leaders would cement rule of law in crime-ridden areas and reduce cartel activity. Instead, targeting top leadership resulted in fracturing the groups, which created a power vacuum. Violence increased because of the high homicide rates between and within cartels as aspiring leaders fought to control elements of the organization and fought for *plazas* vacated by other groups.

Despite disorder within the military itself, the Calderón administration relied upon it to enforce public security because the state and municipal police forces typically charged with the prevention of crime demonstrated even lower capacity to deal with cartel activity. Before the Calderón administration, the Department of National Defense experienced 123,218 desertions out of 191,142 troops (64.5 percent) between 2000 and 2006.[59] Deserters commonly found new work in the cartels themselves, which could provide much higher pay. The *Secretaria de Marina* (SEMAR, Mexican marines)—the best trained and most disciplined organization in the Mexican military—played a principal role in fulfilling Calderón's militarized strategy, with the *Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional* (SEDENA, Mexican army) contributing additional military means. SEMAR and SEDENA conducted operations against cartels to give the federal government time to enact reform to bolster law enforcement institutions. Reliance on the military created significant consequences, principally because the Mexican government treated cartel activity as insur-

gent warfare. As a result, military action aimed at the elimination of leadership did not allow for active citizen involvement in the public security of their municipalities. This limited the amount of actionable intelligence military units could acquire and complicated targeting because cartel members blend in with the law-abiding populace. These actions also failed to install sustainable law and order elements when military units redeployed to other locations. The use of the military during the Calderón administration did not coincide with a declared state of emergency, and thus military operations within municipalities undermined local law and order and led to abuses of power, such as extrajudicial killings and violations of search and seizure laws.[60] Military units replaced local authorities in their area of operations, detained police officers, installed curfews, manned checkpoints along major lines of communication, and conducted military raids against cartel infrastructure and personnel.[61]

The Calderón administration's initiative to reform municipal and state police corruption failed to transform these crime deterrence entities into a viable law and order entity. After Mexico's democratic transition in 2000, government institutions at the state and municipal levels worked within a decentralized system in which the rewards offered to officials to work with (or at least not directly against) cartels far exceeded the pay provided by the government to crack down on an entrenched illicit narcotics enterprise. Police forces simply lost their crime deterrence function. Additionally, municipalities lacked adequate numbers of personnel for crime prevention, with half the 2,022 municipal police organizations employing 20 officials or fewer.[62] Calderón attempted to launch a new police model to overcome these problems by unifying and centralizing municipal and state police into state-level organizations. This move gave power to state-level police forces, and undermined the federalized political system in Mexico that required the municipal level to provide for the welfare of its residents.[63] The law presented to the Mexican Congress to institutionalize this new police model remained in political limbo, and only some states voluntarily adopted the plan.[64] The push toward a centralized police model carried with it an additional and crucial drawback for law enforcement: the reduction in quantity and quality of human intelligence. Without persistent manpower at the local level to induce citizen participation, centralized law enforcement lacked the requisite information needed to prevent criminal activity. Calderón also attempted to bolster federal police force strength, but the effort increased the quantity of federal police agents at the cost of quality training. The federal police training course reduced instruction time from 12 to three months to accommodate the necessary throughput of personnel, cutting course content on leadership, integrity, codes of conduct,

doctrine of intelligence and counterintelligence, culture of legality, public image, and public participation—all hallmarks of a professionalized force.[65]

The administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–18) persisted in continuing the militarized counternetwork decapitation strategy against cartels and failed to resolve the underlying human security problem. In January 2013, President Peña Nieto gave the first speech connecting cartels and Mexican security strategy. One of his five strategic principles consisted of creating a "safe Mexico with improved security and with the citizen and families at the center of the security policies."[66] Despite President Peña Nieto's stated principle, a coherent strategy to enact it remained elusive. Peña Nieto also outlined a broad strategy in his 2014–18 National Security Program to combat violence, drug cultivation, and trafficking in Mexico by increasing coordination among national, state, and municipal institutions, improving access to actionable intelligence through a fusion intelligence center, and utilizing military forces. This strategy provided his administration time to enact 10 lines of effort including criminal justice reform, prison reform, and citizen participation but lacked concrete objectives necessary to measure success.[67]

Peña Nieto aimed to halve the homicide rate in his first six months of office, signaling the importance of this metric to measure performance. As pointed out by Brookings Institute foreign policy expert Vanda Felbab-Brown, this metric masked whether decreases of violence resulted from national strategy and lines of effort or from cartels establishing stable balance of power to facilitate their business.[68] During Peña Nieto's term, the homicide rate of 22.2 per 100,000 residents increased to 24.6 per 100,000 residents by January 2018. The seven major cartels broke into nine flatter cartels and over 200 cartel cells, and they constructed smaller, more networked organizations.[69]

Peña Nieto's approach, like Calderón's, failed to establish sustainable law and order after military operations. Military units continued to succeed in conducting decapitation operations and win the local battles against cartels but failed to win the ensuing peace their improved security provided because of the absence of sustained law and order reforms. Peña Nieto's continuation of Calderón's decapitation strategy manifested in the death or capture of 69 cartel leaders out of a list of 122 high-value targets during his first year in office. SEMAR and SEDENA focused on the most violent cartels, particularly Los Zetas, LFM, and its successor Knights Templar Cartel.[70] Violence decreased in 2013, but the reduction fell well short of his 50 percent reduction promise.

While new balances of power developed and likely contributed to temporary reductions in violence, the manufacture, distribution, and sale of illicit narcotics continued to undermine human security though kidnapping, extortion, and corruption of institutions. Metrics to measure the rate of kidnap-

ping and extortion vary and remain underreported given the potential consequences of punishment by cartels for providing the government with credible information that could lead to their arrest or prosecution.[71] The absence of sustained public security resulted in the rise of rural militias in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero. As the militias grew in popularity as a counter to local cartels, Peña Nieto responded by deploying military personnel to decapitate cartel leadership. He attempted to disarm and reintegrate the militias into the Mexican security apparatus as a rural defense corps. Several militias resisted the federal government's attempts to disarm them and continued to operate independently while others evolved into fronts for cartels.[72]

In the aftermath of military operations against cartel leadership, all the structural conditions remained in place to fuel the narcotic supply-demand dynamic: the large profit margins of illicit trafficking; the lack of socioeconomic programs to reintegrate criminals into society; the lack of adequately motivated or trained law and order personnel to deter and prevent crime; the drug demand from the US. Instead of operating in hierarchal and centralized organizations, cartels evolved into transactional networks, with organizations focused on trafficking over territorial control. Cartels demonstrated a greater aptitude for working with other groups through partnerships. In this manner, cartels resemble a Hydra, capable of entirely regrowing a lost appendage or producing an entirely new and separate organism.

Thus far, the counternetwork decapitation strategy only resulted in increased levels of homicides and a far greater number of decentralized cartels. The branches of the larger cartels typically operate in small areas and lack the organizational, resource, and messaging capacity to deter violent acts from other cartels. As a result, these smaller groups possess less deterrent power within the greater cartel enterprise as they seek to increase their illicit market share. When this increasingly crowded, hypercompetitive market combined with the lower levels of leadership experience among cartels as a result of the decapitation strategy and a unique narco culture, violence naturally increased. The increased violence and instability caused by cartel fragmentation after decapitation outweighs the effects of increasingly networked groups willing to negotiate mutually beneficial arrangements to conduct business.

Peña Nieto's other initiatives failed to fix the underlying human security conditions needed to inhibit the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic. Peña Nieto moved both the federal police and Secretariat of Public Security under the Ministry of the Interior to improve coordination between Mexican and US law enforcement. The change disrupted long-standing cooperation between the US and SEMAR, Mexico's most capable and least corrupt security organization and did nothing to alter the execution of its decapitation strategy. A new

fusion intelligence center received increased funding and manpower to facilitate information sharing between Mexico and the US, but it primarily focused on strategic analysis. An attempt to erect a civilian paramilitary national gendarmerie of 40,000–60,000 officers to police rural areas culminated in only 5,000 candidates attached to the federal police. The gendarmerie initiative suffered from both a lack of funding as well as a lack of suitable recruits; it relied on enrollment from former SEDENA and SEMAR operatives. A one-time police vetting initiative produced dismal results, identifying an insignificant number of corrupt officials given the widespread perception of bribery and criminal impunity (as little as 2 percent in some states).[73]

In 2014, the Mexican Congress reformed the military justice code to clamp down on human rights abuses conducted by military forces. The reform required that abuses committed by military members face investigation and prosecution under the civilian criminal justice system instead of the military system.[74] A 2017 US State Department report indicated that human rights abuses by the Mexican military still occur and yield low rates of conviction.[75] In 2017 alone, the Mexican Federal Attorney General's Office reported 4,390 torture cases under review.[76] The current criminal justice system allows for *arraigo*, a form of preventative detention, whereby the military or police can hold people up to 80 days without charge.[77] The reliance on the military to conduct a decapitation strategy directly correlates to these abuses and further undermines human security and the public's trust in Mexican institutions.

Under Peña Nieto, Mexican security forces also increased drug eradication and interdiction operations. Security forces seized 26.5 metric tons (MT) of methamphetamines, 10.2 tons of cocaine, and 1,346.4 MT of marijuana from April 2014 to September 2015, a 74 percent, 186 percent, and 45 percent increase respectively compared to the same period from 2013 to 2014. Security forces also seized 272 drug laboratories in 2016, a 90 percent increase over 2015.[78] Drug eradication efforts prove difficult in Mexico because of difficulties accessing cultivation sites in remote and mountainous terrain along the Sierra Madre Occidental region, small plot sizes, and lack of economic programs available to encourage farmers to convert to other crops.[79]

On the socioeconomic front, in 2013 the Peña Nieto administration launched a crime prevention program in 57 areas known as *poligonos* (polygons) and secured passage of medical marijuana legalization. Within each polygon, the federal government funded a variety of initiatives: youth activities, drug treatment programs, focused employment opportunities, and increased school resources. The programs obtained inputs from municipal and community leaders to focus projects within each polygon to suit local conditions and counter the root causes of cartel participation.

The program demonstrated several shortfalls. It lacked a coherent application and produced polygons of different sizes throughout Mexico with no standard criteria for application in one area as opposed to another. It also did not account for the influence of crime that crosses the invisible border surrounding a polygon from outside areas. Lastly, it lacked a clear means to measure the effectiveness of a polygon's socioeconomic initiatives to reduce violence and narcotics trafficking.[80] In June 2017, despite 60 percent of Mexicans disapproving of the right to grow and use recreational marijuana, Peña Nieto signed into law a provision allowing medical marijuana use.[81] This legislation will likely accelerate the demise of the illicit marijuana market, in conjunction with Canada's complete recreational legalization in June 2018 and partial US legalization.[82] The fact that the majority of Mexicans disapproved of their supreme court's decision to uphold recreational use implies that efforts to decriminalize or legalize other illicit narcotics will face significant challenges.

The administration of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (2018–present) did not promise any drastic change in strategy to address underlying human security threats. A month after his inauguration in December 2018, homicides in Mexico stood at 24.6 per 100,000 residents. The CJNG, based in the Tierra Caliente region, poses the most overt threat to Mexico, possessing assets valued at over $20 billion, operating in 22 states, sharing ties with the local militias in Michoacán, and contributing to the record levels of homicides in 2018.[83] In 2015, CJNG demonstrated its operational capability by shooting down an army helicopter with a rocket propelled grenade.[84] Its transnational connections throughout Central and South America, control over prime cultivation areas, and access to major ports used to acquire synthetic drug precursor chemicals provide it with the means to aggressively expand and overtly undermine Mexico's control over its own population.[85] In this context, President Obrador ran on a campaign promising to demilitarize the state's war on cartels. He won over 53 percent of the vote in a three-way election and should benefit from his party's control in both houses of congress.

President Obrador faces the task of synchronizing the realities of a domestic threat as pervasive as CJNG with his aspirational policy promises. In a complete reversal of campaign promises, his *Plan Nacional de Paz y Seguridad* (National Plan for Peace and Security) calls for the creation of a national guard.[86] The national guard will combine both SEMAR and SEDENA battalions with elements of the federal police under the Ministry of Defense. The initiative seeks to recruit 150,000 troops within three years and provide training, discipline, and equipment mirroring current military arms.[87] His initiative effectively ends the federal police as a separate entity and does not provide additional resources to state or municipal police forces to conduct civilian law

enforcement duties.[88] The implementation of this plan remains far off and requires no fewer than 16 constitutional amendments.[89] The Obrador administration also seeks to abolish the CISEN intelligence agency and replace it with a new national intelligence agency under a renovated Department of Public Security that had been disbanded under the Peña Nieto administration in 2012.[90] Other initiatives under consideration include decriminalizing marijuana and regulating medical opium use, providing amnesty for low-level criminals and disadvantaged youth, appointing an intermediary to oversee federal-to-state money transfers to combat graft, and appointing an autonomous attorney general to pursue corruption cases without restriction.[91]

The proposed security initiatives under the Obrador administration represent a continuation of his predecessors' counternetwork decapitation strategy via a rearrangement of existing security institutions. Both the Calderón and Peña Nieto administrations enacted similar reforms with no noticeable effect on the problem. Obrador's decriminalization initiative will likely make minimal impact on the hypercompetitive drug market because it does not and cannot solve the enormous drug demand from the US. Amnesty for even low-level criminals may undermine the government in the eyes of law-abiding families who suffer at the hands of cartels. Amnesty also does not solve the underlying conditions that motivate people to work for cartels. The use of an intermediary to fight graft only adds people to a system thoroughly penetrated by cartel corruption. Fundamentally, the Obrador administration remains committed to a war paradigm to resolve a human security problem and continues the trend of misdiagnosing the nature of the problem it seeks to tackle.

Meanwhile, the US supports this paradigm and, in response, pursues a strategy of containment at the border and BPC to support Mexico's counternetwork decapitation approach. In 2010, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the drug violence in Mexico as an insurgency similar to the conflict against cartels and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) in Colombia.[92] The *2017 National Security Strategy* (*NSS*) links cartels with crimes that exploit gaps in governance to fuel the opioid epidemic, corruption of democratic institutions, and violence within communities. The *NSS* lays out its approach to counter this threat via improved border control and immigration policy along with defeating transnational criminal organizations at their source. The strategy also calls for the "construction of a border wall, the use of multilayered defenses and advanced technology, the employment of additional personnel, and other measures" as the means to improve border control and immigration. This containment approach seeks to limit some of the spillover effects of poor human security. The *NSS* also supports the use of US agencies and foreign partners to "target [transnational criminal

organization] leaders and their support infrastructure."[93] The US applies a variety of mechanisms to facilitate the counternetwork decapitation strategy within Mexico.

The Mérida Initiative

The main US effort to build partner capacity with Mexico came under the bilateral Mérida Initiative launched in 2007 under Congressional appropriations for fiscal year 2008. As of March 2017, the US Congress appropriated $2.8 billion in funds toward the initiative. Of that amount, the US delivered $1.6 billion in assistance to Mexico under Mérida's four pillars: disrupting the operational capacity of organized crime, institutionalizing reforms to sustain rule of law and respect for human rights, creating a twenty-first century border, and building strong and resilient communities.[94]

The initiative included a pledge from the US government to tackle domestic drug demand and the trafficking of weapons and bulk currency that fuel cartel activity. A government accountability report found that 70 percent of firearms seized between 2009 and 2014 originated from the US.[95] The bulk currency enables cartels to finance illegal wages and bribes in cash that prove more difficult to track and target. Between 2007 and 2017, 74 percent of Mérida's $2.8 billion of appropriations went to narcotics control and law enforcement efforts while only 10.3 percent funded economic development and 15.7 percent funded military equipment and training.[96] Thus far, the Mérida Initiative lacks useful metrics to measures its progress, and reports tend to focus on statistics like the number of at-risk youths counseled, the number of police vetted, or the numbers of judiciary officials trained.

Mérida shares responsibility for some of the positive developments in Mexico, such as the increased number of cartel members extradited to the US where the criminal justice system offers a better capability to convict top leaders. Mérida also helped Mexico transition to its accusatorial justice system in 2016, improve its correctional facilities to a degree where 55 of them received international accreditation, and successfully apprehend 150,000 migrants in 2015 and 2016.[97]

The initial years of Mérida focused funds on the transfer of military equipment and technical assistance. These efforts aligned with the Calderón administration's use of military personnel to conduct a counternetwork decapitation strategy. Under Mérida, Mexico received four CASA-235 aircraft for surveillance, nine UH-60 Blackhawk and eight Bell 412 helicopters to enhance mobility for raids and interdiction efforts in both urban and rural areas, and a Dornier 328JET for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

Mérida also provided $873.7 million in nonintrusive inspection equipment, forensic technology, and canine teams during the Calderón years and another $146 million in training.[98] Training occurred via an instructional pyramid approach whereby US specialists trained Mexican personnel who then served as the instructor corps to disseminate this training to Mexican security forces.

During the latter years of the Calderón and throughout the Peña Nieto administrations, the Obama administration tailored Mérida toward institution building, economic development, and community-based social programs and put fewer resources into equipment and technical assistance transfers. These efforts coincided with Peña Nieto's implementation of the *poligonos* community program, the legalization of medical marijuana, police vetting, and a security force professionalization initiative. In 2012, Mérida's foreign military financing came to an end and shifted to bilateral military assistance under the US Department of Defense. In 2014, the US Congress reappropriated 15 percent of the assistance slated for Mexican security forces because of human rights concerns prohibited by the Leahy Act. Law enforcement cooperation endured under such programs as the US Immigrations and Customs' Border Enforcement Security Task Force and the Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit. In 2015, Mérida funded a $75 million biometrics program and in 2016, another $75 million for a secure telecommunications infrastructure between US and Mexican law enforcement offices along the border. Mérida appropriations partially enabled Mexico's transition from a closed-room justice system that relied on written statements to the US model of an adversarial and accusatorial justice system using oral testimony and witnesses in court. This change necessitated significant law enforcement and judicial professionalization, partially funded by Mérida appropriations, to codify standards, vet police officers, centralize personnel records, run state-level academies and training courses, acquire audio and video recording equipment for oral proceedings, improve prosecutor and judicial capacity, and conduct public outreach.[99]

Mérida appropriations also support efforts by the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection to secure the border. Mérida partially funds a Mexican customs training academy to enhance their agents' ability to perform inbound inspections and created a Border Bilateral Executive Steering Committee.

The Mérida Initiative does not clarify who bears inspection responsibility for the flow of drugs north and the flow of money and weapons south, nor does it address how to do so effectively without halting the flow of licit products across the border. The US Department of State provided another $24 million in Mérida funds toward equipment, canine teams, and training for

security forces along Mexico's southern border. The US Agency for International Development devoted $90 million in Mérida funds to community support programs such as outreach to at-risk youth and programs to encourage citizen participation in crime prevention, while the US State Department focused efforts on programs for "drug demand reduction, culture of lawfulness, and government accountability."[100]

The Trump administration reverted to the Bush administration's approach to prioritize the Mérida Initiative's first pillar of disrupting organized criminal groups and placed lower emphasis on providing resources toward Mexico's institutions, economic development, and community programs. Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and former Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly met with their Mexican counterparts in May 2017 and produced a statement concerning the need "to disrupt and destroy criminal organizations which threaten our citizens, our communities, and our country."[101] The 2018 budget request for Mérida amounted to only $54 million, 38.8 percent less than fiscal year 2017.[102]

Department of Defense efforts align with this refocus on Mérida's first pillar by supporting the counternetwork decapitation strategy. At Peterson AFB, Colorado, US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), in close coordination with US Southern Command and US Special Operations Command, provides forces to actively identify and disrupt threat networks, lead the military BPC effort, and support combined law enforcement efforts.[103] The DOD spent $64.2 million in 2016 to provide military training and equipment to Mexican security forces in its BPC effort.[104] USNORTHCOM provided training courses in information fusion, surveillance, interdiction, and logistics and well as equipment like communication devices, night vision devices, boats, and aircraft upgrades.[105] To combat cartels, USNORTHCOM also provided small-unit tactical training to 1,500 Mexican marines in 2017.[106] These initiatives facilitated Mexico's ability to pursue its counternetwork decapitation strategy.

Despite the significant efforts of US and Mexican civil servants working to implement the Mérida Initiative, it remains insufficient in scope to tackle the underlying human security problem and lacks adequate metrics to measure its effectiveness. The $1.6 billion delivered under Mérida and hundreds of millions under DOD initiatives are insubstantial compared to the $100 billion that Mexico has invested in its own security and public safety since 2007.[107] US monetary, training, and intelligence contributions to Mexico's security approach only exacerbated the negative consequences of the counternetwork decapitation strategy. Mexican security forces, armed with US equipment from the Mérida Initiative, intelligence from bilateral cooperation agree-

ments, and military tactics and techniques from USNORTHCOM personnel, applied these tools to unseat cartel leadership.

In doing so, they facilitated instability within the hypercompetitive illicit market that produced increased violence, as cartel infighting ensued to establish control over resources and *plazas*. Despite small successes in judicial reform and increased extradition agreements, the US BPC strategy failed by every conceivable metric available: homicide rates, illegal immigration entries, corruption, and drug cultivation. The use of a decapitation strategy in a militarized anticrime approach, and the US contribution to its execution, yielded counterproductive results.

The US containment strategy also yields unproductive results in solving the human security dilemma. While heightened border security increases the capacity of border agencies to detect and detain illegal migrants, it also produces a counterproductive effect in the long term. The current zero tolerance policy toward illegal entries, barriers to asylum application, and long delays for legal entry combine to motivate people fleeing Mexico because of deficient human security to pursue human trafficking options. Cartels dominate this human trafficking business because they can capitalize on their established *plazas* into the US to smuggle people and narcotics.[108] The implementation of a containment strategy via increased border security also raises the risk for cartels to transport drugs into the US, thus increasing costs.

This dynamic cuts into cartel profits and helps explain their incentive to expand into other illegal markets like human trafficking and kidnapping for profit.[109] Border security focused on the control of illegal entry and illicit narcotics does little to correct the flow of revenue and weapons from the US south into Mexico. Containment also must contend with the reality that the level of screening necessary to stop illicit activity from crossing established legal points of entry along bridges, roads, and ports will likely stifle the flow of licit goods. Enacting the level of security necessary to interdict human trafficking and drug smuggling can produce an economic crisis and lead to even higher levels of instability within Mexico as economic privation worsens and cartels battle for a share of an even smaller revenue stream.

Both the US and Mexico applied incoherent national security strategies to solve what amounted to a human security threat. This result stems directly from a fundamental failure to understand the nature of the problem. Mexico and the US favored a variety of strategies for only the symptoms of human insecurity.[110] Counternetwork decapitation can yield results in combating violent extremist networks and insurgencies, because those types of threats typically possess a hierarchy of leadership that formulates rational policy aimed toward defeating a state or increasing its influence and legitimacy to

govern. When applied to a human security threat fueled by societal issues like drug addiction and economic underdevelopment, however, the strategy eliminates targets who have no control over the narcotic supply-demand dynamic.

Containment seeks to reduce the symptom of illegal entries. It can produce results in a long-term grand strategy against a rational state actor because it threatens traditional military force for the infringement of sovereignty or security interests. But when applied to a human security threat where no rational state actor can be held accountable for illegal entries and targeted by traditional military force, containment bears no deterrence or coercive power. BPC seeks to correct multiple symptoms of deficient human security, including corruption and violence. Yet facilitating the ability of a partner nation to execute an ineffective strategy more efficiently only exacerbates the counterproductive results of decapitation.

Some elements of the US BPC strategy, notably in civic reform, economic development, and social programs, address more than the symptoms of human security. These BPC initiatives outside of decapitation and containment address the narcotic supply-demand dynamic by targeting some of the economic incentives and social enablers that entice people to participate in the supply end. However, when applied with insufficient resources, like the Mérida Initiative, the effort cannot produce any fundamental changes in the human security dilemma.

Argument 3: The Strategic Paradox of the Human Security Threat

The policy measure necessary to solve the human security problem introduces a strategic paradox that inhibits its adoption by the US and Mexico. Comprehensive domestic policy reforms to legalize narcotics within the US and Mexico can end the illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic fueling deficient human security. This option will prove politically difficult to implement within states, produce public health challenges, and require multilateral cooperation. More importantly, a legalization strategy creates a duality of interests between the state and cartels over a resource and sets the conditions for widespread economic grievances that can stimulate an insurgency and transform a human security problem into a war.

The US and Mexico militarized counternetwork decapitation strategy will never prove capable of re-establishing widespread law and order within Mexico because it does not integrate long-term public security, law enforcement, economic development, and social programs to alter the incentives for residents to participate in the illicit drug trade and its offshoot criminal ac-

tivities. Decapitation strategies increase the risks for those involved in the drug trade and force cartels to devote resources to self-protection; however, decapitation holds no deterrent value as evidenced by the continued prevalence of the illicit market. Decapitation strategies do allow the state to enact justice upon those who exploit deficient human security and commit criminal acts. The endemic corruption within Mexico and high impunity rate severely limits the ability of Mexico to swiftly and persistently hold criminals accountable for their actions.

A whole-of-government strategy that provides persistent security for economic, political, and social initiatives to take hold suffers from a lack of financial and manpower resources. Mexico's police density ranges from 366 to 370 officers per 100,000 residents, 150 percent more than US levels.[111] These numbers include military personnel performing law enforcement duties. Poor pay and inadequate training undercut police effectiveness in providing security and appear to exacerbate the perception of corruption and criminal immunity. Efforts by federal administrators to reform law enforcement institutions proved inadequate to correct these shortfalls. It remains unclear where Mexico can find or develop trained and incorruptible police forces to provide persistent security, nor do they appear willing to ask for or permit a US military and law enforcement ground presence to augment their internal security. This shortfall in public security keeps economic, political, and social programs from taking root because cartels remain free to coerce and intimidate residents into avoiding participation in said programs, while extorting revenue from licit businesses and assassinating officials who promote policies against the illicit narcotics business. Even with adequate public security, Mexico requires substantial economic investment to alter the underlying underdevelopment and poverty that fuel the narcotic supply-demand dynamic.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency, 46.2 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and as much as 25 percent of the labor force is unemployed.[112] The reality is cartel activity produces enormous profits that can sustain people's economic needs through a salary or bribery. It is not clear how the Mexican government can acquire the financial resources to improve its economic opportunities enough to reduce participation in the illicit narcotics market. US economic investment through the Mérida Initiative and other programs does not offer much promise in overturning this trend, especially given the current US focus on rejuvenating its domestic economy and revising economic relationships.[113]

In the political realm, the cartels' ability to facilitate corruption as well as undermine civil governance through terror tactics severely limits Mexico's capacity to enact reforms and enforce compliance to solve these problems. A

civil law and order enforcement strategy would allow Mexico to mitigate the spillover effects of the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic, hold citizen rights sacrosanct to facilitate civic participation, and deter corruption practices to incentivize more responsive governance.[114] Despite these potential benefits, Mexico does not possess the means to conduct a deliberate and effective civil law and order enforcement strategy. Additionally, enacting this strategy only focuses on the symptoms of poor human security such as high levels of violence and corruption. It does not alter the economic underdevelopment fueling the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic. However, if Mexico proved able to enact and enforce this strategy, it would at least inhibit the ability of cartels to exploit human insecurity, as well as set the conditions for follow-on social and economic initiatives.

Since both a civic law and order strategy and a decapitation strategy appear unfeasible, policy makers may defer to a blended civil-military clear-hold-build counterinsurgency strategy like the one that yielded results in Colombia. The US BPC experience in Colombia presents US policy makers with a beguiling analogy, because counterinsurgency efforts blended with counternarcotics operations as both insurgents and criminal groups relied on the illicit drug trade for revenue.

However, the contextual differences between Colombia and Mexico undermine the value of this analogy. First, US assistance to Colombia greatly outmatched the aid provided to Mexico. US Special Forces and other advisors provided robust military training and equipment to paramilitary counternarcotics commandos known as *junglas* as well as to mobile brigades in Colombia's Joint Task Force Omega. US BPC efforts also provided rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, training, and parts critical for operating in remote areas for sustained periods. In all, the US invested $5.34 billion between 2000 and 2006 to build the capacity of Colombian security forces to counter the FARC, National Liberation Army, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, and the Medellin and Cali organizations. By comparison, from 2007 to 2018, US aid to Mexico amounted to only $1.6 billion. Additionally, the Leahy Act prevents the US DOD and Department of State from training organizations implicated for human rights violations. This restriction did not exist during US BPC efforts in Colombia where groups implicated in human rights abuses received direct support and training.[115]

 The US BPC strategy layered on top of an effective clear-hold-build counterinsurgency strategy. This type of population-centric strategy proved far more effective than the decapitation strategy applied in Mexico because it allowed for localized security and follow-on economic, political, and social reforms. In Mexico, the US BPC effort only exacerbates an ineffective decapita-

tion strategy. Despite the benefits of a clear-hold-build counterinsurgency strategy, this approach is not readily transferrable to Mexico. Colombia experienced a rural insurgency fueled by ideology, political grievances, and economic inequality between urban and rural residents and could find resolution through a war paradigm and political bargaining. Mexico does not share these characteristics. Instead, the country suffers from a widespread lack of economic opportunity rather than urban-rural inequality and does not have an ideological or political element to negotiate with.[116] While clear-hold-build may provide a template for a law and order strategy, it cannot solve the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic unpinning the symptoms of human insecurity in Mexico.

The strategic paradox to human security thus presents itself: the logical policy that the US and Mexico should follow to break the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic will create the conditions for an insurgency. The three strategies presented for Mexico—counternetwork decapitation, civil law and order enforcement, and clear-hold-build counterinsurgency—do not address the demand for illicit narcotics from the US that fuels the human security threat. The US BPC and border control strategy also does not address the demand side of the illicit narcotics trade but instead amounts to an attempt to contain the spillover effects of human insecurity to Mexico. In this effort, the US strategy fundamentally fails as seen by increased levels of violence, drug trafficking, institutional corruption, and continued migratory pressure.

From an academic standpoint, a logical strategy option entails sweeping domestic policy reform to legalize drugs within both the US and Mexico. Doing so allows both governments to control cultivation, manufacture, distribution, transportation, and sales. It also allows both governments to regulate dosage and composition and provide robust drug treatment programs and education to a wider audience. A legalization policy also directly targets the core of the human security dilemma by eliminating the illegal supply-demand dynamic and replacing it with a legal one. This change reduces the incentives for cartels to use violence and bribery to increase their market share because the state, or even regulated businesses operating within a low-risk legal framework, controls the drug trade. A state or business producing and transporting drugs under a legal framework can undercut competition from illicit sources because they hold a comparative advantage from reduced costs, improved efficiency, and less risk. The resultant reduction in violence and corruption could allow Mexican institutions to enact economic, social, and political reforms to improve human security.

Two often-overlooked precedents support legalization of consciousness-altering and addictive psychoactive drugs: alcohol and nicotine, both major

contributors to public health problems, criminality, and accidental death. Despite the potential benefits of a legalization strategy and the precedents for it, widespread public opposition to drug legalization and legitimate concerns over its public health effects will realistically make the strategy extremely difficult for politicians to legislate into law in the future. In a 2015 poll, 60 percent of Mexicans noted their disapproval of a person's right to grow and use recreational marijuana (a less drastic domestic reform than legalization).[117] In a 2018 poll, only 62 percent of Americans approve of marijuana legalization.[118] Although similar polls for other illicit drugs like cocaine and methamphetamines do not exist, an overwhelming majority in favor of comprehensive drug legalization seems unlikely.

Additionally, legalization will require multinational cooperation and potentially near-simultaneous implementation. If the US and Mexico legalized drugs, then cartels would likely increase their supply distribution to African and Western European markets where prices remain high. This would facilitate the immortal and regenerative nature of the illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic. Without multinational cooperation toward legalization, cartels will still employ violence and bribery to control new *plazas* in new hypercompetitive markets.

While a legalization strategy appears logical, it presents a paradox. In addition to the public health and social consequences, the legalization of drugs in the US and Mexico would create the conditions for a full-blown insurgency. Although implementation will likely involve the state coopting some cartel elements as cultivators or manufacturers, it will dispossess most people involved in the previously illegal narcotics enterprise. When combined with the economic underdevelopment and poverty within Mexico, this creates the conditions for an insurgency: an economic grievance as a result of the loss of both legal and illegal revenue-generating opportunities, the presence of armed hierarchical organizations that share a history of resistance to law and order, and ungoverned and semigoverned spaces that provide sanctuary from which an insurgency can organize and operate.

Although the Mexican military appears to be capable of defeating any insurgent group in a tactical engagement, they do not hold the numbers necessary to clear-hold-build and enforce law and order by themselves. As recent US experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated, counterinsurgency requires a long-term commitment of significant resources in both money and manpower to produce results in establishing government legitimacy and influence over the population and solving core grievances. Legalization also creates a duality of objectives between the state and cartels as both now seek to maximize market share of a resource that provides profits. If the

state gains control over narcotics, then cartels simultaneously lose access to them in equal proportion. This changes the nature of the problem from a human security to a war paradigm. Thus, while a legalization strategy can break the illicit narcotic supply-demand dynamic and hypercompetitive illicit economy that fuels deficient human security, it will create the conditions for a war that bears consequences for rights and needs of individual human beings in Mexico. Given this paradox between the logical strategy solution of drug legalization and the capacity of that solution to create the conditions for war, the US and Mexico face few good options.

Conclusion: The Hydra of North America

Several things could alleviate some of the negative spillover effects to solve the root cause of the human security threat to the US and Mexico. First, Mexico must abandon its counternetwork decapitation strategy, and the US must stop supporting it. It motivates cartels to adapt and network, making them more resilient. It also splits cartels into larger numbers that make the market even more crowded and thus increases incentives to use violence and corruption to enhance market share in a highly competitive illicit economy.

Second, Mexico must apply a clear-hold-build construct to a law and order enforcement strategy. This involves using trained, capable, and incorruptible security elements to enforce law and order in a localized area and reward public participation, while avoiding any violations of civil rights. This approach may require military elements with the equipment and training to counter the paramilitary capabilities of some cartels. Then, capable law enforcement entities can provide preventative security measures to deter crime. This security approach can allow for robust social, economic, and political reforms to alleviate economic underdevelopment and alter the historical public acquiescence to criminal activity in Mexico. Given the lack of trained and capable security elements to conduct this approach, Mexico must accept the reality that it can only execute this approach in small areas. As it meets governance conditions that limit the spillover effects from the illicit narcotics enterprise, Mexican security forces could expand their operations into another small, adjacent area.

Mexico can implement these measures in areas experiencing the highest levels of violence; in areas critical for political governance, such as Mexico City; in areas critical for economic growth, such as Monterrey; or in areas resembling ungoverned space, such as the Michoacán or Guerrero states.

Third, the US and Mexico need to find a way to increase BPC efforts in both manpower and money. The enormous capacity and capabilities of the US can

accelerate the ability of Mexico to execute a clear-hold-build law and order enforcement strategy. Without greater US assistance, the timeline necessary to carry out this approach will likely exceed the patience of democratic electorates.

These three strategy recommendations will not end the human security threat or the flow of illicit narcotics into the US but can reduce the levels of violence, kidnapping, extortion, and corruption within Mexico to manageable levels. These recommendations provide a means to mitigate these effects on society and in the region.

Analyzing the nature of the threat to the US and Mexico reveals the difficult and limited strategy options available. The failure of American and Mexican strategists to apply the academic rigor necessary to understand the nature of the threat and the character of the enemy resulted in their misidentification of a human security threat as a war and a crime problem. Consequently, both countries relied upon familiar stratagems to deal with the most visible symptoms of the deficient human security: high levels of violence. Mexican counternetwork decapitation strategy aimed to keep cartels from conducting coordinated violence that undermined public security. The use of military personnel to arrest or kill cartel leadership yielded short-term victories that undermined long-term stability. Decapitation disrupted cartel operations and forced them to adapt, become more resilient, or divide into greater numbers of networked organizations, which increased violence.

Decapitation represented "a way of battle more than a way of war."[119] It proved capable of tactical and operational victories but in the long term undermined Mexico's ability to achieve its political objective of reduced violence. The US enabled this trend through its BPC strategy. The Mérida Initiative provided SEDENA, SEMAR, and some police units with training, equipment, and intelligence support to cement tactical and operational advantages over cartels. However, the BPC effort did not contribute appreciable resources that could facilitate the economic, political, and social changes needed to mitigate the effects of deficient human security. The US BPC strategy only made an ineffective Mexican security strategy more efficient at decapitation. Meanwhile, US containment strategy mitigated some of the spillover effects of deficient human security, notably in illegal entries and violence, but failed to stem the tide of illicit narcotics entering the US market. The public health results of this failure prove staggering and represent a clear challenge to US national security.

The DEA identified Mexico as the primary supplier of heroin into the United States.[120] Cartels produced 111 MT of pure heroin and cultivated 44,100 hectares of poppy in 2017, indirectly contributing to 16,000 heroin overdoses in the US in 2017 alone.[121] The threat does not come from a tradi-

tional or irregular enemy but instead from deficient human security fueled by an illicit narcotics supply-demand dynamic. The only strategy option to break this dynamic involves legalizing drugs in Mexico and the US, but adopting that strategy will contribute to transforming a human security threat into an insurgent threat, not to mention the public health and social consequences of legalization for the US and Mexico.

Neither the US nor Mexico possesses the doctrine or military best practices to deal with a human security threat. Efforts to employ war and law and order enforcement approaches have proven inadequate given the nature of the problem. The deficient human security emanates from an environment of economic underdevelopment that motivates people to accept the risks involved in the illicit narcotics market, to pursue the potentially enormous profits that can meet basic economic subsistence levels. The potential for biological and psychological addiction in people creates the demand to fund these illegal activities in pursuit of profits. Killing or arresting cartel leadership does nothing to change this dynamic because an inexhaustible supply of economically dispossessed people will fill the vacancies. This reality makes the human security threat and cartels regenerative, able to reconstitute leadership and enforcers as well as rebuild networks to perpetuate the supply of illicit narcotics into the US.

The human insecurity that cartels exploit produces a wide variety of spillover effects, making the problem multifaceted. The problem involves not only homicides but also institutional corruption, drug use and addiction, kidnapping, extortion, migration, human trafficking, criminal impunity, money laundering, human rights violations, and regional instability.[122] These issues all produce poisonous effects for human security.

The human security dilemma in the US and Mexico remains a strategic blind spot for the United States. Mexico displays several characteristics that, if left unchecked, can lead to a slow accommodation with state decay. Unchecked corruption and any further expansion of the cartels' ability to coerce political processes and citizen participation can fuse their lucrative illicit economy into the normal functioning of the state, requiring the government to co-opt these groups as the only means to reduce violence.[123]

While Mexico is not a failed state politically, socially, economically, or militarily—and is not close to the brink—the human security threat undermines all these elements of state sovereignty over a generational timeline. Mexico possesses the eleventh largest economy in the world at $2.4 trillion and remains the US's second-largest export market and third-largest source of imports,[124] but these statistics mask the enormous human security problem brewing throughout the region.

Potential state collapse in Mexico or the long-term social and economic consequences of illicit narcotics use in the US will undermine the US's ability to sustain a favorable balance of power across the globe. Drug use and addiction reduce human productivity and reduce the available labor pool and intellectual capacity that underpins a society's sustained economic growth and quality of life. The cartels create regional instability that foreign competitors can leverage to gain access to the Western hemisphere. The human security threat draws the attention of nearly every international and nongovernmental entity in the world. The high levels of violence and lack of human security in Mexico are a global responsibility. The US and Mexico cannot kill or arrest their way out of the problem, and this paper presents an explicit warning to legalization advocates lest that policy mutate from a human security threat into a war.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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Abbreviations

AFO	Arellano Felix Organization
BPC	building partner capacity
CFO	Carillo Fuentes Organization
CISEN	Center for Intelligence and National Security
CJNG	*Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
DTO	Drug Trafficking Organization
FARC	*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*
LFM	*La Familia Michoacána*
MT	metric tons
NSS	*National Security Strategy*
PAN	*Partido Accion Nacional*
PRI	*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*
SEDENA	*Secretaria de la Defensa*
SEMAR	*Secretaria de Marina*
USNORTHCOM	US Northern Command

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