

# **An Approach to the 40-Year Drug War**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## **Abstract**

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In 1969, President Nixon started the now well-known “War on Drugs.” The reason behind his “declaration” of war was the increasing national security threat posed by the transnational drug trafficking organizations. With the aim of making as much money as possible, the drug trafficking organizations simply shifted from the Caribbean to the Southwest border of the United States as their primary smuggling route. This shift found a Mexican government that decided to follow a strategy of appeasement allowing the drug trafficking organizations to grow in strength. In 2006 when President Calderon took the office of the Presidency, he shifted the policy to direct confrontation. This has led to increased violence in Mexico and virtually no slowing of drugs coming across the Southwest border of the United States. Over 40 years ago, President Nixon recognized the national security threat posed by drug trafficking organizations and now that threat is even closer to the United States.

This monograph proposes that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations are susceptible to the current strategy employed by the United States with a few modifications. The aim is to disrupt the Mexican drug trafficking organizations using operational shock. In order to accomplish this, this monograph uses select elements of operational design consisting of arranging operations and effects. These two categories contain the concepts of depth, tempo, and simultaneity. This study asserts that within this operational environment these are essential elements when developing an operational approach. This study reveals that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations employ these elements of operational design more effectively than the United States or Mexican government. At the conclusion, this study reveals that employing these select elements of operational design could enhance the current strategy of the United States and lead to the disruption, through operational shock, of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

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## Introduction

In January 2009, Michael Hayden, the departing CIA chief, claimed that Mexico could become “more problematic than Iraq,” and Michael Chertoff, the departing secretary of homeland security, announced that the Department of Homeland Security has a “contingency plan for border violence, so if we did get a significant spillover, we have a surge — if I may use that word — capability.”<sup>1</sup> Both comments illustrate the ever-increasing national security threat posed by Mexican drug trafficking organizations. These drug trafficking organizations operate a very lucrative business fueled by the demand for drugs within the United States. In order to operate this business, the Mexican drug trafficking organizations need control of operational spaces near the United States border and smuggling routes into the United States. The competition for operational spaces and smuggling routes has led to an increase in violence in Mexico and the potential for violence to spill over into the United States. The rate of drug smuggling and threat of spillover violence is elevating the Southwest border to the level of a national security threat.

The current volume of drugs smuggled across the Southwest border is becoming problematic for the United States. In 1990, the Southwest border supported only 20 to 30 percent of the drugs smuggled into the United States.<sup>2</sup> The success of interdiction operations in the Caribbean forced drug trafficking organizations to find an alternate smuggling route into the United States.<sup>3</sup> The alternate route chosen was the Southwest border, which caused the drug

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon K. O’Neil, “The Real War in Mexico: How Democracy Can Defeat the Drug Cartels, Foreign Affairs,” *Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65175/shannon-k-oneil/the-real-war-in-mexico> (accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Government Accountability Office (GAO), “Customs Service: Drug Interdiction Efforts.” Washington, DC: United States General Accounting Office, Sep 1996, GAO/GGD-96-189BR; Office of National Drug Control Policy, “The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997”. Washington DC: The White House, Feb 1997, 49-62.

<sup>3</sup> Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, *Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context*, 5.; Institute for National Strategic Studies, Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, June 2011), 74.

smuggling increase to 70 percent of drug smuggling by 1991.<sup>4</sup> These statistics indicate that the Southwest border is the predominant entry point for illegal drugs into the United States.<sup>5</sup> This increase in smuggling across the Southwest border created a need for Mexican drug trafficking organizations to control zones of operations referred to as *plazas*.<sup>6</sup> The competition over control of these *plazas* has led to an increase in violence in Mexico.

The upward trend in violence in Mexico attributed to the drug trafficking organizations is staggering. From 2000–2006, the Mexican government reported just under 9,000 killings linked to organized crime. In the next six–year span from 2006–2012 the Mexican government reported over 34,500 killings officially linked to organized crime.<sup>7</sup> To appreciate the increase over the last few years June S. Beittel provides yearly statistics in a 2010 report to the United States Congress. Killings in Mexico numbered 2,280 in 2007, 5,153 in 2008, 6,587 in 2009, and culminating in 15,273 in 2010.<sup>8</sup>

The level of violence becomes even more discernible when examining the statistics in three different categories. The first category is violence between rival drug trafficking organizations. With over 34,500 killings from 2006–2012 linked to organized crime, the violence between drug trafficking organizations accounts for over 22,000 or roughly sixty–four percent of

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<sup>4</sup> GAO, “Drug Interdiction Efforts,” 49-62.; United States Department of Justice, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2011*, National Drug Intelligence Center Product No. 2011-Q0317-001, August 2011, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Justice. *National Drug Threat Assessment 2011*, 13, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Astorga and Shirk, *Drug Trafficking*, 7.; June S. Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, Congressional Research Service (R41576), 7 January 2011, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Viridiana Rios and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, Justice Project, University of San Diego, Trans-Border Institute, February 2011, 1.; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2011*, 50-66.

<sup>8</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 14.; Geo-Mexico, “Drug-related homicides concentrated in eight states,” <http://geo-mexico.com/?tag=mortality> (accessed February 14, 2012). This website provides a translation of the Mexican Attorney General’s Office data for narco-related homicides for the period of 2007-2011.

all killings.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the battle between the Sinaloa and Juarez drug trafficking organizations accounted for over 8,000 or nearly one quarter of those killings.<sup>10</sup> This trend of violence between rival cartels is not just limited to the Sinaloa and Juarez drug trafficking organizations.<sup>11</sup> This category accounts for the preponderance of violence in Mexico.

The second category is the violence the drug trafficking organizations carry out against the Mexican government. From 2007 to 2010, organized crime groups killed twenty–seven mayors— an unprecedented number even in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the 2010 elections held for state governors saw organized crime groups assassinate thirteen candidates, including a former Presidential candidate.<sup>13</sup> In all since 2006, the Mexican drug trafficking organizations have assassinated over 500 Mexican government officials.<sup>14</sup> These attacks against government officials occur in a very small geographic area.

The majority of violence committed in Mexico is located along the Southwest border of the United States. Fifty–six percent of all homicides from organized crime in Mexico occur in just four out of the thirty–two states.<sup>15</sup> Out of these four states, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas both border and contain major drug smuggling routes into the United States.<sup>16</sup> Sinaloa and Guerrero constituted the other states with large increases of violence associated with rival drug trafficking

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<sup>9</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18. With an estimated 76,131 homicides in Mexico, the organized crime accounts for around 45 percent of homicides within Mexico.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 18. Table 1 illustrates the violence between drug organizations in 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sara Miller Llana, “Mexico drug war death toll up 60 percent in 2010. Why?,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 January, 2011. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2011/0113/Mexico-drug-war-death-toll-up-60-percent-in-2010.-Why> (accessed February 15, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 1.; United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, “Global Study on Homicide 2011,” 50.

<sup>16</sup> STRATFOR, “Mexico’s Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes,” 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed 15 February, 2012).



organizations fighting for control over the *plazas*.<sup>17</sup> The location of this violence has caused concern in the United States about violence spilling over.

The largest perceived threat to the United States is violence from Mexico spilling over the Southwest border.<sup>18</sup> The 2011 National Drug Threat Assessment (NDTA) assesses that Mexican criminal enterprises operate in more than 1,000 U.S. cities and constitute the most pervasive organizational threat to the United States.<sup>19</sup> The anticipation that spillover violence will occur is also due to the way drug trafficking organizations establish control. To establish control the Mexican drug trafficking organizations rely on the use of terror, violence, and corruption to enter, dominate, and control regions in which they operate. The goal of these tactics is to subdue law enforcement and remove competing organizations from the new area.<sup>20</sup> In order to stop the spillover violence the United States strategy focuses on the flow of drugs.

The current United States strategy is to stop the flow of drugs into the United States through a hybrid solution. This strategy maintains the goal of reducing and eliminating the international flow of illegal drugs into the United States through international cooperation and

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<sup>17</sup> STRATFOR, “Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico’s Cartel War,” 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, Statement of Joseph M. Arabit Special Agent in Charge, El Paso Division, Regarding “Violence Along the Southwest Border” Before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies, 24 March, 2009, <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/speeches/s032409.pdf> (accessed 15 February, 2012).; Congressional Research Service Report, *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence*, R41075, August 25, 2011, 12. Spillover violence is violence that entails deliberate, planned attacks by the cartels on U.S. assets, including civilian, military, or law enforcement officials, innocent U.S. citizens, or physical institutions such as government buildings, consulates, or businesses. This definition does not include trafficker on trafficker violence, whether perpetrated in Mexico or the U.S.; This narrow definition makes the likelihood that the United States will experience this form of spillover violence relatively small

<sup>19</sup> Department of Justice (DOJ), “National Drug Threat Assessment 2011,” 8.; Congressional Research Service Report, *Southwest Border Violence*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Texas Department of Public Safety, “Texas external assessment,” 2010, 44-45. Although unsubstantiated by any other reports, this report claims 230 U.S. citizens lost their lives from 2003-2009 in Mexico.

interdiction efforts aimed to disrupt the drug trade.<sup>21</sup> The approach centers on three specific goals: (1) collaboration with international partners to disrupt the drug trade, (2) support the drug control efforts of major drug source and transit countries, and (3) attack key vulnerabilities of drug trafficking organizations.<sup>22</sup> The evidence above suggests the implementation of this strategy has done little to nothing to affect the smuggling of drugs across the Southwest border.

The current strategy of the United States does not effectively disrupt the Mexican drug trafficking organizations ability to smuggle drugs across the Southwest border. First, illustrating this failure is the increasing number of drugs smuggled across the Southwest border.<sup>23</sup> Second, the increase in violent battles for *plazas* in Mexico demonstrating the Mexican drug trafficking organizations' desire to keep lucrative smuggling routes into the United States.<sup>24</sup> Third is the increasing perception that violence in Mexico will ultimately lead to spillover violence in the United States.<sup>25</sup> By considering elements of operational art, this study found that the United States must take a comprehensive approach to create shock across all aspects of the drug trafficking organizations. This paper argues that the current strategy employed by the United States is ineffective in achieving its stated goals against drug trafficking organizations. To that end, this paper asserts that the application of operational art and selected elements of operational

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<sup>21</sup> Liana Sun Wyler, *International Drug Control Policy*, GAO Report RL34543, August 24, 2009, 10.; Office of National Drug Control Policy, "National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy 2011," 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Wyler, *International Drug Control Policy*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> GAO, *Drug Interdiction Efforts*, GAO/GGD-96-189BR.; The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997, 49-62.; Astorga and Shirk, *Drug Trafficking organization*, 5.; Marjorie Miller, "New Bosses Taking Over Cocaine Traffic: Mexico: With many 'Desperados' in prison or dead, drug agents shift their sights in the effort to curb the flow from South America to U.S.," 20 February 1993, Los Angeles Times. [http://articles.latimes.com/1993-02-20/news/mn-309\\_1\\_mexico-city](http://articles.latimes.com/1993-02-20/news/mn-309_1_mexico-city) (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Homeland Security, Remarks by Secretary Napolitano (as prepared) on Border Security at the University of Texas at El Paso, 31 January, 2011. [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/speeches/sp\\_1296491064429.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/speeches/sp_1296491064429.shtm) (accessed February 15, 2012).; Matthew Lee, Clinton, "Mexico Violence Fueled by America's "Insatiable" Demand for Drugs," March 25, 2009, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/25/clinton-mexico-trip-agend\\_n\\_178983.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/25/clinton-mexico-trip-agend_n_178983.html) (accessed February 15, 2012).

design can lead to an operational approach that disrupts the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

This monograph contains five sections. Section one consists of a literature review of the theory of operational art and important factors in this type of environment. Section two establishes the methodology used in the monograph. Section three examines at the strategic objectives, organization, operational approach, and tactical objectives for the Mexican government, United States, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Section four looks at three different courses of action for the United States in respect to the operational approach used against drug trafficking organizations. Section five is the conclusion, which provides a summary of the main points and key considerations.

## **Literature review**

### **Theory of Operational Shock**

In the 1990's, Shimon Naveh developed his theory of operational shock by concluding that the military is an open system that has a specific aim that generates the system and determines the direction and patterns for its actions.<sup>26</sup> He continues by explaining the operational level of war as the dominant level with the responsibility for taking broad strategic concepts, creating tactical actions from those concepts, and then linking the tactical actions back to the strategic objectives.<sup>27</sup> Naveh theorizes that operational shock is a way to make the adversaries system collapse by stopping the enemy from accomplishing its desired aims.<sup>28</sup> In order to achieve operational shock Naveh list several vulnerabilities that exist in systems with some type of command structure:

1. Dominance of the aim of the competing system not necessarily its destruction.

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<sup>26</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Oxon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

2. The deep structure and hierarchic logic of action.
3. Divide and fragmentation of the systems structure.
4. Simultaneous attacks against all aspects of the system.
5. Identification of the systems center of gravity and attacking it.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, an operational environment has an adversary with a complex adaptive organization and command structure that lends itself to the concept of operational shock. Therefore, the key elements of depth, tempo, and simultaneity are essential to operational shock.

### **Key Elements**

This paper asserts three criteria are necessary in order to achieve operational shock against the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Naveh states that operational shock is a way to stop the adversaries system from accomplishing its desired aims. This theory is applicable to the current operational environment because of the way the Mexican drug trafficking organizations operate in depth, the tempo used in their operations, the simultaneous operations they conduct, and their organizational structure. Therefore, the three key elements to achieve operational shock are depth, tempo, and simultaneity.

In 1920, G.S. Isserson struggled with the problem of overcoming linear defensive fronts that expanded the depths of the battlefield. He concluded that the offensive element must match the deep echelonment of the opposition's defensive system.<sup>30</sup> He further said, "That the offensive force must be like a whole series of waves flowing toward the shore with growing strength in order to wash away and destroy it with their uninterrupted blows from the depths."<sup>31</sup> This led to his declaration that final victory or success would go to the one whose operational formation is

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 16-20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Kagan, *Army Doctrine and Modern War: Notes Toward a New Edition of FM 100-5, Parameters*, Spring 1997, 134-51.

deeper.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, any effort within this environment must match the depths that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

This paper makes the assertion that the tempo of operations is of utmost importance in this environment. Robert Leonhard provides a useful definition in this case for tempo. According to Robert Leonhard tempo is the number of significant events per unit of time.<sup>33</sup> United States Joint Doctrine continues with tempo by stating that it allows the commander to dominate the action, remain unpredictable, and operate beyond the adversary's ability to react. Joint Doctrine further states, that the ability to control tempo is essential in order to ensure a speedy defeat of the enemy.<sup>34</sup> For that reason within this operational environment, the control of tempo is of paramount importance.

Within the theory of operational art the arrangement of operations to accomplish the strategic objective must occur. Joint Doctrine states that simultaneity is the concurrent application of military and nonmilitary power against the enemy's key capacities and sources of strength.<sup>35</sup> It continues on to link simultaneity to the expanded depth in the operational environment. Simultaneity also places demands on enemy commanders and resources thus contributing to the enemy's speedy defeat.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, within this operational environment, the use of simultaneous or near simultaneous operations is essential.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard W. Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II: The Life and Theories of G.S. Isseron* (Jefferson: North Carolina, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010), 112.

<sup>33</sup> Robert R. Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, July 30, 1994), 69. Robert Leonhard uses the word frequency to establish a broader understanding of the effects of time on war. His understanding of frequency very closely resembles the military definition of tempo. The military definition is still limited in its scope on time and Leonhard's definition provides a more complete idea of how time is of vital importance to any operation.; ADP 3-0, 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> United States Government Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, "Joint Operations Planning," August 11, 2011, III-36.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, III-36.

## **The Gap**

Currently the studies involving either the drug trafficking organizations or Southwest border propose new operational approaches to solve the problem. These operational approaches range from wanting to legalize all drugs, to employing a counterinsurgent (COIN) strategy to win the support of the Mexican populace.<sup>37</sup> The similarity in the new approaches is that they all view the problem of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations as a failure of the current strategy. These proposed operational approaches take for granted that the reason for failure is the current approach, not the inability of the current operational approach to leverage the most optimal elements of operational design. This creates a gap in the literature reviewing the problems of the current strategy towards the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This paper seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the current operational approach through select elements of operational design.

## **Methodology**

This section provides the rationale behind using operational art and select elements of operational design. It will then illustrate why depth, tempo, simultaneity, and operational shock are the relevant elements of operational design within this specific environment. Next, it describes the method and criteria used to study the Mexican government, United States, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Finally, this section describes the scope of the materials considered within this study.

## **Elements of Operational Design**

Joint Doctrine provides the guidelines for how commanders and their staffs develop operational approaches through linking ends, ways, and means. They do this by combining art and science to develop products that describe how (ways) the force will employ its capabilities

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Culp (LTC), "Strategy for Military Counter Drug Operations," *Small Wars Journal*, 2011, 5.; Ted Galen Carpenter, *Undermining Mexico's Dangerous Drug Cartels*, Policy Analysis (No. 688), 15 November, 2011, 13.

(means) to achieve the end state (ends). Through operational art, commanders link ends, ways, and means to achieve the desired end state.<sup>38</sup> A supporting method to help commanders accomplish operational art is operational design. Operational design supports operational art with a general methodology using elements of operational design for understanding the situation and the problem.<sup>39</sup> Figure 1 illustrates this method. In conducting operational design, its elements provide the way to develop the operational approach.

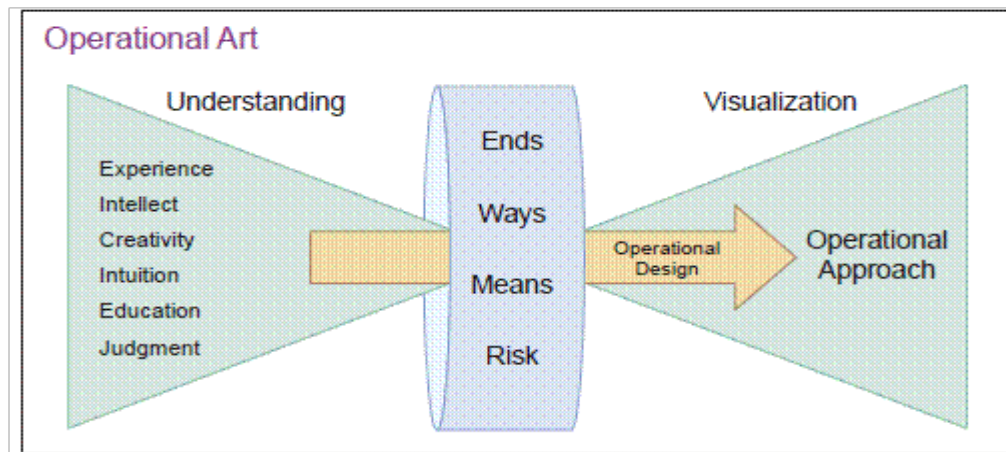


Figure 1. Operational Art.<sup>40</sup>

The elements of operational design are conceptual tools that assist commanders and their staffs in thinking through the challenges of understanding the operational environment, defining the problem, and developing the operational approach.<sup>41</sup> The most prominent element of operational design in regards to this environment is arranging operations. Contained in this element are the concepts of depth, tempo, and simultaneity. The concept of depth seeks to overwhelm the enemy throughout the operational area, creating competing demands and simultaneous demands on enemy commanders and resources thus contributing to the enemy's speedy defeat. Next, the concept of tempo allows commanders to control the initiative to exploit

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<sup>38</sup> JP 5-0 III-1

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., III-2

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., III-18.

friendly capabilities and exploit adversary's weakness. Finally, simultaneity refers to the simultaneous application of military and nonmilitary power against the enemy's key capabilities and sources of strength.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, to practice effective operational art, these elements of operational design are important in this environment.

In order to accomplish a strategic goal the operational approach must achieve an effect within the operational environment. The next element of operational design that is important in this operational environment is effects. Doctrine provides that an effect is a physical and/or behavioral state of a system that results from an action, a set of actions, or another effect. It also states that a desired effect is a condition that can support achieving an associated objective(s). To accomplish this effect the commander synchronizes the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) means given to accomplish the mission.<sup>43</sup> The effect sought in this operational environment is the operational shock through the disruption of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

## **Method and Criteria**

This study uses several authors and current doctrine to provide a structured and focused method to analyze the Mexican government, the United States, and the Mexican drug trafficking organizations by the use of operational art. The structure comes from the way it will review each organization through their strategic objectives, organization, operational approach, and tactical objectives thus revealing each organizations use of operational art. At the conclusion of all the organizations, the analysis will be yes or no in regards to the questions posed. The period of time and geographic region analyzed, provide the focus for the study. The structured and focused

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., III 34-35.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., III-20.



nature of this study will help answer the overall question of the study by determining the use of selected elements of operational design by each organization.

Therefore, the overarching question this study seeks to answer is: which organization uses the selected elements of operational design to develop their operational approach, thus practicing operational art? This paper draws on several different sources to help measure the four selected elements of operational design. The first element of operational design viewed in this paper is depth. Isserson and current doctrine both provide relevant information for depth. Isserson's conclusion is that final success, victory, would go to the one whose operational formation is deeper.<sup>44</sup> Current doctrine states that depth seeks to overwhelm the enemy throughout the operational area.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, when examining depth the question this study posed was, do the organizations achieve the same depth as their rival organization?

The second criterion is tempo. In essence, tempo relates to the pace of operations conducted at any given time. Leonhard provides that tempo is the number of significant events per unit of time.<sup>46</sup> Current doctrine states that, "tempo enables commanders to exploit friendly advantages and take advantage of adversary's disadvantages."<sup>47</sup> This paper will use a combination of the two. Tempo is therefore the significant number of events per unit of time that allows commanders to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative. Thus, the question posed becomes is tempo used to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative against the rival organization(s)?

The third criterion is simultaneity. Simultaneity is the use of concurrent or near concurrent operations against an enemy. Current doctrine states that simultaneity is the concurrent application of military and non-military power against the enemy's key capabilities

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<sup>44</sup> Kagan, *Army Doctrine and Modern War*, 134-51.; Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> JP 5-0, III-35.

<sup>46</sup> Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.

<sup>47</sup> JP 5-0, III-35.

and sources of strength.<sup>48</sup> It also states that the simultaneous operations must occur throughout the operational environment to place multiple demands on enemy commanders and resources.<sup>49</sup> To that end this paper will use simultaneity as the use of all given elements of national power (DIME) placed against the enemy's operational approach. Therefore, when examining the organizations the question this study posed was, does the operational approach utilize elements of national power that are available to place demands on the enemy's organization and resources throughout the depths of the operational environment?

The fourth criterion is operational shock. Simply put operational shock measures the amount of success an operational approach has against the rival organizations strategic objective(s). Naveh offers that systems have specific aims that generate the direction and patterns for its actions. He then offers ways to shock the system that include attacking—directly or indirectly—the deep structure, logic of action, simultaneous attacks against all aspects of the system, and identification of a center of gravity. He concludes that operational shock places demands on the system to which it cannot respond thus stopping it from accomplishing its desired aims.<sup>50</sup> This paper uses operational shock as the disruption of the rival organizations ability to accomplish its strategic aim(s). Therefore, when examining each organizations' operational approach, the question this study posed was, does the use of depth, tempo, and simultaneity lead to operational shock in the adversaries' system?

Undoubtedly, to examine the smuggling of drugs across the Southwest border it is not feasible to take into account every document or report related to the War on Drugs, the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, Mexican government, or the United States. Therefore, this study will focus on the period from 1990–2012 using different government reports to the United States

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<sup>48</sup> JP 5-0, III-35.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., III-36.

<sup>50</sup> Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 165.

Congress for the majority of its information. However, it will also use institutes that study Latin America, Mexican drug trafficking organizations, national security, and the Southwest Border. These institutes include the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Mexico Institute, the CATO Institute, RAND Institute, and STRATFOR. Also used are writings from acknowledged experts in the fields of Latin America, Mexican drug trafficking organizations, national security, and the Southwest border. Used in a limited means to fill out the missing information or corroborate information are print media reports. Additionally, the periods of 1990–2012 are of interest with the smuggling of drugs, 2000–2012 are of interest to the rise in violence in Mexico, and 2006–2012 are of interest in the area of violence spillover into the United States.

## **Framing the Operational Environment**

### **Background of the U.S. War on Drugs**

President Nixon began the war on drugs during a speech to congress on July 14, 1969 by identifying drugs as a threat to national security.<sup>51</sup> In the years following, the Colombian drug trafficking organizations rose to power using smuggling routes through the Caribbean to the United States.<sup>52</sup> JIATF–South and its processor Joint Task Force–4 had the responsibility for monitoring operations that facilitated the interdiction of illicit trafficking and other narco–terrorist threats in support of national and partner nation security.<sup>53</sup> The operations conducted by JIATF–South made it nearly impossible to transport mass quantities of drugs through the Caribbean Islands and into the United States.<sup>54</sup> By 1991, the most efficient route into the United States to

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<sup>51</sup> National Public Radio (NPR), "Timeline: America's War on Drugs," <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=9252490> (accessed September 23, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> United States Department of Defense, JIATF-South website. <http://www.jiatfs.southcom.mil/index.aspx> (accessed November 11, 2011). Formed in 1999 JIATF-South is widely credited with the interdiction efforts in the Caribbean. The predecessors of this organization also deserve the credit.

<sup>54</sup> Munsing and Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force-South*, 27.

maintain the profit margin desired was the Southwest border.<sup>55</sup> The singular nature of this strategy in targeting only the Colombian drug trafficking organizations created the situation where Mexican drug trafficking organizations recognized an opportunity to gain power.

During the mid-1990's the Mexican drug trafficking organizations seized the initiative to secure and consolidate power of smuggling routes across the Southwest border into the United States.<sup>56</sup> The United States tried to shift its strategy to execute a more comprehensive operational approach aimed at containing the Colombian and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. For the same level of assistance that the United States was providing to Colombia, Mexico had to meet certain mandates imposed by the United States. During the 1980's and 1990's despite the requirement for the United States President to certify that anti-drug operations were occurring in drug transit countries, the Mexican government did not change its "narcocorruption" policy.<sup>57</sup> Robert Killebrew, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American society, says that the inaction of the Mexican government in this area caused immense distrust between the United States and Mexico.<sup>58</sup> During this time, the overall policy of the Mexican government was one of accommodation to the drug trafficking organizations mainly due to corruption.<sup>59</sup> There is no single point in history where the major threat to the United States shifted from the Colombian drug trafficking organizations to the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. However, the mid-1990's through the early 2000's seem to signal the rise of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations due to the success of operations against the Colombian drug trafficking organizations.

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<sup>55</sup> Frontline, "Thirty Years of American's Drug War," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron> (accessed September 19, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Bob Killebrew and Jennifer Bernal, *Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels and U.S. National Security* (Center for a New American Security: September 2010), 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

## Mexico's Current Operational Environment

### Strategic objective

In 2006, President Calderon implemented an anti-drug strategy rather than a “narcocorruption” strategy.<sup>60</sup> President Calderon ran on a platform that advocated for reformation within the Mexican government that had become corrupt under previous administrations.<sup>61</sup> President Calderon realized that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations were increasing their violence to gain control over the *plazas*. With this realization, President Calderon based his new strategic objectives on confronting increasing violence within Mexico. This new strategy against the Mexican drug trafficking organizations involved direct confrontation.

Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora articulates how the Mexican government decided to proceed against Mexican drug trafficking organizations. He stated that the Mexican government sought to minimize the firepower and financial advantage of the drug trafficking organizations by breaking them into smaller pieces.<sup>62</sup> By achieving this strategic objective, the drug trafficking organizations would become less of a national security threat and more of a public security problem.<sup>63</sup> The assumption of the Mexican government was that the smaller organizations meant they would be more manageable; however, this is proving incorrect.<sup>64</sup> This method and the corruption within the police led to the militarization of the effort to combat the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>61</sup> Aimee Rawlins, “Mexico Drug Wars,” Council on Foreign Relations: December 12, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/mexico/mexicos-drug-war/p13689> (accessed January 4, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Barry McCaffery, *After Action Report – Visit Mexico – 5-7 December 2008*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> David A. Shirk, *The Drug War Shared Threat*, Council on Foreign Relations: Center for Preventive Action, Special Report No. 60, March 2011, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

## Organization

Leading the problems for the Mexican organizational structure is the duplication of efforts within the security organizations. Clearly defining the roles, responsibilities, and authority between security organizations within Mexico is nearly impossible. An example is the drug interdiction activity, which involves the Mexican Secretary of Navy, the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA), Secretary of the Interior, Secretary of Public security (SSP) and the state and local police.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, municipal police, the Federal Agency of Investigation (AFI) or SEDENA carries out investigations into drug crimes.<sup>66</sup> The overlapping authorities and roles between agencies creates checks and balances within the system; however, it also confuses authority, roles, and responsibilities, which has led to bureaucratic turf battles across the security agencies (see Figure 2).<sup>67</sup> Recognizing the need for reform, President Calderon recently gave SEDENA the lead role for the eradication effort and joined the separate investigative agencies of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) and AFI into one entity.<sup>68</sup>

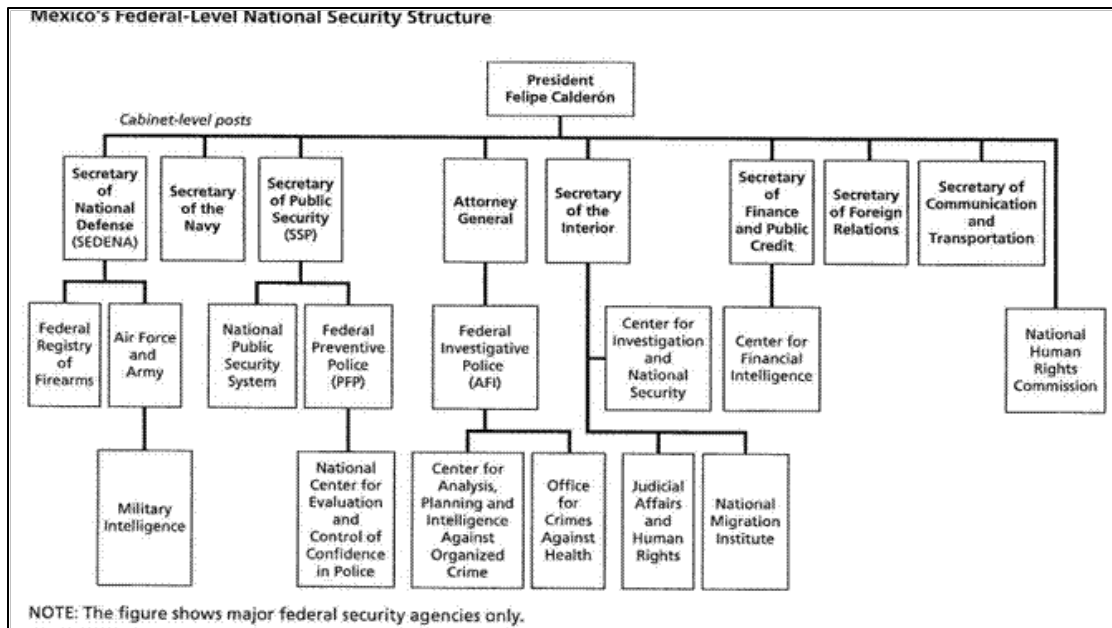
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<sup>65</sup> Agnes, Bahney, and Riley, "Security in Mexico," 15.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 16.



**Figure 2. Mexican government organization.**<sup>69</sup>

The lack of coordination and public distrust of the police force only exacerbates the dysfunctional Mexican security organizational structure. The total number of police in Mexico is approximately 350,000 with about 317,000 belonging to the state and local authorities and the remaining 33,000 under federal control.<sup>70</sup> Within this organizational structure, it is not uncommon for each police organization to keep information to themselves and fail to inform one another of operations.<sup>71</sup> Not only do the police agencies lack confidence in one another, the Mexican public does not trust any agency. According to opinion polls conducted in 2007, the perception of the Mexican populace was that 80 percent of police were corrupt, while the Mexican armed forces are among the most highly respected.<sup>72</sup> The level of respect, of both the police and armed forces, led President Calderon to rely heavily on the latter since 2006 to

<sup>69</sup> Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Benjamin Bahney, and K. Jack Riley, "Security in Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options," (RAND Study Initiative, 2009), 16.; Mexican Government Homepage, "Organizational Structure," <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/gobierno/estructura-del-gobierno-federal/> (accessed January 24, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

confront the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.<sup>73</sup> In an environment in which it is difficult to make the right decision at any time, the deployment of the armed forces is meeting with mixed reactions from the Mexican populace due to high levels human rights violations reported.<sup>74</sup> The duplication of efforts, lack of coordination and public mistrust has led to uncoordinated efforts across all levels of the Mexican security agencies.

## Operational Approach

The first effort in the operational approach is the deployment of the Mexican Army to provide the opportunity to implement reforms within the police. However, with deployments in only 12 of 31 states, this approach is only capable of targeting Mexican drug trafficking organizations in limited areas.<sup>75</sup> Also hindering this approach is the lack of operational reach displayed by the Mexican military. This effort led to what one DEA Agent called the “whack-a-mole” effect on the drug organizations.<sup>76</sup> By focusing their operational approach on specific drug trafficking organizations the Mexican government does not operate in the same depth as the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The deployment of the military is an attempt to buy time for the second operational approach to take effect.

The second effort in the operational approach is to reform the police so corruption is no longer a problem. The beginning of this process included ballistic checks on weapons of police officers that resulted in over 100 state police officers suspensions due to corruption concerns.<sup>77</sup> In 2007, President Calderon continued to purge corrupt federal police commanders in all 31 states

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<sup>73</sup> Hal Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy” (Strategic Studies Institute), 17.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Fact book: Mexico,” under Government, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>, (accessed August 25, 20116).

<sup>76</sup> Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency,” 15.

<sup>77</sup> Colleen W. Cook, CRS Report for Congress, *Mexico’s Drug Cartels*, RL34215, 10.



and the federal district.<sup>78</sup> The Mexican government immediately replaced the dismissed commanders with new commanders who passed a rigorous array of examinations, financial checks, drug testing, and psychological and medical screening.<sup>79</sup> Once in the job the new federal police commanders are still required to pass anti-corruption exams and polygraphs to demonstrate they are not corrupt.<sup>80</sup> The total amount of police fired to date constitutes about 10 percent of the overall force.<sup>81</sup> Although the anti-corruption efforts within the police force are occurring, corruption remains a serious problem. While battling corruption within the police force is important, it is not the only government agency undergoing reformation.

The third effort in the operational approach was to reform the judicial system once again illustrating the need to combat corruption within the government. The Mexican populace's lack of faith in the judicial system to punish criminals results in an estimated three-quarters of crimes going unreported.<sup>82</sup> The failure to investigate or have witnesses come forward also illustrates the weakness within the judicial system.<sup>83</sup> According to Shirk, "The result is widespread criminal impunity, with perhaps one or two out of every hundred crimes resulting in a sentence."<sup>84</sup> To this end, President Calderon committed his government to "Limpiemos Mexico" or "clean up Mexico."<sup>85</sup> This effort shows President Calderon's commitment to fixing corruption and creating a more effective legal system.<sup>86</sup> The last part of the Mexican governments' operational approach centers on external assistance from the United States.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> CRS interview with Mexican Embassy officials, October 27, 2006; "Mexico: Congress Summons Defense Minister," Sam Enriquez, "Mexico Purges Federal Police Chiefs," Financial Times, June 26, 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Shirk, *Drug War in Mexico a shared Threat*, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> McCaffery, *After Action Report*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

President George W. Bush and President Calderon met in Merida Mexico in March of 2007 to begin forming a plan aimed at genuine cooperation between the United States and Mexico.<sup>87</sup> Congress signed the initiative into law in 2008 and thus created the largest Western Hemisphere aid package since Plan Colombia in 1999. Dubbed the Merida Initiative, after the town where the Presidents met, the program had a short life span of only three years.<sup>88</sup> To counter this, the Obama administration requested the extension of funding to carry the Merida Initiative through the 2011 budget year. This initiative provides financial aid, training, and equipment to the Mexican government's counter narcotic efforts.

### Tactical objective(s)

The Mexican government attempts to dismantle the Mexican drug trafficking organizations by employing the Kingpin strategy.<sup>89</sup> The Kingpin strategy focuses the efforts of all agencies involved by specifically targeting the leadership of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The problem with the tactic of targeting drug trafficking organization leadership is the ability of the current Mexican drug trafficking organizations to regenerate with younger more violent leaders.<sup>90</sup> The younger more violent leaders are not only fighting amongst themselves for the coveted *plazas* but also with the Mexican government.<sup>91</sup> The other issue with this approach is the lack of operational reach by the Mexican military.<sup>92</sup> The shifting of resources to pursue the leaders of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations appears to have taken resources away from mission like eradication.<sup>93</sup> With the focus on merely arresting or killing the leadership of the

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<sup>87</sup> Agnes, Bahney, and Riley, "Security in Mexico," 8.

<sup>88</sup> Keven Casas-Zamora, "Mexico's Forever War," *Foreign Policy*, December 22, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/article/2010/12/22/mexico\\_s\\_forever\\_war](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/article/2010/12/22/mexico_s_forever_war) (accessed September 1, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 18.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Astorga and Shirk, *Drug Trafficking*, 7.

<sup>92</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Mexican drug organizations in order to dismantle them, the Mexican government fails to look at the problem holistically.

## Summary

In this section, the information presented were the Mexican governments strategic objectives, the organization, the operational approach, and tactical objectives. Their strategic objective is directly confronting the Mexican drug trafficking organizations to break them into smaller pieces, thus making them easier to destroy. Their organization is heavily dependent on the Mexican military while the police and judicial systems undergo reforms aimed at stopping the previously rampant corruption. Their operational approach is a four-fold effort. The first effort is use of the Mexican military to confront the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The second and third efforts deal with stopping corruption in the police and the judicial system. The fourth and last operational approach is the foreign assistance to help fund the counternarcotics efforts within Mexico. The tactical objective of the Mexican government is myopic in its focus on arresting or killing the drug trafficking organization leadership. The next part of the case study involves looking at the United States strategic objectives, organization, operational approach, and tactical objectives.

## **United States' current operational environment**

### Strategic objectives

To understand the current strategic aim in the United States war on drugs it is imperative to start with the direction provided by the United States President within the National Security Strategy (NSS). According to the NSS, the strategic objectives are, "The disruption and dismantling of the transnational criminal organizations through a multi-national planning and

execution effort led by the United States.”<sup>94</sup> This language recognizes the threat posed by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, but offers little in ways of clearly defined objectives. The United States has long relied upon two strategic objectives that broadly define the approach taken.

In order to accomplish the strategic objective the United States relies on the two broad concepts of eradication and interdiction aimed at the drug trafficking organizations. Cooperation with foreign governments’ eradication efforts is the attempt to eliminate the cultivation and production of illegal drugs.<sup>95</sup> The next effort of interdiction encompasses both assisting other nations to stop drug flow before it reaches the United States as well as increasing the ability along the borders of the United States to further prevent drugs from entering.<sup>96</sup> In order to accomplish the strategic objectives, the United States uses organizations that exist within the current government structure.

## Organization

The United States organization separates into two distinctive categories with the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) serving as the executive agent. ONDCP has all the responsibilities for the United States drug strategy but does not control any agency within the United States organization. The organizational structure splits into the categories of interdiction and investigation. This section will explain the responsibilities of ONDCP and briefly describe the role of the main agencies involved within the efforts of interdiction and investigations.

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<sup>94</sup> U.S. President, “United States National Security Strategy 2010,” 49. The NSS provides other objectives for cooperation and security initiatives. The effort to disrupt transnational criminal organizations is specifically highlighted in the text above, but is not the only effort that directly or indirectly deals with actions aimed at achieving a more stable environment.

<sup>95</sup> Raphael F. Perl, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *International Drug Trade and U.S. Foreign Policy*, RL33582, 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

ONDCP is the executive agency that handles the drug strategy planning efforts and reports directly to the President. The responsibilities of this agency include the formulation of the National Drug Control Strategy, coordination of interagency efforts, and developing the National Drug Control Budget.<sup>97</sup> Another useful tool that the Director of ONDCP can use is the designation of High Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA).<sup>98</sup> HIDTA program provides increased federal assistance to areas of the United States that have high levels of drug production, manufacturing, importation, or distribution and desire to react to the drug threat.<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, this agency shoulders all the responsibilities yet has none of the power needed to coordinate the myriad of agencies involved in the counter drug effort.<sup>100</sup> The other agencies have distinct missions within the organizational structure aimed at either interdiction or investigation.

The Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are the primary agencies involved in the mission of interdiction. The interdiction effort focuses solely on the border of the United States.<sup>101</sup> The role of DOD traces back to 1989 when it became the lead agency for detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime drug trafficking into the United States.<sup>102</sup> The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 states the Armed Forces cannot enforce domestic law unless authorized by the President, the Constitution, or Congress, thus limiting any support DOD can provide to detection, monitoring, and support to other federal, state, or local agencies upon request.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the mission of DHS involves the enforcement of domestic law along the Southwest border. DHS tasks include the prevention of illegal movements across the border,

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<sup>97</sup> Mundel and Munger, *Strategic Planning*, 23–24.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>101</sup> Lauer, interview by author, January 19, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Munsing and Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force-South*, 10.; United States Government Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.4, “Joint Counterdrug Operations,” June 13, 2007, I-2.

<sup>103</sup> JP 3-07.4, I-4 and I-2.

including the smuggling of people, drugs, cash, and weapons.<sup>104</sup> The main effort of DHS within interdiction is the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). The CBP places 88 percent of all agents along the Southwest border and has seen an increase in their operating budget from \$262,647 in 1990 to \$3,549,295 in 2011.<sup>105</sup> DOD and DHS comprise the main agencies that conduct the interdiction mission.

Within the investigative effort, there are the Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Treasury, and DHS. DOJ provides the oversight for the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC).<sup>106</sup> The FBI and DEA work jointly with Mexican agencies to counter the trafficking of illicit drugs, money laundering, and the large criminal organizations through assistance in investigative activities within Mexico.<sup>107</sup> NDIC provides strategic drug-related intelligence and assistance to the drug control, public health, and national security authorities of the United States and its international partners in order to reduce the adverse impact of drug trafficking, drug abuse, and related harms on the United States.<sup>108</sup> DOJ provides the preponderance of the investigative efforts, but as Figure 3 illustrates they are not the only department involved.

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<sup>104</sup> United States Government, Department Homeland Security, under Mission Statement, <http://www.dhs.gov/files/bordersecurity.shtm> (accessed January 29, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> United States Government, Customs and Border Patrol website, CBP.gov website, under U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year Budget Statistics, [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/border\\_security/border\\_patrol/usbp\\_statistics/](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/border_security/border_patrol/usbp_statistics/) (accessed February 16, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> United States Government Department of Justice (DOJ) website, under Organization, <http://www.justice.gov/agencies/index-org.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>107</sup> Mundel and Munger, *Strategic Planning*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> DOJ website, under Mission, <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/about.htm> (accessed March 1, 2012).

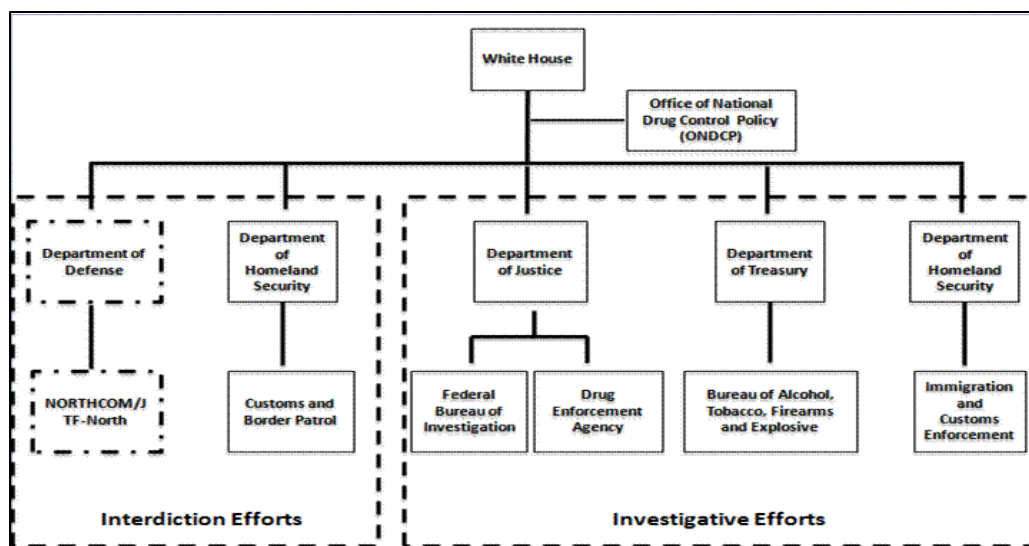


Figure 3. United States government organization.<sup>109</sup>

The Department of Treasury and DHS also have subordinate agencies involved in the investigative efforts. The Department of Treasury provides oversight to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). The ATF not only works within the United States but also internationally to facilitate and coordinate international activities, and requests from foreign nations for assistance in the areas of training and criminal investigations. The aim of working internationally is to interdict and prevent illegal firearms trafficking and combat violent criminal gangs.<sup>110</sup> DHS provides the last major department involved with investigations through its subordinate element of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE conducts and coordinates investigations involving transnational criminal organizations through working with domestic and foreign law enforcement counterparts. Another important aspect of their mission is providing training and capacity building to foreign law enforcement counterparts to combat

<sup>109</sup> William W. Mendel and Murl D. Munger, *Strategic Planning and the Drug Threat*, A Joint Study Initiative by The National Interagency Counterdrug Institute, August 1997, 22.; Dr. George S. Lauer, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, January 19, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> United States Government Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) website, under International, <http://www.atf.gov/field/international/> (accessed March 1, 2012).

transnational criminal organizations.<sup>111</sup> All of these organizations involved in either interdiction or investigations have roles within the three tiered operational approach currently used by the United States.

## Operational Approach

The United States operational approach contains three efforts. These efforts are cooperation, containment, and co-responsibility. The efforts are not solely looking to assist the countries that contain drug trafficking organizations, but also aim to fix the problems within the United States. This section will further explain the three efforts within the United States operational approach.

The first effort in the operational approach is cooperation. The cooperation effort focuses on the recognition that the drug organizations pose multifaceted problems for both countries that required a coordinated response.<sup>112</sup> In an effort to increase this cooperation the Obama Administration created Platforma Mexico, which establishes a nationwide network for intelligence analysis designed to increase Mexico's ability to collect, analyze, and disseminate drug related intelligence.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, the Mexican military also participates in United States sponsored counternarcotics training, intelligence sharing, and pilot training programs.<sup>114</sup> The last and most substantial commitment to cooperation with Mexico is the Merida Initiative. The Merida Initiative seeks to add capacity to the Mexican government similar to what Plan Colombia

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<sup>111</sup> United States Government Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) website, under International Affairs, <http://www.ice.gov/about/offices/homeland-security-investigations/oia/> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>112</sup> Ray Walser, *U.S. Strategy Against Mexican Drug Cartels: Flawed and Uncertain*, (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, April 26, 2010), 6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



did for the Colombian government.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, the United States has sought to add capacity internally to contain the drug trafficking organizations.

The second effort in the operational approach is containment. Focused on the United States–Mexico border the concept of containment is exactly the way it sounds—keep the drug trafficking organizations right where they are, do not let them expand.<sup>116</sup> Containment spurred the creation of the Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy (SBCS) during the Bush Administration. The SBCS received modification by Homeland Security director Janet Napolitano in March 2009 and a government review in 2010.<sup>117</sup> The SBCS review confirmed the commitment from the White House to increasing the capabilities of United States border security. This includes more manpower and increased funding for the border security forces.<sup>118</sup> This operational approach focuses efforts on the borders of the United States while the next operational approach focuses on the United States’ contributions to the problems.

The third and final effort in the operational approach is co–responsibility. The Obama Administration sees the drug consumption, loose gun laws, and economic openness within the United States as the fuel for the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.<sup>119</sup> The so–called “Blame America” approach received large amounts of press when Secretary Clinton took responsibility for the drug consumption and the lax gun laws in the United States, essentially saying it is all our fault.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> United States Department Homeland Security, Secretary Napolitano Announces Major Southwest Border Security Initiative, March 24, 2009, [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1237909530921.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1237909530921.shtm) (accessed 19 December 2011).

<sup>118</sup> United States Government, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy Implementation*, Update 2010.

<sup>119</sup> Walser, *U.S. Strategy*, 9.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

To address co-responsibility the Obama Administration is taking a three-tiered approach. This three-tiered approach focuses on gun control, counter money laundering operations, and drug consumption within the United States. The first step is the re-invigoration of a convention started during the Clinton Administration that set forth harsher penalties for gun smuggling, but never received ratification from the Senate.<sup>121</sup> The next component is confronting the money laundering operations within the United States. The largest operation against money laundering, dubbed Operation Firewall, took place in FY 2009, and seized \$57.9 million or roughly 3 percent of drug related profits in the United States.<sup>122</sup> The last component is the drug consumption within the United States. According the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime the United States is one of the worst offenders in regard to consumption in the world.<sup>123</sup> The co-responsibility strategy requires the United States to take a close look at itself to help repair the security problems created by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Next, this monograph will examine the tactical objectives of the United States.

### Tactical objectives

Just like the operational approach the tactical objectives of the United States is threefold. The tactical objectives are to disrupt the flow of drugs, lower the demand for drugs, and foreign assistance. The tactical objectives are not only looking to assist other countries through strengthen their institutions, but also look at ways to reduce the problem within the United States. This section will now further clarify the tactical objectives of the United States.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>123</sup> United Nations, *World Drug Report 2011*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2011, 35.

The first tactic is to disrupt the flow of drugs smuggled, in both directions, across the Southwest border.<sup>124</sup> This tactic focuses along the border predominately utilizing security screening at border checkpoints.<sup>125</sup> The ability of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations to change smuggling methods makes this effort only marginally effective.<sup>126</sup> Supporters of this approach say that it has disrupted drug shipments and lowered the rates of drug use among American youth.<sup>127</sup> But, multiple reports including the UNODC 2011 report, show an increase in smuggling across the Southwest border and conclude that the United States is one of the worst drug consuming countries in the world.<sup>128</sup> By using this type of tactic along the border, the United States government is seeking to disrupt the smuggling operations on the Southwest border.

The second tactic is to stop or lower the demand for illegal drugs within the United States. One of the world's largest consumers of illegal drugs only fuels the need for the drug trafficking organizations to continue their business within the United States.<sup>129</sup> In order to lower the demand for drugs the United States has sought to educate the public about the harmful nature of drug use. The flagship program that has now spread throughout the world is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program. This program exposes children from the time of kindergarten all the way through twelve grade to drug education.<sup>130</sup> Founded in 1983 in Los Angeles the program has now spread to 75 percent of the school districts within the United

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<sup>124</sup> Cook, *Mexico Drug Cartels*, 17.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 15-17.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> United Nations, *World Drug Report*, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Shirk, *Drug War Shared Threat*, 13.

<sup>130</sup> United States Government, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), under Information, [http://www.dare.com/home/about\\_dare.asp](http://www.dare.com/home/about_dare.asp) (accessed 3 January 2012).

States.<sup>131</sup> This approach focuses on educating the population of the United States in an attempt to remove the power base from the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

The third and last tactic is the Merida initiative. The primary purpose of the Merida initiative is to strengthen the Mexican institutions that will fight the drug trafficking organizations.<sup>132</sup> External to the purchase of additional airplanes, helicopters, and armored vehicles, the initiative also provides assistance in police training, supporting judicial reforms, and cooperation with Mexican agencies.<sup>133</sup> The Merida Initiative also helps drug treatment centers, anti-gang strategies, and drug awareness education.<sup>134</sup> The Merida Initiative, while mainly focused in Mexico, also includes aid for other Central and South American governments.<sup>135</sup> This attempts to match the depths of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations indirectly through assisting foreign governments.

## Summary

First, this section analyzed the strategic objective of the United States. That objective is the disruption and dismantling or transnational criminal organizations through a multi-national planning and execution effort led by the United States.<sup>136</sup> It then examined the two broad strategic objectives of eradication and interdiction. Next, this study examined the organization from the ONDCP through the interdiction and investigative agencies involved in implementing the operational approach. It then examined the three tiered operational approach used by the United States. The three tiers are cooperation, containment, and co-responsibility. The next step involved looking at the tactical objectives of the United States. The tactical objectives were the disruption

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Walser, *U.S. Strategy*, 6.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> United States Government, Government Accountability Office Report, Merida Initiative, 43.

<sup>135</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin M. Finklea, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative and Beyond*, Congressional Research Service Report R41349, August 15, 2011, 39.

<sup>136</sup> U.S. President, "United States National Security Strategy 2010," 49.

of illicit goods across the Southwest border, the need to lower the demand for drugs within the United States, and foreign assistance through the Merida Initiative. The next section is the review of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

## **Mexican drug trafficking organizations**

### **Strategic objective**

The strategic aim for the Mexican drug trafficking organizations is simple: make as much money as possible. With 90 percent of cocaine, 95 percent of marijuana, and 70 percent of methamphetamines and heroin consumed in the United States either originating or passing through Mexico, the profits for drug organizations are massive.<sup>137</sup> The estimated profits range from \$18 billion to as high as \$39 billion U.S. annually.<sup>138</sup> One newspaper reporter writes that, “Mexican drug cartels generate more revenue than at least 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies, and the U.S. government’s highest estimate of cartel revenue tops that of Merck, Deere, and Halliburton.”<sup>139</sup> Figure 4 illustrates the cost of business for cocaine smuggling from 1996–2006.

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<sup>137</sup> Brands, “Mexico's Narco-Insurgency,” 5.; Eric L. Olson and Miguel R. Salazar, *A Profile of Mexico's Major Organized Crime Groups* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Mexico Institute 2011), 2.; Seelke and Finklea, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation*, 3.

<sup>138</sup> Brands, “Mexico's Narco-Insurgency,” 5.; Olson and Salazar, *Profile of Mexico Organized Crime*, 2.; Astorga and Shirk, *Drug Trafficking*, 27.

<sup>139</sup> Manuel Roig-Francia, “Mexican Drug Cartels Move North,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/19/AR2007091902442.html> (accessed 14 February 2012).

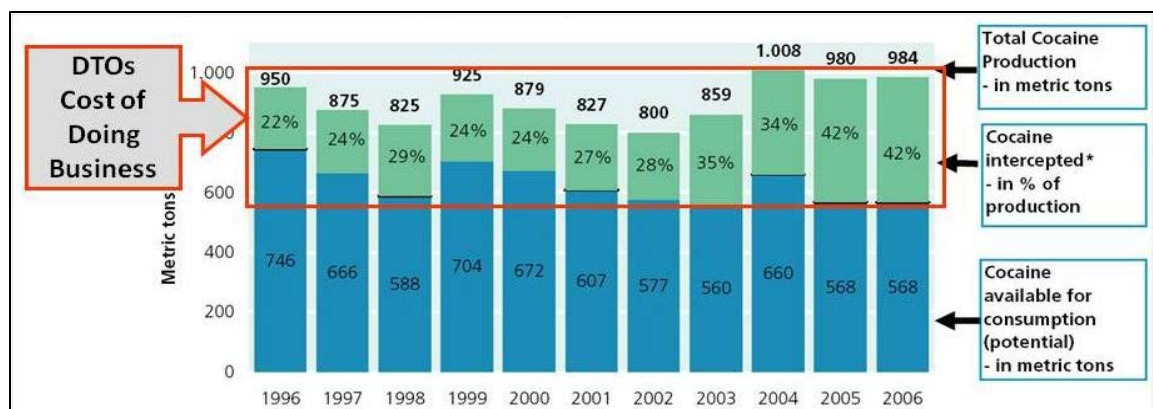


Figure 4. Cost of Business for Cocaine Smuggling from 1996–2006.<sup>140</sup>

In 2009 if the seizure percentage remained fixed at 42 percent, in 2012, the 568 metric tons of cocaine available for consumption is worth around \$15 billion in gross profit. The cost of doing business in seized assets is around \$11 billion.<sup>141</sup> This leaves the Mexican drug organizations with a gross profit of \$4.1 billion through cocaine smuggling operations alone. Mexican drug trafficking organizations make their organizational structure fit their business model.

## Organization

In order to develop an operational approach, understanding the operational environment is essential. This section will focus on the enemy—the major Mexican drug trafficking organizations that currently pose the most significant threat to the United States. Understanding the enemy in this operational environment requires understanding where the multiple drug trafficking organizations trace their heritage. After quickly reviewing the beginning of the drug trafficking organizations in Mexico, this paper will break down the five most relevant drug

<sup>140</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2011, 110.; Culp, “Military Counter Drug Operations,” 4.

<sup>141</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2011, 110.; Culp, “Military Counter Drug Operations,” 4.; Peter Chalk, *The Latin American Drug Trade: Scope, Dimension, Impacts, and Response* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 57. Based off the estimated amount of cocaine produced, refined, and then sold these numbers may not constitute the actual numbers of cocaine available.

trafficking organizations by look at their inception, current leader, major drug(s) trafficked, and violence levels.

The lineage of the current Mexican drug organizations starts with Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo who formed the drug organization known as the Felix Gallardo organization, later called the Guadalajara Organized Crime Group (OCG).<sup>142</sup> This organization grew in power due to its connection with Colombian drug trafficking organizations and lack of competition within Mexico.<sup>143</sup> The Guadalajara OCG became the target of increased operations of both the United State and Mexican government's in the 1980's due to the death of Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Agent Enrique Camarena.<sup>144</sup> Before its collapse, the Guadalajara OCG was able to cultivate some of the most notorious drug kingpins. These kingpins included members of the Arellano Felix family, Rafael Caro Quintero, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, Juan José "El Azul" Esparragoza, Ernesto Fonseca, Joaquín Guzmán Loera, Héctor "El Güero" Palma, Manuel Salcido, and Ismael Zambada all of whom claim Sinaloa as their starting point.<sup>145</sup> The following section will provide a brief summary of the most prevalent Mexican drug organizations that currently operate in Mexico.

### Sinaloa Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO)/Sinaloa Federation

This organization retains the Sinaloa core from the 1960's that descended from the Felix Gallardo network.<sup>146</sup> The current organization is an alliance of many smaller drug organizations

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<sup>142</sup> Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Mexico Institute, "The Felix Gallardo Organization (Guadalajara OCG)," <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/the-felix-gallardo-organization-guadalajara-ocg> (accessed November 17, 2011).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Olson and Salazar, *A Profile of Mexico's Major Organized Crime Groups*, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Astorga and Shirk, *Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 8.; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Mexico Institute, "Sinaloa OCG/Organización del Pacífico," <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sinaloa-ocgorganización-del-pacífico> (Accessed November 17, 2011).

and traces its beginnings back to the mid-2000's.<sup>147</sup> The current leader is Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera.<sup>148</sup> This conglomerate of smaller drug organizations has control or access to the smuggling routes from Tijuana to Juarez, which constitutes the entire Southwestern border.<sup>149</sup> This drug trafficking organization also represents the majority of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or more commonly called ecstasy), and methamphetamine smuggled over the Southwest border.<sup>150</sup> It is unclear exactly how much violence this drug trafficking organization carried out against the Mexican government and civilians. However, it was responsible for 55 percent of the violence against other drug trafficking organizations.<sup>151</sup>

## Gulf Cartel

This drug organization traces its lineage back to the bootlegging era of the 1920's. In the 1980's its former leader established ties with the Colombian Cali cartel as well as the Mexican Federal Police.<sup>152</sup> In 2003, Antonio Ezequiel Cardenas Guillen became the leader of the Gulf Cartel. His reign lasted seven years culminating with his death in 2010 at the hands of the

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<sup>147</sup> Salazar and Olson, *A Profile of Mexico's Major Organized Crime Groups*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> STRAFOR, "Mexican Drug Wars: Bloodiest Year to Date," December 20, 2010. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20101218-mexican-drug-wars-bloodiest-year-date> (Accessed November 13, 2011)," 5.

<sup>149</sup> STRAFOR, Mexico's Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes, 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed February 15, 2012).; STRAFOR, Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico's Cartel War, 24 January 2012. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).; Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 1.; UNODC, *Homicide*, 50.

<sup>150</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 7.

<sup>151</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18.

<sup>152</sup> Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 9. It is good to note here that the corruption of the Federal Police also led the next leader of the Gulf Cartel successfully bribed the Mexican Military. The Mexican military forces he successfully bribed were their Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE, Special Forces Airmobile Group). This group would later fracture off to form the Los Zetas.



Mexican military. The unconfirmed current leader is Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sanchez.<sup>153</sup> This cartel operates solely along the border with Texas in the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila.<sup>154</sup> The primary drugs this organization smuggles are cocaine and marijuana.<sup>155</sup> In order to intimidate both Mexican government employees and Mexican civilians the Gulf Cartel utilizes violence over bribery.<sup>156</sup> The Gulf Cartel also accounts for 13 percent of the rival drug organization violence.<sup>157</sup>

## La Familia

This organization emerged on the scene in 2006 when members burst into a nightclub, fired shots in the air and tossed five human heads on the ground. George Grayson says La Familia is a rightwing vigilante organization who opposes anyone believed to be supportive of other drug trafficking organizations.<sup>158</sup> Jose De Jesus Mendez Vargas and Nazario Moren Gonzalez maintained the organization leadership until 2010. In the same year, after Moreno's death, La Familia fell to the control Jose De Jesus Mendez Vargas.<sup>159</sup> Geographically La Familia is located

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<sup>153</sup> Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Mexico Institute, "Gulf OCG," <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/gulf-ocg> (Accessed November 17, 2011).

<sup>154</sup> STRATFOR, Mexico's Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes, 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed February 15, 2012).; STRATFOR, Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico's Cartel War, 24 January 2012. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>155</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 7.

<sup>156</sup> STRATFOR, "Bloodiest Year," 5.

<sup>157</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18.

<sup>158</sup> George W. Grayson, E-Notes La Familia: Another Deadly Mexican Syndicate, February 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200901.grayson.lafamilia.html> (accessed 15 February 2012). The group known as La Familia bears similarities to Colombia's United Self-Defense Forces (AUC), an amalgam of rightwing vigilantes, rural self-defense militia, former military and police personnel, who oppose anyone believed to be supportive of the guerrillas belonging to the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC).

<sup>159</sup> STRATFOR, "Bloodies Year, 8.;" George W. Grayson, E-Notes La Familia: Another Deadly Mexican Syndicate, February 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200901.grayson.lafamilia.html> (accessed 15 February 2012). Some sources say that La Familia is at war with a group that fractured off that organization in 2011. The activities of La Familia remained very low profile, while the Knights Templar were

mostly in Michoacán, which border the territory owned by the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>160</sup> The major drugs smuggled by La Familia are cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine.<sup>161</sup> The Mexican government has labeled La Familia as one of the most violent criminal organizations in Mexico.<sup>162</sup> It is difficult to provide actual numbers for killings against Mexican government officials or civilians, but the Michoacán state had 1,727 deaths in 2007–2010.<sup>163</sup> Additionally, La Familia accounted for 5 percent of violence against rival cartels.<sup>164</sup>

### Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization/Juarez Cartel

Founded in 1993 this drug organization was in flux throughout the late 1990's because of its founder's death.<sup>165</sup> The current leader is Vicente Carrillo Fuentes.<sup>166</sup> The major drugs this organization smuggles are cocaine and marijuana.<sup>167</sup> This organization is primarily located in

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announcing to society that they were a new vigilante group. This comes from Sylvia Longmire and is uncorroborated.

<sup>160</sup> STRATFOR, "Mexico's Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes," 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed February 15, 2012).; STRATFOR, "Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico's Cartel War," 24 January 2012. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>161</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 7.

<sup>162</sup> Sylvia Longmire, "Mexico's Drug War," under TCO 101: La Familia Michoacán, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-la-familia-michoacana.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-la-familia-michoacana.html) (accessed 15 February 2012).; George W. Grayson, E-Notes La Familia: Another Deadly Mexican Syndicate, February 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200901.grayson.lafamilia.html> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>163</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 21.

<sup>164</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18. Although there is a category for other violence, the only violence actually attributed to La Familia is against the Zetas, which is a total of 5 percent of the overall drug organization on drug organization violence.

<sup>165</sup> Sylvia Longmire, "Mexico's Drug War," under TCO 101: The Juarez Cartel, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-the-juarez-cartel.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-the-juarez-cartel.html) (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>166</sup> Sylvia Longmire, "Mexico's Drug War," under TCO 101: The Juarez Cartel, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-the-juarez-cartel.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-the-juarez-cartel.html) (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>167</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18.

Michoacán and Guanajuato.<sup>168</sup> Although still a drug organization, the Juarez Cartel has expanded its operations to include kidnapping–for–ransom and extortion.<sup>169</sup> The violence used by this organization has also increased. Claiming responsibility for the shooting deaths of the United States consulate worker Leslie Enriquez and the first employment of an improvised explosive device (IED) demonstrating the recent increase in violence used by this organization.<sup>170</sup>

## Los Zetas

Formed in the late 1990's by Cardenas Guillen, the leader of the Sinaloa drug organization, the Zetas consisted of deserters from the elite Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE, Special Forces Airmobile Group).<sup>171</sup> The primary purpose for this so-called private army was protection of territory, personnel, and drug shipments against threats.<sup>172</sup> In 2008, the Zetas branched out and have become one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in Mexico.<sup>173</sup> The current leader of the Zetas is Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano.<sup>174</sup> The

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<sup>168</sup> STRATFOR, Mexico's Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes, 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed February 15, 2012).; STRATFOR, "Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico's Cartel War," 24 January 2012. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>169</sup> STRATFOR, "Bloodiest Year," 12.

<sup>170</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18. The reason the drug organization killed the U.S. consulate worker was the perception she was supplying visas to members of the Sinaloa Federation and denying visas for the Juarez Cartel. The IED blast killed four people and wounded several more. This IED appeared to have been targeting only Mexican security forces and has yet to deploy this weapon against civilians.

<sup>171</sup> George W. Grayson, "Los Zetas and other Mexican Cartels Target Military Personnel," <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200903.grayson.loszetasmilitary.html> (Accessed November 19, 2011).; Sylvia Longmire, "Mexico's Drug War," under TCO 101: The Los Zetas, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html) (accessed 15 February 2012). Both authors also say that the Los Zetas continue to gain members some of which are deserters from the Mexican military.

<sup>172</sup> Sylvia Longmire, "Mexico's Drug War," under TCO 101: The Los Zetas, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html) (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>173</sup> STRATFOR, "Bloodiest Year," 3. Sylvia Longmire, Mexico's Drug War, under TCO 101: The Los Zetas, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html) (accessed 15 February 2012).

main drugs smuggled by this organization are cocaine and marijuana.<sup>175</sup> This organization has a presence throughout Mexico and is one of the more expansive drug trafficking organizations around.<sup>176</sup> Since 2010, the Zetas have taken a drastic turn towards violence. So far, violence against civilians and government agencies attributed to the Zetas include the massacre of 72 civilians, the shooting of two United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents resulting in the death of one, and mass graves discovered by Mexican authorities containing civilians who refused to join the Zetas.<sup>177</sup> Additionally the Zetas are also responsible for 8.8 percent of the killings attributed to rival drug organizations.<sup>178</sup> Each organizations is organized slightly differently depending on its needs and the same holds true for the tactics it chooses to create operational space.

## Operational Approach

The first effort within the operational approach is the creation and securing of operational space. Since the government crackdown on Mexican drug trafficking organizations began in 2006, the competition to control *plazas* has become extremely violent.<sup>179</sup> The Mexican states along the United States border have seen extreme highs in rates of violence as the Mexican drug trafficking organizations fight for control of the routes into the United States.<sup>180</sup> The most intense

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<sup>174</sup> STRATFOR, “Bloodiest Year,” 3.

<sup>175</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18.

<sup>176</sup> STRATFOR, “Mexico’s Drug Cartels, Map: Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes,” 24 January 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/mexicos-drug-cartels> (accessed February 15, 2012).; STRATFOR, “Polarization and Sustained Violence in Mexico’s Cartel War,” 24 January 2012. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/polarization-and-sustained-violence-mexicos-cartel-war> (accessed 15 February 2012).

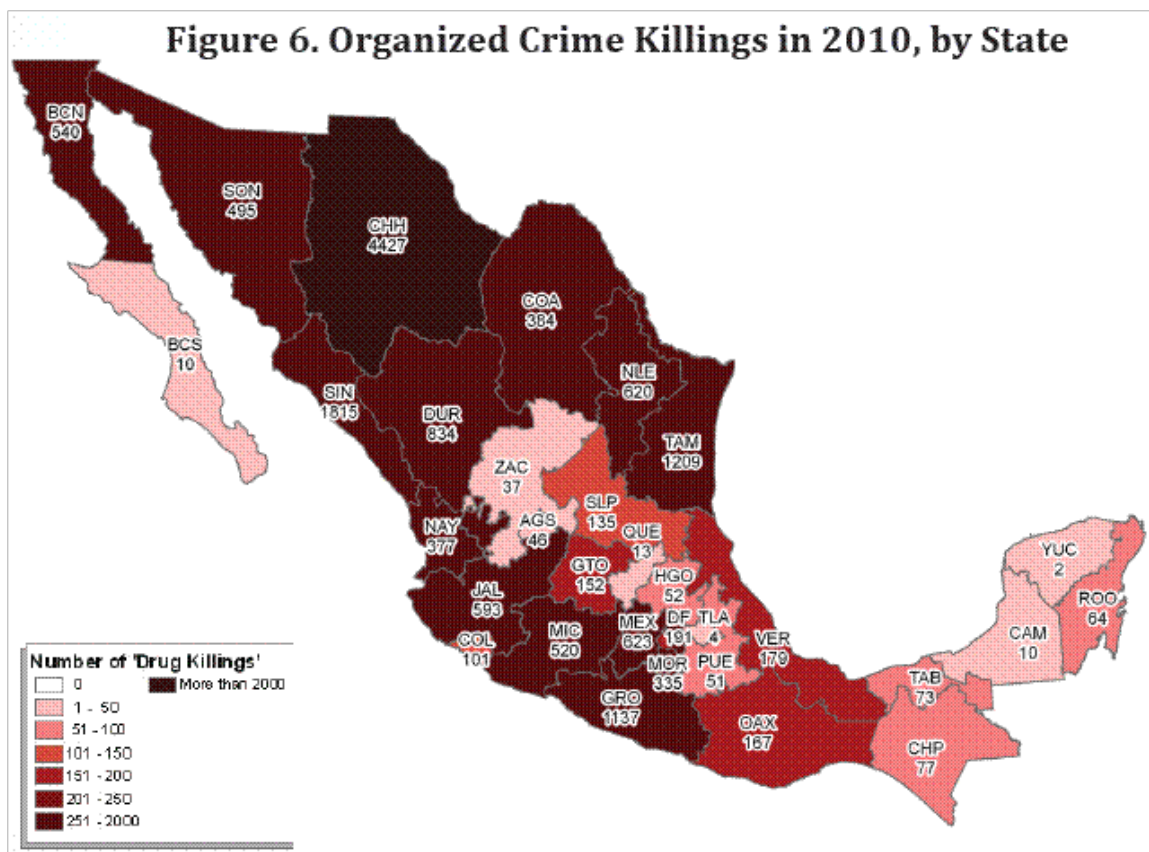
<sup>177</sup> Sylvia Longmire, “Mexico’s Drug War,” under TCO 101: The Los Zetas, [http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos\\_drug\\_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html](http://borderviolenceanalysis.typepad.com/mexicos_drug_war/dto-101-los-zetas.html) (accessed 15 February 2012). All the civilian deaths attributed to the Zetas occurred within Mexico. The Zetas gave the civilians a choice to join, pay a ransom or die.

<sup>178</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 18.

<sup>179</sup> Beittel, *Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 5.

<sup>180</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 10.

fighting has occurred for control over the city of Juarez in the state of Chihuahua and the control of the routes leading into Texas from Tamaulipas.<sup>181</sup> Violence in these areas targets Mexican security forces, Mexican government officials, and rival drug trafficking organizations that are encroaching on territory.<sup>182</sup> Recently, further evidence illustrates that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations are expanding their operations into Central America.<sup>183</sup> This illustrates the depths the Mexican drug trafficking organizations achieve in establishing their operational space. Figure 5 illustrates the violence levels throughout Mexico.



**Figure 5. Organized Crime Killings in 2010, by State.**<sup>184</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>183</sup> Chris Hawley, "Cartels Expand South of Mexico's Border," USA Today, June 2, 2010, [http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2010-06-02-mexicocartels02\\_ST\\_U.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2010-06-02-mexicocartels02_ST_U.htm) (accessed March 1, 2012).; Patrick Corcoran, "Mexican Cartels Expand into Honduras," In Sight, April 14, 2011, <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/771-mexican-cartels-expand-into-honduras> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>184</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 10.

The second effort within the operational approach is the smuggling of drugs into the United States and using their ties with local gangs to sell the drugs. Figure 6 illustrates the rough location of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations in Mexico and their distribution hubs into the United States. In order to smuggle their drugs across the border the Mexican drug trafficking organizations go by air, under the ground, and on the ground.<sup>185</sup> Some of the more common methods are trains, tunnels, ultra lights, and vehicles.<sup>186</sup> The ability to smuggle drugs across the border and reach their final destination where the local gangs sell them is critical to the strategic aim of making of money. Figure 6 illustrates the major smuggling routes across into Mexico and the depth the Mexican drug trafficking organizations achieve outside of Mexico. Figure 7 shows the smuggling routes across the Southwest border and the depth of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations within the United States.

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<sup>185</sup> United States Government, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy Implementation*, Update 2010, 34-36.; National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 14-15.

<sup>186</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 14-15. In December of 2010 authorities confiscated nearly 11 metric tons of marijuana being smuggled from Mexico through Eagle Pass (TX) to Chicago in a freight train. Ultra lights are used due to their inexpensive nature and the fact that it is difficult for law enforcement officials to identify and interdict the aircraft before they deliver their contraband and return to Mexico.

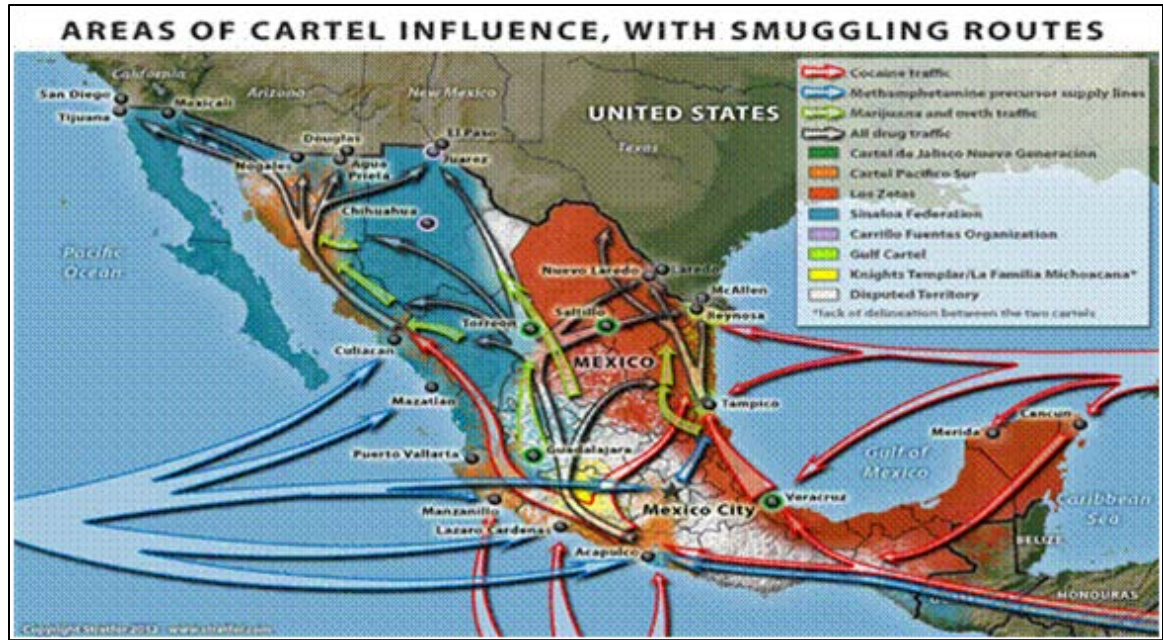


Figure 6. Areas of Cartel Influence, with Smuggling Routes.<sup>187</sup>

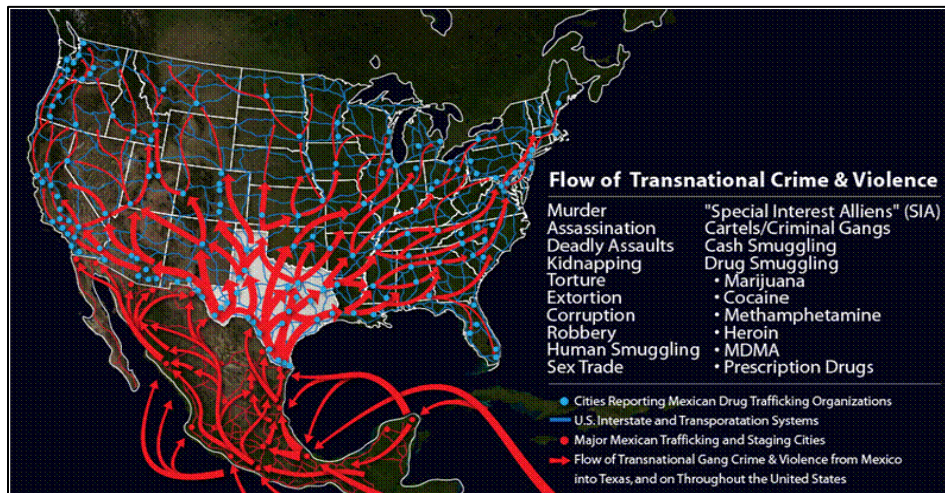


Figure 7. Flow of Transnational Crime and Violence.<sup>188</sup>

The third effort within the operational approach involves turning the process around to smuggle money and weapons back into Mexico. According to the National Drug Intelligence

<sup>187</sup> STRATFOR map See CW paper for citation with copyright permission. National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 3.

<sup>188</sup> Barry R. McCaffrey and Robert H. Scales, PhD, "Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment," Colgen, September 2011, 2.

Center, the Mexican drug trafficking organizations do smuggle large sums of cash back across the border, but prefer a process called Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE).<sup>189</sup> BMPE is a system in which money brokers receive drug dollars in the United States from a Mexican drug trafficking organization member and then provide Mexican Pesos to the drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. The benefit for the money brokers is the ability to purchase United States dollars from the drug trafficking organization at a discounted rate.<sup>190</sup> The next part of this operational approach involves smuggling weapons into Mexico.

The Mexican Security forces seized 75,000 weapons from 2007 to 2010. Of those 75,000 weapons, 60,000 or 80 percent originated from within the United States.<sup>191</sup> Similar to the money laundering, the Mexican drug trafficking organizations use intermediaries or brokers to purchase these weapons in the United States.<sup>192</sup> The Mexican drug trafficking organizations use three main corridors to smuggle the weapons back into Mexico. These corridors are the El Paso Corridor, the Tucson Corridor, and the Houston Corridor.<sup>193</sup> The most common way to smuggle these weapons is in commercial or non-commercial vehicles across normal border inspection points. Another method is the smuggling of weapons through sophisticated and unsophisticated tunnels along the border.<sup>194</sup> Weapons like rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) and hand grenades enter Mexico through its southern border with Guatemala and Belize.<sup>195</sup> The ability to bring in weapons from the United States and other countries in Central America creates an environment where the

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<sup>189</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 40.

<sup>190</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 41.

<sup>191</sup> Colby Goodman and Michel Marizco, "U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico: New Data and Insights Illuminate Key Trends and Challenges," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Mexican Institute, 170.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 193. The El Paso corridor runs from El Paso, Texas to Ciudad Juarez. The Tucson Corridor runs from Tucson, Arizona to Nogales. The Houston Corridor runs from Houston, San Antonio, and Laredo, Texas to Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.



Mexican drug trafficking organizations have more firepower than the Mexican security forces.<sup>196</sup> This ability to essentially “out gun” the Mexican security forces directly contributes to the tactics employed by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

## Tactics

The first tactic commonly known as *plata o plomo* (silver or lead) is the way that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations coerce cooperation from Mexican government officials and the Mexican populace.<sup>197</sup> Each drug trafficking organization uses *plata o plomo* in different proportions. With violence, causing so many issues it seems *plomo* is the preferred method. The Mexican government reported that over 34,500 people had died in drug trafficking related violence since President Calderon began his antidrug crackdown in December 2006.<sup>198</sup> The Mexican authorities maintain that more than 90 percent of the casualties were individuals involved in the drug trade.<sup>199</sup> However, even the remaining 10 percent means an additional 3,461 people died since 2006. An assumption here is that a percentage of the 3,461 chose not to take money or not to cooperate with the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

The next method used by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations is *plata* (silver). The Mexican drug organizations are routinely able to corrupt Mexican government officials, especially the Mexican police. This resulted in the August 2010 firing of 3,200 officers for failing basic integrity tests and another 465 officers lost their jobs for failing to carry out their duties.<sup>200</sup> The willingness to use *plata* extends past the Mexican government and into the civilian populace.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>197</sup> William Finnegan, “Silver or Lead,” *The New Yorker*, May 2010, 45-46.

<sup>198</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 1.

<sup>199</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 13. Due to lack of verification, some critics call the percentage offered by the government into question. The other issue involves the releasing of that data at irregular intervals.

<sup>200</sup> Beittel, *Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 4. Additionally in May 2009 federal authorities arrested 10 mayors and 18 other state and local officials in the president’s home state of Michoacan for alleged ties to drug trafficking organizations.

According to Manuel Roi–Franzai, the drug organizations provide food, clothing, and toys to win the civilians’ loyalty.<sup>201</sup> Through *plata o plomo* (silver or lead), the Mexican drug trafficking organizations arrange their tactics in a way that accomplish their strategic aim of making money.

The second tactic is the techniques and procedures used by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations to smuggle and then sell their drugs. There is a variety of techniques for smuggling drugs across the border. The most recent discovery is the sophisticated tunnels that transportation of large amounts of drugs undetected. An example of the tunnels increased sophistication and ability to smuggle drugs occurred in 2010 when authorities found two such tunnels in the San Diego area.<sup>202</sup> Figure 8 is a newspaper article that illustrates the sophistication and increased capabilities of the tunnels.



**Figure 8. Cross Border Tunnel.**<sup>203</sup>

After the smuggling is complete, the drugs then make it to the hands of gangs within the United States. With a presence in over 1,000 cities in the United States, the Mexican drug

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<sup>201</sup> Manuel Roig-Franzia, “Mexican Drug Cartels Making Audacious Pitch for Recruits,” Washington Post Foreign Service, May 7, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/06/AR2008050602566.html?hpid=sec-world> (accessed 10 November 2011).

<sup>202</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 14-15.; Chalk, *The Latin American Drug Trade*, 54-55.

<sup>203</sup> United States Open Border, “Tons of drugs found in U.S.-Mexico border tunnel,” 4 December 2011, <http://usopenborders.com/2011/12/tons-of-drugs-found-in-u-s-mexico-border-tunnel/> (accessed 14 February 2012).

organizations rely on their relationships with local gangs to sell the drugs.<sup>204</sup> The National Drug Threat Assessment states that one of three types of relationships exist between the gangs and the Mexican drug trafficking organizations:

1. Business – Gangs purchase drugs from Mexican drug trafficking organization members or associates for distribution by the gang.
2. Partnership – Gangs distribute drugs for the Mexican drug trafficking organizations while often providing warehousing, security, and/or transportation services for a share of the profit.
3. Franchise – Gangs operate as extensions of the organizations in the United States.

The NDTA further states that Mexican drug trafficking organizations will continue to solidify their collaboration with gangs in the United States.<sup>205</sup> These tactics link through the operational approach directly back to the strategic aim of making money.

## Summary

First, this section analyzed the strategic objective of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. That objective is to make as much money for as long as they can. It then examined the history of the drug trafficking organizations and looked at the five largest drug trafficking organizations operating in Mexico today. Next, this study focused on the operational approach for the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This operational approach entailed three efforts. The three efforts are creating and securing operational space, smuggling then selling the drugs, and finally getting money and weapons back into Mexico. This operational approach revealed the tactics employed by the Mexican drug trafficking organization. The first tactic is *Plata o Plomo* and the second tactic is the smuggling of drugs across the Southwest border and distributing it throughout the United States. Now that the analysis for each organization is complete, it is possible to answer the guiding research questions within this study.

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<sup>204</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 8.; Congressional Research Service Report, “Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence,” R41075, January 25, 2011, 16.

<sup>205</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 11.

## Summary and Analysis

In the last few sections, this study achieved an understanding of the strategic objectives, organizations, operational approach, and tactics for the Mexican government, United States, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Earlier this study proposed an overarching and four questions to guide this study. The overarching question is: which organization uses the selected elements of operational design to develop their operational approach, thus practicing operational art? The four questions guiding the study were:

1. Do the organizations achieve the same depth as their rival organization?
2. Is tempo used to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative against the rival organization(s)?
3. Does the operational approach utilize elements of national power that are available to place demands on the enemy's organization and resources throughout the depths of the operational environment?
4. Does the use of depth, tempo, and simultaneity lead to operational shock in the adversaries' system?

This section will now answer those questions starting with the Mexican government.

The Mexican government is not effectively applying operational art. The government lacks any ability to achieve depth within Mexico much less matching the depth achieved by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations outside Mexico.<sup>206</sup> In relation to tempo, the Mexican government is able to achieve tempo at a specific place or against a specific Mexican drug trafficking organization, but fails to maintain the initiative for a longer duration of time.<sup>207</sup> The lack of operational reach of their military means simultaneous or near-simultaneous operations are a localized phenomenon just like tempo.<sup>208</sup> The current ability of the Mexican government to react to actions conducted by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations is limited at best.<sup>209</sup>

While the Mexican government can dismantle one drug trafficking organization at a time, it lacks

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<sup>206</sup> Shirk, *Drug War Shared Threat*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 19.

<sup>208</sup> Beittel, I, 18, 21.; Brands, "Mexico's Narco-Insurgency," 15.

<sup>209</sup> George W. Grayson, "Mexico and the Drug Cartels," Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes, entry posted August 2007, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200708.grayson.mexicodrugcartels.html> (accessed November 19, 2011).

the capacity to act against multiple organizations simultaneously. The inability to act against more than one drug trafficking organization in relation to tempo and simultaneity illustrates the inability of the Mexican government to achieve operational shock. Therefore, the Mexican government does not apply operational art.

The United States agencies do not effectively use operational art. The United States attempts to match the depth achieved by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations through aiding foreign governments in their counternarcotics programs.<sup>210</sup> This indirect approach to combating the depth achieved by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations cedes the initiative almost immediately by relying on foreign governments to conduct operations at the pace the United States desires.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, the agencies along the Southwest border and their reactive nature only further relinquish initiative to the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.<sup>212</sup> Within the United States, there are successful operations that use depth, tempo, and simultaneity that meet with good results.<sup>213</sup> Additionally, the legacy organization of United States agencies only creates competition for resources between agencies, which leads to false measures of effectiveness created and reported.<sup>214</sup> To this end, when viewing the Mexican drug trafficking organizations as a system the United States does not achieve operational shock. The lack of depth, tempo, simultaneity, and therefore operational shock means the United States does not apply operational art.

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<sup>210</sup> Wyler, *International Drug Control Policy*, 10.; Office of National Drug Control Policy, “National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy 2011,” 2.

<sup>211</sup> JP 5-0, III-36.; United States Department of Defense Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations, October 2011, 1-2.; Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.

<sup>212</sup> JP 5-0, III-36.; ADP 3-0, 1-2.; Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.

<sup>213</sup> Walser, *U.S. Strategy*, 12.

<sup>214</sup> Dr. George S. Lauer, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, January 19, 2012.

The Mexican drug trafficking organizations use operational art. The depth illustrated in their operations is constantly growing currently spreading through Central and South America.<sup>215</sup> The use of tempo provides the Mexican drug trafficking organizations the ability to smuggle drugs across the Southwest border at a rate that exceeds the reactionary ability of the United States and Mexican government.<sup>216</sup> With multiple routes and means to smuggle drugs across the border the Mexican drug trafficking organizations constantly conduct simultaneous operations.<sup>217</sup> The current inability of the Mexican government to react to the increased violence and to control some states within Mexico has led some to conclude that Mexico is a failing state.<sup>218</sup> The ability to maintain high profit margins, increase depth, and create so many simultaneous demands on government's resources constitutes operational shock. The application of operational art by Mexican drug trafficking organizations is by far the best.

This section answered the overarching question and guiding questions for this study. Figure 9 graphically illustrates the yes or no answers to each question this study proposed. Noticeably, the success of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations is exactly where the Mexican government and United States failed within their current strategy and operational approaches. The Mexican government and the United States need to make some decisions about the future of their strategies if they desire any significant effect against the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

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<sup>215</sup> Max G. Manwaring, "A "New" Dynamic in the Western Hemisphere Security Environment: The Mexican Zetas and other Private Armies," (Strategic Studies Institute), 25.

<sup>216</sup> JP 5-0, III-36. Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.

<sup>217</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 14-15.; Chalk, *Latin American Drug Trade*, 54-55.

<sup>218</sup> George Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 251-264.; Gallup, "Opinion: Mexico's War on Drug Traffickers," Gallup Consulting, February 18, 2009: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/115210/opinion-briefing-mexico-war-drug-traffickers.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2012); Dan Lund, "Moving Toward 2009 without leaving 2006," *Opinion and Policy Report, series 8*. (Mexico City: MUND Americas, 2009); Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 7.

	Does the organization achieve the same depth as their rival?	Is tempo used to seize, retain, or exploit initiative?	Does the operational approach utilize elements of national power that are available to place demands on the enemy's organization and resources throughout the depths of the operational environment?	Does the use of depth, tempo, and simultaneity lead to operational shock in the adversary's system?	Does the organization apply operational art?
MG*	No	No	No	No	No
USG**	No	No	Yes	No	No
MDTO***	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*MG - Mexican government  
\*\*USG - United States Government  
\*\*\*MDTO - Mexican drug trafficking organizations

Figure 9. Summary Chart.

## Courses of Action for the Southwest Border

Clearly, the United States has a decision to make regarding the operational approach used against the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This paper illustrates that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations do a much better job linking their tactical actions to their strategic objective. By referring to the Mexican drug trafficking organizations as a national security threat the United States has three potential courses of action. The first choice is to continue with the current operational approach, the second is to try a new operational approach, and the third is to refine the current operational approach through a more optimal application of the selected elements of operational design.

The first choice is to continue with the same operational approach currently utilized. The current operational approach seems ineffective at linking tactical objectives to the strategic objectives. Although, there are many causes for this, the most obvious is the ineffective organization structure currently in place. Current Joint Doctrine establishes that one way to execute operational art is through operational design. Operational design then allows commanders to answer how the strategic objective—operational approach—tactical objectives and resources are used in concert to achieve an effect. It further states that the commander is the central figure

in operational design.<sup>219</sup> With the ONDCP having the entire responsibility but none of the authorities over the other agencies there is no single commander. Each agency provides its own version of an operational approach and tactical objectives that may indeed accomplish their small portion of the strategic objectives. The problem lies in linking all those agencies together, and with the current command structure, it will not happen for a number of organizational and political reasons. Until attention turns towards fixing the unity of effort, the current operational approach will yield the same results.

The second choice is to discard the old operational approach and try something new. There are many different approaches currently proposed by recognized experts in this area. To illustrate the difference this paper will now summarize four different operational approaches that are achievable within the current constraints of the strategic objective and given organizations.

The first new operational approach is the Kingpin strategy, which focuses on removing the leaders from the organizations, similar to cutting the head off a snake. This strategy for the drug trafficking organizations is similar to the current targeting of al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership by drones.<sup>220</sup> Robert Bonner, a writer for *Foreign Affairs*, goes as far to say that the United States must rely on this strategy since it worked in Colombia.<sup>221</sup> He continues by saying, contrary to popular belief, not anyone can effectively run a large, multinational drug-trafficking organization. Removing the kingpin and his potential successors is the death knell for such organizations.<sup>222</sup> This strategy focuses on direct confrontation with the drug organizations while the next one attempts an indirect approach.

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<sup>219</sup> United States Department of Defense Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, "Joint Operations," August 11, 2011, XIII.

<sup>220</sup> Matthew C. Waxman, "The Targeted Killings Debate," Council on Foreign Relations, June 8, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/international-peace-and-security/targeted-killings-debate/p25230> (accessed February 26, 2012).

<sup>221</sup> Robert C. Bonner, "The New Cocaine Cowboys: how to defeat Mexico's drug cartels," *Foreign Affairs* 89.4, 2010, 35. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Bonner, "The New Cocaine Cowboys," 35.



The second new operational approach is a counterinsurgent (COIN) strategy focused on winning the population of Mexico. Robert Culp writes in a *Small Wars Journal* article that the COIN model developed by Dr. Gordon McCormick is another way to attack the Mexican drug organizations. Culp argues the model will help planners craft a comprehensive COIN strategy to cut threat organizations off from their bases of popular support and to isolate, capture, or kill their members and leaders.<sup>223</sup> He further states, the model offers a structure for relations between the host–nation government, threat groups, the population, and international actors or donors.<sup>224</sup> This approach, he argues, offers an overall strategy that identifies the local populace as the center of gravity in the COIN fight and winning popular support as the key to the state’s ability to win the conflict.<sup>225</sup> While this strategy indirectly targets the proposed source of power for the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, the next strategy seeks a return to the former status quo.

Ted Carpenter, senior fellow for the Cato Institute, proposes the third new operational approach. The foundation of his proposed operational approach is that of accommodation or “appeasement.” The essence of this strategy is simply returning Mexico to the conditions that existed during the era of political dominance of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).<sup>226</sup> Under this system, Mexico’s political leaders would act as the brokers in a market–sharing

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<sup>223</sup> Culp, “Military Counter Drug Operations,” 5.; Brad Freden, “The COIN approach to Mexican Drug Cartels: Square Peg in a Round Hole,” *Small Wars Journal*, December 27, 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-coin-approach-to-mexican-drug-cartels-square-peg-in-a-round-hole> (accessed February 16, 2012). Mr. Freden argues that stripping COIN of the military overtones to control or win over the population then certain aspects of COIN are actually useful in this situation. He continues by listing law enforcement, military operations, intelligence sharing, whole-of-government approach, and emergency extradition procedures under the section he calls COIN *a la crate*.

<sup>224</sup> Culp, “Military Counter Drug Operations,” 5. LTC Culp is a career officer in the United State Army with extensive experience in special operations and low intensity conflict.

<sup>225</sup> Gregory Wilson (COL), “Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and the Indirect Approach,” *Military Review* November-December, 2006.

<sup>226</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, “Undermining Mexico’s Dangerous Drug Cartels, Policy Analysis (No. 688),” November 15, 2011, 12. This proposal started in 2008 with Ruben Aguilar, former Director of Communications for President Calderon; however, prospects for this strategy working are not favorable. It is also unknown if President Calderon would support such a drastic change in policies or if the drug organizations would welcome this return to status quo.

arrangement among the different drug trafficking organizations.<sup>227</sup> The adoption of this strategy by the Mexican government would mean that the flow of illegal drugs into the United States would be unimpeded.<sup>228</sup> This operational approach would not meet the strategic objectives of interdiction or eradication, but it would potentially make the drug selling less lucrative. By making it, less lucrative the Mexican drug trafficking organizations would need to sustain their desire to make money in a different way. Coming from the same author the next strategy involves something highly controversial.

The fourth new operational approach involves the legalization of drugs. This operational approach would involve ending a prohibitionist strategy currently employed and legalizing currently illegal drugs.<sup>229</sup> The advocates of this strategy turn to the drug reforms that took place in Portugal in 2001.<sup>230</sup> Glenn Greenwald conducted a study of the reforms in Portugal and concluded that decriminalization has had no adverse effect on drug use rates in Portugal, which, in numerous categories, are now among the lowest in the European Union, particularly when compared with states with stringent criminalization regimes. Additionally the post decriminalization usage rates have remained roughly the same or even decreased and drug related pathologies have decreased dramatically.<sup>231</sup> While all these new operational approaches seem to have merit this paper advocates for the current operational approach, but using the key elements of operational design to properly link all the actions towards the strategic aim.

The final choice for the United States is to revamp the current operational approach through the elements of operational design that are important in this type of operational

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<sup>227</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Undermining Mexico's Dangerous Drug Cartels, 13.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>231</sup> Glenn Greenwald, "Drug Decriminalization in Portugal: Lessons for Creating Fair and Successful Drug Policies," Cato Institute White Paper, 2 April, 2009, 5-24.; Ted Galen Carpenter, "Undermining Mexico's Dangerous Drug Cartels, 14. Mr. Greenwald conclusion on drug-related pathologies examples is sexually transmitted diseases and deaths due to drug usage.

environment. The first element of operational design to emphasize is the arrangement of operations. The most recent failure of this is the fast and furious operation spearheaded by the ATF that allowed gun smuggling operations to occur without interdiction.<sup>232</sup> The ATF told other agencies to leave the gun smuggling alone, which directly contradicts the co-responsibility operational approach. Sadly, in this case the CBP felt the brunt of this poor use of arranging operations and lost Border Patrol Agent Brain A. Terry on December 14, 2010 near Rio Rico Arizona to one of the guns from the ATF's operation.<sup>233</sup> Arranging operations properly will also lead to depth, tempo, and simultaneity.

To achieve depth the United States currently utilizes direct and indirect approaches. The direct approach comes from all the different agencies from local to federal that operate throughout the United States. The Mexican drug trafficking organizations are also using that depth with a presence in more than 1,000 cities within the United States.<sup>234</sup> The indirect approach is the efforts internationally, specifically through Central and South America in this case. This effort to achieve the same depths as the Mexican drug trafficking organizations is failing for two main reasons. The first failure is in the actual delivery of equipment and training that the Merida Initiative set forth.<sup>235</sup> The second failure is the unequal dispersion of money throughout Central and South America. Mexico accounts for \$1.3 billion while the rest of Central America receives \$248 million.<sup>236</sup> To make the indirect approach achieve the same depths as the Mexican drug

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<sup>232</sup> Fox News, "House Panel Slams 'Fast and Furious' Gun Operation Tied to Border Agent's Death," June 15, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/06/15/house-panel-slams-fast-and-furious-gun-operation-tied-to-border-agents-death/> (accessed February 26, 2012).

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> National Drug Threat Assessment 2011, 8.; Congressional Research Service Report, "Southwest Border Violence," 16.

<sup>235</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Merida Initiative: The United States has Provided Counternarcotics and Anticrime Support but Needs Better Performance Measures," GAO-10-837, July 2010, 24.

<sup>236</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, *Mérida Initiative for Mexico and Central America: Funding and Policy Issues*, Congressional Research Service for 111 Congress, R40135, April 19, 2010, Summary.; United

trafficking organizations the United States must put more emphasis outside of Mexico in regard to foreign assistance and training. If the United States fails to operate in the same depths, victory will ultimately go to the Mexican drug trafficking organizations.<sup>237</sup>

To leverage tempo and simultaneity the United States needs to fix its current organizational structure. The increase in the tempo of operations also contains an interagency and multinational approach that must work in conjunction with each other. With one agency, like the ONDCP, taking the responsibility and authority for all efforts aimed at disrupting the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, synchronization can occur. It does no good to have an operation like Operation Firewall that seized roughly 3 percent of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations profits without continuing the number of events to retain and exploit the initiative gained.<sup>238</sup> This will also require a similar effort to integrate foreign countries into an International Task Force to ensure all governments are operating within relative speeds of each other. This International Task Force also creates the ability to conduct simultaneous or near simultaneous operations. The simultaneous or near simultaneous operations against the Mexican drug trafficking organizations could place more demands on their organization and resources than they are able to cope with. The whole of government approach through the application of DIME is paramount in both tempo and simultaneity, and this must occur through a chain of command that provides guidance and establishes unity of effort between all agencies and governments involved.

Once the arranging of operations occur using depth, tempo, and simultaneity, an effect is possible on the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The effect desired in this complex adaptive system is the operational shock of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. Simply put, the ability to operate in the same depths; use tempo to gain, retain, exploit the initiative; and

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States Government Accountability Office, "Status of Funds for the Merida Initiative," December 3, 2009, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10253r.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2011).

<sup>237</sup> Frederick Kagan, "Army Doctrine and Modern War," 134-51.; Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory*, 112.

<sup>238</sup> Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.; Walser, *U.S. Strategy*, 12.

simultaneous operations on the Mexican drug trafficking organizations disruption is possible.<sup>239</sup> The disruption of the Mexican drug trafficking organizations to accomplish their strategic aim of making money constitutes operational shock.<sup>240</sup> The review of this operational approach does not seek to destroy the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, but it does seek to make it change its logic from making money to worrying about survival. This operational shock will therefore disrupt the smuggling of drugs across the Southwest border.

## Conclusion

Since declaring the “War on Drugs,” the United States can claim only limited success. The rate of drugs smuggled over the United States Southwest border is troubling.<sup>241</sup> The large appetite for drugs within the United States only exacerbates the problem.<sup>242</sup> Maybe the most troubling aspect of this whole scenario is the levels of violence within Mexico. In just six years of directly confronting the drug trafficking organizations, the country of Mexico has suffered over 34,500 casualties.<sup>243</sup> Between the drugs and violence caused by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, it is clear that the United States must do something.

Some experts in this area propose that the United States must try an altogether new operational approach to combat the Mexican drug trafficking organizations. This exposes a gap in the research conducted looking into this problem. Specifically, no one has evaluated the current

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<sup>239</sup> Kagan, “Army Doctrine and Modern War,” 134-51.; Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory*, 112.; JP 5-0 III-35.; Leonhard, *Fighting by Minutes*, 69.

<sup>240</sup> Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 165.

<sup>241</sup> GAO, “Customs Service: Drug Interdiction Efforts,” Washington, DC: United States General Accounting Office, Sep 1996, GAO/GGD-96-189BR; Office of National Drug Control Policy, “The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997,” Washington DC: The White House, Feb 1997, 49-62.; Shirk, *Drug Trafficking organization*, 5.; Miller, “New Bosses Taking Over Cocaine Traffic.”

<sup>242</sup> United Nations, *World Drug Report 2011*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2011, 35.

<sup>243</sup> Icasualties.org, <http://icasualties.org/> (accessed March 2, 2012).; Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 8.

operational approach through the lens of operational art and specific elements of operational design. This paper sought to fill the gap by analyzing the current operational approach through selected elements of operational design. Then, this paper examined the strategic objectives, organization, operational approach, and tactics of the Mexican government, United States, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations. The conclusion of this paper is that the United States' current strategy is ineffective and one of the new courses of action needs implementation. The first is to maintain the current operational approach with no changes that will yield much of the same disappointing results. The second is to try a new operational approach that will yield unknown results. The third is to use the select elements of operational design to enhance the current operational approach so that better results occur.

This paper began with the question: which organization uses the selected elements of operational design to develop their operational approach, thus practicing operational art? This study found that the Mexican drug trafficking organizations use those selected elements much better than the United States or the Mexican government. This study proposes that within similar environments, using the same elements of operational design within this study best supports the development of operational approaches through operational design. Informed by the success achieved by the Mexican drug trafficking organizations, this paper specifically recommends that planners for the operational approach in environments similar to this use depth, tempo, and simultaneity to cause operational shock in the adversary. Additionally, using these selected elements of operational design in similar environments can create an operational approach that effectively links the tactical actions to the strategic objectives.

The implications of this study are not necessarily limited to the current drug smuggling problem across the Southwest border. When most operational approaches fail, the simple answer is to try something new. What this study proposes is that instead of simply trying a new operational approach there is some benefit to reviewing the current operational approach. Understanding the current operational environment and then selecting the most important

elements of operational design to review the operational approaches seems to be appropriate. Once this review is complete the value of modifying the current operational approach, rather than changing directions entirely, is apparent.

Obviously, operational art is critical to any military planning effort, not just looking at the Southwest border. This study proposes that many more lessons are available through applying the same methodology to analyze other cases to reveal lessons learned from successful or unsuccessful operational approaches. For example, examination of Plan Colombia using the same methodology might reveal the important elements of operational design when examining transnational criminal organizations. Looking into both of these could help create future lessons about the important elements of operational design within those specific environments for planners to use in the future.

Additionally, a deeper look into the organizational structure of the United States is merited. The United States typically chooses to fight complex adaptive systems like the Mexican drug trafficking organizations with a highly complex bureaucratic organizational structure. This type of structure does little to accomplish the strategic objectives, but goes to great lengths to accomplish individual agency operational objectives. Since the United States is going to continue the “War on Drugs” a closer look at the organizational structure might yield important lessons about unity of effort and command for the future.

As the United States moves forward with the “War on Drugs,” and attempts to disrupt or dismantle the transnational criminal organizations, operational art becomes more important for planners. Ultimately, the United States must realize that the closest threat to its national security is right at its own border. With this realization a revitalized effort to get the operational approach correct should occur. This paper hopes to offer a glimpse at one way to use operational art, operational design, and select elements of operational design to assist planners in developing a more effective operational approach.

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