

WILL COMMON SENSE EVER PREVAIL? LOST LESSONS, MILITARIZATION, AND CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY IN COLOMBIA AND MEXICO

Marcela Vásquez-León*

John Lindsay-Poland**

Recebido: 13 abr. 2012

Aprovado: 27 abr. 2012

* Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Anthropology and Center for Latin American Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, United States. E-mail: mvasquez@email.arizona.edu

** B.A., Research and Advocacy Director, Fellowship of Reconciliation, P.O. Box 72492, Oakland, CA 94612, USA. <http://forusa.org>; E-mail: johnlp@forusa.org

Abstract: In this article we examine the impact of U.S. militarization in Colombia and Mexico justified by the Wars on Drugs and Terror. By outlining the magnitude of militarization, we seek to illuminate the brutal consequences of an externally defined military approach by U.S., Colombian, and Mexican elites that is disconnected from complex local realities. We argue that these wars, like the Cold War in the past, are not designed to rid the hemisphere of drugs or terrorists, but to maintain an increasingly precarious neo-colonial order. These wars provide the justification to force entire populations out of regions where there are valuable natural resources or to target social movements that demand justice and political accountability. We also highlight efforts to create local spaces of peace and end impunity in each country. By focusing on Bolivia as a point of contrast, we examine common sense policies to change a history of U.S. military intervention through alliances between governments and civil society.

Key words: Illegal drugs. Colombia. Mexico. Bolivia. U.S. Military intervention. Victims.

O SENSO COMUM PREVALECERÁ ALGUM DIA? LIÇÕES PERDIDAS, MILITARIZAÇÃO E CICLOS DE VIOLÊNCIA E IMPUNIDADE NA COLÔMBIA E NO MÉXICO

Resumo: Nesse artigo nós analisamos o impacto da militarização dos EUA na Colômbia e no México, justificada como uma guerra contra as drogas e o terrorismo. Para colocar em evidência a amplitude dessa militarização, nós procuramos enfatizar a brutal consequência de uma externalidade presente na perspectiva militar dos EUA e das elites da Colômbia e do México desconectadas das complexas realidades locais. Nós argumentamos que essas guerras, como a Guerra Fria no passado, não foram elaboradas para eliminar a droga e o terrorismo no continente, mas sim para manter uma crescente ordem neo-colonial. Essas guerras oferecem as justificativas para impor a retirada de populações inteiras de regiões com recursos naturais de elevados valores ou colocar na mira movimentos sociais que lutam por justiça e participação política. Nós também enfatizamos os esforços para se criar espaços locais de paz e pelo fim das impunidades em cada país. Tendo a Bolívia como foco contrastante, nós analisamos políticas que desafiam a história de intervenção militar dos EUA, através das alianças entre governos e sociedade civil.

Palavras-chave: Drogas ilegais. Colômbia. México. Bolívia. Intervenção militar dos Estados Unidos. Vítimas.

INTRODUCTION

On Aug. 28, 2009 presidents of the 12 member countries of the South American Union of Nations (UNASUR) met in Argentina to debate a new accord negotiated by the governments of Colombia's former President Álvaro Uribe and U.S. President Barack Obama. The accord would have institutionalized the use of seven military bases by the U.S. military in Colombia, including four operations outside of Colombia. After intense deliberation, UNASUR members emphasized the need to consolidate South America as a region of peace, which constitutes, as stated in their signed declaration, the "basis for the integral development of our peoples and the preservation of our natural resources, through the prevention of conflict, the peaceful solution of controversy, and the abstention from resorting to threat or use of force" (ANDINA, 2009). As part of the UNASUR agreement, member countries committed themselves "to establishing a mechanism of mutual trust in terms of defense and security" and underscored that "the presence of foreign military forces cannot, with their means and resources linked to their own objectives, threaten the sovereignty and integrity of any South American nation and, as a result, the region's peace and security" (ANDINA, 2009). In stating his position, Bolivian President Evo Morales (2009) argued that,

The dark history of Latin America refers to the permanent political and military interventions of the US ... with different mechanisms: stick or carrot. When there are governments that fight for their sovereignty and solidarity [they receive] sticks and military coups. When there are governments that conform to the empire, well, then there is cooperation.

Morales argued against foreign military bases on the grounds that they represent external policies that are imperialistic and have as their objective the subjugation of the region and the pillage of its natural resources. In Morales' (2009) words:

During colonial times, the Original Peoples were the ones that had to put up with this kind of intervention from the different empires. During the Republican period it was the workers. And then came the different doctrines against Latin American peoples: The anti-communist doctrine that allowed the persecution of labor unions; then the counterinsurgency doctrine against social movements that were looking for deep structural transformations in their search for equality and that led, again, to persecutions and detentions; the anti-drug doctrine -- labor union leaders accused of drug trafficking. Then, the US ambassadors to Bolivia told me that I was the Andean Bin Laden and the Bolivian *cocaleros* were the Taliban. Since September 11 we are terrorists, social movements accused of terrorism, labor unions and Original Peoples, intellectuals, professionals and artists that feel for their country, for its dignity and sovereignty.

He went on to challenge the official version that the objective of bases used by the US military in Colombia is to fight against drug trafficking and terrorism:

History repeats itself, and in the end it's all about control and North American imperialism with many interests involved, including our natural resources... This is not a fight against drug trafficking, because if they wanted to do something... the origin of drug trafficking is in the U.S. (MORALES, 2009).

With a focus on Colombia and Mexico, and using Bolivia for comparative purposes, in this paper we examine how militarization, justified by the Wars on Drugs and Terror and associated failed policies, have engaged these states in different ways. While Colombia and Mexico have tended to go along with militarization that has resulted in gross violations of human rights and sovereignty, Bolivia, after Evo Morales assumed office in 2006, has rejected uncritical neoliberalism and military intervention, becoming in many ways the voice of the subaltern. Unlike Bolivia, in Colombia first and now in Mexico, the voices of the victims try to rise in the midst of a violent war sanctioned by the State, where impunity prevails and common citizens have no formal recourse to justice.

The intention of this paper is twofold. First, with an emphasis on Colombia and Mexico, to illuminate the brutal consequences of an externally defined military approach disconnected from complex local realities by providing a brief outline of the magnitude of militarization and its dire consequences. And second, to briefly highlight different efforts to, at one end create local spaces of peace and end impunity in each country, and, at the other end, radically change a history of military intervention in Latin America through alliances between governments and civil society that are beginning to change the official tone of the debate.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE IN THE MILITARIZATION OF LATIN AMERICA

Beginning nearly six decades ago, the Cold War justified US military intervention in Latin America and its support for military dictatorships, which led to the murder, torture, disappearance and exile of thousands of people throughout the region. A war that was supposed to prevent the spread of communism and pave the way for the creation of “democratic” societies, left instead broken communities, repressive regimes, and absolute impunity. In 1982, the U.S.-backed military government in Guatemala killed 10,000 indigenous people and displaced 100,000 from their homes. Death squads in El Salvador vanished anti-government activists with impunity as the U.S.-backed government fought guerrilla forces. And in Nicaragua the U.S. trained and funded the Contras in order to remove from power the Sandinista government, which had overthrown the bloody U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship (FOX, 2012).

More than 30 years ago, as the Soviet Union collapsed and the specter of communism could no longer justify military intervention, the War on Drugs became the new banner that would justify the continuation of the trend to militarize Latin American countries. The U.S. military, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), intelligence agencies, and mercenary contractors, in collusion with corrupt Latin American governments, militaries, paramilitaries and the promises of a neoliberal future, have led to what has become arguably a worse human rights disaster. For the past two decades, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, the War on Terror joined the War on Drugs and the fear of terrorism justified once again the ratcheting up of the militarization strategy.

The victims of these various wars, justified on moral grounds and undertaken in the name of global democracy and the assumed universal desire for the free movement of capital, are overwhelmingly the poor and the disadvantaged who, to the benefit of a small but wealthy elite, have been jailed, murdered, and expelled from their lands and prevented from making a reasonable and dignified livelihood. As Noam Chomsky pointed out in reference to the war on drugs, it “has little to do with drugs but a lot to do with counterinsurgency and driving campesinos off the land to facilitate mining and other profitable enterprises” undertaken by corporate interests (GRANDIN, 2012, p. 33). Today, these victims of violence are often described as “collateral damage” of the “Americanization” of drug enforcement, which encourages Latin American governments to use military intervention as the principal strategy

against “narco-terrorism,” “creating an environment in which the drug trade and the accompanying violence continues to increase” (BARTILOW; EOM, 2009, p. 92).

The victims¹ however, are also actors who, despite suffering unimaginable atrocities as a result of military abuses, persist in carrying on collective struggles for egalitarian, peaceful and truly democratic societies. As Carlos Beristain’s long-term work with victims of human rights abuses in Latin America shows, victims, who are usually stigmatized, oftentimes prefer to be considered survivors, thus emphasizing their capacity to resist and take an active role in transforming the context of violence. This context, however, goes beyond the violence directly experienced. It also depends on the role taken by the State in providing formal support to victims, including access to justice and the punishment of the perpetrators of violence (2011, p. 14). As Beristain underscores, when victims perceive that the State is implicated in the violation of human rights and they have no recourse to formal justice, the level of trauma increases exponentially, and oftentimes, as is the case of displaced populations, victims lose their ability to make long-term projections about their own lives. As we describe next, the “collateral damage” of the militarization strategy in Colombia and Mexico has left many victims and negligible results in terms of the stated goals. It has also left many survivors who continue to resist.

COLOMBIA’S UNRELENTING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

U.S. militarization in Colombia has been a case study of Morales’ description of changing rationales for militarization that morph over time. The United States played a key role in 1962 advising Colombia to establish a structure to “perform counter-agent and counter-propaganda functions and as necessary to execute paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents” (MCCLINTOCK, 1992, p. 222). Counterinsurgency assistance to the Colombian armed forces included aid that supported the attack in 1964 on an armed peasant commune, leading to the formation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia’s strongest guerrilla organization involved in the country’s ongoing armed conflict (RAMIREZ LEMUS; STATON; WALSH, 2005).

¹ As defined in Beristain (2011, p. 37) “victim is a person who has suffered individual or collective damages, including physical injuries, emotional suffering, economic losses or a substantial reduction of his/her fundamental rights, as a consequence of actions or omissions that constitute a clear violation of international human rights norms or a substantial violation of international humanitarian rights”.

In the 1990s, the drug war increasingly dominated the U.S. official discourse to justify intervention, reflected in increasing levels of military aid. By 1991, Colombia had topped El Salvador as Latin America's largest recipient of military and police assistance, with most of the aid going to the police for drug interdiction and aerial fumigation of illegal crops, particularly in the Amazon region. During the presidency of Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) fumigation of a highly toxic chemical herbicide, Roundup SL² became the key strategy of the U.S. militarization strategy, negotiated through what came to be known as Plan Colombia³. With Plan Colombia, the Colombian military became the primary beneficiary of U.S. military aid and training (RAMIREZ LEMUS; STATON; WALSH, 2005), and Colombia became the largest recipient of U.S. military aid outside of the Middle East (ISACSON, 2010).

After September 11, 2001 the mission of U.S. troops and military assistance in Colombia was formally expanded to include counter-insurgency operations, as Washington waged a “global war on terrorism.” In 2002, Colombian President Uribe (2002-2010) unveiled his “Democratic Security” policy, designed to rid the country of terrorism and destroy the illegal drug trade with increased U.S. military assistance. By then, dozens of U.S. Special Forces were training the Colombian military to protect an oil pipeline located near the Venezuelan border. The pipeline, of which the U.S. company Occidental Petroleum owns a significant portion, had been continuously bombed by guerrilla forces. More than static protection, however, military training was conducted with the explicit purpose of offensive combat (RAMIREZ LEMUS; STATON; WALSH, 2005). In 2009, the U.S. Southern Command and President Uribe attempted to expand the U.S. military mission in Colombia yet again, through an agreement for a U.S. military presence on at least seven bases in Colombia “from which mobility operations could be executed” with “the use of strategic airlift” (AIR MOBILITY COMMAND, 2009, p. 21-22). The U.S. Air Force justified costs for an upgrade of Palanquero Air Base, noting that it would provide “an opportunity for full-spectrum operations in a critical sub-region of the hemisphere where security and stability is under constant threat from narcotics funded insurgencies, anti-US

² This herbicide, a beefed-up version of the commercially available “Round-Up” produced by the Monsanto Corporation, harms human and animal health, poisons drinking water, and damages food crops. Fumigations are carried out by the U.S. defense contractor Dyncorp, a private corporation that answers to the U.S. government but without any oversight by the U.S. Congress.

³ The original Plan Colombia was revealed by then Colombia's president Andres Pastrana in 1998. Its priority was social development and the construction of peace through aid and economic alternatives for coca cultivators (RAMIREZ LEMUS; STANTON; WALSH, 2005).

governments, endemic poverty and recurring natural disasters⁴ (DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE, 2009).

The geographic expansion of the U.S. military mission in Colombia, which would have become entrenched in a ten-year agreement funded through opaque Pentagon funds, alarmed South American leaders, who convened two extraordinary presidential summits of UNASUR. Juan Manuel Santos, elected president in Colombia in 2010, moved to mend relations with his neighbors, and the Colombian Constitutional Court overturned the agreement in August 2010 (LINDSAY-POLAND; PIMIENTO, 2010).

Since 2000 Colombia has received more than US\$8 billion in mostly military aid from the US through Plan Colombia, primarily in support of Colombia's "Democratic Security" policy. The U.S. and Colombian governments have hailed the country as an example of military success in the War on Drugs, applauded for its counter-terrorism and security gains, and portrayed as a model to be followed in Afghanistan and Mexico. But how is "success" being defined? On the "terrorism" front, even though the two leftist-guerrilla groups, including the FARC, have lost ground, military intervention conspicuously omitted combat against right-wing paramilitary groups that controlled a large amount of cocaine trafficking in Colombia and committed the vast majority of atrocities against civilians during the period between 2000 and 2009. In terms of the counter-drug initiative, after countless lives and billions of dollars spent, the drug trade continues as vibrant as ever, with demand at an all time high, robust markets, and an uninterrupted supply. According to UN estimates, the number of tons of cocaine produced in the Andes, where Colombia is the largest producer, went from 925 tons in 1999 to a range of 842 to 1,111 in 2009 (ISACSON, 2010). As long-term analyst Adam Isacson warns, Colombia's model is not one "to be replicated elsewhere. Its flaws are severe, even tragic. Holding Colombia as a 'model' is both superficial and dangerous" (ISACSON, 2010, p. 3).

"Success" has indeed come at a high price. The impact of these successive waves of militarization on respect for human rights in Colombia – respect that became a formal objective of U.S. policy during Plan Colombia--, must be considered a human rights catastrophe. With a population of internally displaced citizens estimated at the end of 2010 at 3.6 million

⁴ State Department cables published by Wikileaks (2009) show that Colombia, especially President Uribe, had Venezuelan military capacities and Hugo Chávez most on their minds in negotiating the base agreement.

(government 2010 figures) to 5.2 million (COHDES 2010 figures)⁵ (IDMC, 2012), Colombia has the largest displaced population in the world. The country also experienced an explosion of civilian killings that correlated with an expansion of U.S. assistance, and of the number of army units receiving U.S. assistance. In 2008, for example, stories became public that Colombian soldiers had detained civilians, sometimes taken them far away, executed them, then claimed them as guerrillas killed in combat. These are known as “false positives.” While cases of “false positives” date back at least to the 1990s, the number of reports exploded in 2004-08, becoming “widespread and systematic,” according to Phillip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions (ALSTON, 2010). Human rights organizations reported more than 3,000 cases of executions by the military, many of them carried out in this way.

Much of U.S. militarization is accomplished not through a direct U.S. troop or base presence, but through military training and other military assistance. If U.S. assistance were having a positive effect on the human rights conduct of assisted units, we would expect to see low numbers of reported extrajudicial killings by the army in those areas where aid to the army is concentrated. Instead, a 2010 study by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) found that reported extrajudicial killings increased on average in areas after the United States increased assistance to units in those areas (FOR, 2010).

The FOR study drew on data for more than 3,000 reported killings of civilians by the Colombian armed forces between 2002 and 2009, and for U.S. assistance to more than 500 military units between 2000 and 2010. On the one hand, for the 16 largest increases of aid from one year to the next to army units operating in a specific jurisdiction, the number of reported executions in the jurisdiction increased an average of 56% from the two-year period prior to the increase to the two-year period during and after the increased assistance. On the other hand, in years after levels of assistance were substantially reduced for units operating in a jurisdiction, the number of executions reportedly committed by units operating in the jurisdiction fell, also by an average of 56%. In those jurisdictions where the number of reported killings was the highest after receiving increased assistance, all had reported multiple army killings of civilians in the period before the increase. This suggests that a problem that was ignored in deciding to increase assistance to a unit tended to become worse afterward.

⁵ The CODHES figure is cumulative since 1985 whereas the government figure is cumulative since 2000 and does not include intra-urban displacement and people displaced by crop fumigations related to Plan Colombia.

The families of those executed by Colombian armed forces were highly unlikely to find justice for these crimes. Despite persistent work by an organized and courageous human rights movement, the presence of a United Nations human rights office, media exposes of “false positives,” the establishment of governmental agencies in multiple ministries to address human rights concerns, the impunity rate was as high as 98.5% for documented killings of civilians by the military (ALSTON, 2010, p. 14).

Nevertheless, Colombians in many sectors have used creative nonviolence to organize for justice and an end to the war’s violence. Women’s peace caravans converge from far corners of the country into communities that have been hard hit by rape, displacement and murder; indigenous communities, such as the Nasa in the Cauca Department, organize with autonomous councils to reject all armed groups and establish an “indigenous guard” to confront army, guerrilla, and paramilitary attackers; urban youth refuse conscription into armed groups and use street theater to confront illegal street round-ups of youth into army barracks; *campesino* and Afro-Colombian communities in combat zones refuse to cooperate with any armed groups and work together toward food self-sufficiency, making their communities less vulnerable to military blockades; churches have banded together and linked with international counterparts, calling for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict; journalists continue to report on these initiatives and the war, despite attempts by the state to brand them guerrillas; and families of politicians, policemen and soldiers seized by guerrillas and held for years under abysmal conditions, continue to march for humanitarian accords calling for the release of their loved ones.

An important comprehensive effort to transform the armed conflict into a possibility to achieve peaceful coexistence through sustainable development is the Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Program (PDPMM). The Magdalena Medio is a mostly rural region that is rich in natural resources, agriculture and cattle ranching, and contains Colombia’s largest oil refinery. Starting in the 1980s it became a center of the country’s conflict and of violent confrontations between military, paramilitary and guerrilla groups. Despite unrelenting violence and the absence of supportive non-armed government institutions, the people of Magdalena Medio with the courage to remain in the region to fight for human rights and help local residents deal with overwhelming and continuous conflict stayed at the forefront of the PDPMM. Since 1995, the program has built a strategic partnership between the Church, civil society, the private sector, and international aid organizations in order to support a large variety of collective grassroots

development initiatives, including smallholder producer and marketing cooperatives (KATZ GARCIA, 2004).

Even though Colombia is full of organized and creative efforts to achieve justice and peace that address exclusion and inequality in the midst of an active and unpredictable armed conflict, one of the most severe criticisms of the U.S. and Colombian militarization policies is that these policies cannot achieve peaceful ends – if that was ever their intention – in large part because they ignore and contradict efforts such as the PDPMM, instead focusing support and capacity-building on violent institutions.

MEXICO'S UNRELENTING CYCLE OF IMPUNITY

Despite the atrocities committed in Colombia, the clear documentation of those atrocities and their correlation with U.S. military aid, the lessons for policy-makers seem to be wasted. This is evident when the U.S. top military officer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, refers to military partnerships between the United States and Colombia as “absolutely vital” to global peace and security (CARDEN, 2010) or when former U.S. President Bill Clinton, in a visit to Mexico states that in order to fight against narco-traffic, Mexico requires a “Plan Mexico” that is equivalent to Plan Colombia (SANDERS, 2010).

In Mexico, U.S. military intervention through the provision of equipment and training to the Mexican military and police, including support for elite and “corruption-free” antidrug units, has also had disastrous impacts. As Freeman and Sierra point out, the role of the Mexican military in the federal police forces and prosecutors’ offices is now well established, as these have gained considerable political influence and autonomy and are no longer subordinate to civilian control (FREEMAN; SIERRA, 2005). Although increased militarization has not had a noticeable impact on the volume of drugs crossing the US-Mexico border, the degree of violence in the country has achieved unprecedented levels. More than 50,000 people have been killed in this violence since 2006, with impunity rates for crime of 98.5%, according to a study by the Monterrey Institute of Technology (INFORMADOR.COM.MX, 2010). An analysis by sociologist Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo of homicide data from Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics, INEGI, indicates that the murder rate in Mexico increased by 50% in 2008 (14,009

homicides) and by an additional 50% in 2009 (19,809 homicides), this compared to a homicide rate that showed a downward trend during the previous two decades. Further analysis indicates that the increase in murders occurred in parts of the country where there has been extensive military intervention, including the U.S.-Mexico border cities of Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana (ESCALANTE GONZALBO, 2011).

The dominant narrative about violence in Mexico starts this way: “When President Felipe Calderon was elected in 2006 and declared war on narco-trafficking...” The story that most media and government officials present is that the Mexican government is fighting brutal narcos and the United States is helping the Mexican government out in that battle (CASTILLO, 2012; BBC NEWS, 2010). Murders and violence are attributed to drug related clashes and those who die are part of the drug cartels, on one side, and police who resist them, on the other (GLOBAL POST, 2011). Hillary Clinton even suggested that the mounting number of deaths was a positive sign that this war is being waged seriously (BBC, 2011).

There are, however, some serious flaws in this narrative. First, there is increasing evidence that many of those who die have nothing to do with either the drug-traffickers or the state. Violence, for example, is also linked to human right violations committed by the military against community activists and others unrelated to the drug trade. In 2006, before Calderon took office, Mexico was undergoing a political crisis. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation started a social movement called The Other Campaign, which marched across the country to document people’s views of the Mexican political system. That same year was marked by massive mobilizations of mining unions and activists protesting the lack of investigation into a mine explosion where 65 miners disappeared. Also, an Oaxaca teacher strike was violently repressed by state police; in response the teachers held a six-month long civil disobedience uprising. The predominant debate in Mexico at the time was about deep social and political issues, evident in the mass mobilizations against social inequality. In January 2007, one month after taking office under strong accusations of electoral fraud and fearing a massive national uprising, Calderon militarized the country under the justification of the War on Drugs (OSORNO, 2012).

In Chihuahua State alone, after the 2008 deployment of army troops, citizens filed 1,250 complaints against soldiers by the end of 2009 for abuses, including torture, forced kidnapping, and murder (DEL BOSQUE, 2012). This reality has become more visible with the growth since

2011 of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity. The movement has led two “caravans of consolation” along the breadth of Mexico, bringing together families of murdered and disappeared civilians, united in their anguish and call for investigations of the crimes against their loved ones.

The second problem is that the narrative gives the impression that there are two distinct separate sides, the drug-traffickers in one camp, and the police, military and the state on the other. But, as the case of the Zetas exemplifies, U.S.-trained elite soldiers can easily switch sides. In the early 1990s, the Zetas were organized as a private military and staffed with former members (deserters) from the Mexican Army’s veteran elite Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFES). After working as a private army for the Gulf Cartel, the Zetas became an independent organization in 2010 and are now one of Mexico’s leading players in the drug trade. The Zetas, as former military elite, are better trained, equipped and experienced than regular police and army units (MANWARING, 2009).

The criminal organizations do not only move illegal drugs, but also prostitution, extortion of licit businesses, other human trafficking, pirated goods, gambling, and skimming government funds. And they do this by controlling territory – once they do so, they can make money from all economic activity, legal and illegal, in the territory. Their methods are therefore military, as well as terroristic, and so the organizations seek out military skills and weaponry (DUDLEY, 2011). These can be obtained from deserters from the armed forces who have been trained by the U.S., in the private U.S. weapons market, and by co-opting police and military units, many of which are supported by the United States.

The Mexican State is also deeply integrated with drug-trafficking organizations, although selectively so. Some analysts have made the case that the state and even U.S. agencies support the Sinaloa Cartel in their battle with other criminal groups such as the Zetas (BURNETT; PENALOSA; BENINCASA, 2010; ROSTON, 2012). When police get into a battle with drug traffickers, and some of those traffickers fall, it benefits their competition, which in some instances is allied with the police or their handlers. Sometimes policemen are killed by traffickers – more than 2,000 federal, state and municipal police have been killed since 2006 (CALIFORNIA SENATE, 2012, p. 4). Sometimes cartel members kill each other.

Whatever the outcome of the battles between cartels and police, they lead participants on all sides to seek more firepower and more destructive weapons. It should be noted that for law-abiding Mexicans it is very difficult to obtain a firearm; the requirements for a gun license are highly onerous and the country has only one government-controlled store that sells guns, located in Mexico City, as there are no private gun stores in Mexico (COSS NOGUEDA, 2011). The international data on firearms possession and violent crime do not suggest that reforming these restrictions would make Mexicans safer. Nevertheless, for the armed forces and cartels, the United States is the principal supplier for the weapons on all sides in this war.

There is a public flow and a private flow of weapons from the United States to the war in Mexico. The public flow is primarily under the banner of the drug war and transnational organized crime, specifically the Merida Initiative, a security cooperation agreement between the U.S., Mexico, and Central America. Through the Merida Initiative, also called Plan Merida by its critics, the United States has granted \$1.5 billion in military and police assistance to Mexico since 2007. Most of this has been in the form of helicopters and aircraft, as well as equipment, training, and weapons. More than 5,000 Mexicans, most of them police, have received U.S. training, and the United States in 2011 announced construction of a second police training academy in Puebla (OVEMEX, 2011). The public flow also includes direct commercial sales, licensed by the State Department, from U.S. weapons dealers to the Mexican armed forces. These sales have also increased dramatically in recent years, growing from a handful of military rifle and assault weapon sales licensed in 2002, to more than 20,000 assault weapons and 14,000 military rifles in 2010 (U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2010).

The private flow that supplies the drug cartels is from commercial gun dealers in the United States, mostly in the border states of Texas and Arizona. There, an individual can legally purchase 20 AK-47s from one or more of the more than 8,000 gun dealers doing business in the border region, and walk out. These are *military* weapons, but the purchase is totally legal. That individual can then pass the weapons onto someone who works for a cartel – that is the illegal part. And that person can easily transport them across the border into Mexico. The line between a private and a public flow of weapons is blurred by “gunwalking” sting operations undertaken by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) between 2006 and 2011. Through these operations, the ATF allowed thousands of guns to be bought by arms traffickers in order to trace these guns to drug cartels and, in theory, arrest key Mexican drug cartel figures.

Operation Fast and Furious, the largest operation so far, resulted in the sale of over 2,000 firearms, of which less than 700 have been found and no arrests of key cartel figures have been made. These operations came into public light after the murder of a U.S. border patrol agent in 2011 (SAVAGE, 2012).

U.S. gun policies in combination with policy mechanisms designed to promote NAFTA, which have opened the free flow of legal commodities between the US and Mexico, have facilitated the illegal sale of automatic weapons to Mexico. It is extremely easy to bring guns into Mexico. Controls are focused in the other direction, and the border is structurally porous for goods going from the United States to Mexico. In the Rio Grande Valley in Texas alone, more than 21,000 trucks and cars cross over the border into Mexico every day, 365 days a year. Even if federal and state authorities put more resources into enforcing laws against gun trafficking, they could not stop this flow at the border. It has to be stopped earlier, at or before the point of sale. So far, U.S. legislators have deliberately refused to establish such controls. As a result, 87% of guns seized in Mexico and traced between 2004 and 2009 – seven out of every eight guns - were sold in the United States (FORD, 2009, p. 15).

What, then, is a more accurate narrative of the violence in Mexico? It is more like this: There are competing mafia organizations fighting for territory, including the Mexican armed forces, and the United States is selling weapons to each of them, training many of them, and establishing armories at the edges of their territories. The violence, however, is not neatly contained within Mexico. The studies by Escalante Gonzalbo in Mexico and FOR in Colombia underline Bartilow and Eom's research in smaller Central America and the Caribbean countries, which concluded that "DEA coordinated drug enforcement... has resulted in an increase in violent and property crimes." (2009, p. 111). They also found that, in the view of many in the Caribbean law enforcement community,

American policy makers demand that countries fully cooperate in drug control to limit the flow of drugs from entering the U.S. but are reluctant to cooperate in meaningful gun control and pass legislation that would limit the flows of guns from the U.S. (2009, p. 112).

As in Colombia, Mexican communities have not been inert victims of this process. Building on movements of solidarity with the indigenous-led Zapatistas, resistance to electoral fraud, environmental activism in the Juárez Valley, struggles against femicide in Ciudad Juárez,

and initially small efforts to promote Gandhian nonviolence, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity began and grew quickly in 2011. Convoled by poet and journalist Javier Sicilia, whose son was murdered in Cuernavaca in March 2011, the movement challenged the stigmatization of victims of violence as criminals and the institutional corruption of the State, organizing a week-long march to Mexico City and two national caravans to the U.S. and Guatemalan borders. The caravans visited communities hard-hit by violence and made visible the suffering and disillusionment of families ravaged by forced disappearances, murders, kidnappings and the state's indifference to or collusion with these crimes. It also articulated U.S. responsibility for this suffering, particularly through the prohibition of drugs and trafficking in guns. The movement managed in its first year to change the frame by which many describe the drug war in Mexico, as regional elites in Central America joined the call to re-examine U.S.-designed drug prohibition strategies.

BOLIVA'S COMMON SENSE ALTERNATIVE

Bolivia represents an important referent and contrast to Colombia and Mexico. Unlike Colombia, in Bolivia, as Kathryn Ledebur points out, "there are no guerrilla movements or paramilitary groups. Thus the ineffectiveness of antidrug programs and the outright harm they generate are clearly evident." (2005, p. 143). Cultivated for over 4,000 years, coca has been a critical part of Andean culture and economy in terms of its symbolic importance, its nutritional and medical properties, and, after the conquest, as a valuable commodity (KOHL, 1996). In the 1950s and 60s, a lack of government presence in many rural areas of Bolivia led to the formation of peasant unions, which took the role of local governance. These included unions of small coca producers in Bolivia's main coca producing regions of the Chapare and the Yungas. Prior to the 1980s, coca was produced as part of a diversified farming system, mainly for local consumption and to supply domestic markets. In the 1980s, the importance of coca as a cash crop grew to unprecedented levels as demand for cocaine soared, mainly from US. consumers. After Peru, Bolivia became the second most important supplier of coca for cocaine production, principally marketed by Colombian cartels, until 1995, when Colombia's production surpassed Bolivia's.

From the mid-1980s to 2004, U.S. military intervention in Bolivia focused on cracking down on suppliers of coca through special U.S.-trained police and military units. UMOPAR, the

anti-drug police funded by the U.S. committed well-documented human rights abuses, failing to differentiate between coca growers and drug traffickers (FARTHING, 2010). Most efforts focused on the Chapare region which became marked by violent confrontations between coca growers and security forces that invariably targeted the poorest and most vulnerable, including small-scale farming families and merchants.

During the 1990s a wave of political protests against U.S.-funded repression overtook the nation. An organized resistance of impoverished coca producers in legally recognized coca unions grew, as several of their leaders were jailed and killed during peaceful protests. In 2001 the president of the Permanent Human Rights Assembly, a national NGO, reported that the United States “talks about human rights and pressures the Bolivian state to carry out forced eradication, which is a synonym for violence, death, murdered *campesinos*, and tortured soldiers and police officers. They put up the funds and we offer up the dead” (LEDEBUR, 2005, p. 163). Also, as in Colombia and Mexico, corruption was a common theme in which those at the top of the drug trade were frequently found to have ties with Bolivia’s political and military elites. Cases of human rights violations were transferred to Bolivian military courts and forced eradication campaigns, like “Plan Dignidad”, left farmers without a viable livelihood. As Ledebur (2005) points out, until the end of the 1990s, when eradication programs intensified, coca provided a safety net for Bolivia’s poor. The economic crisis for the country’s mostly rural poor deepened as a result of hyperinflation, severe drought, and the adoption of neoliberal structural adjustment reforms that closed state mines in the mid-1980s and led to a decline in the prices of most crops. For many, coca production became the only possibility to ensure survival.

Unlike Colombia and Mexico, however, the strength of organized resistance that originated in peasant unions -- particularly among coca growers’ unions in the Chapare, which today represent 45,000 families organized into almost 700 unions -- became critical to the formation of a new left-wing political movement, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) (FARTHING; KHOL, 2010). A series of local political victories by MAS created the momentum that led to the presidential election of indigenous coca grower and head of the Confederation of Coca Producers Evo Morales at the end of 2005. Upon assuming the country’s leadership, and in stark contrast with previous policies, Morales successfully brought an end to 25 years of U.S.

military and political intervention related to the war on drugs. In 2008, Morales banned the DEA from the country on charges of espionage and expelled the U.S. ambassador.

The MAS government initiated a policy known as “*coca si, cocaina no*,” effectively moving the country towards a policy which values the traditional use of the coca leaf and works in coordination with local organizations. As described by Farthing and Kohl, “Alongside support of joint military-police action to curb drug trafficking and economic development initiatives, an innovative community-led control system known as “social control” or “rationalization” works to limit the amount of coca destined for cocaine production” (2010, p. 198). *Cocaleros* can grow as much as 20,200 hectares of coca in the Yungas and Chapare regions and, with the assistance of Bolivian counternarcotics forces, are charged with eradicating the rest. The new program is based on economic development objectives and sees coca cultivation as part of a diversified livelihood strategy that allows farmers to spread risk by producing subsistence and cash crops. Coca growers sell their coca directly to consumers, avoiding intermediaries and obtaining a higher profit margin. At the same time the Bolivian government is promoting the manufacturing of coca leaf-based products such as flour, toothpaste, teas, and a new export drink called Coca Colla (COSTER, 2010). It should be noted that “Colla” is used to designate the Aymara and the Quechua, indigenous peoples of Bolivia.

Export products will require the legalization of the coca leaf in the international market, which entails a change in the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs from 1961 that bans the export of any products that contain cocaine alkaloids. Bolivia has requested that coca chewing and coca leaf for licit and traditional uses be removed from the U.N.'s list of controlled substances (COSTER, 2010). At the end of 2011, Bolivia withdrew from the Single Convention with the intent of rejoining with a reservation pending acceptance of its request. While U.S. officials have said that the Bolivian initiative threatens the integrity of the convention, as Ledebur points out, it is a practical proposal to bring a convention from 1961 up to par with modern times. For the past three years Bolivia has been branded by the U.S. as a country that has “failed demonstrably” in its counternarcotics efforts; however, Bolivia eradicated more coca than Peru did and seized more cocaine than Mexico (WOLA, 2012). In addition, the violence associated with drug control has been eliminated and local producers are collaborating with the once-feared UMOPAR anti-drug police (FARTHING, 2010).

CONCLUSION

In this article we have examined the detrimental effects of U.S. facilitated military intervention and state sponsored violence mainly in Colombia and Mexico, but also in Bolivia (before the election of Evo Morales), justified by the War on Drugs and the War on Terror. We have tried to show a link between an externally defined military approach disconnected from complex local realities and the rise in violent crime and human rights abuses. This military intervention has inflamed existing conflicts and reinforced domestic forces that seek to repress social movements and enrich themselves through links to transnational capital. We have also attempted to show that the victims of these wars, often described as “collateral damage,” are frequently common citizens who are not involved in drug trafficking or terrorism.

These victims, better referred to as survivors, have not remained quiet in the face of the terror that they have experienced, often at the hands of their own governments. Instead, in Colombia, Mexico, and Bolivia, they have struggled to create spaces of peace and to end impunity. In this regard Bolivia offers a contrasting perspective. Through the efforts of MAS and under the leadership of Evo Morales, the country has taken a complete turn away from the received wisdom. Although Bolivia’s “social control” strategy is still in progress, it shows the importance of defining the “war on drugs” from “southern” perspectives, taking into account regional contexts, population needs, community participation, as well as the importance of a dialogue in which the parties involved have equal representation. In the case of Colombia and Mexico, although there are important social movements, like the PDMM and the MPJD, that help the victims of violence cope and resist, these cannot change their respective countries’ policies of militarization without a clear commitment from the state. They also show, however, that it is possible to achieve progress when the emphasis shifts from supporting violent institutions to supporting grassroots efforts toward sustainable rural development, social investment, and the expansion of democratic institutions.

After 30 years of a relentless and senseless war that has displaced and murdered entire social groups, but that has been unable to put a stop to the drug trade, it is clear that policies obsessed with controlling the supply of raw materials, and that do not pay enough attention to the demand side that drives drug production, are bound to fail. In the last instance, it appears that the war on drugs and the war on terror, like the Cold War in the past, are not designed to rid the

hemisphere of drugs, terrorists, or communists, but to maintain a neo-colonial order based on uneven economic globalization. These wars are good for military business and provide the justification to force entire populations out of regions where there are valuable natural resources or to target social movements that demand social justice and political accountability from the state.

Going back to the UNASUR document referred to at the beginning of this paper, we conclude by re-stating the commitment made by member countries “to establish a mechanism of mutual trust in terms of defense and security” and underscore that “the presence of foreign military forces cannot, with their means and resources linked to their own objectives, threaten the sovereignty and integrity of any South American nation and, as a result, the region’s peace and security” (ANDINA, 2009). It will be up to both citizen movements and governing leaders in the region to ensure that these commitments are realized.

REFERENCES

- AIR MOBILITY COMMAND. **Global en route strategy**. Paper presented at the Maxwell Air Force Base Conference, Alabama. 2009.
- ALSTON, Philip. **Report of the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions**. United Nations General Assembly, 28 May, 2010.
- ANDINA. **Texto completo de la declaración de unasur suscrito por 12 presidentes en Bariloche**. 2009. Disponível em: <http://www.andina.com.pe/Espanol/Noticia.aspx?id=7f707FD09YY=>. Acesso em: 23 Mar. 2012.
- BARTILOW, Horace; EOM, Kihong. Busting Drugs While Paying With Crime: The Collateral Damage of U.S. Drug Enforcement in Foreign Countries. **Foreign Policy Analysis**, Malden, MA, USA, v.5, 2009. p. 93-116.
- BERISTAIN, Carlos Martin. **Manual sobre la perspectiva psicosocial en la investigación de derechos humanos**. México: Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, 2011.
- BBC. Clinton Pledges Broader US Effort. **BBC News**. 2010. Disponível em: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8582497.stm>. Acesso em: 23 Mar. 2012.
- BBC. Hillary Clinton Backs Mexico Drug War. **BBC News**. 2011. Disponível em: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12264674>. Acesso em: 23 Mar. 2012.
- BURNETT, John; PENALOSA, Marisa; BENINCASA, Robert. **México Seems to Favor Sinaloa Cartel in Drug War**. National Public Radio, Washington, D.C, 19 Mayo 2010.
- CALIFORNIA SENATE. **Committee on public safety**. Analysis of Senate Joint Resolution, 10 Enero 2012.

CARDEN, Michael. Partnerships 'Vital' to Peace, Stability, Mullen Says. **American forces press servisse**. 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.mcguire.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123212313>
Acesso em: 23 Mar. 2012.

CASTILLO, Mariano. Is Mexico's drug war strategy working? **CNN**. 2012. Disponível em: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/16/world/americas/mexico-drug-war-strategy/index.html>. Acesso em: 16 Fev. 2012.

COSS NOGUEDA, Magda. **Tráfico de armas en México**. México: Grijalba Actualidad, 2011.

COSTER, Helen. Bolivia walks thin line as it struggles to battle coca production. **The Washington Post**, Washington, 13 Nov. 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/13/AR2010111302457.html>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

DEL BOSQUE, Melissa. The Deadliest Place in México. **Texas Observer**. 2012. Disponível em: <http://www.texasobserver.org/cover-story/the-deadliest-place-in-mexico>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE. Justification data submitted to Congress. **Military Construction Program, Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Estimates**. 2009.

DUDLEY, Steven. **The Zetas in Guatemala**. Washington, DC: In Sight Crime in the Américas, 2011.

ESCALANTE GONZALBO, Fernando. Homicidios 2008-2009 La muerte tiene permiso. **Nexos en Línea**. 2011. Disponível em: <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?P=leerarticulo&Article=19431892011> Acesso em: 23 Mar. 2012.

FARTHING, Linda. Controlling Coca Cultivation Bolivia Style. **Upside Down World**. 12 Out. 2010. Disponível em: <http://upside-downworld.org/main/bolivia-archives-31/2721-can-bolivia-slow-cocaine-production->. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

FARTHING, Linda; KHOL, Benjamin. Social Control: Bolivia's New Approach to Coca Reduction. **Latin American Perspectives**, Issue 173, v. 37, n. 4, 2010.

FOR - FELLOWSHIP FOR RECONCILIATION. **Military Assistance and Human Rights: Colombia, U.S. Accountability, and Global Implications**, 2010. Disponível em: <http://forusa.org/colombia-report-2010>. Acesso em: 1 Abr. 2012.

FORD, Jess T. **Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges**. Washington D.C.: United States Government Accountability Office, 2009.

FOX, Michael. Between Past and Present. **NACLA Report on the Americas**, New York, Spring 2012.

GLOBAL POST. Calderon's crackdown on drug gangs and violence among the gangs has killed more than 34,000 people since late 2006. **Global Post**. 2011. Disponível em: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/mexico/110124/clinton-mexico-drug-war>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

GRANDIN, Greg. Turning the Tide Revisited. An Interview With Noam Chomsky. **NACLA**

Report on the Americas, New York, v. 45, n. 1, 2012.

INFORMADOR.COM.MX. La impunidad en México alcanza al 98.5% de los delitos. **Informador**. 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.informador.com.mx/mexico/2010/247146/6/la-impunidad-en-mexico-alcanza-al-985-de-los-delitos.htm>. Acesso em: 1 Abr. 2012.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT MONITORING CENTER (IDMC). **Global Statistics**. 2012. Disponível em: [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpPages\)/22FB1D4E2B196DAA802570BB005E787C?OpenDocument&count=1000](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpPages)/22FB1D4E2B196DAA802570BB005E787C?OpenDocument&count=1000)). Acesso em: 1 Abr. 2012.

ISACSON, Adam. Don't Call it a Model. **Washington Office on Latin America**, 2010.

KATZ GARCIA, Mauricio. A Regional Peace Experience: The Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme. Accord Colombia. **Conciliation Resources**. 2004. Disponível em: <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/regional-peace-experience-magdalena-medio-peace-and-development-programme>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

KHOL, Benjamin. Coca/Cocaine control policy in Bolivia and the United States. **Colloqui**, Cornell University, Ithaca, 11, p. 1-7. 1996.

KRUG, Etienne G., POWELL, Kenneth E., and DAHLBERG, Linda L. Firearm-Related Deaths in the United States and 35 Other High- and Upper-Middle Income Countries. **Int'l J. Epidemiology**, Oxford, n. 214. 1998.

LEDEBUR, Kathryn. Bolivia: Clear Consequences. In: YOUNGERS, Coletta and ROSIN, Eileen (Orgs.). **Drugs and Democracy in Latin America**. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., p. 143-184, 2005.

LINDSAY-POLAND, John; PIMIENTO, Susana. U.S. Base Deal for Colombia: Back to the Status Quo. **Foreign Policy in Focus**. 8 Oct. 2010. Disponível em: http://www.fpfif.org/articles/us_base_deal_for_colombia_back_to_the_status_quo. Acesso em: 1 Mar. 2012.

MANWARING, Max. A "new" dynamic in the western hemisphere security environment: the Mexican Zetas and other private armies. Carlisle, PA.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2009.

MCCLINTOK, Michael. **Instruments of statecraft: U.S. guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency, counter-terrorism, 1940-1990**. New York: Pantheon, 1992.

MORALES, Evo. **Intervención de Evo Morales en Cumbre de UNASUR**. Bariloche, Argentina. 2009. Disponível em: www.youtube.com . Acesso em: 1 Abr. 2012.

OSORNO, Diego. **Inside Mexico's Drug War Part 2-The Political Crisis**. Video Produced by CreaTV-San Jose 48south7th. San Jose Peace and Justice Center, California. 2012.

OVEMEX. US, Mexico build police academy in anti-drug effort. **Borderland Beat**. 14 May 2011. Disponível em: <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/05/us-mexico-build-police-academy-in-anti.html>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

RAMIREZ LEMUS, Maria Clemencia; STATON, Kimberly; WALSH, John. Colombia: A Vicious Circle of Drugs and War. In: YOUNGERS, Coletta and ROSIN, Eileen (Orgs.). **Drugs and democracy in Latin America**. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005. p. 99-142.

ROSTON, Aram. Tinker Tailor Soldier Kingpin. **The Daily Beast**. 30 Enero 2012. Disponível em: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/01/29/el-chapo-guzm-n-mexico-s-most-powerful-drug-lord.html>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012

SANDERS, Nadia. Bill Clinton sugiere un Plan México para combatir el narcotráfico. **CNN-Mexico**. 2010. Disponível em: <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/04/24/bill-clinton-sugiere-un-plan-mexico-para-combatir-el-narco>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

SAVAGE, Charlie. Report by House Democrats Absolves Administration in Gun Trafficking Case. **The New York Times**. 2012. Disponível em: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/31/us/politics/operation-fast-and-furious-report-by-democrats-clears-obama-administration.html>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU. **Foreign Trade Division**. 2010. Disponível em: <http://data.usatradeonline.gov/>. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

UNITED NATIONS. **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs**. 1961. Disponível em: http://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1961_en.pdf. Acesso em: 28 Mar. 2012.

WIKILEAKS. **Ambassador William Brownfield to SouthCom commander Douglas Fraser, “Colombia DCA Negotiations – Ideas for Track 2,”** cable, 27 July, 2009.

WOLA - WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA. Adam Isaacson interviews Kathryn Ledebur. **Latin America Today**. 21 Mar. 2012.