[1](Troyer, 2010)

Narcoterrorism: How Drug Trafficking and Terrorism Intersect

John Cisar

Angelo State University, Center for Security Studies

[1] Afghan children sit outside a poppy field in Now Zad, Afghanistan while older family members worked the poppy fields. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Matthew P. Troyer/Released)

Abstract

This paper provides a working definition of narcoterrorism and links the lucrative drug trade to funding of traditional terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and Taliban. Through examples and methods, it demonstrates how Hezbollah receives hundreds of millions of dollars from the Tri-Border area, the FARC earns half of their income from cocaine, and the Taliban receives half of a billion dollars from the Afghan opiate trade. Furthermore, the paper provides examples how Medillin cartel and Mexican drug trafficking organization acts fit the definition of narcoterrorism. It shows groups like Hezbollah, FARC, Taliban and the Mexican DTOs have and continue to conduct narcoterrorism.

Keywords: FARC, Hezbollah, Taliban, drug trafficking organizations, DTO, drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, terrorism

In 2011, the U.S. State Department reported that 19 of 49 (39 percent) of designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) have "confirmed links to the drug trade." This corroborated an earlier 2003 Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) finding (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 3). Criminals and terrorists often share similar tactics to reach their operational goals which include acts of terrorism and involvement in criminal activity for profit (p. 7). As such, the definition of what constitutes narcoterrorism gets muddied if one only looks at motives instead of acts or results. With international efforts to curtail traditional donor and state funding of terror organizations succeeding, many terrorist groups turn to criminal enterprises to replace that financing in order to survive and operate. For FTOs like Hezbollah, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Taliban, the drug trade provides a significate and lucrative means of support. Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) like those in Mexico and Colombia use intense violence and murder to instill fear into government officials and the population to render that country's judicial systems ineffective thus allowing those groups to apply their trade with impunity. Despite international actions to control drug trafficking and terrorism, narcoterrorist groups like Hezbollah, FARC, Taliban and the Mexican DTOs use their involvement in the drug trade and their application of terror methods to survive and operate.

Literature Review

Defining Narcoterrorism

In order to effectively discuss narcoterrorism, one must first define narcoterrorism. Multiple organizations have diverse definitions of narcoterrorism based on different missions, agendas and viewpoints. The concept of "narcoterrorism" was introduced in 1983 by the Peruvian President Belaunde Terry to designate terrorist-like attacks against his country's drug enforcement police. Drug criminals utilized methods from political assailants to influence the politics of the country by causing terror and obstructing justice (Hartelius, 2008, p. 1). The Department of Defense (DOD) claims it is terrorism that is linked to illicit drug trafficking (2014, p. 181). The Department further articulates terrorism as the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political (p. 266). The DEA more narrowly describes narcoterrorism as confined to violent acts by drug trafficking or terrorist groups that are designed to influence national-level, counterdrug policy (DEA, 1994, p. 1). While the U.S. Department of State uses the United States Code Title 22 Section 2656f legal meaning of terrorism as the premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant [civilians and military personnel who are not in a war-like setting] targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents (State, 2014, p. 317). The State definition focuses on the organization's motives (political change) instead of the societal behavior changes brought on by terror acts. Because of this, State would include the FARC, Hamas and Taliban as narcoterrorist groups but exclude the Zetas, Sinaloa and Medillin crime organizations even though these groups can equally produce societal changing fear in its target groups. Excluding these drug cartels would be a mistake. They too use violence and fear to accomplish their operational goals such as assassinating journalists and bombing newspaper buildings to discourage reporting of criminal operations and targeting government officials to render a country's judicial systems ineffective. For policy consideration and this paper, a much

more useful definition of narcoterrorism is the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments, societies or peoples in pursuit of goals that are usually political and that violence is linked to illicit drug trafficking.

Hezbollah

As one of the world's largest non-state terror groups, Hezbollah is an Iranian-supported Shiite militia, political party, and social welfare organization that was created after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (Harwood, 2013). They are on the U.S. State Department FTO list and are a specially designated terrorist group. Their highlights of terror attacks include suicide truck bombings targeting U.S. Marines and French forces in Beirut (in 1983 and 1984) and U.S. military forces in the 1996 Saudi Arabian Khobar Towers bombing. Hezbollah's cross-border operations from Lebanon into Israel have increased since the Israeli withdrawal to the 'Blue Line' in May 2000[2]. They actively support Palestinian terrorist groups targeting Israel (Levitt, 2005). Additionally, Hezbollah does conduct operations outside of the Middle East, Lebanon and Israel. In 1992, a van bomb outside the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires killed 29 people and injured 250. Two years later, another car bomb attack in Buenos Aires practically destroyed the Jewish-Argentine community center, killing another 87 individuals (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005, p. 60).

Hezbollah's annual operating budget ranges from 200-500 million USD (Cammett, 2011, p. 7). Iran reportedly contributes 100-200 million USD each year although some claim that Iranian financial support has steadily declined. This reduction of support suggests possible motives for seeking alternative and sometimes illicit sources of financing (p. 6). With Shiite Lebanese diaspora communities scattered throughout the Americas, Africa, and Europe, national security experts and government investigators have warned for more than a decade that terrorist financiers use these populations to remit significant funds back to Lebanon and into the coffers of Hezbollah (Harwood, 2013). While normally engaging in criminal activity often increases groups' vulnerability by exposing them to the scrutiny of law enforcement authorities, Hezbollah's reliance on fellow sympathizers and members of local expatriate communities minimizes that potential exposure (Levitt, 2005).

One such area of sympathetic expats is the Tri-Border Area of South America (see Figure 1) formed where the borders of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil meet. For many years, these three countries have been blaming each other for tolerating widespread crime activities in the Tri-Border Area. The lack of a concerted effort by all three governments allows criminal and terror groups to continue to operate almost unchecked. In this region, the short-term goals of criminals and terrorists converge with both benefiting from easy border crossings and networks necessary to raise funds through drugs and arms smuggling (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005, p. 61). The Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este is a center of operations for several terrorist groups. With its lawlessness, the city has long allowed activities of malevolent non-state actors to flourish. Only since Sept. 11 has Ciudad del Este come under closer scrutiny by security

[2] While not an official border, the 'Blue Line' is the 'Line of Withdrawal' of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from Lebanese territory in conformity with U.N. Security Council resolution 425 to roughly the 1978 pre-Israeli invasion of Lebanon troop positions. The Line separates Lebanese and Israeli controlled areas. A 15,000 member United Nations peacekeeping force monitors activities and the cessation of hostilities along the Blue Line (UNIFIL, 2014).

analysts and intelligence agencies (p. 60). In May 2002, Ali Assi, who ran a coffee shop in the Islamic Welfare Center in Ciudad del Este, was arrested at the Beirut airport with 10 kilograms of cocaine. Assi is the father-in-law of Ali Hassan Abdallah who is one of the key operatives of the Hezbollah financial network in the Tri-Border Area and also a business partner of Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad, a convicted Hezbollah lieutenant. Ali Hassan is believed to have ordered fund transfers to Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Middle East through an associate in Ciudad del Este (p. 62). The 2003 arrest of Bassam Naboulsi in Sao Paula revealed a cocaine smuggling ring operating from Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu. Lebanese criminal groups and Hezbollah terrorist cells within smuggling networks transported Colombian cocaine to the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East with about 400 to 1000 kilograms of cocaine shipped on a monthly basis through the Tri-Border Area on its way to Sao Paulo. Bassam's brother owned a store in the Page Gallery shopping mall in Ciudad del Este which is also partially owned by the Hezbollah financier Assad Ahmad Barakat who is related to both brothers (p. 63). Investigations into 1992 and 1994 Buenos Aires bombings discovered that that same mall was used as a front for Hezbollah's crime and funding operations (p. 64). Over all, as much as 261 million USD annually has been raised in Tri-Border Area and sent overseas to support the terrorist activities of Islamic groups (p. 65).

Figure 1 Tri-Border of South America. From *Latin America: Terrorism issues* (p.23), by M.P. Sullivan and J.S. Beittel, 2013, Congressional Research Service.

In February 2011, the Treasury Department identified the Lebanon-based Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB) for its role in money laundering activities of an international narcotics trafficking network with ties to H ezbollah, and imposed sanctions that effectively prohibited the bank from operating in the United States (Sullivan & Beittel, 2013, p. 24). The Treasury Department maintained that the network was involved in moving illegal drugs from South

America to Europe and the Middle East via West Africa. In November 2011, the Department of Justice announced the federal criminal indictment of Lebanese citizen Ayman Joumaa for conspiring to coordinate shipments of cocaine from Colombia through Central America for sale to Los Zetas, one of Mexico's most violent drug trafficking organizations. The U.S. Treasury Department also designated Joumaa as a drug kingpin (SDNTs) and additionally identified him as a specially designated global terrorist (SDGT) in June 2012 (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 14). An extensive DEA investigation revealed that Joumaa laundered hundreds of millions of dollars in drug trafficking proceeds from Europe, Mexico, the United States, and West Africa for cocaine suppliers in Colombia and Venezuela. His organization operates in Lebanon, West Africa, Panama, and Colombia, and launders proceeds from illicit activities and pays fees to Hezbollah to facilitate the transportation and laundering of the proceeds (Sullivan & Beittel, 2013, p. 24). He used trade-based money laundering (TBML)[3] schemes to help conceal and disguise the true source, nature, ownership, and control of the narcotics proceeds. As an example of these fees, Hezbollah was paid to safeguard and transport bulk cash[4] movements through Beirut International Airport (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 14). U.S. Southern Command estimates that Islamist terrorist groups raise between 300 million and 500 million USD per year in the Tri-Border area and duty-free zones of Iquique, Colon, Maicao, and Margarita Island (Levitt, 2005).

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has been in operation since the 1960s and is one of the largest, oldest, most violent, and best-equipped terrorist organizations in Latin America (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 19). As of 2012, the FARC concentrated on low-cost, high-impact asymmetric attacks which commonly included launching mortars at police stations or the military, explosive devices placed near roads or paths, sniper attacks, roadblocks, and ambushes. Attacks on infrastructure, particularly on oil pipelines and equipment, increased by 46 percent in 2013 compared to 2012 (State, 2014, p. 212). Although civilian casualties do occur the FARC mainly targets security forces and government facilities for attack. Government officials, civilians, and foreigners have also been kidnaped for ransom and held for years.

The organization's longevity is due in part to its involvement in the drug trade. The enormous profit opportunity that drug trafficking has provided to the FARC is widely viewed as the driving factor for its involvement in such criminal activity (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 19). Political reform in Colombia and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have eroded the FARC's traditional bases of support (DEA, 1994, p. 7). In need of money to support their revolutionary effects, the FARC first became involved in the drug trade in the

[3] Trade-Based Money Laundering. This alternative remittance system allows illegal organizations the opportunity to transport and store illegitimate proceeds disguised as legitimate trade. Worth can be moved through this process by false-invoicing, over/under-invoicing, and over/undervaluing invoices and customs declarations on commodities that are imported or exported around the world. Global trade is frequently used by criminal organizations to move value around the world because of the complex and sometimes confusing documentation that is frequently associated with legitimate trade transactions (ICE, 2013).

[4] Bulk cash smuggling entails physically transporting large quantities of cash is designed to bypass financial transparency reporting requirements. Bulk cash smuggling does not actually constitute a money laundering mechanism as the cash remains in its original form (Realuyo, 2012, p.7).

1980s by levying protection fees on coca bush harvesters, buyers of coca paste and cocaine base, and cocaine processing laboratory operators in territory under FARC control (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 19). FARC fronts demanded "taxes" from cocaine traffickers which ran about $30 or more for each kilogram of cocaine produced in or transported through their area. In addition, FARC units would extract a 20 percent tax on every kilogram of opium gum sold from farmers involved in opium poppy cultivation. Some FARC groups have negotiated de facto "service contracts" with drug traffickers, and in exchange for money or weapons these units provide security for drug crops, cocaine laboratories, and clandestine airstrips (DEA, 1994, p. 7). When the Colombian government, with help from the United States, began a campaign to eradicate the big drug cartels, the FARC seized the opportunity to take over a larger share of the country's cocaine trafficking. In the beginning, the FARC had a tempestuous relationship with its Colombian drug cartel partners, but later the FARC became a major competitor of the drug cartels (Cardenas, 2013, p. 64). Over time, the FARC took a more direct role in drug production and distribution. FARC's leaders began to eliminate what they perceived as middle-brokers from the narcotics trade and to take a more direct role in drug production and distribution. Farmers were forced to grow and sell coca to local FARC commanders, who then transported the raw material to FARC-controlled processing and refining facilities. By 2005, 65 of the FARC's 110 operational units were believed to be involved in the cultivation and circulation of cocaine (Rollins, Wyler, & Rosen, 2010, p. 18). Colombian Army Commander General Heman Guzman even stated that the FARC had become the "country's third drug cartel" (p.8). By the 2000s, the FARC had become the world's largest supplier of cocaine (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 19).

The effect of this criminal activity as a revenue source was described by Rudolf Hommes, a former Colombian finance minister, when he stated that the main Colombian groups had doubled their funding between 1991 and 1994, with the drug business contributing 34 percent of income, extortion and robbery 26 percent and kidnappings 23 percent (Porteous, 1996). Now the organization receives approximately 50 percent of their funding from the drug economy (Rollins, Wyler, & Rosen, 2010, p. 18). What started out as a Marxist-Leninist organization has become a major narco-trafficking cartel reaping an estimated net profit from drug related crime of at least 300 million USD every year (Hartelius, 2008, p. 1).

Taliban

Across Afghanistan in 2013, Taliban insurgents conducted a significant number of large vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks that targeted Coalition Forces bases, military convoys, and Afghan government buildings. In addition, these insurgents employed a variety of tactics to target Afghan security personnel and Coalition Forces in both major cities and rural areas, seeking to expand their territorial influence and further disrupt civil governance. In major cities, attacks were often well-coordinated and complex with the intention of garnering media attention. Insurgents also assassinated several provincial Afghan leaders (State, 2014, p. 179). Major Taliban attacks included an assault on the Presidential Palace and nearby U.S. Embassy facilities, detonated VBIEDs in front of Afghanistan's Supreme Court building, an attack against the Afghan Intelligence Headquarters in Kabul city, and detonated a suicide VBIED outside a judicial building in Farah City, followed by an assault on the Farah Court Building killing 34 civilians and 12 security members forces with an additional 100 people injured (p. 180). These operations line up with the Taliban's goals of driving the Coalition

Forces out of Afghanistan, overthrowing the central Afghan government in Kabul, and a return to national power.

To accomplish these ambitious goals, the Taliban needs the support of the people and an expansive source of funds. Although historically not always the case, the Taliban have turned to the lucrative opiate trade as a key source of funds. According to United Nations figures, Afghan opiates generated approximately 68 billion USD in worldwide proceeds during 2009 (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 11). Of that, UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates the value of opium plus its heroin and morphine derivatives produced by Afghanistan contributed nearly 3 billion USD or the equivalent of about 15 percent of Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 (Sopko, 2014, p. 1). Approximately 98 percent of Afghanistan's opium is produced in seven provinces that are under Taliban control (Rollins, Wyler, & Rosen, 2010, p. 21). The Taliban reportedly obtains drug-related proceeds in several ways. Since 90 percent of transactions in Afghanistan go through the hawala system,[5] it is difficult to distinguish a legal transaction from an illegal one and is often used by drug traffickers and the Taliban to meld illegally acquired funds into the legal market to obscure where the funds originated (Curtis, 2013, p. 5).

With this in mind, Khan & Er try to make an accounting of the Taliban's drug related income. First, Taliban commanders collect agricultural tithes (ushr) from poppy farmers (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 11). In addition to the profit the Taliban makes by taxing farmers, they apparently also have started growing poppy on their own which they do covertly and avoid portraying themselves as opium farmers. By this, Taliban netted an estimated 142 million USD from the 2011 opium crop alone (Khan & Er, 2013, p. 55). Next, the Taliban tax drug processors according to the amount of refined end product they produce. In 2011, total heroin production in Afghanistan was estimated at around 467 metric tons with the Taliban controlling more than 50 laboratories within Afghanistan. They levy a tax of 250 USD for every kilogram of refined heroin manufactured (morphine base is taxed at a slightly lower rate) which allowed the Taliban to collect approximately 116 million USD from the refining process in 2011 (p. 56). The third and most profitable stage is the movement or shipment of heroin from the laboratory where the opium was processed to the point of sale. Three main routes are used for moving the product out of Afghanistan, and the Taliban either control these routes or provide protection and diversion tactics to ensure safe movement of the opium. Using transport protection fee rate of 850 USD per kilogram and approximately 360,000 kg of product, the shipping phase income is calculated to about 300 USD million annually (p. 57). The total revenue for Taliban from the cultivation, processing, and shipment of opium and heroin comes to approximately 530–570 million USD annually (see Figure 2) (p. 55).

[5] Hawala is an informal system of money transfer that uses a third party and is mainly practiced in Islamic societies. A customer pays hawaladar (#1) in one place who authorizes an associate hawalader (#2) in another place to pay the intended recipient. No actual cash is transferred between the customer and the recipient. Hawaladar #2 trusts that he will be eventually reimbursed by Hawaladar #1 in some way. The whole system is based on trust and leaves no written records thus the transfers are very hard for law enforcement to trace.

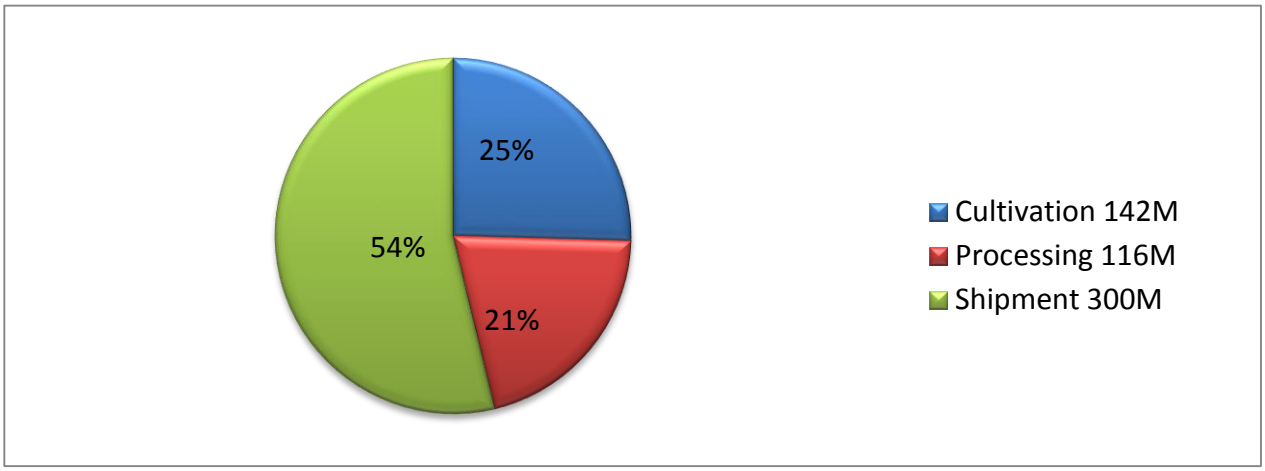

Figure 2 Annual Taliban Drug Revenue. Created using data from "Cutting the link between illegal drugs and terrorists" by K.J. Khan and O. Er, 2013, *Combating Terrorism Exchange, 3*(3), pp. 55-57.

Moreover, local Taliban commanders have at times directly engaged in drug trafficking activities to supplement their incomes (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 11). Links between the Taliban and drug smugglers were highlighted in the case of Haji Bashir Noorzai, a major drug trafficker, who was convicted of smuggling 50 million USD worth of heroin into United States. His indictment alleged that he provided explosives, weapons, and personnel to the Taliban in return for protection of poppy crops and trafficking routes (Curtis, 2013, p. 4).

The Taliban leadership realizes opium remains Afghanistan's biggest cash crop and major income earner (Sopko, 2014, p. 3). Afghans who relied on poppy cultivation favored Taliban rule because it allowed them to continue growing opium (Curtis, 2013, p. 4). The Taliban saw the eradication polices hurt poor farmers while lining the pockets of the Afghan authorities (pp. 2-3). An opium ban threatened to cause widespread public unrest and disrupt the Taliban's ability to consolidate control over the country (p. 3). Recognizing the lucrative nature of this drug trade, the Taliban began to manage and control this industry, allowing the group to guarantee order, security, and a measure of economic prosperity (p. 4). While they asserted that drug consumption was still illegal, the production and sale of opium would be allowed (p. 3). The Taliban's support of the drug trade became the key source of its political legitimacy in poppy-growing regions (p. 4). Thus, the Taliban embracing of the drug trade accomplishes goal of obtaining public support for their movement while securing a lucrative steam of revenue to fund its operations.

Medillin Cartel

In adopting insurgent or terrorist techniques, drug trafficking organizations in Mexico, Central and South America use intimidation, assassination, and corruption to render the judicial system impotent to protect government officials, law enforcement and the people as a whole. The Medillin cartel offered judges, police, and officials the choice of 'plata o plomo' or the

choice of taking financial bribes or a bullet (Roth, 2010, p. 53). Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the cofounder of the Medillin cartel, Pablo Escobar, was responsible for killing an estimated 1,000 Colombian judges and government officials and the bombing of an Avianca jet, murdering 110 people (p. 153). According to General Rosso Jose Serrano, former Chief of Colombia Nation Police Force, Escobar had 500 policemen killed in Medellin in just one year (Boettcher, 2003). His plan of intimidation and corruption paralyzed the Colombian government's efforts to bring Pablo Escobar and his group to justice for their many acts of murder and narcoterrorism. When Colombian President Gaviria ordered him transferred to a more secure facility Pablo just walked out and escaped his luxury prison, built just for him, in front a brigade of armed soldiers. Gaviria's "demand for an intensified effort to capture Escobar" encouraged the use of all police methods in addition to military and extralegal means (Evans, 2008). Those extralegal means included an American-Colombian taskforce in which U.S. Army Delta forces trained and equipped a special unit of the Colombian National Police, called the Search Block, to hunt Escobar and used the U.S. Army Intelligence Support Activity's Centra Spike aircraft to provide intelligence and electronic triangulation position reporting of communications (Boettcher, 2003). Additionally, a vigilante group call Los PEPES (People Persecuted By Pablo Escobar) started using similar terrorist tactics to attack Escobar's family, friends, supporters and properties in an effort to isolate Pablo from his support structure (Boettcher, 2003). With these combined legal and extralegal efforts, the Search Block found and killed Pablo Escobar in December of 1993.

Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations

In parts of Mexico, the same style narcoterrorism has been used to counter the Mexican government crackdown of the DTOs. "A number of indicators suggest the terror campaign is working, with police resignations and desertion from the military at record numbers" and newspapers censoring organized crime coverage (Roth, 2010, p. 54). From 2006 to 2013, 70 Mexican mayors and former mayors were killed, their murders bearing signs of organized crime killings (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira & Shirk, 2014, p. 34). In a sample of 4,380 organized crime murders[6] from 2006 to 2013 by the Memoria project, 680 (15.5 percent) of the bodies were accompanied by some kind of narco-message (narcomensaje) (p. 33). These types of messages are usually directed to government officials or rival cartels (see Figure 3). The same survey sample also found that torture was identified in 710 cases (16.2 percent), decapitation in 456 (10.4 percent), and dismemberment in 349 (8 percent) (p. 34). The intimidation of public and police officials through violence or the threat of violence against their lives or their families' lives, is a much more widespread and effective tactic than just a trade for money, and likely accounts for a plurality of corrupt law enforcement officials in Mexico (Placido & Perkins, 2010, pp. 4-5). From 2006 to 2013, 91 journalist and media workers have been killed with many more suffering kidnappings, beatings, threats and other types of aggression (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira & Shirk, 2014, p. 36). This violence over the past decade makes Mexico one of the

[6] The criteria that the Mexican Government uses to classify murders as "Organized Crime Homicides": 1. Victim killed by high-caliber or automatic firearm typical of organized crime groups (OCG) (.50 caliber, AK- & AR-type). 2. Signs of torture, decapitation, or dismemberment. 3. Body was wrapped in blankets, taped, or gagged 4. Killed at specific location, or in a vehicle. 5. Killed by OCG within penitentiary. 6. Special circumstances (e.g., narco-message; victim OCG member; abducted, ambushed, or chased). (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira & Shirk, 2014, p. 17)

most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Often these attacks cause journalists to self-censor their work and news outlets to stop publishing or broadcasting stories on violent crime. Additionally, organized crime groups appear to be targeting citizens who use social media to report on the violence (Beittel, 2013, p. 27).

Figure 3 Bodies hung with narco-message from a Nuevo Laredo bridge.[7] From "Nine bodies found hanging off Nuevo Laredo bridge" by Ovemex, 2012, *Borderland Beat.* Copyright 2012 by *Borderland Beat*. Reprinted with permission.

The brutal violence, military tactics and powerful weapons such as hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, automatic rifles, and convoy ambushes employed by Mexican drug trafficking organizations far exceed acts normally committed by narcotics trafficking and organized crime in general, and more resemble armed conflicts and insurrections in other countries. The Zetas DTO was formed in 1998 by 14 former Mexican soldiers, some with American paratrooper training, and has grown to command more than 10,000 gunmen that operate from the Rio Grande border with Texas to deep inside Central America (Grillo, 2012). To counter this, the United States has extensively trained and supported special Mexican Marine units to hunt and capture/kill high-level DTO targets. This American cooperation with the Mexican Marines has been highly successful (Miroff & Booth, 2010). Reminiscent of other war zones where people fled for their safety, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, an international non-governmental organization (NGO), estimated in 2011 that 230,000 persons were displaced due to the intense Mexican violence (Beittel, 2013, p. 32). Remarking on the situation in Mexico to the Council on Foreign Relations in 2010, then-U.S. Secretary of State

[7] The bodies of four women and five men were found hanging off a bridge in the Mexican border city of Nuevo Laredo. The message apparently from the Zetas to rivals DTOs and is translated: Fucking (Golfas) whores, this is how I'm going to finish off every fucker you send to heat up the plaza. You have to fuck up sometime and that's when I'm gonna put you in your place. That's when we are going to fuck up "El Gringo" that keeps setting off car bombs, Juanito Carrizales that keeps crying like a bitch because I killed that fucker "El Tubi", "El Metro 4" who asked Comandante Lazcano for mercy when he was kicking the shit out of him, "El R1" in Reynosa, now you're pitching a fit, that's ok, I left you your guys, the others got away, but I'll get them. Sooner or later. See you around fuckers. (Ovemex, 2012)

Hillary Clinton said the organized criminal violence by the drug cartels may be "morphing into or making common cause with what we would call an insurgency"[8] (p. 5).

On August 25, 2011, 52 people lost their lives in a casino fire allegedly ignited by Los Zetas in retaliation against the owners leading Mexican President Calderón to decry this incident as the work of "true terrorists" (Beittel, 2013, p. 40). However, some claim these Mexican DTOs lack a discernible political goal or ideology and thus their acts do not fit the term of terrorism. In their ruthless pursuit of profit, they have a goal of challenging the Mexican government and other countries' state monopoly on the use of force and rule of law. As indicated in a 2012 message signed by the Zetas and hung from a bridge in Monterrey, "Even with the support of the United States, they [Mexican government] cannot stop us, because here the Zetas rule… The government must make a pact with us because if not we will have to overthrow it and take power by force" (Grillo, 2012). A Mexican Senate report detailed that 195 or 8 percent of Mexican municipalities were completely under control of organized crime and another 1,536 or 63 percent were infiltrated by organized crime (Beittel, 2013, p. 45). In addition, the report stated that criminal structures operate with logistical support from corrupt municipal police and politicians (p. 46). Organized crime groups like the Zetas seem to be achieving their goal of taking control of government functions. In light of the current situation, why does the U.S. State Department insist that "[t]here are no known international terrorist organizations operating in Mexico" (State, 2014, p. 217)? The acts of the Mexican DTOs are narcoterrorism as defined by this paper.

Control of Narcoterrorism

With the post 9-11 attention on terrorism, the international community fails to effectively control narcoterrorism. The FARC has evolved into a powerful drug cartel that was militarily decimated as an insurgency by Colombia. Yet, it remains extremely resilient despite being generally unpopular within Colombia as a whole and having very remote prospects for achieving its main ambition (Cardenas, 2013, p. 65). With more than two decades of international counternarcotics efforts, the FARC has refined its strategy and has seen its drug revenues rise to considerable levels to ably fund its terror and propaganda agenda. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has seen a robust resurgence even though they were almost completely exiled from the country by Coalition Forces. Again, years of international antidrug exertions have proven fruitless with Afghanistan providing more than 90 percent of the world's opiates. The Taliban's share of this drug trade has risen to over a half of a billion dollars which enables them to support a high level of attacks on government and Coalition Forces. Even with American government constraints, Hezbollah was able to deploy 10,000 rockets capable of penetrating well into Israel and could provide several millions of USDs of funding to al-Qaeda operatives and Palestinian terrorist groups in a year (Levitt, 2005). The Mexican drug trafficking violence has already spilled over into the United States and Mexican DTOs are present in more than 1,000 U.S. cities (Beittel, 2013, p. 6). Mexican drug cartels conduct murders all across America even in places far from the border like Oregon and Washington where mass execution style shootings and multiple bombing have been linked to Mexican drug traffickers (Zaitz, 2013b). Between January 2010

[8] Insurgency defined as "the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region" (DOD, 2014, p. 129).

and April 2011, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) reported that 22 murders, 24 assaults, 15 shootings and five kidnappings in Texas took place directly at the hands of Mexican cartels (McCaul, 2012, p. 23). American law enforcement officers are also becoming targets. Since 2007, violence against Border Patrol agents has increased by 35 percent to include 13 deaths (p. 24) and the Texas DPS records 58 incidents of shots fired at Texas law enforcement by Mexican cartel operatives since 2009 (p. 25). In Oregon, a Mexican drug trafficker associated with Zetas threatened to kill a DEA agent and his family who had worked to disrupt his drug trafficking operation. The former U.S. Attorney in the area proclaimed, "by threatening an agent's family, that was crossing a line that drug traffickers have not been willing to cross in the United States" (Zaitz, 2013a).

Despite the concentrated efforts of international agencies and governments, there is no evidence of success against narcoterrorism (Khan & Er, 2013, p. 61). Several factors may cause this. In drug-producing countries, the narcotics trade has the potential to provide drug friendly terrorist groups with an added bonus: recruits and sympathizers among impoverished, neglected, and isolated farmers who can not only cultivate drug crops but also popularize and reinforce anti-government movements (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 10). Evidence of this terror group-farmer synergy can be found in Afghanistan where 89 percent of total poppy cultivation occurs in regions that have strongest insurgent and criminal networks (Sopko, 2014, p. 5) and in Colombia where coca production thrived in areas under FARC control (Rollins & Wyler, 2010). Challenged strategic planning by American government agencies may create more favorable conditions for terror groups. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found in his last trip to Afghanistan that no one at the Embassy could convincingly explain to him how the U.S. government counternarcotics efforts were making meaningful impacts on the narcotics trade or how they will have a significant impact after the 2014 transition. In addition, he was astonished to find that the counternarcotics effort does not seem to be a top priority during this critical transition period and beyond (Sopko, 2014, p. 6). The terror-crime nexus creates risks to the American homeland. General Victor E. Renaults Jr, Commander of the U.S. Northern Command, stated that "drug cartels have developed a distribution system to rival the world's largest retailers." Terrorist networks could use their trafficking ties to facilitate the movement of personnel and harmful goods and material into the United States (Rollins, Wyler, & Rosen, 2010, p. 42). Neglected in the post 9-11 environment, international narcoterrorism prosecutions appear to have gained prominence since enactment of the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 27).[9] In spite of concentrated governmental efforts by Mexican President Calderón to attack the drug trafficking organizations, the country's violence rose to record levels with 60,000 organized crime-related homicides and another 26,000 Mexicans reported missing during his six year term. The level of homicides is expected to remain quite high in the near future (Beittel, 2013, p. 37). Even with international sanctions and counterterror efforts, Hezbollah, Taliban, FARC and Mexican DTOs groups have survived and continue to spread their violence and fear as the world continues to struggle to finds ways to control narcoterrorism.

[9] Section 122 of the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-177) added a new prohibition against narcoterrorism with enhanced criminal penalties which it a violation of U.S. law to engage in narcotics-related crimes anywhere in the world while knowing, conspiring, or intending to provide support, directly or indirectly, for a terrorist act or to a terrorist organization (Rollins & Wyler, 2013, p. 27).

Conclusion

A far more useful definition of narcoterrorism is the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments, societies or peoples in pursuit of goals that are usually political and that violence is linked to illicit drug trafficking. As funding from traditional sources dry up, terror groups look at the billions of dollars generated by the worldwide drug trade for financial support. Hezbollah garners hundreds of millions annually through operations in the Tri-Border of South America and taxes on drug movements. The FARC is actually involved in the production and trafficking of cocaine which nets them about half of their annual revenue and the label of Colombia's third major drug cartel. The Taliban have tapped into Afghanistan's 93 percent of the world opium trade to earn a half of billion and mount a resurgence. Through their links with and profits from the illicit drug trade, Hezbollah, FARC, and Taliban can be categorized as narcoterrorists, and their actions as narcoterrorism. With their extensive use of murder to instill fear in government officials and the public at large to further criminal activities, Mexican drug trafficking organizations and the Medillin cartel can too be considered narcoterrorists. Even though the international community has tried, they have yet to defeat these groups. Hezbollah, FARC, and Taliban still conduct their terror operations with funding supplied by the drug trade, and the Mexican crime organizations continue their murderous ways to sustain their lucrative drug enterprises.

References

Beittel, J. S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. (2013). *Mexico's drug trafficking organizations: Source and scope of the violence* (R41576). Retrieved from http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41576.pdf

Boettcher, M. (Performer) (2003). In *CNN PRESENTS: Killing Pablo*. Atlanta: Cable News Network. Retrieved from http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0305/25/cp.00.html

Cammett, M. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security. (2011). *Hezbollah in Latin America – Implications for U.S. homeland security*. Retrieved from http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony Cammett.pdf

Cardenas, J. G. (2013). Human rights as a weapon of terrorists: A case study. *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, *3*(3), 63-70. Retrieved from http://faculty.nps.edu/gsois/ctx/Vol_3_No_3_Final.pdf

Curtis, L. (2013, September 30). *U.S. counternarcotics policy: Essential to fighting terrorism in Afghanistan*. The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, 2845, Retrieved from http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/09/us-counternarcotics-policy-essential-to-fighting-terrorism-in-afghanistan&ei=vYGkU7nDCZeXqAa2-YLoBg&usg=AFQjCNH08SinTc3tBeWmC6E8LCmyJNmZNA&bvm=bv.69411363,d.b2k

Department of Defense (DOD), (2014). *Dictionary of military and associated terms*. Retrieved from http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf

Evans, M. The George Washington University, National Security Archive. (2008). *Colombian paramilitaries and the United States: "Unraveling the PEPES tangled web"*. Retrieved from http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB243/

Grillo, I. (2012, May 23). Special report: Mexico's Zetas rewrite drug war in blood. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/23/us-mexico-drugs-zetas-idUSBRE84M0LT20120523

Hartelius, J. EastWest Institute and the Swedish Carnegie Institute, (2008). *Narcoterrorism*. Retrieved from http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/90550/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/7fcb6741-c9e0-4c69-8bbc-c3a195488fa4/en/2008-02-20_Narcoterrorism.pdf&ei=hzjIU4aXLYTJ8AGA54GYAw&usg=AFQjCNEgXzOTCk7QVml08LQ5riqVRgTeJg&bvm=bv.71198958,d.cGU

Harwood, M. (2013). Hezbollah's tri-border hub. *Security Management*, Retrieved from http://www.securitymanagement.com/article/hezbollahs-tri-border-hub-007779

Heinle, K., Rodríguez Ferreira, O., & Shirk, D. A. Justice in Mexico Project, (2014). *Justice in Mexico project: Data and analysis through 2013*. Retrieved from https://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/dvm-2014-final.pdf

Khan, K. J., & Er, O. (2013). Cutting the link between illegal drugs and terrorists. *Combating Terrorism Exchange, 3*(3), 54-62. Retrieved from http://faculty.nps.edu/gsois/ctx/Vol_3_No_3_Final.pdf

Levitt, M. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, (2005). *Hezbollah finances: Funding the party of god*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-finances-funding-the-party-of-god

Miroff, N., & Booth, W. (2010, December 4). Mexico's Marines team with U.S. DEA. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/03/AR2010120307106_pf.html

Ovemex. (2012, May 4). Nine bodies found hanging off Nuevo Laredo bridge. *Borderland Beat*, Retrieved from http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/05/nine-bodies-found-hanging-off-nuevo.html

Placido, A. P., & Perkins, K. L. U.S. Department of Justice, (2010). *Drug trafficking violence in Mexico: Implications for the United States*. Retrieved from http://www.drugcaucus.senate.gov/Joint-DEA-FBI-Placido-Perkins-5-5-10.pdf

Porteous, S. D. Canadian Security Intelligence Service, (1996). *The threat from transnational crime: An intelligence perspective*. Retrieved from http://www.opens ourceintelligence.eu/ric/doc/The threat from transnational crime.pdf

Realuyo, C. B. Woodrow Wilson Center, Mexico Institute. (2012). *It's all about the money: Advancing anti-money laundering efforts In the U.S. and Mexico to combat transnational organized crime*. Retrieved from http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Realuyo_U.S.-Mexico_Money_Laundering_0.pdf

Rollins, J., & Wyler, L. S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. (2010). *International terrorism and transnational crime: Threats, policy, and considerations* (R41004). Retrieved from http://www.globalinitiative.net/wpfb-file/congress-research-service-international-terrorism-and-transnational-crime-security-threats-u-s-policy-and-considerations-for-congress-march-2010-pdf/

Rollins, J., & Wyler, L. S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. (2013). *Terrorism and transnational crime: Foreign policy issues for Congress* (R41004). Retrieved from http://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R41004.pdf

Rollins, J., Wyler, L. S., & Rosen, S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. (2010). *International terrorism and transnational crime: Threats, policy, and considerations for Congress* (R41004). Retrieved from http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/134960.pdf

Roth, M. P. (2010). *Global organized crime: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Shelley, L. I., & Picarelli, J. T. (2005). Methods and motives: Exploring links between transnational organized crime and international terrorists. *Trends in Organized Crime*, *9*(2), 52-67. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211207.pdf

Sopko, J. F. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, (2014). *Future U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan*. Retrieved from http://www.drugcaucus.senate.gov/hearing-1-15-14/SIGAR John F Sopko.pdf

Sullivan, M. P., & Beittel, J. S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service. (2013). *Latin America: Terrorism issues* (RS21049). Retrieved from http://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RS21049.pdf

Troyer, M. P. (Photographer). (2010, April 14). Afghan children sit outside a poppy field [Web Photo]. Retrieved from https://publicintelligence.net/usnato-troops-patrolling-opium-poppy-fields-in-afghanistan/

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), (2014). *UNIFIL operations*. Retrieved from http://unifil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=11580

United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). (2013). *Trade-based money laundering*. Retrieved from http://www.ice.gov/cornerstone/money-laundering.htm

United States Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). (1994). *Insurgent involvement in the Colombian drug trade: Drug intelligence report* (DEA-94045). Retrieved from http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col33.pdf

United States Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism. (2014). *Country reports on terrorism 2013*. Retrieved from http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225886.pdf

Zaitz, L. (2013a, June 21). Drug cartels in Oregon: Violence in the Northwest. *The Oregonian*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2013/06/drug_cartels_in_oregon_violenc.html#/0

Zaitz, L. (2013b, June 23). Drug cartels in Oregon: Rise and fall of an Oregon kingpin. *The Oregonian*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2013/06/drug_cartels_in_oregon_rise_an.htm