



Guatemala Human Rights Commission / USA

Fact Sheet

Drug Trafficking in Guatemala

THE PROBLEM: Drug trafficking has infiltrated Guatemala, threatening the stability, prosperity and peace of the country. It is a haven for drug traffickers en route from Colombia to Mexico and the US. A recent crackdown on drugs by the Mexican government has pushed drug cartels across the porous border into Guatemala, where the police are infamously corrupt and impunity is 98 percent.

Why Guatemala?

- ◆ Shares 590 miles of border with Mexico, most of which is remote.
- ◆ Hundreds of clandestine airstrips.
- ◆ Ports on the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico.
- ◆ Limited resources and assistance (compared to Mexico and Colombia) to combat trafficking, near-total impunity, and an ineffective criminal system.

Drug Cartels Operating in Guatemala:

The Gulf Cartel:

- ◆ Traffics cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin to the U.S.
- ◆ Los Zetas—the armed branch of the Gulf Cartel, is perhaps the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent of paramilitary enforcement groups.
- ◆ The Zetas also recruit ex-Kaibiles, the Guatemalan Special Forces responsible for massacres committed during the armed internal conflict.

The Sinaloa Cartel:

- ◆ Smuggles Colombian cocaine and is associated with the Herrera organization that operates in Guatemala to bring cocaine to the U.S.
- ◆ One of the largest Mexican cartels. The chief rival is the Gulf Cartel.

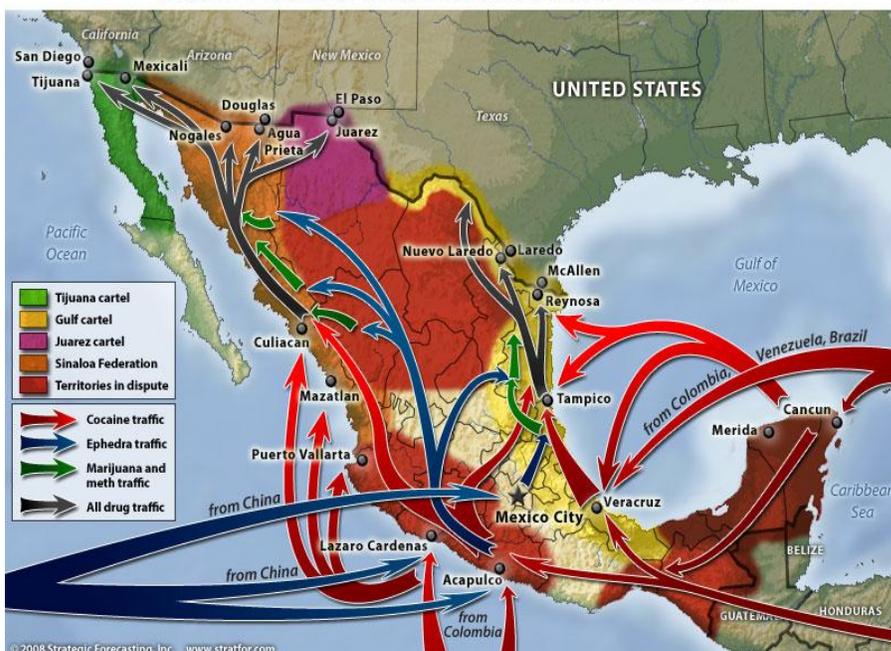
Other Cartels:

- ◆ It is believed that there are a total of 13 organizations trafficking drugs in Guatemala.
- ◆ Local cartels control the drug trade within Guatemala and often collaborate with larger ones.

Key Facts on the Drug Trade in Guatemala:

- ◆ Nearly 400 metric tons of cocaine—75% of the total amount arriving in the US—pass through Guatemala each year. Cocaine passing through Guatemala brings in approximately \$7 billion in US sales each year.
- ◆ Through the aid package known as the Merida Initiative, the US provides support for Mexico's drug war, including \$3.65 million for Guatemala's government and \$550,000 for the Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG).
- ◆ 40% of the 6,200 murders in 2008 in Guatemala were deemed related to drug trafficking.
- ◆ Drug traffickers have taken advantage of the lack of rule of law and have assumed control of almost 30,000 acres in Petén, Izabal, and Chiquimula.
- ◆ Carlos Castresana, former head of the CICIG, estimated that 60 percent of the country's territory is controlled by drug traffickers.
- ◆ From mid-December 2010 to mid-January 2011, President Álvaro Colom declared a "state of siege" and sent hundreds of troops into Alta Verapaz to attack drug traffickers. At the end of the 30 days, Guatemala's army was left weak and underfunded, and many soldiers had already abandoned their posts in small towns terrorized by the Zetas.

CARTEL TERRITORIES AND DRUG ROUTES



Drug Rivalries and Deadly Consequences



November 9, 2008: Armed men boarded a bus carrying 15 Nicaraguans and a Dutch tourist 140 km east of Guatemala City in search of a rival trafficker's drug shipment hidden in the bus. After dismantling part of the bus and not finding any drugs, they interrogated and tortured several passengers they suspected of belonging to the rival drug group. Finally, they shot and killed everyone on board and set fire to the bus.

On March 31, 2009, Guatemalan authorities announced that the perpetrators of this attack were a gang of drug traffickers from Zacapa called el Taquero. They called for the arrest of 11 suspects indicated in the attack, three of whom are members of the Guatemalan police.

On June 8, 2010, Juan Carlos Policarpio was found guilty of massacring the 15 Nicaraguans and 1 Dutch tourist in 2008. Policarpio was sentenced to 50 years in prison for each of the 16 deaths. On June 9, 2010, Hector Estuardo Gonzalez Morales, former PNC officer, was arrested for his role in the 2008 murders. In September 2010, Gonzalez Morales and another member of el Taquero who had been arrested in early June, Roberto Rivera Chacon, were charged with their roles in the 2008 massacre. Gonzalez Morales was charged with conspiracy, murder, and association with illicit substances, while Chacon was charged with high jacking the bus.

Political Violence and Impunity



February 19, 2007: While driving on the outskirts of Guatemala City, a PNC vehicle detained three Salvadoran members of the Central American Parliament and their driver. After several hours, the police officers killed the three politicians and their driver and burned their bodies. After two days, four police officers suspected of the murders were captured and held in a maximum-security prison. Three days later assassins brutally slashed and shot the officers in their cells. Various witnesses stated that prison guards allowed the assassins to enter the suspects' cells. The security minister resigned after these murders.

In March 2009, the CICIG accused ex-Salvadoran Deputy Roberto Silva of being the mastermind behind the crime. The murders were vengeance for judicial action taken against Silva for his suspected ties to drug trafficking.

On December 2, 2010, Silva was sentenced to over 200 years in prison for his role in planning the four murders in 2007. Six other members of Jalpatagua were sentenced to between 17 and 200 years in prison because of their roles in the murders of the three members of the Central American Parliament and their driver.

Sources: La Prensa, CNN, BBC News, the LA Times, and the Guatemala Solidarity Project.

Consequences of the "State of Siege"



December 2010- January 2011: President Colom announced a "state of siege" in Alta Verapaz to reclaim areas of the country that have been taken over by the Zetas. This allowed the military to detain suspects without warrants, conduct warrantless searches, prohibit public gatherings, and control the local news media. The state of siege was initially put in place for 30 days, but was extended until February 18, 2011.

Many fear that a state of siege will do nothing to address drug trafficking unless the police corruption and weak justice system are addressed. Suspending people's civil rights and limiting the freedom of the press are particularly worrisome. La Prensa summed up these concerns:

"It is, at its core, a credibility problem that manifests, for example, in the possibility of not being able to publish reports on abusive actions against the human rights of those detained, particularly against people whose innocence is not in doubt."

Furthermore, the human rights community is concerned that a secondary consequence of such states of siege will be human rights abuses such as the arrest of q'eqchi' peasant leader Pablo Sacrab Pop on December 28, 2010, in Alta Verapaz. His arrest took place in the context of the recent state of siege and the military's ability to make arrests without warrants.