



Guatemala Human Rights Commission / USA

Fact Sheet

Drug Trafficking in Guatemala

THE PROBLEM: *Drug trafficking has infiltrated Guatemala, further destabilizing a country already riddled with violence and corruption. Guatemala 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 they thrive in an environment of organized crime, gangs, and corrupt police and officials.*

Why Guatemala?

The country has:

- ◆ 590 miles of border with Mexico, most of which is remote
- ◆ Hundreds of isolated and clandestine airstrips (DEA)
- ◆ Ports on the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico
- ◆ Near-total impunity and an ineffective criminal system (BBC news)

Cartels Operating in Guatemala:

The Gulf Cartel:

- ◆ Traffics cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin to the US.
- ◆ Los Zetas - the armed branch of the Gulf Cartel. They may be the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent of paramilitary enforcement groups (DEA)
- ◆ The Zetas also recruit ex-Kaibiles, the Guatemalan Special Forces responsible for massacres committed during the internal armed conflict.

The Sinaloa Cartel:

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

Weapons

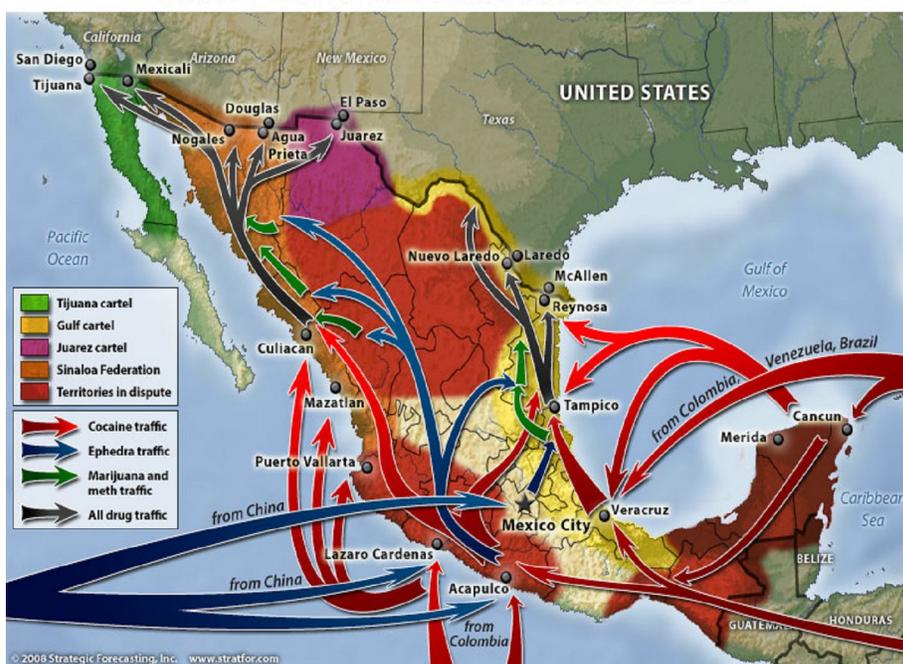
- ◆ Cartels get most of their high-caliber assault rifles from the U.S. but that they are turning to Central America for other military-grade weaponry like grenades and even the occasional rocket launcher (Mexican Authorities)

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.

Key Facts on the Drug Trade in Guatemala:

- ◆ Nearly 400 metric tons of cocaine - 75% of the total amount arriving in the US - passes through Guatemala each year. (US Ambassador to Guatemala Stephen McFarland, Dec. 2008)
- ◆ Cocaine passing through Guatemala is a \$7 billion business (National Drug Intelligence Center)
- ◆ Under the Merida Initiative to combat drugs in Mexico and Central America, the US guaranteed the Guatemala government an initial \$3,650,500 in program funding and \$550,000 specifically for the Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), with another \$11.8 million in potential funding for 2009 (US Embassy in Guatemala, Feb. 2009)
- ◆ 40% of the 6,200 murders in 2008 in Guatemala were related to drug trafficking (President Álvaro Colom)
- ◆ 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. (La Prensa Libre, 2009)
- ◆ Since 2004, the US has given \$41.39 million to Guatemala in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, plus Counter-Drug Assistance and \$3.12 million in economic and social counter-narcotics program aid. (Just The Facts: justf.org)

CARTEL TERRITORIES AND DRUG ROUTES



Drug Rivalries: 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 burning the victims' bodies.

March 31, 2009: Guatemalan authorities announced that the perpetrators of this attack were drug traffickers from Zacapa. They are now calling for the arrest of 11 suspects indicated in the attack, three of whom are members of the Guatemalan police. (Guatemala Times, March 31, 2009)

April 24, 2009: Drug traffickers ambushed and killed five anti-drug agents in Guatemala as they arrived at a warehouse south of Guatemala City to investigate possible drug trafficking. The attackers used grenade launchers and assault rifles to overpower the police. Police eventually seized more than \$3.4 million in drugs, weapons and vehicles at the warehouse including 178 lbs of cocaine, 14 new vehicles, two armored cars, 584 grenades, 3,800 bullets, a rifle, 8 landmines, 11 machine guns, and 7 police uniforms. These weapons belonged to the Guatemalan military, according to Guatemala's anti-drug prosecutor Leonel Ruiz.

Political Violence and Impunity



February 19, 2007: Three Salvadoran members of the Central American Parliament and their driver were murdered in Guatemala. While driving on the outskirts of Guatemala City, a National Civil Police vehicle detained them. After several hours, the police officers killed the three politicians and burned their bodies.

Two days later, 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.



March 2009: the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala accused ex-Salvadoran Deputy Roberto Silva of being the mastermind behind the crime. They reported that the murders were vengeance for judicial action taken against Silva for his suspected ties to narcotrafficking.

Border Violence and Shootouts



November 30, 2008: at least 17 people died in the small town of Agua Zarca, Huehuetenango, near the Guatemalan-Mexico border after a shootout involving rival drug traffickers. The incident occurred after a horse race in which drunken rival Mexican and Guatemalan drug traffickers exchanged insults. Police suspect that tensions between the two groups had been rising because of the Guatemalan traffickers' resistance to working with the Mexicans. Another motive not ruled out by police was the possible robbery of a drug shipment. Guatemala's Vice-President Rafael Espada responded to the murders saying:

"Guatemala is the victim of narcotrafficking groups that have escaped from Mexico, because they see a fertile land here. The Mexican Cartels are entering Guatemala."

March 26, 2008: In Zacapa, a battle between Guatemalan traffickers and the Zetas, the armed branch of the Gulf Cartel, left eleven people dead. Police found US-manufactured AR-15s and grenades at the crime scene. Several bodies were burned beyond recognition. A spokesman for the Attorney General stated the shootout was the result of a drug deal gone bad. Two Mexican nationals were among the dead.