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United States post-Cold War drug and trade policy and Mexico

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Abstract

This essay provides a framework for explanations of the drug war's failure and its incongruity with other regional interests, most notably trade. It suggests three potential theoretical approaches – a conspiracy (realist) theory, a cultural (constructivist) theory, and a compartmentalisation (bureaucratic politics) theory. The literature on US supply side drug control policy and that on its trade policy, as relevant to Mexico, from the Reagan presidency through to Obama's, is brought together, in such a way as to highlight both the consistency in drug policy approach over time and the inconsistency of its application. It is this combined drug and trade policy focus that brings to light the inconsistencies between the suggested narratives, of irrational adherence and of shrewd subversion, and necessitates theoretical explanation. It is argued that the bureaucratic politics model may be the most convincing perspective, and the most useful if the stalemate is ever to be addressed.

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Introduction

On 8 May 2008 Edgar Millan Gomez, Mexico's "highest-ranking law enforcement officer, responsible for overseeing most of [its] counternarcotics efforts" died after being shot eight times in the chest in his home in Mexico City (Friedman, 2008). Less than four months earlier he had ordered the arrest of Alfredo Beltran Leyva, a leader of the Sinaloa cartel – along with Gulf and Juárez one of the largest of the criminal organisations which dominate Mexico's drug trade (Cook, 2007; Friedman, 2008). There is no doubt that this high-profile assassination, as well as a string of others, was the work of the cartels.

Although drugs and drug-related violence are not new to Mexico, the carnage has escalated wildly in the last two decades, as Mexico's cartels have capitalised on the demise of Columbia's Cali and Medellín cartels (Cook, 2007). From about 2005, a year which at that point had the dubious honour of being a "record-breaking year of drug-related violence" (an honour it did not long hold), the violence assumed new dimensions (Freeman, 2006: 1). The killings extended progressively "from low-level operatives to higher ranking ones," and often in home territories – Mexican officials in Mexico City, cartel bosses in their strongholds (Friedman, 2008: 1). Newspaper headlines and tabloid pictures told a more and more gruesome story: "headless corpses, blood-soaked vehicles, and a growing array of victims – drug traffickers, cops, politicians, journalists, and, increasingly, civilians" (Corchado, 2009: 18).

Admittedly, there is a distinctly negative bias to much United States (US) reporting on Mexico. The country's achievements are sidelined and its failings sensationalised, and

for years it has been obvious that there is disproportionate coverage of drug and corruption stories (Baer, 1997). Partly because Mexico is now considered “the most dangerous place for journalists in Latin America”, with dozens of reporters killed and many more gone missing there since 2000, hot-shot foreign journalists “who view Mexico as a happy hunting ground for ... nabbing a narcopolitician and winning a Pulitzer are all too happy to burden the country’s overwhelmingly negative image” (Baer, 1997: 138; Campbell, 2008).

Such issues aside, however, it is clear that the drug industry in Mexico, with its attendant violence and corruption, is of real concern to Mexicans and US policymakers alike (Bussey, 2009). A 2009 national poll reported that almost 60% of Mexicans believed that drug traffickers were winning the war against state forces and, despite widespread Mexican suspicion of US intentions, 41% thought the situation so dire as to warrant turning for help to US forces such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (Bussey, 2009). Still, despite massive commitments in funding, training and deployment in the parallel Mexican and US “Wars” on drugs, in many Mexican cities Mexican forces have been unable to maintain the rule of law (Freeman, 2006).

On a political level, a greater problem than the violence is the fact that drug traffickers have “thoroughly penetrated political and judicial institutions and represent a significant challenge to the sovereignty of the Mexican state” (Rus & Salas, 2006: 13). The 2008 detention of Noé Ramirez Mandujano, anti-recreational drug chief of Mexico’s top organised crime investigation unit, for receiving some \$450 000 a month from a cartel boss in exchange for intelligence reports was just another example of how the “war against drug traffickers is often really a war within the government itself” (Corchado,

2009: 20). Public officials and judges up against cartel dominance in many regions face the simple choice of “*plata o plomo*”, silver or lead – the bribe or the bullet (Dal Bó et al., 2006). In some areas drug traffickers, enjoying extraordinary power to co-opt officials, have truly “become the law of the land”, their reign of terror rendering “the state useless and the citizenry defenceless” (Freeman, 2006: 1, 6). Naturally, Mexican officials claim that the problem is exaggerated and scoff at suggestions of state failure or even weakness, but, even worded as diplomatically as possible, there is no doubt that the “‘corruptive influence and increasing violence’ of Mexico's powerful drug cartels “impede Mexico City's ability to govern parts of its territory and build effective democratic institutions” (Bussey, 2009: 22).

Of concern to the US, then, is not just the harm done by the drugs that make it across the border and onto its own streets but also the fact that, in corroding the rule of law, its neighbours are prevented from “effectively reducing or containing other transnational threats such as terrorism, insurgency, organized crime, weapons trafficking, money laundering, human trafficking, and piracy” (Department of Defense, 2011: 43). The link between international crime, corruption and terrorism is such that it has been called an “unholy trinity”, with alliances forged through use of the same “globalized crime networks ... aided by endemic corruption” (Shelley, 2006: 42). Especially in the post 9/11 world, the US has cause for concern about these “clear linkages between international narcotics trafficking and international terrorism [which] constitute a threat to the national security interests of the United States” (Department of Defense, 2011: 43). Although the dangers of these linkages may currently be more evident in the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) than in Latin America, the principle

holds – that regions with strong criminal networks find difficulty in countering other security threats.

While *domestic* drug consumption in Mexico is of growing concern, it is still “far from being a serious social problem, and the levels remain very low compared to industrialized countries” (Chabat, 2002: 135; see also Fernandes, 2008). The cost to Mexico is due not nearly so much to its own drug consumption as it is to “the social overhead costs imposed by two unfortunate conditions: US prohibitionism that drives prices up, and Mexico’s border status with the world’s largest illegal drug market” (Toro, 1995: ix). In the regional drug market it is positioned not as consumer but as producer and as trafficker between the rest of Latin America and the United States. The attitude of many in Latin America has for decades been that the only “long-term solution for the drug problem is to reduce drastically the demand for drugs in the main consumer countries”, since, as a former Colombian president put it in 1990, “the only law the narcoterrorists do not break is the law of supply and demand” (Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, 2009: 10; Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 424). In short, Mexico has a corruption and violence problem because the US has a drug problem.

Importantly, this is not to suggest that there are no factors endogenous to Mexico that contribute to the intractability of its drug trade. Explanations could include its long history of one-party rule, its poverty, its agricultural arrangements, its culture, its geography etc. A local saying goes, “*Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios, tan cerca de los Estados Unidos*” – poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States (Hamnett, 2006: 3). Although is doubtless crucial to the full understanding of Mexico’s drug problem to address both these aspects (endogenous and exogenous), it

is only the second half of the lament with which this essay concerns itself, leaving the first to those – sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, criminologists etc – more qualified. The important starting point here is rather the observation that, as with all countries which share a common border, the “line between foreign and domestic policy issues has always been somewhat blurred in the case of the United States and Mexico [but] the asymmetry of power and wealth between the two countries [has] made the effect of this blurring more extreme in Mexico”: in other words, the US has a far greater influence on Mexico than vice versa (Purcell, 1997: 142).

It has not always been thus. When Mexico became independent from Spain in 1820, it was the centre of an empire with broad hemispheric power: the Mexican currency was one of the world’s principal mediums of exchange, and indeed the US dollar was based on the peso until the mid-nineteenth century (Hamnett, 2006: 6). It was not until the Texas War of 1836, in which Mexico suffered the loss of a huge swathe of its northern territories, that the balance of power shifted and the divergence in wealth and power began (Hamnett, 2006: 7). Whatever the reasons for the deviation (and there is still considerable debate about exactly “what went wrong”), the reality is that the crux of the relationship between the US and Mexico is its inequality (Hamnett, 2006: 8), one a world power, the other its underdeveloped neighbour. It comes as no surprise that, whereas in most matters the US sees the rest of the American continent as “largely a sideshow at best and a nuisance factor at worst”, the US has been the predominant external element in Mexico’s policy environment since 1836 (Hamnett, 2006: 7).

The US role in providing the massive demand for the drugs produced in and transited through Mexico is, obviously, at the core of its influence on the Mexican drug market.

US drug consumption has been roughly stable for the last decade, with between approximately 11% and 14% of the population over the age of 12 estimated as having used some illicit drug in the previous year (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 124). For comparison, with a caveat as to the utility of cross-national comparison given variability in reporting and law-enforcement efficiency, the prevalence rate in the United Kingdom during the same period has varied between 8% and 11% and in Australia between 13% and 17% (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 125). Given its far larger population, however, even the lower US limit of 11% represents nine times as many drug users as Australia's upper limit of 17%. The impact of the sheer scale of US drug demand on its Southern neighbour is a fairly stable economic and geographic reality which, despite its obvious explanatory power, provides limited explanatory richness. Of more intellectual interest and more practical use to those who wish to be able to alter this reality are the concerted efforts of state-level actors to alter it – that is, through national policy. As explained above, there is a substantial power asymmetry in the policymaking relationship between the US and Mexico. This means that the US plays a crucial role in shaping Mexico's drug policy environment, while the reverse is seldom the case. Very broadly, then, our research question concerns the relationship between US *policy* and the problem of Mexico's drug-production and trafficking industry.

Unsurprisingly, given the scope of the problem, there is a large body of literature concerning this relationship. To start with, the range of potentially relevant policies is extremely broad – for example, considering that Mexico does not itself produce any arms, lax US gun control and the US Congress decision to allow the federal ban on assault weapons to expire in 2004 have resulted in an “iron river” of increasingly

sophisticated arms flowing across the border, leaving Mexican police outgunned in the face of AK-47s, M-16s, Uzis, shotguns, grenade launchers etc (Stewart, 2011; Weinberg, 2008). Most of the systematic work on the relationship between US policy behaviour and Mexico's drug problem, however, has a necessarily narrower focus; specifically, on one of the US's two major Latin American agendas in the post-Cold War era: explicitly drug-related policy or explicitly trade-related policy.

Having thus narrowed our field of enquiry from *all* factors relevant to Mexico's drug trade to exogenous factors only, and then only to those obviously related to US policy, we narrow it further from all potentially relevant US policies to only those explicitly concerned with drugs and/or trade. And, given that the focus in the literature falls for the most part on the last two decades or so (since it has been only in the post-Cold War context that drug and trade interests have come so explicitly to dominate US regional policy), the essay focus is correspondingly primarily limited to this period (Andreas, 1995).

An important distinction must be made at this point between the two major components of drug policy. There are a number of possible domestic responses to the social problems caused by drug addiction. These "fall along an ideological spectrum, with treatment and criminal justice at the liberal and conservative extremes, and prevention falling somewhere near the middle" (Lock et al., 2002: 395). Throughout its history of drug control, but especially from the 1980s onwards, the US government "clearly made a choice to favor the criminal justice approach over that of treatment and prevention" (Lock et al., 2002: 395). But these responses all fall in the domestic sphere, which in the US case corresponds largely with the "demand" side of the anti-

drug equation – although it must be noted that the demand/supply distinction may itself often be more political than purely logical (Reiss, 2010). The “supply” side, which in the US context largely means the international component of the drug war, includes a separate range of policy initiatives, such as crop eradication and substitution programmes, foreign police and military training and funding, direct military intervention, producer country control effort certification, alternative development funding and border inspection. Demand side policy measures do affect foreign actors and markets, but only indirectly and often slowly, through their impact on the size and nature of the domestic market. Supply side programmes, which tend to have explicitly foreign objectives and which therefore impact foreign actors and markets more directly, make for simpler, more direct assessment. Unsurprisingly, it is therefore the supply side component of US drug policy that receives most attention in terms of its impact on Mexico, and on which this essay is focused.

Thus we can at last come to a neat understanding of our independent variable. We are looking at US drug supply control policy and trade policy relevant to Mexico’s drug market in the post-Cold War period. The drug policy component is relatively easily conceptualised as those foreign policy initiatives explicitly relating to the control and eradication of illegal drugs. In the period in question these fall under the banner of the “War on Drugs” and, as we shall see, are characterised as unilateral, militaristic, prohibitionist and rigid. The reason for the inclusion of trade policy may not be immediately obvious, beyond the observation that legitimate trade has constituted the greatest single interest in the region other than drugs. As we shall see, however, US drug and trade policy interests with regard to Mexico appear at times to have been in direct conflict – most notably, in the post-Cold War period, with the promotion of

liberalised or free trade. The US trade policy position with regard to Mexico is exemplified in NAFTA, which came into effect on 1 January 1994, but also includes analogous pre-NAFTA policies (Purcell, 1997).

The dependent variable, Mexico's "drug problem", is even more complex and its content is seldom treated consistently or even made explicit in the literature. Choice of timeframe is a crucial element, and negative policy impact could be measured in terms of, among numerous other options, increases in the volume of drugs moved across the border, in drug-related violence, in industry profitability, in market concentration or in state penetration. Lack of clarity on this point may in fact be responsible for some of the policy failures. For example, a policy that in the short term succeeds in decreasing the number of criminal groups in operation may have an overall negative long-term impact, as a smaller number of cartels swell to fill the void, increasing their power relative to the state.

As we shall see, despite the "messiness" of this variable, scholars in this field are by now consistent in holding that US drug policies have not only failed in achieving their stated end of eradicating or reducing Mexico's drug production and trafficking industry, but have actually been notably counterproductive. On very nearly any definition the Mexican "drug problem" appears to be more severe at the present time than it was before the US drug war began. This question is a descriptive one, and no longer particularly contentious or interesting in isolation. In fact by now almost all analysts agree that "the history of the post-Nixon drug war, and especially the stepped-up campaign that started in 1979 and has yet to crest, demonstrates that the slogan 'a drug-free America' embodied a practical impossibility" (Kleiman, 2011: viii). This

essay, therefore, is not devoted to proving that US policy has failed to improve the Mexican drug situation, nor to determining the *existence* of a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. It is concerned, rather, with *why* US policy has failed, or with the *nature* of that relationship.

Despite the near-universal acceptance of the drug war's failure, explanations for it vary. Criticism tends to focus on one of two apparently mutually inconsistent characterisations of the US policy relationship with Mexico. The US position is most commonly criticised for what is seen as an excessively narrow, single-minded approach – despite growing evidence of failure. But a much smaller body of literature draws attention to the fact that the drug war has not, in fact, been at all consistently implemented. And it is only in widening the analytical scope beyond explicitly *drug-related* policy to include potentially relevant *trade-related* policy that this second perspective comes into focus.

There is a fair amount of literature about the relationship between US trade policy and efforts to control Mexico's drug trade and the consensus is that “the very thrust of international liberalization ... runs counter to the struggle to control the international drug trade” (Raustiala, 1999: 91). Unsurprisingly, it appears that with more and freer trade in all goods comes more and freer trade in undesirable goods. Often it is “the same actual shipment, that drives trade in both licit goods and illicit narcotics” (Thomas, 2003: 5). There may also be a more indirect relationship between liberalisation and the drug trade. For example, while there remains widespread disagreement about the wealth distributional effects of freer trade, a fair number of analysts point out that while the “precise nature of the various mechanisms whereby

the ongoing process of liberalization has altered the pattern of income distribution ... is yet to be carefully analyzed”, where “economic prosperity coexist[s] with pockets of worsening marginalization and poverty ... these disparities are exploited by drug dealers and traffickers in their attempts to develop new markets” (International Narcotics Control Board, 2001: 1; Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2006: 1340). The question of whether trade liberalisation has in fact had this effect on wealth distribution, and thereby on drug markets, is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is an interesting corollary that has as yet received far less attention than it merits.

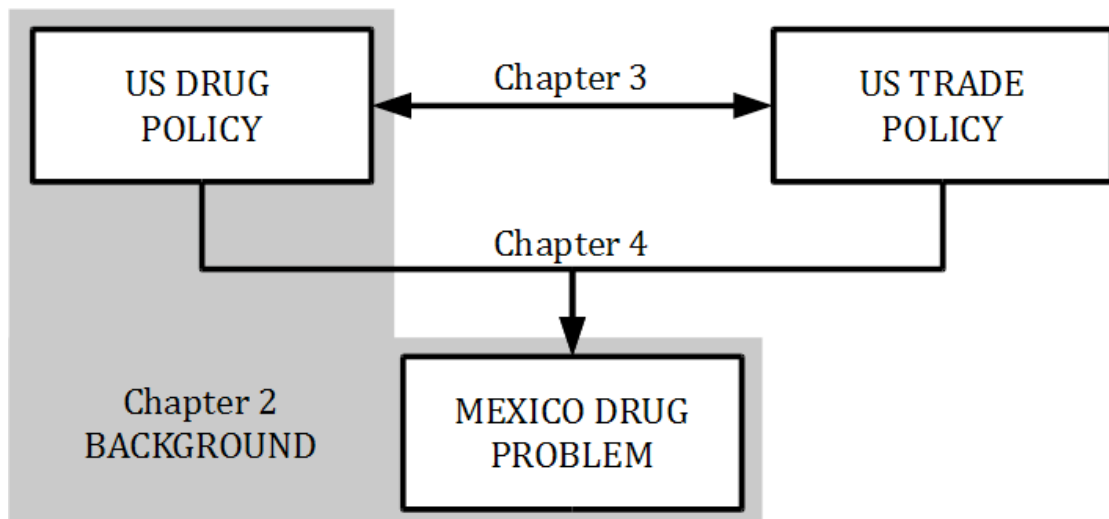
Whatever the real direct or indirect impact of trade liberalisation on drug markets, the two sets of policies – drug policy and trade policy, one essentially concerned with criminal justice and the other with economics – quite simply represent two very different broad imperatives. The former represents prohibition and the latter liberalisation; the former demands an interventionist state and the latter insists the state remain minimal (Andreas, 1995). The border is required to be both closed and open. Little wonder that, especially when it comes to Mexico, the US is accused of incoherence or even schizophrenia (Bewley-Taylor, 1998; Coleman, 2005).

In fact, there is an astonishing disconnection in the literature between that which focuses on drug policy (most of which ignores or devotes little more than a paragraph to trade policy) and that which focuses on the challenges that trade policy pose to drug policy (most of which takes the underlying logic of the latter as given and fails to engage critically with its failure). It is this disconnection that accounts for the dearth of analysis on how these policies can coexist without general ridicule. The twin narratives, of stubborn, blundering drug policy and of slippery, subversive trade policy, are largely

blind to each other. The primary goal of this essay is to bring together these literature sets and thus to expose simultaneously both the consistency in successive US administrations' approaches to drug policy (i.e. the uniformity of policy over the period, despite a paucity of results) and the inconsistencies within each administration's implementation of drug war policy initiatives in the service of other regional policy interests, most often and increasingly trade (i.e. the apparent hypocrisy or schizophrenia in policy application). Or, if you will, the extraordinary consistency of the policy inconsistency.

This relationship, not between the policies and their respective impacts on Mexico's illegal drug trade but between the policy principles themselves, necessitates a more intricate, evaluative question; namely, how can we account for it? This is an almost entirely unexplored area of enquiry and what little work there is tends, with very few exceptions, to be scattered and unsystematic. The secondary goal of this essay is thus to begin a categorisation of potential theoretical responses to this observation.

The structure, then, is as follows.



We begin, in chapter 2, by placing in global and historical context US drug control efforts and Mexico's drug industry. In chapter 3, we provide a framework for explanations of the drug war's manifest failure and its apparent incongruity with other regional interests, most notably trade. We lay out three potential theoretical approaches – a conspiracy (realist) theory, a cultural (constructivist) theory, and a compartmentalisation (bureaucratic politics) theory. In chapter 4, we then provide a unified account of the drug and trade policy contributions of successive administrations, from Reagan to Obama, highlighting both the consistency of drug policy over time and the inconsistency of application, with reference to the parallel drug policy developments in Mexico. Throughout this account, the third of our theoretical approaches, the bureaucratic politics model, becomes an increasingly convincing perspective. Finally, we explore the implications of the bureaucratic politics model for the future of the drug war.

Mexico's narcotics industry and US drug policy in context

While debate and disagreement abound, rational discussions about drugs are extremely rare (Heed, 2006: 104). Pragmatic engagement is all too often forced to defer to symbolic statements of ideology or morality. One of the best-known and most dramatic examples of this is found in the account of the World Health Organization's "Cocaine Project", a massive global study "about how cocaine and other coca products are used, who uses them, what effects they have on the users and the community, and how governments have responded to the cocaine problem" (World Health Organization, 1995: 4). This study, which pointed out, among other things that could be construed as less than totally condemnatory, that health problems "from the use of legal substances, particularly alcohol and tobacco, are greater than health problems from cocaine use", was never officially published (World Health Organization, 1995: 6-7). When a preview made clear what the study findings were to be, the US representative to WHO "threatened to withdraw US funding for all its research projects and interventions unless the organisation 'dissociated itself from the study'" (Mail & Guardian, 2009). The leaked report is accessible, but WHO duly dissociated itself and for the most part pretends the report does not exist.

This reluctance to allow systematic research to disturb preconceived notions is perhaps less surprising if one notes that "social norms" have always been central to how drugs have been defined and regulated, and that "drug" is "not a descriptive but an evaluative concept" (Pryce, 2006: 603). Drugs, defined as those substances consumed for purposes other than nutrition and which are primarily valued for their psychological rather than physiological effects, "have been used by humankind

throughout recorded history, and probably much earlier according to archaeological evidence” (Heath, 1992: 274; see also Goodman et al., 2007: 1). At the same time, “nearly every culture has had traditional social controls over access to and use of psychoactive drugs”, while “most literate societies have codified laws and regulations about the use of drugs” (Heath, 1992: 275). In fact, there is often little pharmacological distinction or difference in gravity of physical or social impact between those drugs that are legal and those that are not. Global deaths due to illicit drugs “are limited to perhaps 200,000 a year which is one tenth of those killed by alcohol and twenty times less than those killed by tobacco” – both of which are far more socially acceptable and leniently regulated (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 3). Social norms trump medicine or statistics. The first movements towards prohibition in the United Kingdom, for example, were not the result of any new awareness of the dangers of by then illicit drugs, but make sense only in the context of increasing industrialisation and its attendant shift in social values towards respect for restraint and discipline (Goodman et al., 2007).

The ethnic groups associated with various drugs have also been crucial to how they have been received and illegal drugs have become a powerful “metaphor for our fear of the ‘foreign’,” with assessments of drugs often serving as a substitute for assessments of immigrants (Gould, 1998: 133). Among leading figures and laypeople alike, there is a strong correlation between attitudes towards immigrants and attitudes towards drugs – “those with very restrictive attitudes towards drugs are more likely to want fewer immigrants coming in ... and to blame immigrants for crime” (Gould, 1998: 137). A drug’s fall from grace or inclusion in the realm of the socially

acceptable has far “less to do with pharmacology than with prejudice and other attitudes” (Heath, 1992: 275).

This amorphous artefact of social norm and fear-based metaphor has, however, come to have a very real international legal weight. Nineteenth-century drug control efforts were insignificant by today’s standards and diverged widely from one jurisdiction to another. They were considered the prerogative of individual states, which in many cases had “little interest in suppressing a business that was so profitable for opium merchants, shippers, bankers, insurance agencies and governments” and which constituted such an “important source of revenue for Great Powers that they fought for control” of drug markets in open wars (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 3). In Europe and Asia, opium was traded exactly as were wheat, coffee, tea or spices (Smith, 1992: 6). In the Andean region, coca, a mild stimulant and a central part of the barter system in the pre-Columbian era, came to be used by the Spanish crown (from 1536) “to better exploit its Indian subjects, who were forced to labour in [its] mines, fields and sweatshops” (Smith, 1992: 12). After continental independence from Spain in 1825, the crop remained a “valuable trading product and source of government revenue within local and national economies [primarily] to supply the Andean custom of chewing the leaf with burnt lime” (Smith, 1992: 12).

The dawn of the twentieth century brought a shift in attitudes, however, and the 1909 Shanghai Opium Commission and the 1912 Hague Convention on Opium heralded a century of increasingly international, increasingly mandatory and increasingly prohibitionist policy adjustments (Pryce, 2006: 604). The approach promoted was based on law enforcement, “presented in terms suggestive of a moral crusade or war”

(Smith, 1992: xi). The unwavering champion of this process, by now practically universally acknowledged, has throughout been the US (Bean, 1974; Fazey, 2003; Friman & Andreas, 1999; Stares, 1996; Zimring & Hawkins, 1992; Nadelmann, 2004; Room & Paglia, 1999 etc). The guise remained one of multilateralism, but the reality was one of a focused attempt “to extend US domestic drug laws to the international arena” (Toro, 1995: 5).

Thus international drug definition and control was gradually pushed away from locally-based responses, through piecemeal “multilateral” agreements, eventually to be regulated by the League of Nations (and later the United Nations) under a number of conventions, each more comprehensive and punitive than the last (Stares, 1996; Krajewski, 1999). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) “is the guardian of these treaties” and oversees the work of the various related bodies, including the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 7; Fazey 2003: 159). These bodies, it must be noted, rely heavily on voluntary donations and continue to be accused of failing to uphold the UN principle of multilateralism, rather serving the policy interests of its most powerful members out of fear of losing much-needed funding (Jelsma, 2008: 19; see also Fazey, 2003). Other than in the case of the ill-fated WHO “Cocaine Project”, it is suggested that donors seldom have to go as far as explicit comment: staff are usually sufficiently strategic to avoid diverging too far from the prevailing “wisdom” (Fazey, 2003: 165). This leaves the scope for policy debate severely constrained (Bewley-Taylor, 2005: 429).

Nonetheless, these UN treaties constitute the minimum international requirement for compliance in terms of supply reduction (Stares, 1996: 36; see also Krajewski, 1999). Bilateral agreements with the US often require far more (Jelsma, 2008: 20). Demand reduction, although attracting growing attention since the 1970s, continues to be seen as a primarily national task, and receives but a fraction of the financial and practical support that the conventions insist on for supply reduction (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 8).

This comprehensive prohibitionist framework (which owing to its breadth and complexity nevertheless encompasses a number of inconsistencies) has had some success (Jelsma, 2008: 3). Proponents are quick to point out that, for example, whereas opium was at the beginning of the previous century produced “in a huge belt, stretching from China to Indochina, Burma, India, Persia, Turkey and the Balkan countries”, production has been successfully narrowed to the point where 92% is now concentrated in Afghanistan (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 3). Similarly, coca production has been almost eliminated in what is now Indonesia, Taiwan and Sri Lanka, leaving only its Andean producers (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) to satisfy global demand (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 3). And whereas in 1906 25 million people (1,5% of the world population) were using opium, the number of users of illegal opiate products today is closer to 16,5 million (0,25% of the world population) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 3).

Lest this present too positive a record for prohibitionist international drug control, and avoiding too extensive a digression into this debate, it is important to mention certain

of its serious unintended consequences – those which even its most vehement supporters must acknowledge. In order to understand the impact of (direct) US drug policy on drug markets in Latin America in general, and Mexico in particular, over the last few decades, it is essential to grasp these negative global consequences generated en route to what can charitably be called an “incomplete success” for the (indirectly) US-driven international drug control system of the last century.

The international drug prohibition system’s first major set of negative consequences follows from the fact that the trade, once not merely regulated but actually largely monopolised by the state, was driven underground. It became a violent black market, entangled with terrorists, arms smugglers, human traffickers etc (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 9; see also Emmers, 2004). And it is exactly its illegality that ensures the narcotics trade’s enormous profitability. What is variously called the “remuneration to risk”, “risk premium” or “prohibition premium” constitutes a large part of the massive value added to what is often a dirt-cheap agricultural product at one end of the supply chain and an expensive luxury product at the other (Thoumi, 2003: 9; Costa Storti & De Grauwe, 2009: 48; Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 426).¹

High rewards draw high risk-takers, “those both capable and inclined to inflict whatever damage [is] necessary ... in order to carry out their business”, and violence escalates (Toro, 1995: ix). Indeed, there are three aspects to the relationship between drugs and violence – psychopharmacological effects (e.g. the agitation and aggression associated with crack cocaine), economic-compulsive drives (crimes committed in

¹ In this process, the price, depending on the product and shifts in the market, routinely increases in the region of 300-fold (Smith, 1992: 7).

order to fund drug habits) and systemic violence (that due to clashes between competing criminal groups and between such groups and law enforcement) (Tullis, 1995: 8). Violence associated with the first aspect is clearly independent of the drug's legal status but, given that this represents a tiny proportion of the total violence due to drugs, by far the majority of "narcotics-related violence results from the criminalization of narcotics rather than from the use of narcotics themselves" (Thomas, 2003: 31). Because drug markets "operate without the usual protection against fraud and violence offered by the [legal] system ... contracts cannot be enforced through written documents and the legal system; agreements are made hurriedly, sometimes in ambiguous code, and orally" – with the result that the inevitable disputes must be settled "privately and often with violence" (Freeman, 2006: 9).

Another dangerous aspect of the mere fact of prohibition is that, with its consequences of massive profits and extreme violence, it creates the dangerous conditions for corruption, or the mutual penetration of the criminal group and the state (Andreas, 1998: 161). By these means drug trafficking operations are uniquely able to "compromise political and administrative systems and erode the rule of law" (Emmers, 2004: 8). In some places such corruption reaches into the very highest levels of government, with presidents themselves becoming embroiled in cartels (Shehu, 2000: 11). Further, because reaping the financial rewards of prohibition necessitates money laundering, licit and illicit industries become inextricably entangled, making it very difficult to do anything about the latter without hurting the former (Laniel, 1999: 240).

The second negative consequence of the US-backed international drug control system has been the fact that the focus on law enforcement may not only “have drawn resources from health approaches to what, ultimately, is a public health problem” but also that “the use of the criminal justice system against drug consumers, who often come from marginal groups, has in many instances increased their marginalisation, diminishing capacity to offer treatment to those who need it most” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 9). This constitutes one of the earliest and most common criticisms of the prohibitionist system – that the greatest proportion of the harm caused by narcotics is due to their illegality, and that “harm reduction” (rather than supply reduction and usage criminalisation) should be the guiding principle (Krajewski, 1999: 330). This could be achieved through a range of possible strategies, including decriminalisation, partial depenalisation and medicalisation etc; any strategy, really, that acknowledges that “many of the people addicted to drugs must be dealt with outside of the legal system” (Heed, 2006: 105). The UN drug control conventions do not leave room for such attempts at finding “a better balance between protection and repression” (Jelsma, 2008: 20). Some go so far as to say that the drug control conventions, in their rigidity and lack of regard for human rights, constitute such an acute contradiction with “the core values of the United Nations” that they seriously undermine its legitimacy (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423).

The third major set of negative consequences of the global drug prohibition regime is rooted in the fact that “enforcement efforts in one geographic area have often resulted in diversion of the problem into other areas” and similarly that “pressure on the market for one particular substance” has often “inadvertently promoted use of an alternate drug” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 9). Thus, while

opiate consumption over the course of this control regime has indeed been markedly reduced (from 1,5% to 0,25% of the world population), the range of illicit drugs available, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants and ecstasy-group substances, has risen significantly in the same period: up to 250 million people (5,7% of the world population aged 15 to 64) currently use some illicit drug at least once a year (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 12).² While the global drug control system has certainly had some successes, particularly in terms of regional production patterns, the record of unmet previous deadlines holds out little hope that the goal of “eliminating or significantly reducing” global illicit drug supply and demand will be attained by 2019 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 7).

Complicating any measurement of possible success and confounding eradication efforts is the fact that there are a number of difficulties in accurately assessing the narcotics industry, few of which are taken into account by the policy makers and journalists who put such assessments to use (Thoumi, 2003: 1). In the context of prohibition, the survival of this trade depends on its traders’ skill at maintaining secrecy, baffling law enforcement and continuously adapting and reinventing themselves. Unlike than in the case of licit products, there are no quarterly reports or press conferences to inform interested parties. Each attempt at assessment of the scope of the illicit drug industry is forced to make use of often indirect and unreliable evidence, sweeping assumptions and a range of possible variables (Thoumi, 2003: 2).

² Before dire visions emerge of a twentieth of the globe in crack dens, it must be remembered that, of these, only 10% to 15% are considered “problem users”, those who “inject drugs and/or are considered dependent, facing serious social and health consequences as a result” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, (UNODC, 2010: 12). On the other hand, of course, consumption levels do not come close to an indication of the quite possibly millions of people dependent on the industry in some way, including small- and large-scale farmers, chemists, drivers, enforcers, wholesalers, street dealers, money launderers, corrupt officials, cartel bosses etc (Emmers, 2004: 6-7).

Different observers “give the assumptions different weightings, which obviously biases ... outcomes, sometimes substantially” (Tullis 1995: 35). For example, reputable estimates of the value of the global cocaine market vary between US\$80 billion and US\$100 billion (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 16). To give some perspective, it may be noted that the difference between these two amounts is roughly equal to the entire value of the global Web search industry (Gabrilovich et al., 2009: 1). The problem is complicated further “and in no small way by the political ends such estimates are intended to serve” (Tullis, 1995: 37). For example, producer nation officials tend to overestimate production (because “they are involved in constant and delicate negotiations over the levels of international aid, or compensation” to be paid for eradication), while the US government “increases its estimates ... when it is opting for a repressive or militarized strategy and drops them when [producer nations are] pushing for economic compensation” for reduction (Tullis, 1995: 37).

What is clear, however, is that the global narcotics industry is extremely large. It may comprise about 8% of world trade – roughly the size of the world tourism industry, or the entire pre-crisis Spanish economy (Naím, 2003: 30; Emmers, 2004: 6). According to other estimates, it may be the world’s second largest industry, greater than oil and smaller only than weapons (Swanstrom, 2007: 3). Revenues are such that in 2009 the Head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime controversially reported that all that kept sections of the world banking industry afloat in the aftermath of the financial crisis was the liquidity provided by the billions of dollars flowing from the drug industry (Syal, 2009: 1). Somewhat less controversially, it is said that for decades the discharged external debt obligations of a number of developing countries

could never have been honoured without the considerable help of their “narco-dollars” (Laniel, 1999). Despite a century of concerted global effort, and issues of social norms and difficulties in measurement aside, there can be no doubt that the drug industry “powerfully affects international relations” (Friman & Andreas, 1999: 2).

But, crucially, what both the international drug control system’s successes and its failures have made clear is that broad global estimates and assessments are of little use in understanding the drug market; the devil is in the narrower regional and national dynamics. We therefore turn now to Mexico’s role in the global illicit drug trade, and to the historical precedent for drug policy during the period of our analysis.

Mexico grows and refines significant quantities of cannabis and opium (although, as mentioned above, the vast majority of opium is grown in Afghanistan), produces some methamphetamines and also provides a major transit point for cocaine from the Andean region (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 20). Cannabis has been produced in Mexico and exported to the US since the nineteenth century, and it is believed that opium was introduced to Mexico and began to be grown by Chinese immigrants in the 1910s and 1920s (Toro, 1995: 7). It is estimated that Mexico meets 90% of the US cocaine demand and is its number one provider of methamphetamines and number two provider of heroin (Davi, 2009: 5). Unsurprisingly, Mexico has long been considered the “cornerstone” of US suppression efforts in Latin America (Toro, 1995: 6).

Although it is a major player in regional drug production, Mexico’s “principal role in the international trafficking arena” is that of distributor, or “bootlegger” (Recio,

2002: 22). This is crucial to understanding that the drug trade between the US and Mexico can with little fear of contradiction be described as “essentially the result of domestic policies in the United States” (Davi, 2009: 25).

The starting point here is that in the “global market for illicit drugs, each country plays a role relevant to its resources, political structure, and domestic demand” (Toro, 1995: 1). For a complex set of reasons, some obvious and some less so but all beyond the scope of this essay, most drugs “destined for international trade originate in less developed countries or regions” and most are consumed in industrialised countries (Tullis, 1995: 36). In this as in any other commercial enterprise the issue is one of comparative advantage.

Given Mexico’s “location and relative poverty, the length and emptiness of its border with the United States, the tradition of drug production in Mexico and its Latin American neighbors” and the fact that its direct Northern neighbour is “by far the largest single consumer of illicit drugs” in the world, Mexico’s role of smuggler is hardly surprising (Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 91; Tullis, 1995: 36). Canada, on the other hand, “a wealthy nation without a tradition of drug production and no neighbors who are themselves drug producers”, exports few drugs to the US and may even be a net importer (Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 91). In many ways, Mexico is “the perfect smuggling platform”, and for over a century its entrepreneurs have been willing and able to supply “whatever those in the United States wanted but were unable to obtain legally in their own country” (drugs, alcohol, prostitutes, migrant workers, medical treatments etc), just as the US has “always been ready to provide whatever Mexicans want and cannot acquire readily in Mexico” (weapons, automobiles, electronics etc)

(Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 99).³ Seen from this perspective, the issue of what is smuggled across the border from Mexico is clearly a function of what cannot be legally obtained in the US. Thus it is clear that what has contributed most powerfully to the development of Mexican drug smuggling organisations is the series of prohibitionist strategies introduced by the US since the end of the nineteenth century (Davi, 2009: 25).

Before that time, opiates, cocaine and cannabis “were legal substances that could be purchased, sold and used without difficulty in the United States”, and their use, far from being “restricted to reducing pain or countering insomnia”, was promoted in a range of consumer products (Recio, 2002: 22-23). An 1897 mail-order catalogue, for example, offered “‘hypodermic cases’ that included a syringe, two needles, two morphine bottles and a case for only \$1.50” (Recio, 2002: 23). This was to change radically. For some time, especially after injured Civil War combatants who had been heavily treated with opiates returned home, there had been concern that these substances could result in serious addiction, leading the medical community to begin to “publicise the habit forming properties of such medications” (Recio, 2002: 23). But the real fear engendered by addicts was not directed at these soldiers, nor at the high-income women (known as habitués) who were, in fact, the most common regular drug users, but rather at the “mostly poor minorities such as the Chinese and Mexicans (who lived mainly in the West) and the Blacks (mostly in the South)” (Recio, 2002: 23). Increasingly, cocaine “raised the spectre of the wild Negro”, disregarding law

³ With this long history, smuggling across the border (and, indeed, the corruption its success requires) may be described as being embedded in the system and, arguably, a “natural phenomenon of geography, history and economics”; certainly among some Mexicans, it has become so commonplace as to be considered, despite its illegality, perfectly legitimate (Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 99, 101). Contributing to this is the fact that, just as with much licit Mexican business, smuggling enterprises tend to be strongly based in family or region, with extended family, political and social kinship ties (Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 101).

and social barriers while under its devilish influence, opium of the devious Chinese, cannabis of the shifty Mexican – just as hard liquor drinking was associated with the Irish and Italians (Recio, 2002: 23-24; Gould, 1998: 134). And the evil influence was observed to be spreading. The early twentieth century saw “racist anti-vice” groups joining forces to lobby for control of drugs and liquor, and instilling in US public opinion a different view towards their consumption and commercialisation, increasingly presenting their use as an issue of morality (Recio, 2002: 24).

But since this moral war could not be fought against an essentially neutral substance, it had to be fought against real human adversaries (Heath, 1992: 279). Those who were “on the other side” were portrayed “in terms of imagery that has deep roots in American national character” – the bad guys, it was frightening but also reassuring to be told, were “shorter, darker people, with alien names and accents, often operating with apparent impunity in corrupt nations of the Third World” (Heath, 1992: 279). In a move only too familiar to social scientists and psychoanalysts alike, all the negative qualities that Americans refused to recognise within themselves were thus neatly scapegoated onto an outcast group, making prohibition an apparently viable and admittedly attractive choice (Heath, 1992: 280).

In 1914, this “prohibitive paradigm” was embodied in the Harrison Act, which is “largely viewed as the foundation of 20th century US drug policy” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 418; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 50). The Act meant, among other things, that a medical prescription was now required to buy any drug (Recio, 2002: 25). This paradigm, as strengthened through supplementary legislation and legal judgments over the following decade by those of the belief that “addicts

were criminals first and addicts afterwards”, ensured that by 1922, prohibition was complete, and that the emphasis in drug policy remained fixed firmly on law enforcement and supply-side strategies (Bewley-Taylor, 1998; Recio, 2002: 25). The primary target in those first years was the medical profession and thousands of doctors and pharmacists were sent to prison for prescribing or being in possession of drugs. It was not until the 1930s “that the Narcotics Division began to gear its attention towards traffickers and bootleggers” (Recio, 2002: 25). By then American and Mexican entrepreneurs and owners of existing businesses had firmly established drug operations (and, incidentally, alcohol operations) across the border (Recio, 2002: 27).⁴ It was during those first three decades of the twentieth century that “a pattern emerged”, Mexico becoming a major producer and provider of cannabis and heroin to the US (Chabat, 2002: 135). This pattern has proved extraordinarily resilient. With very few exceptions, those Mexican states (mostly in the northwest) that began their illicit activities in these early years of prohibition remain the major production and trafficking nodes of the drug industry. By now they have close on a century of experience “of developing and improving channels to distribute drugs into the United States” (Recio, 2002: 42).

⁴ Of course, the establishment and extraordinary success of drug and alcohol operations in Mexico during this period (and, indeed, in its entirety), is also a function of a number of endogenous factors. The Mexican Revolution (1910 to ~1920), for example, fostered conflicts of interests in that while some, being otherwise occupied, paid little heed to the burgeoning trade, others (most famously, the incorrigible General Cantú) were receiving fiscal support from, if not themselves building, strong and extraordinarily lucrative monopolies in the trade of illicit goods, in order to finance their armies (see Davi, 2009 and Recio, 2002). Other important factors include geography (specifically, the difficulty in accessing some provinces), as well as the weak and flexible law enforcement institutions under the highly centralised authoritarian decision-making of the post-Revolution regime (See Davi, 2009). But while it is not suggested that the drug trade created these problems, it certainly does “feed upon, magnify and exacerbate them” (Freeman, 2006: 2). These and other domestic factors are, however, beyond the scope of this essay, which is explicitly limited only to the relationship between United States policy and the drug trade in Mexico.

Already in the 1910s and 1920s, however, the US had made attempts to “enlist the cooperation of Latin American governments in suppressing the drug market” – most of them unsuccessful (Serrano, 2006: 625; see also Recio, 2002). But while other countries resisted efforts to curtail their “lucrative, ancient and legal” local markets, Mexico was fairly quick to capitulate to US prohibitionist demands (Toro, 1995: 6). Mexico supported the 1912 Hague International Opium Convention and during the years that followed officially prohibited trade in the main illegal drugs: cannabis, opium and cocaine (Recio, 2002: 22-23).

Still, despite some scandals of drug corruption in the 1930s (resulting, for example, in the resignation of Mexico’s minister of the interior in 1931), drug trafficking was not considered an issue of national security, and was not even “an important topic on the Mexican domestic or international agenda” until the 1980s (Recio, 2002: 23). Certainly, domestic use was fairly limited and not, as in the US, considered “a social problem of important dimensions” (Chabat, 2002: 135). When Japan took control of the Asian supply of opium during World War II, however, the US military was in urgent need of morphine and for the first time “large scale” opium production began in Mexico (Chabat, 2002: 135). Once the war ended this trade was soon driven underground, creating a number of major smuggling routes (Davi, 2009: 26). It was only in the 1940s and 1950s that the Mexican government began to take a real interest in signing and committing itself to implementing the ever-proliferating array of international agreements designed to utilise a more punitive approach to combat the traffic in illegal drugs (Davi, 2009: 26).

Later, in the post-war era and into the 1960s, drug use in the United States and elsewhere became “mainstreamed”, the popularity of synthetic drugs increased and drug use became part of a new “‘subversive’ anti-war draft dodger lifestyle” that challenged traditional norms (Pryce, 2006: 605, 606). The hallmarks of the 1960s became sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, and liberation from taboos, including the use of illegal substances (Pryce, 2006: 606). Inevitably, drugs “crept up the political agenda as governments sought to respond to a new class of drug user” (Pryce, 2006: 605, 606). It was in this period that the “perennial attempts by governments to control drugs and drugs users [began to be] transformed from a low-key battle of attrition into an international ‘crusade’” against drugs (Pryce, 2006: 605).

So it was that in 1971 the Nixon administration came to declare its “War on Drugs”.⁵ Nixon’s “war”, however, entailed a fairly limited number of domestic and foreign policy initiatives – most famously, Operations Intercept and Condor (Chabat, 2002: 135; Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 106). The first, reflecting the US’s “colonial image of Mexico”, at least apropos the anti-drug fight, was a clear attempt “to shape and direct

⁵ This Nixon’s speech “declaring war”, it should be noted, was less a declaration of a new war than a public redefinition of an existing one. Nixon’s anti-drug programmes had been implemented from the beginning start of the administration in 1969. The characterisation of drug-related policy as a “war” is highly significant, however, since the American president is the “chief inventor and broker of the symbols of American politics ...[and] the ultimate way to extend one’s perspective to others is through metaphor” (Elwood, 1995: 93). Presidential speeches “‘invent’ or define an issue, the possible resolutions to that issue, and the framework to perceive that issue and its resolutions,” making definition any president’s “greatest asset in his or her power to persuade” (Elwood, 1995: 94). Of course, presidential invocations of the war metaphor on the domestic front have sometimes failed to “resonate with the body politic” and have quickly faded as discursive frameworks – for example, Ford’s “War on Inflation” and Johnson’s “War on Poverty” (Elwood, 1995: 94). But in juxtaposing war and illness metaphors (both of which are ubiquitous in American discourse) in the concept of “War on Drugs” successive American presidents effectively provided “an almost impenetrable perspective on that issue” (Elwood, 1995: 94). The war and illness metaphors in defining the “War on Drugs” is artfully fused, for example, in a 1986 speech by Reagan, who explains that, “Drugs are an epidemic, a social disorder that acts aggressively and that warrants Americans’ defensive actions” (Elwood, 1995: 99). Arguably, with “millions behind bars” and increased drug-related militarisation across the region, the war on drugs may have “slipped the reins of metaphor to become a literal war”, with comparable expense and casualties (Boyd, 2002: 1).

Mexico's internal and international approach to drug production and trafficking" (Cottam & Marenin, 2005: 18). In Operation Intercept⁶ the US, in an effort to halt the flow of drugs, searched and scrutinised every person crossing the border from Mexico (which, given daily traffic volumes, essentially constituted a unilateral decision to shut down the border) and indeed it was successful in forcing Mexico to reaffirm its commitment to the fight against drugs – but telling in that it was called off after only three weeks, thus making a negligible impact on the volume of drugs imported (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 420; Cottam, 2006: 4; Payan, 2006: 863). The border simply could not stay closed.

The second programme, Operation Condor, consisted of a "massive aerial eradication campaign with defoliant chemicals" of drug plantations in Mexico, in conjunction with a concerted cooperative effort to seize drugs in transit and to apprehend traffickers (for both of which the United States provided extensive financial and technical aid and advice). This was the most ambitious and most successful mission of the 1970s (Toro, 1999: 629). Thousands of hectares were defoliated, seizures of heroine and cannabis reached record levels, a number of high profile traffickers were incarcerated, imports were cut by as much as 75%, and the project was considered a "complete success" (Toro, 1999: 629). Importantly, though, even this overwhelming success "failed to produce any lasting impact upon illegal drug use within the US" (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 419). The market was certainly disrupted and rerouted, but it was far from destroyed. As importantly, this programme was loudly touted as cooperative, but in reality entrenched the precedent for later "bilateral" agreements, in that agreements with "American personnel acting in advisory capacities" effectively

⁶ More specifically, Operation Intercept I, as the experiment was to be repeated in 1985.

came to mean “unilateral demands to be carried out under American supervision” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 418).

This anti-drug victory under Nixon was followed by a relative lull. Both Ford and Carter, while not dismantling any of the legislation or institutions devoted to drug control, were rather more aware of the “limits of federal efforts to control drug abuse” and were seen as having a relatively relaxed attitude with regard to drugs (Davi, 2009: 26). The post-Vietnam drug “epidemic”, however, began to shift attitudes once more (Epstein, 1989: 1276). The later 1970s and early 1980s also saw the spread of the “dance-drug” culture and a concomitant explosion in the range and use of synthetic drugs, particularly ecstasy, as well as the creation and proliferation of cheap and newly smokable heroin and cocaine derivatives (Pryce, 2006: 606). This meant that the era of relative tolerance came to an abrupt end with the election of Reagan, who in his first inaugural address in 1981 vowed to conquer the “evil scourge” of drug abuse (Davi, 2009: 26; Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 418).

Reagan’s approach marked a change, however, in that not only did it make effective use of national television to “dramatise” his anti-drug crusade but it also marked the beginning of the mobilisation of substantially greater levels of resources and, overall, the assignment to the anti-drug battle of a significantly higher priority than that which his predecessors had employed (Bagley, 1988a: 189, 211). No president had “spoken out more against drugs” than he, and no administration had “signed more anti-drug treaties or spent more money to stem the flow of drugs” into the country (Bagley,

1988a: 211). It was clear from the start that Reagan had no qualms about deploying US forces abroad to achieve that end (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 418).⁷

Domestically, the drug landscape was changed dramatically in the 1980s by the development of crack cocaine, a “chemical derivative of cocaine, made by combining cocaine hydrochloride (powdered cocaine) with water, ammonia, and sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) [which] produces an intense high similar to pure or ‘freebase’ cocaine, but it is much less dangerous to produce and is inexpensive” (Kleiman, 2011: 680). Cocaine was no longer a drug only for the rich. The new drug’s “strength, simplicity of production, and meagre price tag gave rise to a new drug market that was easy to enter and that offered the potential for huge financial reward” (Kleiman, 2011: 680). The competitive violence intrinsic to such illegal markets increased dramatically, and the popular media, “despite the fact that overall rates of illegal drug use had peaked in the late 1970s ... was quick to report on the rising levels of violence, to claim drug use, and particularly crack use, was reaching epidemic levels, and to blame crack use for the rise in violence” (Kleiman, 2011: 680). Again, although crack use was already on the decline from 1986, from this date the media only stepped up its efforts to demonise the drug (Kleiman, 2011: 680).

The rise in media attention over the exploding crack market, as well as First Lady Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign, “fanned public consciousness” to new

⁷ And again, in this period, the “cultural, economic and ideological hegemony of the US enabled it successfully to internationalise its new emphasis on supply-side policies, through the UN dancing to America’s tune” (Pryce, 2006: 606). Internationally, as the Cold War fizzled out, the war against drugs replaced the Cold War rhetoric against communism, and drugs became the strategically useful new “good enemy” (Carstairs, 2005: 63). In fact, it was a perfect fit with the existing world-view of each side in the Cold War. “For those trained in Communism, it [was] an easy switch from demonizing all capitalists to focusing particularly on illicit drug market capitalists ... [f]or anti-Communists, an evil empire with hidden subversive tentacles everywhere [was] a familiar idea” (Room, 1999: 12).

heights (Bagley, 1988a: 162). Long-established perceptions of an America “filled with good” but with bad foreign elements with “the potential to threaten and destroy the underlying fabric of American life, society and ... values” were recrystallised and, not for the first time, provided implicit justification for any policy that claimed to protect that seemingly perennially-endangered ideal that is the American way of life (Kent, 2010: 9). Already at this stage the costly long-term failures of the past had made it clear to many that review and reconsideration of international drug policy was overdue (indeed the 1980s began a gradual refocusing away from “zero tolerance” approaches in many other countries, especially in Europe); what happened was more of the same (Pryce, 2006: 607; Jelsma, 2008: 4). As the end of the Cold War left a vacuum in place of the previous *raison d'être* of the military-industrial-intelligence complex, drugs quickly became the major new international security threat (Pryce, 2006: 607).

The “social and political climates in the United States during this period” resulted in “aggressive expansion and reshaping” of drug policy under the Reagan administration, in the direction of further prohibitionism, moral sensationalism, unilateralism and militarisation (Kleiman, 2011: 680). It is therefore Reagan’s “War on Drugs”, inasmuch as it represents a “departure from previous administrations’ strategies and established significant inertia for future policy”, which is the starting point of this essay’s analysis. In the next section, however, we first explain why the drug war’s failure is no longer in question, and how we can begin to frame the explanations for that failure.

Explaining and framing the failure

As we shall show in chapter 4, US policymakers under the administrations that followed Reagan have varied in the emphasis they have placed on and the strategies they have employed in the drug war as relevant to Mexico. This variation, however, has been within a narrow band of policies (while some other countries have come increasingly to explore divergent policy options), and has largely remained infused with the militaristic rhetoric of the early 1980s. This extraordinary policy consistency, and the hundreds of billions of dollars it has required, would make sense if ample and convincing evidence of its success could be provided.

There is a huge body of literature on this topic. This section draws on familiarity with a hundred-odd sources, and even in this has had to be selective. What they make clear is that success is not easily quantifiable, and even total triumph in one project can for a number of reasons result in failure in the overall objective. Moreover, the choice of an assessment timeframe is crucial. Successes in the short term may not be sustained in the long term, and vice versa. Analysts “generally recognize that evaluating program efficiency and strategy effectiveness are not simple tasks” (Perl, 1992: 18).

As mentioned in chapter 2, owing to the “clandestine nature of the business, it is impossible to know with any precision” the exact amounts of illicit drugs grown, produced and shipped (Perl, 1992: 30). And “without access to such data, and without truly reliable base figures, it is difficult to gauge with any reliability whether, indeed, drug production and shipment to the US is increasing/decreasing according to any specific percentage” (Perl, 1992: 30). Even a sustained increase in the amount of drugs seized by law enforcement does not reliably indicate whether a greater or lesser

quantity is necessarily available for seizure, and the case becomes even more opaque given the “number of aircraft seized or intercepted, ... number of arrests of major traffickers, dollar value of assets seized, quantities of chemicals seized, and hectares of drugs eradicated” (Perl, 1992: 30). The “sad fact is that, in gauging the potential efficacy of supply-reduction efforts, there is little *a priori* reasoning or knowledge from laboratory experiments that can give us the answer” (Moore, 1990: 121). We must “rely instead on our cumulative, historical experience as it is reflected in our statistical systems [and] we are handicapped by the slowness with which experience accumulates” (Moore, 1990: 121).

Taking these challenges into account, however, and to put it very mildly, the overwhelming evidence of cumulative, historical experience presented in the literature is that the US foreign supply reduction approach, in every one of its incarnations, has failed.⁸ In fact, no major programme of the war on drugs has yet had any lasting impact on the flow of drugs coming into the country or brought it any closer to becoming “drug-free” (Andreas et al., 1991; Bagley, 1988a, 1988b; Boyd, 2002; Carstairs, 2005; Cottam, 2006; Falco, 1996; Heath, 1992; Latin American

⁸ The domestic policy components of the “prohibitionist model”, marked by a level of punitiveness that has left the US with by far the largest prison population in the world, is not here addressed further than to note that there is mounting evidence that it too fails in its objectives, while resulting in a host of dangerous unintended consequences (see for example Ryan, 1998). One crucial factor of this is its racial dynamic. For example, despite the best evidence suggesting that drug use is evenly distributed by race, and most users reporting that their drug dealers are of their same race, meaning that the demographics of distribution likely reflect the demographics of drug use,

[s]tudies consistently show that police officers disproportionately stop and search African-Americans and Hispanics ... Yet reported “hit rates” – the proportion of searches that actually reveal contraband – are as high or higher for whites as for minorities ... The disproportionate targeting of minorities does not stop on the nation’s highways, but extends to general drug arrest and incarceration rates. For example, while blacks represent only 14-15% of drug users, in 1995 they were 35% of those arrested for drug possession, 55% of those convicted for drug possession, and 74% of those sentenced to prison for drug possession. Although African-Americans committed drug crimes in rough proportion to their representation in the population at large, they were sentenced at a rate 5 to 6 times their representation in the population. (Cole, 2001: 247-248).

Commission on Drugs and Democracy, 2009; Mabry, 1988; Nadelmann, 2003; Reuter, 1992; Rice, 2010; Room & Paglia, 1999; Ryan, 1998; Toro, 1995; Weinberg, 2008; Youngers, 2011, etc). After nearly 40 years and at a cost of \$40 billion a year, US drug policy is near-universally viewed as a failure (Corchado, 2009: 22). Almost no “serious students of drug policy contend otherwise” (Ryan, 1998: 223). Despite the billions of dollars spent, “there has been no noticeable change of drug usage in America” (Rice, 2010: 31). As throughout the region, anti-drug policies in Mexico “have failed to produce any lasting impact upon illegal drug use within the US” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 420). And although “the number of casual users of drugs has declined since the late 1970s, little of this can be directly attributed to the war on drugs” (Ryan, 1998: 223). There is quite simply no evidence that the drug war has had any lasting impact on the trend (Meier & Smith, 1994: 439). Not only did the decline, in fact, begin “well before the drug war of the mid-1980s”, but it is also more directly attributable to “preventive education, increased emphasis on health, fear of AIDS and other diseases, and demographic trends (particularly the decline in the population most at risk, young people between 16 and 21)” (Ryan, 1998: 223). Moreover, while there has been an “overall decline in the prevalence of drug use since 1979, we have seen dramatic increases in drug-related emergency department visits and drug-related deaths coinciding with this period” (Drucker, 1999: 15).

The plan for the war was to “eliminate the adversaries, through prison or death”, but at most it has succeeded in transforming them (Fernandes, 2008: 9). Monopolies “transmuted into networks”, “major organizations were segmented”, and “big bosses were subdivided into intermediary criminal leaderships” (Fernandes, 2008: 9). Centralisation gave way to specialisation and diversification, making supply

increasingly efficient (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010: 79). Mexico has in the past two decades experienced a “significant increase in trafficking of cocaine and trafficking and production of methamphetamine” and an estimated “70% of U.S. cocaine originating in South America passes through the Central America-Mexico corridor” (Brouwer et al., 2009: 1). Illegal drugs have since the mid-1980s become available in Mexico in increasingly large quantities and at increasingly low prices (Brouwer et al., 2009: 1). In fact, despite decades of engagement and billions in financial support, a 2009 intelligence report presented to President Barack Obama expressed such “concern about rapidly rising drug-related deaths in Mexico and the expansion of fiefdoms under the effective control of drug trafficking organizations” that it “concluded that Mexico was becoming a potential failed state, on a par with Pakistan” (Lindau, 2011: 180).

Drug-related violence in Mexico has in the last few years reached unprecedented levels (Freeman, 2006: 1). Disturbingly, “some Mexican and U.S. officials attempt to paint a positive picture of Mexico’s counter-drug campaign, even claiming that rising violence is an indicator of success” (Freeman, 2006: 10). They argue that “[t]he more we destroy the production of drugs, the more we catch drugs in transit, ... the more [drug traffickers] are desperate and challenging the authorities” (Freeman, 2006: 10). But what is becoming increasingly clear is that an increase in murdered Mexican traffickers “doesn’t translate into fewer drugs entering the United States ... [r]ival traffickers or those new to the business are only too eager to replace them and move a product for which there continues to be strong demand” (Freeman, 2006: 10). Mexico continues to meet the vast majority of the US drug demand (Davi, 2009: 5). And with Mexican drug profits from American sales estimated at \$25 billion a year, this is

unlikely to change (Quinones, 2009: 79). Civilian deaths have also become increasingly common over the last two decades, as police-trafficker violence spills into new areas and bystanders get caught in the crossfire (Corchado, 2009: 18). One political cartoon in April 2010 even suggested a new Mexican government slogan: “So that drugs will not get to your children ... we are killing them” (Cockcroft, 2010: 28).⁹

The handful of sources that do claim victory in the drug war tend to be in the form of unreferenced opinion pieces in conservative newspapers (written by directors of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy); of Drug Enforcement Administration “reports” (which go so far as to claim a “95% success rate” in reducing drug use); of arguments based on the contention that alcohol prohibition in the 1920s was an unqualified success; and of the work of a few academics who have fallen conspicuously silent on the matter over the last twenty years (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2003: 5; Moore, 1989, 1990; Walters, 2008).

But this is not to say that the criticism is uniform, and this is where the discussion becomes more interesting. Explanations for the drug war’s failure fall into one of two broad categories, depending on the analytical focus – that is, on whether the focus is

⁹ Indeed, the drug war has had a range of massive and dire unintended consequences. For one thing, in consistently flouting the ideal of multilateralism and in employing a drug diplomacy based on “too much pressure and too few incentives, too much fingerprinting and too little cooperation”, it has “achieved little besides raising the level of friction in US relations with Latin America” (Bagley, 1988a: 171; Sharpe, 1988: 78). Another common concern is the fact that the US drug strategy, which, despite evidence to the contrary, has been “to promote the myth of a special ability of the military in fighting drug production and trafficking”, has enhanced Mexico’s “reliance on the military for internal missions despite the lack of civilian oversight and results from decades of such experience” (Mares, 2003: 72). The use of the military “in an internally oriented drug war is problematic for any democracy, but especially one in transition from authoritarianism to democracy” as in Mexico (Mares, 2003: 72). The “expanded role of the military in every facet of the drug war” is a significant and worrying development (Lindau, 2011: 177-178). Welch et al. (1999), in fact, interestingly treat the war on drugs as a literal, rather than figurative, war. This allows them to apply just war theory, which they use to show convincingly that the war on drugs fails on every one of the six just war criteria (just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality and discrimination) (1999: 49).

primarily on drug policy or primarily on the dangers posed to drug control by trade policy. Within the first category, there are two opposing schools, those that suggest that the solution is to try harder and those that argue for the drug war's futility.

The first school of explanation comprises those who attribute failure "to any number of reversible causes: poor administration, weak leadership, inadequate resources, insufficient penalties" etc, and who argue essentially for more of the same but on a greater scale (Ryan, 1998: 223). This is usually the position either implicit or explicit in the drug-related campaigning of conservative politicians and is difficult either to prove or reject. Indeed, the foreign supply control approach, which argues that "if there were no drugs coming in ... then there would be no drug problem" is "logically compelling" and has powerful political appeal. It provides "convenient if distant targets for public anger that might otherwise be directed toward elected officials". And getting "foreign farmers to stop growing drug crops seems easier than curbing America's appetite for drugs" (Falco, 1996: 121).

It is difficult to imagine, however, how especially the Reagan presidency can realistically be outdone in terms of "outspoken public leadership by a charismatic and popular president, virtually unanimous congressional support, widespread public approval, massive deployment of economic and human resources, cooperation from the public media and the private sector, and considerable diplomatic leverage with many supply and transit countries" (Bagley, 1988b: 190). Yet Reagan was unsuccessful in making any lasting dent in drug production or use. There are certainly those, especially among military and drug agency strategists, who argue that every bit of effort "devoted toward solving the crisis of drug abuse in this country ... is effort

well spent toward establishing control at our borders, stabilizing fragile democracies in our hemisphere, directly saving the lives of US citizens, and enhancing our national security” (Stavridis, 2008: 110). But even most of these by now acknowledge that the term “‘War on Drugs’ is inadequate as a metaphor”, that victory will not be won by traditional military means, and that demand reduction through treatment must be at the centre of drug strategy (Stavridis, 2008: 111-112).

Even supposing for a moment that every one of the “diplomatic, organizational and resource problems could be resolved” and that law enforcement innovation could keep up with that of the traffickers, there are reasons to believe that more intractable factors would “doom or severely limit this strategy” (Sharpe, 1988: 78). This is the starting point for the second school of purely drug-policy based explanation for the drug war’s failure, which provides a coherent set of reasons why “at heart the drug war is fatally flawed, [and] no amount of tinkering with leadership, administrative efficiency, funding levels, or penalties can be expected to turn failure into success” (Ryan, 1998: 223).

In the earlier section on the criticisms of the US-backed international drug control regime we have already come across the three most crucial arguments for this second view, that drug war policies had and have no hope of success. These three basic concepts that are argued to spell the inevitable failure of a supply control approach to drug policy can be termed the “profit paradox”, the “hydra effect” and the “punish to deter fallacy” (Ryan, 1998: 223). There are many more, and more complex, analyses of this subject, but these three factors are the starting point of almost all.

We began with the “profit paradox”. We outlined how it is that its illegality provides for the narcotics trade’s enormous profitability, through what is known as the prohibition premium. In fact, it is estimated that “the drug market is so large and lucrative that ... the average drug organization can afford to lose 70-80% of its product and still be profitable” (Ryan, 1998: 224). The profit paradox comes down to the fact that “whatever success drug enforcement achieves in artificially raising prices only translates into inflated drug profits” which in turn “create a healthy incentive for drug suppliers to remain in the trade and for new suppliers to enter” (Ryan, 1998: 224). And with many suppliers eager to capture some of the artificially inflated profits, supply remains high enough to keep prices from rising too high, “thus undermining the goals of the policy” (Ryan, 1998: 224).

Another aspect of the profit structure of the drug market that “severely limits the potential impact of interdiction and source-country programs” is that by far “the largest drug-trade profits are made at the level of street sales, not in foreign poppy or coca fields or on the high seas” (Falco, 1996: 125). This means that even an “inconceivable” 50% reduction in Latin American cocaine supplies would only raise the street price an estimated 3% (Ryan, 1998: 224). We further explained that these high rewards tend to draw high risk-takers, “those both capable and inclined to inflict whatever damage [is] necessary ... in order to carry out their business” (Toro, 1995: ix). And because drug markets “operate without the usual protection against fraud and violence offered by the [legal] system”, inevitable disputes must be settled “privately and often with violence” (Freeman 2006: 9). Economists have consistently “warned that an illegal market produces less of a good at higher prices with more violence than a legal market produces” (Meier & Smith, 1994: 439). This combination of massive

profits and extreme violence also creates the perfect conditions for corruption, through which drug trafficking operations are able to “compromise political and administrative systems and erode the rule of law”, thereby entrenching their position further (Emmers 2004: 8).

The second unintended consequence we mentioned, which we will now call the “hydra effect”, was the fact that “enforcement efforts in one geographic area have often resulted in diversion of the problem into other areas” and similarly that “pressure on the market for one particular substance” has often “inadvertently promoted use of an alternate drug” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 9). Quite simply, the “economics of drug cultivation mitigate against sustained reductions in supply” (Falco, 1996: 125). Illicit drugs “such as heroin, cocaine, and marijuana are easy to grow, refine, transport, and sell; hence, entry barriers are notably low” and since there is an “almost endless supply of suitable places in which to grow these crops”, if one production area is wiped out, lost crops can easily be replaced elsewhere, where they may be more difficult to detect (Falco, 1996: 125; Ryan, 1998: 224). For example, in Mexico in the 1970s, “the government's opium-eradication campaign drove farmers to change their cultivation techniques, growing opium poppies in much smaller patches under large-leafed crops, such as banana trees, which made aerial detection difficult” (Falco, 1996: 125). And as the aftermath of the Colombian cartels’ “defeat” makes clear, even overwhelming “success against one drug organization simply guarantees a larger market share for competitors” (Ryan, 1998: 224). The nature of the drug industry is such that what you push down in one place can and will easily pop up again elsewhere.

The third criticism we raised was that the focus on law enforcement has “drawn resources from health approaches to what, ultimately, is a public health problem” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009: 9). In reality, the “mountain of research on the presumed deterrent effect of punishment ... has been inconclusive” and there is virtually no evidence that drug users, especially serious drug users, “respond like rational consumers seeking to satisfy desires in a free market” – they are quite simply highly unlikely to quit because of threats of punishment (Ryan, 1998: 224). Moreover, quantitative historical and cross-sectional analyses show that increases in drug arrests result more than anything in an increase in violent crime (Meier & Smith, 1994: 439). This is the “punish to deter fallacy”, and it is the other single greatest criticism of a prohibitionist drug control policy.

Singly and combined, these three simple principles, which have been well supported in theory and also repeatedly in the historical record, make the entire failed drug war seem an exercise in expensive futility. In fact, there is reason to believe that all the founding principles of the war on drugs (that a reduction in drug supply significantly decreases drug use, that drugs, rather than the fight against drugs, are what result in violent crime, etc) may be unsound (Sollars, 1992). But these concerns remain ignored by Washington’s drug policymakers. Few politicians will risk seriously suggesting “that a supply-side strategy abroad cannot succeed in solving the problems of drug abuse and violence at home [or] would be willing to risk being labeled ‘soft’ on drugs or to surrender the convenience of blaming a foreign enemy”. And there are just as few drug officials who “would risk the budgets of their agencies, let alone their jobs, to argue that what they are doing is destined to fail” (Andreas et al., 1991: 126).

In fact, drug agencies, in seeking to look good in the eyes of their political superiors, have been found to summarise information ever more selectively as it moves up the ranks, editing reports “to make sure that they do not say anything positive about any drugs” (Meier & Smith, 1994: 438; see also Leshner, 2004). This leaves the information distorted to the point where “the federal government ... ceases to be considered a reliable source for information on drugs” and creates a policy process “where facts are irrelevant or assumed – the solution is always more money, more arrests, and more punishment” (Meier & Smith, 1994: 438). Within these bodies, moreover, although there tends to be some acknowledgement of failure to date, the rhetoric is such that failure marks only the need for a redoubling of efforts and “any call for flexibility tends to be seen as unacceptable and indeed traitorous” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 312). It is these law enforcement bureaucracies that were “a major source of demand for the initial criminalization of illicit drugs” and which continue to champion its cause (Benson et al., 1995: 25). Indeed, bureaucratic lock-in is one of the most convincing arguments for the drug war’s extraordinary capacity to flourish in the face of failure. This explanation is in keeping with Allison’s “Model II”, the “organizational process model”, which holds that government organisations are governed by a fixed set of standard operating procedures – such that the behaviour of government “is determined primarily by routines established in these organizations prior to that instance” (Allison, 1968: 16).

Both the “try harder” and “futility” explanations for the drug war’s failure, however, take account only of drug policy in their analyses. There is a second broad category of explanation – one that rather emphasises drug policy inconsistencies and that draws attention to the fact that despite the sustained rhetoric and diplomatic energy, “US

international control policies have in practice frequently been subordinated to other foreign policy concerns” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 421).

Naturally, the US may have any number of potentially conflicting interests in a region at any one time. Indeed, we shall see evidence of policy clashes and inconsistencies in a number of instances. The most powerful single interests competing with that of drug control in Latin America, were, first, countering communism and, later, the promotion of free trade (most crucially, in NAFTA) (Bagley, 1988a: 170). Since the thawing of the Cold War and the dissipation of the communist threat, US policy towards Latin America has been driven principally by two major agendas: “promoting the spread of neoliberal market reforms and combating the spread of the illegal drugs trade” (Andreas, 1995: 75).

The argument that the drug war’s failure may be due to the incompatibility of these two agendas is raised most often by those in implicit support of the drug war and in explicit opposition to free trade, with the important exceptions of Andreas and Bewley-Taylor (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 117). Whereas arguments for the inevitability of the drug war’s failure tend to ignore the existence of other policy interests and are unsurprisingly condemnatory of its founding principles, many of those that focus rather on the drug war’s habitual subordination to other policy interests, most notably that of free trade, tend to avoid engaging with its problematic aspects and are often in implicit support of supply-side drug control. This is not to say, of course, that the two sets of arguments (that the drug war is inherently flawed and that it is undermined by trade liberalisation) cannot both be correct and equally important ways of

understanding the failure – indeed, we shall explore below some ways to take account of them both.

Logically, there are three possible views on the relationship between the promotion of free trade and the prospects for drug interdiction. The first view “expects that trade openness will undermine drug interdiction; a second argues the opposite; a third argues that trade openness does not necessarily affect drug interdiction” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 117). One presumes that either the second or the third view is implicit in US policymakers’ parallel promotion of these two imperatives. Neither is superficially implausible and there are some arguments to be made in favour of each.

The first view, that trade openness will undermine drug interdiction, is as plausible, however, and has a fair amount of evidence in its favour. Indeed, the idea that “the very thrust of international liberalization ... runs counter to the struggle to control the international drug trade” is by a fair margin the majority view (Raustiala, 1999: 91). According to this view, “trade openness increases the sheer volume of legal cross-border trade and provides cover for drug smuggling by providing ample opportunity to conceal illicit cargo in licit trade” and consequently “states’ ability to detect and interdict drug trafficking is severely diminished” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 119). The sheer volume of containers crossing borders makes it impossible to inspect very many of them. An interesting example of this is the Netherlands, which infamously has a “greater availability of illicit drugs than its European neighbours”, a fact often interpreted as evidence of the dangers of the relatively lax Dutch drug legislation but which studies have shown is rather due to the fact that the Netherlands has three times the port traffic of any other European country, necessitating unusually brisk cargo

inspections (Farrell, 1998: 22). Indeed, there is mounting evidence that the “transition of Mexican-based groups from ‘small-time’ smugglers to major traffickers was perhaps facilitated by the increase in cross-border trade with the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement”, which in turn has facilitated hundreds of billions of dollars worth of legitimate trade, as well as the movement of “more than 295 million people, involving upwards of 88 million cars and 4.5 million trucks and railroad cars”, crossing at 38 official border crossing points each year (Brouwer et al., 2009: 3). To “inspect every truck coming across the border would create a traffic jam all the way to Mexico City” (Andreas, 1996: 58). US officials believe that approximately one percent of these are actually inspected, meaning that the vast majority pass through freely to the United States, “where they may travel virtually unchallenged” (French, 2005: 530). For the same reason, trade liberalisation makes some drug production processes themselves much easier, because it makes precursor chemicals and equipment far easier to access (French, 2005: 534; Stares, 1996: 52).

At the same time, in fostering the integration of financial markets trade openness “has provided drug traffickers with more opportunities to launder money and invest in other activities, legal or illegal, further strengthening the drug industry while weakening the efforts of law enforcement to monitor the flow of drug money into the legitimate economy” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 119). A trade of this size “requires the ability to hold, transfer and exchange”, in secret, hundreds of billions of dollars, and then to launder this money to “conceal the true origins and sources” of its wealth, “to avoid detection and possible confiscation” (Seddon, 2008: 722; Shehu, 2000: 4). There is a great deal of evidence that financial liberalisation allows drug money to be laundered in increasingly complex and transnational ways – through the “stock

market, Internet banking and Internet casino [sic], the insurance and real estate industries, credit and debit card schemes, the diamond and gold industries, currency markets, the entertainment industry, and the hotel and rental car industries” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 120). This expansion of trade and global transportation networks “has also encouraged the cooperation and the formation of alliances among criminal organizations across different countries”, expanding the power and reach of cartels and thereby strengthening their ability to evade local law enforcement” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 120). In fact, it is this extraordinarily efficient harnessing of the forces of change for profit that has led both law enforcement officers and business analysts to point out that, “If only it were legitimate, there would be much to admire about the illicit drug industry” (Heed, 2006: 104).

Another argument for the negative impact of trade liberalisation on drug control efforts follows an entirely different logic – and it is one that runs exactly counter to perhaps the greatest single US justification for the compatibility of its trade and drug policy, which is the hope that, especially in the longer term, “as the Mexican economy grows, there will be less incentive to rely on illicit businesses such as drugs for economic support” (Levenson, 1994: 854). There is, as yet, no consensus about the long-term wealth distributional effects of freer trade (and this essay makes no attempt to settle the question) but the argument goes that, at least in the short and medium term, “trade openness has a displacement effect on a country’s work force” and that “[p]eople who have lost jobs due to trade reforms are more likely to turn to the drug industry for alternative means of employment, thereby strengthening the drug industry with an ample supply of recruits” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 120). Trade openness, in removing those preferential trade policies which often were designed to protect

groups of domestic producers in developing countries, has significantly reduced their income, forcing them to “turn to the drug industry for alternative income” (Bartilow & Eom, 2009: 120). The record in other parts of Latin America supports this contention, as it seems that the illicit drug sector may, for example in Bolivia, actually “have served to ameliorate the costs of restructuring to the extent that it has created opportunities for employment in both the agricultural and urban informal sector” (Alvarez, 1995: 144).

As for the economic record of NAFTA itself, while some emphasise Mexico’s gains, others argue that its “gradual economic genocide has ... generated humiliating poverty for three-fourths of the population”, pushing many in the intermediate classes down into the ranks of the poor and destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs (Cockcroft, 2010: 28). For example, urban artisans known as Tepitenos (after the Mexico City barrio of Tepito) used to make their living by repairing and reselling junk “in the pre-NAFTA environment of high tariffs on legally imported consumer goods” (Brouwer et al., 2009: 3). But as “tariffs have fallen and the market for black-market merchandise dwindled, Tepitenos have found that there's only one thing that will generate the kinds of profits they're now used to. So Tepito has become Mexico's cocaine mart” (Brouwer et al., 2009: 3). Whatever the long-term prospects or confounding variables, the evidence does point “overwhelmingly to the conclusion that Mexico’s reforms, backed by NAFTA, have largely been a disappointment for the country” (Zepeda et al., 2009: 1). This is because, despite “dramatic increases in trade and foreign investment, economic growth has been slow and job creation has been weak” – and now, moreover, with its economy so “closely tied to that of its northern neighbour, Mexico is suffering the most severe economic crisis of the region”

(Zepeda et al., 2009: 1). That this has plausibly contributed to Mexico's worsening drug problem is hardly surprisingly, since it is by now almost universally accepted that where "economic prosperity coexist[s] with pockets of worsening marginalization and poverty ... these disparities are exploited by drug dealers and traffickers in their attempts to develop new markets" (International Narcotics Control Board, 2001: 1). Moreover, the resulting "material and economic effects" of liberalisation, which may include rapid restructuring in terms of urbanisation, changes in living standards and access to mass media, lead to social fragmentation and considerable "cultural anxiety and turmoil", which history indicates can create an explosion in both drug use and drug market participation (Castells, 1999: iv; Lieber & Weisberf, 2002).

But perhaps the strongest evidence for the contention that trade openness aids rather than harms drug traffickers is the "spectacular" decline in the price of heroin and cocaine in the US and Europe in the last two decades, a period for the most part characterised by increased liberalisation, despite the fact that demand seems to have kept pace with supply (Storti & De Grauwe, 2007: 1). This price decrease, studies have shown, is entirely due to a decrease in the "intermediation margin" or the difference between producer price at source and the retail price for the consumer in the US and Europe, which essentially represents the difficulty, cost and risk involved in getting the product from the one to the other (Storti & De Grauwe, 2007). In other words, prices have been decreasing during the period of global trade liberalisation primarily because trafficking is getting easier.

So, although there may be ways in which the promotion of free trade may result in gains in the drug war, there are many more why it may not. Be this as it may, the

broader ideological inconsistency stands. The trade liberalisation and drug prohibition imperatives are mutually inconsistent. The former demands a minimal state, while the latter insists it become effectively interventionist (Andreas, 1995). The border is required to be both closed and open.

Especially since the 1990s, the free market ideology and the “doctrine of consumer sovereignty” have triumphed – in the “view of orthodox economists in North America, few impediments indeed are legitimate in the path of the consumer who has the resources to purchase a commodity” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 309). This perspective will grudgingly acknowledge “‘market imperfections’ to the extent that use of a commodity has adverse effects on others, but ... any harm a consumer may do to him/herself is already accounted for in the price s/he chooses to pay” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 309). Even so, public-health concerns are often subordinated to economic considerations and free-trade principles, with especially the United States using free-trade rules “to attack alcohol controls [and] to force open Asian tobacco markets” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 309). But in the world of the drug conventions, the “eager consumer is to be saved from him/herself, by whatever means necessary” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 309).

The US wants it both ways. In fact, far from seeing it “as a problematic combination, US officials view market liberalisation as a facilitator of drug market prohibition” (Andreas, 1995: 76). What it comes down to is that NAFTA in particular was probably anticipated to be a double-edged sword: from a commercial perspective, the perfect ally for drug trafficking, but politically, the perfect ally to fight drug trafficking (Paternostro, 1995: 47). According to the 1994 National Drug Control

Strategy report, “market-oriented governments are much easier to work with and more willing to cooperate with the international community in a common effort against the illicit drug industry” (Andreas, 1995: 76). The experience of Peru and Bolivia, the two countries that had by the mid-1990s “implemented the most sweeping neoliberal market reforms and orthodox austerity measures ever attempted in Latin America”, should already by the time of that report have given cause for concern (Andreas, 1995: 76). In both of those countries, it transpired that not only was compliance with US anti-drug strategies not significantly improved but, in fact, “compliance with neoliberal policy objectives ... necessarily meant undermining US drug policy objectives” (Andreas, 1995: 76). Fully complying with US drug control objectives would have so “damaged the same neoliberal programme which the USA ... demanded and supported” that they were forced to “unofficially defect from the US ‘war on drugs’ – even while trying to maintain the perception of official compliance” (Andreas, 1995: 77).

But the bizarre reality, as we shall see, is that the issue of drug control did not come up at all during NAFTA negotiations (Drucker, 1999: 17). US officials “took no chances in letting the drugs spectre taint the creation of a new economic order” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423). The Agreement itself makes no mention of any crime concerns other than intellectual property offences (Levenson, 1994: 857). And, especially during NAFTA’s early years of implementation, very little was being written about its potential impact on the US drug control efforts (Levenson, 1994: 844). The decision to go ahead with NAFTA was made with what criminal justice commentators called a “remarkable and somewhat frightening[ly]” myopic view of it as an economic agreement, and with barely any input about its potential impact on

drugs and other crime (Levenson, 1994: 863). And “[a]cknowledging, discussing, or even suggesting the possibility that the drug trade and neoliberal economic policies actually fuel each other rarely enters the official policy debate in Washington” (Andreas, 1995: 85). In fact, it is only really in the post-9/11 world that “widespread attention has focused on the logic of US trade and security mandates in America’s borderlands” (Coleman, 2005: 198). We have already seen that there is reason to believe that there are major flaws in the principle of the drug fight itself, as well as an apparently wilful failure to critically engage with those flaws.

The question, then, is this: how can we explain *both* of these observations, so often treated separately – that not only is the drug war being apparently irrationally adhered to, but economic policy in direct conflict with the drug war is being apparently irrationally adhered to? There are as yet incredibly few analyses that take account of both of these. Next, we shall make a start to categorising the few existing attempts at holistic explanation.

We have already looked at one convincing explanation for why the drug war continues to be fought, despite its manifest failure and the likelihood that its founding principles are unsound – that is, that its bureaucratic design has essentially locked it in. But this vision of monolithic, irrational anti-drug agencies, blindly following a fixed set of standard operating procedures, does not account for the observation that “narco-diplomacy is consistently influenced by wider US foreign policy” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422). Similarly, the view of successive US policymakers pushing through trade liberalisation measures with no apparent concern for its drug war implications is not obviously compatible with the observation that the drug war continues to receive

massive financial and ideological support. There are as yet fewer than half a dozen analyses that are able to take account of both these narratives – even fewer explicitly so. There already appear, however, to be three general categories of explanation. We shall call these the conspiracy theory, the cultural theory and the compartmentalisation theory.

The conspiracy theory, which has the convenience of being compatible with the realist model, is essentially the suggestion that the parallel but apparently conflicting trade liberalisation and drug prohibition imperatives are perfectly rational if one accepts that they both serve some other, unstated goal. – for example, “extending global US military hegemony and extending the reach of the legal US drug economy, which often depends on raw materials and consumer markets in the very same territories forced to participate in the US-led drug control regime” (Reiss, 2010: 2). Certainly, there is legitimate concern about the fact that, while “making strenuous efforts to exclude from their shores every conceivable kind of illegal substance”, the US (and other industrialised countries) “are also vigorously pushing their own substances, such as alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceuticals onto the very same countries from which they are doing their best to exclude illegal drugs” (Room & Paglia, 1999: 308). An example of the deeply unequal and subjective relations around the supply of and demand for legal and illegal drugs is seen in the “handling of the concurrent crises in Mexico of drug trafficking and the swine flu, or H1N1 virus” (Reiss, 2010: 4). US congressional discussions explicitly and un-ironically linked the two issues, pledging in one go that the US government “would provide sufficient resources and support for the mass production of (privately patented) flu vaccines

(especially ensuring adequate supplies to the US military), while waging war against drug cartels” (Reiss, 2010: 4).

A more subtle take on this theoretical interpretation of US actions is one that sees border policing as not so much about the “instrumental goal of law enforcement”, but more about the “expressive role of law enforcement”, with the “performance” of the border as a blockade ensuring that “the larger process of economic integration will not be derailed by domestic and bilateral politicking over drug trafficking and migration issues” (Andreas, 2000: 141). In this analysis, then, economically opening up the border necessitates making it “at least appear to be a more formidable police barrier” (Coleman, 2005: 187). The suggestion is that US border prohibition exists “as a second-order theatrical foil to U.S. geoeconomic interests (i.e. free trade), such that ‘real’ US trade interests are strategically accompanied by parallel security ‘images’” (Coleman, 2005: 187).

More generally, there are already a number of strong arguments around drug control policy and economic policy respectively as elements “in the hegemonic pretensions of the United States in the western hemisphere” (Walker, 1993: 45). There is room for both its narcotics and economic policies in a unified view of the US as extending an American empire, “safeguarding the national interests of the United States, as the only possible provider of global security and other international public goods, as the only state with the capacity to undertake the interventionist and state-building tasks that the changing character of security have rendered so vital, and as the essential power-political pivot for the expansion of global liberalism” (Hurrell, 2006: 548). For all its championing of deregulation, neoliberalisation is a mode of governing societies,

and one with its “home address” in Washington, DC (Corva, 2010: 3). Especially in the post-9/11 world, which has been observed to mark a return to parochialism and unilateralism and an increasingly narrow focus on US security interests, “the western hemisphere ... reveals a relatively simple pattern: the reassertion of US hegemony” (Castañeda, 2003: 70). There are as yet no systematic analyses of how *both* US drug and trade policies may further this end.

The cultural theory, which more neatly corresponds to the constructivist model, rather emphasises the incoherence, or at least complexity, of Americans’ conception of their border region. Here, the border is understood as a space of simultaneous nationalising and internationalising influences, reflecting in an intricate way both interdependence and asymmetricality, “with the US the dominant partner that defines in large part the terms of collaboration and integration” (Coleman, 2005: 186). Border policing, according to one interpretation of this view, complements neoliberalisation “in that it concerns a xenophobic and hypernationalist instatement of borderland law and order against flows of migrants [and drugs] unleashed by the liberalization of rural and urban Mexico” (Nevins, 2002 in Coleman, 2005: 187). The point is that the border is a complex “security/economy nexus”, subject to a wide range of explicit policies and implicit influences and images, each of which in turn often invokes “some overarching notion of American identity” (Coleman, 2005: 187).

Americans, including policymakers, “see the United States as rational, confident, disciplined, able to control its actions and its future, interested in the cooperative good and willing to compromise to achieve it, unwilling to be coercive unless absolutely necessary, and consistently supportive of fundamental human and democratic rights”

(Cottam & Marenin, 2005: 14). Mexico, on the other hand, “is seen through a colonial image ... as undisciplined, democratic in pretext ... unwilling to confront its own problems, nonrational, corrupt, violent, dirty, unsuccessful, and immature” (Cottam & Marenin, 2005: 14). There are potentially complex drug and trade policy imperatives inherent in the well-documented racial underpinnings of domestic drug responses, which may well ripple through to its international side (Reiss, 2010: 9). Borderlands consciousness is as likely as any other to be racist, if not more so, because it is at “the fraying margins of state power” and the site where the “globalizing politics of labor subordination” is at its most crucial and contested (Rosas, 2007: 82-83).

These cultural imageries powerfully shape both border policy and on-the-ground practice, in incoherent ways (Ackleson, 2005; Cottam & Marenin, 2005). Discourses around perceived threats and opportunities form complex social environments within which actors must then formulate solutions based on those prevalent understandings (Ackleson, 2005: 166). Variations in drug and trade policy thus reflect more diffuse concerns about economic hardship and social change (Burke, 1992: 579). Moreover, borderland law is shaped from afar, “by distant and disconnected policymakers ... for whom the region is a vacant, abstracted, and unpopulated frontier of geopolitical and/or geoeconomic significance”, and who embody in it the conflict between different conceptions of US “national interest” through hypernationalist, paternalist and racist images (Coleman, 2005: 187).

The difficulty in testing either the conspiracy or the cultural theory is that “the very hiddenness of the agenda means that it is rarely, if ever, explicitly stated” (Ryan, 1998: 235). While it is conceivable that candid interviews with policymakers or tell-

all autobiographies may eventually reveal the conspiracies, the same is not true for subtle cultural environments. For them, “[n]o smoking gun awaits discovery in official policy statements, preambles, records or committee hearings, or even survey or interview data” (Ryan, 1998: 235). This makes the claims both provocative and nonfalsifiable (Ryan, 1998: 235). In any event, the data here gathered, all of which is a matter of public record, is not of the kind that would bring either the cultural or conspiracy explanations satisfactorily to light.

Finally, and more usefully in this context, there is the compartmentalisation theory, which focuses on the bureaucratic disconnect between the bodies involved with drug war policy and those involved with economic policy. Specifically, it questions the assumption that “events in international politics consist of the more or less purposive acts of unified national government and that governmental behavior can be understood by analogy with the intelligent, coordinated acts of individual human beings” (Allison & Halperin, 1972: 41). Unlike the conspiracy theory, and like the cultural theory, its basis is irrationality. Interestingly, however, it is unlike the cultural theory (which arguably does make the analogy with individual human beings but which does this on the assumption of human irrationality) in that it emphasises the fact that government decisions are made by a “conglomerate of large organizations and political actors who differ substantially about what their government should do on any particular issue and who compete in attempting to affect both government decisions and the actions of their government” (Allison & Halperin, 1972: 41). Different agencies “have independent bureaucratic interests (budgets, power, prestige, access to the White House) that they seek to enhance and protect, which are also quite independent of ‘rational’ foreign policy decisionmaking” (Wiarda, 2000: 175).

Inexplicably, this bureaucratic politics model has been explicitly applied to the problem of the relationship between US narcotics and trade policies by only one author (Andreas, 1995, 1996, 2000 etc). It seems likely to be a rich source of explanatory power, and it is the theoretical framework that most obviously presents itself in the account in the next chapter.

In the following section, we fulfil this essay's primary goal, reviewing the historical record of the drug war with emphasis on those factors that most clearly demonstrate the twin narratives already discussed – that is, of both dogmatic adherence and of shrewd subversion (during the Reagan presidency, largely to more traditional security concerns, but later, through the same mechanisms, increasingly to trade interests). It is this approach that allows us to bring to light our secondary focus, on the relationship between these narratives, which we have here theoretically systematised and which we shall see lends credence to the applicability of the compartmentalisation model.

The War on Drugs, NAFTA and Mexico

We now recount the most salient drug policy and trade policy features and developments of the War on Drugs from the Reagan presidency through to the present Obama presidency, interspersing to a lesser extent the relevant parallel developments in Mexico from the de la Madrid to the Calderón presidencies. This must needs be a superficial account of these forty years of complex policy developments within and between these two countries. Most notably, developments in narco-diplomacy between the US and other countries in Latin America that have not been significant to Mexico are largely omitted.¹⁰ The account below is, however, the minimum overview necessary to an understanding of the nature and the impact of the US policy approach to Mexico. Assessment of the success or failure of drug war policy initiatives is kept to a minimum – as, one is tempted to conclude, has been the approach of US policymakers throughout.

United States: Reagan (1981-1989)

Reagan's presidency began in 1981 with his vow to conquer the "evil scourge" of drug abuse.¹¹ By a year later, when, in his typically hyperbolic fashion, he officially

¹⁰ The term "narco-diplomacy" is common in the literature. It is best explained by Baviskar (1996) as describing "the rather prickly focal point of bilateral relations between ... [drug-producing countries and] the US, especially since the 1980s: the unwelcome dependency between ... the world's major producers of drugs and its biggest consumer-market" (1996: 655). Moreover, the "all-pervasive nature of the drugs trade has given rise to a special vocabulary: narco-trafficking, narco-terrorism, narco-funds and narco-corruption" (Baviskar, 1996: 655).

¹¹ Interestingly, "scourge" remains the overwhelming favourite among terms characterising the drug problem in high-level drug policy discussion forums. Room (1999a0: 1693-1694) provides an illuminating analysis:

The literal sense of a scourge is a whip or a lash used to inflict pain or punishment. But the term has long been used in English primarily figuratively. The Oxford English Dictionary records two main senses, each with a long history. One is "a thing or person that is an instrument of divine chastisement" ... The other sense is "a cause of (usually, widespread) calamity. Applied, e.g., to a cruel tyrant, a warrior, a war, a disease that destroys many lives"

redeclared the “War on Drugs” as a higher national security priority than ever, it was already becoming clear that, to this end, even the previously unthinkable would be justified (Bagley, 1988a; Carstairs, 2005; Kent, 2010; Mares, 2003; Walker, 1993, etc.) The promised “full-scale” attack involved enacting tougher domestic anti-drug legislation, expanding federal drug enforcement budgets, widening the role of the US military in drug control efforts, stepping up interdiction programmes at the borders and abroad, and increasing levels of diplomatic pressure, and assistance, to source and transit countries (Bagley, 1992: 2). Crucially, Reagan believed that “America’s drug problems stemmed from an overly tolerant approach to drug users, drug dealers, and drug producing countries”, and he devoted an unprecedented 80% of the anti-drug budget (itself larger than ever before) to law enforcement and interdiction, as opposed to prevention, education and treatment (Falco, 1992: 3). Between 1981 and 1986, the budget for law enforcement and interdiction more than doubled, from \$800 million to \$1,9 billion (Falco, 1992: 3).

In 1984, with the creation of the National Drug Enforcement Policy Board, Reagan began in earnest to try to centralise government anti-drug programmes (Bagley, 1988b: 167). The Board’s authority was extended to include “not only enforcement, but also prevention, education, and treatment activities as well”, and its members included the Attorney-General and representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency,

... "Scourge" is thus ambiguous about the exact nature of what is causing the trouble. It can be used concerning disease, for a social problem, or for a natural (or divinely- inspired) disaster. But it does not necessarily invoke any of these categories. And it can be used both of an impersonal force and of volitional acts by humans ... It is remarkable that almost none of the framing rhetoric in the general debate mentioned dependence or even addiction in characterizing the drug problem. Instead, the characterizations of the nature of the problem tended to the moral and ethical ... [T]he drug user is almost absent from the rhetorical framing in the general debate ... By and large, the problem is also not personified. Mostly the discussion is in terms of "drug trafficking" or of the "drug trade". In a few speeches, personification proceeds as far as "drug traffickers", or "narcoterrorists", but without any further specification.(Room, 1990: 1693-1694).

the Office of Management and Budget and the office of the Vice-President (Bagley, 1988b: 167-168). Despite this formal reorganisation, reports continued to find that drug policy remained “diffuse and overlapping”, and the Board appeared unable to resolve “long-simmering interagency battles over ‘turf’” (Bagley, 1988b: 168).

The death of basketball star Len Bias from a cocaine overdose in 1986 further fuelled the anti-drug frenzy, leading politicians to compete “ferociously among themselves to see who could propose the ‘toughest’ drug policies”, in turn resulting in the passing in October of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (Bagley, 1988b: 164). This Act stepped up the attack on all fronts, including more than tripling resources for “eradication, crop substitution and enforcement programs” abroad, from roughly \$40 million to over \$200 million annually (Bagley, 1988b: 165).

Moreover, although the Reagan administration itself was reluctant to entirely subordinate any other foreign policy imperatives, such as countering communism, to that of drug control, Congress in this Act firmly established drug control as the top foreign policy priority (Murphy, 1990: 1262-1263). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act, together with amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act, created a certification system of aid leveraging, meaning that US foreign aid was henceforth to be conditional on certification that a country was making satisfactory efforts to combat drug production and trafficking (Bagley, 1988a; Murphy, 1990: 1623; Serrano, 2003: 124). The consequences of decertification range from “cutting off US anti-narcotics assistance and development aid to blockage of loans from multilateral lending agencies and creating barriers to the entry of the imports from offending countries” (Baviskar, 1996: 655).

Despite the gravity of the threat, however, the certification process is based “more on political judgements than on technical assessments” and, needless to say, quickly became the source of “considerable irritation” for the countries subject to it (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 420). Through certification, Congress came to play an “increasingly important role in US drug diplomacy, and ... [d]ecisionmaking in foreign drug policy became hostage to voters’ concerns” (Serrano, 2003: 124). Ironically, this meant that this extreme measure, intended to entrench total commitment to drug eradication, inevitably had the opposite result. Through Congressional certification, drug policy was doomed to take the form “of a measure tailored to suit domestic consumption and to appease an agitated US audience; it was not necessarily conducive to effective international drug control” (Serrano, 2003: 124). Significantly, the Reagan administration did not once use decertification to punish a close ally or one that was receiving US economic or military assistance (Bagley, 1988b: 169).

The certification provision did, however, become the “main instrument of leverage over drug-affected states” not currently in favour – leverage used to force foreign governments to “engage in law enforcement measures such as crop eradication, law enforcement militarization, extradition of foreign nationals, and mutual legal assistance for prosecution” (Murphy, 1990: 1623; Serrano, 2003: 124). But the introduction of the certification process did not significantly “alter the underlying dynamics of US narcotic foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 420). As one contemporary lawmaker put it during debate on certification, “Folks, there is nothing new. You have just got to keep plugging away, putting money in the battle ... and pressuring the foreign governments to come on board” (Bewley-

Taylor, 1998: 420). Through the certification mechanism, the United States was merely affirming its well-established “‘custodial’ role as the self-appointed guarantor of norms and standards accepted or imposed on the international community” (Serrano, 2003: 125). Still, the unilateral introduction of this coercive instrument, so starkly highlighting the asymmetrical character of US-Latin American relations, made clear the increasingly coercive nature of US narco-diplomacy (Baviskar, 1996: 655).

This threat of economic punishment was soon complemented with another, even more traditionally coercive, foreign policy instrument. As it became increasingly obvious that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) (established under Nixon in 1973) was too inexperienced and too small, the Coast Guard too tight on resources, and state and local law enforcement officials hampered by their inability to operate outside the US, the US military itself took on a growing role in the interdiction effort (Mabry, 1988: 55). Whereas the first half of the 1980s had already seen the US military providing equipment and technical assistance to Latin American counter-narcotics teams with seizure, crop destruction and arrest missions (with modest and temporary success at re-routing drug flows), the second half saw an escalation in militarisation and an expansion in the scale of foreign projects (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 419).

A number of these operations were considered wildly successful, leading one DEA administrator to proclaim in 1986 that, “We are finally making progress in the international war against cocaine ... the traffickers are hunted men” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 419). Federal cocaine seizures, for example, “rose from just 2 tons in 1981 to 27 tons in 1986 and to almost 100 tons by 1989”, while foreign assistance

programmes contributed to “a substantial reduction in the flow of marijuana and heroin smuggled into the United States from Mexico” (Bagley, 1992: 2).

But, only a few days after the task force departed Bolivia (after Operation Blast Furnace in 1986), a major US newspaper featured a political cartoon showing a sky filled with US helicopters leaving Bolivia, and one pilot saying to the other, “This reminds me of Vietnam. We go in with a large force, accomplish almost nothing, declare victory, then go home” (Abbott, 1988: 95). In fact, in the longer term the record became fairly clear. Despite the breathtaking scale of Reagan’s project, more drugs than ever were being consumed in the US at the end of his presidency than preceding it (Bagley, 1988b: 190; Epstein, 1989; Mabry, 1988; Murphy, 1990; Reuter, 1988 etc). Growing frustration with this manifest failure resulted in the passing of another Anti-Drug Abuse Act in 1988, which was primarily “geared toward setting the tone of drug policy and drug control in the United States into the future” (Kleiman, 2011: 681). It “specified the country’s drug control budget, and indicated that future policies were to be based on scientific research”, with the eventual policy goal of a “drug free” America (Kleiman, 2011: 681). The 1988 Act “did not abandon existing US supply-side programs abroad but, rather, expanded them” while simultaneously stepping up (mostly more punitive) demand reduction efforts domestically (Bagley, 1992: 4). The supply-side component continued to receive by far the greater proportion of the resources (Bagley, 1992: 4).

Despite this apparent commitment to combating drugs, however, there were under the Reagan administration, and throughout the period in question, a number of cases where drug policy in the region was subordinated to other concerns. Probably “the

most graphic and alarming case”, the one which best “epitomizes the ambivalence of US international drug politics”, came to light in 1989, with the case of the Panamanian General Manuel Noriega (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422; Kleiman, 2011: 50). Because of Panama’s “crucial strategic position in the Western Hemisphere”, and despite the fact that Noriega “was heavily involved in the drug trade [he had] been employed by various US intelligence agencies, notably the CIA, since at least the early 1970s” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422). The General’s “co-operation in Panama during the 1980s was seen to be an essential element in US monitoring of left wing activities in Latin America”, and he was therefore tolerated by both the Carter and Reagan administrations (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422; Kleiman, 2011: 50). In fact, evidence suggests that, in exchange for Noriega’s provision of “financial assistance and logistical support for the *Contras* during President Reagan’s campaign against the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua ... elements in the US government allowed drug dealers to fly narcotics into the USA” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422). It was only when Noriega’s relationship with Washington deteriorated, owing to his “anti-US rhetoric and the increasing instability of his regime”, that he was indicted on drug-trafficking charges and Reagan eventually bowed to internal political pressure and decertified Panama in 1988 (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422; Kleiman, 2011: 50). This ultimately resulted in Operation Just Cause in 1989, in which the US invaded Panama “to capture the dictator and return him to the United States for trial” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422; Kleiman, 2011: 50).

Indeed, the *contras* themselves, first overtly and later covertly supported by the US in their resistance to Nicaragua’s communist regime, were repeatedly accused of “involvement in drug trafficking, although no hard evidence implicating the principal

contra organization ... has ever been made public” (Bagley, 1988a: 170). Despite suspicions, most famously raised by Senator John Kerry, the CIA simply “did not pursue them aggressively because of the heavy commitment of the Reagan Administration to the *contra* movement” (Bagley, 1988a: 170). Similarly, reports of involvement in drug shipments by members of the Honduran military were, although not exactly covered up, certainly not scrutinised too carefully (Bagley, 1988a: 170). For some “hardline critics of the Reagan administration's anti-drug policies, the bottom line was that President Reagan talked tough, but never really got tough” (Bagley, 1988b: 192). They contended that “the high priority rhetorically assigned to the anti-drug crusade was undercut or diluted by federal budgetary constraints and competing domestic and foreign policy concerns” (Bagley, 1988b: 192). In this and numerous other cases during the final years of the Cold War, “Washington’s preoccupation with communism ... often meant that the drug war was relegated to a secondary position on the list of foreign policy priorities” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422).

Still, at least nominally, the main focus of the international component of this stage of the war on drugs was on the production and trafficking of cocaine, with the result that particular attention was on the major Andean cocaine production centres, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru (see Falco, 1992). Relations between the US and these and other drug-producing countries took on a fairly stable pattern: “worsening narco-relations, unilateral American initiative and/or damaging incident, charge-countercharge, spill-over into relations in general, escalating rhetoric from officials and media, mediation by cooler heads, binational conferences followed by words of praise for one side by the other, and improved cooperative efforts” – only for the cycle to begin again (Bagley, 1988a: 173).

Relations with Mexico (-1988)

US narco-diplomacy played out rather differently with Mexico than with the Andean cocaine producers. Despite the success of Operation Condor in the 1970s, in the 1980s Mexico “appeared again as an important supplier of marijuana and heroin to the United States [as well as] a point of transit for the cocaine coming from South America” (Chabat, 2002: 136). But as the focus on stopping drugs at the “source” has been maintained, Mexico, “usually portrayed as merely a transit point”, has for the most part been subjected to rather less foreign policy pressure than countries in the Andean region, with other concerns (most notably the demands of free trade) often taking precedence (Paternostro, 1995: 41). Although it did receive massive counternarcotics aid (including DEA training and equipment), directly interventionist policies such as those seen in Bolivia and Colombia were not replicated in Mexico (see Bewley-Taylor, 1998; Cottam, 2006; Paternostro, 1995).

By the late 1980s, however, in Mexico too the drug problem was considered an issue of national importance. President de la Madrid in 1987-1988 “elevated narco-trafficking to the realm of a national security issue for Mexico” and soon “one-third of Mexico’s defence budget became directed towards drug control” (Andreas, 1998: 161; Cottam, 2006: 3). But direct intervention by the US simply was not politically viable, partly because of Mexican nationalism and partly because of the sour tone of US-Mexico relations resulting from acts of US narco-unilateralism – such as the unauthorised deployment of US anti-drug agents into Mexico in the 1930s, the closure of the border crossing during Operation Intercept in 1969 and unsanctioned passes by

US spy-planes and satellites over Mexican territory in the 1980s (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 419-420; Paternostro, 1995: 36). Throughout the period in question, and although “full certification has been granted to Mexico every year without exception since 1986, it has been a source of public friction between both countries” (Chabat, 2002: 142). In what has “become almost a ritual every year, in the weeks before the certification”, Mexico has repeatedly refused “to recognise the certification process, regarding it as a possible violation of international law, and a certain illustration of American arrogance and imperialism” (Cottam, 2006: 6; Chabat, 2002: 142).

Under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which monopolised power for 71 years, Mexico “championed an expansive and stern view of national sovereignty and non-intervention”. Under that doctrine it led opposition to US interventions throughout Latin America and “became communist Cuba’s staunchest backer in the Western hemisphere” (Leiken, 2001: 94). Mexican nationalism is “intensely sensitive to any perceived effort by non-nationals to exercise power or decision-making authority on Mexican soil” and any such action “is perceived as a challenge to the authority of the Mexican state, is associated with the Mexican historical experiences of invasion, and is simply not considered acceptable” (Cottam, 2006: 5). Much to the frustration of American policy-makers, Mexico thus “tends to be very cautious about such interaction given a perceived tendency for the US to take advantage of cooperative endeavours and maximise its own interests and priorities” (Cottam, 2006: 5; Leu, 2008: 58).

US-Mexican narco-relations became particularly strained in 1985, after DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by Mexican drug

traffickers – quite possibly with the complicity of the Mexican police (Chabat, 2002: 136). The US responded with Operation Intercept II and its drug policy overall became more nationalistic, unilateral and militarised than ever (see Cottam, 2006).

United States: George H.W. Bush (1989-1993)

When George H.W. Bush took office in 1989, the new president devoted his entire first televised address to a call to arms in the War on Drugs (Paternostro, 1995: 47). He assured viewers that, “we will for the first time make available the appropriate resources of America’s Armed Forces” and “intensify our efforts against drug smugglers on the high seas, in international airspace, and at our borders” (Heath, 1992: 269).

During the following months “the media were full of feature stories, editorial, news reports, and background accounts about ‘the drug menace,’ ‘drug lords and the cartels,’ the ‘war on drugs,’ and many other variants on the theme of drugs as the enemy of the collective American people” (Falco, 1996: 122). Bush, who had been characterised as a “wimp” during his time as vice-president, was eager to recast himself as a “tough guy”, and moved the Office of National Drug Control Policy, created under the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, inside the White House (Heath, 1992: 269). The office director, “popularly dubbed ‘Drug Czar’”, in keeping with the “tough guy” approach, “promptly declared a policy directed almost exclusively to the supply side, aimed at keeping drugs from coming into the country, and failing that, keeping them from the public” (Heath, 1992: 270).

The Department of Defense, initially resistant to “congressional efforts to enlist the military in the drug war ... when faced with major budget cuts after the collapse of the Soviet Union ... embraced a drug-fighting mission”, thereby “protecting some endangered programs by reclassifying them as drug-related” (Falco, 1996: 122; Heath, 1992: 271). As the old pretext disappeared, the US was arguably preparing to “spy on the whole of Latin America” under the new pretext of combating drug trafficking (Saxe-Fernández, 1994: 234).

Whatever the intention, however, when Bush’s new Secretary of Defense, former Congressman Dick Cheney, “publically proclaimed that detecting and countering the production and trafficking of illegal drugs was a ‘high-priority, national security mission’ for the Pentagon”, this was a “dramatic policy statement” (Bagley, 1992: 4). Major Pentagon involvement resulted in rapid escalation “in US military investment in drug-producing countries, with more personnel following more money and equipment” (Bagley, 1992: 4). In one incident representative of the period, for example, a massive and expensive new long-range radar system, “[o]riginally designed to detect air attacks from the Soviet Union ... was reapplied in the detection of aircraft used by drug smuggling organizations” (Kleiman, 2011: 133).

So it was that the Bush administration began committing unprecedented “material resources, military training, and intelligence to try to bust the Andean cocaine trade” under the “highly publicised ‘Andean Strategy’ ... announced in September 1989” (Heath, 1992: 271). “Control at the source had never been given such a chance to succeed” (Walker, 1993: 62). This strategy, in which arms and hundreds of millions of dollars were provided to bolster Andean military and police activities, was from the

start, however, described as suffering from poor management and bureaucratic rivalry (Walker, 1993: 58). Even so, it was eventually successful in dealing massive blows to Colombia's main syndicates, the Medellín and Cali cartels, in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bagley, 1992: 5; Gonzalez, 2009: 73). Eventually the leaders of both cartels were arrested or assassinated in the 1990s, and although arguably "the hydra simply grew, spawning hundreds of smaller organizations, penetrating deeper into and corrupting more profoundly the Colombian government and bureaucracy", throughout this market-disrupting process and over the next few years Mexican syndicates, "which formerly had worked for the Colombians", quickly took up the slack in terms of delivering drugs to the US (Bagley, 1992: 5; Gonzalez, 2009: 73). And as the Mexican cartels "expanded their control over the drug supply chain, revenues exploded" (Chabat, 2002: 136; Davi, 2009: 28; Gonzalez, 2009: 73; Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 35-36). The scale involved can be guessed by noting that it is estimated that in 2009 Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organisations generated as much as \$38 billion in wholesale proceeds from US drug sales – "by comparison, Google's worldwide revenue in 2009 was \$23.6 billion" (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 30).

Mexico (1988-2000)

While these "successes" were being hard won in the Andes, however, and the War on Drugs was being extended to its full might, relations with Mexico came to be increasingly dominated by trade issues. Relations began to improve dramatically in the spring of 1990 when the new Mexican President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, "proposed a free trade agreement with the United States ... a revolutionary proposal

from a country that had spent 150 years building walls to keep out US goods, investment, and influence” (Pastor, 1996: 101). Salinas “was the driving force in Mexico behind the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was negotiated under President George H.W. Bush and implemented under President Bill Clinton, paving the way for Mexico to become the second-largest trade partner to the US” (Bussey, 2009: 44).

For “both presidents Salinas and Bush – and [later] Clinton – the fast-track signing of NAFTA superseded all other matters” (Paternostro, 1995: 37). “They all believed that opening the 2,000-mile shared border would bring opportunities that would strengthen both countries’ economies” and Washington, to the surprise of many, did not use the leverage the NAFTA negotiations provided “to press for more drug-enforcement cooperation” (Paternostro, 1995: 37). Mexico, aware of “the Bush administration’s wish to have NAFTA ratified and put into effect as quickly as possible”, arguably made rather better use of its own leverage, which “enabled Mexico to chart its own drug control course without the pervasive fear of decertification that had marked bilateral relations for several years after the murder of Enrique Camarena” (Walker, 1993: 60). Although Bush was unsuccessful in passing NAFTA through congress, the policy was finally approved and implemented under the Clinton administration in January 1994 (Davi, 2009: 17).

While developments within the hemisphere over the preceding few years had “altered the rules of the game somewhat” and countering communism was no longer a serious concern, with the goal of free trade a new duality clearly came to characterise US regional strategy (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 422). Washington’s “desire to forge

beneficial economic relations with Mexico [increasingly] produced serious inconsistencies in its drug policy” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423). This is not surprising, since, as discussed in the previous chapter, “in attempting to embrace free market economic principles, whilst simultaneously adhering to prohibition and supply-oriented policies, the US faces awkward practical and ideological dilemmas” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423). Again, despite the constant reaffirmations of anti-drug policy as a top priority, it was forced to defer to other regional concerns (Bagley, 1988a: 170; Dolan, 2005: 452).

Indeed, what became clear was that while “congressional committees and government agencies endlessly debate how to attack the drug supply [and] continually track the amount of drugs interdicted and the number of traffickers arrested”, they have neither the incentive nor the responsibility “to confront the uncomfortable reality that the highly-praised economic reform programmes ... both feed and feed from the drug trade” (Andreas, 1995: 85, 1996: 67). And, at the same time, while “those concerned with the implementation of market-based reforms carefully monitor the debt service record, export earnings, inflation levels, and the pace of privatization in Mexico”, their progress reports “rarely even mention the coca trade, let alone discuss its links to the formal economy and market reforms” (Andreas, 1995: 85, 1996: 67).

Still, during NAFTA negotiations with President Bush, Salinas, the “practical economist who promised to modernise Mexico” and “was ready to let bygones ... be bygones”, signed Mexico up to Bush’s war on drugs as a token of good faith (Paternostro, 1995: 46). Since Salinas expressed such “eagerness to join the United States in a free trade agreement in 1989, the Mexican government had to show that it

was doing all it could to clean house” (Toro, 1999: 50; Walker, 1993: 637). DEA agents were allowed to return to work in Mexico and greater resources were pledged to “strengthening military and police operations against traffickers” (Gonzalez, 2009: 73). Salinas even went so far as to permit American-piloted aircraft “to fly over Mexico to monitor drug trafficking activities” (Gonzalez, 2009: 73). This was to become a major bureaucratic blunder, however, since the programme was “arranged and coordinated between the DEA and the PGR [the Mexican Office of the Attorney General], without including the SRE [the Mexican secretariat of foreign relations], whose officials became enraged when they discovered it” (Reuter & Ronfeldt, 1992: 123). When the news emerged weeks later, Salinas was forced to denounce the presence of US military on Mexican soil and the flights were discontinued (Gonzalez, 2009: 73).

As explained above, success against the Andean cartels in many respects directly resulted in the escalation of the Mexican problem (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 29). So it was that, despite efforts by Salinas and his successor, President Ernesto Zedillo, the 1990s saw a major increase in drug traffic through Mexico (Gonzalez, 2009: 73). Whereas in 1989 30% of the cocaine entering the US passed through Mexico, by 1995 it was 80% (Paternostro, 1995: 44). At the same time, whereas there had in the past been “a reluctance to allow the military to play a stronger role”, that mind-set dissolved with the Zedillo administration (Andreas, 1998: 161). The “confluence of higher spending [and increased militarisation] by Mexican governments to combat drug trafficking and higher illegal drug flows through the country’s territory” created the conditions for mounting narco-violence in Mexico in the late 1990s (Gonzalez, 2009: 73). At the same time Mexico’s growing middle class had become increasingly

vocal in its demands that the government “find ways to provide them with a basic level of security and stability” (Leu, 2008: 59).

In fact, throughout the 1980s and 1990s Mexico had undergone a long and gradual “transition towards free markets and democracy” (Rus & Salas, 2006: 7; see also Leiken, 2001). After its 1982 debt crisis, Mexico “decided to dig itself out of its financial hole by making exports competitive”, curbing inflation, reducing the public deficit, joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, cutting tariffs, deregulating and privatising key sectors of the economy, etc, all of which “helped shift Mexico’s economic orientation northward” (Leiken, 2001: 95). But as Mexico’s economy opened, its closed political system, under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), came under increasing strain. Free trade, as more and more American legislators were telling Mexico, was “a club for democracies only” (Leiken, 2001: 95). After the end of the Cold War, moreover, Mexican stability was no longer “so vital that Washington would overlook the nature of its neighbor’s regime [and] Mexico quickly became a target for criticisms from the American right, which worried about drug trafficking, and the American left, which worried about human rights” (Leiken, 2001: 96).

United States: Clinton (1993-2001)

Despite having famously admitted to having “tried marijuana as a youth”, Clinton, like his predecessors, made a bold promise about drugs (Mares, 2003). His promise was “to reduce drug taking in the USA by half by 2003 and to ‘win the war on drugs’ by 2008” (Fazey, 2003: 165). His strategy did, however, vary slightly from those of

his predecessors. In 1952 Frank Klingberg “wrote about the swings in US policy between periods of ‘extroversion,’ when the United States turned its attention and energies abroad, to ‘introversion,’ when it concentrated on internal problems”, and noted that “the pendulum tended to swing home after wars” (Pastor, 1996: 99). Clinton “was the first US president to take office after the Cold War, and he moved to the rhythm of a postwar era” (Pastor, 1996: 119).

The Clinton administration’s strategy sought to “downplay the drug issue as a priority driving the new administration's policy agenda”, rather linking it to other important domestic goals and presenting it “as just one of the elements in efforts to spur economic growth, reform health care, curb violence among the nation's youth, and ‘empower communities’” (Perl, 1993: 143). Similarly, it represented a “lowering of the high profile given to narcotics control” on the international front, “treating it as another element among foreign policy goals of equal relevance, such as the emphasis on democracy, support for market-based economic growth, and protection of human rights” (Perl, 1993: 143). Under Clinton, the staff of the Office of National Drug Control Policy was “trimmed to barely 20 per cent of what it was under President George Bush”, and many began to hope that “a programme of education, treatment, and rehabilitation together with tough law enforcement at home would supersede the prior emphasis in drug policy on eradication and interdiction” (Walker, 1993: 37). On the other hand, the Clinton administration was “slow to make appointments and erratic in coordinating policy, with the result that the rest of the US-Latin American agenda was addressed at mid-levels of the government's bureaucracy in a highly compartmentalized way”, even prompting Senator Christopher Dodd, Chairman of the

Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, “to characterize the administration's performance as the ‘amateur hour’” (Pastor, 1996: 108).

Still, Clinton’s “new” strategy “basically retained all of the elements of its predecessor” (Pastor, 1996: 109). It was widely criticised for being so very like Bush’s, with some noting that minor “changes in institutional design cannot correct a problem that is inherent in the structures of governance” (Meier & Smith, 1994: 440). Clinton’s administration did somewhat “[stress] the demand side of the equation” but its budget allotted only 5% more to demand efforts than formerly (Pastor, 1996: 109).¹² It also placed slightly “less emphasis on interdiction [but] more on eradication and cartel-busting” (Pastor, 1996: 109). Under Clinton, there was a further breakdown of the separation between US law enforcement and intelligence communities and the president “ordered the intelligence agencies to give priority to such ‘transnational threats’ as organized crime, in addition to their traditional missions” (Andreas & Price, 2001: 41). Also under Clinton, the drug programme “appropriated an ever-increasing share of a much-reduced aid program to Latin America” and aid for the drug programme in Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia alone soon “surpassed the total aid allocated for all of Central America” (Pastor, 1996: 109).

Finally, instead of “adopting a cooperative approach to the problem, the US Congress used its aid as a stick to mandate a new paternalism” (Pastor, 1996: 109). The Clinton administration made full use of the certification provision, a decision “surely made

¹² Demand-side focus, it must be remembered, is not necessarily related to any decrease in punitiveness. Interestingly, in fact, it has been argued that the “massive wave of incarceration” under the Clinton administration may well have cost Al Gore the tightly-contested 2000 presidential election in Florida – where “even a minor drug offense, such as a low-level, nonviolent drug possession, is counted as a felony” and where such offenders “often never face any time in jail”, but nevertheless lose their right to vote forever (Boyd, 2002: 4).

easier by the fact that, in the changed post-cold war scenario” those that had been valuable allies against Soviet aggression in South America no longer needed to be treated with forbearance (Baviskar, 1996: 655). Furthermore, “as the record in Latin America and elsewhere makes clear”, certification had by this stage “evolved into a powerful instrument serving a wider variety of foreign policy goals beyond drug control per se” and the “degree to which certification has become embedded in the wider and more complex context of US domestic politics and foreign policy making helps one understand the inconsistencies and apparent double standards that have accompanied its implementation” (Serrano, 2003: 124-125). Mexico itself was “threatened with decertification a number of times during the 1990s”, much to the fury of Mexicans, and in 1997, “the last time Mexico was threatened with decertification, the Mexican Congress voted unanimously to condemn certification in principle as an insult to national sovereignty” (Cottam, 2006: 6).

In fact, the “continuing high levels of trafficking and drug related corruption in Mexico” should have resulted in decertification (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423) but it became clear that the US was unwilling to decertify its important new trading partner (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423). Even in the 1997 incident when Mexico’s top anti-narcotics official was arrested “on charges of working for the country’s most notorious drug lord”, although the US Congress was “keen to exercise its power within the certification process and decertify Mexico, Clinton was able to parry the congressional manoeuvre” and was able to certify Mexico for another year “as a co-operative ally in the US war on drugs” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423).

“Strategic considerations of the moment have plainly tainted the process, [and] although countries that have been the object of specific US security concerns seldom escaped the fallout of certification, it became increasingly clear” that concessions would be made where deemed necessary (Serrano, 2003: 126). Paraguay and Peru, for example, were given special treatment “to preserve a fragile transition to democracy and to avoid disrupting the peace process with Ecuador, respectively” (Serrano, 2003: 126). According to one view, the Clinton administration went so far as to strategically decertify Colombia in 1996 in order to make possible Mexico’s full certification (Serrano, 2003: 126).

Indeed, during this period it became clear that the end of the Cold War had “opened up a new perspective on Latin American-US relations” (Paternostro, 1995: 37). Whereas until 1989 “Washington saw the region only in terms of security – as a backyard where communism needed to be contained”, Clinton repeatedly praised the region’s democratisation and emphasised its importance to the world economy (Paternostro, 1995: 37). In particular, he consistently praised Mexico’s economy, always “ignoring or downplaying Mexico’s problems [such as] the prevalence of powerful drug-trafficking networks inside the country” (Paternostro, 1995: 37). Clinton, like Bush before him, maintained the vastly expensive and militarised supply-side status quo in much of Latin America but, when it came to Mexico (again like Bush), seemed primarily concerned with promoting the dream of free trade and ensuring the illegal drug trade would not spoil “the image of one big happy economic family of nations” (Bewley-Taylor, 1998: 423). In short, despite “nominal moves towards demand side” and other strategies, the Clinton drug policy “barely differed ... in either scope or action” from that of Bush, and the Clinton administration continued

to follow “the traditional war on drugs inherited from its predecessors” (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 30; Kleiman, 2011: 130).

Mexico (2000-)

When, in the context of high levels of drug violence in 2000, Vicente Fox of the centre-right National Action Party (PAN) for the first time in Mexico’s history wrested the presidency from the PRI, he did so largely on the promise of turning the tide against drug cartels (Gonzalez, 2009: 73). And, even more strongly than under Salinas or Zedillo, with “the advent of democratic government, Mexico [began] turning its back on its history of isolationism and its fiercely noninterventionist foreign policy”, began looking beyond its borders, “trying to spur development ... while pursuing robust partnership with the United States” (Leiken, 2001: 91).

At the same time, the “demise of Mexico’s dominant-party state ... left an institutional void that allowed drug cartels to flourish”. The PRI had “used cooptation and coercion, along with a host of other practices, to construct governability” and employed a “set of unwritten rules that partially regulated the conduct of [criminal] organizations and their relationship (heavily tinged with corruption) with the Mexican state”. The vacuum created by the collapse of centralised control “unleashed new opportunities for criminality, and Mexico’s institutions were not up to the new threats that emerged” (Lindau, 2011: 179).

President Fox’s anti-drug programme, which involved purging and reorganising the federal police forces and the extradition of captured drug lords to the US, “though

effective at raising the number of individuals arrested and drug shipments confiscated, fell far short of the government's objective of defeating the cartels" (Gonzalez, 2009: 74). The new police forces "soon succumbed to the bribes and threats of the criminal syndicates" and government infiltration "continued to such an extent that a spy for a drug cartel was discovered working in the president's office in 2005" (Gonzalez, 2009: 74). By 2004–2005, violence was so out of control that Fox "implemented an operation involving 1,500 army and federal police officers in Mexico-US border cities" (Gonzalez, 2009: 74).

But even Fox's approach was relatively soft compared to that of his successor, President Felipe Calderón, who took office on 1 December 2006 (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 31). Whereas Fox "started using the military to assist local law enforcement with minor conflicts", under Calderón "the military was extensively engaged to hunt down and exterminate" trafficking organisations (Leu, 2008: 59). Within weeks of his election, some 6 500 troops were dispatched and, as of 2010, some 45 000 Mexican troops – about a quarter of the standing army – "are engaged in a domestic war with drug cartels, which shows no signs of abating anytime soon" (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 31). Calderón has also introduced sweeping police reform initiatives "similar to Colombia's approach to stemming its rampant cartels", including "rigorous new standards for testing new police hires and screening officers already on the force", resulting in the arrest of hundreds of federal, state, and municipal officers (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 37). And "as more local law enforcement officials are charged with fraud, waste, and abuse of power", replacing those indicted has required expanded military deployment (Leu, 2008: 59). Nonetheless reports continue to emerge that "squad-sized units of the police and army have been tortured, murdered, and their

decapitated bodies publicly left on display” and that senior police figures are auctioning their loyalty to the highest bidder (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 31).

United States: George W. Bush (2001-2009)

President George W. Bush, “comfortable with Mexico from his days as Texas governor and eager to court the burgeoning Latino vote ... declared his desire for a ‘special relationship’” between the US and Mexico – a special relationship “as clear and strong as we have had with Canada and Great Britain” (Hakim, 2001: 58; Leiken, 2001: 91-92). To this end, “Bush broke with tradition by choosing Mexico for his first foreign visit [and] in his first months as president, Bush met with a string of Latin America leaders and travelled to Quebec City to promote hemispheric free trade” (Leiken, 2001: 92). He also “uttered words that were music to Mexican ears, acknowledging that the two countries’ mutual drug problem derived from US demand” (Leiken, 2001: 92).

But although “President George W. Bush's early pronouncements about the importance of Latin America raised hopes for a new golden era in relations between the United States and its neighbors”, things did not quite work out according to expectation (Nadelmann, 2003: 94). The attacks on 11 September 2001 “dashed all expectations of increased US attention to Mexico, as America’s focus shifted to Iraq and Afghanistan” (Corchado, 2009: 21). Skirmishes “over trade, economic policy, and the war in Iraq ... completely eroded the optimism that greeted Bush's arrival in the White House” (Nadelmann, 2003: 94). After 9/11, Bush also abandoned the ongoing discussions about migration with Mexico “and instead framed border

enforcement in terms of his new antiterrorist rhetoric, hopelessly politicizing and even racializing border issues” (Rus & Salas, 2006: 12).

In fact, later on the very same day as Bush’s statement acknowledging the role of US drug demand in creating the mutual drug problem, the US bombed Iraq (Leiken, 2001: 92). In response, “unlike the Mexican news media, which denounced the bombing ... Mexico’s Foreign Office declared its empathy for Bush’s ‘global responsibilities’ and actually blessed the American attack” (Leiken, 2001: 92). As the war progressed, however, Mexico’s opposition to it grew, souring relations dramatically and moving “concerns about Mexico-U.S. border problems to the back burner among Bush administration policy groups” (Cottam & Marenin, 2005: 20). In fact, since 9/11 in some respects “the war against terrorism has largely subsumed the war on drugs [and despite] links between the drug trade and terrorist organizations, the relative importance of the drug issue as an organizing principle for foreign relations, which rose to the fore in the aftermath of the Cold War, is beginning to fall” (Carstairs, 2005: 63). The US “is now sending money to Colombia to fight ‘terrorism’ and telling Canada that its plan to decriminalize marijuana would provide funds for terrorists” (Carstairs, 2005: 63). The relationship between controlling the trafficking of illegal narcotics and preventing additional terrorist attacks reflects an increasing tendency among United States policymakers to promote the integration of [antinarotics and antiterrorist policies] into one unified policy”, most crucially in Colombia and Afghanistan (Dolan, 2005: 451). Rather than marking a change, however, it is arguable that the growing emphasis on narco-terrorism allowed the Bush administration to avoid “deviating from its steady military approach” (Dolan, 2005: 460).

But Calderón's unprecedented commitment to a war on drugs in Mexico, as well as the unprecedented violence that followed, "got the attention of President George W. Bush and the US Congress in 2007" and, after the Calderon government had formally requested military aid from the US, talks began about what was to be called the Mérida Initiative, "named after the Mexican city where the presidents of Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States held meetings in March 2007, when the idea was first discussed" (Gonzalez, 2009: 76; Weinberg, 2008: 23). This was to be a "security partnership" between the two countries, with funds provided to Mexico "to be spent on surveillance aircraft and equipment, technical assistance for programs fighting corruption, promoting judicial reform, better prisons and anti-money laundering efforts" (Bussey, 2009: 25). The Bush administration called the Mérida Initiative "a new paradigm' of bilateral cooperation in the war on drugs and terrorism" and pledged to provide \$1,4 billion in successive tranches in a "multiyear 'security cooperation package'" (Weinberg, 2008: 23).

Many officials were and continue to be concerned that this is not nearly enough, and that the entire Initiative will be little more than "a drop in the bucket" (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 37). Both Mexican officials and the US Congress have also become increasingly critical of "the slowness of delivery of promised assistance to Mexico under the Mérida Initiative" (Beittel, 2009: 15). "Indeed, most of the Mérida funds earmarked for Mexico have yet to find their way there. Instead, they have ended up funding American defense and security contractors—who have refused to disclose how they are being used in the drug interdiction program" (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010: 37). The Initiative has also been criticised for earmarking too much of its funding for

military spending and for appearing “to show greater concern for protecting property than people” (Rice, 2010: 32).

United States: Obama (2009-)

When Obama made his “hemispheric debut” at the Summit of the Americas, he told his counterparts, to riotous applause, “I’m here to launch a new chapter of engagement that will be sustained throughout my administration” (NACLA Report on the Americas, 2010: 14). Moreover, when, in a “widely watched You Tube video, US President Barack Obama is asked whether or not the drug war may in fact be counterproductive ... instead of the resounding NO that would have come from any of his recent predecessors, Obama responded: ‘I think this is an entirely legitimate topic for debate’” (NACLA Report on the Americas, 2010: 14). He was, however, careful to qualify his remarks by adding, “I am not in favor of legalization”, even acknowledging “the legitimacy of debate on US drug policy is a significant shift from the past, when successive administrations stifled discussion and routinely labeled anyone promoting alternative approaches to the so-called US ‘war on drugs’ as dangerous and surreptitiously promoting massive drug use and poisoning America’s youth” (Youngers, 2011: 1).

Obama’s new director of National Drug Control Policy, R. Gil Kerlikowske, “suggested on various occasions that the new administration was making a historic shift on drug policy”, even telling the Association of Chiefs of Police that “it’s become increasingly clear that the metaphor and philosophy of a ‘War on Drugs’ is flawed ... it’s time to adopt a different approach” (Youngers, 2011: 1). Also, unlike

his predecessors, Obama “acknowledged a deeper US role in the illicit drug trade [and has] declared he would not pretend that combating drugs ‘is Mexico's responsibility alone’ (Reiss, 2010: 1). During a visit to Mexico to “discuss the full gamut of the bilateral relationship, from US support for the drug war and economics to immigration” and “to show support for President Felipe Calderón and his war on the cartels”, Obama recognised that the “demand for these drugs in the United States is what is helping to keep these cartels in business [and that] this war is being waged with guns purchased not here, but in the United States” (Bussey, 2009: 24; Reiss, 2010: 1).

But this “welcome change in tone” has not been matched by any significant change in policies, and there has been “far more continuity than change” (Reiss, 2010: 1). Essentially, the Obama administration has “ratcheted down the rhetoric and has placed greater emphasis on the problem of demand and problematic drug use”, has taken a somewhat “more collaborative approach in UN debates” and has shown “restraint in reacting to progressive reforms undertaken by some Latin American governments” – in short, it has adopted a somewhat more diplomatic approach to drug policy (Youngers, 2011: 1). But “[d]espite the change in discourse and diplomacy”, “broader drug policy reforms at the domestic level remain elusive and in the international sphere the U.S. ‘war on drugs’ continues apace” (Youngers, 2011: 1). In fact, “the administration's acknowledgement of ‘shared responsibilities’ has helped only to cement the ongoing militarization of the region” (Youngers, 2011: 1).

Obama pledged his support for the Mérida Initiative, much of the funding of which goes to Mexico (Corchado, 2009: 21). In what Mexican officials have suggested may

be a case of “mixed signals”, however, Congress in 2010 cut back spending on the \$1,4 billion Mérida Initiative (Rice, 2010: 58). According to many, the Obama administration “has been providing only modest support to its southern neighbor [which] will largely have to make do with \$1.4 billion in funds over three years appropriated under the ... Mérida Initiative” (NACLA Report on the Americas, 2010: 14). Indeed, obtaining foreign anti-drug funds from the US Congress has become increasingly difficult and the Obama administration has not been able to muster the political will “to take on the bureaucratic battles” that any major shift in funding priorities would entail (Youngers, 2011: 9).

Obama’s administration has made use of the tool of decertification – on Bolivia, Burma, and Venezuela – designating them “as countries that have failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements” (Reiss, 2010: 1). These measures have made clear that the “political ideologies associated with governments in the hemisphere – not the actual health consequences or ‘violence’ emanating from struggles over control of the drug trade – have determined the certification process, [since] if this were not the case, Colombia and Mexico, as the major ‘producer’ country and the largest ‘transit’ country, respectively, would undoubtedly top the blacklist of drug war failures with their thousands of displaced peoples, environmental devastation, and documented human rights abuses” (Reiss, 2010: 6). Yet it is Bolivia and Venezuela “that have been branded as drug - control rogue states, primarily as an outcome of political tensions between these nations and the United States”, making it clear that “decertification is used as a tool to criminalize challenges to US hegemony” (Reiss, 2010: 6-7).

In fact, “perhaps nowhere is the continuity of a wrong-headed US policy more evident than in Bolivia”, where, “upon the election of President Evo Morales, a former coca grower, the Bolivian government ceased forced eradication of coca, instead relying on agreements with local coca growers federations to meet coca reduction targets” (Reiss, 2010: 7). Here, despite the fact that “the government’s annual coca reduction targets are consistently met and illicit drug seizures have gone up significantly under the Morales administration”, Bolivia was designated as a country that has “failed demonstrably ... to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements” and was summarily decertified (Youngers, 2011: 6). It was decertification that led Bolivian president Evo Morales to accuse Obama of having “‘lied to Latin America’ at the Summit of the Americas in April, when the U.S. president said ‘there is no senior partner and junior partner’ in the United States’ hemispheric relations” (Reiss, 2010: 6; Youngers, 2011: 6). By this time, needless to say, “Obama’s honeymoon with Latin America [was] definitively over” (Reiss, 2010: 7).

Conclusion

Mexico faces a well-nigh overwhelming drug problem, with multiple well-armed groups “fighting among themselves while simultaneously fighting the government . . . , fueled by vast amounts of money earned via drug smuggling to the United States . . . , with resources to bribe and intimidate government officials”. The imbalance in resources between these groups and even the highly militarised, US-backed Mexican state has the potential to reverse the relationship between government and cartels (Friedman, 2008: 2). While it may be some way short of a failed state, Mexico’s drug-related violence and lawlessness are already reaching terrifying levels. This drug problem in Mexico “is rooted in and inseparable from US policy [and] it is not a problem that Mexico can solve on its own” (Freeman, 2006: 16).

The starting point of this essay, based on the overwhelming consensus in the literature, is that the US foreign supply reduction approach to the drug problem, under every administration and in every one of its incarnations, has been a complete failure. What decrease there has been in US drug consumption is entirely attributable to unrelated factors. But the drug war has certainly had some effect, in the form of a huge range of hidden costs and negative spinoffs. Relations with Latin American have come to be shaped by suspicion and resentment. Fragile new democracies have been encouraged, on pain of decertification and loss of aid, to expand the powers of their military. Its record simply does not justify the extraordinary policy consistency encompassed by the War on Drugs. The only remaining question is that of *why* it has so dismally failed.

This essay laid out two broad categories of explanation – those that include only drug policy factors and those that take into account clashes with other policy interests.

Within the first category are two schools. The first represents those who attribute failure to any number of reversible causes, such as poor administration or inadequate resources. This explanation continues to be politically popular. The second school is that which argues that from the outset the militarised, supply-side prohibitionist strategy employed to date had no hope of destroying the drug trade. The “profit paradox,” the “hydra effect” and the “punish to deter fallacy” render such strategies futile. In the second broad category of explanation for the drugs war’s failure are those who point to the fact that other policy interests, increasingly the goal of free trade, have often been prioritised over the drug war. While there are arguments to be made for the possibility that trade openness will strengthen drug interdiction capabilities or that the two are not necessarily connected, there is a great deal of evidence for the argument that trade liberalisation is in direct conflict with drug prohibition, and the Mexican experience seems to bear this out. This discussion does not, however, seem to have been held during NAFTA negotiations. What we have, then, when we take the view that at least part of the explanation for the drug war’s failure is its conflict with other policy interests, are two observations that appear to be mutually inconsistent. The first is that the drug war continues to be fought with no apparent concern for its continued failure. The other is that economic policies that threaten the drug war are being pursued with no apparent concern for their mutual risks.

This brought us to the secondary goal of this essay – to begin a categorisation of potential theoretical responses to the twin observations of policy coherence over time but policy incoherence across drug and trade interest areas. What little existing scholarship there is on this phenomenon tends, with very few exceptions, to be scattered and

unsystematic. Most takes account of only one of the aspects, or mentions the other only in passing. Thus three potential theoretical explanations for this apparent paradox were presented – the conspiracy (realist) theory, the cultural (constructivist) theory and the compartmentalisation (bureaucratic politics) theory.

We turned then to this essay's primary goal – that of bringing together the literature sets on US drug and trade policies as relevant to Mexico. Thus the historical account of the drug war was presented, from the Reagan presidency – which set the parameters for the period – through to the present day. Throughout, what was highlighted from the mass of potential data was the evidence for our twin narratives, which (although domestic political interests and the need to resist the communist threat have certainly played their historical parts) only really become clear with the inclusion in the analysis of trade policy developments.

In tracing this policy inconsistency, an increasingly useful perspective appears to be one that stresses the influence of bureaucratic forces. Quite simply, drug control strategists and economic reform strategists “clearly respond to different pressures, represent different interests, use different modes of evaluation, operate within different institutional settings and are focused on different kinds of problems” (Andreas, 1995: 86). At least part of the reason for the drug war's apparent schizophrenia (as well as Obama's apparent inability to really turn around the drug war ship, despite some evidence of such an intention) must be the fact that, owing to the massive “complexity of US-Mexican relations and the growing diversity of domestic interest groups involved”, a vast number of US agencies is involved with foreign policymaking – “no less than forty-three agencies involved in the drug war

alone”, almost all of which are involved in some way with Mexico (Middlebrook, 1991: 274; Wiarda, 2000: 176). Each of these, and the equally numerous others involved with trade issues, “conducts a quasiautonomous policy” mostly reporting directly and only to their own Washington departments (Wiarda, 2000: 176). And even when, because Mexico “is so important, the big issues in US-Mexican relations are immediately bumped up to cabinet, National Security Council, and White House levels”, this is the level “at which the least Mexico expertise is brought to bear, [where] attention spans may vary [and] other more immediate issues may suddenly take precedence” (Wiarda, 2000: 177).

Indeed, the evidence is throughout the period in question Congress and the White House have “played politics” with foreign policymaking, “doling out whole programs to different agencies on political and bureaucratic grounds” and with each agency then conducting its own foreign policy “with little or no attachment to a central core of principles and interests” (Wiarda, 2000: 187). In short, the “sheer proliferation ... of agencies and programs, the fact that the left hand of US policymaking seldom knows fully what the right hand ... is doing, and increasingly the political and bureaucratic ‘games’ that one part of the American government tries to play on others ... are now becoming exceedingly destructive and self-defeating” (Wiarda, 2000: 187). And, although good process “is no substitute for good policy, of course, ... there can be no good policy without good process” (Middlebrook, 1991: 272).

The above being established, it seems likely that a more focused analysis of the bureaucratic dynamics of the creation and execution of US drug and trade policies would provide a good starting point for understanding the drug war’s intricacies and

planning its replacement. The apparent usefulness of the bureaucratic politics model does not mean, of course, that the conspiracy or cultural theories cannot offer equally valuable perspectives, especially if the data gathered was of a different nature. It is likely, in fact, that Allison's critics are correct in suggesting that it "remains to be seen whether the most fruitful challengers to [the rational actor model] will prove to be paradigms concentrating the analyst's attention at the intra-governmental level of analysis, or on cultural, societal, cognitive, or affective factors – or perhaps some combination of these" (Welch, 1992: 141). The tragedy, of course, is that the "greater complexity and comparative difficulty of organizational, bureaucratic, or psychological approaches to international politics", even in providing more nuanced and reliable understandings, "perpetuate the 'theory gap' that currently favors ... rational-actor analysis, just as they perpetuate a similar gap between the natural and the social sciences" (Welch, 1992: 142).

A useful insight of the bureaucratic politics model, however, and one which sits well with our observations of the drug war, is its prediction that "surrender will not come at the point that strategic costs outweigh benefits," but nor will it "wait until the leadership group concludes that the war is lost" (Allison, 1968: 61). Failure, in other words, is no forerunner of surrender. The US will not by any means necessarily follow, as some suggest, the post-war European example, of massive economic integration resulting in an influx of drugs and forcing states to "re-examine, and ultimately relax, their drug laws, because it becomes clear that they cannot keep the substances out" (French, 2005: 540).

Instead, according to Allison's model, surrender "is likely to come as the result of a political shift which enhances the effective power" of those within government who already believe the war to be futile ("particularly those whose responsibilities sensitize them to problems other than war, e.g. economic planners") over those who advocate for the war (Allison, 1968: 61). It is possible, for example, that the world's recent economic woes could through necessity enhance the relative power of economic planners over drug law enforcers. This window of opportunity may already have been lost. On the other hand, the impact of the recession could be more powerfully a social one, such that the cultural model will provide a more useful predictive tool. Whether or not these and other changes will necessarily be good for the Mexican drug problem as a whole, it is likely that they will transform the drug trade on a scale that advocates of the War on Drugs could only have dreamed of.

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