Organization of American States

Topic B: Containing Drug Abuse and Trafficking

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Introduction

Since its formation, the Organization of American States (OAS) has attempted to address problems threatening the democracy, peace, and safety of peoples living in the Americas. One such problem that OAS has been trying to address since the 1980s is that of drug abuse and drug trafficking in many nations of the Western Hemisphere. The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention has stated that the production, trafficking, and sale of illicit drugs is a full-scale industry (albeit an illicit one), with annual revenues approaching or exceeding $400 billion. It is rare that a drug is consumed in the same country where it is produced; most drug trade, especially in the Western Hemisphere, crosses international borders.

In 1986, the OAS established the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), which meets twice a year in an effort to coordinate efforts amongst the various member nations. The main purposes of the CICAD are to serve as a policy forum for Western Hemisphere nations to discuss all aspects of the drug problem, to foster multilateral cooperation on drug issues in the Americas, to thwart the effort of illicit drug production, deny traffickers the profits gained from the trafficking of drugs, and to treat both illicit and licit drug abuse. Furthermore, the CICAD promotes drug-related research, recommends minimum standards for drug-related legislation, and carries out evaluations to monitor the progress made by nations towards the drug problem.

In 1996 and 1998, respectively, the CICAD passed an Anti-Drug Strategy in the Western Hemisphere and a Plan of Action, which together outlined the issues created by the illicit production, trafficking, and abuse of drugs and created measures to combat these issues.

Despite these attempts to control drug abuse and trafficking, prices for cocaine and heroin are at a record low today, indicating their widespread availability. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration has stated that 82% of the heroin consumed in that country comes from Latin America, and Colombia produces 75% of the world's cocaine supply.

In nations such as Colombia, the military and national police have well-known ties to right-wing paramilitary organizations, which, along with guerilla groups, depend on the drug trade for profits. These organizations have led to untold violence within Colombia, all of which can be connected to the drug trade.

While the United States has attempted to unilaterally address the drug problem with the War on Drugs, which began in 1969 under the Nixon Administration and continues to the present day (although the Obama Administration has officially deprecated the phrase "War on Drugs"), the United States remains a huge player in the black market for drugs. Thus, it is coordinated international action, and not the individual or bilateral attempts that have long been attempted to restrain drug trade, that are most effective.

The goal of this committee is to create that coordinated effort against the production, trafficking, sales, and abuse of illicit drugs without infringing on the sovereignty of nations that are the most prevalent sources of drugs. Review of the CICAD's anti-drug strategy is an excellent starting point for developing resolutions, but ultimately must be refined to address the drug-trade as it pertains to the Western Hemisphere moving into and beyond the decade of the 2010's.

Background

While the drug trade in the Western Hemisphere is multifaceted, it fundamentally revolves around the trafficking of cocaine produced in South America to the United States, the world's largest market for the drug. Drug shipment routes between Peru and Colombia, where the vast majority of cocaine is cultivated and produced, and the United States have historically been flexible and have undergone constant evolution in response to interdiction efforts or changing markets. For example, Colombian drug traffickers used to control the bulk of the cocaine trade by managing shipping routes along the Caribbean smuggling corridor directly to the United States. By the 1990s, however, as the United States and other countries began to focus surveillance and interdiction efforts along this corridor, the flow of U.S.-bound drugs was redirected through Mexico, which remains the main shipment route

for the overwhelming majority of cocaine entering the United States.

A similar situation has been occurring over the last two years in Central America. From the 1990s until as recently as 2007, traffickers in Mexico received multi-ton shipments of cocaine from South America. There was ample evidence of this, including occasional discoveries of bulk cocaine on everything from small propeller aircraft and Gulfstream jets to self-propelled semisubmersible vessels, fishing trawlers and cargo ships. These smuggling platforms had sufficient range and capacity to bypass Central America and ship bulk drugs directly to Mexico. By early 2008, however, a series of developments in several Central American countries suggested that drug-trafficking organizations — Mexican cartels in particular — were increasingly trying to establish new land-based smuggling routes through Central America for cocaine shipments from South America to Mexico and eventual delivery to the United States. While small quantities of drugs had certainly transited the region in the past, the routes used presented an assortment of risks. A combination of poorly maintained highways, frequent border crossings, volatile security conditions and unpredictable local criminal organizations apparently presented such great logistical challenges that traffickers opted to send the majority of their shipments through well-established maritime and airborne platforms.

In response to this relatively unchecked international smuggling, several countries in the region began taking steps to increase the monitoring and interdiction of such shipments. The Colombian government, for one, stepped up monitoring of aircraft operating in its airspace. The Mexican government installed updated radar systems and reduced the number of airports authorized to receive flights originating in Central and South America. The Colombian government estimates that the amount of cocaine trafficked from Colombia by air has decreased by as much as 90% since 2003.

Maritime trafficking also appears to have suffered over the past few years, most likely due to greater cooperation and information-sharing between Mexico and the United States. The United States has an immense capability to collect maritime technical intelligence, and an increasing degree of awareness regarding drug trafficking at sea. Two examples of this

progress include the Mexican Navy's July 2008 capture — acting on intelligence provided by the United States — of a self-propelled semisubmersible vessel loaded with more than five tons of cocaine, and the U.S. Coast Guard's February 2009 interdiction of a Mexico-flagged fishing boat loaded with some seven tons of cocaine about 700 miles off Mexico's Pacific coast. Presumably as a result of successes such as these, the Mexican Navy reported in 2008 that maritime trafficking had decreased by an estimated 60% over the last two years.

While it is impossible to independently corroborate the Mexican and Colombian governments' estimates on the degree to which air- and seaborne drug trafficking has decreased over the last few years, developments in Central America over the past year certainly support their assessments. In particular, to make up for losses in maritime and aerial trafficking, land-based smuggling routes are increasingly being used — not by Colombian cocaine producers or even Central American drug gangs, but by the now much more powerful Mexican drug-trafficking organizations.

Despite these concerns and the growing presence of Mexican traffickers in the region, there apparently have been no significant spikes in drug-related violence in Central America outside of Guatemala. Several factors may explain this relative lack of violence.

First, most governments in Central America have yet to launch large-scale counternarcotics campaigns. The seizures and arrests that have been reported so far have generally been the result of regular police work, as opposed to broad changes in policies or a significant commitment of resources to address the problem. More significantly, though, the quantities of drugs seized probably amount to just a drop in the bucket compared to the quantity of drugs that moves through the region on a regular basis. Because seizures have remained low, Mexican drug traffickers have yet to launch any significant reprisal attacks against government officials in any country outside Guatemala. In that country, even the president has received death threats and had his office bugged, allegedly by drug traffickers.

The second factor, related to the first, is that drug traffickers operating in Central America likely rely more heavily on bribes than on intimidation to secure the transit of drug

shipments. This assessment follows from the region's reputation for political corruption (especially in countries like Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama and Guatemala) and the economic disadvantage that many of these countries face compared to the Mexican cartels. For example, the gross domestic product of Honduras is $12 billion, while the estimated share of the drug trade controlled by the Mexican cartels is estimated to be $20 billion.

Finally, Mexican cartels currently have their hands full at home. Although Central America has undeniably become more strategically important for the flow of drugs from South America, the cartels in Mexico have simultaneously been engaged in a two-front war at home, against the Mexican government and against rival criminal organizations. As long as this war continues at its present level, Mexican drug traffickers may be reluctant to divert significant resources too far from their home turf, which remains crucial in delivering drug shipments to the United States.

Stopping drug trafficking is very complicated, as solutions must address both the demand side and the supply side of the drug market. As mentioned earlier, CICAD has created the central plan for the OAS to attack the war on drugs. In this plan, they have outlined strategies for both demand reduction and supply reduction, emphasizing that it will take a global commitment to solving the problem. Secretary General José Miguel Insulza stressed what direction the new strategy should pursue: "I am in favor of a more comprehensive and balanced strategy that considers in a very important fashion reducing demand as a main goal… As long as there is a market for drugs, they will keep flowing…[however], reducing demand is only possible with much more emphasis on education, prevention and rehabilitation programs." The quasi-governmental National Drug Council coordinates the demand reduction programs of the various governmental entities such as Sandilands Rehabilitation Center, and of NGOs such as the Drug Action Service and the Bahamas Association for Social Health. Schools and youth organizations are the primary target of prevention/education program. These programs typically work to inform children about the problems arising from the abuse of drugs.

Current Status

Recently, the OAS, through CICAD, has opened a review process of the current drug situation and ways to combat it. Through their findings, they hoped to find solutions for reducing both demand and supply. Some of the many common problems that they found were the absence of inter- and intra-agency collaboration and coordination, problems with data collection, and a lack of expertise on policy development, monitoring and evaluation. They published an article in 2009 entitled "How to Develop a National Drug Policy" in hopes that each member state could learn how to implement an effective solution for drug trafficking. The main goal of this article was to "help promote consistency in how Member States prepare and present their National Drug Strategies, which, in turn will facilitate clear and well-defined linkages to the Anti-Drug Strategy in the Hemisphere." Clearly, Member States have an urgent need for not only the latest methodologies and research-based approaches for policy formulation and implementation, but also for straightforward, practical, didactic help to create, implement, and refine policies in accordance with the changing nature of their individual drug problems and circumstances. The guide was made to serve as a useful tool for countries in the process of developing or reviewing National Drug Strategies. It would enable Member States to do more on their own and be less dependent on external assistance.

They outlined that there are two main categories of a National Drug Policy. The first category, demand reduction, consists of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation activities. Such activities are aimed at stopping drug use before it starts, discouraging initial drug use from progressing into a major problem, and ending addiction and its associated damaging health and crime consequences. The second category consists of efforts to curb access to illicit drugs through activities aimed at cultivation, production, and trafficking. The success of the use of these categories depends on the strength of a Member State's institutional capacity to support demand- and supply-reduction activities. This institutional capacity is extensive and diverse and cuts across areas such as the legal framework and the ability of National Systems to coordinate and collaborate as they establish policies and programs.

Furthermore, this capacity also includes the collection and management of drug-related data through a National Drug Information System.

However, although they developed a thorough guide, the OAS is still having trouble getting all of their members to actually implement systems. Dr. Maria Teresa Chadwick, the Executive Secretary of the Chilean Drug Program, stated that "evaluation has shown that most countries are still delayed in developing and articulating harmoniously those elements. These limitations become more evident when contrasted with the high human, economical and social cost the drug phenomenon is still imposing on our society." Comprehensive action is difficult but necessary for defeating the drug problem. Dr. Chadwick later stated that "All this must be considered when debating the effectiveness of strategies facing the drug problem. We should wonder whether it is possible to wait for results provided that drug strategies in most countries have not come yet to full development. Integrity and balance, two basic factors that are to model any strategy in this area, have not been assumed…in the planning and execution of their interventions."

A solid conviction has also been reached about the importance of basing drug policies on scientific evidence. The problems brought about by drug use are not just moral or ethical issues—they also entail an impact on public health and carry economic effects as well. The corresponding definitions and decisions must therefore be based on scientific evidence and points of view. This is a principle now accepted by all governments and it is among the foundations of practically all the policies that have been implemented in the region.

Therefore, the use of illegal drugs is an issue that can affect a society as a whole. However, the majority of users fail to notice the dangers that drugs can cause. A number of studies have shown that many people do not regard occasional or experimental marijuana use as being very risky. There is a general perception that access to marijuana is relatively easy. The supply of marijuana is also high. These three factors, taken together with high rates of use,

the increased potency of marijuana, and the growing number of people seeking treatment for marijuana abuse, mean that marijuana is a definitely a drug that demands particular attention.

Also, recent years have seen the continued development of new substances for illicit consumption. For more than a decade, amphetamine-type stimulants have been, after cannabis, the substances responsible for the greatest share of the world's consumption problems, and, globally, amphetamine and ecstasy usage is now double that of cocaine. But more important for us is the fact that this expanding market is now reaching wide and deep into Latin America and the Caribbean, creating new problems and diluting the separation that used to exist between producing countries and consuming countries. With the emergence of synthetic drugs and the spread of consumption into new regions, drug use is now found in almost all the countries of our region and in almost all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, drugs are being produced.

Latin American nations generally place a lower priority on drug control than the United States. National goals of economic development, promoting political stability, and curbing insurgent violence are viewed as more important than reducing drug production and trafficking. Countries of the Hemisphere can ill afford to neglect the issue of drug control entirely, however, in large part because of the repercussions such a move would have on the nations' bilateral relations with the United States. The power of the United States in international lending organizations, as well as the strong need of many Latin American countries for U.S. financial assistance, contributes to this inequitable power relationship. For this reason, "cooperative" counterdrug programs between Latin American countries and the United States have generally been more a product of the hegemonic influence exerted by the U.S., rather than joint agreements resulting from negotiation between equal partners. To avoid over-generalizing the status of drug control efforts in Latin America, situations in the primary drug producing nations should be examined individually. Each of these countries, particularly Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico, face different internal political situations which produce varied approaches to drug control. Analysis of these cases provides a detailed

assessment of the prospects for drug control efforts.

Of these four nations, Colombia has received the most publicity in the U.S. press for its drug related problems and especially the increased violence which the trade has brought to the nation. During the late 1970s Colombia became a major supplier of marijuana to the U.S. market, but cocaine quickly surpassed marijuana in quantity and export value during the 1980s. In 1992, Colombia's estimated coca cultivation was 37,100 hectares. However, the country's most significant role in the global cocaine trade has been in drug processing and transport, rather than coca production. Colombia continues to be the world's leading supplier of cocaine.

Colombia's National Planning Council has claimed that the fight against drugs is lost and that the current government's "Democratic Security" policy is largely to blame for the systematic increase in human rights violations in the country. The president of the council, Adolfo Atehortua, condemned the nation's anti-drug policy, saying that it had been a total failure. As proof, he said that neither the number of hectares planted with illicit crops nor the net production of drugs had been significantly reduced. He also suggested that the spraying stop as it was increasing poverty in rural areas. "The general and indiscriminate aerial spraying of crops damages farmers who have no other options, the helpless producers, testers without life projects or jobs, but does not eliminate the persistency of the drug plantations," Mr. Atehortua argued (Vanovac, 2009).

Peru is not home to trafficking organizations of comparable power to those in Colombia. Peru is the largest producer of coca leaf in the world, however, and also is home to the strongest armed insurgent movement in the Hemisphere. Drug control is a minimal priority for the Peruvian government, but the nation has nonetheless been coerced by the United States to take some steps toward controlling drug supply.

To understand the role drug production and trafficking play in Peru and in government policy, one must understand Peruvian society and the sharp class divisions that exist within it. Peru is virtually two nations in one. Lima, the capital, is the country's largest city and

possesses the vast majority of the wealth. The mountainous sierra, where the majority of Peruvian campesinos live, is another world compared to Lima. The sierra has been virtually ignored by the residents of the coastal capital for years, and deep resentment has arisen in the minds of campesinos.

The economic power of the drug trade in Peru is staggering, and makes official corruption an insurmountable obstacle to drug control programs. A large percentage of Peruvian states have been declared "emergency zones" by the central government and are directly controlled by the military. The Peruvian military was first deployed to the Upper Huallaga Valley, the biggest coca producing region in the world, in 1984-85, which immediately led to the corruption of deployed officials (Craig 17). Military officers in Lima now compete to be assigned to the "zona roja," or red zone, as the areas in which drug trafficking flourishes are known. Commanders are paid by their subordinates for assignment to these regions, where the payoffs for allowing single shipments of drugs to pass checkpoints often exceed the annual official salaries of some officers. Corruption stemming from the drug trade in the Peruvian military has become so institutionalized that the Peruvian military actually opposes aggressive drug control efforts, albeit unofficially. Drugs are a business for the Peruvian military, and they cannot afford to fight against their own economic interests (Interview).

As an Andean country, Bolivia is similar to Peru in many ways. The majority of its population is comprised of poor campesinos, and the rugged geography of the nation is ideal for coca cultivation. The Bolivian altiplano and Chaparé regions produce vast quantities of coca leaves processed into cocaine in clandestine jungle labs. The Bolivian economy is also floated by coca dollars, experiencing significant annual income from the drug trade roughly equivalent to the combined value of all other Bolivian exports.

Yet despite these similarities, Bolivia's drug control situation is very different from that faced by Peru. Bolivian society does not display extreme class cleavages between the capital's inhabitants and rural campesinos, or at least not to the same extent as Peruvian society. Bolivian campesinos growing coca are better organized than their Peruvian counterparts and exert strong political influence on the government. Sharp reduction in the nation's licit

export earnings has made it even more reliant on foreign assistance and increased its dependence on the United States.

Mexico's independent stand against the "colossus of the north" is to a large extent aided by the size of the Mexican licit economy. Mexico's national finances are not floated by the drug trade to the degree that the Colombian, Peruvian, or Bolivian economies are. Mexico is therefore less susceptible to the stick of U.S. drug control policy. This relative freedom from U.S. drug policy coercion is also enhanced by Mexico's refusal to accept U.S. economic aid and thereby become a "line-item" in the U.S. budget. The fact that Mexico's drug traffickers do not pose a direct armed threat to the central government, as in Colombia, places its government in a unique drug control situation among the nations of the Americas.

Although Mexico has officially had a vigorous drug control policy for many years, illicit drug production and trafficking in Mexico is far from "under control." In many states renowned for high production levels of illicit drugs, drug lords exercise *de facto* control over local affairs. Justice and order in these regions are determined not by due process, but rather by the barrel of a gun. Although Mexican drug lords have, until very recently, received relatively less publicity in the U.S. press than their Colombian counterparts, they are still extremely powerful and pose a serious potential threat to authorities.

Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico each face unique circumstances with regard to their drug control efforts. The relative priority assigned to national goals like political stability, economic growth, drug control, democratization and human rights vary among these nations, as does the U.S. reaction to these differing government priorities. The "narcoticization" of U.S. diplomatic relations with these nations over the past several years has had pronounced effects in each country, and has also impacted other U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region.

Questions to Consider

1. How can it be assured that the solution reached is realistically implementable?

2. How does national sovereignty play into enforcing an international policy?

3. What steps can be taken to ensure a long-term reduction of drug trafficking?

4. What can you do to make sure that every country will participate?

5. What more can CICAD do to aid in the drug trafficking problem?

6. How can the major countries play a role as leader in curbing drug trade?

7. How does the drug trade fit into the economic atmosphere of each country?

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