



**Forum:** Economic and Social Committee

**Issue:** The fight against international drug organizations

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## Introduction

The global drug trafficking market is estimated to be worth up to 652 billion US \$, surpassing the total GDP of many of the countries most directly involved. Those most harmed by this trade are developing countries, particularly politically fragile ones. Drug Cartels and Trafficking organizations are often linked to high crime rates, as they use violence or the threat of violence to ensure obedience amongst their employees, to maintain a reputation, and especially as an aspect of competition for clients and territory with rival cartels. Due to its climate, South America is well suited for the cultivation of many drugs, enabled by the political instability and corruption that often plagues national governments. Furthermore, its proximity to the United States, one of the largest drug consumers in the world, provides an advantage as it is able to reach consumers more efficiently, leading to the rapid proliferation of international drug organizations.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Drug cartels

A drug cartel is a criminal organization focussed around supplying drug trafficking organizations both nationally and internationally. While these can be loose agreements, they can also be massive enterprises that battle for dominance and control of trade routes.

### Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)

Drug Trafficking Organizations produce, transport and/or distribute large amounts of illicit drugs, often across international borders, to supply smaller-scale organizations in countries where the climate or conditions are unfit for drug cultivation

### Illicit Drugs

Illicit drugs are drugs that are illegal in a particular country, the most common being: Cannabis, Cocaine, Opioids, and Methamphetamines. There are varying degrees of the legality of certain drugs, such as Cocaine, which is legal in the United States for medical use, and complete legality in Mexico to cultivate, possess, and transport, however, not to sell. Furthermore, cannabis is tolerated in countries such as the Netherlands, and legal in countries such as Uruguay, however, holds exceptions such as the forbidden sale to foreigners.

### Opiates



Opiates are a type of drug found in opium poppy plants, with a variety of effects such as pain relief. Hence why they are primarily used medically as anesthetics, under names such as Morphine, Vicodin, or Oxycodone. However, they are also used recreationally, either in its medical form sold without a valid prescription or as Heroin, an extremely addictive drug that can create dependency within its users after trying it only once. In 2014, an estimated 13-20 million people used Opiates recreationally.

## Methamphetamines

Methamphetamines are a stimulant that affects the Central Nervous System (CNS). It reduces appetite, increases activity and talkativeness, and gives a sense of happiness. Because the 'high' starts and fades quickly, people often experience a crash that can leave them wanting more, leaving them very vulnerable to dependency. Colloquial names include (crystal) meth, speed, or ice.

## War on Drugs

The War on Drugs is a military, economic, social and political initiative by the US federal government, created to reduce the illegal drug trade in the country. Seeing as the majority of illicit drugs enter the United States from Latin America, the initiative, aimed at reducing the production, consumption and distribution of drugs, often includes interference or aid with foreign governments struggling with drug trafficking or cartels.

## Balloon Effect

The 'balloon effect' is a popular analogy regarding drug transport and suppression, particularly in South America. The analogy refers to a balloon being pushed in one area, moving the air to another part of a balloon, rather than reducing the air in the balloon all together. If law enforcement attempts to focus its attention on drug production and trade in one area, drug routes and cultivation processes will either grow or move elsewhere, in response to the lack of access from the targeted area, and comparative availability in an area with less resistance.

## General Overview

Drug Organizations are dangerous for a variety of reasons; aside from the fact that they provide illicit drugs to the population with little way to control it, the means of transportation, cultivation, and trade are plagued with violence and illegality. Furthermore, the DTO's are often also involved in extortion of businesses, law enforcement or government officials; kidnapping for ransom, intimidation, murder and sex trafficking.

## Government involvement

Drug violence can force the government to spend more resources on law enforcement, leaving other areas, such as sustainable development or education, underfunded. This creates a cycle that traps nations in poverty and violence and often attempts to suppress drug



trafficking in one country, pushing the violence and trade more north to other countries, known as the balloon effect.

### Kingpin strategy

The kingpin strategy has been used throughout the war on drugs, with significant successes, resulting in the eventual diminishing in influence of some DTO's. The strategy works by attempting to dismantle and eventually incarcerate leaders of cartels hoping the drug cartel falls apart without them. However, rather than causing the collapse of the cartel, in reality it leads to division within the organization, resulting in extreme violence due to opposing claims of leadership. These consequences are often worse, making the kingpin strategy result only beneficial to media and further publicity purposes. In reality, the Kingpin strategy doesn't deal with the underlying causes and effects of drug cartels. Aside from that, placing so much importance on one leader creates a myth around one person, that leads to admiration and imitation.

### Governmental corruption

Corruption through intimidation or payoffs has long been seen as a given for the drug trafficking industry, and various court cases show just how deep-rooted this corruption is. It is known that in the late 1980s, the chief of Mexico City's Federal Police accepted bribes. Moreover, one of a DTO's main Colombian suppliers admitted to bribing everyone from journalists to Tax Officials, stating: "It's impossible to be the leader of a drug cartel in Colombia without having corruption [...] they go hand in hand". Furthermore, one of a cartel's former chief was ready to reveal two former Mexican presidents who had accepted bribes from the organization.

## Major Parties Involved

### United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is an organization within the United Nations founded in 1997, merging the preceding United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention. The UNODC aims to aid member states to control the trafficking, production, and distribution of illicit drugs, as well as aid in international trafficking situations. The organization is based both in the field, helping member states' ability to control drug trafficking, and in research and analytical aspects, increasing the knowledge and understanding of the drug trade while simultaneously helping states implement drug control programs. Aside from drug control, the UNODC also helps with drug-related crime and social issues, in particular organized crime, corruption, drug abuse and health, and terrorism prevention.



## Mexico

Mexico is one of the largest drug suppliers in the world, as one of the two countries to share a border with the United States, allowing them to transport drugs across land. The country grows marijuana itself, as well as transporting opiates and other hard drugs from further south. Violence is rampant as turf wars between cartels are common and the homicide rates in Mexico are much higher than the global average. Cities such as Tijuana, are a major connection point for drug trafficking across the border due to its proximity to the airport and the city of San Diego, making it a particularly targeted area for cartel influence, and was recently named “Mexico’s most murderous city”. While Afghanistan is the global leader in Poppy production for opiates, Mexico is increasing its production to meet American demand, and a steep rise in heroin users has created an opioid crisis that some dub a humanitarian crisis for the US.

## United States of America

The US is heavily involved in the drug trafficking industry in South America, as it has led the ‘war on drugs’ in an attempt to prevent illicit drugs from entering their country. However, America leads as the world’s largest user of illegal drugs, generating a large demand that South America seeks to fill.

## Colombia

Colombia is the world’s largest producer and cultivator of coca, the plant used to make cocaine. According to the UNODC, this is made possible due to the lack of state control. The organization further says that an estimated 106,000 Colombian farmers live off coca farming. Colombian authorities have attempted to curb coca production by spraying chemicals over coca farms to forcibly destroy the crops, however due to its abundance this tends to affect poor farming families more than the trafficking or production industry itself.

## Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

The CND was established in 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to aid the process of drug control and legislation in member states. In 1991, the General Assembly enabled the CND to function as the main governing body of the UNODC with two main areas; “a normative segment for discharging treaty-based and normative functions” and an operational segment for exercising the role as the governing body of the UNODC”. There has been criticism in the past on the bureaucratic nature of the commission as the CND rarely coordinates with other UN bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

## Timeline of Key Events

June 1971 Nixon announces the “war on drugs”



- 1946 CND Founded
- 1969 Nixon temporarily closes the US-Mexico border to combat marijuana entering the US, with little success
- 1973 The DEA (Drug enforcement administration) is founded in the US
- 1993 Colombian police with help from the US track down and kill Pablo Escobar, dismantling the Mandellín cartel, causing traffickers in Cali to rise in power
- 2000-2015 “Plan Colombia”, a partnership between Colombia and the US to combat drug trafficking
- 2015 “El Chapo” escapes a top security jail through a tunnel in his cell
- 2017 El Chapo extradited to San Diego for trial after being recaptured in 2016

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have been many attempts to solve the issue of international DTO's due to the devastating political, social, economic and even environmental impact that they have. However, it is often a lack of communication between different focusses that results in its failure.

The War on Drugs has been initiated by the United States, it is however, difficult to control due to the underlying persistent requirements of supply and demand. Often aggressive means are sought out such as burning coca or poppy fields, but this has very limited success and harms poor farmers rather than large cartels. In the late 20th Century, the United States aggressively targeted cocaine routes between Colombia and the United States, however this only resulted in the cartels switching their routes.

A longstanding possibility that many countries have been considering is the decriminalization of drugs. The new president of Mexico, Obrador, has proposed a 5-year plan to decriminalize illegal drugs, which offers users treatment rather than punishment, by “redirecting the resources currently destined to combat their transfer and apply them in programs - massive, but personalized - of reinsertion and detoxification”. This programme tackles the demand of drugs, as it allows for people at risk or already with a dependency to receive help, however it is less likely to be effective with drugs such as marijuana which is very popular recreationally in all areas of the Americas.

## Possible solutions

Decriminalization and Legalization are both very popular arguments, and the positive effects in countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, and Portugal can clearly be seen. However,



these nations are fundamentally more peaceful than South America, and have had political stability for decades. While the hope is that legalization will cripple drug cartels, the implications of legalizing drugs such as heroin have to be considered, and it cannot be assumed that the illicit drug trafficking industry will simply dissolve. By decriminalizing drugs, the trade becomes regulated, cultivators sell to certified buyers with a much lower risk of violence and the overall price reduces as the clandestine aspects of the illegal drug trade - bribery, small scale transport, and elaborate schemes to secretly transport drugs across international borders - is no longer necessary. Furthermore, the legal drug industry could reduce the rate of unemployment, as well as bringing in revenue through taxation.

Another possible solution would be alternative development programs, that tackles the underlying issues of drug demand, as well as to the issue why people enter the trafficking industry. The resolution by the Commission on Narcotic Control shows very well how through education and alternative development, people can be prompted to stay away from the trafficking industry by providing different prospects.

When regarding possible solutions, the reality of corruption must also be addressed. Pouring money into nations where high-ranking government officials will use it for personal use will not do much to end the trade, and it is a complicated issue that cannot be ignored, as corruption plays a fundamental role in the drug trafficking industry. Possibilities include sending in UN peacekeepers, aiding to stabilize the currency in countries such as Venezuela where hyperinflation is a large issue for wages, or offering pardons to officers who come clean about their actions.

## Useful documents

This video explains the balloon effect and how drug trafficking routes for cocaine were formed, as well as how it affects the people of South America. <https://youtu.be/tWcV94G4rRI>

This video provides an insight to the drug cartel world and shows how the kingpin strategy was used.

<https://youtu.be/v394vC23HW0>

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