



The War on Terrorism and the War on Drugs... Why can't we win one without fighting the other?

By L. Rivera, PhD

Introduction.

The illegal trafficking and use of illicit drugs is having a negative impact in nearly all aspects of our lives. The economic cost of dealing with the problem alone is colossal and drug abuse has reached epidemic proportions worldwide; however, the effects are not restricted to the people that consume these poisons. The prospect of making easy money has contributed to the corruption of public officials, Military officers and law-enforcement personnel. The October 7, 2010 FBI arrests of 133 police officers, prison guards and US Army officers in Puerto Rico on charges of aiding drug traffickers, exemplifies the gravity of the problem. Combine that with the threat of terrorism and we have nothing less than a recipe for disaster.

Drugs and the War Effort in Afghanistan.

Much attention has been given to reports from Afghanistan that identifies illicit drug trade as a major source of income/logistical sustainability for the Taliban. According to reports, income derived from poppy fields is being used to arm potential suicide terrorists with vests packed with explosives, car-bombs and other weaponry that is being used against targets like police stations and security forces. There have also been allegations of Osama bin Laden's personal involvement in drug trafficking to finance al Qaeda's activities (Perl, R. F. 2001).



Picture of poppy field in Afghanistan
Photo from www.cleveland.com

The bottom line is there is plenty of evidence that links terrorist's organizations to illicit drug trafficking.

According to an August 9, 2010 report in the New York Times titled "U.S. to Hunt Down Afghan Drug Lords Tied to Taliban," which make reference to a congressional report dealing with this issue; the link between the Taliban and illicit drug trade has escalated to the point that it has prompted a major shift in American counterdrug strategy in Afghanistan.

Afghans believed to be drug traffickers with ties to the Taliban have been placed on a Pentagon target list to be *captured or killed*—United States military commanders told Congress "We have a list of 367 'kill or capture' targets, including 50 nexus targets that link drugs and the insurgency."

Illicit Drugs and Terrorism in the Western Hemisphere.

The link between illicit drugs trafficking and terrorist organizations is not unique to Afghanistan's Taliban and al Qaeda, but also common practice by terrorists and insurgent organizations in the western hemisphere. In 1959 after Fidel Castro overthrew Cuba's long-time dictator, Fulgencio Batista, the Soviet Union began its relationship with Cuba which by 1961, had evolved in to a full fletch operation throughout the Latin America theater by funneling weaponry and economic assistance through Cuba to various insurgent groups such as the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) in EL Salvador, the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* of Nicaragua and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). However, it all ended on Christmas Day, 1991, when the Hammer and Sickle Flag of the Soviet Union was lowered for the last time above the Kremlin and replaced with the Russian flag ... *The Fall of the Soviet Union*.

After the fall of the Soviet Union the economic and logistical support was no longer there and terrorist's organization/insurgent groups ventured into illicit drug trafficking to source their activities. Two of the main left-wing insurgent groups (also State Department-designated FTOs), in Latin America—the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—are primarily funded through drug production and trafficking operations. While the two groups differ in terms of size and territorial reach, both have increased their involvement in the drug trade from levying



“taxes” on coca harvesters and mid-level buyers to directly controlling multiple aspects of the drug supply chain.

Some may argue the relevance of these organizations to the security of the US. But although the FARC falls under the classification of “National Terrorist Organization” and their goal is to overthrow the government of Colombia rather than attack the US; the FARC is particularly known for its international contacts and relationships with foreign terrorist groups, transnational organized crime groups, and even some state actors (Wyler & Beittel, 2010).

Picture of Security Forces protecting a Ground Based Radar site in Colombia used to track aircrafts suspected of transporting illicit drugs.

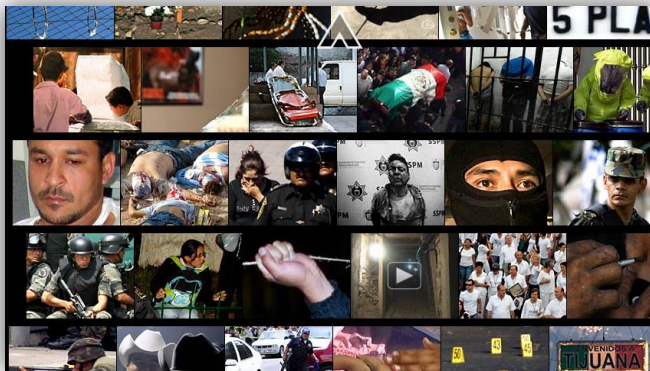
The Terrorists and Organized Criminal Organizations/Gangs Connection.

Narco-terrorist organizations like the FARC possess an infrastructure that has been used to smuggle illicit drugs into the US for decades. This same infrastructure can easily be used to smuggle other illegal non-human cargo, such as materials that can be used to construct WMD’s, like a dirty bomb. This combined with their alleged connection with the MS-13—an organization known for its willingness and ability to smuggle illegal human cargo into the US—can easily be leveraged by organizations like al Qaida to infiltrate personnel with the skill sets necessary to build such device.

In June 2004, the Colombian Police indicated the FARC and other drug cartels had ties to MS-13 cliques in El Salvador. They believed the MS-13/FARC connection is more natural due to common language and culture; and also conceded that it is not inconceivable that MS-13 might also conduct business with other terrorist organizations, such as al Qaida and Hezbollah. Later that year, a September 2004 Washington Post article reported an al Qaida/MS-13 connection in Honduras in which a key al Qaida cell leader, Adnan G. El Shukrijumah, had met with MS-13 leaders. Another report indicates the MS-13 has a major smuggling center in Matamoros, Mexico—all of which represents a clear threat to the security of the US.

In January 2006, the Department of Justice reported that 10 foreign nationals from Colombia were indicted by a federal grand jury in Miami, Florida, on charges of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization and alien smuggling. Assisted were members of the FARC. It is alleged that the individuals charged provided these FARC members with false documents and helped them procure weapons and drugs.

Other reports claim that Mexican drug cartels may be upping the ante even more, adopting terror techniques not previously seen in the growing violence on the border. A Hezbollah-like car bomb exploded in a border town as a congresswoman asks Homeland Security about links between the terrorist group and Mexican drug cartels. This is more than an immigration problem (National Terror Alert Center, 2010).



Car bombs are a terrorist specialty and not a drug cartel modus operandi. The heavily armed cartels are more into shootings and kidnappings. So the car bomb that exploded in Ciudad Juarez, near a federal police headquarters, killing four, was either a change in tactics for the cartels or a sign of teaming up with a terrorist group, one of which could be Iran-linked Hezbollah. Officials called it a well-planned trap and the first time that traffickers have used a car bomb since the start of a military-led offensive against drug cartels. It also may be the first indication of Hezbollah's growing influence south of the border (National Terror Alert Center, 2010).

Gangs and the Mexican drug cartels—which in some places are better armed and more powerful than the government forces—have turned the illicit drug trafficking problem into a full-blown insurgency in that country. Thus far in 2010, 11 Mexican mayors have been murdered by drug traffickers and over the past four years more than 28,000 killings have been linked to illicit drug trafficking.

Unfortunately the atrocities associated with drug trafficking are not restricted to Mexican officials. In August 13, 1986, DEA Special Agent Victor Cortez who was investigating the kidnapping, torture and assassination of another DEA Special Agent—Enrique “QUIQUE” Camarena—and his informant were arrested by Mexican Police. While in their custody he was subjected to physical abuse and torture by police officers who used his body and face as a punching bag, applied electricity to his genitals and water-boarded him with water that was laced with an irritant that was later identified as powdered Jalapeño Peppers. His captors also held a revolver to his head, asked questions and then drop the hammer. A few hours later while being moved to a different location within the Police station, Cortez assessed the situation and made an attempt to escape. Luckily for him his actions resulted in a struggle that attracted the attention of his boss—the country DEA Attaché—who was at the police station attempting to secure his release at the time (Rivera, L. 2004). The latest act against US Officials by narco-terrorists in Mexico was the February 15, 2011 attack against two DHS/ICE agents near the San Luis Potosi. Who while on their way to Mexico City, were followed and forced to stop by two vehicles—using tactics similar to a law-enforcement felony stop. They were immediately surrounded by a dozen bad guys and although the two identified themselves as US Government Officials assigned to the US Embassy, the bad guys opened fire on them killing one and critically wounding the other.

For more than two years, U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials have been warning that the dramatic rise in violence along the southwestern border could eventually target U.S. citizens and spread into this country. The violence posed what the officials called a *"serious threat" to law enforcement officers, first responders and residents* along the 1,951-mile border. The numbers bear out those concerns, according to the State Department: 79 U.S. citizens were killed last year in Mexico, up from 35 in 2007. In Juarez, just across the Rio

Grande from El Paso, Texas, 23 Americans were killed in 2009, compared with two in 2007 (Conery, B. & Seper, J. 2010).



Old Warrior Billy Waugh (USSF SGM-Ret) with Young Warrior Jay Vigo (USCG) at the first American Warrior International Conference, Titusville, after Waugh's lecture on the capture of terrorist Ilych Ramirez-Sanchez —AKA "Carlos the Jackal."

According to Retired USSF SGM and former CIA Operator "Billy Waugh"—personal opinion based on "Open-Source" information—the southern border of the US, from Texas to the Pacific, are rife with druggies who actually are involved in the trafficking of 1. Narcotics moved to the north for sale,

2. Personnel moved to the north for dollars, and 3. Al Qaida and weapons moved to the north to do future damage / harm to selected US Mainland cities. Each bit of trafficking brings in tons of USD to the Drug Czars of the border areas (Waugh, 2010).

Summary.

At a time when the United States debates how best to respond to the threat of terrorism, it must also find better ways to deal with the illicit drug problem. Although doing nothing is a course of action, it is the author's opinion it is not the preferred one in this case. The bottom line is that the drug related violence we have seen in countries like Colombia and Mexico are already spilling over our southern borders. For this reason any strategy for combating terrorism, must also include combating the illicit trafficking/smuggling of human and non-human cargo, to include illicit drugs.

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