



Mexican DIP:
Drug Cartels, Immigration, & Politics

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It is 5 am on July 29, 2009, two cars pulled up in front of the police chief's house in the southern Mexican city of Veracruz, and nine gunmen got out, armed with assault rifles and 40 millimeter grenade launchers. They blasted their way into the house, and it took them *less than five* minutes to execute Police Chief Jesus Antonio Romero, his wife, and their son. The gunmen set the house on fire killing the remaining three children, all girls.¹

No, this is not a Grisham novel. It's not a New York Times best seller, a violent new Play Station video game, or a Hollywood blockbuster. This is the ultimate in reality shows—it's every day life in the bloody, brutal world of the Mexican drug cartels.

These are not merely gangs of thugs and hoodlums; these are sophisticated organized crime syndicates fielding armies of enforcers equipped with military-grade firepower. They have total disregard for human life, and the tactics described in the home invasion and slaughter of the Romero family, are examples of **terroristic** acts². To be clear, Merriam-Webster defines terrorism as the "systematic use of terror, especially as a means of coercion"! This is the every day reality in Mexico's drug wars.

Allan Wall, in his seminal essay, **Searching for Paradigms & Parallels in Mexico's Drug War³**, emphasizes, "Drug cartels are a form of terrorism. Mexican narco-terrorists aren't inspired by religion like Bin Laden; they are driven by a *lust* for money and power." To put this in perspective, consider how Wall links the drug cartels activities and philosophies to terrorist acts.

Cartel hit men mean not only to rub out their targets, but to terrorize others, including would-be snitches or adversaries. That's why they've cut off people's heads, arranged human heads in pyramids, and dropped heads onto a dance floor of a night club with a message that the killings were the work of The Family (La Familia)". They've put victims in 55 gallon drums, poured flammable

liquids on them and set them ablaze. They have stuffed victims into tires and set them afire. Severed heads of eight soldiers were found in plastic bags near a shopping center. And to “top” things off, Santiago Meza—nicknamed El Pozolero, “the soupmaker”—confessed to having dissolved the bodies of more than 300 people in acid.

My topic today is Mexico: Drug Cartels, Immigration, & Politics, Mexican “DIP” for short! Drug cartels are pervasive and insidious forces with tentacles that reach every corner of the world. Immigration—legal and illegal—is a global issue that is emotionally-charged and highly partisan. International politics, especially Mexican politics in particular, is a tangled web of cross purposes, mixed messages, dichotomies, and loaded with contradictions. Any of these would be suitable subjects for their own paper, but in the case of Mexico, all three converge in a perfect storm that makes Mexico’s Hurricane Wilma look like a light summer breeze. According to the US Justice Department, “Mexico drug trafficking cartels represent the greatest organized crime threat to the United States.”⁴

For example, just eleven days ago, “three people connected to the US Consulate were shot to death by men [of two potential drug gangs fighting for control of the City] who intercepted their cars as they returned from a child’s birthday party in Ciudad Juarez, a key entry point for drugs into the US.” This tragedy is additive to the 33 other people who died in Acapulco and Guerrero that same weekend. A message to all: “The situation in northern Mexico remains fluid; the location and timing of future armed engagements cannot be predicted.”⁵

A recent Wall Street Journal headline encapsulates the theme of this paper in four simple words, “**Mexico’s Hopeless Drug War**”⁶. It’s like a disease that won’t go away; as Dr. Denise Dresser observed, “... for every drug-trafficker who is caught, another one will emerge in his place.” Cartels continue to recruit younger and younger. *Sicaritos* are children who are “assassins, 13 or 14 years old, since when they are young, they can take on the world.”⁷ One thirteen year old *Sicarito* reflected after committing

his first killing, "I loved doing it. Killing that first person, I loved it. I thought I was Superman." With the violent drug cartel culture being engrained into the hearts and minds of children, the hope of eradicating drug cartels and drug trafficking is both delusional **and** idealistic, and about as likely as me becoming a pro basketball player! The sad fact is "twenty five percent of students over the age of twelve in Mexico City have tried drugs. This not only affects the social fabric of society but increasingly impacts on domestic political stability."⁸

The facts speak to me clearly and definitively. I think it is important to paint a composite picture of the situation in Mexico, and how it explains some of our own problems. For the United States, there is clearly more at stake in Mexico than in Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan or any other global terrorism hot spot—in the words of former CIA director Michael Hayden, "Mexico could become more problematic than Iraq"⁹—yet despite decades of well-meaning initiatives, misspent and poorly allocated resources, economic saber-rattling, and political posturing by both Democratic and Republican administrations (let's remember that President's **make** foreign policy¹⁰), the situation is only getting worse and more deadly. As one DEA agent observed, "It doesn't matter if violence is perpetrated on the Mexican or US side of the border, the bodies are just as dead." Alberto Islas, a security consultant who advises the Mexican government, says there is no escaping reality: "There is an arms race between the cartels."¹¹ The relevance of this statement will become apparent later when I review the major drug cartels and look at their "**nation building**" activities.

The bulk of street corner narcotics enter the United States from Mexico along our largely-unprotected 1,952-mile border, with smuggling by sea and air doing effective end-runs around what border guards we have. Protected by corrupt Mexican police forces and with almost unimpeded access to the world's most lucrative drug market, the wealth of the Mexican drug cartels cannot be underestimated. Mexican drug kingpins control an illegal drug business worth at least \$142 billion a year. In the United

States alone, earnings estimates from the wholesale illicit drug trade range of upwards of 48.4 billion annually¹². General Barry McCaffrey, Former President Clinton's Drug Czar, minced no words when he said, "The dangerous and worsening problems in Mexico fundamentally threaten US national security, and we cannot afford to have a *narco state as a neighbor*."¹³

While few are willing to say it or even infer it, I will call it as I see it: Mexico is a "failed state" characterized by social, political, and economic dislocation and Mexican foreign policy is a failed strategy because the militarization approach to waging war against drug cartels has not worked. Even though Mexico is still largely in control of its territory, it has lost the ability to govern some parts of the country. Narco-terrorists are in control of many states within Mexico, and Mexico's continued destabilization is a national security risk for all of us. Despite the pleasantries and idealism of Mexico's ambassador to the United States who gamely reassures us that Mexico is a "vibrant civic society and a country with solid institutions", we have to act even if Mexico can't or will not. In the field of diplomatic public relations, ignorance may be bliss but it is no excuse; Mexico is a failed state, economically, socially, and politically—let me explain why I concluded this position:

Hit extremely hard by the global economic meltdown economically, Mexico's unemployment is at a 13-year high (1 in 6 looking for a job) with over 50 million Mexicans trying to scrape by on five dollars per day and with 20 million of that 50 million living on less than two dollars a day or less; for these destitute millions, drug trafficking is considered an acceptable way out of grinding poverty. While Mexico showed both discipline and resilience after its 1994 Peso crisis and even again in the last 7-10 years when Mexico reduced its foreign debt exposure, reigned in spending, saved oil profit windfalls, but now its economy is headed for substantial negative growth, oil prices continue to stagnate and production is declining by 10% a year (Mexico once the seventh largest oil producer will be a net importer by 2017¹⁴), Federal tax revenues are just 9% of GDP, public expenditures on infrastructure

continues to decline and exports are plummeting—in all but one area, illicit drugs. While everything else in their economy is collapsing, Mexico’s drug trade is exploding! It is the “#2 supplier of heroin, the largest foreign source of marijuana, and the largest producer of meth, with Mexican drug cartels controlling at least 13 **primary** drug distribution centers in the US”¹⁵. As Witness for Peace, in their fact sheet, surmise, “Deeply impoverished people in Mexico have three options for survival: migration; tenuous and often dangerous work in the informal economy, and crime - including drug running.”¹⁶ It is no wonder, Mexico ranked 60th in competitiveness in the world as published by the World Economic Forum.

To connect the dots, let me paraphrase Allan Wall: “The problem of drug cartels is definitely a criminal problem. It is a problem in the context of being a series of military operations. It is a form of terrorism. It’s also a political problem because drug money is already influencing Mexican politicians, from the national down to the local levels, and is getting more powerful by the day.”¹⁷ A democracy in Mexico may be short-lived.

Shannon O’ Neil, a Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, traces today’s violence to the Mexican Revolution which began over one hundred years ago. The Revolution scarred the country and left it with a single political party (originally called the National Revolutionary Party but later renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI). PRI controlled Mexico for seventy-one years from 1929 to 2000 when Vicente Fox of the National Action Party was elected President for a non-renewable term of six years. As O’Neil points out, the PRI’s reach and historical influence went “beyond politics; it created Mexico’s ruling economic and social classes.”¹⁸ A sobering and disconcerting introduction to my topic, but it is through this worldview and context today we will look at Mexican DIP – **d**rug cartels, **i**mmigration, and **p**olitics.

Drug Cartels

Now let's take a hard look at what is happening with the drug cartels in Mexico, and whether Mexican President Felipe Calderon is making any progress toward his ambitious goal of weeding out corruption and providing more muscle in Mexico's drug hot spots¹⁹. Since his inauguration, he has spent over \$6.4 billion to fight the drug cartels and in December 2006, he sent 6,500 federal troops to the state of Michoacan to end drug violence there. "This action is regarded as the first major retaliation made against the cartel violence, and is generally viewed as the starting point of the war between the government and the drug cartels"²⁰. In 2008, the Mexican government identified 2,204 so-called "zones of impunity" where crime was largely uncontrolled; today, they claim that number has dropped to 233²¹, thanks to their financial, human, and technological investments that are supporting the tens of thousands of soldiers and federal police cracking down on the violence and murders, and the decriminalization of small amounts of drugs. While Mexico repeatedly cites the US demand for drugs as the cause for the cartels' power and violence²² and the broad proliferation and availability of US assault weapons (providing justification and "air cover" for the Mexican government's posturing on illicit drug transactions), the Mexican cartels are branching out to human trafficking, arms smuggling, auto theft, and kidnapping for ransom. They are expanding their geographic reach far beyond Mexico, from Argentina in South America to more than **200** cities in the United States, and as noted on a March 22, 2009, **New York Times** interactive map of the reach of Mexico's drug cartels - Fort Wayne, IN is a drug cartel hot spot and to most other countries and major cities in the Western world.

Drug cartels are sophisticated operators, rapacious, and entrepreneurial in their actions, shipping to the US by boat, private vehicles, commercial trucks, airplanes, and believe it or not even a "submarine puttering off the Pacific coast carrying more than 5 tons of cocaine".²³ Once limited to Border States, the cartels' pervasive reach has spread inland; Atlanta, Georgia has now "emerged as one of the

nation's richest drug-distribution hubs."²⁴ In fact in October 2009, 300 members of a major Mexican drug cartel were arrested in twelve US states including a corrupt US Sheriff in Texas.²⁵ These are the lengths they will go to protect their "drug franchises", and as Calderon himself candidly offers, "...I think a good cleaning is in order on the other side of the border."²⁶ Indeed, this assertion is correct. In one year, the US has seized along the southwest border in one year, "3,232,691 pounds of marijuana, 21,986 pounds of cocaine, 3,765 pounds of meth, and 795 pounds of heroin."²⁷ Need I say more! This is big business.

You might have known that Mexico is the twelfth largest economy in the world, the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, the tenth largest car manufacturer, the United States' second biggest trading supplier, a great place to vacation, in beautiful places like Moon Palace Resorts in Cancun, and an important and strategic oil supplier. What you might not have known is Mexico is the top foreign supplier of marijuana — and also a major supplier of methamphetamines — to the United States.²⁸ Since late 2006, more than 18,360 people have been killed in Mexico in drug-related violence (more than six times the tragic losses of 9/11), and Mexican cartels have now displaced Colombian groups as the dominant cocaine traffickers in the world. So amazing is that last fact, there's even a name for it: the Colombianization of Mexico. Even though Calderon weakened the cartels initially in late 2006 and again 2008, violence and blood-shed are still the name of the game in 2010. The stakes are high, as the United Nation's World Drug Report concluded, "It is estimated the annual **global** commerce in drugs is worth roughly **320 billion US dollars**, a figure larger than the individual gross domestic products of almost **90% of the world's nations**."²⁹ Further, and it is hard to fathom, but the Mexican drug trade, as an industry, would represent **20%** of all exports to the United States³⁰.

There are seven major, and at least a score or more of other cartels in Mexico, including three "super cartels" in the Gulf, Sinaloa, and Juarez regions. There are 31 states in Mexico, and the cartels are firmly

entrenched in 18 of them. President Calderon has deployed 25% of Mexico's military troops just to confront the cartels.³¹ The Juarez Cartel is active in 21 Mexican states; the Sinaloa Cartel is present in 17 states, and the Gulf cartel is active in 13 states. A fourth group vying for "super cartel" status is the Tijuana Cartel, which is present in at least 15 states.³²

Let's look at **three** major "super cartel" players and their modus operandi (Note Figure 1 and 2).

- **Sinaloa Cartel** (also known as the Pacific Cartel). It operates out of the Western Mexican States and distributes cocaine and marijuana through gangs in Arizona, California, Texas, Chicago, and New York City. In fact, Atlanta, believe it or not, has become a major distribution hub for powerful Mexican drug groups with authorities confiscating over \$70 million in drug-related cash (more than anywhere else in the United States), and Atlanta has become a transfer point for truckloads of Mexican cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine.³³ This cartel acts like a franchise of sorts, integrating a smaller network of local gangs, and tends to be less sophisticated than the Los Zetas. The Sinaloa Cartel has formed an alliance called The Federation with the Juarez and Valencia cartels. Sinaloa is lead by Joaquin Guzman Loera, known as "El Chapo" (Shorty in English!), the most famous of drug lords and the most wanted. He is one of the richest people in the world. He escaped from a maximum-security prison in 2001. Likewise, while in prison, the head of the Tijuana Cartel and the Gulf Cartel forged an alliance against the Sinaloa Cartel and its network effectively creating a turf war against these two super cartels.
- **Los Zetas** (enforcers for the east coast of Mexico). Most of the Los Zetas are ex-Mexican soldiers who were trained (allegedly, in the United States)³⁴ to combat drug gangsters. This cartel acts as a private army and is generally considered one of the most powerful cartels in Mexico. Their focus seems to be securing routes from Guatemala to Mexico and integrating the remnants of

the Gulf Cartel; however, this activity has not been officially confirmed. Using sophisticated military tactics, Los Zetas have access to “50 caliber machine guns, grenade launchers, and even ground-to-air missiles.”³⁵ This group is led by El Lazca and The Hummer. Both were Special Forces soldiers, and they have close ties to the La Familia Cartel.

- **La Familia** (vigilante group in the west-central Mexican state of Michoacán.) This cartel runs speed labs in dozens of locations and their enforcement techniques are nothing short of terrorism. They famously dumped five severed heads on a dance floor, and are considered the most violent criminal organization in Mexico. La Familia controls the distribution of drugs directly to the consumer and was the subject of a 44-month US law enforcement operation called Project Coronado in which several distribution networks in the US were dismantled and over 1,100 people were arrested including 755 Sinaloa cartel members.³⁶ This group was led by Alberto Espinoza Barron known as “la Fresa” (The Strawberry in English!)

Despite George W. Bush’s woefully inadequate **\$1.4** billion Merida Initiative (dubbed Plan Mexico), was touted as a “new security cooperation initiative” to “professionalize Mexico’s military and civil forces”³⁷ and launched in 2007—of which a mere \$4.5 million was to be invested in improving local Mexican police and most was spent on special weapons and satellite surveillance—Calderon’s crack down still has \$1 billion in the coffers to train and equip local police who are competent and non-corrupt and who can fight alongside Mexico’s federal police to destroy the cartels. This purported new paradigm for security was meant to improve border security and reduce crime but has barely put a dent in either, and still 90% of the cocaine that flows into the United States comes through Mexico. The Merida Initiative is unlikely to have a meaningful, long-term impact in restraining the drug trade, and President Obama is largely continuing and fueling Former President George W. Bush’s Mexican policies through his signing the 2009 Omnibus spending bill which allocated an additional \$300 million into law under

the Merida Initiative provided certain human rights requirements were met. However, Congress withheld \$700 million to see if the money is being spent “wisely.”

From January 2000 to September 2006, prior to Calderon taking office, the Mexican government arrested over 79,000 people, including 15 cartel leaders, 74 lieutenants, 53 financial officers, 428 hit men, and 78,831 low-level drug dealers. This compares to the 10,000 people arrested from December 2006 to August 2007, which begs the question: ***what is Calderon up against?*** Upon taking office in December 2006, Calderon, a “Harvard-educated Conservative” himself declared “organized crime is out of control.”³⁸ Calderon admitted when elected to the presidency that “drug violence had overwhelmed the governments of the nation’s capital and key states across Mexico”³⁹. Calderon’s call to action that “All of Mexico’s social sectors must be united to fight against drug trafficking”⁴⁰ in order to wipe out the drugs, guns, and money” is a farce given the fact that most levels of government and law enforcement are on the Cartels’ payroll. Local Mexican law enforcement is so severely impaired, under-resourced and under-trained that a comprehensive and effective law enforcement solution seems out of reach given today “drug gangs wield more influence than the authorities in at least 8 percent of the 200 counties in Mexico.”⁴¹ Last year, the Obama Administration sought \$80 million from Congress to provide Black Hawk helicopters to better track drug runners. It will take a lot more than this to alter the course of the drug cartel’s grip and arm’s race.

Consider the following—

In Mexico, a police officer is considered a part-time job, not a profession or career. Police officers are grossly underpaid, under trained, and mostly corrupt—in fact; corruption, bribes, and a bad reputation define the typical Mexican police force.

1. A police officer used to get a pair of black jeans and a black Tee shirt. Now, they actually have uniforms but lack arms and communications equipment to protect themselves and

law-abiding citizens. Even though the local police can't (or won't) fight the cartels, the odds of overcoming the corrupting influences of the drug trade by creating a new national police force or the militarization of Mexico are pretty much slim to none. In late 2009, Calderon launched a \$1 billion drive to "train and equip beleaguered local police forces with the goal of producing competent and non-corrupt local police forces."⁴² One suspects this will be another pounding-money-down-a-rat-hole exercise.

2. A police officer in Mexico could make twice as much working illegally as a California lettuce picker. Even though wages have been doubled to US\$615 a month, Mexican cops still augment their meager incomes by taking bribes or "*mordidas*" for common offenses like traffic tickets and curfew violations.
3. Mexican police officers are physically exhausted, often working 24 hour shifts and then still having to complete the full day's paperwork before heading home.
4. Every Mexican police force **is** corrupt—local, state, and federal. If you are a victim of a crime in Mexico, the last person you call is a police officer. In fact, policemen regularly play dual roles as both pursuers and protectors of the drug traffickers. In 2009, the influence and intimidation of the drug cartels was felt in Villa Madero—the entire 32 member police force simply resigned or failed to show up for work.⁴³
5. Most Mexican politicians (at all levels of government) are either owned or leased by the cartels. Many accuse the Calderon government and the army of protecting the Sinaloa Cartel to the detriment of the other cartels, which raises the question: are all politicians in Mexico somehow corrupt? The answer: Yes. Period. To put this in perspective, cocaine traffickers spend \$500 million a year on bribery—more than double the budget of the Mexican

Attorney General's office. Here's a bit of irony for you: as a percentage of population, there are more Mexicans involved in the cultivation, processing, and distribution of drugs than there are lawyers in the United States! No offense to our distinguished lawyers who are in the room today.

6. A 2007 survey concluded 7 out of 10 crimes are not reported. Police, courts, and society don't do their job, look the other way, or are just plain corrupt.

If any of this is troubling or unsettling to you, consider a **USA Today** article last year in a story entitled, **YouTube Riddled With Drug Cartel Videos, Messages**, the article points out, "The violence among Mexican drug cartels is not filling just the streets of Mexican border towns: It's also spilling into gruesome online videos, chain email blasts, blogs and chat rooms. The videos on YouTube and Mexican-based sites are polished — professional singers croon about cartel leaders while images of murdered victims fade one into the next. In the comment area, those loyal to the opposing cartels trade insults and threats." ⁴⁴

Immigration

Now let's examine the attitudes and role that immigration, immigration policy, partisan politics and border patrol has played in Mexico. My remarks on immigration will be limited to assessing the impact on the United States of immigration from Mexico, and I will not be covering the judicial activity regarding immigration. I will editorialize my comments by saying our government's answer to everything lately is to appoint a Czar—pay czar, infotech czar, faith-based czar, health reform czar, green czar, TARP czars abound. Well, it will take a lot more than appointing another Czar to fix the systemic issues, and the Mexican Border Czar is just another cosmetic example of a lofty title with broad powers answering only to the Commander in Chief. One may wonder if these broad-reaching and power grabbing czars are constitutional, and more may wonder why President Obama has appointed

more Czar's than the Romanov Dynasty, but that's a subject for another paper. If we thought consensus was in reach on what was effective, meaningful and cost saving health care reform looked like, meaningful Congressional bi-partisan immigration reform is an illusion and not likely to happen in the foreseeable future. Immigration is an emotionally-charged national issue that costs us conservatively \$40 billion per year. While the Holy Grail is to achieve "**fair** and **meaningful** immigration reform," the facts show just how far out of reach this is: in 2008, only one of six new *legal* immigrants was from Mexico but, according to the Department of Homeland Security, six out of 10 *illegal* immigrants come from Mexico.⁴⁵ In a recent poll, 89% of Americans think this is a problem.⁴⁶ The problem is neither the Congress nor the President has the guts to deal with this political "hot potato".

The drug cartels have figured out that their smuggling networks work for more than drugs, and they've expanding into human trafficking. Their techniques are highly sophisticated and include contracted human smugglers called "coyotes" who are paid to bring illegal immigrants into the United States to "drop houses", where illegal immigrants take refuge after crossing the border.⁴⁷ Coyote fees have risen from \$500 per illegal immigrant in 1993 to \$2,500 in 2008.⁴⁸ Smuggler fees for a trip to Los Angeles can cost upwards of \$5,000. Places like Phoenix have reported over 160 "drop houses" where illegal immigrants settle and, in another new sideline for the drug cartels, 350 kidnappings for ransom in 2007. Alarm bells should be going off: we must "protect ourselves" to ensure the violence, drug, guns don't continue to cross our borders. Whether we like it or not, **we must enforce the immigration laws to better protect the United States**. Furthermore, there should be **no** amnesty for illegal aliens. When amnesty was first granted in 1986, it was supposed to be a one-time thing but was renewed seven times. In 1986, over 2 million Mexicans took advantage of amnesty, but it did nothing to end the illegal migration problem. Considering well over 20% of illegal aliens have criminal records or are affiliated gang members, it is a problem of vast proportions. We know from experience, the government is

unable to distinguish criminals from non-criminals one only needs to look at the terrorist who boarded a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit despite alerts from his family. The stakes are too high to just be benevolent. The objective should be “meaningful and fair immigration reform” and not “comprehensive reform” whereby comprehensive is de facto to mean that the US grants amnesty to the over 12 million illegal aliens living in the United States. This would be detrimental to our national security interests on all levels and dimensions - political, socially, economically, and strategically.

Experts agree that the Mexican migration to the US is in decline due to the recession, lack of jobs and stepped up border control. Over 90% of our 18,404 border control agents are stationed along the Mexican border with the principal purpose of “detecting and preventing the entry of illegal immigrants and illegal drugs”⁴⁹, but this misses the severity of the fundamental problem. There are at least 11 million illegal immigrants in the US, and Mexico accounts for most of them.⁵⁰ Despite Homeland Security Director Janet Napolitano’s criticism of border fence construction, the US needs to complete it as a matter of national security for all the reasons I cited in my assessment of the drug cartels. This would have been a legitimate use of stimulus funding despite its \$1.2 billion price tag and lifetime maintenance costs of nearly \$50 billion⁵¹; however, over 60 miles along the Texas border remain unfinished, with the economic and social consequences still unchecked⁵² and 2,000 guns are easily transported from the United States to Mexico daily. Despite the passage in 2006 of the Secure Fence Act that required the US to build over 700 miles of double-reinforced security fencing, cost effective technology, “political will” and American ambivalence remain major issues in broad scale adoption and completion. Rationale for fence completion is twofold and includes “it may control the flood of assault weapons and cut down the amount of drugs that come into the US from Mexico.”⁵³

The Center for Immigration Studies, an independent, non-partisan, non-profit research organization founded in 1985, concluded in their 2001 Mexican Immigration report, “Policy makers in the US need to

consider programs designed to **improve the labor market skills of legal Mexican immigrants** so they can better compete in the modern American economy. The US should also consider policies designed to **reduce unskilled legal and illegal immigration** from Mexico since Mexican immigration is reducing the wages for the poorest American workers."⁵⁴ Both of these conclusions speak to the need to address a comprehensive solution to Mexico's economic development challenges. Without meaningful economic opportunity and prosperity along with restoration of political stability and comprehensive judicial and law enforcement reform, Mexico is on a death spiral to failure and collapse.

Practically speaking, Jeffrey Davidow who was US Ambassador to Mexico from 1998 to 2002, correctly laid out the challenge for the US-Mexico illegal immigration issue and the likelihood that the problem can be solved anytime soon. He clearly stated:

- The Mexican economy doesn't provide sufficient employment opportunities for its people, so high rates of outflow will occur until that changes;
- The attraction of the US affords a better way of life (economic security, access to health care, personal opportunities);
- Mexico will not use force to stop its citizens from leaving.

Given these circumstances, the number of illegal immigrants who do cross will keep growing. The US policy we should be adopting would be to intervene in creating significant and dynamic economic development opportunities in Mexico to create a more vibrant, job-rich economy. What makes this so challenging is that Mexico is unable and unwilling to reform itself, but it is in our self-interest to help them nonetheless. Our national security, economically and socially, is really at stake. Vernon Briggs, a Cornell University labor economics professor, captured the **economic paradigm** best by stating: "The toleration of illegal immigration undermines all of our labor; it rips at the social fabric. It's a race to the

bottom. The one who plays by the rules is penalized ... a guest worker program guarantees wages will never go up, and there is no way American citizens can compete with guest workers."⁵⁵

A 2009 survey by Zogby International⁵⁶ found people in Mexico think granting legal status to illegal immigrants in the United States would actually *encourage* more illegal immigration to the United States. Considering the after-effects of 9/11, the deepening of the current recession, the financial turmoil and chaos in our country, the seeming necessity of denying some public services to illegal aliens despite the American spirit of opportunity for all, it is important to examine the attitudes and views on immigration. Among the survey findings:

- A clear majority of people in Mexico, 56%, thought giving legal status to illegal immigrants in the United States would make it more likely that people they know would go to the United States illegally. Just 17% thought it would make Mexicans less likely to go illegally. The rest, 27%, were unsure or thought it would make no difference.
- Two-thirds of Mexicans know someone living in the United States; one-third said an immediate member of their household was living in the United States.
- Interest in going to the United States remains strong even in the current recession, with 36% of Mexicans (39 million people) saying they would move to the United States if they could. At present, 12 to 13 million Mexico-born people live in the United States, so we're looking at a potential three-fold increase in Mexican immigration, most of it illegal.
- Both the bad economy and increased immigration enforcement were cited by Mexicans as reasons fewer of them were going to America as illegal immigrants and more were coming back to Mexico.

The bottom-line is this—we have had an ongoing failure to secure our nation’s border with Mexico. We need to assign troops to permanently patrol the border. In fact, 79% of Americans polled support this position.⁵⁷ As I said earlier, the bulk of illicit drugs sold in the US come from Mexican drug cartels. Mexican immigration has grown from less than 800,000 in 1970 to over 8 million in 2000, with nearly three-quarters living in just four states and half living in California.⁵⁸ Federal crackdowns and investigations on businesses that purportedly hire illegal immigrants knowingly is only the tip of the iceberg, but it does address the public’s outrage to “punish” perceived corporate villains - a concept in vogue in a post-TARP world today that is supposed to make us all feel better. What it doesn’t address is the underlying issue—illegal immigrants would not come if there were not jobs in our country we needed them to do. Despite Congressional gridlock on expanding/amending the E-verify program, E-verify is an important step in helping to certify that employees hired by companies are legally authorized to work in the United States and to create a more level playing field for businesses following the Law.

“In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a **rapid and sudden collapse**, Pakistan and Mexico.”⁵⁹ Understanding this reality, I happen to agree with Dr. George Grayson, a professor of Comparative Politics and author of **“Mexico’s Struggle with Drugs and Thugs”** when he posits the following recommendations, in addition to others I have offered previously, on thwarting immigration traffic and the movement of drugs:

1. Crack down on the employers of illegal workers;
2. Begin issuing difficult-to-counterfeit ID cards;
3. Better inspect vehicles leaving and entering Mexico;

4. Keep a closer eye on small aircraft that ferry drugs and money between the Northern states of Mexico and Southwest part of the United States; and
5. Monitor the whereabouts of the 30 to 40% of foreigners who enter the U.S. legally only to overstay their visas and disappear into the population.

Sobering, Grayson concludes, “The cartels fight at three levels: within their own enterprise for dominance; against other cartel alliances for market control; and against the security forces of the state (police and military) to fend off interference. Collectively this amounts to a virtual civil war.”⁶⁰ This is why law abiding Mexicans traverse the border through the Arizona desert, risking their life through potential dehydration and probable drowning to attempt to achieve the American dream and while criminals are transporting illicit drugs regularly. Reflecting on the drug-related violence and seamless flow of weapons crossing the border, Hillary Clinton commented, “Our insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade.”⁶¹ At the same time, she also clearly acknowledged the lack of United States success in stopping the “narcotics trade”.

Politics

Now let’s turn our attention to and examine the role of politics in Mexico—its political structure, climate and the potential “Colombianization of Mexico” in the country’s post-revolution history. In the interest of time, I am not going to cover the politics going back to 1519 when the Aztec Empire was destroyed by the Spanish or the Mexican Revolution of 1910 that drove a new social and cultural movement, but I will instead focus on modern day political issues as they relate to immigration reform, democratization efforts in Mexico, and the influence of political and law enforcement corruption through the major drug cartels. “Drugs have, in these cultural contexts – imperialism, colonialism, and globalization – helped to define interactions between cultures. Mathew Gendle, in his essay, **Use and Abuse: Drugs and Drug Commerce in a Global Context**, articulates the following, “During the last

500 years, the global drug trade may be conceptualized as one of several 'economic engines' that have driven imperialism and colonialism; two processes that were central in the initial creation of global networks of commerce and trade."⁶² In Mexico, the rising sophistication, violence, and drug commerce can be traced to the "unraveling of a long time implicit arrangement between narcotics traffickers and governments controlled by the PRI."⁶³

Even by his own acknowledgement, one mayoral candidate Mauricio Fernandez stated, "Drug cartels have thoroughly contaminated Mexican politics, and two major drug cartels control the police and politics in and around the city of Monterrey, Mexico."⁶⁴ This bold politician recognizes the fundamental precept of Mexican politics everywhere in the 31 states and Federal District comprising Mexico - the connection/linkage between the drug cartels and politics, and the likelihood that the drug cartel can dictate who is a candidate or not, who lives or who dies, or who is elected to political office or not. The scope of this statement cannot be underestimated – "Prior to the mid-term elections last July 2009, Federal authority's detained 10 mayors and 20 other local officials as part of a drug investigation."⁶⁵ Despite the "tainted past", rampant fraud and the drug cartels influence, Mexicans view of elections has evolved since 1988 with 67% of those polled in 2000 believing their vote will be respected versus 23% in the 1988 elections.⁶⁶

Mexican political analyst, writer, and University professor Denise Dresser, testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs, in March 2009; she eloquently captured the Mexican political condition when she stated, "The former ruling party that governed Mexico in an authoritarian fashion for over 71 years left behind a **toxic** legacy. During the 1980s, drug-trafficking blossomed throughout the country as a result of political protection; drug traffickers infiltrated the Mexican government, frequently aided and abetted by members of the Federal Judicial Police as well as state-level officials. The political structure built by the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) provided

a shell for organized crime that was able to swell—not despite the government, but thanks to the blind-eye it often turned.”⁶⁷

Dr. Arthur Warmoth, a professor at Sonoma State University, in a 2001 paper entitled, “**An Introduction to Mexican Politics in the Context of NAFTA**”, states, “Politics is society’s process for consciously creating institutions and institutional arrangements.”⁶⁸ In order to understand the Mexican society, one must understand its dependency on culture or customs as a “high context culture,” one in which there is a strong emphasis on the past and non-verbal messages. This focus on past and richness of culture cannot be ignored when assessing Mexico’s interminable political structure and pursuit of reforms.

“Mexico first experienced full democracy only in 2000, four years after elections became free and fair, when 71 years of one-party rule by the PRI (the Institutional Revolutionary Party) were ended.”⁶⁹ John Ross, in a newsletter called Counter Punch, wrote an article called “**Politics as Drugs and Drugs as Politics**.” He had the following insight and observation “Mexico’s most dangerous drug is politics and Mexico’s addiction to authority and power.”⁷⁰ The PRI emerged as a “vehicle for keeping political competition among a coalition of interests in peaceful channels.”⁷¹

Mexico first proclaimed its Independence from Spain on September 16, 1810 and the republic was established in 1824. Here are a few highlights of Mexico’s **recent** political, economic, and social development⁷²:

- In 1988, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari introduced economic austerity measures and steps were taken to control corruption.
- In 1994, Mexico joined the North American Free Trade Agreement, tying its economy even more tightly to the United States.

- In 2000, the PRI party lost its stranglehold over government for the first time when the people elected Vicente Fox, who had a “unique cowboy style and popular charisma, with his trademark boots and “Fox” belt buckle”⁷³, as Mexico’s president. This event is widely viewed as Mexico’s freest and fairest election in its history. Fox’s focus was to reform and modernize the judicial system and implement new transparency initiatives (for example, freedom of information laws). December 1, 2000, Mexico achieved “electoral democracy”⁷⁴. However, democracy for Mexicans is not about “liberty” as Americans see democracy, for about 40% of Mexicans it is about equality. Interestingly, Mexicans have at least 4 different notions of democracy (voting/elections, form of government, welfare/progress, and respect/rule of law.⁷⁵)
- In 2006, President Felipe Calderon was elected, by a narrow margin, from the National Action Party (PAN), which is gaining ground as the right-wing party; however, the left-leaning PRI still controls 18 governorships.
- In 2009, in the mid-term Mexican elections, the PRI “more than doubled its seats in the lower house of Congress. It won five of the six state governorships in play and many important mayoral races”.⁷⁶

In order to clarify how the Mexican political structure⁷⁷ operates, consider some of its important historic underpinnings:

- The 1917 constitution separated the federal republic into independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches, with the executive branch being the most dominant and powerful.
- Executive power is in the hands of the President who is elected every six years and appoints the Cabinet. There is no vice-president. Perhaps, a best practice for us to consider in the United States! While decentralizing since electoral freedom in 2000, the Executive branch still wields substantial decision making authority.

- The National Congress (parliament) consists of a Chamber of Deputies (500 Deputies for a 3 year term; 200 representing 5 electoral regions and 300 representing single-member districts) and the Senate (128 Senators for a six year term through direct and proportional representation).
- Each of the 31 states has its own constitution administered by a governor for six years. Ironically, a majority of Mexicans believe “congress is more important than the president for a functioning democracy despite symbolically and practically speaking the presidency remains the dominant political institution in Mexico.”⁷⁸

Emily Edmonds-Poli, in the book **Contemporary Mexican Politics**, opines, “The future of Mexico’s democracy will depend on its ability to address some major policy challenges including economic stability, poverty and income disparity and inequality, and legal and human rights reform.”⁷⁹

Despite his narcissistic admiration of himself and his often combative style, Vicente Fox did initiate efforts to work on legal reform and law enforcement corruption. Current Mexican President Calderon, on the other hand, has concentrated his efforts on passing fiscal, pension, and energy reforms. Despite his efforts however, “the schools are still a mess, human rights abuses remain, and drug traffickers threaten the integrity of the state.”⁸⁰

Mexico is quickly becoming, if it hasn’t already become, the next Colombia, Congo, or Lebanon. The August 2009 decriminalization of “small amounts of drugs for personal use”—marijuana, cocaine, LSD, meth, heroin, and opium— means users will no longer face prosecution unless they are apprehended three times with amounts below the minimum, and then they will face mandatory treatment. All experts agree this move will not “reduce corruption, cartel intimidation, or the local terror by drug lords and kingpins.”⁸¹ In the end, it is more likely an admission by Mexico – things aren’t getting better despite their rhetoric on reform and success of the militarization strategy. As Roderic Ai Camp elucidates in his book **Politics in Mexico**, “If Mexico can address both income inequality and political

corruption in the next decade, democracy's future seems assured. **IF** it fails to address these issues, its survival is questionable.⁸² Hillary Clinton squarely emphasizes the same by putting on the table the "importance of addressing poverty and other socio-economic problems which help drug cartels expand their influence."⁸³ Roderic wrote his book on democratic transformation in 2003 so survival seems to me to be a "tough putt" given where Mexico finds itself in 2010.

Further, immigration reform is not for the timid. George W. Bush tried twice to get immigration reform during his second term without success and while President Obama wants to overhaul the immigration system, it is unlikely to occur in the near future. His focus continues to be on the borders and he acknowledges the yin and the yang of, "You can't fight this war with just one hand. You can't have Mexico making an effort and the US not making an effort. As Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano emphasized, it is not about pointing fingers, it's about solving a problem."⁸⁴ She just has been ineffectual at getting anything done with respect to Mexico – talk is cheap, decisive action and resilience is difficult and mid-term elections are not far off. The "audacity to hope" things get better is not effective nor a comprehensive foreign policy strategy for Mexico!

A documentary film entitled "**Drug Wars: The Colombianization of Mexico**" has as its sub-title, "The deadliest terrorists in the world are not living in the Middle East." Think about that a statement for a moment—"the deadliest terrorists in the world are not living in the Middle East." We cannot minimize or underestimate the impact of the corrupt police, the personal armies, the enormous financial and human resources of the drug lords, and the havoc they are causing in destabilizing the Region. We need both the recognition and acknowledgement that "organized crime does not rest"⁸⁵. Considering 80% of Mexico's legal exports are destined for the United States and we share a common 2,000 mile border, we have a mutual interest in Mexico's success in combating "terrorism and controlling the illicit drugs into the United States"⁸⁶. Mexico's short-lived democracy may hang in the balance; it is not

inconceivable that Mexico's pre-2006 "perfect dictatorship", as it has been called, ruled for 71 years prior to their first "free and fair" election could re-emerge and, even worse, **A FAILED NARCO-STATE IN OUR OWN BACKYARD** will arise if the cartels and organized crime continue to usurp control and create relationships with US gangs, allowing traffickers to "excavate cross-border tunnels and install ramp-assisted smuggling roads over the border fence to move (even more) illicit drugs into the United States."⁸⁷

Just this week, the Obama Administration had a wake-up call and Hillary Clinton, Bob Gates, and Janet Napolitano headed to meet with Mexican officials for the so called "real deal talks" on the drug war. Just to reinforce the current strategy is not working, "a poll in the Mexican paper Milenio showed **59%** think smuggling cartels are winning the drug war; against **21%** who say the government is."⁸⁸

So there you have it: the Mexican DIP—Drugs, Immigration, and Politics—and this is no tasty Guacamole! This is a toxic concoction attacking America at its core, and it's going to give us a case of social and economic indigestion that will give new meaning to Montezuma's revenge! It's not coming; it's already here—knocking on Fort Wayne's door—and we'd better take steps to stop it. In Calderon's own words, "We can't close our eyes to this harsh reality of the cartel threat."⁸⁹ In my view, neither can the United States, or Fort Wayne for that matter. This drug war knows no boundary, the militarization strategy and United States "wait and see" approach or "just say no" campaign of the past has been a complete and utter failure, and no one is immune to its effects in the Global narco-sphere, and in particular in our Western narco-sphere. The bottom line is that the one thing Napolitano got right and should give us all pause is her unsettling reminder - **"the next president of our southern neighbor might be a narco-trafficker."** My unequivocal view is it presumably will be so.

Figure 1. Map of Mexico



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K. Yancey 8/17/06)

Figure 2. Mexican Cartel Areas of Influence



Source: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, adapted by CRS (P. McGrath 3/2/2007)

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Biographical Sketch: Karl R. LaPan

Karl R. LaPan is a business professional with over 24 years of experience in a wide variety of consumer, industrial, technology, and financial service industries; he is now the President/CEO of the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center and Park, a high tech, high touch 55-acre campus dedicated to accelerating the growth of innovative companies. LaPan spent eight years with the GE Company in a variety of strategic business units and roles, six years with NBS Imaging Systems running its worldwide imaging operations, and ten years leading the Innovation Center.

He is a frequent speaker and lecturer on customer service & loyalty, creativity and innovation, generational change, entrepreneurial growth, marketing & management strategy, business & strategic planning, and leadership.

He coauthored *Creating Winning Business Plans* with Steve Franks (Author House 2005) and is a frequent writer/columnist for the Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly and Business People magazine. In 2005, Mr. LaPan was named one of the Top 10 Power Players in Technology in Northeast Indiana by the Fort Wayne Business Journal.

His latest work is the first in a series of incubator guide books entitled *Strategies for Advancing Your Organization and Yourself*. He has also co-authored with three other writers a revision of the National Business Incubation Association's best selling work entitled **Best Practices in Action**, due out in May 2010.

Outside of his professional affiliations, his main passions and interests are higher education, health care, and technology. He is an Executive-in-Residence and Adjunct Faculty member in the MBA program at Taylor University. He also serves on the Taylor University MBA Business Advisory Board, Indiana University-Purdue University Ft. Wayne (IPFW) Richard Doermer School of Business Advisory Council, The Indiana University School of Medicine- Fort Wayne Advisory Council, The IPFW Office of Engagement Advisory Council, and the Manchester College President's Leadership Council.

He is married to Kelly and has three young sons (Griffin – 12; Drake – 10; and Brayden – 7) and is active in the local community. He serves on the board of three innovative emerging growth companies (BioAvascular Solutions, BioPoly RS, and TrustBearer Labs). He also serves as the Corporate Secretary and board member of Physicians Health Plan of Northern Indiana (PHP) and serves on its Finance, Audit, Compensation, and Physician Reimbursement Committees. In addition, he is a board member of the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA) and is a member of its Membership, Strategic Directions, and Nominating Committees. He also chairs the NBIA Audit Committee. He is a founding member of the Indiana Business Incubation Society, and is the Appeals Officer for Early Childhood Alliance's USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). He was recently elected to the Board of Directors of Grabill Bank, and is a prior board chair of the League for the Blind & Disabled.

He holds a BS (high honors, Summa Cum Laude) in Business Management from Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, NH and a MS in Human Resource Development, Pi Alpha Alpha, from the American University in Washington, DC. He is a graduate of General Electric's Financial Management Program and the Mahler Program for Executives. Additionally, he is certified in One Page Business Plan, Predictive Index, and a certified dream manager. He has completed five of the professional development programs offered by the Disney Institute. He grew up in rural Western Massachusetts and attended and graduated high school in 1983 from Northfield Mt. Hermon School, one of the largest independent co-educational boarding schools in America.

This is Karl's second Quest paper. His first paper was delivered in 2004 and was entitled **The History of Aboite Township**.