

# Background Guide for the Mexican Drug War

This simulation is a joint crisis committee, which means that you will not only be acting within your committee in order to form alliances and issue directives, but rather will have to deal with an entirely separate committee equally committed to furthering their aims and goals. Joint Crisis Committees are fast moving, intense, and require substantial preparation in order to faithfully portray your role.

## Background to the Mexican Drug War:

First, a little terminology: the phrase “Mexican Drug War” can in fact refer to two separate, but related wars. The first is a civil war of sorts: a war between the separate, distinct drug cartels within Mexico attempting to gain control of drug corridors and to expand their spheres of influences and profit margins within *la patria*. If you are on the side of the drug cartels, for instance, it is important to know which cartels you are currently aligned with and which cartels are your sworn enemy. However, it is the second drug war which is more important to this simulation: the war between the Mexican Law Enforcement, under the administrations of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderon, who have attempted to cull the expansion of power of the cartels, as well as prevent the rampant murder of the citizens of Mexico.

As with any historical event, it is difficult to point to event and claim that that was the start of the event or war in question. With the Mexican Drug War, it is even more difficult, however, I will attempt to summarize the events which led to the escalated violence of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is Mexico’s very geography that has allowed it to become a haven for drug smugglers and the associated violence. Mexico is, of course, located directly south of the United States, and the U.S-Mexico border is the primary source for shipments of cocaine, marijuana, and heroine into the U.S. (Indeed, although many politicians would have you believe that the problem stems largely from so called ‘hard drugs’, approximately 50% of the cartel’s profits derive from the shipment and sale of marijuana.) It is also used as a base for transporting drugs to the Caribbean and ports further south, though the general flow of drugs is from South American into Mexico, and from there into Texas and throughout the United States.

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, Colombia’s Pablo Escobar controlled one of the greatest drug fortunes in modern history. His product was cocaine, and the exports were lucrative—between 10 and 20 billion dollars per year. Escobar exported across the globe, using drug webs as far spread as Africa and the Caribbean. However, investigation and law enforcement cracked down in the Caribbean and in Southern Florida, specifically Miami and Escobar logically turned to Mexico, the largest Central American country with the most lax drug laws as well as an unstable government. Furthermore, Mexico already had experience shuttling heroin and cannabis across the border in what remained largely a cat-and-mouse-game between small drug dealers and the U.S. border police. Compared to today’s widespread issues,

the violence rising from the trafficking of heroin and cannabis was insignificant, both because the volume was far lower and because far fewer cartel leaders were being caught. Eventually, Escobar and other prominent drug lords developed so called “payment in product” plans, whereby the people receiving the drugs in Mexico and smuggling them up to the United States would be paid for their service by skimming 30-60% of the Cocaine and distributing it themselves. Mexico was now thoroughly involved in the illicit drug trade, every step of the way—transportation, sale, and distribution. Today we see the results of Escobar in the formation of the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels, who have taken over and are now primarily concerned with the import and export of cocaine into and out of Mexico.

Fighting between drug cartels was inevitable as their power expanded in the late eighties and nineties and they began to run into each other in the various drug corridors of Mexico. When there is no monopoly, there is competition, and competition between drug lords inevitably leads to murder, kidnappings, and mayhem. This is largely what we see today: the results of Escobar’s cocaine empire still haunting millions of Mexican citizens. From the early 1990’s to 2000, the Mexican government preferred to plug their ears and pretend the problem was not occurring, taking little to no action on the drug cartels even when frequently asked by the United States government. In 2000, the government of Vicente Fox responded to escalating violence between the rival Gulf and Sinaloa cartels by sending Federal troops to Nuevo Laredo. Over 100 people died in the span of less than a month; but eventually the cartels backed off and Nuevo Laredo became habitable once more. This was essentially the totality of Fox’s attempts at curbing drug violence in Mexico.

However, in 2006, what we consider the Mexican Drug War began when Felipe Calderon was elected President Calderon is an intriguing figure: educated in Mexico City as well as Harvard University. Calderon took a hard line stance on the drug war, stating that he believed the drug cartels were attempting to overthrow the government and bend it to their will. On December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Calderon launched “Operation Michoacan”, generally regarded as the start of the Mexican Drug War. Michoacan was suffering greatly from the Mexican Drug War, with over 500 people dead in under a year in the area. Calderon dispatched 4,000 Federal Troops in order to stop the violence and to engage in military operations against the drug cartels. As the fighting between the Cartels and the police increased, the Mexican Navy and Air Force was brought in to surround Michoacan by “land, air and sea.” The operation has led directly to the extermination of “La Familia Cartel”, one of the three largest and most powerful cartels in Mexico. However, the power vacuum vacated by ‘La Familia’ has been partly plugged by the “Knights Templar Cartel”, a splinter group. Critics point to this as evidence that fighting the cartels is akin to the mythical Hydra of Hercules’ task: every time you cut off a head, another head appears.

Calderon’s strategy seems to be reactionary; that is, he supplies his troops to wherever the fighting seems worst rather than attempting to establish a strong military presence in order to dissuade cartels from establishing control there in the first place. However, this is probably a simplification: the soldiers in the Cartels outnumber soldiers in the armed forces and possess some of the most advanced weaponry any insurgency group has ever known. This is due to a large portion of the cartels being deserters from the Mexican Armed Forces, as well as the

hundreds of thousands of guns being smuggled across the United States border and into Mexico. Other than Michoacan, hotspots include Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, where Calderon has dispatched over 20,000 combined forces in tactical and peacekeeping missions. From 2008, there has been little to no progress in terms of efforts to dismantle the power of the cartels, merely skirmishes and battles leaving thousands dead.

The effect of the Mexican Drug war on Mexico and South American cannot be understated. The number dead are truly shocking: 48,000 citizens in the last 5 years, not counting the nearly 10,000 missing and presumed dead. And it is important to note that not only cartel members and soldiers are being killed: nearly 1,000 children have died, and cartels have begun to resort to disturbing tactics such as murdering citizens and hanging them from highway overpasses in the resort town of Cuernavaca or throwing parts of dismembered corpses onto dance floors in Mexico City. The violence reaches every corner of Mexico, orphaning tens of thousands and causes civilians in particularly contentious areas to fear for their lives every day. The economic impact of the drug war is also astonishing: Mexico is the 14<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world and the largest in Central America. Foreign investors are incredibly wary of Mexico due to its turbulent situation, leaving it with little opportunities to grow and move forward. Stopping the drug war is paramount to bring *la patria* into the new world order.

#### **Law Enforcement & Mexican Government:**

As the Mexican government and assembled law enforcement, you will obviously be tasked with alleviating the suffering of your citizens and curbing the power of the numerous cartels. Attempting to “win the war” is impossible and illogical, you must instead attempt to stop a particular cartel or foster an environment in which cartels cannot flourish. You must think in both short term situations and in the long term, all while balancing a precarious economy in the wake of the financial crisis. Your task, it would seem, is difficult.

The simulation is designed to represent a cross section of the people most interested in stopping the violence as well as those with the most power in order to stop it. There are generals among you who have firsthand knowledge of the fighting on the street, and admirals who control the great water ways of the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico. But there are also cabinet members, politicians appointed or elected to positions that have a great deal to do with the war. You are in charge of the total assembled might of the Mexican Armed Forces, and you may use it in whatever way you believe will have some impact on the cartels.

Mexico does not spent much on its armed forces, only .5% of its GDP is devoted to military expenditure. The Mexican Armed Forces are divided into two main branches: the Mexican Army and the Mexican Navy. The Mexican Army is composed of almost all of the infantrymen (the majority of men on the ground actively engaging the cartels) as well as, rather curiously the Mexican Air Force. The Navy also possesses the Mexican Naval Infantry and Naval Aviation. Soldiers in these forces are known as career soldiers; they are not volunteers and instead serve a three year term and are encouraged to sign on for another five years unless they wish to attain a higher rank and remain in the army as an officer.

The Mexican army is commanded by the Minister of Defense, and the entire army is highly centralized. There are 12 “Military Regions” which divide the country, these entirely in accordance with the demands of the Minister of Defense and the President. The army currently deploys approximately 175,000 active forces as well as nearly 400,000 additional reservists. The Air Force is not well funded and primarily consists of 18 Air Force bases scattered about the country. The country is divided into four regions: Northeast, Northwest, Central, and the Southern region. These regions are quite localized and the officers in control of each region have a significant amount of power.

The Navy, though smaller than even the Air Force, has a strong infrastructure and maintains a strong military presence in Mexico. The Navy is currently in the process of building ships at Numerous naval dockyards in Mexico; they also have access to two fleets of Destroyers and Auxiliary Vessels. (Carriers, Battleships, Scout ships, submarines, etc.) They are divided in two major groups, according to the two surrounding oceans: The Pacific Force and the Gulf Force. These both have their own commander.

### **Cartels and their Spheres of Influence:**

In this simulation, the cartel committee will represent the faction of cartels leader by the Sinaloa Cartel. Thus, the committee will include leaders from the Sinaloa Cartel, some from their allies in the Gulf Cartel, the leader of the La Familia Cartel. As well, some impartial delegates not aligned with either cartel – but with important interests of their own to consider – will also be represented. They include three of Mexico’s top suppliers of raw materials needed for drug production, as well as envoys from Colombia and Texas who are linked with the Sinaloa/Gulf faction. Delegates will be tasked with actively resisting the efforts by the Mexican Government seeking to curtail their operations. Along the way, they will debate central questions that govern the way that drug cartels are run, including what tactics will help cartels hold their ground against both the government and rival cartels, as well as whether cartels should focus more on drug distribution or extortion and violence, and even whether the cartels ought to focus more on the distribution of narcotics or amphetamines.

The hierarchies of the various Cartels that operate within Mexico are shadowy, but a general pattern emerges if one studies various cartels throughout history. Cartels generally have one or two leaders, who may be also referred to by their various nicknames. Below them are various Lieutenants, each of who is in charge of a specific branch of their cartel. Some Lieutenants command the notorious hit squads associated with various branches of the cartels,

while others supervise the day-to-day operations of the trade.

## Mexican drug cartels' main areas of influence



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The Sinaloa Cartel is based in the city of Culiacan in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. Its primary sphere of influence is in the states of Sinaloa, Durango, Baja California, Chihuahua and Sonora. These states form the heartland of Mexican Marijuana and Opium production, as well as being the states that border the United States of America. Thus, the Sinaloa Cartel has many contacts and envoys to various cities in the American southwest, and is rumored to be involved heavily in importing drugs to the states of Texas, California, Arizona and New Mexico. The local fishing and agriculture industries of the state of Sinaloa have taken a large nosedive due to increasing cartel activity.

The Sinaloa Cartel's chief rivals in the 2000s were Gulf Cartel and Tijuana Cartel. However, in the past two years, the Sinaloa and the Gulf Cartels have merged to form an alliance along with the La Familia Cartel. They remain opposed by a second faction that formed around the same time consisting of the Tijuana Cartel, the Juarez Cartel and Los Zetas. The two

factions often encounter each other in bloody skirmishes that have decimated parts of the Mexican countryside.

The Gulf Cartel is based in Matamoros in the state of Tamaulipas. Its primary influence is in the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Veracruz. This cartel is noted for focusing on kidnapping and extortion in addition to drug trafficking.

Perhaps most important for delegates to recognize are the motives governing the Mexican Government's crackdown on the cartels. Cartel-on-cartel violence has decimated the Mexican tourism industry and tarnished the country's international image. The cartels seem to produce nothing positive to the average Mexican citizen, and other than a small spike in the private security industry; Mexico's economy has suffered from the war. A study by Viridiana Rios from Harvard University has stated that "while [acknowledging] some small and less diversified rural communities, drug-traffic cash flows may be helping to alleviate a grinding stage of poverty and underdevelopment, they conclude that the illegal-drug industry generates economic losses of about 4.3 billion dollars annually." However, foreign-direct investment remains fairly stable. Total economic losses due to violent crime in Mexico are 12.3% - an astounding amount. The social effects of the drug war are apparent to everyone –the brutal violence associated with cartels has forced entire cities to live states of fear. For example, the use of public transportation in Mexico City has decreased by 20% due to fears of random assaults by cartels.

The delegates representing envoys and suppliers have their own interests to take note of, and the delegates from the three cartels will need their cooperation in order to keep business stable. 90% of the world's cocaine, for example is consumed in the United States. Especially in cities like New York, where 90 lines of Cocaine are consumed by every 1000 inhabitants per day. Keeping the American markets stable is a must to ensure the lifeblood of the cartels. Marijuana also remains a major crop – the illegal substance being six times more profitable to cultivate than vanilla, a major crop in Mexico.

## **Cartel representatives**

### Sinaloa Cartel

Leader - Antonio "El Chapo" Guzman

Lieutenant - Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia

Lieutenant - Juan "El Azul" Jose Esparragoza Moreno

Commander of the Baldies - Enrique "El Cuy" Gonzalez Lima \*FICTIONAL\*

Commander of the Blondies - Andreas "El Gordito" Rodriguez de los Gatos \*FICTIONAL\*

### Gulf Cartel

Leader - Jorge "El Coss" Eduardo Costilla Sanchez

Lieutenant - Mario Cardenas Guillen

Lieutenant - Andreas "El Carne" Ramirez Velasco \*FICTIONAL\*

Commander of Hit Squads - Felipe "El Guapo" Angel Hernandez \*FICTIONAL\*

### La Familia

Leader - Servando "El Profe" Gomez Martinez

La Familia Lieutenant - Juan Pablo "El Culebra" Ruiz Ordaz

La Familia Hit Squad Lieutenant - Miguel Saturnino "El Chicharron" Hoyo Sanchez

Impartial Delegates \*FICTIONAL\*

US Envoy - Gabriel Duran de la Esparilla

US Envoy - Santa Cecilia Prado Jimenez

Amphetamine Supplier - David Quach

Narcotics Supplier - Antonio Pizano Marina

Marijuana Supplier - Juan Ariel Gaviria

Barbiturate Supplier - Jaime Luis Navarro Flores