ANOTHER WAR?
Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat

The rise of violence as a side effect of Mexico and US policies vis-à-vis drug trafficking

THESIS

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“Border people are poverty-stricken, unschooled and physically unwell. If Americans want to avoid the border as a future, they need ‘a well-devised, binational plan to tackle the issues of the border’\textsuperscript{1}. For years the border has experienced what is like to be caught in the middle of a sustained effort to stop the manufacturing, trafficking and consumption of drugs. The difference in the current situation it that this ‘war’ has been elevated to the national security level: it is not longer a mere law enforcement operation, “the rhetoric is more that of a fight to death”\textsuperscript{2}.


\textsuperscript{2} Williams, in Payan 2006, pp. xiii
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“On the border, the drug war is part of the landscape” 

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Abstract

The latest Mexican administration, from 2006 until the first semester of 2010 - when this work was finished - has seen the rise of violence within the territory as never before. Despite the declared “war on drugs” of President Felipe Calderon, the illicit activity of drug trafficking has not diminished significantly, nor has the consumption. Moreover, the violence, money-laundering and corruption, between other related social problems, have spread. To reduce the trade of narcotics, the United States (US) Federal government has for years relied mainly on coercion against drug suppliers of cocaine, marijuana and poppy farmers. With Calderon, Mexico decided to follow the American strategy of the use of force against drug dealers in order to end the illegal activity. Yet, coercion has created negative side effects and the strategies of both countries are seen the responsible for worsening drug problems.

This work looks at one of the side effects of the Mexican-American strategy: the rise of violence. Often, initiatives of the US and Mexico have coincided with geographical shifts in drug production and trafficking. The one that has had the most profound effect on the relationship of these countries is the one tracing the drug trade from Colombia to Mexico and then onto the American market. The strategies from the American government have motivated cartels to strengthen their organizations, to fight for the dominance of territory and to develop new techniques, either surpassing the authority or getting its cooperation on both the Mexican and American side, in order to maintain the profitable business of the trade of drugs. For years the cartels have enjoyed the protection of both governments, but with the change of the ruling party in Mexico and the open and declared “war on drugs”, the population has been affected with the notably higher rates of violence for the last three and a half years.

The conception of security has a different meaning for each country and that is part of what does not allow Mexico and the US to make each other’s strategies fit into a single one that could bring the desired results - the control on drug trafficking. The former is worried about public security while the later with national security. The aim of this work is to understand and explain this difference throughout social constructivism and relate it to the evident rise of violence with regard to combating drug trafficking,
taking into account the realist approach to explain the material forces that influences this conception. The work does reveal that American and Mexican initiatives against drugs have contributed to the rise of violence and a change of drug policy from both countries is urgently needed.

This work is rooted in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and security and intends to contribute to the literature on drug policies and to research on IR and security. This work focuses on illicit activities and therefore extends the spectrum of the discipline. By offering a social constructivist explanation regarding security conception, the present work helps to understand why the drug related problem of violence have become worse at a period during which Mexico has undertaken significant efforts against drug trafficking. The aim is to contribute to the drug policy debate treating the question of policy effectiveness as a secondary issue. Moreover, by looking the case of Mexico vis-à-vis the US and the fight against drugs this work shows how even though both countries have the same goal – control the trade of drugs - they look at the problem differently and thus apply strategies in their own way, blaming one another for each.
Introduction

A proper definition of security has long been the dominant issue in international politics, yet not a single one applicable to all states will be ever possible, as the sources of perceived insecurity are varied and challenging. During the Cold War, security was linked to the protection of the state and issues were framed as “national security” concerns. This concept was related with territorial integrity and the preservation of sovereignty; it was dedicated to recognizing the capabilities and intentions of others. When the Cold War ended, alternative versions of security were seen as contradicting the focus and energy of previous studies. It started to be argued that the individual can be the only true referent of security, and the state, simply an instrument for the protection of that primary referent. ³ It looks at the first glance that these two interpretations of security appear incommensurable, but at the same time, it does not mean that either interpretation invalidates the other. The concept of national security still resonates with IR theorist as the state continues to be the primary political unit in world politics. Yet, developments in human rights and global ecology make the logic of human security more acceptable to mainstream security issues.

This project is intended to bring together approaches to the study of security, and how it is perceived in Mexican and American territories. A reserved attempt is made to merge critical form of realism with the political discourses from constructivism. It is hoped that insecurity regarding drugs can be seen in a new way. If it is true that the state plays a necessary role in mitigating the uncertainties of international anarchy for citizens - where states have accepted the responsibility for protecting their citizens-, the security of the state is a prerequisite for the security of the individual. However, it is also questionable to what extent the emphasis on the state can contribute to understand

security. It is necessary to reflect on the current state of security studies the recent focus by constructivists on epistemological coherence and cultural influence.\(^4\)

Constructivists are seen as more optimistic about progress in international relations than the realists and its materialist ontology. Constructivism focuses on language and rhetoric in order to construct the social reality of the international system of anarchic. Language allows us to make sense of the world we inhabit. What we take to be threats represent linguistic claims rather than objective facts. Saying that language is the central fact in determining the sources of insecurity, constructivists have uncovered social facts that remained hidden in realist studies. Scholars of the post-positivist approach have examined the importance of culture and identity and established how deep-rooted cultural constructs and entrenched identities result in specific interpretations of enemies and threats. The theoretical pursuit of security risk being marginalized by bureaucratic agencies and political actors that considers the concept apolitical, requiring little more than policy implementation.\(^5\).

It is during this moment of crisis that a re-evaluation of the concept of security becomes necessary. To this debate, it is introduced a practical political problem that recently has required attention. In today’s international environment, complex environmental, economic and societal issues have recently been labeled “security concerns” in an attempt to jettison studies of security from the constraints of the Cold War paradigm. Even though power and influence still matter in an atmosphere defined by the anarchical relations between sovereign states, it is the social construction what gives full meaning to the concept of security.

Within the societal issues of security concern is the recent “war on drugs” in Mexico. Different governments have explored several options to diminish production,


trafficking and consumption of narcotics all over the world. It is noticeable that the Americans have played the main role in putting pressure on those countries whose efforts against drugs are regarded as insufficient. The purpose of this work is to explore the situation in Mexico fighting against drug trafficking, the new strategy the Mexican government is following in order to do so and the influence of the American government in doing so. If Mexico and the US have benefited from a friendly relationship and a degree of economic integration within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the rise of violence and the incapacity to control drugs could erode this ‘friendship’. Both countries are affected by this social problem, but both are also said to be the causes of it.

As drug trafficking and the violence are problems that directly involves both parties and is in their national interest to provide the best solution on behalf of their citizens, Mexico and the US have used different means, without achieving a satisfactory solution as of yet. In this context arises the overall research question, analyzing through the theoretical framework of constructivism, to what extent does the difference of security perception of Mexico and the US, in regard to combating drug trafficking, caused the rise of violence? How Mexico perceives threats and insecurity and how the US does it, is explained throughout this project. It is intended to bring together contradictory approaches to the study of security to help us to understand the perception of such concept by both actors, and how security has been linked lately with drug trafficking. The US sees drug trafficking as an international problem, external to its discourse and the way to combat it is with the use of force. Lately Mexico decided to follow the American measure putting the army in the front line to fight against drug trafficking.


7 North American Free Trade Agreement signed in 1992 came into force in 1994 to form the trilateral commercial bloc of México, the United States and Canada.
In the First Chapter it is explained the importance of an epistemological constructivism building a security conception. Taking the concerns from realisms and constructivism, it will be demonstrated that both approaches not only complement each other, but become necessary for this more comprehensive reading of the drug trafficking as a source of insecurity. Yet, constructivism explain better because it explores what is the perception of the US vis-à-vis Mexico regarding security on the topic of drug trafficking. Alexander Wendt has developed his theory of the international system as a social construction arguing that “anarchy is what states made of it” and cooperation would depend on the perception that one state has from another one. His theoretical framework reflected in his work “Social Theory of International Politics” is partly used and explained. In his view of the system in idealist and holist terms, a better understanding of the rise of violence due to drugs can be achieved. Yet, he rejects the thesis of “ideas all the way down” in his book, concluding that it is important to rescue power and interest from materialism in order to show how the substance and significance of them is formed by ideas. From here emerges the importance of realism as a compliment for a security concept.

In Chapter 2 is introduced the case of Mexico regarding drug trafficking giving a brief description of how this problem has increased since the 1990s. The last and current regime period will play the main role here and a comparison of how the new strategy is different from the past ones will be given. Throughout the chapter the problem of drugs

\[8\text{ D. Lott, 2004.}
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\[10\text{ Wendt, Alexander (1999). Social Theory of International Politics, Cambridge University Press, United Kindom.}\]
in Mexico is described, how it evolved from a health problem to a social one that threatens the international security. If is true that more countries have been involved in the “global illicit drug market”\textsuperscript{11}, this work exposes the case study of Mexico because the rise of murders of policymakers, policemen, witnesses and innocents represents a palpable threat to one of the most powerful international states - the US.

Studying the current war on drugs in Mexico, it can be examined how the US may in fact be undermining its security interest and creating its own insecurity. This regional example is explored in Chapter 3 that further demonstrates the applicability of the constructivist approach to Mexican-American security issues. By analyzing how instances of security are interpreted and formed by the language employed, it is developed an understanding of the particular threats envisioned by US policy makers. Using the complex sets of issues discussed by realist and constructivists allows the picture of the drug war to emerge that links the domestic agenda in the US with the foreign policies pursued in Mexico. The case of Mexico and the US has been selected because it represents one of the most characteristic cases where the drug trafficking problem has brought the rise of violence as a security concern. Wendt’s theoretical framework is helpful in describing the ideas and culture that Mexico and the US have on security and drugs.

After a review of what have been the strategies implemented and the results obtained in the last decade, especially since President Felipe Calderon took office, an argumentation of how the security conception is related with the rise of violence in Mexico would be given. That argumentation is meant to be the contribution of this work. Chapter 4 provides a comparison of the perceptions of Mexico and the US on security in relation to the social problem of drug trafficking. The collective identity that Mexico and the US have of drug trafficking is explained through social constructivism as the main problem of the conflicts regarding drugs. Nevertheless, the material aspect plays an important role. As the main concern of the government and citizens, however, it is the

\textsuperscript{11} Friesendorf, 2006 pp.1
security rather the material aspect, thus social constructivism could better explain why it is getting worse with the implementation of the new policy of “zero tolerance” on drugs. It is the aim of this work to emphasize the social side, mentioning the economic implications only when necessary.

As explained by Wendt, “a little of the international life is a function of material forces as such”\textsuperscript{12} and the case study presented here seems to fit with this proposition. The implementation of force by the Mexican government gives the impression that materialism does not settle the solution of the problem, but it does influence it. Ideas, perception and culture could be the determinants of the policy making-decision process by the Americans and Mexicans leaders in a greater way than materialism is. This leads us to the conclusion of the present work where the facts are explained with a theoretical perspective.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, pp.371
Chapter One

Theoretical framework

In the International Relations subfield of security issues, the influence of realist scholars linked the theoretical disposition to military and strategic matters. This section explains the connection between realism and security presenting key features. Various concepts of security are given and examined on how each seeks to advise the policy maker so as to bring about enhanced security. Later, a constructivist approach is taking regarding security formation. Differences and similarities are summarized and the successes and failures inherent in the current understanding of realism and national security studies discussed. An inclination to social constructivism as a better explanation for the security formation is exposed.

Realist approach on Security

Hans Morgenthau links the concept of security to physical integrity and sovereignty. For him the concept of insecurity ultimately rest on a subjective psychological base. The feeling of insecurity is the motive for a nation to arm itself against other state, because of the fear of being attacked. However, Morgenthau is committed to defend that a feeling of security results from material conditions that carry on the subsequent psychological condition. Speaking to the US, he writes that “it pursued a policy seeking to maintain at first its security and very soon its predominance of the Western Hemisphere”. Morgenthau links the concept of security to physical integrity and sovereignty and this concept lies at the heart of national interest.

Morgenthau insists on making the balance of power a central part of any foreign policy strategy that attempt to defend the national interest. He notes that the creation or restoration of a balance of power in the international system has been at the core of US diplomatic and military strategy since the beginning of the 19th century. A consistent

policy of balancing strengthens the position of the US and enhances national security. Absolute security appears utopian for him, but while it cannot be achieved, insecurity can be mitigated through the careful application of strategies that signal to others the power possessed by a state and the intent to defend that state against hostile actions by another state in the system.

Whether explicit or not, most of the realists centers the study of security around the state and considers national security a limiting factor in the scope of issues that present themselves to the theorist. At their core, issues of security rest on the physical integrity of the state. A fascination with power as a central point on the study of international politics is another issue shared by realists; power seems to be a prerequisite for security. Morgenthau considers power the necessary complement to pacific intentions. On the other hand, Kenneth Waltz, a neo-realist, equates power with military capabilities and suggests their fundamental role in the protection of the state. His approach is compared below with Alexander Wendt, a scholar of constructivism.

Constructivist and Security

The study of security exposed in this section is more diverse in theoretical assumptions and policy recommendations. Unlike the traditional security text of realism, constructivism is best understood, initially, as an epistemological approach. Constructivists challenge the positivist approach to the study of world politics and converge around a concern for the importance of identity and culture in the investigation of the sources of insecurity. They are committed to testing the materialist ontology and empiricist epistemology common to realism; the limits of language are the limits of the world.

14 D. Lott, 2004
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According to David Copeland, “global politics is said to be guided by the intersubjectively shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors”\textsuperscript{15} - not interested in objectively explaining behaviour and modelling state activities, rather constructivists interpret actions within a particular social discourse. Constructivists are involved in analyzing the coherence of preech-acts. For them, words do not stand for things in an external world but are a part of a complex social structure that provides the rules for the use of that language.\textsuperscript{16}

It is necessary to consider a general constructivist epistemology as a prerequisite to a coherent analysis of security. Barry Buzan’s\textsuperscript{17} approach suggest in recognizing how language defines the world in which actors live. It is important to recognize how this epistemological constructivism challenges our ability to understand security issues. Securitization then is a practice that brings about broad recognition of a threat.\textsuperscript{18} The specific act of labelling something a threat makes it real and the concept of security, like all concepts, is intersubjective in nature. Speech-acts require the implicit or explicit acceptance of a host of actors to be considered possible.

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\textsuperscript{16} D. Lott, 2004


\textsuperscript{18} D. Lott, 2004
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Alexander Wendt’s “grand theory” aimed to redefine the territory of sociology, synthesizing the classics. His book ‘Social Theory of International Politics’ (1999) is self-consciously designed to echo Kenneth Waltz’s (1979) ‘Theory of International Politics’ work, which better explained the International Relations during the two decades following its publication. Wendt made a minimal correction to Waltz’s theory and showed it with the simple adhesion of the word ‘social’ to the title of his work. “Although most mainstream IR scholarship is materialist, most modern social theory is idealist” because the structure of society is constituted by thoughts rather than material forces. Wendt defends culture and ideas, not material power structures, as the core to the formation of states’ relationships with one another. The latter does not mean that materialism is inexistenent, it is just not the core of the formation of the structure of the system. Wendt summarizes his position in the statement “states are the immanent forms of subjectivity in world politics”.

On one hand, Kenneth Waltz, committed to a scientific approach to international politics, equate power with military capabilities and suggest their fundamental role in the protection of the state. State capabilities can be measured against one another and the relative level of security for each state in the system can be calculated. The overriding concern with power, points to a view of the world as imperfect and dangerous one that may require force as a tool of state. It is in the need to control the dark side of human nature that power becomes a requirement for the state. Yet, what makes power a tool of such importance for the realist is also what makes it such a problem.

20 Ibid, pp. 25
21 Wendt, 1999 pp.9
22 Waltz, 1979, pp 131
Wendt insists that we must assume states are unitary actors that can be anthropomorphized in order to think of them as individuals with qualities as identities, interest and intentionality. Only with this assumption we can make use of the social theory to analyze the behaviour of corporate agents in the international system. This behaviour is what constitutes the structure of that system.

It is very hard to recognize, as well as to deny, that Wendt´s approach is a limited expression of an equally limited shift in American politics. Often, in foreign policy, the “moral” plays a greater role than national interest, particularly since the US tends to use in its arguments before the American society to justify some of its governmental actions, saying that it is in the national interest to “do the right thing” wherever it is needed. This kind of argumentation is the nub of Wendt´s theoretical assumptions. Namely, if the interests of a state are socially constructed, then the American ones cannot be limited by traditional realist conceptions of the national interests.

Security and violence are some of the main concerns of international politics and states are the main actors in the regulation of such matters. How a state controls and/or uses the violence will depend on the system it takes part in and the identity it possesses. Wendt argues that a constructivist theory of the states system explains much better than realism what this entails. He defends the personality of the states, arguing they have a “Self” and people with different behaviour affect the system they are part of, meaning the international one. States are referred to as a person is, talking as if they have their own “mind”, decisions, desires, and objectives and so on. These different characteristics make them unlike one another: it is up to each state to define how the relation within the system will be.

As states are actors, they have their own desires, better named interest. In his theory, Wendt describes types of interest and identities (as depending on how a state behaves and how it gets perceived, the interest will be formed). For identities, he makes the following categorization: corporate, type, role and collective; while for interest he separates them into objective (needs) and subjective (actor´s understandings of the specific needs). The needs, or objective identities, are defined by Wendt as the national
interest of a state and they are based on basic needs, just as human’s have basic survival needs. These basic needs are “physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem”. He argues that even though the states are based on the interpretation of those needs in relation to self interest, a state does not solely found its actions on self interests. The state’s perception from any kind of need is what would form the subjective interest that makes it to take action. A state is constituted by internal structures which are prior to the state system, which means that every state already has some characteristics intrinsic to their nature, while other ones arise as power is created for the international system they are part of.

Security is the main goal to be achieved by any coherent state with a claim to protect their own interest, but how every state pursues this end would depend on the “personality” it has. Every state is legally constructed, organized and recognized by others, which means laws are essential to handle their own formation and the structure they take on. Violence is said to be controlled and legitimized by the state under the circumstances that might be used by the national authorities. But in the real world, it is not only the state that enforces the use of violence. Drug cartels – as will be exposed later on in this work - use force in some territories already controlled by them and not by the state: it exist a facade of government control, but in reality the drug cartels are in charge regarding security, as is seen in Mexico nowadays. Thus, can it be said that the state shares these properties with cartels and other non-actors? Wendt exposes that the legitimate use of organized violence is in the hands of the state and it executes a monopoly on the issue. Modern states usually divide the protection of their security into two main forces: police for the internal order and an army for external protection.

Currently, the state - meaning Mexico in this case - in its right to execute force and implement organized legitimized violence in order to constraint the drug dealers, actually provokes the cartels to increase the non-legitimized violence over the society. What really matters is not the legitimacy of the monopoly of violence, but the important

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23 Ibid, pp.198
part is the efficiency of the state to control it. Currently the Mexican state has used the force of external protection, namely the army, for internal order, which obviously does not match the typical divisions of security forces as described above by Wendt.

A state is sovereign in two senses - internally and externally. The former refers to the fact that the state is the supreme authority in society and it is precisely this society that recognizes that the nation has certain powers and authorities over them. The latter means a state cannot always act at their own will on the international level, it is subject to external factors that constraint it. Lately, it is a material of debate if Mexico still enjoys its sovereignty. It looks as if the national government has lost control over the implementation of the use of violence and cannot provide the level of security that the society demands.

Wendt makes a distinction between state and society but argues both are internally related, one cannot exist without the other. To be a society, people that form it have to share some knowledge, culture, ideas, habits, language and so on, but also they have to have a defined boundary, meaning a specific territory. The latter is the last property mentioned by Wendt and it is crucial for the formation of a state, meaning no territory equals no state. The size and composition of it, however, might vary according to the social and material constructions.

In order that a state becomes an agent of the system, it needs to be considered as a Self, meaning that it speaks with a “single voice”. To make this possible, the people that form that state have to share some knowledge and be able to reproduce an idea of the state as a “person” and not a conjunct of individuals that institutionalizes and authorizes collective action by their members. An internal decision can be possible through centralization and internalization. The latter means that all the beliefs and perceptions of a state are taken as part of it, while the former talks about the hierarchical decision-making process. If some knowledge is shared and internal decisions are taken by the individuals that compose the state, then it will turn into an agent of the system.
The identity of each individual will depend on the ideas held by themselves and the ones held by the others. As mentioned before, Wendt refers to different kinds of identities within the same state: personal/corporate, type, role and collective\textsuperscript{24}. The first kind of identity is the one that differentiates one state from another, it is the constitution by means of the self organizing structure and has its base on materials. The state bodies and territory are the representation of this identity and thus can only exist as one. But what is more important is that a sense of Self exists through memories and consciousness of what the state in question is and this is what distinguish the Self from the Other in the international level. Simply, that is what differentiates Mexico from the US or from any other state.

The second type, identity, refers to the conjunct of shared habits, attitudes, similar appearance features, values, beliefs and any kind of characteristics with social content that make it possible to categorize individuals in a particular group. The base that lies behind this identity is intrinsic to actors. They can be what they are all by themselves. In a state, a type identity is reflected in the form of its regime, i.e. capitalist, monarchic, etc. On the other hand, there is a kind of identity that is not built-in, in contrast it exists due the relation with the Other - how the Self and the Other behave toward each other will bring a position into the social structure they form, or their role in identity. The fact that sovereignty is a corporate identity, because this institution is inherent to the state, becomes a role only when it is recognized by the Other. Finally, the relationship between Self and Other is what brings up the collective identity – the fourth of Wendt’s - because the Self necessarily includes the Other to form a single identity. It combines the role and the type identities. It takes part of the type identity in the sense that it involves shared characteristics, but not all types of identities can form a collective identity as not all engage in identification. Either way, when it does, this identification is difficult to construct in a complete way, rather, it is only in some specific fields or issues. This is just as Mexico can identify itself with the US in some aspects.

\textsuperscript{24} Wendt, 1999, pp.224
Identities come first then the interests come up in the minds of the states, defined as actors. The logic is that an actor cannot know what they want nor develop its interests if it does not first know who it is. But as there are different kinds of identities present in a state, there are also different kinds of interests, as mentioned before, specifically, objective and subjective. The functional imperatives, which are need to be satisfied if an identity is to be repeated, are the objectives interests. If these are not convened then the identities that arise could not be carried on. On the other hand, the beliefs that those actors have regarding how to achieve their desires are the subjective interests, the motivation for the way they behave. Thus, we can say a state is an actor whose behaviour is motivated by different interests based on its types of identities. In other words, it will act in order to achieve those interests built according to its own Self as a pre-social actor and reshape them according to how it is perceived by the Other. Some identities lead to specific actions.

The subjective interests, or better said, the motivations that move a state to act in a certain way, are the security needs - physical survival o, autonomy, economic well-being and the collective self-esteem - as groups call the fact of feeling good about themselves about what they are\(^{25}\). These security needs are the key of the state-society complexes and at the same time, the limits to what a state can do regarding foreign affairs. In the case of Mexico-US, the American government is trying to intervene in the control of the Mexican security mainly because, besides its policy of “doing the right thing” and helping states who are losing control over its society, this problem is getting out of the control of the Mexican government and is increasing the degree to which the US is affected, according to the American security perception. It is in the interest of The White House to not be influenced for the insecurity problem of its southern neighbour, nevertheless it has indirectly been for a long time, though recently it has become more evident and hard to constrain.

\(^{25}\) Ibid, pp.235-237
Following the anthropomorphizing of the state, once it is born or created, it will naturally try to survive and reproduce itself, just as a normal person will do so. It will look for its own survival no matter what it implies. Waltz bases his theory on this kind of logic, arguing that states are self interested and egotistic actors that only care about themselves, but Wendt contests his approach saying that the identification with the Other will become internalized and this is when each state will think of itself as a “We” and not longer just as a Self. Mexico and the US are said to be fighting against a threat that affect both states – drugs – but the American and Mexican performance might not be based on a “We” view in regard to the security perception on combating drugs, otherwise the rise of violence would have not taken place. Yet, at the same time, the internalization is expected to come over time. The model of the European Union (EU) is the closest we can find on the international level of a sample of a collective action – with all the implications it entails – in general, anarchy is the system that governs. Waltz defines anarchy as a material bias, mainly formed by the distribution of capabilities among the nations, while Wendt defends that anarchy “is what states make of it” and it is the distributions of ideas – and not capabilities - that forms the international system. This, however, does not mean material forces are not important, they just do not determine by themselves the structure of the system.

As every theoretical assumption, a collective identity has some limitations. It is for a specific relationship and its capacity and behavioural inferences depend on the reason for which it is formed. Collective identity will often be in conflict with self-interest identities because it requires a full identification with the Other. The structure of any internalized culture is associated with a collective identity. In order to change the structure of that culture, first the collective identity has to change, with the breakdown of the old identity a new one will emerge. The formation of the identity will happen on the micro level and the change of the structure at the macro level.

26 Wendt, 1992

27 Ibid, pp.338
In theory a change in the identity of a state, brings a change in the structure, but in reality, a change of internal culture, in order to evolve from one kind of structure to a better one, is difficult. This difficulty is due the fact that each actor has internal sources of stability – even though is not the best one - that make them not want to change. They fear losing that stability for the uncertainty of a new kind of order. External factors can also inhibit change even if actors want it. If we take this into account in the case exposed here, Mexico after 72 years under a ruling party changed its identity regarding drugs, and effectively, it loss the “stability” it used to have regarding violence. President Calderon tried to implement a kind of identity when the Mexican society was not ready to adopt it. The ideas and interest of the new political party were not internalized by the population, thus the actions taken have shown not effective results.

As exposed by different schools of thoughts of IR, and according to Wendt and his social constructivism, the world is an anarchic place where the main problem for international cooperation is the absence of trust and how one state perceives the other. In this context, drug trafficking is a factor that erodes the trust between the states and creates situations of tension, which in turn lead to an unstable international environment. The main elements of the national and international security on Mexico’s agenda are international drug trafficking, migration of Mexicans to the US and homeland security at the border, also constituting the principal reasons for conflict between the two countries. The US does not trust in the political and judicial systems of Mexico as Washington considers them weak and vulnerable to the corruption and inefficient to combat crime and implement justice. This institutional weakness makes the fight against drug trafficking inefficient, producing no visible results or an ending.

In this context, the US seems to have internalized the problem of drug trafficking that is present in Mexico and vice versa. But at the same time, the strategies implemented

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by each government seems egotistic and self-interest driven. This work argues that the lack of identifying the Self with the Other in a positive way is what does not allow Mexico and the US to form a security regime in regard to drugs. International interests are no longer the same as the national ones. On the international level, ending drug trafficking is the main interest, but in the case of Mexico, controlling the violence has become the priority, leading the government to even make deals with cartels in order to “protect” the security of its citizens in the past. With the change of identity regarding drugs, the Mexican government alter the stability of the illicit activity, thus the level of security of the country.

Sources of insecurity

Constructivism seeks to investigate how identity performances and cultural boundaries define the sources of insecurity by differentiating Self and Other, as Wendt claim in his work with the anthropomorphizing of the state. In these instances, the other is “threatening” and “dangerous” for the Self which is defined in opposing terms. It is the image of the Other that creates the sense of insecurity. Cultural ideas, as Wendt defend, rather than material capabilities, in Waltz´s work, represent the sources of insecurity.

Understanding the sources of insecurity and the means to overcome them requires that policy makers and social groups reflect on identity constructs in an effort to re-interpret what is foreign, Other and dangerous. How can constructivism be used to explain the policy-side of the security problematique? US security agencies are currently engaged in rooting out terrorist in other countries because it is believed these terrorist threaten US national security. While realist scholars accepted the state interpretation of outside “dangers” and proceed to ask what material evidence there was for insecurity, a set of questions form constructivists are asked, like how the state has come to interpret certain groups as terrorist threats, for example. A critique of identity performances suggests how both American and foreign cultural practices are inculcated in the
ideational sources of insecurity with the example of the events of September 11. Insecurity is a result of Self/Other dynamics that play out at the boundaries of identities.

Constructivism suggests a radically different understanding of the sources of insecurity. Instead to locate threats on the material collection of weapons, bank accounts, terrorist networks and so on, constructivists argue that insecurity is a result of cultural practices that create enemies. 30 Mexico finds its enemy regarding drug trafficking in the demanding part, as without the narcotics market the production and traffic of such substances would take no place. Regarding violence, the Mexican government finds the source on the arms supplier counterpart, as without high-tech weapons criminals would be not able to commit crimes. In other words, both Mexico and the US, create their own insecurity on cultural practices, ideas language and perceptions. Yet, it is important to consider a balance of this ideational consideration with material ones.

30 D. Lott, 2004
Chapter Two

The War on Drugs in Mexico

At the end of 2006, Mexico started working with a new strategy against its main national security problem - it was called “war against drug trafficking” and is still in process. But is it a real war? To what extent this war jeopardizes the security in Mexico and in the US? At the beginning it was seen as a mere strategy to fight against this as a social problem, but as time has passed it actually turned into an active conflict between the Mexican government and drug dealing groups best known as ‘cartels’. The main characteristic of the current strategy that differentiates it from former ones is the use of force by the Federal Police, Navy and the Mexican Army. Mexico adopted and followed the American idea to combat the problem of drugs: with coercion. The main purpose of the use of such force by the national government was to penalize drug dealers and to increases national security, certainly not to create more violence within the territory. What has happened, however, is totally the opposite. The national insecurity had increased as now even people from the government and innocent civilians have been murdered, events that did not happen in the past. \(^{31}\) This has become a widespread phenomenon, powerful and difficult to control. The drug trafficking network could be said to be better organized than the judicial/police system because it can operate simultaneously in different states.

Although violence due to drug trafficking has always existed, it has increased since the fall of the main Colombian cartels in the 1990s\(^ {32}\). In the past, violent clashes in Mexico were limited to cartels, those who were directly involved in the drug market, or

\(^{31}\) Up to September 2009, newspapers had estimated at more than 13,600 killings since the present regime in Mexico took office (The New York Times, March 24, 2010). But informal sources argue the number of deaths ascend come up to 25,000 so far in July 2010.

those who interfered with it. Innocent civilians\textsuperscript{33} were not touched, and the government either pretended not to know the cartels’ activities or worked directly with them, being corrupted. Nowadays, as those boundaries have been crossed and the government tries to fight also against the corruption – an element that is seen as the key of the successful drug market - people from the police and government have died\textsuperscript{34}. The main drug dealers currently operate under the philosophy “\textit{plata o plomo}” (‘silver or lead’ in its literal translation) with representatives of the Mexican government, meaning that the use of bribes or threats\textsuperscript{35} to continue with the traffic of drugs is prominent.

The ‘new strategy’ launched by the Mexican president Felipe Calderon consists of fighting directly against drug dealers with the use of force. This is the main reason why it had been criticized in many ways, mainly if is the best option to contest the predicament. This social problem is not merely a national issue; it is one that involves those states that use Mexico as a transit state to trade drugs and those who contributed to maintain the functioning of this market. Buyers of drugs and sellers of weapons can be categorized in the second group and the principal actor that plays this role vis-à-vis Mexico is the US. As the worries from the US regarding the rise of violence are increasing, the state has intervened in a passive way providing funds to Mexico to implement strategies and to

\textsuperscript{33} This term is used here to refer to citizens not involved in any sense with the drug production, trafficking, distribution or consumption.

\textsuperscript{34} The Minister of Internal Affairs in Mexico, Juan Camilo Mouriño and José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, a leading prosecutor of drug cartels, died on November 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2008 due an airplane crash in a neighborhood in Mexico City (Jimenez, Sergio J. \textit{Perfil de Juan Camilo Mouriño}. El Universal, Mexico City. Newspaper at http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/552696.html (May 16th, 2010)). The fact is thought to be caused by powerful drug traffickers even though the evidence demonstrated it was a pilot error.

The official number that President Calderon gave was that 137 federal police agents had died. But it is estimated that more than 1000 police agents, soldiers, judges and lawyers had been victims of the drug trafficker’s violence. (National Commission of Human Rights and the General Attorney’s Office in Mexico -estimated number).

improve the police training with the “Plan Merida”\textsuperscript{36}. But even though the American government is already intervening, with financial funds for the training of the police force- they are considering to have a more active role, a fact that conflicts with the policy of non-intervention that Mexico defends\textsuperscript{37}; Mexico does not want any kind of military intervention from the US, rather the Mexican government is using its own army to combat the violence from drug trafficking. The use of army and the enforcement is a copied identity that President Calderon adopted from the American government, with the difference that in Mexico the force is applied within the territory, with no external use as the American army does.

The Mexican government frequently criticized the US foreign policy for favoring military regimes throughout the developing world and this is why it is against the direct intervention of the American army on Mexican territory. Fernando Gomez Mont, the Secretary of the Mexican Government\textsuperscript{38}, has pointed out several times that the US has to take responsibility for the violence in Mexico due the trafficking of weapons from American territory. He also said that the plans and strategies to be followed to constrain the violence in Mexico have to be made by the Mexican government and not dictated by any other state, meaning the US\textsuperscript{39}. On the other hand, Mexico has been categorized as a “failed state” as the country does not show a full control over its territory\textsuperscript{40}. This has been


\textsuperscript{37} Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, Article 89.

\textsuperscript{38} By May, 2010.

\textsuperscript{39} CNN, Mexico

used as the main argument for the Americans in their attempts to intervene, as the instability in Mexico means a threat to their own security. Simultaneously, in order to be nominated for a failed state means that the state has lost total control over its own territory and Mexico still has it. The loss of power is very much dependent on the final results of the continuous strategy that will be implemented. Is Calderon’s a real strategy? If the intention was to end the social drug problems, why is there a new one on the rise, meaning the issue of security? Whether all of the current violence will at the end bring control on drug trade and free the citizens of the threat that the criminal groups present is out of the scope of this work.

*México: “so far from God, so close to the United States”*[^41]

Mexico, as the neighbor of the US, the most powerful country[^42], also means to share borders with the largest consumer of drugs in the world, together with all of the consequences it implies. Through the years, this issue has presented the need to double efforts and increase diplomatic talks to avoid the undermining of the good relationship both parties enjoyed, especially in relation to trade.

The attitude toward facing the social problem of drug trafficking has included unilateral positions with political and economical pressure, alongside joint actions of cooperation and agreements of both short and long term. The pressure put on Mexico to deal with drug trafficking by the US has undermined the capacity of the Mexican government to determine, independently, its own solutions. Mexico turned out to be the object of many American legislators, agents fighting drug trafficking and conservative

[^41]: Popular Mexican lament (*Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos*). Translation taken from Friesendorf, 2006. pp. 71

[^42]: Some argue the hegemonic power of this country had decreased, but for long time was considered the principal global potency and, yet it still plays a leading role in. Hegemony or not, the US plays one of the most important roles all over the world, and that is why this term is used here, because especially for Mexico it is actually “the most powerful country”.
ideologist, who desperately look for the cause and solution of a problem that demoralizes their citizens.

The government of the US accepted the fiction that the main reason of its social problem is Mexico. But has it really? Just because it is its unique, developing country neighbor, does not necessarily mean it is the cause - what if the US should have been in a different geographical position, with neighbors to the east and west? The location of Mexico put the country in a particular position, being the next door country of the American global potency, but this does not mean it is the main cause of the American drug crisis. If there is production and commercialization of illicit products, it is because there is a market. When the activity through the Mexican borders has diminished because of government forces, the demand had been attended to by other countries through other means.

On the other hand, there is an asymmetrical participation in the different stages of the trade of drugs (from cultivation until final sale). Only 8% of the final value of the drug goes to the countries of production, which means the rest of the money stays in the US, giving room for another illicit activity, such money-laundering, if the profit is not invested first in its own economy. This material effect is at the same time the cause of the continuity of drug trafficking.

The unilateralism of the US in the decision-making process regarding drug trafficking is the cause that has made the American politics fluctuant and a non permanent patron. External factors of the problem, such as elections campaigns, political pressures, an increase in delinquency, sources of money-laundering and so on, have

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played an important role in the pressure the US has put on the producer countries, with no effective campaign to abolish the demand and organized mafias in the American territory. Mexico on several occasions has gone beyond the US in its effort to combat drug trafficking, with the inclusion of the National Army in the labors of eradication.

Just as any other country with the same social problem, the Mexican government’s legislature hopes that drug use and drug trafficking could be controlled, or at least contained by an administrative framework backed by coercive sanctions. Due to what this illicit activity represents, namely an international “common enemy,” it requires a much greater degree of cooperation and unified laws applicable on any side of the Mexican-American border. The cooperation strategies must be accompanied by techniques that allow the society to recover for all the damage caused by the trade of drugs, reducing the crime.

*Dealing with drugs: Health Problem*

When, in 1913, a package with the inscription “drugs” was received by mail in a post office, the Mexican government made an official concern on the consumption of opium, even when it was used for medical purposes. It was forbidden to send or receive that kind of merchandise. Since then, and in the Constitution of 1917, the Council of General Health started to control substances related with the alteration of the human condition, meaning alcohol and narcotics. Mexico accepted the implementation of controls regarding cultivation of drugs on its territory in order to prevent the clandestine exportation of it after the International Convention of Opium in The Hague (1911-1912). Later, in 1960 Mexico launched a campaign to eradicate fields of poppy and marijuana

45 Fortson, Rudi, 2002 pp. 457

using the most modern technology available at the time, an act that was awarded with international admiration, including from the US.  

At the end of the 1970s the health social problem regarding the consumption of drugs emerges as a global issue. In the US, and many other countries, the increase of consumption of drugs was noted, related with the merger and spread of contra cultural social movements, better known as hippies groups. Being the most important neighbor of Mexico, the impact reached the country making the creation of initiatives to face the problem a priority. The first national strategy was the creation of institutions to help the addicts to narcotics. In 1969 the Centre of Youth Integration was created and in 1972 the Health Secretariat put into function the Mexican Center of Drug Codependence Studies, which latter was absorbed by the Psiquiatrist Mexican Institute in 1979. By the beginning of the 1980s, there were already functioning several organizations working on the reduction of consumption of drugs, developing tactics to prevent and treat drugs addictions. In 1986 the National Council against Addictions was formed by presidential mandate and the Addictions System of Epidemiologic Vigilance came into force by 1990.

Nevertheless, the problem was increasing and new strategies were needed. It is when the Reform Program of the Health Sector (1995-2000) started implementing preventive measures rather than curatives. It also defined the need of an integral point of view that considers different variants and actions at local levels as well as at the federal one. Yet, all these strategies were merely in the health sector, meaning in the programs of health institutions, as it was considered just a health problem of the Mexican society.

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Rudi Fortson defines a social problem as “any irregular activity in the pattern of human behavior in which some action is required to be carried out by and on behalf of the community in order to maintain harmonious co-existence…” which gives us the path to say that drugs, more than a health problem, are a social one.

The trade of narcotics is a problem which threatens the national security due to the level of corruption in the institutions in charge of combating those drug dealers and groups who transport narcotics all over the territory. The loss of government control over the police force in order to maintain the peace and protect the citizens is rising as never anticipated. It is true that the addiction of drugs in Mexico has risen, but not in a significant way, therefore is not the realist meaning of drugs what is important here. Nevertheless, the authority insist on punishing those who consume drugs and putting them into jail, even though they are not the main problem nor is their imprisonment the best solution. Consumers need to be treated, not judged.

Putting aside the negative consequences of drugs regarding health, physically and mentally, narcotics consumption denigrates the individual, pushing him to act illegally as his productivity decline in such a way to lose friends, relationships, jobs and so on. It is the social/subjective meaning of drugs what cares more than the objective damage it can provoke. With no job, the human being sees the option to get into the black market of drug trafficking and get handsome rewards: this problem is a vicious cycle with its roots on the national social strategies. In addition, the evident and open hostility between the cartels whose see each other as enemies in the way Wendt describes the term of “kill or


50 Interview with Maria Elena-Medina Mora, General Director of the Psiquiatric Institute “Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz”. In Este País: Tendencias y Opiniones. Magazine. No. 226, January-February 2010 pp.28-29
be killed”\textsuperscript{51}, generates social concerns and scare. They do use all the force they are capable to, in order to literally destroy the enemy, meaning anybody who interferes with the continuity of their business.

Mexico, is in such a position to be used as the main “door” to introduce narcotics into the American territory. George Bush father, on April 1989, recognize before agents of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA): “we cannot blame Latin America for our own hunger of drugs...”\textsuperscript{52}. Cargos from all over Latin America pass through Mexico and the money that generates makes the poor population to get in the illicit business easily, mainly because there is a demanding market: as far the demand exits, so does the offer.

\textit{Structure of the cartels}

A drug cartel might have thousands of “direct employees”\textsuperscript{53} who in some way contributes to making the business work, including lawyers, accountants, weapons buyers and hired murders, or as they are called \textit{sicarios}\textsuperscript{54}, but also other indirect employees. The market of drugs is so profitable that cartels have enough money to corrupt law enforcement official and politicians: they are indispensable in ensuring that drugs operations succeed with no interference by government’s operatives. Mexican illegal drug-driven corruption is found all over the territory, involving thousands of people. In fact the US said the corruption in Mexico is the “glue that holds the Mexican system together and the oil that makes it work”\textsuperscript{55} and it is really hard to define. Over and over this problem is found in every

\textsuperscript{51} Wendt, 1999.

\textsuperscript{52} Every second Mexican addict to drugs got the habit while they lived in the US as legal or illegal workers. Belsasso Guido, 1994 pp.220

\textsuperscript{53} Payan, 2006, pp38

\textsuperscript{54} The executioners for a cartel receive this name. Drug cartels prefer to hire ex policemen or ex military agents for their gunned force, because they are already trained to use weapons and might have internal contacts within the local police force.

administration in a classic example of the “players may change, but the game continues”.  

The drug dealers are mainly divided by those who export the drugs and those who sell narcotics within their own territory. A cartel is a confederation of local enterprises functioning with certain level of independency, but tight to a corporative politics in a hierarchical structure of three levels: leaders or capos at the first level, then lieutenants, military chiefs, financial operators and lawyers in a second stage and finally the sicarios or murders, distributors and sellers. Drug dealers groups have the structure of a company, or even better, because they can react to changes very fast, without all the paperwork of a legal enterprise. The cartels already have decided who is going to be the next head of the group much earlier the actual one stop executing the leader role – because he gets into prison or get killed. Usually the succession of power is among familiar members of the group: relatives and friends tend to take the new place, but sometimes the hunger of power might interfere within the groups and cause violence inside the same organization.

In Mexico, eight are the main organizations trafficking drugs: the cartel of the Gulf, the Sinaloa one, the one from Juárez, from Tijuana, the Milenio one, from Oaxaca, form Colima and the recent formed, the Family from Michoacan. Yet, the two that have more friction and competence, meaning violence, are the one form Sinaloa and the Gulf one. They both are in constant competence and aggression due four principal reasons: the decrease of the price of drugs in the US - thus both groups want to control more territory -; the competence getting the deals with the Colombian cartels to transport their cocaine; internal fights and the rise of investment in violence as a response of the government aggressive strategy against them. Each of them has their own group of sicarios: The Black guys and The Bold ones work for Sinaloa and The Zetas (Z’s) from

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the Gulf. The Zetas, is considered the most dangerous organized criminal group all over the country, and recently got independent from the Gulf cartel, forming their own. The violence that arises as a consequence of the union of drug-trafficking cartels and guerrilla groups is known as narco-terrorism.

**Drug Dealers’ law: Plata o plomo?**

As any other open market, in the black market disputes arise; the difference with the former is that the solutions most of the time implies the use of violence with non restriction. The main reasons for the cartels to enforce violence are either for competition or “adjustment of accounts”. The violence may rise between cartels, intra-cartels or directly against the national government.  

Being more profitable one point of entrance than another at the Mexican-American border, the principal cartels fight between them due to dominate certain territory or when the counterpart gets into the other’s domain. On the other hand, when the leader of one cartel -the capo- gets caught or put into jail, the disputes between the followers arise in response of the ambition to occupy the head of the cartel. And the third kind of violence involves the members of the government in any hierarchical level, when they interfere with the illicit activity of the cartels.

We live in an upside down world where criminals now are imposing their law to authorities, at least in the specific case of Mexican drug dealers. “Plata o plomo (silver or lead) is a two-option decision”: either take the money offered by the capos (bribes as silver) or surely get killed (a bullet to the head meaning lead). Those who insist to resist the illicit activity and even try to combat it are generally guaranteed death. As we can

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57 Payan, 2006, pp 41-42

58 Ibid, pp.40

59 In 2005, just a couple of hours after the Police Chief Alejandro Dominguez took office in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, northern border of Mexico, he was found dead. In Payan, 2006.
see, not always the officials are the ones who look for the rewards of being part of the illicit activity, but they have no option if they want to be alive: those who really reject involved simply keep silence and took no action even when the felonies are evident. If the authority does not interfere with the drug trade, the sicarios do not interfere with their lives. This means that if the police do not take a stand against the cartels, in all likehood they will no will be killed, as drug dealers prefer to not harm officers who stay neutral. Nevertheless, if an officer already took the plata related to the drug business and then decides to turn back, and not doing it again, then is when the plomo comes into the picture.

*Change of strategy*

It is well known fact, that the Mexican government makes deals with the cartels, providing protection to those who in exchange for less violence possible. The intention behind such action is to maintain the public order and keep the cartel’s operations as out of the public eye as possible. Due to the change in the democratic system of the Mexican government, however, the relationship between the authorities and the cartels has turned into a tumultuous one. The existence of the earlier deals was possible before because the homogeneous power existent in Mexico was dominated by one party for 72 years, the Revolutionary Independent Party, but with the change of rule party to the National Action Party in 2000, the federal government was no longer homogeneous and the deals of no aggression with the cartels became harder to accomplish. ⁶⁰ As a consequence, the cartels have defended their territory with extreme violence, seeing everyone who opposes or interferes with their activity as an enemy.

Since 2000 and continuing on the present day, the Mexican government has not given up on combating capturing the main leaders of the cartels. Unfortunately, this

action has just raised the violence with brutal executions taking place in the country. The
murders vary in their choice of victims, ranging from neighbors or friends of people
involved in the cartel, who may not even be directly related to the activity, to Ministers and
people of the government officials. The loss of life is almost unbelievable: in 2008, the
national daily average of executions was 13.4, starkly contrasting with statistics from 2007
and 2006—when the numbers were much lower at 6.2 and 5.8 deaths per day respectively.
Yet, even these numbers cannot be taken at face value as they only reflect the
officially reported murders, not accounting for the hundreds of missing people or those
who died “by accident”. There are also questions regarding the rumored deaths and
disappearances that are simply not reported so as to avoid the increase of panic among
the population should the real numbers become public knowledge.

The instability of the country regarding security, and the assumption by the
society and drug dealers that the Mexican government is protecting the cartel of Sinaloa,
have provoked anger in the other cartels, increasing still more the violence against
innocents even more. News reports on officers capturing drug dealers are featured
almost every day, but the fact is that they are actually capturing the small drug
entrepreneurs while still allowing the large cartels to operate. The government favored
term of drug war is thus ambiguous as they are not fully engaged in fighting against the
enemy, or at the very least, they have a different conception of who the enemy is.

61 See footnote 34.
62 Guerrero, 2009, pp. 38
63 The Mexican government has arrested key people from most of the main cartels but the one of Sinaloa. When they have captured anyone related to this cartel, mysteriously is released soon because they do not find enough charges to keep them on jail. Joaquín Guzmán Loera, El Chapo Guzmán, the head of the cartel has been not caught so far (until July, 2010) after he escaped from jail in January 19th, 2001* (*Source: Notimex. Se cumplen nueve años de la fuga del Chapo Guzmán. Milenio.com at http://www.milenio.com/node/363123 -July 12th, 2010-).
64 The term enemy here regards to drug trafficking as a social problem, not to the people involved. In other words, drug trafficking is what must be “killed” not the people who participates, which must be only punished but not killed.
superficial scratches that are made only serve to provoke the cartels to behave even more violently. If the government applies a sort of selection when deciding whom to capture and when to apply the law, then the problem will simply continue and will get worse.

What takes the situation to the current horror levels is the fact that the sicarios and the killers do not just murder the people, but instead they torture them before they can die. The bodies are then just thrown away on the roads, exposed outside of governmental building or in the main square of the cities. The motives behind such actions are actually a way to “discipline” the population, letting them know what they are capable of.

“Punishing cheating or mistakes”65 with torture and death is how cartels implement “justice” among drug leaders and the people who get in the way or are related to them.

While the time past drug dealers used to go about their business in a relative pacific way, but as they dabble in the use of narcotics themselves, their crimes become more gruesome and coincidental, in the sense that anyone who gets in their way can fall victim to their rage. Therefore, a vicious cycle can be identified. Specifically, the government’s actions destabilize cartels due to their lack of consequential planning and rather than ending the drug trafficking once and for all, they provoke the cartels to act in desperation as they attempt to continue with their profitable activity, killing those who intervene. In order to commit such crimes, they consume drugs themselves, which affect their behavior and consciousness, provoking murders on innocents. The government’s subsequent reaction is to increase its use of violence in an attempt to destabilize cartels, and the cycle starts over again. The key to a solution and an end to the process of violence are in the government’s plan in dealing with this problem, not only on the Mexican side, but also on the American. The Merida Initiative (Plan Merida) is an association between the US and Mexico in order to fight the organized crime and the violence, while promoting human rights and international law. This initiative mainly

65 Payan, 2006, pp.44
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consist in the financial support from the US of 1,400 millions of dollars for the training of polices and the implementation of better equipment to combat drug related activities.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{Latest administrations: from PRI to PAN}

\textit{Ernesto Zedillo}

The main strategy during President Ernesto Zedillo’s administration (1994-2000), the last of the leaders from the Revolutionary National Party (PRI for its initials in Spanish), was to maintain dialogue and concentrating on the resolution of the possible differences between Mexico and the US,\textsuperscript{67} in relation to the drug strategy. Basically the action paths of Zedillo revolved around the recognition of the responsibility of Mexico regarding the detection and destruction of production fields of drugs, but he also asked that the developed countries work to stop the chemical production in laboratories of synthetic narcotics. By defining the selling and using of drugs as a common problem, in the framework of the United Nations (UN)\textsuperscript{68} initiatives as well of the World Health Organization (WHO),\textsuperscript{69} Zedillo’s strategy focused on a scheme of cooperation in such a way that every country assumes their faults in the chain of drugs consumption. Exchange of information, coordination to allow for the arrest of cartels everywhere while still recognizing each other’s sovereignty; control of arms distribution, and the establishment of mechanisms to locate, persecute and punish money-laundering, were all crucial proposals of Zedillo’s administration. In addition, he proposed a restructuring of the


\textsuperscript{67} Lajous, 1994


government institutions internally, including a reform of the penal system, increasing the sentences for criminals.

Zedillo proposed public campaigns and programs regarding the side effects of drugs to be implemented in communities and schools, with specialized and trustable information. Those programs were part of the preventive strategy of Zedillo, as for him prevention would help to revert the contamination of the inhabitants and it was easier to achieve than treatment strategies, especially due to the scarcity of financial resources.70

**Vicente Fox**

In 2000, after an intensive electoral campaign, President Vicente Fox took office, becoming the first Mexican President from the National Action Party (PAN from its initials in Spanish) after 72 years of its counterpart, the PRI, ruling the country. Fox’s program71 of government at the beginning of his regime tried ending the relationship between the drugs cartels and politicians; the problem of drugs was thus considered a federal issue. The main initiative was to not allow the organized crime to become better coordinated, prepared and armed than the security bodies of Mexico. It was planned to improve the procedures of implementation of justice with databases of the national arms, vehicles and people in order to have the most recent information available for national security purposes. The creation of the personal registration number of identity was thought to facilitate the identification and localization of persons and avoid crime.

Another initiative of Fox, was the improvement of the standard of living, reducing poverty as a way to reduce drug trafficking. The logic behind the move presupposes that this problem emerges in an environment of scarcity, where the desperation of the population as they try to get a better income in order to survive. Fox’s main strategies

70 Belsasso, 1994

71 Fox, Vicente (2000), *Vicente Fox propone*. Ediciones SACV. pp.46-49
were thus founded on the basis of detecting the rural areas with the potential for production, agricultural programs for the improvement of those areas, opening the market and financial support for the rural infrastructure. He planned that the money coming in for drug trafficking and money-laundering would be designated to the creation of institutions and organizations to help the drug addicts, in the mean time that drug activities were stopped.

Fox suggested a wider communication system: working with multilateral agencies and other countries to share information regarding international transfers in order to improve the investigations regarding money-laundering. He said that drug trafficking as a worldwide problem needed to be combated throughout cooperation and not with unilateral decisions as most of the times are proposed by the US. Not different from other administrations, Fox emphasized that within the limits of the American legislation, Mexico will not permit any kind of direct intervention on its territory by the American army or police force. President Fox wanted to encourage the population to denounce any illicit act regarding to drugs trafficking. He also promoted the involvement of Mexico in international institutions such the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States to create a global regime to control drugs, with strategies in the South to protect the borders.

Felipe Calderón

President Felipe Calderón entered office at the end of 2006 with the launch of an impressive plan of action, which involved the police and army of Mexico in a strategy that had never been implemented before, adopting the American model of the use of force. The goal was to recover the state of law in several areas of the territory which were considered to be under the control of drug cartels. So far, the fight against drugs has achieved none of its goals, instead leaving a trail of deaths and increased violence. Unsurprisingly, the Mexican population has become skeptical and afraid of drug dealers, the military and the police, all three to a more or less equal degree. Regions, cities and
states have witnessed how their styles of life have changed over the last administration. To have an idea, just a glance either on the local newspapers or international press gives the reader the picture of the level of violence within the Mexican territory: it seems that the cartels are the ones dominating the national security. Moreover, many police men have quit their jobs and moved to another place with their families, before the violence of the cartels can reach them.\footnote{72}{Progreso, No, 28 pp. 32}

Nowadays the violence has reach levels as the terrorist attacks in the US, Irak, Afghanistan and so on with car bombs. Moreover, the number of deaths that the narco-terrorism has left behind is compared with the victims of the latest international conflicts: in the war on the Malvinas were 907; in the Gulf one, 300; in the invasion of the US to Afghanistan, 1,025 and in the occupation of Iraq by the American army, 4,386, while in the “Mexican war on drugs” have been around 25,000\footnote{73}{“La Guerra del Narco”. Proceso No.28 (April, 2010), weekly magazine. Mexico D.F., Mexico.} death so far, not counting missing people whose demise is not proved.\footnote{74}{Rodriguez Garcia, Arturo. No consultó…y luego nos dejó solos. Progreso.com.mx Semanario de Información y análisis. México. D.F., July 14th, 2010. At http://proceso.com.mx/rv/modHome/detalleExclusiva/81380 (July 16th).} The worst part is that the criminals do not hide from police, contrary they leave clear messages to let the population know who committed the crime.\footnote{75}{Alzaga, Ignacio. Estalla en Chihuahua coche bomba; 2 policías muertos. Milenio.com. July 16th, 2010 at http://www.milenio.com/node/488547 (July 16th)} Despite the efforts on the part of the Mexican government to content with the social problem of drugs, the structure of the cartels has remained practically the same, with an increase in aggression.

The fight continues between the main cartels with the intention of controlling certain areas of the Mexican territory in the north of the country, meaning the regions where the drug cargo transits on its way to the US. Further, the Sinaloa cartel is still the largest one, ruling the key regions for the transit of drugs, playing a hegemonic role. According to reports of detentions made by the Mexican government, the main actors...
have been removed from most of the cartels, but in reality this applies to only a few from the Sinaloa and certainly not to anyone of significance or having an important role for their operations.

Although the outcome after almost four years of his administration, Calderon continually insists his strategy is the best one to face the social problem of drug trafficking\textsuperscript{76}, but the public perceives that the narcotic industry challenges the very existence of the government\textsuperscript{77}, on the Mexican side as in the American one.


\textsuperscript{77} Martin, J.M. & Romano A. T., 1992
Chapter Three

Mexico and United States Policy

The Mexican state is considered of strategic importance to the US. Throughout the Cold War, “US security was seen as inextricably linked to promotion of the private enterprise system and unobstructed US access to Third World economies and raw materials”.  

Mexico, rich in petroleum and natural resources, being the neighbor of the US, represents a key piece for the American government. The relationship between Mexico and the United States has been characterized by a dynamic where of cooperation and conflict; distrust and friendship. As a consequence of the asymmetrical partnership, Mexico had opted to keep diplomatic relations aside of the US’s decisions in the international environment, allowing the Mexican government to have its own action space in international politics, with bilateral agreements all over the world. Yet, over the last years the US has claimed a security interest in its relationship with Mexico and its complexities of internal politics that have complicated US policy regarding drug trafficking. This section examines the origins of cartels and the trade of drugs and the creation of interdiction and eradication initiatives to reduce the amount of illicit drugs from Mexico to the American territory.

With the signature of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which came into force in 1994, internal markets were opened between Canada, Mexico and the US. This treaty meant a strictly trade partnership and it did not bring with it agreement on all other issues where the US and Mexico differed, like political issues on the international level. In this sense, Mexico has always kept a neutral position with the US’s

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actions and interventions in third countries. In short, economic interdependence stands apart from political matters, “each aspect of the complex relation has its own dynamics”\textsuperscript{80}, meaning every issue has its own actors, governmental or non-governmental, public and private.

Topics such as the trafficking of arms, generated in the US and not controlled, and the intervention of the DEA\textsuperscript{81} in the fight against drugs within the Mexican territory have been on the bilateral agenda Mexico-US so far. The market of weapons is not well controlled, as the cartels get their provisions form the American suppliers since Mexico is not capable of producing such arms- and the intervention of agents from the US goes far beyond the mutual agreement, which only includes the support to the Mexican government with information and intelligence. The measures that the US has taken over the countries with insufficient control over the drug trade have gone from the military attitudes of the Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The American assumption that diminishing the production of drugs diminishes the demand is a problematic view of the solution that misled the general strategies. Focusing on the issue from such a perspective ignores the actual needs of the society. As far the demand continues, the production will as well and not vice versa.

The drug problem resides in the perception that Mexico and the US have from each other and their own perception of security. Regarding the security conception, it cannot be thought apart from the border and drug trafficking\textsuperscript{82}. Americans perceive Mexico as a cause of problems, while Mexicans feel they are being abused and neglected by the US. Americans expect too much of Mexico and Mexicans think the US is very demanding. In short, they do not trust each other, especially in the implementation of law. The US accuses Mexico of not “have[ing a] strong hand” with criminals and drug dealers, 

\textsuperscript{80} Lajous, 1994, pp. 85

\textsuperscript{81} Drug Enforcement Administration’s website at http://www.justice.gov/dea/programs/marijuana.htm (July 6th, 2010)

\textsuperscript{82} The migration and homeland security are leave aside here for practical reason and lack of space.
and Mexico thinks the US does not do anything regarding the high level of drug consumption in the American market. Mexico feels that they are under the American command and the US hardly ever views its relationship as one of domination (at least in the public sphere). The way each country sees its counterpart, or how the Self sees the Other in accordance with Wendt’s theory, implies a long list of aspects, yet the one that needs to be emphasized is that they “are engaged in a reluctant partnership”83.

“The border, the drug war is part of the landscape”84

The line that divides Mexico from the US is seen by the latter country as the end of its world and thus responsibility, seeing Mexico as the “threat” regarding drug trafficking. Both parties understand that they are tied by the border, but this same border is the reason for the reluctant affiliation. Even under the umbrella of NAFTA and the economic integration it implies, there are not enough real institutionalized mechanisms of cooperation between Mexico and the US, although both countries emphasize the importance of their relationship and they profess their fraternity.

The hostility that each party treats the nationals of the counterpart, especially for the Mexicans, is evident at the border. Here another conception plays an important role: the two countries have a different definition of the border. Mexico has its border open to Americans, and most of the nationalities. They can cross, travel and even reside on Mexican territory. The Aztec territory is open to trade and investments with its northern neighbor, privileges it has taken advantage of it, especially since NAFTA came into force. On the other hand, the US is a closed border, mainly in terms of labor due to its history of migration. If Mexico and the US do not share a common definition of the border, then they hardly share the one of security.

83 Payan, 2006, pp 121

84 Ibid, pp.49
There is contrast between the different northern towns of Mexico. In San Pedro Garza García, in the state of Nuevo León, the richest city of the country, the companies play the role of sponsors of the police, giving them between 5 and 100 thousand Mexican pesos\(^{85}\) monthly in order to guarantee the security of their interest. In such a way they are basically supplying all of the necessary elements as weapons, patrols, uniforms, bulletproof vest, etc., and salaries to the security force of the regional government. On the other hand, in the same state of Nuevo León, but in rural areas, even the use of cars by polices is limited, as they do not even have money for gasoline\(^{86}\).

The violence in Mexico has risen to the level the criminals use acid in order to destroy the bodies of their victims\(^{87}\). When Santiago Meza\(^{88}\), was captured, he confessed himself dissolved in caustic soda\(^{89}\) (sodium hydroxide) at least 300 people. Therefore it is hard to provide a trustworthy number of victims because the official reports do not coincide with the ones made by the population and witnesses from the towns where most of the fights between cartels and the military occur. When the government reports 2 or 3 losses, people who were there say there were between 20 and 40 bodies picked up.\(^{90}\) On the other hand, the death of General Juan Arturo Esparza García\(^{91}\), head of the Public Security in the municipality of Garcia in Nuevo León, who had occupied important positions at the Presidential level in security, exemplifies the speed of the cartels to act.

\(^{85}\) Around 320 and 6400 euros at the exchange rate of 15.55 Mexican pesos for 1 euro, by June 2010. The amount given varies of the size of the enterprise and its welfare.

\(^{86}\) Progreso, 2010. No.28, pp. 17

\(^{87}\) Ibid, pp. 18


\(^{90}\) Ibid, pp. 27

\(^{91}\) Ibid, pp.18
Mr. Esparza was killed just four days after his new appointment: sicarios laid an ambush for him in his way to attend an emergency call from the President of the municipality.

The insecurity and corruption as well the rise of violence might have their roots in social carelessness, as those municipalities in the North have no opportunities for a job, nor do they have a sufficient level of education. The absence of security missions in rural areas has provoked the migration of people, raising the marginalization level in Nuevo Leon, a state which brags about being the most industrialized in Mexico. Conversely, the inaccurate diffusion of the criminal acts throughout the media, gives potential opportunities to the governments to make use of the violence even if they violate the law or human rights, and almost nobody questions government sponsored violence, as criminals “deserve to be punished, no matter what”.

National security concept

For decades the idea that Mexico did not need a national security policy to be perfectly planned, which fit with its needs and national interests, prevailed. It seems that Mexican government takes for granted that due to its geographical situation, the US would avoid any threat to Mexican security. Having a friendly relationship with the US and its largest military power, Mexico has justified the absence of a concrete Mexican policy in the sense of national security from external threats.

On the other hand, the absence of geopolitical or strategic interests by Mexico in any other part of the world also played a role as the national security was limited to the domestic issues. The concept of external security for Mexico meant the defense of its sovereignty and national interests, seen as the protection of its capacity of auto-determination at political, economical and legislative level, the defense of its territory and the preservation of its natural resources, in the framework delimited by international law. For instance, it can be said that Mexico defines its national security as “the set or norms, strategies and general measures as well specific ones that contribute to the preservation of its national sovereignty, involving the territorial integrity, maritime and
national airspace; its political auto determination and the promotion of the cultural heritage, values and principles that distinguish Mexico from any other country”.

An extreme nationalist definition of national security, as the one Mexico adheres to, does not fit with the one that the US encompasses. The concept of national security for the US is not limited to the protection of their national borders, political institutions or its economic wealth. The doctrine of national security for the US goes beyond, it is the safeguarding of a whole set of national interest at the international level, publics as privates, which implies the development of political and military capabilities and the use of persuasive methods or intervention.

The US is generally considered a global hegemony, taking actions to reflect and maintain that role all over the world. Thus, it can be said that its concept of national security is not based on the national defense of its territory, it is based on maintaining its economic, political and military power. Mainly its security conception has its roots in the propagation of its ideology and prestige, an image of supremacy in other states with influence. Also the American doctrine includes the care of economic interest such as the supply of raw material, traffic routes, markets and investments spaces. In this sense, the concept of national security of Mexico does not match the American one.

The US has always enjoyed having two pacifist countries as neighbors and despite this it has still been involved in many international conflicts throughout history. The explanation for this is that because the American government operated under the principle of promoting the country’s strength and security in different situations, it has used everything, from the possibility of communist to the control over the drug dealers crossing its territory, as excuses to exert force.

In 1983, when the concept of national security was included in the Mexican National Plan of Development of 1983-1988, the Mexican government defined national

92 Translation from Vertiz Avelar, 2003. pp. 51

93 Vertiz, 2003
security as the “integral development of the Nation and the tool to maintain the condition of liberty, peace, and social justice within the constitutional framework”\(^\text{94}\). Mexico emphasized the security issue as domestically solvable and not workable within the framework of international intervention from any other nation. The main reason as to why Mexico defended the principle of non-intervention is because it had suffered mutilation of its territory\(^\text{95}\) throughout its history, not to mention that it was the main colony of Spain. Based on its historical roots, Mexico’s foreign policy of non-intervention has ruled over its territory, as have prudence and its abstinence from participating in armed conflicts, especially in those where the US was involved, are the reflections of Mexico’s fear of being dominated ever again.\(^\text{96}\)

Yet, little by little the analysis of international actions that might affect the domestic security was introduced into the perspective of the governmental authorities. This concern was reflected in the National Plan of Development 1989-1994. It included the declaration that one of the goals of the national security was to act firmly and with anticipation, with the purpose of avoiding any external act that could be a threat to the national security\(^\text{97}\). Simultaneously, it emphasized the political and economic fields more than the military one. Nevertheless, it has been emphasized that drug trafficking is the main danger to the internal security, threatening the international security as well. Mexico has looked to support from the international community, asking them to assume their own


\(^{95}\) Half of Mexico’s former territory was taken for the US in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The territory included the current states of California, Nevada, Utah, Texas, part of Colorado, New Mexico and Oklahoma.


responsibility in the chain, not only blaming the Mexican government new strategy on the control of violence within its territory, because this violence involves many other actions taken by other countries.

The argument that drug trafficking is a national security issue is due two reasons - the internal policy and the foreign policy. On the internal field, drug dealers threaten the monopoly of the state in the use of violence in some regions and undermine the power of the national government in the enforcement of law and order. Regarding the bilateral ambit, the measures taken to combat drug trafficking in Mexico have had an orientation of foreign policy, as exemplified by the avoidance of the extraterritorial application of national laws and the persecution beyond the US border.98

Other elements that became a part of the Mexican national security concept include the cash flow and conflicts in Central America. National movements in Central America were attended to with diplomacy, meaning that national representatives of Mexico were sent to establish relations; with the objective of avoiding the possibility that these movements would get into Mexican territory. The dialogues and negotiations Mexico had with countries in conflict was thought to be the result of bringing a certain level of agreement and peace in that country and avoiding the US intervention with their military: Mexico’s strategies had thus been characterized by negotiations rather than the use of force.

Alternatively, another one of the peculiarities of the Mexican concept of security has been the low participation of the Mexican army in decisions concerning national security. Until recently, the army has been less active, only now taking an active part in these kinds of issues. The increasing trade of drugs and the armed movement in the

serves as an example of the cases where the army increased its participation for the establishment of social order and protection of the population. Due to the geopolitical situation of Mexico and the principles of its foreign policy, however, the Mexican Army almost never participated in military alliances not even in security bodies under the umbrella of international organizations. Mexican foreign policy has been clear in this sense, avoiding any kind of integration, cooperation or alliance regarding security, international or regional, which can be interpreted as interventionist. Nevertheless, the low level of participation of the army in foreign policy has had an important role in the public policy, because they form part of the government, holding positions such deputies, senators and so on. In this way, they are integrated to the Mexican politics, though not in the traditional role armed forces usually play.

United States of America

With the attacks of September 11, American measures of security protection increased in a notable way. The US increased the number of personnel at the border with Mexico, thus the budget designated to national security protection and the inspection of border crossers becomes more exhaustive. Yet despite all of the new actions taken, the number of illegal immigrants and the trade of drugs have barely diminished. The American action only managed to redefine the concept of security to include all border issues, effectually displaying a new and more hostile attitude toward border-crossers and a new layer of bureaucratic paperwork.

99 Zapatista Movement on charge of Subcomandante Marcos, is a revolutionary group which protest for the rights of the indigenous population in Mexico, mostly concentrated on the south of the country. Yet with the years, this movement turned into a violent one threat national security.

100 The Joint Commission of Defense Mexico-United States, is an inactive organization which work with social activities and not military ones.
American approach on Drug Trafficking

The American drug policy over the last forty years reflects contradictions in the mission of the enforcement agencies the US has, such as the DEA, because it is involved in a wider criminal justice system. Since the predecessor of the DEA, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), the drug enforcement has been subordinated to the concerns of the US intelligence community, mainly the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which has cared little about drug enforcement even though it has often used drugs as tools of espionage and counterintelligence. Actually, it was often hard to distinguish whether FBN agents were CIA men using narcotics jobs as a cover or if they were drug enforcers merely helping counterintelligence. Due to this practice, the DEA, to some extent has tolerated anti-communist drug dealers abroad and drug abuse at home, often “in the name of national security or counterintelligence experimentation” as the DEA functions under the same scheme that the FDN did. Thus, the police become the organization who will deal directly with the trade of drugs. Its work has produced more crime as a consequence, mostly due to corruption within their own ranks and the impossibility of processing of thousands of drug dealers (from small streets sellers, to the groups importing big amounts from the south) and users. The drug plague and the rise of consumers highlight the incapacity of the judicial system to cope with the social problem; the lack of local law enforcement is the key of domestic drug markets.

Political espionage is the job of the CIA, not the DEA, but the line between the two American agencies is blurry, nowhere more so than in Mexico, where the CIA has required the drug agency to hand over a list of all of its Mexican assets and coordinate operations. The CIA provided international protection to ensure the successful creation of


102 McCoy, W.A. & Block A.A. 1992
the main Mexican cartel, in exchange for cooperation regarding the protection of American operations: the secret war against Castro’s Cuba. In return for helping the CIA move weapons to Central America, the agency facilitated the movement of drugs into the US to the drug dealer operating in Mexico, Alberto Sicilia-Falcon, a Cuban exile operating out in Tijuana. The head of the Federal Direction of Security in 1975 in Mexico, Miguel Nazar Haro, protected Sicilia from torture when he was captured, as a means of avoiding the possibility that he could imply security agencies, both from the US and Mexico, in the trade of drugs.  

This case is just an example that shows the ties of the American security agencies with the Mexican ones, demonstrating from which point and to what extent the roots of this relationship have helped to strengthen the cartels, therefore encouraging the use of force. The concept of national security of the US put other kinds of crimes in the first place, including terrorism, all of which have to be attended before moving on to those related to drugs. American government fears that concentrating on drug cases within its territory could remove resources away from other court priorities, such as more serious felony cases.

**American War on Drugs**

Mexico became the most important US heroin supplier following the Turkish poppy ban and the elimination of the French Connection\(^{104}\). With the prohibition of drugs by the Americans in the 1920s, the price incentive motivated Chinese immigrants to grown poppy in the Mexican states of Sonora and Sinaloa.\(^{105}\) Later on, World War II changed the US drug policy stance towards Mexico and they asked the country to grown


\(^{104}\) Friesendorf, 2006

marijuana to manufacture ropes and poppy to produce medical morphine due to an increased number of injured US soldiers. The need for this medical morphine was overestimated and by 1944 the production was out of control. The slow response from the US to the Mexican drug boom, with anti-drug programs with short-term success -as the President Richard Nixon’s Operation Intercept which lasted for 17 days with interceptions of drug cargo at the border, or the aerial spraying of herbicides on poppy fields- allow Mexican drugs entrepreneurs to build strong organizations.

Harrison act of 1914 was the first American legislation that sought to control the domestic traffic of opium and cocaine and since then multiple law enforcement has continued in a never-ending fight against addictions. Yet, the problem has its roots in politics. In the US the political reaction against drugs has been set off by phases of rising public protests and concern. As time passes, the political response falters and declines as public pressure flows away. The growing fear of drugs in the US began at the end of the 1800s and since then, the country has found no long lasting solution to either the control of domestic addiction or to drug trafficking. Repression, no matter the level of it, has not been able to control the complex system of the international drugs trade. On the contrary, the increased repression has produced expansions of both supply and demand.

The “underground empire” of drug trafficking embraces the use of power and violence, making use of politics at the multinational level. The very first try of the US to

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launch a program against drugs was in 1972 with President Richard Nixon\textsuperscript{110}, who was the one that brought up the term “war on drugs” in relation to Turkey. Eventually the American government could constrain its main supplier of narcotics at that time, but since then new ones emerged, as the demand continued in the US. This in the end futile attempt at an international solution compounded the actual problem, over the long term.

In 1987 a United Nations Report made the reference that drug trafficking was linked with the illegal trade of arms and money-laundering\textsuperscript{111}. It was reflected upon by the American government and in 1989 President George Bush declared his own “war on drugs” –an extension of Ronald Reagan’s earlier campaign\textsuperscript{112} where the US put pressure in the Andean area to eradicate cultivation of drugs, mainly cocaine and imposed strategies in order to cut the flow of narcotics via the Caribbean and Mexico into its territory.

Diplomatic and international efforts\textsuperscript{113} to control source country production and a wide range of trafficking interest have also not met successful results. There is a lack of stopping the importation of illegal drugs from the American governments as well as from other countries, as the long chain of drug trafficking coming from Colombia and Mexico has seen nothing in terms of control, instead has resulted in pandemic of violence. This violence due to drug trafficking for long time has been ignored in the US because it did not represent a significant number of murders. Little attention was put on it as the investigations were just focused at the lowest level of the drug distribution system -


\textsuperscript{111} Martin J.M. & Romano A.T., 1992


\textsuperscript{113} Drug Enforcement Administration at http://www.justice.gov/dea/programs/ocdetf.htm. (July 8th) The DEA has many programs for the eradication of drug trafficking, but none has achieve the goal so far.
crimes on the streets. Nevertheless, around the 1980s, academics criminologists started to see the violence having a correlation with drug trafficking at other levels\textsuperscript{114} and began studying the illicit business trend of violent behavior.

The major drug of abuse within the American population is marijuana, even thought cocaine also has a significant market. Though the US strategy to combat the trade of drugs into its territory has been on the agenda for a long time, it seems that every action or strategy that the government decides to implement end the problem, but has instead increased it. In the decade of the 1980s, the US put into operation a series of actions in the area of the Caribbean Sea to curtail the run of cocaine from Colombia. But, “smashing the cartels did not reduce the flow of drugs. It simply changed the structure of the industry, crating space in the market for many new small and intermediate producers”,\textsuperscript{115} because as a response, the Colombian dealers looked for counterparts in Mexico to keep going with their business. Until this point there were not big groups working as illicit suppliers of marijuana and heroin in Mexico, but Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, proved to be willing to work together with the Medellin Cartel from Colombia (the most powerful cartel in drug trafficking in the 1980s) in the trade of cocaine into the US. Gallardo was well known in Mexico for the consolidation of small time smugglers in the 1970s into a single organization which controlled much of the illegal drug trade along the Mexico-US border. The joint cartel of Colombia-Mexico became an excellent drug cartel that played an important role in the 1980s. In contrast with the illicit activity existing today, the program Gallardo was leading avoided the use of violence as far as possible and all the operations were negotiated rather than executed with the use of force.


Hardly a solution, the new mix posed a new problem – the alliance of the Colombian and Mexican cartels. The American government readdressed their efforts to constrain that joint-cartel and in 1989 Gallardo was arrested in Mexico. Being in prison, however, did not stop him from continuing lead the trade of drugs in the Colombia-Mexico-US chain, but as his followers started to fight among them in an attempt to control the redirection of the cartel while its leader was in jail. As mentioned before, Gallardo did prefer negotiation over violence, and he suggested to his lieutenants that they divide the organization into territories. He ordered them to keep a corridor, control the drug transit there and respect the rest, with the single rule of no violence between them. This is how the main Mexican cartels emerged: the Tijuana Cartel, the Sinaloa-Sonora Cartel, The Juarez Cartel and the Gulf Cartel. Then once again the criminals found a way to continue their business despite the law enforcement intent of the US. From one, four cartels to fight against emerged, covering more territory than before and turning the problem into one that has been harder to control, as now every defined territory was covered by a specific group.

The drug policies of the US have been selective. On the one hand the American government put pressure on Turkey and France, but made small efforts to reduce drug production in Mexico or Southwest Asia, where drug policies were sacrificed for the fight against communism. It was only when large drug cargos from the two later mentioned areas were getting into the US that the Nixon administration responded. Without Nixon initiative against Turkish and French drug dealers, Mexican-based traffickers would have found harder to build their realm. As a consequence, drug production, trafficking, consumption, as well as violence and corruption have spread since then. This can lead to the conclusion that US drug policies shifted the trade of narcotics to Mexican cartels - Third World production is tied to First World drug users.116

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When US policy makers consistently sought to view the drug issue as a supply-side problem, thereby externalizing the issue and making the problem largely one of production and trafficking, realist cold offer a critique of the policies enacted and be understood by those state policy makers. A realist summation mirroring some state concerns is the workforce cost of the US economy related to lost production, job-related accidents and health care. Also the profit derived from the illicit trade of drugs which fuels the growth of violent criminal organizations whose economic resources and political influence give them the means to destabilize, to intimidate and even to manipulate various national governments in the region.  

US government hardly talks with their counterpart in Mexico for the establishment of joint cooperation in the fight against the problem of drugs as a national security problem. Cautious paranoids, limited by a world-view defined by anarchical relations between states, are predisposed to view the drug issue as “international” in origin by the American government. Based on a materialist ontology and empiricist epistemology, and following this bias to view threats as external to the state, realist policy direction focuses on source country production of illicit drugs. A quasi-war can likely be constructed. Therefore, producers, drug dealers and those that cover these groups might be defined as enemies intend to harming the US and undermining US national interest. But the question how drugs became labeled as a security threat rather than a domestic health issue remains outside the realist purview. The domestic security matters that are reflected in the national security strategies pursued by the state seem not to have a place in the realist account. These domestic security issues often draw on cultural norms and identity performances that are best analyzed from the constructivist school of thought, discussed in this project.

The US concept of security in its narrow and conventional terms including the welfare and the potential threat of the survival of the state, consolidated even more after September 11, did not allow a deep integration with Mexico. Both governments seem to

have failed to construct effective institutions that can systematize further negotiations for political integration. At the border, with all the problems that it represents (as the point of entrance of drugs to the US and of money and arms to Mexico), both countries solve—if possible— the problems day by day, with no long-term policies established.

The main approach given to this “war against drug trafficking”, is to combat the production and distribution, leaving aside the problem of the consumption or selling of arms, where the US plays the main role. But the US has never fully admitted their part, seeing their high consumption index of drugs as a consequence of the offer and not as an internal social problem. The US does not see their society as the source of the problem; it considers itself a victim of the illicit market dominated mainly by the Mexican cartels. Therefore, the absence of the recognition contributes to a lack of cooperation between those two countries. It was not until the administration of Barack Obama that the US started to recognize its part in the problem as a shared responsibility issue between both states. The acknowledgment has, however, resulted in little effort being put forth in support of Mexico, as the US still insists it is an exogenous issue.

*Cartel’s response*

The cartels, both the Mexicans and Colombians, have responded to every effort at a clean-up by the US and the Mexican governments, showing their flexibility to adaptation and fast adjustment to almost any circumstance in order to continue their activity. They change their modus operandi, involving more people, either through recruitment of new members or by corrupting officials and agents. The organizations originated with Gallardo’s order, are almost the same ones still in operation, not only at the border, but within the whole territory of Mexico. They kept functioning just as companies do, even

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when the entire "personnel" has changed. Better yet, cartels have an effective and quick capacity to embrace changes, whether this happens outside or within them.

Drug cartels have the advantage of no bureaucracy vis-à-vis governmental actions: drug trafficking works 24/7 and the communication within the operators is easier and faster than all the memoranda and paper work of the governmental offices, with the simple rule of death for those who disobey orders. For the government, it takes too long to put into practice any strategy or plan, “that is the difference between the US drug war bureaucracies and the criminal organizations they are up against”\textsuperscript{119}. They adapt and change their structure in order to keep the organization alive. When the American government designed a plan to constrain drug trafficking and began putting it into force, the cartels already had a way to pass over those measures, either with stronger sources to respond with or wiser methods to avoid the new governmental measures. This is the reason why cartels are said to be better organized than the same police of armed forces.

The American strategies to strengthen controls at the border with Mexico rarely affect the large cartels because most of the people who are arrested do not carry with them big amounts of drugs, in fact they usually are one-time drug-crossers and they do not work for the large cartels but some smaller drug dealers, thus they cannot provide valuable information to the police. Pedestrian are too risky and inefficient for those who control the drug market, the cartels. Those groups use many different means of transporting and crossing the border, from pre-prepared vehicles with hidden compartments for drugs\textsuperscript{120} to the use of trucks with commercial merchandise\textsuperscript{121} and back

\textsuperscript{119} Payan, 2006. pp. 31

\textsuperscript{120} A vehicle prepared for the transportation of drugs can be a car, trucks or vans and basically are modified to build in special compartments where drugs can be hidden: in the gas tank, behind the dashboard, the spare tire...the drugs then are wrapped and often basted in substances from gasoline to oils and perfumes to disguise the smell, to be undetected by the sniffing dogs. The cartels even have sniffing dogs to test if the drug packages can be detected from them, if so, they take the necessary measures before to send those vehicles to cross the border. Payan, 2006, pp.33

\textsuperscript{121} With the entrance of the NAFTA, the trade between Mexico and the US increased and so did the traffic of drugs using the truck which transport the exported products into the American territory to hide tons of
American officials do not offer the kind of protection the Mexicans do and it is less extensive, having a much more concentrated impact than the corruption in Mexico. The Mexican officials function as body guards for the drug dealers or capos and/or the merchandise they transport. On the other hand, professionals are easily corruptible for a good salary. The American corruption works differently. They do not protect in such a way the capos, they simply “wave hands” allowing trucks to cross the border with no inspection. Therefore, it logically has a bigger impact of the corruption on the US side than on the Mexican one: with the impossibility of drugs crossing into the American market, the rest of the “employees” would not be necessary to pay with bribes.

Heavy Metals

The days when the cartels used “normal” weapons have been left in the past; nowadays they use guns capable to pass armor-plated vests worn by the officers who fight against them. They can even blow up vehicles and bring down helicopters. An official report from the Attorney General's Office (PGR for their initials in Spanish) said that the narcotics. Checking the larger trucks is very costly and time consuming to run a thorough inspection of every truck: police officers at most check randomly a couple of them. Even though the government is implementing new technology to detect drugs - as X-ray scanners or programs as putting official seals after an official checked only legal merchandise was put in the truck-, the cartels are one step beyond searching for ways to strike the new technology. Payan, 2006.

122 As easy as construct a tunnel from a back yard house nearby the Mexican border connected to one on the American side to avoid the check point on the surface. Also sophisticated tunnels are made, even with ventilation system and lifts, like the one found in Tijuana on December, 2009. Source: Roderick, Amy. U.S., Mexican Authorities Investigation Cross-Border Tunnel: passageway equipped with lighting, ventilation and elevator systems. DEA, December 2nd, 2009 at http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/sd120209.html (June 20th, 2010).

possibility that the cartels and criminals organizations could gain access to sophisticated weapons was almost nonexistent due to the complicated process that is involved in buying them and getting trained to be able to use them. As it has been said, however, those groups are better prepared to react when confronted with new situations and technology. It does not matter how complicated the use of the newly developed arms is, the cartels get trained by specialized ex-officials from the Mexican army who has deserted. Mexican security forces thus face the problem of combating the high-tech weapons used by the big drug dealers with simple guns. The question that arises as a result is how the weapons get into Mexico in the first place? The answer is surprisingly simple, weapons enter in the same way the money does—through the US-Mexican border. Corrupted American brokers help to make it possible, not to mentioning their Mexicans counterparts who also cooperate.

The trade of arms near the border on the American side does not have any kind of control. Everybody can legally buy any kind of weapon in any quantity required, with no restriction at all nor control or identification. There are more than 12,700\textsuperscript{124} legal supply shops, plus there are also the multiples clandestine supermarkets, houses, sport shops and so on dedicated to sell arms. How does the US want to implement strategies against the Mexican criminal groups if they do not implement policies in the control of the trade of weapons on their own territory? Could a coherent strategy really stop the cartels of getting the guns they want? In fact, it is proven that they even use some that are not legal in the US either, so it is assumed they steal them from the American and Mexican Army.\textsuperscript{125}

With the increasing demand of guns on the part of the drug dealers from Mexico, the ties of both markets are growing, as the US is the biggest supplier of weapons of Mexico. Cartels even use drugs instead of cash to pay, thereby allowing that those drugs

\textsuperscript{124} Maullón, 2009

are later exchanged for money within the American territory. “The smuggling of weapons into Mexico has been going on regularly at least since 1986”\textsuperscript{126}, with the cooperation of agents and officials from both sides.

Secure Border Initiative

In 2005, the US proposed a Secure Border Initiative (SBI). The main discrepancy between the conception of security strategies between Mexico and the American counterpart, while Mexico looks for a joint strategy, the White House wants to impose what they think is the best. Either way the SBI was principally based on the increase of the use of force with more agents to watch American border, a comprehensive and systemic upgrading of the technology used in controlling the border, increased investment in infrastructure improvements at the border (physical security such as walls, vigilance towers and so on, all meant to detect and reduce illegal crossing), and increase interior enforcement of American immigration laws. The US government focuses on unilateral strategies and decisions, a short-term approach centered largely on law enforcement\textsuperscript{127} with no attention paid to either the larger social or the economic forces that motivate people to smuggle drugs.

There is little thought given to the construction of a long-term, bilateral solution between Mexico and the US in terms of the drug trafficking trouble, not to mention the other border problems such as illegal immigration and homeland security. But each of these problems need to be looked at separately, as they have their own dynamics, actors and cannot be seen as one. Although the American government says that with the detention of the leaders of the cartels, those criminal organizations will break up and the

\textsuperscript{126} Martin J.M & Romano A.T., 1992 pp.75

\textsuperscript{127} Payan, 2006
flow of drugs, arms and cash across the border would stop, this seems an unlikely far possible reality.¹²⁸

“The US treats the boundary as if beyond the borderline there were simply an abyss and the ‘national security threats’ on it came from that dark chasm, that Mexico is assumed to be”¹²⁹; if the White House does not change its perception of Mexico as a neighbor, then it is unlikely that a successful joint strategy will emerge.


¹²⁹ Payan, 2006, pp.20
Security Analysis

There are two kinds of security, the national security that every country profess to defend and elaborate their politics, and the public security, or better said the domestic security. The first one refers to those actions coming from the exterior that might affect and put under threat the security of the country as a whole, while the latter is the level of safety the citizens can enjoy in their homeland and implies the aggressions within the national territory. With these definitions of the kinds of security that Payan (2006) gives in his book, it can be deciphered which one is the priority for the US and which for Mexico.

The White House has always been worried about external threats to the country and it constantly intervenes in any country with signs of war, violence, disorder, lack or law enforcement, or a different ideology, as well as any other reason it considers to be in disaccord with their concept of justice. The US justifies every intervention they promote with the argument of the avoidance of a “global” threat, really meaning a threat for itself. The Americans also increase their hegemony by showing they are the “police” of the world, and their mission is to put order everywhere it is needed, thus they focus on the possible external threats.

Nonetheless after September 11, the American government started to see their own citizens as threats to the national security, shifting the threat they might represent to the realm public security. However, because the US treats their own citizen under the label of “threat to national security” if they behave suspiciously, the thin line which distinguishes a national threat from a simple crime can sometimes be invisible to the law’s enforcement eyes. Therefore security for the Americans is that national security, the survival of the country as a whole is more important than the mere survival of inhabitants.

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130 Payan, 2006
Contrarily, Mexico separates the two kinds of security and differentiates them from one another. Outer threats are not the main concern for Mexicans, as they have never felt their sovereignty to be threatened in such way. Public security, on the other hand, has taken everybody’s thoughts, especially with the latest events regarding internal violence. Lately, the relations between the US and Mexico have been shaped by the public security of the latter. The Mexican government has seen security in a broader way than just the terrorists’ attacks coming in from abroad. They care more about the organized crime within the country, which actually is the one that represents a real threat to the security of Mexico.

Drug cartels are the main concern of the government of the Aztec state, especially because the degree to which they can destabilize the whole of Mexican society. The whole system of operation of those illicit organizations affects the security and economy of the country, even jeopardizing its sovereignty, internal order and the government’s monopoly of the use of violence. Other worries, not deeply commented on here, are the safety of the illegal immigrants who jump into the US, the poverty and environmental degradation.

The issue where the US overlaps its concept of security with the Mexican one is regarding drug trafficking, where a grade of mutual aid might be seen. But the failure of the strategies from both sides has shown that the mechanisms of cooperation that exists between them are minimal. The problem is that the US does not trust Mexico and Mexico does not want to rely on US intentions\textsuperscript{131}. The US points out that the authorities and officers in Mexico are corrupt and even cooperate in an open way with the capos. By contrast, Mexico is afraid that the US might intervene and jeopardize its sovereignty. This mutual distrust has not allowed both actors to fully work under the same position. “Each tackles the problem differently and separately”\textsuperscript{132}, using their own strategies and

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 2006

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 2006, pp. 125
instruments, which only provokes the cartels to develop new ways to avoid the law and continue their operations between the fractures the Mexican-American governments have.

The militarization at the border responds to the security conception of the US since they see the border problem as an issue of national security, justifying the use of force. American authorities view their unilateral response as appropriate instead of working on a joint strategy. In short, they see Mexicans as the nearest enemy, even when they say Mexico is its friend in politics and trade. Therefore, the ideas of Wendt regarding the role played in the system by the states, is not limited to a single one. The relationship cannot be clearly defined as either enemy, rival or friend, the Self can see the Other as a friend in some aspects and rivals in another. The latter describe how the US perceives Mexico.

Construction of security

The way each country have created their own conception of security, involves in some extent the media. How the national and international facts are presented to the people, weighs heavily on the perceptions among the Americans and Mexicans. Newspapers, magazines and news are the easiest and main source of information for the people. The headlines of the media in particular are what makes the new attractive, but they also creates a picture in the the reader’s mind. Titles such as “Bodies of Mexican General, Two soldiers found”\textsuperscript{133}; “Mexico: 1,000 killed in drug violence so far in ’09”\textsuperscript{134}; “The level of violence rise”\textsuperscript{135} and “Executed sum of 24,826: Attorney”\textsuperscript{136} creates paranoia


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among the nationals, and especially the Americans, where the perception of a public issue is transformed into one of national security.

The US perceives the violence regarding drug trafficking as an exogenous problem which is getting into their territory little by little from countries like Mexico. Yet, crimes related to drugs have long existed internally although to a less degree. The American government sees the violence in Mexico as a threat and it has focused on punishing the people who commit crimes as drug trade or murders and it has elaborated throughout the years the National Drug Control Strategies with not much success, largely because they do little to control selling arms.

**NAFTA and Security**

Whit NAFTA a window of opportunity for economical growth was opened, but what the agreement did not consider was the necessity of new infrastructure. With the increase of traffic due the international trade, the infrastructure already existing was not enough. This weakness was found by the cartels as an occasion to increase their own business taking advantage of the fact that not all the trucks were inspected by customs. The human resources and the technology were/are not enough, reason used as justification of the investment in border control on the part of the US.

NAFTA also did not produce any mechanism of cooperation on other issues besides trade. It did not address the possibility of creation of institutions to coordinate policies (as the European Union has done since Germany and France decide to cooperate on coal and steel trade). With no strategies to cooperate in other fields, nor even the intention, the security issue was never touched on via as a joint dialogue. The area that most resents this lack of cooperation is the border area, as the social and economic disorder in Mexico is seen as a security problem.

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Though the NAFTA signatories took no measures to widen the agreement beyond trade, in 2005, Canada, the US and Mexico got together and launched the “Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America” based on the foundation that security and economic integration were closely related. Sadly, no progress or real compromises have been made since then nor have any kind of institutional mechanism been launched to face the security issue in North America.

Americans trust in Canada, but not in Mexico when it comes to security. This corresponds mainly to the conception of the North American perimeter as a single unit to be defended, a single unit that only includes Canada and the US, leaving Mexico on the outside even though geography indicates the Mexican territory is also part of North America and the NAFTA, only by its name, indicates so as well. This concept must be redefined in order to fight together the security threat that the drug cartels represent. Mexico, on its part, does not want to form part of any joint effort with the US, because it would mainly mean adopting US initiatives, yet by President Calderon the Mexican state is following the coercive American way of thought.

137 Payan, 2006
The War on Drugs under a Constructivist approach

Rather than focusing on the material environment that makes up the Mexico-US drug trade, social constructivism begin an investigation of the drug war by studying how US collective identity is reproduced in its Mexican policies. As a start, the language employed to define the policy problem is inherently political and demonstrates how US cultural practices are reinforced and reproduced in the policies proposed in Mexico. It is possible to finds examples of the importance of language in addressing the drug issue, as it becomes political when investigation the drug issue. On the other hand, constructivism articulates the strength of the identity performances that ensued. The reproduction of the “external enemy” instance of popular culture must be considered: some popular films or television series regards as villains to Latin American drug runners penetrating the American territory: Traffic, Miami Vice and Weeds are just some examples. In these examples, the discourse that emerges places the problem beyond the US.

The emergence of a specific sociological language further reinforces the perception that the “evil” exist outside US cultural and political boundaries. This is the case with the term drug trafficking, which suggests the external dimension of the issue: that the core of the problem is traffic and producing, as has been said earlier here. Drugs come to be seen as a threat just as the Missiles of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and drug traffickers become analogous to the Soviet soldiers. Thus both, the capability (drugs) and the willing agent (capos) are present in the resulting national security issue.


139 The movie Traffic (2001) directed by Steven Soderbergh portrays the fight on drugs on the Mexican Border. Miami Vice film (2006) by Michael Mann explains how a man pick up drugs that are transported from South American cartel into the US. Weeds (2005-present) is a black comedy-drama television series by Jenji Kohan which shows a widowed mother who turned to selling marijuana from Mexico the the US. The examples are American productions.
Illicit drug use was framed as an immoral act: drug dealers and users were considered to coexist as the margins of the society. The moral content of the policies developed to fight drug trafficking suggest that drugs dealers are not simple targeting Americans, but innocent Americans. The US promotes the image that the nation is under attack by actors intending on doing intentional harm. Externalizing the criminal aspects of the drug issue seems to play the political philosophies most valued by Americans. The problems associated with initiating a domestic war on drugs parallel to the one being fought in Mexico are considered. For a state as the American one, set up on political liberty and limited government interference, a domestic war on drugs would be both unpolar and potentially destabilizing. Domestic legislation limit is negative consequences by targeting already marginalized groups as African-Americans for example. Prison sentences for crack cocaine possession (common on the latter mentioned groups because the cheaper price) are stronger than those for similar quantity of cocaine powder ownership. As a result, this policy has brought jailing of young African-Americans in a disproportionate way related with white Americans.

This racial bias of domestic drug incarcerations gives the idea that the US defines Others as threatening to the Self, as social constructivism suggest we act depending on the perception formed of the Other: some identities leads to specific actions. Examples supporting the American source of insecurity are US perception of Japanese during WWII and Arab-Americans after the September 11 attacks.

Social Constructivism Theory and the US-Mexico Relationship

Social constructivism relies on the idea IR is rooted not on the material aspect—including military sources and economic capabilities — but rather, on the social matters. From the vantage point of the social constructivist theory, the US intervention in the drug trafficking prohibition in Mexico transpires because the states involved “identify with
each other and feel the obligation and legitimacy to help others.” Based on this view, the US decided to help combat drug trafficking in Mexico through a hands-on approach because of their perceived social obligation to the country. According to Wendt, the decisions and policies made by a state, in this case the US, rely heavily on their accordance with the collective and social identities formed by their mutual relationship. As it has been argued, it is not solely this reason that the United States has become so deeply involved.

It was already mentioned in the first part of this thesis that the level of violence in Mexico has risen since 2000 as a consequence of the new strategy developed by the Mexican government for combating drug traffickers. It revolved around ending the relationship between the drug cartels and politicians. In such a scenario, what has been the role of the US government in worsening the state of violence in Mexico? To begin with, when the US and Mexico, along with Canada, formed the NAFTA, they opened the way for the three countries to participate in the free trade of commercial goods. Thanks to the NAFTA, cartels were able to make the free trade an avenue for drug trafficking, taking advantage of the less strict security on the US border. While isolation from this Agreement is not seen as a solution, a better planned improvement of infrastructure would have avoided to some extent the rise of drug trade.

The economic relationship, the existence of which facilitated the illegal business ventures of the cartels, also gave the US the opportunity to meddle with the policies of Mexico regarding drug control. Based on the concept of social constructivism, the US justification for its behavior in intervening with Mexico's domestic political policies rests on the idea that it is their social obligation as the more powerful country to contribute to fighting the worsening situation of drug trafficking in Mexico.


The reality is not so simple. The costs of drug trafficking to the US, which have been estimated to be at around $70 billion per year, contribute to the US meddling over drug trafficking from Mexico to the US. This can be explained further in the social constructivist theory by taking note that social structures have three elements, including shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. These constitute the situations in which the actors appear, whether cooperative or conflictual. In this specific instance, the shared knowledge is the fact that drug trafficking exists and has caused problems, including fully fledged disputes, between the two states. The material resources are the impact that the cost of drug trafficking from Mexico has had on the US. Lastly, the practices involved in this situation are the security policies that the two states have been implementing in an attempt to combat the problem.

Both states do not share the same concept of security and how it is jeopardized by drug trafficking; the material cost differs on each state, from economic resources from the American side as support for the Mexican society to face the rise of violence and on the other hand human lives in Mexico. The practices taken from the Mexican government in the form of security policies, being the use of force within is territory is an internal “war on drugs” when the US has always declared this kind of war to Others and has not followed a domestic one. The three elements of the social structure in the international relationship of Mexico and the US have then constituted a conflictual relationship and have aggravated the state of violence in Mexico.

The Difference in Security Perceptions in a Social Constructivist Approach

In the social constructivist theory, the physical entities involved in relation to the two countries, such as geography and economic trade, create the relationship between them without actually taking into account the impact that they have on one another, as it is the

142 Data from Drug Enforcement Administration in 2001.

143 Wendt, 1992.
ideas and beliefs that have more significance in their bilateral system. It is through this facet of social constructivism that the ideation of the differences of security perception of Mexico and the US are embodied.

Mexico has only been interested in its own national security. Security, or protection, that only encompasses what is inside the state. Therefore, in the situation of drug trafficking, once the drugs have escaped its territory and have arrived on the US commercial market, the Mexican government ceases to consider them as an issue of national security. On the other hand, the US concept of national security is not limited to just what is inside its geographical boundaries, instead, it goes beyond them. The US does not equate it with the national defense of their territory, but also includes everything that permits it to maintain its economic, political and military power.

From the vantage point of social constructivists like Wendt, security is not a fixed objective, but a result of social constructs. The concept of security in this case consists of the three facets of social structure. Security is a shared knowledge, although Mexico and the US have different perspectives on it. It also comprises of material resources, because of the means to impose them such as military forces. Lastly, the concept of security is a practice when applied through the security policies. In Mexico's case, the concept of stricter security on drug trafficking arise from the social construct with its relationship with the US. Policies regarding drug trafficking, though they have been present even before the intervention of the US, are not fixed objectives in Mexico, as they are only there as a result of the existence of drug dealings within and outside the country. As for the US, the decision to impose strict regulations and legislations that intervene


with Mexico's policies regarding drug dealings also came into play as results of the social interaction between the two countries, for better or worse.

**Drug Trafficking as a Threat**

In line with social constructivism, it is clear that the issue of drug trafficking has only become a threat because one of the actors has presented it as such. If viewed from this perspective, the bulk of the blame would be on the US because of its role as the actor who aggravated the issue of drug trafficking, resulting in extreme acts of violence within Mexico. As was said earlier, the security measures imposed by Mexico are limited to the domestic level, and Mexico did not previously need national security policies to be enacted. Mexico's behavior of protecting only what is inside its geographic boundaries in part stems from the fact that the country had never been invaded since gaining independence. Because it respects other's sovereignty, Mexican government expects the rest to do the same and do not intervene in its territory.

Though the behavior of the leaders to concede to cartels may be viewed as a means of protecting the citizens from the immense violence that could be caused by declaring a war on them, when viewed from the social constructivist approach, the Mexican leaders' previous lack of initiative stems from the notion that drug trafficking is not a threat to the government and its citizens. It was thus not until the US had the opportunity to intervene with Mexico's political agenda through NAFTA in 1994, that the state of violence in Mexico became more intense. As the US resisted having the Mexican government concedes to the system of the cartels, they were forced to move away from their definition of national security but proved unwilling to adapt some of the viewpoints of their northern neighbor.

The behavior of the US government regarding their security measures, on the other hand, when viewed from the theory of social constructivism, is a social product that resulted from the various cases of attacks that have transpired in the country. As a result
of threats to its national security, the US has been distrustful of the countries around it, and has been meticulous in planning policy measures in order to protect its interests.

The existence of the issue of drug use and trafficking, if seen from the social constructivist approach, is nothing more than a social product\textsuperscript{146} as one actor - the US - classifies it as a external threat for its citizens and the Other –Mexico- as the consequence of a demanding market. Therefore, it can be inferred that the violence resulting from the combating of drug use and trafficking is a result of the social interaction between the two countries. Because Mexico and the US have completely different perspectives on security, the negative discourse between the two regarding their policies makes the matters worse, resulting in a higher level of violence.

\textit{Structural Change}

Efforts and strategies from both the Mexican and the US governments on drug control have proven ineffective. Since there is a discrepancy in the strategies used by each country, there is an absence of communication regarding the possibility of a unified way of combating drug dealers. Although there have been efforts, the strategies produced on both sides have only increased the rage of the cartels and the will to prove their competence, resulting in a bigger number of lost lives. In the social constructivist approach, this security discrepancy between Mexico and US is a social structure that is created as a result of their intersubjective understanding in which both states are distrustful of each other and through which they question each other's objectives and assume that their interests would be compromised.\textsuperscript{147}

As has been shown in this thesis, drug trafficking continues to flourish with organizations that are flexible and better equipped to face any law enforcement effort. It


\textsuperscript{147} Wendt, 1992, pp. 73
is more than clear that a new approach on security issues in North America, specifically meaning in the US and Mexico, is needed, one that could really make the population feel safe. The level of interdependence between Mexico and the US requires a new regime of security as the current one has demonstrated to be unilateral and enforcement-based, mainly by the US.

Why have not the strategies used by both Mexican and American governments made a positive difference regarding the combating of drug trafficking? For one, neither has internalized the concept of how drug trafficking affects their citizens. They do not work based on the concept of drug trafficking as a problem, they just do enough to make the cartel leaders lose their balance and then increase their desire for power over the government.\footnote{Flores Pérez, Antonio. De Falacias que no lo parecen y mitos que no lo son. In Revista: Este País: Tendencias y Opiniones. No. 226, enero-febrero 2010 pp.25-27} Combating the big organizations heightens their competency, lowering the prices of drugs and therefore increasing the desire for dominance of a territory, bringing violence with it in the desperate act of keeping the high profits of the illicit activity. A possibly better, and more permanent, solution would be to first eliminate the small drug dealers and then continue on with the bigger ones. In such a way, if the small enterprises disappear and the largest organized groups survive, a monopoly would be created. This could be the optimum situation because markets of the illegal merchandise would become inefficient in a monopoly as the production would slow down and the prices would increase, making it impossible for others to get into that business. The described scenario would thus eliminate the possibility of a rise in violence. Yet, the Mexican government thought starting directly to the big cartels would avoid the formation of new ones and break down drug trade.

According to social constructivism, “structural change occurs when the relative expected utility of normative vs. deviant behavior changes... when actors redefine who they are and what internalizing a culture involves the formation of a collective
identity...” 149 What does this mean to the US and Mexican governments? For one, there should be a channel allowing for constant communication between the two countries regarding the development of a joint policy regarding the battle against drug trafficking. This, however, will not work if the two countries just implement their respective policies without consultation with and assistance from the other because more often than not, both will tend to fail. There should also be re-conceptualizing of what each implies in their meaning of security, because clearly, both countries have different interpretations regarding the concept.

Wendt pointed out that in order to change the social structure, “the breakdown of an old identity and the emergence of a new one” 150 should be strived for. In terms of the drug trafficking and violence issue regarding both Mexico and the US, what it means for both government is that they must go down to the core of the problems. In Mexico, it lies in the empowered cartels and their system. If the Mexican government could penetrate their system, and not just combat the issues through blood wars, then a structural change could occur. In the case of the US, on the other hand, what needs to be reassessed are the terms of the NAFTA in a way such that it would help to prevent the traffic of the drugs from penetrating deeper into the US market. Not only has the US not taken the blame for the aggravation of drug trafficking nuances from Mexico, it disregards drug use as a social problem among its citizens. Rather than dealing with the drug issue head on, the government puts the blame elsewhere, on an external force. In order to successfully make a structural change, the US thus needs to address the issue of drug use among its citizen first hand.

As the Mexican ex-President Ernesto Zedillo said, “combating drug trafficking cannot be the exclusive responsibility of one single nation. They have to be efforts of

149 Wendt, 1999, pp. 320
150 Ibid, 321
cooperation from the international community to face the social problem”151. The absence of coordination between Mexico and the US in their strategies is what makes the drug dealers, their groups or cartels stronger. This lack of coordination responds to a lack of shared perception of the same problem. Payan’s statement summarizes the above as, “criminals and other undesirables find a wedge of safe in the gray area where joint solutions do not exist”152.


152 Payan, 2006 pp. 126
The Case of Violence due to Drug Trafficking

Although it has been implied throughout this thesis that the adoption of the US government regarding domestic policies by President Calderon on drug trafficking has made an impact on the level of violence in Mexico, it would still be important to consider if it has been theoretically proven that state policies have effects on ethnic violence. The social constructivist approach entails looking into ethnic violence and movement towards secession. A hypothesis of the theory states that “indiscriminate repression against an ethnic/national group generates more antagonism and violence...” If one would follow the social constructivist approach closely, then this hypothesis of the theory would only prove that the stricter policies made the US intervention in the domestic policies of Mexico a catalyst in generating a higher level of violence in the latter.

The presumption of the Mexicans being innately violent as a people is also an important factor to discuss. The fact is that the violence in Mexico is a domestic problem as it relates to drug policy, even without the intervention of the US government. From the viewpoint of the US on the aggravation of the state of violence, it could be assumed that violence is, in fact, an innate social problem in Mexico. As social constructivism argues, violence within the national group could be explained in the following way: the people behind the cartel system, as drug dealers, know who they are and what is legitimate and what they want to achieve. This is evident from the social environment in which they exist. As has been said earlier, conflict is nothing but a social product and the drug cartel violence is no exception. According to the social constructivism theory, the social relationship as such is one in which the actors—in this case, the members of the cartel

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154 Ibid, 14.
system—are permitted to define how they interpret each other's actions, define their interests and pursue their goals. In this case, it is through violence.\textsuperscript{155}

Would the violence resulting from drug trafficking be worse if it were not for the Mexican-American attempts to improve the situation, or would there be fewer problems if both countries had not embarked on an anti-drug campaign in the first place? Policy makers stress the first explanation, while the population favors the second. Calderon’s government argues that although anti-drug strategies have not solved the social problem of drugs, they nevertheless have prevented higher levels of drug consumption and violence. The thousands of people who have lost a member of their family or have been reached by the violence, either from the government or the cartels, believe the opposite. Journalists, drug policy researchers and the public at large, support the idea that there would be fewer problems if the US and Mexico had not embarked on a “war on drugs”. They argue that coercive drug policies create side effects such as human rights abuses, a weaker control of armed forces and, of course, violent conflicts. This work shares the view that due to the way the concept of security is defined by the US and Mexico, their coercive drug policies are potentially problematic.

The variety and intensity of the exchanges and the level of interdependence between Mexico and the US, as well their geographical vicinity, confers a unique character to their kind of bilateral relation which demands special attention from both governments. Drug problems have been getting worse simultaneously with increased US anti-drugs efforts. Especially due the capture of the capos, the violence within and among the cartels increased because the followers are looking for the domination of a group and/or territory. The intervention of the State is perceived as a challenge for the criminal organizations.

The anti-drugs strategy has centralized its efforts diminishing the offer of narcotics with three kinds of actions: “embargos of drugs, money, arms and vehicles; destroying cultivated fields and detentions”. Yet, the difference of perception of security has made both the US and Mexico suffers from the rise of violence of cartels in their will to survive governmental decisions. A re-conception of the term is thus needed, especially the given level of interdependence the two countries have. A set of policies focused on the joint collaboration of Mexico and the US must be settled, because it is not only that drugs and criminals that flow from Mexico to the US, but money and weapons that come from the North to South.

Does the end justify the means? In order to achieve one goal, it does not matter the measures that are taken and the means that are used, or even the people that need to be passed over if the actions lead to the intended purpose. Nevertheless, the strategy started in 2006 by President Calderón has not convinced the population. The thousands of dead people are not worth the end of drug trafficking, principally because it simply cannot be stopped. It might be controlled to some extent, but not end as long as the demand prevails. On the other hand, the government says the results of the strategy will be seen in the future, but some sacrifices are needed now. If the deaths of those that have perished due to the war on drugs help, in a way, to end with the criminal activity, they would have helped their nation just as the heroes of the past did it, thus leading an end to the fear and pain inflicted by the cartels. At the moment, however this ideal is very far away from being achieved, even impossible.

Although this project makes emphasis on the constructivist approach to understand drug trafficking as a source of insecurity due to the violence it generates, the issues involved in understanding American political culture might not play a role in the material understanding of threat and this is the place where realism plays a central role. Yet, those issues informs the ideational sources of insecurity and, without recognizing

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how states come to understand the security threats that realist and state policy makers find, a broad security calculus is left to be just partial.

The introduction of economic considerations involved in the drug issue proved elements overlooked by state actors. Large groups of Mexicans are subject on selling drugs in order to survive. Their “ontological security” is tied to their ability to sell marijuana or coca throughout Mexico and export it to the US. The risk that this activity involves –especially lately- is said to worth, because some individuals rather to live a short-wealth life than a long one in poverty. The identities of these marginalized groups are connected to their material interest (survival) in drug dealing. Changing those interests would consequently change their identities, yet Wendt’s social constructivism is needed here again, because in order to change those interests, first the identities must be modify. According to Wendt, actors first need to know who they are in order to know what they want and not vice versa. However, realism supports the first idea which in turn would enhance Mexico national security by removing the market incentives now present to deal drugs.

Nevertheless, altering current interest would mean finding a solution to poverty in Mexico. Here the realist inclusion of economic variables seems most important because without marginalized groups or cartels able to achieve ontological security, US security is compromised by the economic logic of drug trafficking. Moreover, as Mexican-American proposals result in extra disorder to the cartel, they are hard-pressed into unpopulated regions of Mexico. Cartel’s survival-choices become even more constrained. Currently, cartel economic interests converge with the political interest of sicarios. These latter groups come to represent the only possible protection for drug trafficking and drug dealers’ collective interest of “protection” from both the states, Mexico and the US. The strategies of both governments make it unavoidable that drug dealers define their interest in opposition to them. This analysis suggests that not only Mexican policy does not bring the expected positive outcomes, it has shown to be also counter-productive. Mexican policy created insecurity, just as the US security policy in Colombia did. The frontal fright against cartels in Mexico increases the incentives for market entrance because with
the justification of extra-legal armed political movements, increasing the level of violence, therefore the insecurity.

Making use of a social constructivism approach with the support of realism when need it to explain some issues of the phenomena, a counter state policy project biased on the idea that improving countryside poverty though democratic reforms and micro-development support, is in fact a stronger security mean than current suppression and interdiction efforts. On the domestic level, a constructivist analysis of the drug war inquires US identity performances and the interest they bring about. By challenging an evaluation of US cultural practices, which confronts the drug war as a foreign war and advocate its domestic importance in defining an Other, social constructivism mirrors on how the drug war underlines racism and the negative effects of capitalism at home. American society defines drugs as something existing on the “outside”, harming its cultural constituency that is largely “innocent” because they transfer the domestic effects of the drug war onto a largely poor part of the population.

Taking into account constructivist and realism (when necessary), puts forward far-reaching explanations to the problems related to drugs –production, trafficking and consumption. When both approaches are recognized as basic tools for the creation of an engaged critique of state policy, the resulting strategic proposals test governing state practices. Revealing the association between contingent identities and material interests becomes a central element of a more broad understanding of the drug trafficking. By doing so, engaged academics can demand more of the state than has been usually considered.
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