

Foreword

As St. Augustine once said, “For what are states but large bandit bands, and what are bandit bands but small states?” The same statement still holds true after several centuries, particularly when it comes to the interactions between national governments, organized crime, and drug trafficking on the American continent.

As drug trafficking now forms an integral part of Central American states’ GDP, the main question becomes, “Why haven’t state leaders been able to prevent this issue from getting so ingrained in their geopolitical systems?” William L. Marcy answers this question in this thorough examination of the history and evolution of Mexico’s and Central America’s drug wars.

Drawing on a multitude of primary sources, archival materials, and previous works, Marcy delineates the “narcotrafficking corridor,” explaining how Mexico became a major narcotics producer and transit country, how Central America came to be the regional pivot for narcotics moving northward, and how the Mexican cartels deepened their presence in Central America with the help of gangs and contraband networks.

Beginning with the evolution of US counternarcotics policy in Mexico during the Nixon administration—including the implementation of Operation Intercept and its transformation into the Mexican government’s permanent antinarcotics campaign—Marcy provides a broad survey of Central America’s conflicts and the rise of narcotrafficking during the civil war era. He also demonstrates how traffickers exploited Central America’s fragile peace to turn the region into a transnational pipeline for moving illegal goods, money, weapons, and people.

Narcostates delves into the numerous factors that have contributed to the evolution of the region’s drug wars, along with the effects of narcoviolence, the steps taken to combat it, and the impact of US policy throughout

the region. It provides an in-depth analysis of how Colombian traffickers expanded into Mexico and Central America in the 1980s and 1990s, how Mexican cartels eventually took over the region's distribution networks and routes, and the challenges confronting Mexican and Central American authorities in their efforts to stem the spread of narcotrafficking. The US government's solution has been to militarize the drug war. However, militarization has raised as many questions as it has answered. It is fascinating to read how Marcy draws parallels between the militarization of the drug war and the Colombianization of Mexico.

The United States' aggressive posture and increased military aid to Mexico were critical components of US efforts to secure its southern border while fighting both the drug war and the war on terror. Marcy clearly identifies the link between drug trafficking and terrorism and how proceeds from drug sales might be used to fund terrorist acts. The drug war should not be viewed as a secondary national security concern for the United States. The rise in violence and instability in this region poses a serious threat to the United States. In addition, given the growing power of the Mexican cartels, it is not unreasonable to believe that the drug war will eventually lead to a political meltdown in Mexico. The economic and political consequences of this meltdown could exacerbate the already acute refugee and immigration crisis or invite hostile foreign actors to intervene along the US border, potentially destabilizing the United States from within.

Marcy's book also serves as a warning for my country, Brazil, as it comes at a critical and dramatic juncture. Following several years of progress against money laundering, drug trafficking, and organized crime, several political figures linked to narcotrafficking have returned to politics. Brazil's progress seems to have stalled, which will have an impact on the region's political and economic climate. This is something that historians will have to investigate in the future. For the time being, Marcy's book offers an excellent and in-depth exposé of what happens to states when drug trafficking, criminal organizations, and civil war collide.

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