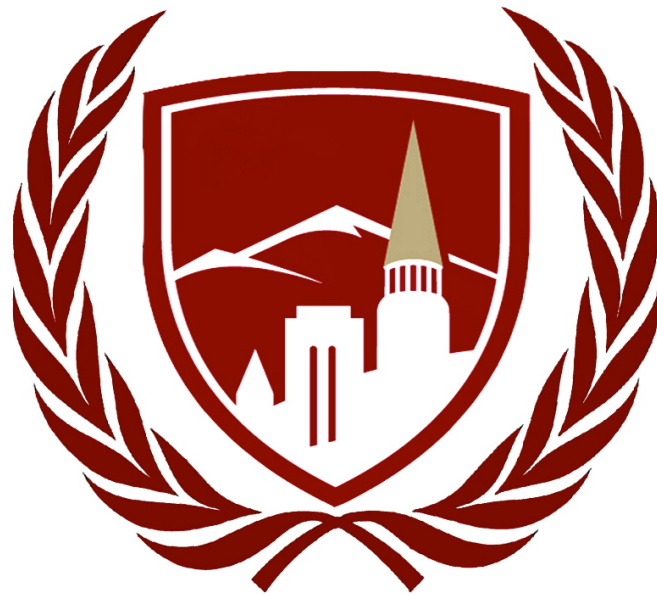


UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



INTERMEDIATE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Drug Trafficking in Venezuela



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Introduction

The U.N. defines drug trafficking as “illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws”.¹ Drug trafficking took off in Colombia in the mid 1970’s when Mexico began to crack down on the trade in their country. When Mexico was no longer supplying the quantity of drugs that they had been in the past, much of that trade moved south to Colombia.² Originally the trade was primarily of marijuana. However, the trade expanded, drug leaders were able to use profits from selling marijuana to Latin American countries and the United States, to expand their trade into cocaine and heroine as well. The trade of these drugs expanded towards the end of the 20th century and has continued to be a present issue today as it is currently estimated that the trade of drugs in Colombia is about a \$10 billion industry.

Historical Background

As the illicit trade has grown over the past forty years, political corruption has become an increasing issue as leaders of the drug trade gain power in the political system. The cartels have gained this power through their money and have proved to be a violent threat to Colombian society. This violence began to become prominent in the 1980’s in Colombia, when the drug leaders gained strength and began threatening the country with violence.³ When faced with possible sanctions from the Ministry of Justice in 1984, individuals associated with the drug cartel assassinated the minister of justice.⁴ One year later guerillas associated with one of the major drug cartels entered the Ministry of Justice building, taking dozens of hostages. This resulted in a military stand off that resulted in over 100 dead, including more than half of the Supreme Court Justices.⁵ The brazen nature of the drug cartel’s actions showed that the cartels believed they were becoming untouchable and did not have to play by the government’s rules. Encounters like these became a symbol of the growing influence and power of the drug cartels, both over the people of Colombia as well as the government of Colombia. By the mid-1980s, there were two prominent nation-wide drug cartels that controlled all the cocaine trade in Colombia.⁶

Since the 80’s the cartels have only continued to grow and their power has only grown with them. However, the organizational structure of cartels has changed, presenting new challenges to the governments attempting to enforce drug laws. Due to joint US and Colombian operations, the two major drug cartels in Colombia had fallen, their leaders imprisoned or killed. After these operations, it became apparent that the government had developed ways to track the movements and products of nation wide cartels. As such,

¹ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/>

² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/126016/Colombia/25343/The-growth-of-drug-trafficking-and-guerrilla-warfare>

³ <http://bogota.usembassy.gov/testimony9.html>

⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/126016/Colombia/25343/The-growth-of-drug-trafficking-and-guerrilla-warfare>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <http://www.insightcrime.org/organized-crime-profile/colombia>

drug cartels became much smaller and decentralized in order to avoid detection.⁷ For example, one drug cartel would specialize in transporting cocaine from Colombia to Mexico, another cartel would specialize in making the paste necessary for the manufacture of cocaine, and a third cartel would specialize in running the laboratories manufacturing the cocaine.⁸ This decentralization of drug cartels also led to much smaller groups of violent offenders associated with cartels. Because of this, violence in Colombia became more about rebel guerilla tactics than outright war with the military.

During the 80s when the drug trade was expanding, cartel leaders built up sizeable cash assets, making them and others involved in their organizations incredibly wealthy. While this made the drug business incredibly lucrative for citizens, it also made it incredibly lucrative for police, government officials, and politicians.⁹ As such, with the rise of drug cartels came the rise of corruption within the government. Many government officials accepted drug cartel money in some form at least once during the course of their careers. Because of the level of government and police corruption, it made enforcement of drug laws exceedingly difficult.¹⁰ This government corruption played a huge role in the sustained growth of the cartels throughout the 1980s and 90s.

Current Status

The drug problem in Colombia is still a very real and present threat today. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration and Colombian Police, today there are currently more than 300 active drug smuggling organizations in Colombia.¹¹ These organizations pose a threat to the people of Colombia and that threat spreads to all countries in which their trade is involved.

The illegal drug trade has not only posed a physical threat in the form of violence, but it has also become an economic issue. Because all of the money involved in the trade is laundered, it is not taken into account in the country's economy. This has made inflation of land and property prices skyrocket, which makes it difficult for those citizens not involved in the trade to own land. This obstacle on the property ladder has made it difficult for economic growth to occur in the country.¹²

Needless to say, besides the crime, corruption, and economic hardships the drug trade has caused, the mass production and distribution of illicit drugs leads to illicit drug use both domestically and in all countries to which the contraband is distributed. The production, trade and use of illicit drugs are all counterproductive to the Millennium Development Goals that the United Nations has created in hopes to decrease the negative affects of illicit drugs.¹³ The Organization of American States (OAS) needs to take action on this issue because the trafficking in Colombia has the possibility of negative implications for

⁷ <http://www.insightcrime.org/organized-crime-profile/colombia>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ http://www.controlrisks.com/webcasts/studio/foco/foco_issue_1/english/article_2.html

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/business/inside/colombian.html>

¹² Ibid

¹³ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml>

the entire region as the trade travels beyond the boarder of the country and into most all other member countries of the OAS. As trafficking in Colombia is controlled, the reach of the distribution areas will decrease and therefore the illegal use of drugs will decline in all areas that have been reached by the trade efforts of Colombian cartels over the past forty years. Additionally, it is appropriate for the OAS to address because while the drugs are distributed throughout the continent it is possible that the violence associated with the trade spreads as well.

While the drug trade is still especially concerning, even more concerning is the violence that has resulted from the drug trade. The OAS reports that violence stemming from the drug trade is one of the most significant issues facing Colombia today.¹⁴ Conventional wisdom states that ending the drug trade will end the violence. However, violence is starting to become its own issue, as drug cartel and guerilla leaders have begun to fight against the government attempting to come into power, rather than just to assert their dominance.¹⁵ Thus, some leaders have begun focusing on stopping the violence rather than stopping drug trade. However, no one can deny the fact that most guerilla leaders have deep ties with the drug trade. Recently, the CIA has been taking action and has killed an estimated twelve leading rebels involved in the drug trade.¹⁶ Though this disruption in the cartels may be a step towards improving the situation, a more widespread and comprehensive approach must be taken in order to completely control the situation. The United Nations has attempted to put such plans in place with little success.¹⁷

Because the situation in Colombia is unique compared to other countries who have drug trafficking issues and especially compared to those in which it is not such an issue, it may be necessary for a long term and comprehensive plan to be created specifically for the situation in Colombia. Rather than relying on the United Nations to solve this problem, or to leave Colombia to solve this problem on their own, it is important that the OAS steps up as a smaller organization with a more specific focus, steps in to help Colombia and thus the entire American continent overcome the this threat.

Bloc Positions

Colombia: Recently Colombia has vanished from the world's spotlight and has received very little media attention. However, the Colombian government is working hard to ensure that the world is cognizant of the continuing violence and drug trade. Colombia believes that the solution to the drug problem lies in the cooperation of all involved parties, not just the Colombian government. As such, they are relying on organizations such as the UN and IOAS to provide aid and support their quest to end drug and guerilla related violence.

¹⁴ <http://www.cato.org/blog/look-oas-report-drug-policy-america>

¹⁵ <http://0-www.jstor.org.bianca.penlib.du.edu/stable/4490481?seq=3>

¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/22/cia-helped-colombia-kill-rebel-leaders>

¹⁷ https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=VI-19&chapter=6&lang=en

United States: Since the 1980s the US has given huge amounts of monetary aid to the Colombian government in the hopes that it would help stem the flow of cocaine into the US. In 1999 this effort was renewed with the introduction of *Plan Colombia*, which collectively refers to all US legislation and support aimed at undermining the drug cartels. The US also has extensive extradition treaties with Colombia so that the extradition process of Colombian drug cartel leaders to the US for prosecution is much easier.

Organization of American States: The OAS maintains that the drug problem is not caused by the presence of drugs, but rather the weak governments and institutions present in most of South America. Currently the OAS is discussing the pros and cons of making the drugs markets legal, in hopes that this would decrease violence and bring stabilities to countries' economies. There are also talks of focusing efforts on violence prevention instead of drug prohibition, with proponents arguing that the main problems to address are violence related rather than drug related.

Prep Questions

- How is the drug trade different in Colombia than other Southern American countries?
- Does the US have a different role in ending the drug trade than other less developed countries?
- Can the problems of drug trafficking and guerrilla violence ever be separated from each other or will the two always be irrevocably connected?
- Should other South American countries be expected to help combat Colombia's drug problem?
- Have UN actions regarding the drug trade and "War on Drugs" been too optimistic and failed to realistically see the world, or should countries continue to work towards a drug free world?