

3. How Mexico waged war on drugs

A prime reason that Colombia has been targeted as a major producer of illegal narcotics is that nearby Mexico has successfully refused to continue to play that role, just one aspect of its definance of the International Monetary Fund's ban on high-technology development.

Likewise, Mexico first "inherited" the drug trade when Turkey began its crackdown on outlaw drug production. The effective ban on the legal growing of poppies initiated by the Turkish government in 1972, in collaboration with the U.S. government to eradicate heroin production in Turkey, forced the British-Shanghai drug-running networks to move their operation elsewhere.

When the then Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), together with the Turkish government, began their offensive against heroin production, Turkey was providing the U.S. with 75 percent of its heroin supply. Now Mexico was chosen to take over Turkey's role as the U.S.'s main supplier. Conditions in Mexico were perfect. The marijuana drug-running networks were already in place and there was no transportation problem, given Mexico's proximity to the U.S. The northern region of the country, where most of the heroin and the bulk of the marijuana were being grown, was snugly in the hands of or protected by the large landholders (*latifundistas*), historically a key link in the world's British-dominated drug-running networks.

Within two years Mexico was turned into the major supplier of heroin to the 500,000 heroin addicts in the U.S., providing 89 percent of consumption. Seventy-five percent of the marijuana consumed in the U.S. also came from Mexico.

By the end of 1974, it became clear to the government of Mexican President Luis Echeverria that the land-based, military-police efforts to eradicate poppy production were doomed to be a losing battle. The paramilitary drug apparatus was well organized and offered full protection to the peasantry engaged in drug cultivation, while ensuring that antidrug forces in the region did not live long. According to the DEA, after "intensified diplomatic efforts by both countries to find a basis for a solution to the problem," the Mexican government asked for U.S. assistance.

Targeting the regions

Mexico's war against drugs, Operation TRIZO, was divided into two phases. During the first phase, the known drug-growing areas were divided into five zones. A war room was set up with maps of the targeted zones. Then, using ultramodern detection equipment, perfected during the 1960s, the operation TRIZO teams made photographic studies of the zones;

with special cameras, they detected the location and size of both marijuana and poppy fields.

In addition to U.S. technical assistance, such as helicopters, planes, aerial photograph equipment and spray equipment, DEA personnel began training members of the Mexican Federal Judicial Police (MFJP) and antinarcotics personnel to be able to continue directing the drug eradication program once U.S. advisory assistance was no longer necessary.

It was Mexico that made sure that the U.S. drug eradication program gave stopping marijuana production the same priority as stopping heroin production. A White House paper prepared by President Ford's Domestic Council on fighting marijuana cultivation stated that the U.S. could not assign marijuana the same priority as heroin. But in a press conference given in Mexico City in 1975, the Attorney General of Mexico Ojeda Paullada responded to this statement by saying, "This (question) is one of concern to us because, in the first place, we are honor-bound by an inter-treaty to prohibit this substance as indeed is the U.S. . . .

"Second, as I have repeatedly pointed out to visiting U.S. officials, it has persons who traffic in marijuana are the same ones who traffic in heroin."

The DEA-proposed spraying program that began in January of 1976 included the eradication of marijuana and heroin.

Targeted areas were put under military control, road blocks set up, leading Mexican drug dealers jailed, and *latifundistas'* lands were expropriated. Poppy and marijuana fields were bombed with the herbicide Paraquat. Paraquat was chosen and recommended by the DEA because of its lack of harmful effects on personnel using the spray, on the peasant populations or on the soil. Precise mapping of the drug fields enabled planes to destroy only targeted plantations, not crops.

The end of Phase I four months later netted a total of 22,887 poppy fields for a total of 14,000 acres of poppies.

Phase II of the operation went into immediate preparation. On May 10, a 25-day reconnaissance mission was launched using U.S. aircraft flown by DEA pilots and crews, and accompanied by MFJP spotters. Areas under surveillance were increased by an additional 9,000 square miles.

The second phase of TRIZO began in September of the same year. According to a DEA report on the program, "During the first five weeks of the new campaign, 1,116 acres of poppy fields were destroyed, as compared with 405 acres during that same period the previous year — a ratio of almost three to one." The military remained in the sprayed area, thus

insuring that replanting would not occur. According to the present Deputy Head of the Mexican Drug Control program, "The Americans have confirmed that there is less Mexican heroin in the U.S. and that its purity is down to about 4 percent from 40-50 percent three years ago." There has been a 50 percent reduction in the number of deaths due to heroin overdose reported in the 1977-78 period.

In terms of the effectiveness of the marijuana spraying program, Mexico's Assistant Attorney General Alba Leyva told a *New York Times* reporter last May that "we found loads of sprayed marijuana dumped by the roadside because the sellers couldn't find a buyer for it . . . the traffickers aren't stupid."

New drug haven in Colombia

Once it became clear to the controllers of international drug trafficking that the U.S. and Mexico were committed to ridding both countries of drugs, new areas for cultivating poppies and marijuana had to be found. Colombia presented an excellent solution, having perfect conditions for growing and smuggling marijuana — a huge coastline, access to two oceans, and a poverty-stricken population which could be brought into a production-processing apparatus. In addition, the thousands of families involved in coffee-growing, as well as the coffee-processing, packing, and shipping apparatus could easily be converted to produce, process, and ship marijuana.

Billions of dollars were immediately pumped into the northern region of Colombia. Peasants were bought off or coerced into planting marijuana instead of traditional crops. Irrigation systems were set up, and agronomers were sent to offer credits and "teach" the peasantry how to get a better yield and more "potent" crops. The three major cities in the region, Santa Marta, Riohacha, and Barranquilla, were turned into centers for drug money transactions. Over 100,000 people are now directly or indirectly involved in the drug-smuggling operation, as body guards, paramilitary personnel, growers, pickers, processors, or runners of the crop to the "mother boats" which wait out at sea to bring the marijuana to the U.S. Within two years, Colombia has replaced Mexico as the major supplier of marijuana to the U.S., supplying it with 75 percent of all the marijuana consumed.

Pothead media mourn Mexico drug destruction

Alternativa, Colombia, Aug. 1978: Mr. Bensinger (head of the U.S. Office on Narcotics) mentioned the success of similar (militarization — ed.) measures taken in Mexico, also under pressure from the U.S. In effect in Mexico, and particularly in the state of Sinoloa, drastic militarization measures have included intense bombardment of the marijuana and poppy areas with disastrous effects for the affected zones. The indiscriminate use of herbicides, defoliants and even Napalm to destroy the huge plantations from the air has produced irreparable ecological damage, destruction of subsistence crops and poisoning of the waters and animals. Not to mention the physiological consequences for the population in general...

High Times, U.S., Nov. 1977: The government doesn't call it a war — they say it's a "police action" against heroin dealers. But it is really an illegal, undeclared military campaign with full air support and biochemical weapons trained against a few million defenseless peasants and some fields of flowers.

This much is known: The United States is involved in its largest direct intervention in a foreign country since the Vietnam War. The enemies this time are Mexican campesinos and marijuana exporters working high in the Sierra Madre that overlooks the Pacific Ocean...(with) indiscriminate use of defoliants proven to cause birth defects, disease and wanton destruction of plant life throughout the countryside. By the time the Dope War grinds to a halt, nearly a fifth of Mexico's soil will be a poisoned wasteland where nothing will grow.

Thousands of acres of marijuana and poppy plants gassed and burned on orders of the DEA. 100 or more dead.

Above all, 3.8 million peasants condemned permanently to live in below-subsistence poverty.