

Mexico's drug kingpin is a Bushman, too

by Gretchen Small

Mexico-bashing has become a favorite hobbyhorse of leading U.S. Republican congressmen, who charge that Mexico has become a "narco-state" run by the cartels, upon which war must be waged. Yet, the head of the drug cartel apparatus in Mexico is George Bush's principal Mexican ally, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the President of Mexico in 1989-94, hailed as a hero by those same Republicans for his free trade program.

The government of Salinas's successor, President Ernesto Zedillo, against whom those Republicans would wage war, has moved against the cartels. Each time, it has run smack into the Salinas machine, still the most powerful political machine in Mexico, precisely because Salinas and his family are still protected by the Bush-Wall Street-Kissinger group. As the *Wall Street Journal* never ceases to remind the Mexican government, to attack Carlos Salinas is to attack them; Salinas, a director of Dow Jones & Co. which publishes the *Journal*, works for them.

Drugs: a family affair

Although the drug trade started to grow at a dizzying pace under President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88), it was under Carlos Salinas's regime, with its Bush administration-sponsored free trade economic model, that the cartels consolidated their power in Mexico. Under the Salinas regime, marijuana cultivation declined, but with that thrown as a sop to anti-drug forces, the country was handed over to the drug trade. Opium cultivation and production of heroin soared, while Mexico became a primary transshipment point for cocaine coming up from Colombia into United States, and entered the ranks of the major drug-money-laundering centers.

At the same time, a narco-terrorist force, which first surfaced in Chiapas in the Jan. 1, 1994 Zapatista uprising, was consolidated as a nationwide force—under the personal protection of the President's brother, Raúl Salinas, an official in the President's National Solidarity Program, Pronasol, and the government food distribution system, Conasupo.

On Aug. 16, 1996, the Zedillo government struck against cartel control over the Federal Judicial Police (PJF), purging over 700 officers, because the PJF was about to become a wholly-owned agency of the cartels. Who had appointed 70% of the state police commanders, 22 of whom are today under arrest as drug traffickers? A PJF director under the Salinas administration, Adrian Carrera, and Carlos Salinas's personnel secretary, Justo Ceja, working with the President's brother, Raúl Salinas.

Raúl Salinas sits in jail, under investigation by Swiss, U.S., and Mexican officials for links to money laundering, including drug money, and charged with ordering the murder of PRI ruling party Secretary General José Francisco Ruiz Massieu. According to a Nov. 23, 1995 report prepared by the Mexican Attorney General's office with the help of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. and Mexican governments have evidence that, right after Carlos Salinas received the nomination as the Presidential candidate of the PRI in 1987, his brother Raúl struck a deal with Gulf Cartel kingpin Juan García Abrego, guaranteeing the cartel protection for as long as his brother was President. The Gulf Cartel, at its height, functioned as "the shipping arm of the Cali Cartel . . . their United Parcel Service," in the words of one U.S. official.

Raúl fulfilled his promise, even hiding García Abrego on his properties upon occasion. But with Salinas out, and Raúl in jail as of February 1995, the drug kingpin's protection was gone. He was arrested by the Zedillo government on Jan. 14, and shipped off to the United States to face drug-trafficking and murder charges.

Protected by NAFTA

Numerous Bush administration officials have since admitted that they knew what was going on in the Salinas government. Richard Thornburgh, Bush's Attorney General, admitted to Mexico's *El Financiero* on March 28, 1995, that the U.S. Justice Department had the Salinas administration's drug ties under investigation from its beginning. In 1990, things "took an unexpected turn," he said. "Salinas said that he wanted to negotiate the Free Trade Agreement and the Bush administration was happy. Salinas at that point became not only the best friend of Bush in Latin America, but the 'golden model' for developing countries. Corruption and the war on drugs went into the background."

"People desperately wanted drugs not to become a complicating factor for NAFTA. . . . There was a degree of illicit activity that was just accepted," John P. Walters, senior official for international drug policy in the Bush White House, told the *New York Times* in July 1995. Another Bush official, former Customs Commissioner Carol B. Hallett, concurred: "They [other Bush administration officials] said we could not make drugs part of the debate. . . . I think it was a terrible mistake not to tie the two together."

But the NAFTA free trade program was premised on the capture of drug monies, to bail out the financial system. In a paper delivered to a 1994 CIA-FBI symposium on drugs, James Moody, retired chief of the FBI's organized crime division, admitted that U.S. agencies knew the privatization program of Salinas had become a vehicle for the cartels to buy up the economy. "The FBI notes that many of these firms are being purchased by Mexican and Colombian drug-trafficking organizations. These semi-state firms are comprised of significant financial institutions, factories, and leading industrial and service-oriented businesses which are worth billions of dollars," he said.