

Forum: Disarmament Commission

Issue: Combatting the dangers of organized crime in South America

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Introduction

Organized crime has been a prevalent issue in the region of South America with crime syndicates being able to commit acts of violence, financial crime, trafficking, etc. These groups have been accredited for producing South America's supply of illicit drugs and the illegal trafficking of children, women, etc. Though a majority of South America nations are signatories of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNOTC)—also known as the Palermo Convention—and have also ratified it, organized crime has been a common practice in these countries.

One of the most notorious types of organized crime organizations in South America are the drug cartels. Many in South America recognize the infamous Pablo Escobar—once the leader of one of the biggest drug cartels—for being extremely successful in running the illicit business of smuggling the drug Cocaine into the US. However, he didn't only focus on the drug business, he also focused on other matters such as government bribery and murder. As a result his cartel was able to expand and focus on other illicit matters outside of smuggling drugs.

Many criminal organizations have also been accredited to numerous counts of human right violations. Human trafficking is common in South America as the region is usually accredited for being poorer leaving civilians more vulnerable from these trafficking ring's exploitation. Similar with drug cartels, trafficking rings also have the resources to focus on other matters. A police investigation in Peru found out that the country's former chief of police was actually an enabler of the trafficking ring.

Admst this countless types of criminal deeds, it is imperative that countries must immediately take action in order to prevent organized crime groups from committing more acts of violence and obtaining new abilities before they possess the equivalent power of a member state.

Definition of Key Terms

Organized Crime

Criminal acts planned and committed by transnational, national, or local centralized groups of criminals. Examples of organized crime groups—sometimes called gangs—include: drug cartels, terrorist organizations, prostitution rings, and mafias. Note that other organizations such as states, police forces, and corporations may use

organized-crime methods, however because they are formal social institutions, these organizations are not considered organized crime groups. Organized crime groups have the power of committing acts of violence, financial crime, cyber crime, corruption, and trafficking. Organized crime gives criminals an advantage over standard crime as there is more resources in the organization further presenting more power into their hands.

South America

South America is one of the seven continents in the world and is located on the south-western hemisphere of the globe. Many countries in South America are affected by organized crime including Brazil, Colombia, and Peru and therefore are relatively ranked as unsafe nations.

Drug cartel

A drug cartel is a form of organized crime that mainly focuses on the illicit trafficking of drugs however can participate in government corruption, human rights violation, and acts of violence. South American countries have been infamous for cartels such as the Medellín cartel and the Cali cartel which left a huge mark on the illicit drug industry. Though the presence of cartels in South America have now shifted more towards Central America, drug cartels in South America still remain a prominent threat to all member nations both inside and outside South America.

Background

History

South America has long been one of the poorest regions in the world. A victim of the colonization by European powers invading their lands, taking all of the resources, and turning many of the natives into slaves, South America was left with a shattered future. Many civilians were left in poverty and couldn't escape from it. Governments also had little power in carrying out actions and people viewed many authorities as those who were seeking for personal benefit. Because of the poverty, many resorted to crime which—as a result—helped establish the foundation for organized crime organizations.

Rise of the Drug Cartels

In the 1960s, the drug trade was dominated by Argentina, Brazil, and Chile which mainly produced marijuana—which was more popular at the time. However by the 70s, the industry had shifted to Colombia. A small time criminal by the name of Pablo Escobar took advantage of this industry shift by seizing the opportunity to supply the US market with cocaine to feed the US's growing cocaine addiction. He did this by smuggling coca paste into Colombia, refining it, and paying “mules” to smuggle it into the USA. Through this, he was able to earn huge sums of money from sales and established the Medellín cartel. At its greatest height, he was able to earn 4 billion US dollars per year controlling 80% of the cocaine supply in the United States. Though he was known to be very violent, he rallied support from among Colombia's citizens. At the time, a majority of Colombia was in poverty and the government was unable to implement any order or law.

Wherever the government couldn't step in for the poor, Escobar would step in therefore gathering much support from Colombia's poor population. Through Escobar's profits, he was able to easily bribe a majority of enforcement and government officials. Even though he was paying a large sum into bribes, the profits exceeded the cost for bribes so much that it didn't matter. If it didn't work out, he would resort to violence. Anyone who crossed with Escobar was killed by his legion of sicarios—hired guns—some even as young as 14. Escobar was even able to obtain a seat in parliament passing treaties that benefited the Medellín cartel. In 1984, a justice minister by the name of Lara Bonilla, who had exposed Escobar as a drug baron, was assassinated. Escobar wasn't convicted however Colombian president Belisario Betancur declared war on drug traffickers sending Colombia into a decade of violence. The murder rate soared with in 1991, a total of 28,000 murders across Colombia and 7,081 in the city of Medellín alone. Finally on December 2, 1993, police forces surrounded Escobar's complex and killed him. The cartel split into many factions and the golden age of the illicit drug trade ended. With Escobar gone, other cartels started rising such as the Cali cartel and Sinaloa cartel. However the drug market mainly moved to Mexico. By the 90s, 80% of cocaine entered through Mexico. Escobar's reign scarred a whole generation of youth in crime and Colombia today suffers from the effects of the drug trade even today.

Rise of Militias

With many South American governments being weak to implement any order, it wasn't hard for armed groups to arise in the region. Countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil etc. have been affected by guerrilla forces, militias, and neo-paramilitary groups for decades. Some groups have even been organized by civilians themselves. For example in Brazil, militia members are mostly members of the Brazilian federal police forces who commit crimes that go unpunished. Many South American countries view these militant groups as a huge threat to the government as not only can they overthrow the government, they participate in many other forms of organized crime such as drug trafficking and human trafficking. Not only that, Residents in the region have established their own self-defense groups. They view themselves as the real law enforcers however many of them are also committing crimes such as femicides and robbing. Some militias serve under certain government officials which makes it harder to combat these groups.

Current Issues

There are many issues in South America today that make the continent one of the poorest and most dangerous. Many of these issues are not being dealt with in an efficient manner by the government both due to the mistrust of the people and corruption. This leaves many civilians unprotected who resort in illegal migration north into countries such as the US seeking for a better life. The civilians are truly some of the biggest victims of organized crime in South America.

Human Trafficking

Trafficking is a huge issue in South America, especially child trafficking. Many children are kidnapped by trafficking rings. Street children are even more at risk as they are unsurveyed by the government and are most

likely to disappear without anyone knowing. Many young children are sold for illegal adoptions with some of them being sold into physical labor. However as many reach an older age, trafficking rings start selling them into sex slavery. Lots of children are trafficked north into Mexico where prostitute rings control their lives from there on.

Drug trade

Even though many drug cartels have migrated into Mexico, South America is still the largest plantation ground for drugs. In 2017, around 171,000 hectares of South America's land was used to grow coca—the key ingredient for cocaine. Local gangs take the coca from the farmers and process it to make the final drug. In the 21st century, many drugs are exported out of South America by going through land or going off the coast of the Pacific ocean into Mexico where it is smuggled into the United States for sales. The drug trade today not only focuses on the USA, it also focuses on other customers such as Australia and Spain. For example, cartels have smuggled drugs into West Africa which was then smuggled into European countries such as Spain.

Corruption

One main reason why governments in the region cannot act as quickly is because of the level of corruption in South America. Many officials are bribed by organized crime groups for the benefit of the groups to go unpunished and unsurveyed. Some officials even use organized crime groups for their own protection or plan to overthrow the government. Cases of corruption have happened in countries such as Brazil and Venezuela. Currently Venezuela is in a crisis with the Maduro party and organized crime groups have taken advantage of this crisis to gain more power in the government.

Murder

South America is the murder capital of the world. Only 8% of the world's population is in Latin America and yet in 2013, one in three of the world's murders happened in Latin America. It is very cheap and easy to kill in South America. For example in Brazil, only 8 in 100 homicides results in a conviction while the global average is 43 per 100. Because of these high levels of impunity and weak institutions, it is difficult to lower the murder rates. The militias also only provide more danger as many disregard their duty to defend the people and commit crimes themselves resulting in the civilians being in great danger of being killed.

Major Parties Involved

Brazil

In 2011, for every 100,000 people there were 27 murders in Brazil. This makes Brazil one of the deadliest countries on Earth. In many instances, these crimes are the result of gangs and cartels that form within disenfranchised communities. Brazilian law enforcement has also immensely suffered, and many of Brazil's military police have been killed by these gangs. There are three large organized crime groups in Brazil: Amigos dos Amigos, Comando Vermelho, and Primeiro Comando da Capital. Together, these groups smuggle drugs across the nation, and are influential in the Brazilian judicial process. Although Brazil is a signatory of the UNOTC, the state has not clearly defined organized crime in its penal codes. In fact, organized crime groups control some prisons in Brazil.

Mexico

Mexico is also a nation that has fallen victim to immensely high crime rates. The nation is making an effort to implement better judicial mechanisms to address these issues, and formulate an anti-organized crime system, including adopting legal concepts similar to that of the US. In recent years, there has been increased tension as a result of competing organized crime groups, after a power vacuum created by the capture of "El Chapo" Guzman.

Guatemala

As a result of immensely high poverty and corruption, organized crime groups have been able to prosper throughout Guatemala, building a large drug trafficking network. Corruption plays a large role in this, and former high-ranking politicians and even a President (President Otto Perez Molina) are serving jail time for bribery. Money laundering is common within the government, and dozens of arrests have been made regarding this issue.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime: adopted 29 September 2003 by the United Nations General Assembly, this convention provides international regulations and protocols aimed at addressing how the UN and multilateral operations against organized crime groups are to be conducted.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: the central UN agency who's goal is to combat and address the use of drugs, criminal activity, and organized crime.
- The Conference of the Parties to UNOTC Resolution 8/4: prepares technical assistance from member states through the form of working groups and resources for the carrying out of the UNOTC's provisions.
- The Conference of the Parties to UNOTC Resolution 9/2: deals directly with the production of firearms, outlining important measures to address this issue such as introducing the UNOTC's protocols within domestic legislation.

Possible Solutions

- More resources devoted into investigating money laundering and corruption. Corruption within governments is what allows drug trafficking to prosper, and thus greater international scrutiny could help combat this threat.
- Establishing a greater presence of NGOs and UN agencies in the region to help those affected by organized crime would help lessen the immense damages caused by these groups, offering assistance for those who desperately need it.
- Better drug education could help deter potential users from turning to drugs and help lower demand for drugs, taking out a main part of organized crime in South America.
- Overall economic policies aimed at improving the general quality of life of people living in South America could turn people away from joining drug cartels. These policies also have lots of other benefits to society as they deal with access to important goods and services such as clean water.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. <https://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainenomics> (Wall Street Journal Cocainenomics)
This website is super useful if you want to find more about the history of the medillean cartel and other drug cartels at its highest point and also its affect on the world into the 21st century.