

**THE INTERNATIONAL EXPLOITATION OF DRUG WARS AND
WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT**

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
OCTOBER 12, 2011

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. It is a privilege to be with you to discuss a topic of such importance to U.S. national security and to relations with our hemispheric neighbors.

Latin America is a region transformed from Cold War days, when politically-motivated violence led to untold pain and suffering across the hemisphere, from revolution, coups and dirty wars in South America to hot wars in Central America. Out of that difficult period, however, came a hemispheric commitment to democracy, first agreed by consensus at the 1994 Summit of the Americas in Miami. The Summit institutionalized the concept that full participation in the hemispheric community requires democratic governance, a commitment that was formalized almost exactly 10 years ago with the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in Lima, Peru.

The hemispheric commitment to democracy is a recognition that strong democracies, with strong institutions, provide the fairest means of governance. As a result, they offer the best inoculation to Latin American societies against the scourge of political violence, much of which flared in previous decades as a result of the perception that authoritarian political and economic systems were exploitative and unfair.

At the same time, however, nations where democratic institutions and state control are weak or threatened can become incubators for criminal activities, creating permissive environments that can be exploited by those intent on pursuing extra-legal activities.

Perhaps the best example of such a scenario is the tri-border region of South America, a somewhat lawless region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay that has been linked to fund-raising for extra-legal global actors including Hezbollah. Criminal enterprises—primarily smuggling operations—provide ill-gotten gains that can then be transferred abroad. At the same time, the lack of effective state control has encouraged extra-regional actors to set up and expand their operations from the tri-border region to elsewhere in Latin America.

Elsewhere in Latin America, the situation is less clear-cut. For many years, the Government of Colombia exercised only cursory control, if any, over much of the country. This lack of state control was exploited by the FARC, ELN, and other guerrilla movements, allowing them the freedom to build contacts with other extra-regional revolutionary groups including Spain's ETA. As the Government of Colombia has effectively taken the fight to the guerrillas over the past decade, political violence has been dramatically reduced and the guerrillas have increasingly turned into criminal enterprises, making common cause with drug traffickers as a means of survival. In the case of Colombia, however, political insurgency pre-dated drug trafficking; links between the two came only in later years as the political insurgency was effectively degraded.

There is no doubt that permissive environments can attract global mischief-makers, and that the drugs trade, by undermining the effectiveness of, and public confidence in, democratic institutions, can lead in some ways to such permissive environments. Central America is perhaps the best example in this regard. The region has become one of the most dangerous on earth, according to a recent Senate report, more violent than Mexico. After a generation of bipartisan efforts to midwife democracy in Central America, the institutions of these mostly young, fragile democracies are being hollowed out, corrupted by the drug traffickers and their allies. Impunity is rampant, and the police and security forces in several countries have been penetrated by the drug gangs. At this point we do not see a pattern of politically-motivated violence in Central America stemming from the drugs trade, but it is certainly true that several of these countries are in difficult straits. Violence is a daily reality for far too many citizens of the Central American region. We should be working with these nations to ensure that the inclination to politically-motivated violence does not arise.

Mexico, too, of course, is faced by the scourge of the illegal drugs trade. As in Central America, at this point we do not see a pattern of politically-motivated violence engendered by the cartels; rather, we see the cartels fighting each other, and the Mexican security forces, to maintain control over lucrative drug transit corridors into the United States. The cartels prefer either a weak state or a state that turns a blind eye to their activities; they do not appear to want to overthrow the state at this point nor are they using violence to support one political actor or party over another. Nonetheless, what they are doing is eroding the sovereignty of their neighbors, particularly Guatemala, by crossing the border and setting up operations in Central America. Much of Guatemala's huge Peten region lacks effective state control and has become a safe cross-border sanctuary for Mexican drug cartels.

With this in mind, it is vital that we work in tandem with democratically-elected leaders across the region to address these issues and help to ensure that criminal activities do not blossom into politically-motivated efforts. We can best do this by supporting the institutions of democracy. This would include an emphasis on vetting and professionalization of police and security forces and a focus on the entire administration of justice, which in some cases has been overwhelmed by the demands of the fight against drugs. It also implies an attack on corruption and the elimination of violence against journalists, including social networkers, who work to expose violent offenders.

At the same time, we can do a better job in this country to reduce the demand for drugs which is driving much of the insecurity impacting the region. For example, we should re-stigmatize illegal drug use by linking it publicly to death and destruction in Mexico and Central America, much as the blood diamond and conflict minerals campaigns have effectively done in parts of Africa. A renewed public campaign, including new-media which potentially reaches more of the target audience, would be an important place to begin. Violence has spiked and people are dying gruesome, preventable deaths in Mexico and Central America as a result of U.S. consumer tastes. This needs to stop.

We can also think creatively about ways to support democratic allies in our common fight by considering the transfer of excess equipment, as appropriate, from the downsizing effort in Iraq that is now underway. In particular, mobility and communications equipment would be useful for a region with vast un-policed and under-resourced areas. At the same time, we must also do a better job working to prevent the supply of automatic guns and other weaponry to the region. Otherwise, criminals will continue to have access to firepower that can challenge the ability of the state to control its own territory, one of the key indicators of a failing state and a means through which politically-motivated ends can begin to take root. Without weaponry, the threat of violence of any sort is reduced.

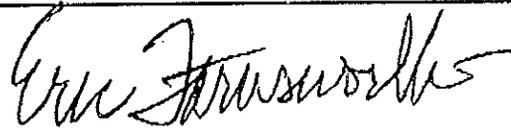
For the most part, drug traffickers and others involved in illegal activities prefer weak states which allow them to conduct their affairs unmolested. They do not seek to *overthrow* the states. Nonetheless, by their destabilizing presence and ability to generate large sums of untraceable cash resources, they do have the potential of supporting such groups, as in Colombia, to the extent they may seek to find common cause over time. In this regard, the best antidote remains: full support for Latin American nations as they consolidate and build upon the democratic gains of the past.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

1. Name	2. Organization or organizations you are representing
ERIC BARNSWORTH	Council of the Americas
3. Date of Committee hearing	
OCT 12, 2011	
4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?	5. Have any of the organizations you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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