

CARTELS & GANGS

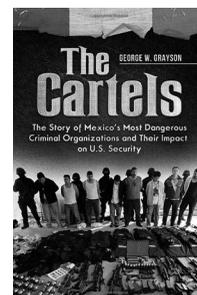
The Cartels: The Story of Mexico's Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on U.S. Security

By George W. Grayson

Reviewed by Robert J. Bunker, Distinguished Visiting Professor and Minerva Chair at the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College

The Cartels, written by George Grayson, a noted expert on Mexico and Emeritus Professor at the College of William & Mary, is a no-holds barred expose of the criminal violence, corruption, and crisis of governance gripping Mexico. The author has over two-hundred research trips to Latin America, two recent books on the topic—one focusing on Los Zetas (2012; with Sam Logan) and the other on narco-violence and Mexican failed state potentials (2010)—and three recent US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, monographs concerning La Familia cartel (2010), the rise of vigilantism (2011), and Felipe Calderón's policies influencing the Mexican armed forces (2013). The reviewer, having read all of these more specialized works, can see where material has been drawn from them for this new endeavor. This book, in fact, can be considered Dr. Grayson's production of a more generalized work on the subject much akin to Sylvia Longmire's *Cartel* (2011), Paul Rexton Kan's *Cartels at War* (2012), and Ioan Grillo's *El Narco* (2012).

The work, which was published at the end of 2013, draws upon very up-to-date Spanish and English language works, interviews, and email correspondence providing as current a picture as possible when it went to press. It is composed of preface and acknowledgements, introduction, ten chapters, thirteen appendices, notes, selected bibliography, and an index. Its chapters can be grouped into four basic themes, each of which will be discussed in turn. The first theme, comprising the introduction and Chapter 1, is that of the historical era when drug traffickers were subordinate to an autocratic state. It begins with the story of Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) and his Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) successors through Ernesto Zedillo (ending Nov 2000). The rise of Miguel "El Padrino" Gallardo and the relationship of traffickers to the government are also discussed along with the fact that, if the rules were not followed, enforcer teams would be dispatched from Mexico City to levy PRI extra-judicial justice. The second theme, comprising Chapters 2-4, is that of the transitional era in Colombia, South Florida, and Mexico when the fortunes of the Colombian cartels waned and the Mexican cartels become ascendant. It chronicles the shift in cocaine flow from Florida to Mexico and then provides information on the Gulf, Los Zetas, Sinaloa, Beltran Leyva Organization (BLO), Juárez, La Familia (Knights Templars), and Arellano Félix Organization (AFO) cartels. Also covered is the National Action Party (PAN) policy shift—under Vicente Fox (Dec 2000-Nov 2006)—of no longer sending out governmental kill-teams to punish traffickers who got out of line. The resulting second-order effects, along with other factors, inadvertently contributed to the power balance reversal between the cartels and the federal government.



Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2013

328 pages

\$63.00

The third theme, comprising Chapters 5-6, focuses on the Calderón era (Dec 2006-Nov 2012). It is one of direct confrontation, with the cartels spurred on by the increasing national security threat they represented to the Mexican state. This second PAN administration's approach, one with a kingpin strategy focus, reliance on the armed forces, and close coordination with the United States, is highlighted. The experiences of the Mexican military are also chronicled; as a mission for which they were ill prepared to undertake as well as the impacts, including human rights abuses, this has had on Mexican society. Military engagements (firefights and arrests) with municipal and state police forces in the pay of the cartels are also detailed. The final theme, comprising Chapters 7-10, is on the present administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (Dec 2012-Current). This new administration has engaged in campaign ploys—like the stillborn Gendarmería Nacional program—and media spin, downplaying the extent of the cartel threat, to further its public image and Machiavellian agendas for the benefit of the PRI now once again in power. The increasing rise of vigilantism in Mexico is also covered within this theme along with the enablers of organized crime which include elements of the Church, banking and business interests, and Mexican state governors, whom (due to the executive-legislative impasse in Mexico City since the late 1990s) have increasingly gained in political power and wealth, resulting in their either looking the other way or directly colluding with the cartels.

Many of components of the work are highly informative and provide great insights into the relationships and animosities of the cartels to the Mexican government under the various administrations—both PRI and PAN—and to each other. Further, the writing benefits from Grayson's approach to categorizing information in such a way that it is easily digestible. For instance, the table with the "Ten Commandments of 'El Padrino'" (23) is extremely useful in showing the subordination of the narco-syndicates to the old PRI political machine. Of note from this table is how executions of opposing traffickers were to take place north of the US border, if possible (Commandment 4)—what we would call spillover. Yet, American civilians were not to be kidnapped, extorted, or killed either south or north of the border so as not to incur the wrath of the US government (Commandment 5). Other tables show us the differences between the drug wars in Colombia and Mexico (96), a general history of drug activities (228-232), and military desertion rates in Mexico—which between 1997 and 2012 number over two-hundred and twenty thousand personnel and beg the question how many of these individuals have gone over to the cartels (264).

Criticism, of what is otherwise an excellent overview of the recent history of the Mexican cartels and their interrelationship to Mexican politics, focuses on the fact that quite a few typos can be found within its pages; better proofing would have been beneficial. The work is also thin on analyzing cartel impacts on US security, making that part of the subtitle a misnomer. About two pages discuss corruption of US personnel (209-211) while the Mérida Initiative, from which the new PRI administration has distanced itself, is mentioned in more sections of the book (93-104, 175-176) additional analysis of its and other impacts seemed warranted. While it is recognized that Mexico is the major transit point of illicit narcotics flow into the United States and anything negative

taking place in Mexico—such as loss of territories, ongoing corruption and violence, and regional failure due to cartel activities may have a direct US homeland security impact—some sort of focused discussion of these threats vis-à-vis Peña Nieto’s policies in the conclusion would have been beneficial to the reader.

Still, in summation, *The Cartels* is a well-researched and highly readable work that would make for an excellent college textbook and be of interest to more general readers such as military officers and policy makers interested in this subject matter. The various tables and many appendices for organizing information are also useful. The work very much deserves its rightful place in both personal and college libraries next to other general works published on the Mexican cartels over the last few years.

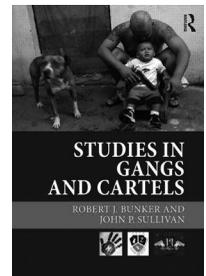
Studies in Gangs and Cartels

By Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan

Reviewed by José de Arimatéia da Cruz, Professor of International Relations and Comparative Politics at Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah, GA and Visiting Research Professor at the US Army War College

Studies in Gangs and Cartels is written by two eminent scholars in the field of law enforcement and transnational criminal organizations. Robert J. Bunker was a Distinguished Visiting Professor and Minerva Chair at the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College; while John P. Sullivan is a career police officer and an Adjunct Researcher at the Scientific Vortex Foundation, Bogotá, Colombia. This important work is the culmination of the authors’ works from the mid-1990s to the present with new chapters written specifically for this anthology. Readers will see the progression of gangs and cartels and their nefarious activities from third-generation or third-phase cartel typologies.

Studies in Gangs and Cartels addresses the broader challenges gangs and organized crime can present to states. (1) Gangs and cartels in the twenty-first century have become more than an annoyance to governmental authorities and law enforcement agencies. Crime and criminally illicit activities have become more global in scope and can destroy the social fabric of a society while also undermining the authority and legitimacy of a state. One only has to think of the current situations in Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil to realize the impact of criminal elements in society and its detrimental effects. As Bunker and Sullivan point out, “extending their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organizations through bribery, coercion and intimidation to facilitate, enhance, and protect their activities, transnational criminal organizations are emerging as a serious impediment to democratic governance and a free market economy. This danger is particularly evident in Colombia, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, and other parts of the former Soviet Union where corruption has become particularly insidious and pervasive” (63). The traditional view of crime as a localized issue and therefore a concern only to the police on the beat is no longer valid in the twenty-first century. As Bunker and Sullivan argue, “rather than being viewed only as misguided youth or opportunistic criminals or, in their mature forms, as criminal organizations with no broader social



New York: Routledge, 2013

232 pages

\$155.00