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September 2010

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The views expressed in this research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, Department of Defense, US Southern Command or Florida International University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The problems of criminal fiefdoms—alternatively governed spaces (AGSs) in which criminal organizations, rather than formal authorities, effectively control the population and act as the arbiter of internal order—have become a serious security issue in Latin America. In several countries, criminal fiefdoms have taken shape against the backdrop of rampant criminality that has afflicted much of the region over the past two decades, with this phenomenon intensified by competition between rival transnational drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).
- In nations as varied as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Brazil, criminal organizations ranging from youth gangs to sophisticated DTOs control large portions of the national territory. They serve as de facto governments as they collect “taxes” through dues and extortion, demand the loyalty, or at least the acquiescence, of the people under their control, and punish those who interfere with their illicit activities. Such groups wage irregular warfare—defined as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations”—against their competitors and governments.¹
- While criminal organizations like MS-13 and the First Capital Command (PCC) of São Paulo sometimes provide order and limited social services, they also exploit and terrorize the populace. Criminal fiefdoms have thus exposed the weakness of governance, showing that states cannot control their territory or protect their citizens. This is having a corrosive impact on the public

¹ Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, September 11, 2007, pp. 1-6.

psyche, material conditions and is undermining democracy.

- Addressing this problem will be a difficult and complex task. The issue of criminal fiefdoms is rooted in structural problems—inequality, lack of opportunity, corruption, and above all, weak state capacity. Efforts must concentrate on building broad political compacts in support of holistic anti-crime programs and efforts to strengthening the state.
- Within this context, there are several initiatives to consider, including:
 - Smarter targeting and efforts to develop tools necessary to sustain long-term investigations and successful prosecutions;
 - Creative policing strategies that focus on police-civilian interaction and protection of the population;
 - Short and long-term efforts to strengthen honest law enforcement and judicial officials to reduce corruption;
 - Building the institutional capacity of the agencies and offices charged with combating and prosecuting organized crime;
 - Macro and micro-economic initiatives to broaden opportunity and stem the stream of recruits for organized crime;
 - Intensified U.S. efforts to deal with the demand side of the DTO problem and a capacity and willingness for innovation and experimentation.

INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, Latin America was roiled by Marxist insurgencies that, in the process of seeking to overthrow governments, carved out “liberated zones” in which insurgents could operate freely and extract resources from the population. Today, ideological violence has faded, but the problem of alternatively governed spaces (AGSs)—areas in which some groups other than the government are the *de facto* arbiter of internal order—continues to plague the region. A variety of criminal organizations, ranging from youth gangs to transnational drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), have established “criminal fiefdoms” in which they operate with little or no interference from the authorities and have established a form of dominance—complete with “taxation,” limited social services, and often-brutal punishment—over the population. This phenomenon is most pronounced in Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, but it is also evident in Brazil. Where fiefdoms exist, states are essentially experiencing irregular warfare, as criminal groups compete with established governments for control and influence over the civilian population. This phenomenon has highlighted the weakness of many states, and is having a severely corrosive impact on democratic governance and the rule of law.

This paper thus analyzes the origins, manifestations, and ramifications of the problem of criminal fiefdoms. The first section offers an analytical framework for understanding the issue. The second and third sections present case studies, focusing on the current situation in Guatemala and São Paulo, Brazil. The fourth section discusses policy implications.

CRIME, THIRD-GENERATION GANGS, AND IRREGULAR WARFARE IN LATIN AMERICA

The problem of AGSs has always plagued Latin America. Since the emergence of modern Latin American states in the early 19th century, a variety of factors—namely underdeveloped state capacity and deep socio-economic and ethnic cleavages—have left governments vulnerable to internal disorder and, at times, deprived them of control over parts of the national territory. During the Cold War, for instance, the Marxist insurgencies that took hold throughout Latin America established “liberated zones.” In countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia, these zones eventually came to encompass large swaths of the countryside. Rebel groups used these areas as bases and staging grounds, and within these areas it was guerrillas—rather than the government—that ruled. In some cases, this “governance” took the form of implementing measures designed to win the loyalties of communities marginalized by government, such as building clinics and schools. In other cases, guerrilla governance focused more on resource extraction, and involved compelling people to provide labor, military service, or “donations” of money and supplies. Those who did not show sufficient enthusiasm for the guerrilla cause were frequently executed as “traitors.”²

Notwithstanding the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the problem of AGSs is not mainly a function of ideological conflict, but rather a by-product of the wave of criminal activity that has swept the region over the last 20 years. Since the end of the Cold War, a variety of factors have left the region vulnerable to crime and violence, such as porous borders, extensive illegal economic flows, and access to guns. Endemic corruption and weak state institutions are giving criminal organizations significant

² Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), chapters 2, 6-7.

leeway to operate. Widespread poverty and social alienation ensure a steady supply of young recruits, and densely packed urban slums give them near-impenetrable havens in which to operate. The deportation of tens of thousands of criminals from the U.S. over the past 15 years has effectively overwhelmed law enforcement capacity in countries like Guatemala.³

Across the region, an array of criminal groups—international drug traffickers, violent youth gangs, and organized crime syndicates—have thus largely replaced Marxist rebels as the chief purveyors of disorder. These groups have carved out niches in a variety of illicit activities—drug smuggling, human trafficking, arms dealing, kidnapping, robbery, extortion, and money laundering—and made insecurity a fact of life. Latin America regularly competes for the title of most violent region in the world (in terms of homicides), and its youth murder rate was more than twice as high as that of any other region in 2008. In some Central American countries, violence is approaching levels last seen during the civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s. Even where murder levels are lower, violence and crime have driven down economic activity, fostered widespread fear, and made life miserable for much of the population.⁴

There is no single model of organized crime. Some criminal groups are relatively small street gangs that are involved mainly in petty robbery, small-scale extortion and drug trafficking, and the occasional murder for hire. At the other

³ Max Manwaring, *A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), passim; also Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Tackling Transnational Crime: Adapting U.S. National Security Policy,” Brookings Institution, July 18, 2008.

⁴ “Latin America Tops Murder Tables,” *BBC News*, November 26, 2008; Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, “Youth, Violence, and Democracy,” *Current History*, February 2007, pp. 64-69.

end of the spectrum are sophisticated, multi-tiered organizations that operate in several cities or even on a transnational basis. Gangs like the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) in Central America and the First Capital Command (PCC) in Brazil, as well as paramilitary groups like *Los Zetas* in Mexico, have hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of members organized into numerous cells and overseen by a centralized hierarchy. They employ individuals ranging from hit men to accountants and lawyers, who occupy key nodes in illicit networks. With different divisions and sub-divisions responsible for specific activities some criminal groups actually resemble corporations.

Some analysts refer to these groups as “third-generation gangs,” because they represent the highest evolution of organized crime in Latin America.⁵ These gangs use a mixture of violence and corruption to neutralize governments and protect their business; they employ a variety of weapons—heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, sniper rifles, and crude armored vehicles—and strike with astounding brazenness and savagery. What the gangs are doing, in essence, is seeking to intimidate the state and the citizenry into submission and win a free hand in pursuing lucrative illicit business dealings.⁶ In addition to violence, corruption plays an integral role in undermining state institutions. Criminals have long used the formula of *plata o plomo* (money or lead) to corrupt government officials; third-generation gangs have become masters of this strategy. Confronted with the choice of an easy payout or a violent death, law enforcement frequently opts for the former. Gangs are thus not just

⁵ John P. Sullivan, “Transnational Gangs: The Impact of Third Generation Gangs in Central America,” *Air & Space Power Journal* (Spanish Edition), Second Trimester 2008.

⁶ USAID, *Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment: Annex 2: Guatemala Profile*; “Es provocación cabeza arrojada en alcaldía de Acapulco,” *La Crónica*, June 30, 2006.

battering the state from without; they are also weakening it from within.⁷

Across the region, gangs like the PCC, MS-13, and the Zetas have taken this approach to the logical next step, using violence to carve out geographic areas where government is essentially powerless to intervene. In areas of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Brazil, gang violence has become so intense and gang influence so pervasive that authorities have largely retreated. Gangs use these areas as free zones for drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and other illegal activities, and exert their own form of governance. They lay down a code of conduct, specifying which activities are allowed. Those who comply with this code are generally rewarded with protection as well as limited social services like food, toys, and clothing—the allure of which is not to be underestimated in impoverished areas where the population has long been slighted by the state. Those who do not comply are punished/ killed.⁸

From an analytical perspective, it is clear that many Latin American countries are beset by irregular warfare. The 2007 Joint Operating Concept defines irregular warfare (IW) as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations.” IW favors “indirect and asymmetric approaches,” and frequently involves groups—transnational criminal enterprises, insurgents, terrorists—who use innovative, unconventional

⁷ Jose de Cordoba and David Luhnnow, “Mexican Officials Allege Drug Cartel Infiltrated Attorney General’s Office,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 28, 2008; “Drug Charges for Guatemala Tsar,” *BBC News*, November 16, 2005; Luis Esteban G. Manrique, “A Parallel Power: Organized Crime in Latin America,” *Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos*, September 28, 2006, www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/1049.asp.

⁸ Telephone interview conducted by the author with a DEA official, July 23, 2008; Manwaring, *Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty*, pp. 27-29.

tactics to overwhelm a stronger foe. As a result, IW resides in the “grey area” between accepted typologies of conflict. It is a “complex, ‘messy’ and ambiguous social phenomenon that does not lend itself to clean, neat, concise, or precise definition.” While some analysts might object to the use of military vocabulary to describe criminal activity, this description—with all the nuance and even ambiguity that it implies—accurately describes the regional security challenges posed by AGSs.⁹

Because of this complexity, IW can be very difficult. It requires the threatened government to synchronize police and military programs, and to combine security initiatives with a variety of additional projects—intelligence, social reform, institution-building, and economic development, etc.—aimed at ameliorating the conditions that allow criminals to thrive. Given that the armed forces have historically been used against the citizenry, there is often strong resistance to involving the military in domestic security matters, even when the police are clearly overwhelmed. Criminal insurgency in AGSs thus poses a severe test for regional governments, with fledgling democracies struggling to formulate an adequate response. The remainder of this paper examines four such cases: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and the role played by the PCC in São Paulo, Brazil.

GANGS, DTOS, AND THE CRISIS IN GUATEMALA

Guatemala has suffered a wave of violent crime during the last two decades, and has been continually plagued by corruption, institutional debility, and inequality while struggling with drug trafficking and the legacy of a brutal three-decade civil war. Murder levels skyrocketed over the

⁹ Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, September 11, 2007, pp. 1-6.

past decade, reaching 108 per 100,000 inhabitants (compared to a world average of less than 9 per 100,000).¹⁰

The problem of AGSs is manifest in two distinct types of geographical areas in Guatemala—marginal urban barrios afflicted by a heavy gang presence, and outlying areas where a government presence is weak and drug-trafficking pervasive. With respect to the former, the gang problem in Guatemala had its origins in the civil war, as displaced and uneducated—but often well-armed—young people turned to crime. This phenomenon subsequently received a major boost from destabilizing refugee flows, particularly the deportation of Guatemalan émigrés-turned-gang members from Southern California in the U.S.

Gangs like MS-13 and 18th Street (M-18) are at the center of the crime epidemic. Smaller gangs (*pandillas*) focus on petty extortion, robbery, small-scale drug trafficking, and, occasionally, kidnapping and murder. Larger, transnational gangs (*maras*) use international connections to participate in arms smuggling, human trafficking, large-scale auto theft, racketeering, and other organized crimes.¹¹ Gangs are intensely territorial; they seek to control swaths of urban territory to maximize profits from drug distribution and collect “taxes” in the form of extortion from local business owners and residents. In the case of the *pandillas*, areas may be as small as a couple of square blocks; in the case of the

¹⁰ Kevin Casas-Zamora, “Guatemalastan: How to Prevent a Failed State in Our Midst,” Brookings Institution, May 22, 2009, www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0522_guatemala_casaszamora.aspx, accessed June 2, 2009; Michael Deibert, “Guatemala’s Death Rattle: Drugs vs. Democracy,” *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Winter 2008/2009, pp. 167-168.

¹¹ Good summaries of gang activity include Federico Brevé, “The Maras: A Menace to the Americas,” *Military Review*, July 2007, pp. 91-92; Thomas Bruneau, “The Maras and National Security in Central America,” *Strategic Insights*, May 2005, www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/May/bruneauMay05.pdf, accessed July 22, 2009.

maras, entire neighborhoods are at stake. To achieve dominance, gangs use a blend of tactics. They offer money, food, and other goods to residents who accept their rule, providing a social safety net that has long been absent in Guatemala. Gangs also offer an alternative to relying on a corrupt, ineffective police force, and provide protection for members and citizens who accept their rule, and intervene—albeit brutally and summarily—in disputes between residents of their fiefdoms. In effect, those who show loyalty to the predominant gang can avail themselves of services that the Guatemalan government has long failed to provide.¹² Yet it would be a mistake to glamorize the role the gangs play in providing order, because they rely heavily on violence and terror. *El Flaco*, a member of MS-13, explains the ruthless methods by which the gang extorts money and eliminates resistance to its power: “We have a saying: If you don’t pay, we won’t hurt the father; sadly, it’s the children who’ll pay... We send them a letter... We ask for \$5,000 to \$13,000, depending on the kind of business he’s in. If he doesn’t pay, we kidnap his wife or a child, and we kill them. Then we send him body parts showing him we mean business, and we keep kidnapping family members until he pays.”¹³

As gang competition has intensified, they frequently seek to shock the population into submission. One detailed study (2004) reports that, “initiation into the 18th Street Gang required the rape, disfigurement, and murder of a young woman.”¹⁴ The way gangs use violence to cement their

¹² Author’s Interview with USAID Official, 24 November 2009; Diana Villiers Negroponete, *The Merida Initiative and Central America: The Challenges of Containing Public Insecurity and Criminal Violence*, Working Paper Number 3, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, May 2009, *passim*.

¹³ John Burnett, “Private Assassins Target Gangs in Guatemala,” *National Public Radio*, December 22, 2008, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98593139, accessed July 22, 2009.

¹⁴ Villiers Negroponete, *Merida Initiative and Central America*, p. 13.

control of a given territory is evident in another favored tactic—attacking the heavily used bus systems in Guatemala City and other urban centers. The gang that dominates a certain bus route normally charges around \$13 per day for the right to transit the zone unmolested; drivers who refuse to pay are murdered. In addition, gangs occasionally conduct widespread, simultaneous attacks on transportation infrastructure. In 2008, 255 bus drivers and their assistants were murdered across the nation.¹⁵

These tactics have had an immense impact in a country where the government is widely seen as corrupt, incompetent, or some combination of the two. The police are undermanned and underfunded, compounding the issue of corruption and allowing the gangs to establish virtual free zones in numerous *barrios*. One of these *barrios*—*El Gallito*—is located only a couple of miles from the presidential palace in the capital. As of 2008, local gang leaders have dominated *El Gallito*.¹⁶ This problem is even worse in the rural areas, where competition between rival DTOs has intensified as Guatemala has assumed an expanded role in the inter-American drug trade. During the 1980s, Colombian cartels dominated the drug trade, often cooperating with corrupt military officials to move cocaine, marijuana, and heroin shipments northward. After these organizations—particularly the Cali and Medellín cartels—were dismantled in the early 1990s, Mexico’s Sinaloa cartel stepped in. Since 2005, *Los Zetas* have begun to assert their own claim over the Guatemalan drug trade. The Zetas are moving south to extend greater control over their supply network, and to find sanctuary at a time when the Mexican government has launched an all-out offensive against DTOs.

¹⁵ Samuel Lowenberg, “Street Gangs Target and Kill Bus Drivers in Guatemala,” *WorldFocus*, March 30, 2009; “Guatemalan Bus Drivers on Strike to Protest Murders,” *Latin American Herald Tribune*, March 17, 2009; Mariela Castañón, “Siguen los ataques en autobuses,” *La Hora*, October 28, 2009.

¹⁶ Interviews with USAID and DEA Officials, November 22-24, 2009.

According to one official in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Zetas are seeking to “reach out into Guatemala, extend their operation into Guatemala, and take over the Guatemala corridor.”¹⁷

For drug traffickers, as for youth gangs, controlling areas where organizations can operate free from government interference is a crucial operational imperative. In recent years, these efforts have focused on a number of outlying areas, especially those—such as Huehuetenango and Petén—with frontage on the Mexican border. Dense vegetation and a limited government presence impedes effective surveillance of these areas, and groups like the Zetas, Sinaloa, and local drug traffickers have all sought to construct bases of operations in these regions. Traffickers have been particularly active in constructing clandestine runways—crude airstrips where cocaine and other drugs are flown in from Colombia and subsequently broken into smaller shipments to be sent across the border—to the point that, as of several years ago, there were nearly 500 such airstrips in Guatemala.¹⁸ In rural areas, traffickers are accumulating private property. Ranches and farms are sought as safe havens from the police (or competitors) and as depots where drugs and arms can be stored. In most cases, traffickers seek to purchase properties initially, but if resistance is met, they resort to intimidation or force.¹⁹

DTOs consolidate their influence in these zones through the usual mix of corruption and violence. Local and

¹⁷ Author’s Telephone Interview with DEA official, November 23, 2009.

¹⁸ Stephen Johnson, “Guatemala’s Drug Crime Challenge: How We Can Help it Cope,” Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, June 9, 2009; “Statement of Rogelio E. Guevara, Chief of Operations, Drug Enforcement Administration, Before House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, October 10, 2002.

¹⁹ “Narcos obligan a finqueros a venderles sus propiedades,” *Prensa Libre*, December 7, 2008.

departmental officials who decline to tolerate (or participate in) trafficking have been murdered, often in brutal fashion. DTO operatives are also believed to have been behind a recent assassination attempt against the governor of Petén.²⁰ According to the U.S. State Department, “money from the drug trade has woven itself into the fiber of Guatemalan law enforcement and justice institutions.”²¹ The cartels pay small-town mayors for the right to set up clandestine airstrips, and bribe judges, police commanders, military officials, and border guards to avoid government surveillance or prosecution.²² It is estimated that up to 40 percent of Guatemalan territory is either contested or effectively beyond the control of the government.²³ In the case of corruption and violence, each has intensified due to competition between the Zetas and their rivals. The Zetas, initially formed by Mexican special-forces deserters, have advanced training in intelligence, counter-insurgency, complex assaults, and other techniques. As of mid-2009, the group had an estimated 300-400 operatives in Guatemala. The group has established training camps, arms depots, and drug caches in regions that border Mexico, and Guatemalan officials estimate that the Zetas have a presence in 75 percent of the country.²⁴

²⁰ “Guatemalan Governor Emerges Unscathed from Attack,” *Latin American Herald Tribune*, August 2, 2009.

²¹ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “Guatemala,” *2009 International Narcotics Strategy Report: Volume I*, February 27, 2009.

²² Author’s Telephone Interview with DEA official, November 23, 2009; Silvia Otero, “Zetas ganan terreno en suelo guatemalteco,” *El Universal*, December 4, 2008.

²³ Mark Schneider, “Guatemala: The Next to Fall?” *Global Post*, April 16, 2009.

²⁴ “Guatemala: Otro territorio Zeta,” *BBC Mundo*, June 17, 2009; Juan Carlos Llorca and Frank Bajak, “Mexican Drug Cartels Expand Abroad,” *Associated Press*, July 21, 2009; Ellingwood, “Drug Violence Spilling into Guatemala”; James Painter, “Narcos amenazan a Guatemala,” *BBC Mundo*, August 17, 2009.

The Zetas ruthlessly target their competitors as well as officials thought to support rival DTOs. In March 2008, a firefight in Zacapa between the Zetas and Guatemalan traffickers claimed 11 lives. In late 2008, another shootout involving the Zetas, this time in Huehuetenango, left 17 dead. According to press reports, the fighting was so intense that police and military units had to wait for the combatants to exhaust themselves before moving in.²⁵ The government simply cannot compete with well-armed, well-funded DTOs. Guatemala has a single, national police force (the National Civil Police), and its outposts in rural areas are too often small, isolated, and undermanned. Police side arms (many of which are reportedly defective) are no match for fragmentation grenades, automatic weapons, armor-piercing ammunition, and rocket launchers.

AGSs are having a devastating effect on the national psyche. According to a study conducted by USAID, “86 percent of Guatemalans surveyed feel that the level of insecurity facing Guatemala presents a threat to the future well-being of the country, and 45 percent feel that insecurity poses a threat to their own personal security.”²⁶ According to *Latinobarómetro*, only 8 percent of Guatemalans think that democracy works better in their country than in the rest of Latin America, the lowest figure in the region.²⁷ Insecurity is giving voice to authoritarian sentiments. According to a 2004 USAID study, “Guatemalans cite crime, along with corruption, as one of their top concerns and high levels of crime [are] cited as the top justification for a military coup.” Such sentiments are evident in the explosion of private

²⁵ Quoted in Author’s Telephone Interview with DEA official, November 23, 2009; Mariela Castañón, “Autoridades explican balacera en Santa Ana Huista, Huehuetenango,” *La Hora*, December 1, 2008; “Narcos mexicanos retan poder de mafias locales,” *Prensa Libre*, December 2, 2008.

²⁶ USAID, *Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment: Annex 2: Guatemala Country Profile*.

²⁷ *Latinobarómetro, Informe 2008*, pp. 91, 103.

security personnel employed in Guatemala, as well as the upsurge in vigilante violence against suspected criminals. Both of these trends have provided affluent Guatemalans with some measure of security, but they have also underscored the fact that the state has lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of force.²⁸

It is not simply Guatemalans that will suffer the consequences if this trend continues. The emergence of AGSs, particularly those dominated by DTOs, would impede U.S. counter-narcotics operations in Central America and make the restoration of order in Mexico all the more difficult by providing DTOs with a cross-border sanctuary. Just as troubling, the continued weakness of the Guatemalan state would set a terrible precedent in a region where representative government remains fragile, and numerous countries are facing the same type of threat from organized crime and internal violence.

CRIMINAL FIEFDOMS AND CONTESTED SPACES IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS

For much of the past decade, the problem of criminal fiefdoms in El Salvador and Honduras was primarily a function of gang activity. In El Salvador, for instance, it has been estimated (2006-2007) that the *maras* controlled at least 15 municipalities.²⁹ This phenomenon is primarily to be found in marginal urban areas such as Soyapango, an extremely poor section of San Salvador. As one reporter has remarked, “The slum called Soyapango... is a big step down from even the worst L.A. housing projects. The corrugated iron shacks have no running water. There are flies and rats.

²⁸ Richard L. Millett, “Crime and Citizen Security: Democracy’s Achilles Heel,” in Millett, Jennifer Holmes, and Orlando Pérez, eds., *Latin American Democracy: Emerging Reality or Endangered Species*, New York: Rutledge, 2008, p. 255; USAID, *Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment: Annex 2: Guatemala Country Profile*.

²⁹ Manwaring, *A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty*, 20.

Sewage runs through the streets.”³⁰ For several years Soyapango has been the site of conflict between MS-13 and M-18, both of which have thousands of members. The results were gang-on-gang violence, “collateral damage,” and the eventual division of Soyapango and its constituent neighborhoods into areas dominated by one gang or another. In 2007, one assessment reported that, “rival gangs have carved up this San Salvador suburb into home turfs where they rule through extortion, armed robbery, and homicide.”³¹

Both MS-13 and M-18 have sought to consolidate their control of these neighborhoods and extract resources from residents. Bus drivers are taxed if they wish to transit the area and killed if they refuse to pay, resulting in periodic stoppages of bus service in the area; and gang members demand that businesses pay a “war tax” to fund criminal operations and provide them with a steady cash flow.³² There are reports that some longtime community members receive a measure of respect from the *maras* and have made peace with gangs. One resident commented that, “Now there is a kind of truce with the community members, who have decided not to go to the police ... perhaps because of this ... they leave us alone.”³³ The price of peace is acquiescence, and the gangs continue to extort money.³⁴ In some cases, the *maras* have taken to using extreme violence in an attempt to recruit members and extract labor from residents. In 2008, an eight-year old child was apparently shot in retaliation for refusing to join a gang. To escape these problems—as well

³⁰ “Central America Imports Crime from U.S.” *Washington Times*, 17 July 2000.

³¹ David Shelby, “Extreme Sports Offer Salvadoran Youth Refuge from Violence,” *America.gov*, 25 June 2007.

³² Mo Hume, “(Young) Men with Big Guns: Reflexive Encounters with Violence and Youth in El Salvador,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26 (2007), 487.

³³ Marlon Carranza, “Detention or Death: Where the ‘Pandillero’ Kids of El Salvador are Heading,” Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, www.coav.org.br/publique/media/elsalvadoring.pdf.

³⁴ Hume, “(Young) Men with Big Guns,” 487.

as associated issues like the rape of young women—families that can afford to have taken to leaving Soyapango in search of a less precarious existence. According to one report, around 300 families fled Soyapango in 2004 alone.³⁵ Even the police find that they have immense difficulties operating in places like Soyapango. While *mareros* are sometimes reluctant to murder on-duty police officers (who can shoot back), they have shown no hesitation in killing off-duty officers (who usually do not carry guns). Because many officers come from poor communities and live in the areas where they work, they face a substantial disincentive to undertake any type of assertive action against the gangs. Those who do can be “green lighted,” meaning that any gang member who comes upon that particular individual is authorized to kill him. This dynamic has deeply compromised police operations. According to one affidavit: “The gangs have become so powerful that some police officers do not interfere with the *maras*’ criminal activities.” Some officers will give warning to the gangs about a particular raid, for example. In this way, some police can survive in gang neighborhoods... Police officers are forced to decide whether they want to follow their duties as officers, or whether they want to protect their lives, become corrupt and collaborate with the gang.”³⁶ In many cases, they opt for the latter.

The situation is similar in a number of Honduran municipalities, where gangs use violence in an effort to reinforce control of territory or dissuade aggressive government countermeasures. In 2003, for instance, presumed M-18 members in San Pedro Sula viciously killed several young women in what was apparently a response to

³⁵ Ana Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2005, www.foreignaffairs.org.

³⁶ “Affidavit in the Matter of Juan Alvarez,” www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Participate/National_Center/Resource_Library/ES12B_redacted.pdf, accessed 23 August 2010.

government efforts to convince the *mareros* to disband.³⁷ A year later, MS-13 members in Chamalecon stopped a bus traveling through their territory. They proceeded to murder 28 passengers. The attack was aimed at underscoring the gang's power. As Ana Arana relates, "The slaughter had nothing to do with the identities of the people onboard; it was meant as a protest and a warning against the government's crackdown on gang activities in the country."³⁸

As in the case of Guatemala, the prevalence of contested areas and criminally-controlled AGSs have increased as Central America has taken on a larger part in the inter-American drug trade. Located between South America and the U.S. and characterized by dense terrain and weak governments, El Salvador and Honduras have become attractive targets for the DTOs. Mexican traffickers have long had cooperative relationships with the *maras*, but now they seem to be making efforts to establish a more direct presence. The Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel are rumored to have begun setting up bases along the Honduran coast and in the rugged interior. They use these bases, as well as farms that they have purchased, as depots for drug shipments and arms caches.³⁹ DTOs have also begun to set up clandestine airstrips and have bribed and threatened officials in order to carve out greater room to operate. In one recent counter-narcotics operation in Honduras, the State Department writes

³⁷ Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, "The Duality of Latin American Cityscapes," in Koonings and Kruijt, eds., *Fractured Cities: Social Exclusion, Urban Violence, and Contested Spaces in Latin America* (Toronto: Zed Books, 2007), 20.

³⁸ Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America."

³⁹ Eliot Brockner, "Recession, Mexican Drug Cartels, Putting Honduras at Risk," *Mexidata.Info*, 23 March 2009; Sarah Grainger, "Mexican Drug Cartels Expand Reach in Central America," *Reuters*, August 26, 2010; "Cae avioneta en Colón pero no hallan droga," *El Heraldo*, 2 February 2009; Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs *2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume I, www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/index.htm.

that, “clandestine airstrips hidden in thick vegetation were discovered, and ammunition, aviation fuel, food, and lighting equipment were confiscated. This semi-permanent camp was linked to multiple recurring illegal flights and used international organized crime as a very important point for the transshipment of drugs.”⁴⁰ DTOs are thus pushing deeper into Central America, acquiring control over strategically valuable territory.

As they do, competition between DTOs is becoming more intense and problematic. In April 2010, the massacre of nine people in Tegucigalpa was linked to competition between Mexican organizations. “These deaths were provoked by territorial disputes between drug traffickers,” the Tegucigalpa police chief asserted.⁴¹ Similarly, there are reports that the Zetas have sought to have the Honduran security minister murdered, and the country’s top counternarcotics official was killed in what appeared to be a drug-related hit in 2009.⁴²

“THE STATE IS NOW THE PRISONER OF THE PCC”— GANG GOVERNANCE IN BRAZIL

The problem of AGSs is not limited to Central America and Mexico, but is also a problem for a country not normally associated with this group of nations—Brazil. Even as Brazil’s major cities have become centers of global business and finance, powerful criminal groups dominate Brazil’s numerous slums and prisons.

⁴⁰ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume I.

⁴¹ Gustavo Palencia, “Drug Gangs Kill Nine in Honduras as Violence Grows,” *Reuters*, 11 April 2010.

⁴² Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume I; Grainger, “Mexican Drug Cartels Expand Reach in Central America.”

The mega-gangs that dominate urban life in Brazil's major cities were, in most cases, born in overcrowded prisons, and represent a fusion of criminal expediency with the tactics and left-wing ideology of urban guerrilla groups that operated during the 1960s and 1970s. Most originated as relatively small groups dedicated to protecting members in prison, and subsequently gained a wider following by calling for improved prison conditions. As these groups became more powerful, they tapped into a wide array of illicit networks—drug trafficking especially—and began to spread their influence beyond prison walls and into slums where state control was weak. To appeal to disenfranchised slum-dwellers, these gangs wrapped themselves in slogans touting the need for social justice and economic redistribution.⁴³

The most notorious—and most powerful—criminal organization is the First Capital Command (PCC), which operates in the state of São Paulo under the motto, “Liberty, Justice, and Peace.”⁴⁴ The PCC is now thought to command the allegiance—or at least the obedience—of perhaps 90 percent of the well over 100,000+ prisoners in that state, as well as tens of thousands of members beyond prison walls. Since its founding, the PCC has branched out considerably, and now plays a strong role in a variety of criminal enterprises—car theft, extortion, arms trafficking, kidnapping, and bank robbery. As Brazil has become a major consumer of cocaine, the PCC has also claimed a leadership role in cocaine trafficking and distribution,

⁴³ João de Barros, “Brazil’s Real Overlords,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 14, 2007. The link to the urban guerrillas is evident from a perusal of Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Chapel Hill: Documentary Publications, 1985).

⁴⁴ Brian McCann, “Criminal Networks in Urban Brazil,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Summer/Fall 2007, p. 17; Tom Phillips, “Blood Simple,” *Guardian*, September 17, 2006.

forging alliances with groups from Colombia and Paraguay.⁴⁵

The PCC protects its enterprises through a variety of activities meant to give it latitude from the oversight and interference of state authorities. Aside from corrupting large numbers of government officials, the PCC has worked to create safe havens where its members are nearly immune to the actions of the police or other government authorities. This strategy was honed in the prison system, where the PCC established virtual states-within-a-state during the 1990s. The PCC laid down a strict code of conduct for its members and collected “taxes” in the form of mandatory dues. As the PCC’s growing numbers and reputation for ruthlessness made it more powerful, it began to regulate nearly all aspects of prison life; for example, conjugal visits, payment of debts, allotment of cells and bunks, and the distribution of drugs and contraband. “Cleaners” ran and continue to run cell-blocks as their own personal fiefdoms, and their permission is apparently still required if one inmate seeks to murder another in retribution for an unpaid debt or other injury.⁴⁶

PCC rule brought drawbacks and benefits for the prison population. Arbitrary violence became less common, and the imposition of some semblance of order had a mitigating effect on overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Yet the

⁴⁵ The best discussions of PCC activity are William Langewiesche, “City of Fear,” *Vanity Fair*, April 2007, www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/04/langewiesche200704, accessed November 14, 2009; Alvaro da Souza Pinheiro, *Irregular Warfare: Brazil’s Fight against Criminal Urban Guerrillas* (Hurlburt Field: Joint Special Operations University, 2009). See also Samuel Logan, “Brazil’s PCC: True Power Behind the Violence,” *Power and Interest News Report*, May 24, 2006.

⁴⁶ Langewiesche, “City of Fear”; “18 With a Bullet,” *PBSNews*, January 1, 2008; “Brazil: Organized Crime, Including Street Gangs,” *UNHCR RefWorld*, October 2007, www.unhcr.org/refworld/type,QUERYRESPONSE,,BRA,4784def01c,0.html.

PCC regularly used violence, murdering its rivals and those who refused to acknowledge its supremacy. During one riot in 2005, the PCC beheaded five rival gang members and placed their heads on pikes to be displayed before news cameras.⁴⁷ As the PCC has expanded, it has steadily moved into the *favelas* that make up much of São Paulo. This expansion was undertaken to give the PCC control of drug distribution in the growing market, and also to find new sources of revenue. The impoverished *favelas* have proven fertile ground for fostering PCC influence and power. Often built on the sides of hills, the *favelas* are characterized by dense urban terrain that is a nightmare for the police. Equally important, the slums are populated by poor residents who have traditionally seen little in the way of attention or benefits from the formal government.⁴⁸

The PCC runs São Paulo's *favelas* much as it runs the prisons. "Pilots" are charged with overseeing gang activities in several municipalities, making them the de facto authority for up to several hundred thousand citizens. The PCC dominates drug trafficking, armed robbery, and other criminal activities in these areas, and as in the prisons, it has laid down a code of conduct by which the residents are expected to follow. Crimes committed by non-members are summarily punished, and victims of rape, robbery, or other crimes can petition PCC leaders for recourse. Non-affiliated criminals are expected to coordinate their activities with the PCC leadership, and to offer part of the take as tribute. To foster goodwill, the PCC often undertakes the exemplary punishment of neighborhood nuisances and throws parties or distributes money or food to area residents.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Brazil's Mighty Prison Gangs," *BBC News*, May 15, 2006.

⁴⁸ de Barros, "Brazil's Real Overlords," *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

⁴⁹ Langewiesche, "City of Fear"; James Louis Cavallaro and Raquel Ferreira Dodge, "Understanding the São Paulo Attacks," *Revista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, Spring 2007, <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/951>.

The PCC thus functions as a crude form of government, but it can also be incredibly brutal in enforcing its dominance. PCC operatives have extorted money from local businesses in order to fund criminal endeavors, and they have attacked police stations and other symbols of government power. For example, the PCC mounted 44 attacks in November and December 2003, and in January 2006, launched a two-day series of attacks against São Paulo police. The group is also apparently responsible for dozens of bombings of public buildings, and there are reports that its members have contracted private security personnel to provide instruction in the use of advanced weapons. In effect, the PCC is seeking to convince the state that it is better off allowing the gang to operate unhindered.⁵⁰ Indeed, the PCC has demonstrated a willingness to use hostages. In 2006, when a prison superintendent refused a series of escalating demands and sought to transfer some 765 PCC members to a new facility, the PCC embarked on a five-day binge of attacks that threw South America's largest city into chaos. One Brazilian military analyst described the situation as "a week in Baghdad."

Pistols, rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades were used by those involved. In a coordinated series of attacks, carried out with military precision, 293 assaults took place on police stations, patrols, road checkpoints, stores, justice courts, 17 banks, and other establishments. Some 215 hostages were taken in 80 prison riots across the states of São Paulo, Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Bahia and also in the federal capital, Brasília. Eighty-two public transport busses were burned and a metro station was attacked causing chaos for an estimated 6 million

⁵⁰ *Epoca*, 22 May 2006; "Brazilian Gangs Attacks the Police," *New York Times*, May 14, 2006; da Souza Pinheiro, *Irregular Warfare*, 11-15.

workers in the city and the state of São Paulo. A total of 161 people were killed, including 41 policemen (most of them military) and prison guards, 107 gang members, 9 rebelling prisoners, and 4 civilians⁵¹

Although 4,000 military police were deployed, the attacks demonstrated that the PCC was a dominant force, and that order would be maintained only with PCC willingness. As one Brazilian security official puts it, "...the state is now the prisoner of the PCC."⁵²

The activities of the PCC have laid bare the fundamental weakness of the state and underscored the inequality that pervades Brazilian society—the rich can purchase protection and live in gated communities, while the poor are left to their fate. If the government cannot address these problems, they may come to constitute a drag on the country's geopolitical ascent. Many citizens are already asking why the government should devote more resources to activities abroad when it cannot even control its own cities, a sentiment echoed by presidential candidate José Serra in 2010.⁵³

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In Guatemala, Brazil, El Salvador, and Honduras, rampant criminality and competition between criminal

⁵¹ da Souza Pinheiro, *Irregular Warfare*, 2; Daniel Howden, "Gangs Bring Anarchy to Brazil's Biggest City," *The Independent*, August 10, 2006.

⁵² Stephanie Hanson, "Brazil's Powerful Prison Gang," Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, September 26, 2006, www.cfr.org/publication/11542/, accessed October 27, 2009; Samuel Logan, "Riots Reveal Organized Crime Power in Brazil," *International Relations and Security Network*, May 18, 2006.

⁵³ See Brands, *Dilemmas of Brazilian Grand Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010).

organizations—particularly transnational DTOs—is manifesting itself in the rise of criminal fiefdoms. In these spaces, official governance has largely given way to the rule of groups that use a mixture of inducement and brutality to co-opt or intimidate citizens, neutralize opponents and governments, and win a free hand in managing illicit activities. Beyond having socio-economic consequences, this trend has illustrated the political shortcomings of Latin American states and thrown the credibility of governments into doubt.

What might a solution to this problem look like? While the issue of criminal fiefdoms is alarming in its own right, it cannot be divorced from the broader wave of crime that has swept Latin America in the past two decades, nor can it be separated from the social, economic, and political conditions that have enabled this rampant criminality. Crime in the region is rooted in a combination of structural influences including corruption, inequality, and a lack of legitimate opportunities for at-risk populations. Underlying all of these problems is the weakness of the state. The strength of entrenched elites has long kept tax revenues low in Latin America, making it difficult for governments to carry out the functions and provide services—law and order, decent education, an honest and professional bureaucracy—normally associated with effective democratic governance. The lack of tax revenue has long crippled the administrative capacity and performance of Latin American governments.⁵⁴

Viewing the criminal fiefdom phenomenon solely from a law enforcement perspective provides an incomplete analysis. Just as experts on counter-insurgency and IW emphasize the need to embed the use of force in a large scheme of military and non-military programs, efforts to address this problem must therefore deal with both its symptoms and its

⁵⁴ Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003).

underlying causes. This reality indicates that regional governments will have to overcome—or at least mitigate—a variety of entrenched challenges if they are to make meaningful progress in tackling the issue of AGSs. A combination of the problems noted above has frustrated efforts to weaken the power of criminal organizations in Latin America.

There are, however, examples of countries breaking free of these constraints and forging a holistic approach to strengthening governance and the rule of law. Between 2002 and 2010, Alvaro Uribe leveraged the disillusion of the Colombian electorate to forge a national compact that allowed him not simply to wage an offensive against the FARC and its allies, but also to combat corruption and strengthen the Colombian state. Since 2006, Felipe Calderon of Mexico has sought to emulate this model, though his ultimate success in doing so remains to be seen.⁵⁵ Going forward, the task for regional leaders will thus be to forge the broad political accords necessary to build tax revenues, strengthen the state's administrative capacity, combat corruption and socio-economic exclusion, and improve the capabilities of the forces of order.

Within this context, there are several categories of programs that will be integral in any strategy to reduce the power of criminal organizations. With respect to the most visible aspects of anti-crime initiatives—security and enforcement—a central imperative is to work toward smarter targeting that improves the quality—not the quantity—of arrests. Many countries take a broad-gauge approach to

⁵⁵ On these examples, see Thomas Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe’s Colombia (2002-2006) vs. FARC,” *Military Review*, March-April 2007, p. 41; Vinay Jawahar and Michael Shifter, “State Building in Colombia: Getting Priorities Straight,” *Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 58, 2, October 2004, pp. 143-154; Mark P. Sullivan and June S. Beittel, *Mexico-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 18, 2008, pp. 3-4.

dealing with organized crime, focusing on so-called *mano dura* policies that seek simply to incarcerate as many suspected gang members as possible.⁵⁶ A more effective approach would be to target leadership elements and operatives who provide special skills and services. Doing so not only entails leveraging existing intelligence capabilities—those of the home country and U.S. agencies—it also means engaging with academics, gang experts, and former criminals who are able to map vulnerabilities in gang and DTO hierarchies. As one DEA official states, “To get the greatest bang for your buck, you have to rely on your intelligence network.”⁵⁷ Similarly, it will be necessary to help governments develop anti-money-laundering and asset confiscation regimes so that they can attack the finances of criminal organizations, as well as witness protection programs and other capabilities crucial to long-term investigations and successful prosecutions. U.S. agencies have considerable experience in capacity building, and such efforts with several governments have yielded results.⁵⁸

A second imperative is to experiment with and refine creative policing techniques that can be used to break the grip of criminal organizations on densely populated urban environments. In Central America, U.S. agencies have sponsored professional exchanges and other programs that promote community-policing strategies and other efforts designed to immerse the police in the population, yielding greater cooperation and intelligence. In Brazil, various state

⁵⁶ For critiques of *mano dura* strategies, see Laini Reisman, “Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Responding to Central American Youth Gang Violence,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 147-152; Dennis Rodgers, “Pandillas y maras: protagonistas y chivos expiatorios,” *Revista Envío*, December 2007, www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3697, accessed July 13, 2009.

⁵⁷ Author’s telephone interview with DEA official, November 23, 2009.

⁵⁸ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009 *International Narcotics Strategy Report: Volume II* (Washington, D.C.: State Department, 2010).

police agencies have adopted counter-insurgency style strategies in dealing with the *favelas*, emphasizing the need for police officials to live among the population and establish a permanent presence.⁵⁹ The wisdom of these particular policies has been heavily debated, but these initiatives do represent the type of unconventional thinking needed to deal with an irregular threat like criminal fiefdoms.

Aggressive policing, in turn, will be effective only if carried out and supported by honest, competent professionals. Because addressing current deficiencies in police and judicial institutions will be a long-term process, it makes sense to take a two-tiered approach. First, U.S. and Latin American officials should identify the pockets of trustworthy, courageous public servants and augment the capabilities of these groups, building a small core of professional officials. The U.S. possesses several tools that can be useful in this regard: personnel exchanges with U.S. law enforcement agencies to promote a culture of professionalism, interaction with U.S. police officers familiar with community policing techniques, assistance in the training and vetting of small, elite forces that will be needed to carry out sensitive operations, and support for offices charged with monitoring official performance and prosecuting corrupt officials.⁶⁰

Over the long term, more thoroughgoing institutional reform will be necessary to improve the performance of the police, judiciary, and other institutions charged with upholding law and order. As U.S. officials and NGOs operating in Guatemala and elsewhere have discovered, making progress

⁵⁹ On this latter initiative, see “To Rid Slums of Drug Gangs, Police in Rio de Janeiro Try War Tactics,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2009.

⁶⁰ In Mexico, the Calderón government has used this strategy of relying on small, specially vetted forces, which U.S. officials consider to be more reliable than the broader law enforcement community. See Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, “The Long War of Genaro García Luna,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2008.

on these issues requires taking a bottom-up approach to institutional reform—training or re-training officials, developing anti-gang laws, and building rational budgets and personnel management systems that reward good performance. The key in all this is to take a building-block approach: start with small, basic steps that can form a foundation for more ambitious measures. USAID has already begun devoting greater resources to these tasks in Central America; given additional resources, it may be possible to improve and expand upon these initiatives.⁶¹

Governments must also address the socio-economic conditions that provide a steady stream of recruits for *maras*, *pandillas*, and other criminal organizations. At the macro level, this requires implementing policies that increase investment and stimulate growth. At the micro level, this means investing in vocational training, education, and after-school activities that will keep teens and young adults off the streets and give them some hope of succeeding in a legitimate line of work. A good example of this latter type of policy is the USAID community center initiative in Guatemala, which provides the resources necessary to found centers where young people can learn a trade, use computers, and socialize—but only on the condition that municipal governments, church groups, and private businesses furnish the physical space and the volunteer labor necessary to sustain the centers. By operating in this manner, USAID has brought additional resources to bear on the gang problem and has helped build partnerships between government and important groups of citizens.⁶²

If the U.S. is serious about combating criminal fiefdoms, it must also face up to the reality that much of the money that funds organized crime in the region comes from U.S. drug consumption. Since the unveiling of Plan Colombia, the

⁶¹ Author's Interview with USAID Official, 24 November 2009.

⁶² Author's interview with Harold Sibaja, November 20, 2009.

increasing emphasis on combating drug-related violence abroad has not been matched by sustained, intensive efforts to deal with the demand side of the equation. Funding for domestic demand restriction activities fell as a percentage of the U.S. counter-drug budget between 2001 and 2008, with the budget for anti-drug advertising falling by more than half under the Bush administration. Similarly, while a number of cities within the U.S. have begun to consider the quasi-legalization of marijuana and other harm-reduction strategies, the national debate on this issue is still relatively impoverished. Outlining a comprehensive demand-side strategy is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that the U.S. will need to devote greater resources, political will, and creativity to deal with this issue.⁶³

This list of measures should be considered suggestive rather than definitive or exhaustive. Combating crime, ameliorating social ills, and correcting institutional decay are far from exact sciences, and a capacity for innovation and adaptation will be vital in addressing these issues. To achieve this, a policy “entrepreneur,” or a creative problem-solver “willing to experiment with new approaches, to learn from others, and more important, to abandon initiatives that are not bearing fruit,”⁶⁴ is required if the U.S. seeks to effectively deal with the problem of AGSs and criminal fiefdoms in Latin America.

⁶³ Liana Sun Wyler, *International Drug Control Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2008), pp. 2-3, 12; Marcela Sanchez, “U.S. Antes Up to Fight Drugs in Mexico, As It Cuts Funding for Programs Here,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 1, 2008; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *U.S. Obligations under the Merida Initiative*, 110th Congr., 2nd Sess., February 7, 2008, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “The Latin American Experience,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, October 2008, p. 78.

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