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## DRUG TRAFFICKING, VIOLENCE, AND INSTABILITY IN MEXICO, COLOMBIA, AND THE CARIBBEAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY



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### KEY INSIGHTS:

- The relationships between powerful criminal groups and states are complex and create transnational issues of corruption and the production, transportation, marketing, and consumption of illegal products and services that have national security implications for most states in the Western Hemisphere.
- The Colombian government has successfully responded to challenges from the FARC and several criminal groups, but the challengers have responded with adaptations that ensure their survival. The persistence of these security challenges continue to cause concern over the intersection of drugs and terror.
- Mexico has experienced an increase in organized criminal violence in several of its states; much of the violence is associated with drug trafficking and associated illegal activity. Counterintuitively, some areas sustain high levels of illegal activity without high levels of violence if the state retains sufficient enforcement capacity or cooperates with organized crime.
- U.S. drug policy has had enormous effect on the Mexican drug trade. However, the solution to organized crime and related violence will ultimately rely on Mexican federal, state, and community ability to understand the issues and more effectively combat corruption and gangs, while providing more effective governance and economic opportunities for its citizens.
- The small Caribbean nations are experiencing increases in drug trafficking and related violence, but are even less equipped than their larger neighbors to combat these problems; lack of U.S. support has created a vacuum that is being filled by Cuba and Venezuela.
- Consistently identified issues were: (1) the region's need to address the intersection of corruption and violence, (2) the unexpected and unintended consequences of national and international policies, and (3) the operational issues surrounding the concepts of decriminalization, tolerance of criminal activity, tough stands against criminal activity, and improving governmental systems.

### Introduction.

The University of Pittsburgh Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies, the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, the University Center for International Studies, the Center for Latin American Studies, the Office of the Provost, and the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, conducted a colloquium at the University of Pittsburgh campus on October 28-30, 2009, entitled "Drug Trafficking, Violence, and Instability in Mexico, Colombia, and the Caribbean: Implications for U.S. National Security." Key note speakers were: (1) Bruce Bagley, Professor and Chair, Department of International Studies, University of Miami and Director, University of Miami's Center of Latin American Studies (CLAS), who addressed "What Can the Mexican State Do to Combat Organized Crime?" and (2) Jorge Chabat, Professor/Investigator, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), who discussed "The Drug War in Mexico: Dilemmas and Options." This colloquium was attended by over 150 government officials, academic experts, think tank members, U.S. military, and U.S. and international students and faculty.

The conference focused on a national security challenge which has to this point been contained but is taking dramatically new and dangerous forms. The emergence of new criminal groups in Colombia, increased violence in Mexico, and the possible spread of these criminal activities to Cuba and other Caribbean islands, create new instabilities which could result in one or more strategic shocks, in an area which is both the backyard and soft underbelly of the United States. Even if this does not

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