

Instability in the Northern Triangle of Central America:

Drug-Trafficking, Organized Crime and Canadian Foreign Policy

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The current political instability and drug related violence in Central America is a global security concern. The Northern Triangle – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – are gripped by weak institutions, poverty, violence, organized crime and drug trafficking. This report examines the origins of Canadian involvement and US-Canada relations in Central America, the current predicament in the region and Canadian national interest in the Northern Triangle. The purpose is to explore current national policy engagements in the Northern Triangle and to address the role of the Canadian government in effectively addressing this hemispheric challenge.

The Shifting Central America

The epicentre of drug violence and instability in the Americas has an increasingly fatal grasp in Central America. While Columbia and Mexico have traditionally represented the hub of cocaine trafficking, recently the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—have become the latest casualties of organized crime. The growing instability in the Northern Triangle and the capacity of organized crime to transcend borders presents a deteriorating security dilemma for Canada and the Hemisphere.

The origin of Canadian engagement in Central America coincides with the rise of the Central American crisis of the 1980s. National interest in the region was based on factors such as security, immigration, aid and domestic pressures. Canada pursued multilateral institutions as a forum for restoring peace which created tensions with US policies of interventionism in the region. During this decade Canadian foreign policy began to actively engage in the Hemisphere and to formulate a vision for the Americas. This pace of greater Canadian involvement in Latin America would fade throughout the 1990s and into the early millennium.

Since 2007, re-engagement in the Americas has become a priority in Canadian foreign policy and coincides with the rise of instability in the Northern Triangle. Canadian interests in the region have a domestic component, but are ultimately driven by a concern for larger and far-reaching destabilization in the Americas. Thus far the Canadian approach to the region has been through multilateral institutions and collaborative regional initiatives that support increased state and judicial capacity. The instability in the Northern Triangle is likely to intensify without long-term, sustainable policies for building state capacity; a coordinated international effort that will leverage effectiveness and the development of a broader hemispheric strategy that addresses consumption and demand in drug-trafficking.

The Central American Crisis of the 1980's

Before the Central American crisis of the 1980s, Canadian foreign policy in Latin America was traditionally imparted to the United States, with the exception of engagement in Chile, Cuba and Commonwealth Caribbean states. The 1980s mark a particularly brutal and violent period for Central America, which was homogenous in its low levels of industrialization, underdevelopment, skewed economic structures and weak, undemocratic political institutions. The victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979 initiated the breakdown of old regimes in region, but violence, instability, civil war, intrastate conflict and extra-regional involvement precipitated the Central American crisis.

By 1986 in the “the five ” Central American nations—Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua— more than a third of labour force was unemployed, real wages had decreased, inflation soared and the economy had contracted by 28-percent. (CEPAL, 1987, 3). The Canadian government became increasingly engaged in the region with assistance through aid programs, providing \$3.16 million provided to Canadian NGOs and food in the first half of the 1980s (CIDA, 1984, 91). Overall aid for Central America more than doubled from \$22.5 million in 1981 to \$55.4 million in 1987, and reflected the ongoing commitment and investments in the region (CIDA, 1987, 51). The increasing violence and poverty in the region precipitated the exodus of refugee claimants and by 1987, 18-percent of the Central American population was internally

displaced or forced to flee. From 1983-1988, 17,000 refugees entered Canada and from 1983-1986 approximately 3,000 refugees a year were claimants from Central America (Molot, 1990, 238). The predominance of Central American claimants was important in fostering Canadian interests in the region. This occurred in conjunction with increasing calls to action by domestic NGOs and unions that insisted the Canadian government address the issues of aid and US military interventionism in Central America.

Given that Central America had never figured prominently in Canadian foreign policy, it is critical to explore the nature of this unprecedented interest in the 1980s. As mentioned the domestic non-governmental sector had strong interests and relentlessly attempted to influence Canadian foreign policy. The first high-level trade and investment mission to Central America occurred in 1979, but in the 1980s Canada did less than 2-percent of total annual trade with all of Central America (Haglund, 1987, 796). The focus of the Canadian economy in the Americas was geared towards Commonwealth Caribbean nations and the US, therefore engagement in the Central American crisis was not founded on economic interests. The impetus for Canadian foreign policy in the region during the 1980s is best deliberated through the lens of security.

Both the Canadian and US government considered security as a fundamental reason for engagement in Central America. Security interests could be framed in the context of East-West, North-South and West-West conflicts (Haglund, 1987, 811). The E-W conflict was favoured by the US as the logic for involvement in the region, whereby Central America was the breeding ground for the escalation of Soviet and Cuban power and necessitated military intervention. Canada under both the Liberals and Tories largely rejected the view that the conflict was an extension of the Cold War. Instead the roots of crisis were understood as N-S conflict, caused by disparity and inequality. Accordingly, security threats were mitigated through aid policies, diplomacy and the promotion of human rights. An underlying security interest throughout the Central American crisis of the 1980s was that of mounting W-W tensions. The Atlantic Alliance was threatened, given that Western European nations openly criticized US policies in the region. Fallout between the Western powers had a destabilizing potential by threatening to strain NATO relations. De-

escalation of the crisis was a prominent international focus, expressed in a resolution of the UN General Assembly in November 1986, supporting the decision of the International Court of Justice on Nicaragua's case against the US. The court ruled that the US had broken international laws by training, equipping, financing and supplying the contra forces and mining Nicaragua's harbours (North, 1990, 56). The US Reagan administration used its power to actively sabotage the ability of the U.N. to fulfill its agenda in Central America and this threatened irreversible harm to institutional authority of the UN. For Canada as a middle-power the UN was an important forum for influence and the fact that the US could single-handedly disrupt attempts by the international community to resolve conflicts was a major source of W-W tension (Keating, 2002, 4).

Central America represented serious points of W-W tensions between Canadian and US given the divergent policies. Each nation differed on the cause of the crisis and were more fundamentally at odds on how to achieve a mutually desired outcome—a region with a peaceful, liberal, capitalist government. The foreign policies of the two nations diverged on the manner in which to accomplish this outcome, Canada attempted to use diplomatic means and the US exercised military actions. US policies and military interventionism in Central America violated the fundamental tenants of Canadian foreign policy which rested on; respect for international law, peaceful resolutions, self-determination and the use of multilateral institutions. Canadian criticisms of US actions in the region were framed as condemnation of all “outside intervention”. Structuring Canadian foreign policy criticism in this manner was purposely vague; as such a broad statement could also apply to the Soviet Union and Cuba. Throughout the 1980s the Canadian government frequently upheld the long-standing practice of framing policies in terms of international institutions and obligations. While outright criticisms were rarely made of U.S. policies, in the instances where it occurred the UN was the preferred forum. Canadian actions in Central America were conducted in a manner that acknowledged the potential escalation of W-W tensions, while upholding fundamental principles of national foreign policy.

Canadian involvement in the peace process was its clearest divergence from U.S. policy

in Central America. The Contadora Process was the initial attempt towards peace in the first half of 1980s and laid the groundwork for the more substantial stages of the process, the Esquipulas negotiations. Esquipulas was composed primarily of Central American nations and was a regionally led process to peace. Canada remained involved in roughly the same capacity as it had during the Contadora portion of the negotiations, providing advice primarily on areas related to border patrols and peacekeeping. In 1988, the Esquipulas countries asked Canada to assist, in conjunction with the UN to set the “verification and control follow-up machinery” and framework for peacekeeping (Government of Canada, 1988, 13) In 1989 Canada was instrumental in the organization and dispatch of reconnaissance and observer operations, ONUNCA and ONUSAL, for the UN in Central America (Graham, 1988, 40). Quiet diplomacy through aid programs, peacekeeping and the use of multilateral institutions was often utilized to oppose the military intervention and uphold the tenants of Canadian foreign policy.

The end of the 1980s marked a shift in Canadian foreign policy and its role in the Americas. Since the inauguration of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948, Canada had displayed no interest in becoming a member and seemingly eluded hemispheric engagement. In 1989, as the peace process in Central America and Canadian involvement intensified, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced that Canada would seek membership because “Hemispheric cooperation is integral to Canada’s interests and the OAS holds the key to that co-operation. Canada’s presence here today signals a new departure in our relations with Latin America. We recognize that our interests are directly engaged here. We will no longer stand apart” (Government of Canada, 1989, 4). Membership in the OAS was consistent with Canadian history and experience in multilateral forums, mediation, pragmatism and its non-imperialist image. Canada entered the final decade of the century signalling that it identified as a nation of the Americas and was transitioning towards a more engaged foreign policy in the region.

New Disorder in the Northern Triangle

While the 1980s marked an unprecedented engagement in Central America by the mid-1990s, Canada was heavily distracted from the region. The withdrawal from hemispheric

activities was in part due to increasing peace and stability in the region. The shift was also due to competing crisis in other global regions and specifically a greater focus on development, health, human rights and poverty issues in Africa. In terms of security concerns, the post-9/11 years resulted in unparalleled focus on the US-led ‘War on Terror’ and an increasing preoccupation with terrorism as a destabilizing force. During the late 1990s and at the turn of the century many of the economic policies, based on free market principals, envisioned to promote development in Latin America were falling short or were rejected. An increasing distrust for international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and ensuing economic instability in the Latin America resulted in Canadian economic disengagement in the hemisphere. While Canada focused on other competing priorities and commitments, the hard sought peace and stability in Central America was beginning to falter.

Unlike the 1980s, when Central America was in the midst of conflict with an ideological-political tilt and interventionist practices, the current instability is due escalating drug trafficking and organized crime. Throughout the 1990s, South American drug traffickers routed North American bound narcotics, specifically cocaine, through the Caribbean. With increased anti-trafficking measures implemented in the Caribbean, with major engagements from the US, Mexico soon became the new route. While controversial but touted as effective, Mexico launched its version of the “war on drugs” at the end of 2006, mainly through better surveillance of major air and sea arteries. This in no way eliminated the grips of organized crime but created a more restricted and unfavourable environment for operations. Not to be deterred, the hub of the cocaine trade relocated to three neighbouring nations, referred to as the Northern Triangle— El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

This part of Central America has become the new frontier for drug trafficking; where 84 percent of cocaine that reaches the U.S. passes through the region (Archibold, 2011). In the Northern Triangle, Guatemala now transports 60 percent of drugs in transit from South American-drug producing countries to the US, and the homicide rates have increased in conjunction with the accompanied growth of organized crime (Beaubien,

2011). The nation has largely ungoverned border with Mexico and is a prime location for the drug trade and the advance of cartels, namely Los Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel. Guatemalan security forces lack the capacity to confront traffickers, the judicial system is increasingly unable to enforce the law where only 1/20 homicides are prosecuted and the state continues to be weakened by the encroachments of organized crime (The Economist, 2011). The growing instability in Guatemala indicates the growing capacity of organized crime and drug-trafficking to continue to threaten the Northern Triangle.

The severity of the situation in the Northern Triangle is perhaps best echoed by the homicide rate, which are measured per 100, 000 of the population. Globally the average homicide rate is 6.9 and while the Canadian rate is well below that average at 1.8 the average homicide rate for the Americas is 15.6. The steady decline in homicide rates in Central America from 1995 to 2005 has reversed and increased sharply since 2007. Traditionally the topic of drug related violence and homicide in the Americas conjures thoughts of Columbia and Mexico. While the average homicide rate in Mexico is 18.1 and 33.4 in Columbia, these nations do not represent the highest figures for the Americas. Unfortunately this is bestowed to Honduras with a rate of 82.1, followed by El Salvador with a rate of 66 and Guatemala –surpassed only by Jamaica—with a rate 41.4 which has long been contested to be artificially low (UNODC, Global Study on Homicide, 2011). These alarmingly high homicide rates have also encroached into other nations in the region and serve as an indication that Central America is not nearing a crisis point but has arrived. The ‘mano dura’ (strong-arm) tactics that are implemented to fight the increasing lawlessness, violence and organized crime often fall short of addressing other underlying causes of the crisis

The situation in the Northern Triangle is a reminder that the rising levels of violence, homicide and corruption will continue to cause the deterioration of state-run institutions and loss of governmental control over national territory. Drug-related violence and corruption impact Central American economies with a loss of 8% of its GDP (Economist, 2011). Systemic poverty, decreasing GDP and low educational attainment exacerbated instability, increase the vulnerability of communities and hastens the encroachment of

organized crime. Events such as the global economic downturn may further exacerbate instability, as economies slow down and remittances bound for Central America decrease. The economic profits from the cocaine trade are great and seriously undermine the ability of the nations in the Northern Triangle to overcome such a profitable industry. In 2008 the amount of cocaine shipped through Central America carried a street value of more than half the per capita GDP of Honduras and roughly 20 times Panama's and Guatemala's combined 2007 defence budgets. It was also more than 100 times the amount allocated by the United States under the Mérida Initiative to assist interdiction efforts by Central American nations (World Bank, 2011, 12). Strengthening weak states and counteracting the organized crime related to drug trafficking is essential for economic and social development to occur. The declining situation threatens not the nature of democracy in the fragile states of the Northern Triangle, but has the capacity to destabilize Central American and create a larger hemispheric security dilemma.

Canadian National Interests in the Northern Triangle

During a tour of the Americas, in July 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated that "Canada's government has made it clear that re-engagement in the Americas is a critical international priority for our country...Canada is committed to playing a bigger role in the Americas and to doing so for the long term" (DFAIT, 2009). The focus of the new strategy was to promote prosperity through greater economic ties, support for democracy and enhance security in the region. As the strategy was unveiled, violence and instability were gaining strength in the Northern Triangle and presented a key engagement opportunity. The volatility in Central America falls within Canadian security priority and is an issue of national interest.

There are however distinctions in the hierarchy of national interests, broadly defined in three categories: vital interest, major interest and other interests (Rempel, 2006). Vital interests are those necessary for Canadians and directly related to prosperity, security and independence. The Canadian national economy is largely carried by its trading relationship with the US, which accounts for 78.9 percent of Canadian exports and 54.1-percent of imports (Global Finance, 2011). Canadian economic interests are

shaped by its interconnectedness with the US; therefore instability in the Northern triangle does not directly impact vital Canadian economic interests. Vital Canadian security or sovereignty interests are also not directly impacted by the instability in the Northern Triangle given the lack of state to state threat. At the foot of the hierarchy are “other” interests which refer to desirable policy outcomes that are only remotely linked to Canada’s national objectives. In this context the Canadian position would perceive instability in the Northern Triangle as a region where there is little at stake in terms of deciding to engage or stand by. While this would enable Canadian foreign policy to select priorities deemed relevant and appropriate in the region on an ad hoc basis, it appears this is not the desired strategy.

Given the severity of instability in the Northern Triangle and the implications for larger scale impact, it is more conceivably a major interest—which are those that contribute to the most immediate national security and prosperity objectives—for Canadian engagement. The proximity of the Northern Triangle to the US and the potential for progressive regional instability presents real concern for Canada’s major ally in terms of economy and security. As violence spills over the borders, the security threat posed to the US and the potential for greater destabilization in Mexico have implications for the Canadian economy in terms of NAFTA and regarding the ability of the US to focus on mutually beneficial economic interests. Combating organized crime and drug trafficking in the Americas remains a US based initiative but impacts Canada as a major defence ally to the US, especially if violence spills northward. The Northern triangle carries legitimate security concerns for the nation due to Canadians traveling abroad and the potential influx of refugees or illegal immigration. The ability of this crisis to transcend borders elicits real concerns that the exportation of violence, trafficking in narcotics or small arms and other activities associated with organized crime will impact Canada, especially in national Diaspora communities and in urban centers. National priorities and commitments to democratic governance, economic prosperity and security are impacted by destabilization in the Northern Triangle and therefore represent a major interest for Canadian foreign policy.

The Existing Canadian Approach

Given the importance of the Canada-US relationship, the fact that the war on drugs is historically a US initiative, the potential for W-W tension is reminiscent of those that existed in Central American in the 1980s. Previous US strategies in the war on drugs, such as militarization programs, increased criminalization of drugs and controversial reforms, have often diverged from the use of multilateral institutions more commonly implemented in Canadian foreign policy as a means of addressing drug-trafficking. Combating the spread of cocaine and related organized crime in the Americas—including a long history and conflicting relationship with key nation such as Columbia—has provided the US with lessons on the more effective approaches. A major shift in US foreign policy towards drug trafficking in the Americas occurred with the Mérida Initiative in 2008, an agreement between the US, Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The intention was to fight the threat of drug trafficking and transnational crime in the Western hemisphere. A three-year, \$1.4-billion program with Mexico receiving \$400 million per year in aid and a significantly smaller amount of \$65 million per year divided amongst the nine remaining nations (Lowell and Mines, 2011). Some prominent outcomes have been the success in increasing the capacity of Mexican institutions to disrupt transnational criminal organizations, greater sustainability in rule of law, reforms to Mexico's police and security forces and a new collaborative U.S.-Mexico partnership. Essential to the Mérida Initiative is that US engagement occurs in a supportive and facilitative role through third-country technical expertise and equipment that maximize benefits for Mexico. While this initiative is by no means flawless, it is responsive to priorities set by Mexico and is a regionally based program that signals increased willingness of the US to collaborate in the quest for greater stability in Central America.

In many respects the Canadian foreign policy response to the current instability in the Northern Triangle has pursued a path similar to that taken during the Central American Crisis of the 1980s. Once again Canada has approached the region implementing non-interventionism, multilateral forums and assistance through the provision of aid or expertise. The main multilateral groups through which Canada co-operates for

international drug control are the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in an active role in the central policy-making bodies of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). Canada has also responded to growing instability in the Northern Triangle through the OAS under the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), which has a regular presence in the electoral processes and political crises in the region and in the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), the drug-fighting body of the organization. Canada has taken the situation in Central America seriously, through the OAS, by pressing for democratic initiatives that are essential for strengthening the capacity of the region to combat organized crime and drug-trafficking.

Canada continues to engage the growing crisis in the Northern Triangle through the UNODC and recently provided \$430,000 for the creation of a network of Central American anti-organized crime and drug units that will strengthen the capacity of the region's investigators and prosecutors to handle complex, transnational cases. This will provide a safe forum for sharing information and intelligence on trends, organizations, routes and methods with counterparts. Canada is also contributing \$743,000 to the Santo Domingo Pact and Managua Mechanism which will fight drug trafficking and transnational organized crime by preventing criminal activity through an establishing information-gathering mechanism and the provision of technical assistance and training. Over \$542,000 was recently contributed to crime prevention and criminal justice reform efforts in the Americas by providing technical expertise, conducting needs assessments and developing and disseminating knowledge tools in support of technical assistance. Canada is also supporting an asset recovery network, contributing over \$530,000, in Central America assists in convictions and confiscation of assets in cross-border criminal cases (DFAIT, 2011). Additionally support is provided for larger international security efforts through funding and equipment for the Comando Regional de Entrenamiento de Operaciones de Mantenimiento de Paz (CREOMPAZ), a regional peacekeeping training school in the region (Government of Canada, 2009). The UNODC has provided an essential multilateral forum in which Canadian foreign policy is able to engage in promoting stability in the Northern Triangle.

Fundamentally, Canada is also supporting regionally based initiatives, contributing over \$5.2 million to help address security challenges and implement institutional reforms through the Central American Integration System (SICA) (DFAIT, 2011). The seven member nations— Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama— commit to cooperate in order to develop and implement a joint security strategy. In part SICA is designed to “set up a new model of regional security based on the reasonable balance of forces, the strengthening of civilian authority, the overcoming of extreme poverty, the promotion of sustainable development, the protection of the environment, and the eradication of violence, corruption, terrorism, and drug and arms trafficking” (SICA, 2011). Regionally based initiatives are essential stability in the Northern Triangle and continue to be encouraged in Canadian foreign policy.

Canada’s contribution is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade through the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force’s (START’s), Global Peace and Security Fund (GPSF) and the Anti-Crime Capacity-Building Program (ACCBP). The Global Peace and Security Fund is managed by START, which leads Canada’s coordinated approach to assist fragile and crisis-affected countries. The fund provides financial and operational resources that contribute to conflict prevention and peace building, including justice and security system reform initiatives. Since START’s creation, \$113 million have been contributed to initiatives in the Americas that promote peace and security, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Established in 2009, the ACCBP provides up to \$15 million a year to enhance the capacity of beneficiary states, international organizations and non-governmental entities to prevent and respond to threats posed by transnational criminal activity throughout the Americas (DFAIT, 2011). In Central America and the Caribbean, funding is focused on preventing illicit drug trafficking, reforming the security sector and preventing crime. Recently Canada has focused on strengthening the judicial and security sectors in Guatemala with a contribution of \$7.1-million, including \$4.6 million from the GPSF and \$2.59 million from the ACCBP. This will support a number of projects being implemented by a variety of international and Canadian organizations that will reform and strengthen security and justice institutions in Guatemala.

Canadian defence actions, through the Department of National Defence, against organized crime and drug trafficking are undertaken through the rationale of human security as a vital component to Canada's security agenda, as outline in the Canada First Defence Strategy (DND, 2011). Actual defence commitments to interdiction of drug trafficking in the region have been modest and occur in collaboration with the US. The department of national defence has increased its commitments to the region such as through the Military Training Assistance Program where budget allocation to the Americas have risen from 18-percent of its total budget in 2005-2008 to 25 percent (DFAIT, 2009). CIDA also has a role in the Northern Triangle and as part of the 2009 Aid Effectiveness Agenda; the Government of Canada announced that 80 percent of bilateral resources would be focused on 20 countries, among which was Honduras (CIDA, 2011). While CIDA programs are not designed to directly impact organized crime, programs in Honduras have focused on children, youth and food security and thereby have indirect impacts on promoting stability. By addressing poverty issues in the Northern Triangle, CIDA funded programs help mitigate the weak capacity and limited resources of the state and can diminish the lure of organized crime. Canada has clearly become increasingly engaged in the Northern Triangle, selecting to support a wide range of bilateral programs of cooperation and through the use of forums in multilateral institutions.

Continued Efforts: Mitigating Organized Crime and Drug-Trafficking

Despite increased commitments in the Northern Triangle, success is not easily obtainable because of the nature of organized crime which is mobile, vicious and quick. Canada has continued to focus on bilateral and multilateral initiatives the barriers that exist to this approach are that "Multilateral co-operation has a restricted capacity to face these threats because it has been based on the principle of sovereignty. Consequently, the measures proposed are limited by the institutional strength of every state" (Chabat, 2011). The structural institutional weakness in the region prevents the enforcement of laws and is a barrier to success in the Northern Triangle. Multilateral arrangements that provide financing or equipment are not a quick-fix since the issues of organized crime are further complicated by corruption because "in order to target the profits of criminal organizations they need effective institutional tools and they do not have them precisely because of

the immense economic power of organized crime that corrupts the state itself" (Chabat, 2011). Initiatives that attempt to address criminal organizations in Central America must account for the fact that the states have limited capacity and that reforms are easily hindered by corruption.

In Central America, Canadian foreign policy has a standing tradition of international co-operation, reinforcing national public institutions to fight organized crime and contributing to initiatives that build state capacity. This by no means will ensure the desired outcome but are essential components to success. In an environment of fiscal conservatism the potential for financial contributions are increasingly finite. Effective use of funds will be paramount to stability in the Northern Triangle in finding; therefore investments should continue to be heavily implemented on initiatives that have proven capacity to bolster the capacity of the state. A long-term Canadian commitment and vision to support democratic endeavours and facilitate institutional strength in the Northern Triangle is needed.

The creation of a well defined, sustainable policy approach will be essential for future engagements in the region and will provide a standardized approach that most effectively uses funds.

Drug trafficking and organized crime now impact most of Central America and a more integrated regional approach is necessary. This must be undertaken with South America and the US, for Canada this will require collaborating with nations that share common interests of multilateralism and state building. Mobilizing support will also require a strong partnership with agencies, individuals and civil society in the Northern Triangle. While widespread cooperation and integration have been lacking in Central America, developing a harmonized approach will be complex but necessary for success. Increasing coordination efforts that engage the Northern Triangle can enhance effectiveness in tackling security threats, leverage capacity-building expertise, prevent the duplication of similar initiatives and efficiently employ resources.

Instability in Central America which is perpetuated by organized crime and drug trafficking does not thrive without the demand for consumption. Of the roughly 440 metric tons

of cocaine available for consumption, around 63-percent is consumed in the Americas and 29-percent in Europe (UNODC, 2011 Drug Report, 121) The single largest cocaine market is the US with an estimated consumption of 157 metric tons of cocaine, equivalent to 36-percent of global consumption. Almost 37-percent of all cocaine users worldwide are found in North America and is the sub region with the largest number of users, accounting for more than a third of all cocaine users' worldwide. The prevalence of cocaine users among the population is 2.4-percent for the US, 1.4-percent for Canada and .4-percent for Mexico (UN Drug report, 2011, 89). It is this demand that sustains the Latin American drug industry and results in the increasing instability in the Northern Triangle. Strategies that address supply-side tactics are essential but without addressing demand the issues in the region will perpetuate. Policies and laws related to the consumption and distribution of cocaine can impact the chain of supply and demand.

Given the high level of drug-related corruption in the criminal justice systems and the vast resources of organized crime in the Northern Triangle, many drug enforcement efforts may not be particularly effective in reducing instability. The polices and laws of major consuming nations have the potential to impact the manner in which drug trafficking and organized crime function within the Northern Triangle. The responsibility falls to major consuming nations to identify the implications of domestic drug policies and laws in Central America and collaborate to find practical resolutions. National policies that address local drug control methods can have serious implications for other state, especially if they are democratically weaker. This is exemplified by the trend of domestic interdiction measures that have propelled organized crime into weaker nations and in the end fail to address the problem on a larger scale. Effective policies that address the issues of the demand for drugs are vital since organized crime has proven its ability to transcend borders. Without this approach cartels will continue to be rapidly moving targets, thereby diminishing the ability to have long term, effective policy options for addressing drug trafficking and organized crime. At the core of the debate regarding demand is legalization versus criminalization, such subjects are rife with controversy and neither end has proven particularly effective in addressing the demand for cocaine. Despite these differing approaches to curbing demand there is a need for a broader

international approach for combating drug-trafficking in the hemisphere that goes beyond interdiction and instead strategizes to reduce demand. In particular this should include prevention and rehabilitation programs aimed at the reduction of violence, drug use and risky behaviour in youth in order to prevent the cyclical and generational nature of this crisis in the Northern Triangle.

Final Reflections

The complex past and dark legacy of Central America— a region marked with poverty, violence and civil war—has positioned the region to be susceptible to drug trafficking and organized crime. The shifting epicentre of drug violence and instability to the Northern Triangle presents a growing challenge to Canadian and Hemispheric security. Canada has a history of commerce, investment, development, military assistance, immigration and the promotion of democratic values in the Americas. By examining the establishment of Canadian engagement in Central America policy makers gain a more comprehensive understanding the nature of this relationship, best described as cyclical intensity in terms of interest and awareness.

Since the 2007, re-engagement in the Americas has become a priority in Canadian foreign policy and the Northern Triangle is a region well suited for spotlight given the reaffirmed interest of security in the Americas. Canadian interests in the region have a domestic component, but are ultimately driven by the greater concern for larger destabilization in the Americas. Canada should continue to approach this issue with capacity building, security sector reform and support for justice institutions. There is also a new sense of urgency for stabilizing the Northern Triangle and this requires a fast, responsive and broader approach.

To utilize financial resources with maximum efficiency Canadian foreign policies should approach engagement in a coordinated international effort that will leverage effectiveness. The instability in the Northern Triangle is likely to intensify without long-term, sustainable policies for building state capacity and the development of a broader hemispheric strategy to address the consumption and demand for cocaine. Canada

should look ahead for opportunities to collaborate with Central American nations and broader global partners to combat organized crime and drug trafficking in the Northern Triangle, in order to promote security, democracy and prosperity in the Americas.

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