

8-6-1997

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### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Features in Two Prestigious Magazines Offer Insights on Mexican Drug Trade." (1997).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3775>

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## Features in Two Prestigious Magazines Offer Insights on Mexican Drug Trade

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1997-08-06

According to two separate reports published in early August in the Miami-based Latin Trade magazine and in the Mexican weekly Proceso, drug trafficking continues to have a profound impact on Mexico's political and economic structure.

According to Latin Trade, US and Mexican investigators have estimated that drug-trade profits currently being laundered through Mexico range from US\$10 billion to US\$15 billion per year. Miami magazine says drug profits represent 3-5% of Mexican GDP Latin Trade says the amount of money laundered through Mexico represents the equivalent of 3% to 5% of Mexico's annual GDP.

The drug profits are invested in a variety of areas, including the real estate market, stocks and bonds, and occasionally in public-works project, according to the article. "For a developing country that has averaged just 4% GDP growth annually in the five years prior to the 1995 economic crisis, this flood of money represents the difference between growth and stagnation, or worse, recession at the macroeconomic level," the report said.

However, some Mexican business leaders expressed doubt about the magazine's contention that drug profits have a major impact on the Mexican economy. Raymundo Winkler, director of the Centro de Estudios Economicos del Sector Privado (CEESP), said drug traffickers probably invest a relatively small percentage of their profits in Mexico, perhaps purchasing some luxuries or paying for the maintenance of small businesses.

Instead of sinking their money into Mexico, said Winkler, many drug traffickers seek more lucrative direct and indirect investments in the advanced industrialized countries.

### *Proceso details military involvement in drug trade*

Meanwhile, a separate article published in Proceso suggests that high-ranking military officials may be deeply involved in the drug trade. According to Proceso, which cited confidential documents obtained from the Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA), key officers may have entered into a special "arrangement" with drug trafficker Amado Carrillo Fuentes several years ago. Carrillo reportedly died in a hospital in Mexico City in early July after eight hours of plastic surgery (see SourceMex, 07/16/95).

In the article, Proceso also revealed that six military officers based in Jalisco state have been under investigation for alleged drug ties that date as far back as 1991. According to Proceso, documents from the military's secret files show that Gen. Juan Felix Tapia Garcia, former head of the military zone in Jalisco state, is suspected of providing protection to prominent drug trafficker Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo in exchange for "gifts" from the drug lord. A statement by SEDENA has

confirmed that the defense secretariat is investigating possible drug ties involving 34 current or former members of the military. SEDENA, however, did not mention the names of officers under investigation.

According to Proceso, its revelations have led to repercussions in the military. Allegedly, two army officers Col. Pablo Castellanos Garcia and Captain Miguel Angel Hernandez Torres are now being tried by a military court on charges of having copied classified military documents on the internal drug investigations from military computers to provide to Proceso. For his part, Attorney General Jorge Madrazo Cuellar confirmed that his office is investigating 20 members of the military for "crimes against health," which is the classification used for drug trafficking by Mexican law enforcement authorities. "These investigations do not mean that we should view the entire armed forces with dishonor," Madrazo told reporters.

### *Proceso revelations spur demands for government investigation*

The Proceso revelations led the Comision Permanente a joint legislative committee with representatives from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies to launch its own investigation to determine the extent of drug trafficking in the Mexican military. In a joint statement, congressional leaders of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), the Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) demanded a thorough investigation of the information in Proceso.

The legislators raised the possibility of organizing hearings on the matter, which would include testimony from Defense Secretary Enrique Cervantes Aguirre. During the past year, President Ernesto Zedillo's administration has taken some action to combat drug trafficking, such as eliminating the corrupt Instituto Nacional para el Combate contra las Drogas (INCD). The drug enforcement duties were transferred to a special unit under the jurisdiction of the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) in mid-April (see SourceMex, 05/21/97).

But despite the administration's apparent willingness to investigate armed forces involvement in drug trafficking, there is a high level of skepticism on whether any high-ranking members of the military will be convicted. In a follow-up interview with Proceso, Francisco Molina Ruiz a former INCD director said President Zedillo would sincerely like to combat drug trafficking, but he will not take any concrete action because many government institutions, including the army, are too entrenched in the drug trade. According to Molina, the Policia Judicial Federal, which is headed by an army general, will almost certainly stifle any direct actions by Mariano Herran Salvatti, the PGR's chief drug enforcement officer. "Herran Salvatti cannot make any moves because he is surrounded by 30 members of the military who have been assigned to key positions in the fight against drug trafficking," said Molina. "Because of this, I predict we will not see any direct moves against the military."

Similarly, the government-sanctioned Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH) expressed concern about the reports of strong military involvement in the drug trade. However, CNDH president Mireille Roccati said the government has no choice but to continue to use armed forces personnel to combat drug-related crimes. "Unfortunately, we lack a civilian police force that is trained to fight drug trafficking," said Roccati. As a partial solution, Roccati urged the Zedillo

administration to nominate civilians to oversee the military personnel involved in drug-trade investigations.

### *General's testimony could implicate other officers*

Meanwhile, attorneys for Gen. Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo hinted that the former INCD director could implicate "high- level officials, including members of the military" in upcoming testimony. Edgar Herrera Navarrete, an attorney for Gutierrez Rebollo, said the general's testimony could prove harmful to many current members of the military. Herrera did not specify a date when Gutierrez Rebollo would testify. Gutierrez Rebollo and two other officers were arrested in February on charges of accepting bribes to protect Carrillo Fuentes.

At the time of his arrest, Gutierrez Rebollo had led the INCD for only two months (see SourceMex, 02/26/97). In another related development, a few days after the Proceso article was published, two gunmen shot a woman who was alleged to be a liaison between the military and drug traffickers. The victim, Irma Lizette Ibarra Naveja, was shot in Guadalajara as she walked to her truck. Local law enforcement authorities in Guadalajara referred the case to federal agencies, which was a clear indication that the assassination may have involved organized crime, drug trafficking, or other federal offenses.

Ibarra's assassination was the third attack in recent days on witnesses preparing to testify or talk to the press on Mexico's growing scandal involving ties between the military and drug traffickers. (Sources: The Dallas Morning News, 07/28/97; Los Angeles Times, 07/29/97; Novedades, 07/28/97, 07/30/97; Excelsior, 07/30/97; Miami Herald, 07/28/97, 07/31/97; El Economista, 07/30/97, 07/31/97; Associated Press, 07/31/97; El Universal, 07/28/97, 08/01/97; Siglo 21, 08/01/97; The News, 07/28-31/97, 08/01/97; Proceso, 07/27/97, 08/03/97; Reuter, 07/30/97, 08/04/97; La Jornada, 07/30/97, 08/01/97, 08/05/97, 08/06/97)

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