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Galeana Abarca, Andres

Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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**THESIS**

**UNGOVERNED SPACES IN MEXICO: AUTODEFENSAS,  
FAILED STATES, AND THE WAR ON DRUGS IN  
MICHOACÁN**

by

Andres Galeana Abarca

December 2014

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Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez

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**UNGOVERNED SPACES IN MEXICO: AUTODEFENSAS, FAILED STATES,  
AND THE WAR ON DRUGS IN MICHOACÁN**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The spiral of violence generated by the drug war in Mexico over the past decade has raised security concerns, not only in Mexico, but also in the international community. The rise of vigilante groups in Michoacán (operating at least in theory) against organized crime and violence related to drug trafficking has recently and dramatically drawn attention to the relative weakness of government institutions in some parts of Mexico. This has in turn led some commentators to continue to describe Mexico as a potential “failed state.” However, the term failed state overlooks the specific location and character of both organized crime and violence in those parts of Mexico where it has become a problem. It is argued here that an understanding of the vigilante groups in Michoacán in relation to the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic particularities of Michoacán can best be achieved by setting aside the notion of a failed state and using the idea of “ungoverned spaces.” Taking ungoverned spaces as its point of departure, this thesis argues that the high level of violence in the ungoverned spaces in Michoacán has resulted in a parallel system of governance in much of the state; however, this is not the same as a failed state. This thesis takes a fresh look at drug trafficking and violence related to drug trafficking that moves beyond broad notions of failed states and focuses on the specifics of ungoverned spaces in parts of Mexico and elsewhere that drug-trafficking and violence in particular have generated considerable concern.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CONEVAL	National Evaluation Council of Social Development Policy
GDP	gross domestic product
PAN	National Action Party
PRD	Democratic Revolutionary Party
PRI	Revolutionary Institutional Party
SHCP	Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit
TEU	twenty-foot equivalent unit
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republics

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## I. INTRODUCTION: FROM FAILED STATES TO UNGOVERNED SPACES

This thesis will answer the question “Why did the *autodefensas* emerge, specifically in Michoacán, in 2013?” Early in that year, the emergence of the *autodefensas* in the state of Michoacán complicated the usual landscape of armed conflict in the region. The violence has always been a result of competition between rival criminal organizations. The rise of these groups reflects the social consequences of prolonged violence and the government’s inability to enforce the rule of law in historically rural regions that were, and are, difficult to control. The so-called “war on drugs” has contributed to the emergence of ungoverned spaces, spaces in which the state is not properly functioning. Furthermore, in some these spaces, control has transferred to organized crime, whether directly or indirectly.

This thesis argues that the high level of violence in the ungoverned spaces in Michoacán has resulted in a parallel system of governance in much of the state; however, this is not the same as a failed state. Furthermore, there is no consensus on the proper definition of failed state, therefore I will offer a critique of the term to justify why this not apply to the Mexican case, taking “ungoverned spaces” as its point of departure. For example, some writers argue that the concept is unable to explain the fragmentation of the public power, the historical context, and the social disintegration as a source of ungovernability.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter first lays out the research question and the definition of *autodefensas*, as well as ungoverned spaces that guide this work. Next, it explains the integration of this thesis and provides a brief conclusion about the emergence of the *autodefensas* in Michoacán state. After that, lays out the concept of failed state, its origins and evolution, and then challenges the applicability of the concept to Mexico. The last section of this chapter examines the impact of the drug prohibition and the industrialization process in Michoacán between 1940 and 1950, both of which

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<sup>1</sup> Adam D. Morton, “The War on Drugs in Mexico: A Failed State?” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 9 (October 2012): 1632.

contributed to the configuration of ungoverned spaces in the state. Historical events help to draw a better perspective of failed state.

#### **A. WHY DID THE AUTODEFENSAS EMERGE, SPECIFICALLY IN MICHOACÁN, IN 2013?**

There are two primary variables to explain the emergence of the *autodefensas*. First is Mexico's political reconfiguration from 2000 to 2012, during which the PRD governed Michoacán. In 2012, the return of the PRI to power disrupted the informal systems that existed at the edge of the legal framework in Michoacán, which explained the political transition issues that ensued. The second variable is the active presence of organized crime in the Michoacán. A criminal organization called La Familia Michoacana, and later the Knights Templars, were able to create an entire network that controlled the municipal police, politicians, and the people. It controlled the local economy, the mining industry and also controlled the in/out trade flows of the port of Lazaro Cardenas. In such cases, the people constructed alternative forms of governance in the absence of the "legal authorities."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the political, social, and organized crime relations became the key answering the main question of this thesis, why did the *autodefensas* emerge specifically in Michoacán in 2013?

For the purpose of this thesis, self-defense groups, or *autodefensas*, will be defined as "a group of people who organize themselves into groups to take the law into their own hands in order to reprimand criminals and protect their community."<sup>3</sup> In light of this definition, an "ungoverned territory" will be considered as "an area in which the state faces significant challenges in establishing control."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anne Clunan, and Harold A. Trinkunas, eds., *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Moritz Schuberth, "Challenging the Weak States Hypothesis: Vigilantism in South Africa and Brazil," *Peace, Conflict & Development* no. 20 (April 2013): 40.

<sup>4</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2007), 1.

## B. THESIS OUTLINE

This work will be divided into four chapters. Chapter I introduces the overall study. Chapter II analyzes the existence of ungoverned spaces in Michoacán. First, it examines how the cartels have fought against each other to achieve control of the state. The purpose of this discussion is to understand the complex criminal systems within the state. Then, the chapter explores two weaknesses, the security and governance apparatuses. It offers some evidence of the extent of organized crime's penetration into the security and governance institutions. This discussion focuses on providing understanding as to how organized crime has infiltrated the security and governance apparatuses.

Chapter III discusses the contemporary version of the emergence of the *autodefensas* at the beginning of 2013. The beginning point and the model for the movement are the organizations that arose in the town of Cherán. This chapter also identifies the recognized leaders of those organizations, whose principal objective was to expel the Knights Templar from the state of Michoacán. In addition, Chapter III explores the importance of the state in relation to geography, agricultural, and industrial production.

In this thesis, some aspects of discussion are deliberately left out of the argument. The first aspect left out is the state of democracy in Mexico, as the author does not imply that democracy is part of the problem. Although Mexico is a democratic country with defects, it is acceptable in terms of legality and institutional integrity. Its laws, public and private institutions, political parties, and the electoral systems, work well, even though some systemic deficiencies need to be improved to become a high-quality democracy. Also not included in the discussion are the neoliberal reforms implemented in México; some observers argue that these economic reforms have affected the development and the welfare of the society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Coletta Youngers, and Eileen Rosin, "Drogas y Democracia en America Latina, El Impacto de la Politica de Estados Unidos [Drugs and democracy in Latin America, The impact of U.S. policy]," in *La Guerra contra las Drogas Impulsada por Estados Unidos: Su Impacto en America Latina y el Caribe* [The war on drugs promoted by United States: Its impact in Latin America and the Caribbean], ed. Coletta A. Youngers, and Eileen Rosin (Buenos Aires, Argentina: WOLA, 2005), 10.

Chapter IV provides a conclusion to this work. The purpose of this thesis is to show that self-defense groups emerged in Mexico, specifically in Michoacán, due to various factors, such as the relations of power with different political actors. Therefore, different political parties in the transition of power have caused an unbalance in the system, not in the sense that power alternation affects democracy, but in the ways that have affected the informal economies. In addition, organized crime in Michoacán is functioning as a parallel system of governance in the state. Because of this, political, social and organized crime relations have emerged in ungoverned spaces where the state is no longer present.

### **C. THE INVENTION OF THE FAILED STATE**

The concept of failed state is relatively new. On the other hand, the theory about successful and unsuccessful states can be traced back to Max Weber,<sup>6</sup> a German sociologist writing in the nineteenth century, who focused primarily on the question of “state” legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Weber defines the state as a “human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory”<sup>8</sup> In addition, he notes that territory is part of the state’s characteristics. Thus, paradoxical as it may seem, the monopoly on the use of violence is the factor that allows for the existence of both the rule of law and the welfare of the state.

During the 1990s, writers like Gerald Helman, Steven Ratner, William Zartman, Charles Tilly, and Noam Chomsky discussed the pertinence of the concept and the proper definition. Due to discrepancies between the writers’ points of view, the literature has been using different terms for the concept, such as fragile state, rogue, shadow, failing, collapsed, and others.

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<sup>6</sup> Some scholars consider that as early as the seventeenth or eighteenth century theories of failed state existed, as is illustrated by Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury in *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, 1651.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, “Politik als Beruf [Politics as a vocation]” (Munich, Germany: Duncker and Humblodt 1918–1919), accessed July 28, 2014, <http://nw18.american.edu/~dfagel/Class%20Readings/Weber/PoliticsAsAVocation.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In 1992, Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner attempted to define the concept of failed state. They referred to such nations as “simply unable to function as independent entities”<sup>9</sup> and included in this category countries like Haiti, Yugoslavia, the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Chad, Ghana, and Somalia. Additionally, they stated, “governmental structures have been overwhelmed by circumstances,”<sup>10</sup> but they did not explain what those circumstances were. Contrary to this idea, Rosa Ehrenreich Brooks posits that the concept does not properly explain the condition of countries that have waged armed conflict and civil wars and now suffer a debilitated existence.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Charles T. Call goes beyond that and states,

Just as the State Failure Task Force has done, scholars should abandon the concept of state failure, and put renewed effort into devising categories of analysis that will be denotatively and connotatively clear, useful, and discriminating.<sup>12</sup>

The State Failure Task Force to which Call refers was a multidisciplinary research project funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1994. The primary objective of the task force was to analyze and identify the causes of state failure in countries that could be denominated as failed; in other words, those countries that represented risk for the international security.<sup>13</sup> After the September 11 attacks, the concept of the failed state was brought to the attention of the international community. Now, it is linked with the war on terror; the task force searches for reducing areas that will function as a sanctuary for terrorist organizations.

Currently, it is possible to identify at least eight indexes that rate state failure; the most well-known is the Failed State Index, created by the Fund for Peace and published annually. The principal objective of the index is to provide analysis of 178 countries

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<sup>9</sup> Gerald B. Helman, and Steven R. Ratner, “Saving Failed State,” *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1992): 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Rosa E. Brooks, “Failed States, or the State as Failure?” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 72 no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 1161.

<sup>12</sup> Charles T. Call, “The Fallacy of the Failed State,” *Third World Quarterly* 29 no. 8 (December 2008): 1505.

<sup>13</sup> Jack A. Goldstone et al., *State Failure Task Force Report* (McLean, VA: Science Applications International Corporation, 1995), 1.

using a particular methodology that considers a state in relation to its capacity of responding to certain factors, such as political, economic, and social demands, grouped according to 12 indicators.<sup>14</sup> Recent studies have criticized the methodological weaknesses that were routinely used by the indexes to evaluate state performance.<sup>15</sup> Finally, it is necessary a different approach to understand the particularities of each nation state in a historical and globalized context.

#### **D. BEYOND THE THEORY OF THE FAILED STATE: MEXICO**

The United Mexican States (commonly referred to as Mexico) are composed of 31 states and one federal district, Mexico City, which is the capital of the country. Similar to the government of the United States, Mexico's government has three branches: the executive branch, in the figure of the president; the legislative branch, which is composed of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies; and the judicial branch, which is composed of the Supreme Court and subordinate courts.

The president, governors, senators, and deputies are all elected through a public democratic process supervised by an electoral entity called the Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute). These elections are held every three to six years, depending upon the level of authority to be elected. To illustrate this, in the 2012 elections for the president, senators, and deputies, 49,087,446 Mexicans participated, which represents the 63.14 percent of the registered voters.<sup>16</sup> In addition, there are 10 political parties at the national level; however, only three can be considered as major parties, including the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), National Action Party (PAN), and Democratic Revolution Party (PRD).

Regarding its economy since 1994, Mexico has signed 10 free trade agreements with 45 countries and 30 reciprocal investment promotion and protection agreements. In

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<sup>14</sup> Fund for Peace, "The Methodology Behind the Index," Fragile State Index, accessed August 28, 2014, <http://ffp.statesindex.org/methodology>

<sup>15</sup> Francisco Gutierrez et al., *Measuring Poor State Performance: Problems, Perspectives and Paths Ahead* (London: London School of Economics, 2010), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ricardo Quintero, "La Educación, la Cultura Cívica y las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil en México [Education, culture, and civic organizations of civil society in Mexico]," *Revista Innovación Educativa* 12, no. 60 (2012): 149.

addition, Mexico is an active participant in multilateral and regional organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>17</sup> Because of these agreements, the country is becoming one of the most globalized and open economies. In 2013, the gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately \$1.327 trillion dollars, and it is the second largest export market and third largest source of imports to the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, Mexico's export economy is shifting from agriculture to manufacturing—especially computers, cars, and appliances.<sup>19</sup> In other sectors, such as education, health, and jobs, Mexico is improving qualitatively and quantitatively.<sup>20</sup> For instance in 2012, Mexico achieved universal health coverage with an enrollment of 52.6 million people in less than a decade.<sup>21</sup> In May 2014, the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) estimated an increase in GDP of 2.7 percent,<sup>22</sup> meaning that the Mexican economy is still growing and is no longer in recession. In contrast, in 2012, according to the National Evaluation Council of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), there are

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<sup>17</sup> Secretariat of Economy: Mexico, "International Trade Negotiations," last modified 2014, <http://www.economia.gob.mx/trade-and-investment/foreign-trade/international-trade-negotiations>

<sup>18</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Mexico," The World Factbook, accessed August 29, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>

<sup>19</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, *Oferta y Demanda Global de Bienes y Servicios* [Supply and demand of good and services] (Aguascalientes, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2014), 1.

<sup>20</sup> "How's Life? Mexico," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, accessed June 29, 2014, <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/mexico/>

<sup>21</sup> "Mexico Achieves Universal Health Coverage, Enrolls 52.6 Million People," Harvard University School of Public Health, August 2012, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/mexico-universal-health/>

<sup>22</sup> Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, "*La Secretaría de Hacienda Estima un Crecimiento del PIB para el 2014 de 2.7 por Ciento*" [The Secretariat of Finance estimated a growth of 2.7 percent of the GDP for 2014] (Mexico City: Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit, 2014), accessed August 29, 2014, [http://www.hacienda.gob.mx/Biblioteca\\_noticias\\_home/comunicado\\_045\\_2014.pdf](http://www.hacienda.gob.mx/Biblioteca_noticias_home/comunicado_045_2014.pdf)

53.3 million people living in poverty conditions.<sup>23</sup> What conflicting the figures demonstrate is the inequality that exists among the Mexican people.

The security apparatus in Mexico includes military organizations, such as the Army, Air Force, and Navy, along with the federal police, and a new organization called the Gendarmerie, which possesses a combination of police and military training. Mexico's armed forces have assumed a leading role in the fight against organized crime; however, at the state and municipal level, the law enforcement is weak, as authorities are in charge of the prosecution of common crimes like robbery and kidnapping. Certain data shows that municipal governments punish only five percent of common crimes, which means that the probability of getting away with committing a crime is 95 percent.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, security and justice have become subjects of constant analysis because public safety is an essential part of the welfare of the society. In this context, the rule of law must create the necessary conditions that allow citizens to perform their daily activities with the confidence that their lives, property, and other assets are exempt from all danger.

## **E. UNGOVERNED SPACES**

Mexican drug-trafficking organizations have been working since the 1920s when the international community “began prohibiting the production, consumption, and distribution of alcohol and psychotropic substances.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the emergence of drug trafficking has a direct relationship to the creation of the post-revolutionary Mexican State.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, “Medición de la Pobreza en México y en las Entidades Federativas 2012 [Measurement of poverty in Mexico and in the state 2012]” (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, 2013), accessed August 29, 2014, [http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Informes/Coordinacion/Pobreza\\_2012/RESUMEN\\_EJECUTIVO\\_MEDICION\\_POBREZA\\_2012\\_Parte1.pdf](http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Informes/Coordinacion/Pobreza_2012/RESUMEN_EJECUTIVO_MEDICION_POBREZA_2012_Parte1.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Hector Aguilar Camín, “On Mexican Violence,” in *Rethinking the War on Drugs through the U.S.-Mexico Prism*, ed. Ernesto Zedillo, and Haynie Wheeler (New Haven, CT: Betts House, 2012), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Luis Astorga, and David A. Shirk, “Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context” (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2010), accessed September 10, 2014, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8j647429>

<sup>26</sup> Salvador Maldonado Aranda, “The Drug Trafficking in the Rural Mexico, Illicit Crops, Territories, and Drugs in Latin America, Comparative Perspectives,” *DILEMAS* vol. 5, no. 4 (October 2012): 583. 569–595

In Michoacán, the industrial growth between 1940 and 1950 attracted the attention of companies and businessmen. They were able to commercialize profitable resources such as mining and agriculture. The government's purpose was to integrate the entire region into the political and national economy.<sup>27</sup> New lines of communication were created, and there were provisions of financial support to local farmers. Because of the actions of the government to promote growth, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank developed a good impression of Mexico because of these actions. The commercialization of the production of Michoacán not only made businessmen and political caciques rich but also drug dealers. They began to use the new infrastructure to expand their illegal businesses.<sup>28</sup>

Other factors contributed to organized crime settling in Michoacán, such as the change in the cocaine supply to the United States from Colombia, the topography, climate, and the highway system that connected to the North border of Mexico. The increasing importance of the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, located in the Michoacán state on the Pacific Ocean, was another factor because it was the location of the imported and exported products coming from Asia. In summary, historical events, as well as the legal and illegal economies within state and non-state actors, helped configure ungoverned spaces or areas that were loosely governed.

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<sup>27</sup> Aranda, "The Drug Trafficking in the Rural Mexico, Illicit Crops, Territories, and Drugs in Latin America," 584.

<sup>28</sup> Salvador Maldonado Aranda, "Drogas, Violencia y Militarización en el México Rural: El caso de Michoacán" [Drugs, violence and militarization in the rural Mexico: The Michoacán case], *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 74, no. 1 (2012): 11.

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## II. THE CONFIGURATION OF UNGOVERNED SPACES IN MICHOACÁN, MEXICO

It is important to contextualize the notion of federalism in Mexico before analyzing the configuration of ungoverned spaces in Michoacán. In Mexico, federalism has existed since the nineteenth century, as laid out in the constitutions of 1824, 1857, and 1917,<sup>29</sup> particularly when the country was established in the form of federal representative republic.<sup>30</sup> The principal objective was to create a united nation in which each state could achieve the progress and development that it could not achieve independently.<sup>31</sup>

According to these constitutions, the executive is unitary, the people must elect it, and presidents will only serve one term.<sup>32</sup> During the first 100 years of Mexico's existence as an independent state, liberals, conservatives, federalists, republicans, centralists, and the monarchy fought against each other to control the country. Then, President Porfirio Diaz Mori established the longest dictatorship (1877–1880 and 1884–1911). It is important to mention that the Porfiriato left the country with a solid productive and industrialized system, but it contrasted with a profound social disparity and disorder that ended in the revolution in 1910.

Besides the political power given by the constitution to the president, it is necessary to add the formation of a political party capable of gathering all the power in favor for the president.<sup>33</sup> For instance, the PRI has its roots in 1929, when former president General Plutarco Elias Calles (1924–1928) founded the National Revolutionary

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<sup>29</sup> Jorge Carpizo, “Notas sobre el Presidencialismo Mexicano [Notes about the Mexican Presidentialism],” *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 3 (1978): 20.

<sup>30</sup> Miguel Carbonell, *El Federalismo en México: Principios Generales y Distribución de Competencias* [Federalism in Mexico: General principles and distribution of competencies] (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), 379.

<sup>31</sup> Carpizo, “Notes about the Mexican Presidentialism,” 20.

<sup>32</sup> This term was applied until the constitution of 1917, and only after Plutarco Elias Calles that the presidential term went from 4 to 6 years.

<sup>33</sup> Cordova Gutierrez, Carbonell Bolaños, and Silva Pelaez, *Ensayos sobre el Presidencialismo Mexicano*, [Essays about Mexican Presidentialism] (Mexico City: Aldus, 1994), 66.

Party (PNR). Certainly, the foundation of the PRN is called *maximato*;<sup>34</sup> in other words, General Calles wanted to continue rule the country by being the man behind the power (behind the President in functions) until the differences between him and General Lazaro Cárdenas del Río (1934–1940) caused the exile of Calles.<sup>35</sup>

In 1980, former President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982–1988) stated, “The executive branch has traditionally been the most powerful of the Mexican government. This situation is due to deep historical and social conditions and cannot be explained simplistically.”<sup>36</sup> The power relationship between federal and state governors was in the form of the centralization of power, and it was maintained in the same way for more than 70 years when the PRI ruled Mexico.

In 2000, with the arrival of the PAN to the presidential office, the power relationship changed. It moved from a centralized decision-making process to a decentralized one, where governors at the state level gained political autonomy. It can be argued that decentralization in the political system generated competition, conflict, and lack of cooperation between different levels of government due to two conditions. First, intergovernmental actors originated from different political parties; and second, the lack of transparency in accountability originated from the absence of an efficient mechanism of coordination.<sup>37</sup>

This chapter is concerned with the configuration of ungoverned spaces, through which it considers aspects such as how drug cartels have fought against other cartels to achieve control of the state. The purpose of this discussion is to understand the complex criminal systems within the state. In addition, this thesis will consider aspects, such as

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<sup>34</sup> The Maximato is the period under which, even though there were other presidents Plutarco Elias Calles remained the “jefe maximo.” Behind Presidents Portes Gil, Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo Rodriguez, while presidents still have to obey Elias Calles.

<sup>35</sup> Cesar Cansino, “De la Crisis Política a la Transición Pactada: El Caso de México en Perspectiva Comparada [From the political crisis to the negotiated transition: The case of Mexico in comparative perspective],” *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 40, no. 162 (December 1995): 125.

<sup>36</sup> Miguel De La Madrid Hurtado, *Estudios de Derecho Constitucional* [Studies of constitutional law], 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1980), 248.

<sup>37</sup> Enrique Cabrero Mendoza, “Gobierno y Política Local en México: Luces y Sombras de las Reformas Descentralizadoras [Local Government and Politics in Mexico: Lights and Shadows of decentralization reforms],” *Política y Sociedad* 47, no. 3 (2010): 175.

social support that favored organized crime, which allowed it to remain and expand in these regions. As well as other factors that allow the configuration of the ungoverned spaces in Michoacán.

## **A. CONFIGURING UNGOVERNED SPACES**

Since 2007, there are ongoing attempts to unify the police command in the country and to promote only one chain of command. In addition in 2016, the justice systems will change from inquisitorial to accusatorial in response to the reforms implemented in 2008.<sup>38</sup> However, while these measures are carried out, the security crisis now affects the governability of certain areas of Mexico, such as the states of Michoacán, Tamaulipas, and Guerrero. Drug cartels, which had been hidden powers, expanded their radius of action through power struggles between the each other and by launching an offensive against the state and society. Depending upon the state location, insecurity comes in different forms. In México, not all drug cartels operate in the same way; some more violent than others, and each interacts differently with the authorities and the community.

### **1. The Fight for Hegemony of the State**

To achieve the hegemony of the state, organized crime needs certain essential conditions. First, it acquires control of the territory by corrupting the local authorities. Second, it obtains sufficient financial support, and third, it oppresses the vast majority of the population by creating a system of terror.

In the 1990s, a criminal organization called Los Valencia—later called Cartel del Milenio (Millennium Cartel)—controlled the production and distribution of marijuana and the flow of cocaine coming from Colombia. According to Ricardo Ravelo, it provided those drugs to the Cartel de Ciudad Juarez and later to the Tijuana and Sinaloa cartels.”<sup>39</sup> In 1990s, there was a relative calm in the state because the cartel was

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<sup>38</sup> Secretariat of Government, “Agreements Approved by the Coordinating Council for the Implementation of the Criminal Justice System,” *Diario Oficial de la Federacion*, August 17, 2010, [http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5155512&fecha=17/08/2010](http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5155512&fecha=17/08/2010)

<sup>39</sup> Ricardo Ravelo, *Los Capos. Las narco-rutas de Mexico* (Mexico City: Debolsillo 2005), 196–204.

dedicated to the drug business. However, by the late twentieth century, according to George Grayson, due to the successful campaigns launched by U.S. to stop the flow of cocaine from Colombia to Miami and from there to the eastern of United States, Mexico came to play a big role in the drug-trafficking business.<sup>40</sup>

In 2001, when the Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel) sent its gunmen, Los Zetas, to take control of the territory, it sparked a fierce battle in the state. Los Zetas looked for local allies and eventually managed to expel the opposition; meanwhile, the violence in Michoacán reached its peak. As a result, Los Zetas took control of the route for cocaine from the Pacific coast to Tamaulipas.

In 2006, a new criminal organization made its appearance by throwing five heads into a discotheque with the message, “La Familia (The Family) does not kill for pay. It does not kill women, does not kill innocents, and just kills those who should die. This is divine justice.”<sup>41</sup> This organization, La Familia Michoacana (Michoacan Family) as members called themselves, was led by Nazario Moreno Gonzalez (The Craziest One);<sup>42</sup> La Familia Michoacana was to be the organization that would end the extortions, kidnappings, and liberate the state from Los Zetas. Or so it promised.

Meanwhile in 2006, the former president Felipe Calderon Hinojosa (2006–2012) launched a military campaign (Operation Michoacán) in the state to end the violence generated by these rival organizations. The pressure exerted by the federal government on one side, and La Familia on the other against Los Zetas, ended with the expulsion of the latter. It can be inferred that its expulsion was because Los Zetas’ logistics system was severely damaged, which complicated and compromised the transportation of illegal products to the north.

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<sup>40</sup> George W. Grayson, ed. “Shift in Cocaine Flow, the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas,” in *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico’s Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on U.S. Security* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2014), 50.

<sup>41</sup> Jaime Marquez, “Narcos Decapitan a otros Cinco en Michoacán [Narcos Behead Another Five in Michoacán],” *El Universal*, September 7, 2006, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/27599.html>

<sup>42</sup> In 2010, Gonzalez was reported killed in a shooting with the federal police, then in March 2014 his death was confirmed by federal officials, which meant he was reported to have died twice.

In 2011, the Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templars) emerged as a splinter of La Familia Michoacana. The organization was led by Servando Gomez Martinez (La Tuta [the Teacher]), a former school teacher. This criminal organization adopted the same modus operandi as the previous one. Servando described his organization as a “brotherhood founded by a set of statutes and codes, dedicated to protect the Michoacán people from organized crime.”<sup>43</sup> However, the Knights Templar also diversified its activities so that the drug business was no longer its principal source of income. On average, the monthly income of the Knights Templar was about 80.8 million pesos (6.3 million USD).<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Social Support

The Familia Michoacana and later the Knights Templars both denied being drug cartels, and each considered itself a religious organization whose fundamental principle was helping and protecting the community to gain social support. They claimed to administrate “divine justice” to rapists, bandits, and other criminals. One of the statements of the Knights Templar was “our only plea is that we love our state and we are no longer willing to tolerate the dignity of our people getting run over.”<sup>45</sup>

These criminal organizations take credit for building schools and roads and lend money to farmers and others in need. They claim they are strengthening the community spirit and say “all members are from Michoacán.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, La Familia Michoacana took advantage of the economic crisis of 2007. A study by Grayson “found that 79 percent of the population in Michoacán lived in poverty.”<sup>47</sup> Approximately more than 1.2

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<sup>43</sup> “Knights Templars Profile,” InSightCrime, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar-profile>

<sup>44</sup> Different open sources such as *Milenio*, *El Universal*, and *Proceso and Revolucion Tres Punto Cero* have pointed out the monthly income of the Knights Templars was about 80.8 million pesos (6.3 million USD).

<sup>45</sup> Raul R. Villamil Uriarte, “Michoacán como Laboratorio Social del Proyecto de Autogestión Comunitaria Armada. ¿Estado en Disolución, Fallido, Fragmentado o Vacío de Poder? [Michoacán as a laboratory project of armed community: State solution, failed, fragmented or power vacuum?],” *El Cotidiano* no. 187 (September 2014): 82.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> George W. Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies, 2010), 10.

million people lacked basic health services coverage, so those criminals claimed to be there to provide those services that the state could not.

Another aspect that allowed the rise of La Familia Michoacana was the migration of many men from Michoacán to California and further north into the United States to earn enough money to sustain their families, which left their towns without adult male presence or with a significantly decreased one. According to George Grayson, “males who remained in the state often gravitated to the narco-economy, which constituted far more than growing drugs.”<sup>48</sup> For most individuals, the decision to support the drug traffickers was influenced by the behavior of organized crime.<sup>49</sup> As Victoria Malkin states, “to ensure success for drug-trafficking organizations they will have to consolidate themselves as a social group.”<sup>50</sup>

### **3. Geographic Conditions and State Weakness**

According to Maldonado, many municipalities in the “Apatzingan valley became narco-towns because of its geographic conditions,”<sup>51</sup> which allowed growing drugs between the high and lower lands. Also, the Sierra Madre del Sur (Mountain Range of the South) extends to the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero. Some points between those states, according to Maldonado Aranda, are called “small golden triangles because the state’s security apparatuses simply have no presence there.”<sup>52</sup> The major drug plantations are located in the vicinity of the mountain range.

The difficulty in accessing those zones forced the federal government to build runways to provide better communication with the towns in those areas; however, the drug dealers began using these runways for drug trafficking. To say that the nation-state has the absolute monopoly on the use of force within its territory is in this case naive. As

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<sup>48</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Gordon H. McCormick, and Frank Giordano, “Things Come Together: Symbolic Violence and Guerrilla Mobilisation,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007): 299.

<sup>50</sup> Victoria Malkin, “Narcotrafficking, Migration, and Modernity in Rural México,” *Latin America Perspectives* 28, no. 4 (July 2001): 121. 101–128

<sup>51</sup> Maldonado, “Drugs, Violence, and Militarization in the Rural Mexico: The Michoacán Case,” 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Adam D. Morton states, “It is not possible to capture the Mexican state totally because of its large, complex, and shifting relational identity that has taken contrasting forms over time and space.”<sup>53</sup>

Arguably, there is a relationship between the state’s weakness and the current violence and the lack of infrastructure in difficult terrains has isolated some communities and made it difficult to deliver basic social services. However, those areas are propitious for criminals for their recruitment process and so increase its manpower. As a result, the criminal organization is functioning as a provider of employment and services.

#### **4. Political Change and the Informal Rules**

Drug trafficking has been present in Michoacán for many years; however, it can be argued that during the last three state governments, these activities increased.<sup>54</sup> For instance, according to Grayson,

The debilitation of the PRI shattered the networks that, while infused with corruption, enforced the rules of the game that constrained violence, curbed impunity, provided services to the faithful, and invested the masses with a tenuous link to decision makers.<sup>55</sup>

During the administration of the former governor Lazaro Cardenas Batel (PRD, 2002–2008) the extortion of the municipal authorities started, and he requested help to former president Vicente Fox (2000–2006) because in Michoacán drug cartels had a strong presence inside the municipal authorities. It was 2006 when former President Calderon launched his version of the war on drugs (Operation Michoacan). One of the justifications for Calderon to send the federal forces to Michoacán was the idea that drug traffickers were fighting to take control of territorial spaces from the government. In

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<sup>53</sup> Morton, “The War on Drugs in Mexico: A Failed State?,” 1637.

<sup>54</sup> Jaime Rivera Velazquez, “Los Limites de la Depredacion [The limits of predation],” NEXOS, accessed September 4, 2014, <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=20022>

<sup>55</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 10.

several “regions of the country, they are threatening the state level, and have penetrated its institutional structure.”<sup>56</sup>

During the period of Leonel Godoy Rangel (PRD, 2008–2012), there were several communication problems between him and the federal government because of the lack of coordination and cooperation related to the security matters. Under his administration, there was neither investigation nor prevention of crime because he argued that organized crime was the responsibility of the federal authorities.<sup>57</sup> For instance, the conflict had its breaking point when federal forces arrested 30 municipal authorities in 2009 (Operation House Cleaning), and the arrested authorities were charged with having connections to organized crime. For example, Grayson states, “after the first five armed incursions into the state, Calderon changed his strategy to focus on politicians who were enabling La Familia and other cartels to act with impunity.”<sup>58</sup> The reason for this approach was due to the infiltration of La Familia Michoacana in the municipalities,<sup>59</sup> during which time the working relationship between the federal and state governments deteriorated. The half-brother of Governor Godoy was elected federal deputy for the PRD and was accused of having links with La Familia Michoacana.<sup>60</sup> Currently, he is a fugitive from justice.

The security problems continued to increase in the state; Godoy Rangel and Fausto Vallejo Figueroa (PRI, 2012–2014) encountered similar problems. However, Fausto Vallejo resigned as governor on June 18, 2014, claiming health problems. His administration was questioned because of a significant indicator of insecurity, the emergence of a civil armed group that displaced the local authorities. Additionally, his former secretary of the government, Jesus Reyna Garcia, was arrested in April 2014

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<sup>56</sup> Cesar Morales Oyarvide, “La Guerra Contra el Narcotráfico en México, Debilidad del Estado, Orden Local y Fracaso de una Estrategia [The drug war in Mexico, weak state and local order failed strategy],” *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 231 (2011): 11. 4–31

<sup>57</sup> Jaime Velazquez Rivera, “Crimen Organizado y Autodefensas en Mexico: El Caso de Michoacán, [Organized Crime and Autodefensas in Mexico: The Case of Michoacán]” (Bogota, Colombia: Programa de Cooperación en Seguridad Regional-Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014), 10.

<sup>58</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 65.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>60</sup> “SSP: El Hermano de Leonel Godoy Vinculado a la Familia; Esta Profugo [SSP: Leonel Godoy’s brother linked to “La Familia;” is fugitive],” PROCESO, June 14, 2009, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=116955>

because he made a deal with the Knights Templar to favor the PRI in the election process of 2011. Perhaps this is why organized crime has acted freely in the state.

Likewise, Rodrigo Gerardo Vallejo Mora, the son of former Governor Fausto Vallejo Figueroa, was accused of covering up dealings with the Knights Templar; this stems from a video showing their conversations. He too has faced a judicial process starting in August 2014.<sup>61</sup> Because there are five politicians who have been linked to organized crime, and the people do not believe in the formal structures, there is an urgent need for stable institutions capable of carrying out the law.

The informal rules that exist at the margins of the state were ingredients for La Familia Michoacana to become powerful. For example, the criminal organization has regulated the price of avocados, lemons, and other agricultural products. The perception that Michoacán people have about La Familia is that it is a huge organization that controls the state. An example of this is the delayed construction of one federal prison in La Ruana municipality of Buena Vista Tomatlán.<sup>62</sup> The facility was supposed to be completed in December 2012, but the pressure and extortion of this criminal organization made completion impossible. The balance of power between La Familia and the state government shifted in favor of the criminals. Thus, the “legal government” did not exert actual control over the population; instead, it exerted an artificial control.

## **5. Culture and the Use of Mass Media**

In Michoacán, certain areas are identified with the rancharo culture, which directly supported the drug trafficking.<sup>63</sup> As Maldonado stated, “this culture is characterized by the values of individualism against the state and the family against

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<sup>61</sup> Marco Campillo, “Consignan a Hijo de Fausto Vallejo por Encubrimiento [Fausto Vallejo’s son is in jail for concealment],” MILENIO, April 8, 2014, accessed September 5, 2014, [http://www.milenio.com/policia/Rodrigo\\_Vallejo\\_Mora-Consignan\\_hijo\\_de\\_Fausto\\_Vallejo\\_0\\_347965234.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/Rodrigo_Vallejo_Mora-Consignan_hijo_de_Fausto_Vallejo_0_347965234.html)

<sup>62</sup> Juan P. Becerra, “Templarios Retrasan Apertura de Carcel Federal [Templars delays the Federal’s prison opening],” MILENIO, October 18, 2013, accessed September 10, 2014, [http://www.milenio.com/policia/Templarios-retrasan-apertura-carcel-federal\\_0\\_173982811.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/Templarios-retrasan-apertura-carcel-federal_0_173982811.html)

<sup>63</sup> Aranda, “Drogas, Violencia y Militarizacion en el Mexico Rural: El Caso de Michoacán,” 13.

society.”<sup>64</sup> In this context, the *ranchero* code created networks of brotherhood between those who cultivated the drugs and the traffickers. The farmers prefer to plant an acre of marijuana rather than corn because it provides more economic profit. Thus, drugs have become part of the culture and the economy, but more importantly, people have adopted to this as a way of life.<sup>65</sup> The territories in Michoacán are somehow complex networks that include family, economic, and political aspects. As a consequence, the areas where drug trafficking is part of the economy, systems are breeding criminal activities; therefore, the state no longer controls that area.

The drug problem has been central to most of the media; it was a topic that all news programs, magazines, and newspapers devote a special section in its transmission. Rather than being a deterrent element, this has contributed to more young people have joining criminal organizations. In March 2011, in response to this problem, the federal government signed a 10-point pact with the mass media. The principal objective of this pact was to reduce the graphic images presented, which could empower drug cartels by promoting their actions.<sup>66</sup> To counteract the government’s agreement, the Familia Michoacana and the Knights Templar began to use the local radio station, printed journals, and electronic means to spread its message and justify its actions.

The corrupting power of drug trafficking has also infiltrated some media. For example, on September 22, the news portal MVS displayed two reporters, Eliseo Caballero of TELEVISIÓN—the main television network in Mexico—and Jose Luis Diaz of the agency Esquema. They met with the leader of the Knights Templar, Servado Gomez Martinez (La Tuta) and advised him on how to develop strategic communications to gain more presence in the media. At the end of the video, the reporters accepted money

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<sup>64</sup> Aranda, “Drogas, Violencia y Militarización en el Mexico Rural: El Caso de Michoacán,” 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Fabiola Martinez, “Pacto de Medios para Limitar Información sobre Violencia [Media’s pact for limiting information on violence],” *La Jornada*, March 21, 2011, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/03/25/politica/005n1pol>

in exchange for their services.<sup>67</sup> This illustrates the penetration of organized crime and the control that it exerts on the media.

## B. CONCLUSION

In the configurations of ungoverned spaces in Michoacán, it is possible to see the following factors. First, the state and its legal institutions do not permeate the entire Michoacán society.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, other organizations are appropriated to the role of the state as a provider,<sup>69</sup> such as the Familia Michoacana and later the Knights Templars. As Stewart Patrick states, “The relationship between transnational organized crime and weak states is parasitic. All things being equal, criminal networks are drawn to environments where the rule of law is absent or imperfectly applied.”<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the *ranchero* culture has low obedience with the law, and consequentially, participants in the *ranchero* culture were involved in illegal activities; thus, state was no longer the primary source of authority.<sup>71</sup>

Second, corruption in legal institutions, as it was shown in this chapter, has diminished state authority; therefore, security problems have increased with the emergence of the *autodefensas* in 2013. Because many state government officials participate in illegal drug networks, drug trafficking have overshadowed the formal structures of power and created informal economies that are beyond the scope of the state.

Finally, the wide presence of organized crime in Michoacán has challenged the state’s monopoly on the use of violence and the added corruption by local police who worked for organized crime. The two drug cartels displaced the state government and

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<sup>67</sup> “Corresponsal de Televisa en Michoacán y Otro Periodista Asesoraban y Cobraban con La Tuta [Televisa correspondent in Michoacán and other journalist were charged for advising La Tuta],” Aristegui Noticias Network, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://aristeginoticias.com/2209/mexico/corresponsal-de-televisa-en-michoacan-y-otro-periodista-asesoraban-y-cobran-con-la-tuta/>

<sup>68</sup> Rabasa, “Ungoverned Territories,” 7.

<sup>69</sup> William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Patrick Stewart, “Weak States and Global Threats: Fact or Fiction?” *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 38.27–53

<sup>71</sup> Rabasa, “Ungoverned Territories,” 8.

forced citizens to pay taxes to the criminals for protection. All of these factors have provided the conditions for the configuration of ungoverned spaces in Michoacán. In the end, the criminal activities have become part of the economy, the social system, and daily life; the population accepts the participation of criminal organizations, whether they like it or not.

### III. MICHOACÁN AND ITS *AUTODEFENSAS*

During the last decade, public security in Mexico has experienced several issues. Organized crime, with its firepower and money, has exposed the weakness of municipal and state governments. These governments have poorly armed, untrained, and inadequately paid police forces, which represent the first line of defense of the Mexican state. The phrase *plata o plomo* (silver or lead) represents the breaking point for most municipal police. How can these police forces face the threat that organized crime represents? For decades, these fragile police forces have maintained order in the country, which prompts the question as to why the security crisis has only recently begun.

The violence generated by non-state actors that affects some communities reveals the infiltration of organized crime in all levels of government. This scenario is one of many that President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018) and his staff have had to deal with. On December 1, 2012, President Peña took office for the PRI after 12 years of being in the opposition party. That same day, President Peña announced his state policy based on five fundamental axes.<sup>72</sup> The principal objective of this plan is to reduce homicides, kidnapping, and extortion, most of which were related to organized crime. However, government's policy apparently has not been working because of the perception of the citizens regarding the overall violence in the state. The percentage of citizens who did not support the government rose from 72.3 percent in 2013 to 73.3 percent between March and April of 2014,<sup>73</sup> which means there was an increase of a full percentage point in only two months.

This chapter discusses the contemporary version of the emergence of the *autodefensas*. It begins with the model for the movement for the organizations that arose in the town of Cheran. This chapter also lays out who are the recognized leaders of those

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<sup>72</sup> Presidencia de la Republica, “5 Ejes para Lograr una Democracia de Resultados [5 axis to achieve democracy results],” December 1, 2012, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/5-ejes-para-lograr-una-democracia-de-resultados>

<sup>73</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, *Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública* [National survey on public perception about victimization and safety],” no. 418 (Aguascalientes, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2014).

organizations. In addition, Chapter III explores the importance of the state in relation to geography, agricultural, and industrial production.

#### **A. A TOWN NAMED CHERAN, THE BEGINNING**

On February 24, 2013, the *autodefensas* emerged in three communities of Tierra Caliente<sup>74</sup> in Michoacán: La Ruana, Tepacaltepec, and Buenavista. The objective of the *autodefensas* was to end the 12-year dictatorial regime of the Knights Templar cartel over the state. The motivational model for the movement was the peasant organization of the Purepecha plateau,<sup>75</sup> which since 2011 began to organize, arm, and self-govern with the objective of protecting themselves by expelling organized crime from the area.

The first indigenous community to organize into a form of contemporary self-defense groups was that of Cheran. In Cheran, the social system was damaged, and its stability was threatened. The government in Cheran could no longer properly function and maintain the legitimate use of violence because non-state actors had taken control. In other words, the state no longer monopolized the means of coercion within that municipality.<sup>76</sup>

In April 2011, these members of the town took over the entire local security by arming and organizing their own government. Their decision had its legal foundation in Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution, in the International Labor Organization Convention 169, and in the United Nations' Declaration of Indigenous People. One year later, the community organized its municipal elections<sup>77</sup> and decided to separate from any

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<sup>74</sup> Tierra Caliente is located in the Pacific Ocean and covers some municipalities of Guerrero, Michoacán, and the Estado de Mexico.

<sup>75</sup> *Wikipedia* describes Tarascan Plateau as “The Purepecha Plateau is a region of the Mexican state of Michoacán. It is located at the foot of the Trans-Mexican volcanic belt. It has several lakes, like Lake Patzcuaro, Lake Cuitzeo, and Lake Zirahuén. It has a strong indigenous presence (the Purepecha), dedicated to agriculture and forestry.” *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Tarascan Plateau,” last modified December 2009, accessed August 10, 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarascan\\_Plateau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarascan_Plateau)

<sup>76</sup> Chalmers A. Johnson, *Revolutionary Change: The Social System: Coercion and Values* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 19.

<sup>77</sup> Legally referred to as indigenous communities under the system of uses and customs through a series of community caucuses.

political party or form of intervention from the state government. This was the first step to achieve autonomy.

In May 2014, the Supreme Court recognized the rights of the indigenous community of Cheran, Michoacán, to choose, by the method of customs, its municipal authorities and to enable them to bring constitutional challenges against reforms that they considered a violation of the fundamental rights of the inhabitants. The decision of the Supreme Court changed the criterion, saying that municipalities were not entitled to bring constitutional challenges against acts that violated the rights of communities and indigenous peoples.<sup>78</sup>

Beginning with the community of Tepalcatepec in February 2013, the *autodefensas* adopted a form of civil guards to protect the community. This town became the center of experience and support for others municipalities in the area.<sup>79</sup> By mid-2013, it formed the General Council of Community Self-Defense, the primary function of which was to organize groups to achieve collective agreements in the decision-making process. At this point, the *autodefensas* was no longer a guerrilla movement in which a small group of armed people used hit-and-run tactics, and they were no longer against the established government. These reforms constituted the expressions of organized people in defense of their fundamental rights.

## **B. VISIBLE LEADERS OF THE AUTODEFENSAS**

One characteristic of the leaders of the *autodefensas* is that they belong to the towns where the security problems are particularly severe. In addition, key leaders are also charismatic and appealing to the population, enabling them to attract more followers to their movement. Like the local population, they share the same grievances. The self-

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<sup>78</sup> Direccion General de Comunicacion y Vinculacion Social, “Suprema Corte de Justicia Reconoce a los Pueblos Indigenas el Derecho a la Consulta [The Supreme Court of Justice recognizes the right of indigenous people to consultation],” no. 87, Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nacion, May 29, 2014, [http://www2.scjn.gob.mx/red/coordinacion/COMUNICADO\\_87\\_2014.pdf](http://www2.scjn.gob.mx/red/coordinacion/COMUNICADO_87_2014.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Tierra Caliente has a population of 500,000, the Meseta Purepecha has 120,000 inhabitants, and the avocado area 600,000 (major population centers: Uruapan, Tancítaro, Los Reyes, Tacámbaro, Ario de Rosales, and Zitácuaro). The population of the state of Michoacán in 2013 was 4.5 million and Morelia the state capital was 700,000. In other words, about 30 percent of the population in Michoacán lived in areas where they had formed Autodefensas.

defense groups are comprised of farmers, professionals, and even politicians in Michoacán. The question here is why did the Michoacán people join the *autodefensas*? The answer is because it was better to join the *autodefensas* than to continue paying organized criminals bribes for their right to live and work.

### **1. Hipolito Mora Chavez**

Hipolito Mora Chavez was the original founder of *autodefensas*. In February 2013, he was the first to take arms against the Knights Templar in La Ruana. On March 2014, he was arrested and accused of the probable homicide of Rafael Sanchez Moreno, also known as “El Pollo,” and Jose Luis Torres Castañeda. It is interesting to note that both belonged to the Knights Templar and the *autodefensas*.<sup>80</sup> According to the news portal Aristeguinoticias.com, Jose Luis Torres Castañeda was the father of Jose Luis Torres, who worked for the PRD senator of Michoacán, Iris Vianey Mendoza Mendoza.<sup>81</sup> As the leader of the *autodefensas* in La Ruana, Hipolito Mora was accused not only of his probable participation in these murders but also of another 35 felony charges; however, after 65 days in jail, he was released from all charges.<sup>82</sup> After leaving jail, he enlisted in the Fuerza Rural Estatal (Rural State Force).

### **2. Jose Manuel Mireles Valverde**

Jose Manuel Mireles Valverde was a doctor by profession, working for the Red Cross in Sacramento, California. In 2008, he was a candidate for state congressman for the PRD, but he lost the election. His name was one of the first to come to the public eye as a spokesman between the *autodefensas* and the state and federal government. On June 28, 2014, he was arrested along with 72 others in the port of Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacán

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<sup>80</sup> “Hipólito Mora, Detenido por el Asesinato de dos Autodefensas [Hipolito Mora, arrested for the murder of two autodefensas],” Aristegui Noticias Network, March 12, 2014, accessed June 29, 2014, <http://aristeguinoticias.com/1203/mexico/hipolito-mora-detenido-por-el-asesinato-de-dos-autodefensas/>

<sup>81</sup> Iris Vianey Mendoza is a senator for the PRD; she has been working as Secretary of the Board, Commission of Foreign Relations Committee Asia-Pacific, Member of the National Defense Commission and Secretary of the Committee of Public Safety.

<sup>82</sup> Eliseo Caballero, “Hipolito Mora Sale de la Carcel [Hipolito Mora is out of Jail],” *Noticieros Televisa*, May 17, 2014, <http://noticieros.televisa.com/mexico-estados/1405/hipolito-mora-sale-carcel/>

for violating the Federal Firearms and Explosives Law.<sup>83</sup> He was charged with carrying weapons that were intended for the exclusive use of the Mexican Armed Forces. Mireles is the only founder of the *autodefensas* who did not enlist in the Rural State Force.

### 3. Estanislao Beltran Torres

Estanislao Beltran Torres, also known as “Papa Pitufó” (Papa Smurf), replaced Mireles as a spokesman and coordinator of the *autodefensas*. He worked as a farmer and then became Comisario Ejidal (Delegate Ejidal) in his community. However, the group of La Ruana, led by Hipolito Mora, accused Estanislao “of representing others’ interests that were not related to the fight.”<sup>84</sup> On May 10, 2014, he was the first so-called leader to join the Rural State Force.

Recently, these leaders have started to fight for primary leadership; this reflects the instability in the dialogue and lack of trust between them. The fragmentation in leadership of the *autodefensas* can be understood due to their different motivations and activities. As journalists have pointed out, “the *autodefensas* has been infiltrated by organized crime, and now they are filling the gap left by the previous criminal organization.”<sup>85</sup>

## C. ORGANIZATION, LOGISTICS, AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

The *autodefensas* has been following a pattern since its foundation. First, organizers established a clandestine group that promoted the participation of more citizens. Second, they performed reconnaissance of the area, locating the position of members of organized crime, their movements, and the logistics chain. Third, they

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<sup>83</sup> Jazmin Ferreyra, “Detienen a Jose Manuel Mireles en Lazaro Cardenas [Jose Manuel Mireles arrested in Lazaro Cardenas],” *WRADIO*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.wradio.com.mx/noticias/judicial/detienen-jose-manuel-mireles-en-lazaro-cardenas/20140627/nota/2296409.aspx>

<sup>84</sup> Dennis A. Garcia, “Autodefensas, con Signos de Fractura: Desconocen a Papa Pitufó como Vocero [Autodefensas, with signs of fracture: Papa Smurf is no longer known as spokesman],” accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2014/817082.html>

<sup>85</sup> Charles Parkingson, “Nuevo Cartel en Michoacán Refuerza Temores por la Criminalización de las Autodefensas [New cartel in Michoacán reinforces fears about the criminalization of autodefensas],” *InSightCrime*, May 6, 2014, <http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-del-dia/nuevo-cartel-michoacan-refuerza-temores-criminalizacion-autodefensas>

established contacts with the nearby communities to emerge simultaneously and confront the criminals.

For financial support, each organization finances its own activities, funded mainly by the local population. One documented case of financial support comes from Michoacán's migrants to the United States of America, who have provided economic resources to the movement and whose actions have given a political projection for the movement.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, according to Jose Mireles, part of the money used to support these *autodefensas* was usually paid to the cartel for protection—around 30 million pesos (280, 000 USD) in monthly payments.<sup>87</sup> Currently, this money, plus the revenue from the lemon production that the Knights Templar abandoned, is going to support the *autodefensas*.<sup>88</sup>

In terms of armaments, the *autodefensas* have considerable firepower; their armament varies from pistols to Barrett rifles, the cost of which hovers around 23,000 pesos, or approximately 1,800 USD.<sup>89</sup> It is also necessary to consider the ammunition for each armament, fuel for their vehicles, and food to sustain the operation. It is still unclear how this organization obtained the total amount of resources for its operation.

The political program of the *autodefensas* was to formally end the oppression that the organized crime exerts in the state including: extortions, robbery, kidnapping, murders, production of drugs, and drug sales. It can be argued that their actions are equivalent to taking political control of their communities and replacing the government in security matters. In this regard, in a January 2014 poll, 53 percent of Mexicans felt that the *autodefensas* defended their communities better than the authorities did, and 57

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<sup>86</sup> Laura Sanchez Ley, "Migrantes en EU Financian Autodefensas [Migrants in U.S. funded autodefensas]," *El Universal*, February 2, 2014, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2014/migrantes-en-eu-financian-a-autodefensas-984315.html>

<sup>87</sup> Jose Cardenas, "Michoacán, un Estado de Guerra [Michoacán, a State of War]," *Excelsior*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/jose-cardenas/2013/11/21/929807>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Silvia Otero, "De Hasta \$18 Mil, el Costo de Armas de Autodefensa [Up to \$18,000, the Cost of Weapons for Autodefensas]," *El Universal*, January 18, 2014, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2014/de-hasta-18-mil-el-costo-de-armas-de-autodefensa-980436.html>

percent agreed that communities should form their own police.<sup>90</sup> The public support for this movement is quite understandable due to the insecure conditions prevailing in the state.

#### **D. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

In January 2014, one year after the emergence of the *autodefensas*, President Peña signed and published a decree that identified the national commission for the security and integral development of Michoacán state. In accordance with the national development plan (2012–2018), which one of its main objectives is “Mexico in Peace.”<sup>91</sup> The principal objective is restoring the rule of law in the state.

Also in January 2014, the federal government proposed an agreement with the leaders of the *autodefensas*, and signed an eight-point document.<sup>92</sup> Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, secretario de gobernacion (Secretariat of Government), said that the measure was temporary and that *autodefensas*’ members who wanted to become law enforcement officers would have register with the Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional (Secretariat of the National Defense).<sup>93</sup> The government’s decision to integrate the *autodefensas* into the Rural Police changed, instead of being part of that force the federal government created a hybrid organization called the Policia Rural Estatal (Rural Police State Force).

Since that day, the government has been working with the newly created force. In January of 2014, a national poll observed that 53 percent of Mexicans were in favor of the *autodefensas*.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, the Secretary of National Public Security states that homicides and extortion have increased between January and June 2014. What this

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<sup>90</sup> “Policia Comunitaria [Community Police],” Parametria, accessed August 25, 2014, [http://parametria.com.mx/carta\\_parametrica.php?cp=4514](http://parametria.com.mx/carta_parametrica.php?cp=4514)

<sup>91</sup> Gobierno de la Republica, “Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013–2018: Mexico en Paz [National Development Plan 2013–2019: Mexico in peace],” accessed August 10, 2014, <http://pnd.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/PND.pdf>, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Gillia Horton, *Conflict in Michoacán: Vigilante Groups Present Challenges and Opportunities for the Mexican Government* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, Mexico Institute, 2014), 5.

<sup>93</sup> For more information of the eight-point pact visit: Gary J. Hale, “Autodefensas, Vigilantes and Self-Policing in Mexico: Civilian Dominance over Public Safety Policies?” *Small Arms Journal*, June 23, 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/printpdf/15848>

<sup>94</sup> “Policia Comunitaria [Community Police],” Parametria.

illustrates is that the *autodefensas* might not be contributing to improve security and have become a part of the problem.

According to the portal news *Excelsior* in May 2014, a new cartel has emerged in Michoacán and is known as La Tercera Hermandad (the Third Brotherhood or H3).<sup>95</sup> Included in this group are members of the *autodefensas*, Knight Templars, and the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion (Jalisco's Cartel New Generation). Apparently, this new organization is filling the gap led by the Knights Templars, and it is starting to control the state. At the end, the question will be: Is the H3 a new organization or the Knights Templars just are changing the name?

#### **E. WHY IS MICHOACÁN SO IMPORTANT?**

The geography of Michoacán provides the necessary conditions for the establishment of organized crime structures. There are four aspects to be considered here. First, the state shares a border with five other jurisdictions including Guerrero (south); Morelos, Estado de México, Queretaro, and Guanajuato (center); and Jalisco, Colima, and the Pacific Ocean (west). These borders allow access to the routes, either to the center of the country, or to the north in the drug-trafficking routes. Taking advantage of the highways, roads, and third order trails, organizations gain access to the 113 municipalities and the railroads that specially connect to the northern part of the state.<sup>96</sup> In general, these infrastructures allow the trade and transportation of any raw material from the area to any part of the country; however, the communication routes inside the state are not well connected with the rural areas.

Second, the weather conditions range from -2° C to more than 32 degrees Celsius (or from 28.4° to more than 90° Fahrenheit). These variations in temperature facilitate

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<sup>95</sup> Andres Becerril, "Autodefensas dan Origen a otro Cartel: Nace en Michoacán La Tercera Hermandad o H3 [Autodefensas give rise to another cartel; born in Michoacán the Third Brotherhood or H3]," *Excelsior*, August 5, 2014, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2014/05/06/957619>

<sup>96</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, *Estructura Económica del Estado de Michoacán* [Economic structure of the state of Michoacán] (Aguascalientes, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2000), [http://www.inegi.org.mx/prod\\_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/derivada/cuentas/estruct\\_econo/mich/147334I.pdf](http://www.inegi.org.mx/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/derivada/cuentas/estruct_econo/mich/147334I.pdf)

growing anything from lemons to avocados, as well as marijuana and poppy production. People have been growing such plants in Michoacán since 1947.<sup>97</sup>

Third, the Harbor of Lazaro Cardenas is the second most important port on the Pacific coast. Due to the intensification and diversification of its operations, any kind of merchandise can embark from this port to any Pacific coastline port.<sup>98</sup> For example, in 2012, the Port of Lazaro Cardenas moved 1,242,777 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs),<sup>99</sup> up from 2005, when it only moved 132,479 TEU.<sup>100</sup> In this regard, the import of chemical precursors from China for the production of methamphetamines has been one of the leading activities of organized crime in the state. Additionally, the 200 kilometers of coastline are propitious for drug smuggling at sea and transportation to the north.

Finally, the mineral industry in the state obtains metals such as gold, silver, copper, iron, and lead, and 13 other non-metallic minerals. The most common metal mineral is iron, for which production has varied from 3,116,823 tons in 2008 to 4,049,927 tons in 2012.<sup>101</sup> Michoacán is the state that produces the most minerals in Mexico. The conditions previously described make Michoacán a fertile ground for both legal and illegal activities. The latter has led to criminal structures settling in the area where there are gaps in power between local and state authorities.

## F. CONCLUSION

At this point, the *autodefensas* in Michoacán have emerged because of the absence of the state in certain regions, particularly in ungoverned spaces. Due to the inability of the state to provide adequate security, these groups flourish in such areas.

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<sup>97</sup> Maldonado, “Drogas, Violencia y Militarización en el Mexico Rural,” 11.

<sup>98</sup> Juan N. Ojeda-Cárdenas, “Los Puertos Mexicanos en el Siglo XXI: Situacion y Debate 1991–2012 [Mexican ports in the XXI century: Situation and debate 1991–2012],” *Ciencia y Mar* 15, no. 45 (2011): 25, 19–62

<sup>99</sup> According to *Wikipedia*, a twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) is an inexact unit of cargo capacity often used to describe the capacity of container ships and container terminals. *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit,” accessed December 1, 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-foot\\_equivalent\\_unit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-foot_equivalent_unit)

<sup>100</sup> Ojeda- Cárdenas, “Los puertos mexicanos en el siglo XXI,” 30.

<sup>101</sup> Mexican Geological Service, “Panorama Minero del Estado de Michoacán [Mining panorama of the state of Michoacán],” Secretariat of Economy, accessed July 20, 2014, <http://www.sgm.gob.mx/pdfs/MICHOACAN.pdf>

Under these insecure conditions, combined with the wealth of the state in natural and mineral resources, criminal actors find it ideal to appropriate the role of security provider. It is important to mention that the negative consequence of the violence generated by criminal organization is different from common violence.

The emergence of this new cartel would be the fourth generation of criminals in Michoacán. It seems that the emergence of the Third Brotherhood (H3) has been produced by the fall of the empire of the Knights Templars. Now, the rules of the game will probably be the same; there will just be a change in the provider.

Michoacán is immersed in the process of political reconfiguration and the acceptable use of violence, where different actors are playing the role of the state (*autodefensas*, municipal, state and federal authorities, and criminal organizations). In the region, there are multiple interests: political, economic, or social. The fact that the most useful political resource used by the *autodefensas* is violence is part of a long dynamic socio-political process that has existed in the region since the revolutionary era (1910–1920).

## IV. CONCLUSION

Mexico is not a failed state; however, in some parts of the country its security, political framework, and institution of justice have been coopted and corrupted. In addition, there has been a profound breakdown of the social order due to the presence of organized crime. An example of this is the particular case of Michoacán and the emergence of the *autodefensas*. A combination of factors has configured ungoverned spaces where a parallel system of governance has emerged. Just like common crime constitutes a threat to the population, drug trafficking is the main threat to the state.

As seen in this thesis, the cause for the emergence of self-defense groups in Mexico, specifically in Michoacán, is the relation of power with different political actors, whether formal or informal, relations that provide incentives for violence. Therefore, different political parties involved in the transition of power contribute to the imbalance to the system, not in the sense that a change in power between political parties affects democracy, but in the context of the informal economies. Because of this quasi-relationship, ungoverned spaces are configured where the state is no longer present, and when there is no legitimate monopoly on the use of physical violence, other groups (community-based or criminal organizations) may appropriate that role. Michoacán is the first documented case of a narco-state in the history of Mexico.

First, winning the war on drugs is a never-ending process. Since the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the government has been using the same strategy—the direct approach using the military and police forces in ground and maritime interdiction and eradication, combined with the kingpin approach. Initially, the paradigm was imported from the United States and included a puritanical moral influence of prohibition; however, later it involved a symbiosis with a growing antinarcotics bureaucracy that was used as a form of unilateral pressure.

To some extent, these strategies have yielded positive results and have prevented tons of drugs from reaching consumers. The consequences of the strategy to fight the major cartels, such as Golfo, Zetas, Familia Michoacana, Knights Templars, and others,

have led to the fragmentations formed by many cells beginning operating independently. Even these small organizations have become more violent because they have diversified activities, such as collecting illegal rents, street control, illegal extraction of hydrocarbons, and human trafficking.

Second, the real cause of the emergence of ungoverned spaces in Mexico is most probably the corruption of the authorities.<sup>102</sup> The historical and structural problems of the justice system, police forces, and government institutions are embedded in the state. Therefore, to deal with the configuration of ungoverned spaces, Mexico must reinforce the state and municipality institutions. As seen in Michoacán, what occurred was an enormous deterioration of the state institutions. Because of the intolerable situation, the Michoacán people organized to defend themselves from the criminal organizations.

Third, it is important to have as fresh indirect approach to the war on drugs, one that strengthens consumption prevention, culture of legality, education, an efficient, effective, and reliable police structure, and a good judicial system. All of these activities must be implemented at the local level with a strong governmental presence. This presence need not be solely in terms of military and police forces, but also in the media, in schools, through the reclamation of public spaces in the communities, and through the promotion of employment programs.

The results of these activities will ultimately be seen in the long term. Above all, it is imperative that coordination between different levels of governance be improved and reinforced; therefore, work efforts must be in the same positive direction. At least the first steps of a new approach need to be taken. Finally, Mexico should look to other countries, such as Portugal, to learn how to deal with drugs and corruption so that it can begin to balance the unequal forms in that the drugs problem is addressed in U.S. and Mexico.

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<sup>102</sup> Sylvia Longmire, *Cartel: The Coming Invasion of México's Drug Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.

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