

Has the U.S. Government Decided to Join the Drug Cartels, Rather than Beat Them?

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On June 15, 2012, the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) officially closed its facility in Johnstown, Pennsylvania; also on that date, their official website began offering the following message: “This website is no longer maintained and may contain dated information.”¹

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush announced plans to create the NDIC in order to “consolidate and coordinate all relevant drug intelligence information gathered by law enforcement agencies and analyze it to produce a more complete picture of drug trafficking organizations.”

“The mission of NDIC is to provide strategic drug-related intelligence, document and media exploitation support, and training assistance to the drug control, public health, law enforcement, and intelligence communities of the United States in order to reduce the adverse effects of drug trafficking, drug abuse, and other drug-related criminal activity,” the website stated.

The NDIC was opened in 1993 and employed roughly 350 researchers and support staff who analyzed data and produced incredibly detailed reports on the nation’s drug and gang problems.

Those reports, such as the annual National Drug Threat Assessments, were seen by many as an invaluable resource to law enforcement agencies at every level of government and, in recent years, often provided a very sobering look at the growing influence of the Mexican drug cartels across this country.²

Then, something strange happened...

In 2011, the annual report stated that the number of U.S. cities in which Mexican drug cartels were distributing illegal drugs through street gangs had been reduced by no less than 1,500 cities.

In 2010, the National Drug Threat Assessment

stated that drugs were being sold on behalf of the cartels in “more than 2,500 cities.”

The 2011 National Drug Threat Assessment also claimed that the cartels were now only operating in “a thousand U.S. cities.”

So, if the report was to be believed, in only one year’s time the Obama administration managed to eradicate all of the cartel operatives and street-level dealers from 1,500 cities, resulting in a 60 percent reduction?

Where were the press releases?

Why didn’t the Obama campaign talk about this rather astounding feat every day?

Why wouldn’t beleaguered Attorney General Eric Holder brag about this monumental achievement?

Or, was this utterly improbable claim just as absurd as it sounds?

YOU DECIDE

The NDIC’s 2010 report *Drug Trafficking by Criminal Gangs* notes, “The influence of Hispanic and African American street gangs is expanding as these gangs gain greater control over drug distribution in rural and suburban areas and acquire drugs directly from DTOs (drug trafficking organizations) in Mexico or along the Southwest Border.... In 2009, mid-level and retail drug distribution in the United States was dominated by more than 900,000 criminally active gang members representing approximately 20,000 domestic street gangs in more than 2,500 cities.”

The NDIC’s 2011 report, *Transnational Criminal Organizations*, points out, “Mexican-based TCOs were operating in more than a thousand U.S. cities during 2009 and 2010, spanning all nine OCDETFs (Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces) regions.”

How were cartel smugglers and street dealers completely eliminated from 1,500 U.S. cities without anyone noticing?

Of course, the drug cartels are more powerful than ever and by at least one estimate, achieved operational control over 70 percent of Mexico in late 2011.

Additionally, U.S. law enforcement has been reporting more and more violent encounters with cartel operatives, as was the case in November 2012, when

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Los Zetas gunmen attacked Harris County deputies in a shootout.

At the risk of sounding conspiratorial... Could this be a classic case of “shooting the messenger” or perhaps, even manipulating the message?

In 2011, columnist Pedro Vega of the Johnstown, Pennsylvania newspaper known as *The Tribune-Democrat* wrote: “If we allow NDIC to close, we should be prepared as a nation to tolerate a greater organized, though less understood threat, otherwise defined by DEA’s bureaucratic imperative to justify its continued existence, absent the independent ‘reality check’ provided by the NDIC during the past 17 years.”³

That preceding statement is not mere speculation; it is a simple fact.

It is also a fact that the Mexican drug cartels present a clear and present danger to this country, and as is the case with any enemy, intelligence is not only key to understanding your enemy but also to defeating him.

Given the growing threat posed by the cartels and increased drug trafficking throughout the U.S., why would the Obama administration even consider losing a resource as valuable as the NDIC?

We now share our National Parks with the drug cartels.

For nearly 20 years, the Mexican drug cartels have been taking over large sections of this nation’s, once pristine National Parks to grow marijuana on this side of the border, thus placing the supply closer to the demand, and creating more profit.

In March 2016, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued the following press release:

Two Mexican men illegally present in the United States were each sentenced to serve federal prison terms for intentionally manufacturing and possessing with intent to manufacture 50 or more marijuana plants in the Routt National Forest in Colorado.

These sentences were announced by U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the U.S. Forest Service, and the Routt County (Colorado) Sheriff’s Office.

The two defendants, Alfonso Rodriguez-Vazquez and Nestor Fabian Sinaloa-Sinaloa, were first charged by criminal complaint August 8, 2015. They were then indicted by a federal grand jury September 28. On November 24, Rodriguez-Vazquez was charged by Information, and then pleaded guilty to manufacturing 50 or more marijuana plants. On November 30, Sinaloa-Sinaloa was also charged by Information, and then pleaded guilty to the same crime.

On March 7, 2016, Sinaloa-Sinaloa was sentenced

by Chief U.S. District Court Judge Marcia S. Krieger to serve 33 months in federal prison, to be followed by three years of supervised release.

On March 8, Rodriguez-Vazquez was sentenced by Chief Judge Krieger to serve 30 months in federal prison, to be followed by three years on supervised release. Both men appeared at their court hearings in custody, and were remanded at each hearings’ conclusion. As illegal aliens, both men face deportation after they complete their prison sentences.

Both defendants were found maintaining a three-fourths-acre illegal grow site located in the Buffalo Pass area, northeast of Steamboat Springs, Colorado. The eradication team seized 926 marijuana plants and removed camping gear from the site. The Forest Service also cleaned up additional trash and other items. The marijuana-grow operation was found after a citizen reported suspicious activity to the U.S. Forest Service.

“Growing marijuana on public lands is not only a violation of the drug laws, it is a devastating form of environmental crime,” said U.S. Attorney John Walsh. “The Forest Service and Routt County Sheriff’s Office, with the support of Homeland Security Investigation, deserve particular credit for their aggressive law enforcement work, which ensured that these two individuals were arrested and held criminally accountable.”

During a 2009 briefing, Gil Kerlikowske, chief of the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy told reporters: “Mexican drug trafficking organizations have been operating on public lands to cultivate marijuana, with serious consequences for the environment and public safety.”⁴

Cartel operatives move into remote areas of our National Forests and set up huge marijuana grows, where they divert natural streams to irrigate their illegal crop, kill endangered wildlife, use banned pesticides and various chemical agents which leach into the soil, and leave mountains of trash behind.

In June 2003, *The Christian Science Monitor* reported on what was then “a developing problem,” what follows is an excerpt from that article:

“This is massive-scale agriculture that is threatening the very mission of the national parks, which is to preserve the natural environment in perpetuity and provide for safe public recreation,” says Bill Tweed, chief naturalist at Sequoia National Park. “[Growers] are killing wildlife, diverting streams, introducing nonnative plants, creating fire and pollution hazards, and bringing the specter of violence. For the moment, we are failing both parts of our mission, and that is tragic.”

“The most [visitors] used to worry about is running into a grizzly bear. Now there is the specter of violence by a masked alien toting an AK-47,” says David Barna, chief spokesman for the National Park Service (NPS). He and others say the problem is national, but most pro-

nounced in California, Utah, and Arkansas, and in parks with international borders such as Big Bend in Texas and Glacier in Montana.⁵

In fact, in August 2016, KXTV reported that Plumas National Forest, located in the Sierra Nevadas of California, which has long been a favorite place for hikers, has become “a place where hunters were walking in the fields and killed and bodies found later.” The article quoted cattle rancher Mike Grubs: “We live next to a marijuana grow.... They had pit bulls running free and they attacked 2 cows and bit their ears off.”

Grubs runs his cattle in Plumas and Butte Counties. He does his best to avoid the grows, but sometimes his cattle wander into the wrong area.

The Plumas National Forest is rugged, remote, and has numerous water sources. Marijuana is often grown in deep canyons under the cover of dense forest growth.

“What we encounter is a number of Mexican nationals or people not from the United States running the gardens,” said Plumas County Sheriff Detective Chris Hendrickson.⁶

Of course, our public lands are continuously used by drug smugglers, who have even killed a Park Ranger.

On August 9, 2002, Ranger Eggle was killed by Mexican drug dealers while on duty in Arizona’s Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Park. Eggle was attempting to apprehend two smugglers, after being notified by Mexican authorities that the two had crossed the border and were headed into the park. One of the drug dealers opened fire on Ranger Eggle with an AK-47. He died before a medevac helicopter arrived on the scene. Mexican police officers shot and killed Eggle’s murderer. U.S. Park Ranger Eggle, 27, left behind his grieving parents and his sister (also a U.S. Park Ranger).

According to the “2011 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites,” the following is a short list of National Parks where large-scale marijuana grows have been discovered:⁷

ARIZONA/NEVADA

- Lake Mead National Recreation Area

CALIFORNIA

- Whiskeytown National Recreation Area
- Point Reyes National Seashore Park
- Yosemite National Park
- Santa Monica National Recreation Area
- Kings Canyon National Park
- Sequoia National Park
- Golden Gate National Recreation Area
- Redwood National Park

UTAH

- Dixie National Forest
- Bryce Canyon National Park

WASHINGTON

- North Cascades National Park

Of course, our federal government could eradicate, not only these illegal and ecologically disastrous marijuana farms currently being manned by heavily armed foreign criminals. We could do so simply by utilizing the services of the 461,000 members of our National Guard.⁸

So why don’t they do it?

However, this government may well be using the military in another way: are we only keeping our troops in Afghanistan to protect the opium trade?

In 2000, the Taliban banned opium production in Afghanistan, making it illegal to grow poppies. Any farmer caught cultivating the cash crop would be severely punished, usually by death. By the middle of 2001, there was basically no opium produced in Afghanistan, though that nation ordinarily led the world in production of the drug. However, since the start of the U.S. led invasion, the poppy fields began growing again and the opium trade is flourishing as never before.

The Taliban had relied on opium sales to finance their operations until July 2000. It was then that the regime’s leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, issued a ban on the drug trade, because he claimed that it conflicted with Islamic law. Less than a year later, a U.N. delegation visited the areas of the country where poppies were traditionally grown and found nothing.

The former head of the U.N. Drug Control Program, Antonio Maria Costa, said: “There are no poppies. It’s amazing.” By January 2002, the U.S. military had the Taliban on the run and the poppy fields had returned in earnest. At the same time, the U.S. and NATO nations signed a worldwide ban on opium production.⁹ The U.N. released a report on the return of the Afghan opium trade, which noted: “Afghanistan has been the main source of illicit opium: 70 percent of global illicit opium production in 2000 and up to 90 percent of heroin in European drug markets originated from Afghanistan.”

The report went on to say: “There are reliable indications that opium cultivation has resumed since October 2001 in some areas (such as the southern provinces Uruzgan, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Kandahar), following the effective implementation of the Taliban ban on cultivation in 2001, not only because of the breakdown in law and order, but also because the farmers are desperate to find a means of survival following the prolonged drought.”¹⁰ Despite the Bush administration claims at the time that the international drug trade helped finance terrorism, a blind eye was turned to the activities of the Afghan warlords and the Pashtun mafia. The U.S. and our NATO partners ignored the re-introduction of the poppy crops and allowed opium production to flourish. In 2007, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime released a

report which found that during 2006, opium production increased by 50 percent from the previous year.

Afghanistan produced a record of 6,700 metric tons in 2006, and was responsible for 92 percent of the world's opium production. This rise corresponded with the dramatic fall of Southeast Asia's opium production, which, in contrast only produced 370 metric tons that same year. In the past, it has been reported that the CIA is involved in Afghanistan's opium production, or at least in protecting it. In March 2002, a U.S. foreign intelligence official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, reminded a reporter with NewsMax.com of the CIA's record of involvement with the international drug trade.

The official said: "The CIA did almost the identical thing during the Vietnam War, which had catastrophic consequences — the increase in the heroin trade in the U.S. beginning in the 1970s is directly attributable to the CIA. The CIA has been complicit in the global drug trade for years, so I guess they just want to carry on their favorite business. The sole reason why organized crime groups and terrorists have the power that they do is all because of drug trafficking. Like the old saying, 'those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.'" Since 2001, Afghanistan's opium crop in metric tons is 78,120.¹¹

Afghanistan's 2010 crop was nearly cut in half

from the previous year's production due to a blight hitting the poppy fields. However, the reduced supply tripled the price of opium, earning the farmers \$605 million that year, up 38 percent from 2009. The current high price is now convincing many of that country's farmers to give up on growing traditional crops such as wheat, and enter opium production. In addition to being the world's number one opium supplier, Afghanistan is now the largest producer of hashish, producing between 1,500 and 3,500 tons annually.

While the U.S. government has always claimed to be making strides in the eradication of Afghanistan's opium fields, the United Nations reports that only 5,351 hectares of opium were eradicated in 2009, less than 4 percent of the amount planted. In 2010, the amount of land used for poppy cultivation was 123,000 hectares, with the amount reportedly eradicated, unchanged from 2009. By the end of 2012, 154,000 hectares were being devoted to the poppy crop.¹² Though Afghanistan produces about 90 percent of the world's opium supply, a mere two percent of the drug is actually seized within that country's borders.

Afghanistan could now be fairly described as a "narco-state," and the role that the U.S. military has played in that nation's illicit evolution cannot be ignored.

In fact, a 2013 *New York Times* article stated: "This country is on its way to becoming the world's first true



A U.S. soldier on patrol in one of the poppy fields in Afghanistan, which can now be "fairly described as a 'narco-state.'"

narco-state,” said one international law enforcement official, who did not want to be quoted criticizing the Afghan government. “The opium trade is a much bigger part of the economy already than narcotics ever were in Bolivia or Colombia.”¹³ But Mirwais Yasini, a former head of counternarcotics for the Afghan government and now a prominent member of Parliament, said, “I wouldn’t go that far.” “But if it goes on like this in the future, I am worried about that happening,” he said. Mr. Yasini said eradication efforts had been countered by insecurity, compounded by corruption at local, provincial, and national levels. “I don’t see anything tangible that has been done,” he said. “There is no meaningful crop substitution and no effective enforcement.”

The United Nations has estimated in the past that opium trafficking makes up 15 percent of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product, a figure that is expected to rise as international military and development spending declines with the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops.

As of January 2017, there were approximately 8,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, fifteen years after invading that country.

As of February 28, 2017, a total of 2,392 U.S. service members have been killed in Afghanistan.¹⁴

In fact, in addition to the United Nations taking notice of the “American Effect,” the leadership of Russia has outright accused our government of actively trafficking in Afghan opium...

In February 2008, The Center for Research on Globalization reported:

The U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO] forces in the country have not only failed to eliminate the terrorist threat from the Taliban, but also presided over a spectacular rise in opium production. Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Afghanistan was on the brink of becoming a “narco state”.

Narco business has emerged as virtually the only economy of Afghanistan and is valued at some \$10 billion a year. Opium trade is estimated by the U.N. to be equivalent to 53 per cent of the country’s official economy and is helping to finance the Taliban.

Unfortunately, they [NATO] are doing nothing to reduce the narcotic threat from Afghanistan even a tiny bit,” Putin angrily remarked three years ago. He accused the coalition forces of “sitting back and watching caravans haul drugs across Afghanistan to the former Soviet Union and Europe.” As time went by, Russian suspicions regarding the U.S. role in the rise of a narco state in Afghanistan grew deeper, especially after reports from Iraq said

that the cultivation of opium poppies was spreading rapidly there too.

“The Americans are working hard to keep narco business flourishing in both countries,” says Mikhail Khazin, president of the consultancy firm Niakon. “They consistently destroy the local infrastructure, pushing the local population to look for illegal means of subsistence. And the CIA provides protection to drug trafficking.”¹⁵

THE CARTELS OWN MEXICO

In January 2012, Edgardo Buscaglia, a professor at Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México in Mexico City, told *El Universal* that through corruption of local officials, criminal gangs were in control of 71.5 percent of Mexico’s cities and towns.¹⁶

Buscaglia said:

They are operating notoriously in front of the noses of the police, the politicians, and the authorities of all stripes, and for this there has to be some type of tolerance from the state and it can be at a political or a police level. This is telling us that this type of co-opting is on the rise and now we are seeing greater competence between criminal groups to place themselves in these municipal jurisdictions and this competition generates violence.

Buscaglia has served as an adviser to both the World Bank and the United Nations.

- In January 2012, arrest orders were issued for 33 former mayors in the Mexican state of Veracruz on suspicion of corruption charges. Leonardo Mendoza, former mayor of Benito Juárez, was the first taken into custody.

Veracruz Deputy Attorney General Reynaldo Escobar told the Associated Press the ex-mayors were among 115 government employees in the state charged with corruption between 2004 and 2008.

Corruption among government officials is, of course, the key to the rise of the cartels.

- In May 2010, Mexican police arrested the mayor of Cancun, Gregorio Sanchez, and charged him with a money laundering and association with drug smugglers. Sanchez, was apparently feeding information to the Beltran Leyva and Los Zetas cartels.

That same month, former governor of Quintana Roo, Mario Villanueva Madrid, was extradited to the United States, after he was indicted on charges of corruption and aiding cocaine smugglers.

- In May 2009 alone, Mexican authorities arrested 10 mayors and 20 local officials after they were implicated through an investigation into the ultra-violent La Familia cartel.

If La Familia cannot buy-off a politician (often, because they have already accepted bribes from a rival organization), they simply kill him.

In April 2009, congressional candidate Gustavo Bucio Rodriguez was shot to death at the gas station he owned. Only days earlier, the body of Nicolas Leon, Mayor of Lazaro Cardenas, was discovered. Leon had been tortured and shot to death, with the initials “FM” (Familia Michoacana) left on his body.

An example of the tolerance Mexican authorities have for the cartels, came in April 2011, when *The Dallas Morning News* printed a letter to the editor from Arturo Sarukhan, Mexican ambassador to the United States, who wrote in response to an editorial which appeared in the paper, entitled “Let’s call Mexico’s drug cartels what they are: terrorists.”¹⁷

The editorial was written in support of U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX)’s proposal to designate Mexico’s drug cartels as terrorist organizations.

The ambassador took issue with that opinion. Ambassador Sarukhan wrote:

These transnational criminal organizations, which operate in both our countries, are not terrorist organizations. They are very violent criminal groups that are well structured and well financed. They pursue a single goal. They want to maximize their profits and do what most business do: hostile takeovers and pursue mergers and acquisitions. They use

violence to protect their business from other competitors as well as from our two governments’ efforts to roll them back. There is no political motivation or agenda whatsoever beyond their attempt to defend their illegal business.

Misunderstanding the challenge we face leads to wrong policies and bad policy making. If you label these organizations as terrorist, you will have to start calling drug consumers in the U.S. “financiers of terrorist organizations” and gun dealers “providers of material support to terrorists.” Otherwise, you really sound as if you want to have your cake and eat it too. That’s why I would underscore that the editorial page should be careful what it advocates for.

And, since the July 2012 election of Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Enrique Pena Nieto, Mexico’s efforts against the cartels have been dramatically reduced.

The PRI controlled Mexico for more than 70 years, until 2000, when the more conservative National Action Party won the presidency.

Throughout his campaign, Pena Nieto vowed to stop focusing his nation’s resources on apprehending drug cartel leaders and attempting to stop the flow of drugs into the United States.

In May 2012, Pena Nieto’s campaign coordina-



SOURCE: STRATFOR

RICH CLABAUGH/STAFF

tor, Luis Videgaray, told the Associated Press: “Each administration chooses its operational objectives, and the objective per se is not the extradition or capture of big bosses, or the burning of seized drugs.”

It has long been alleged that the PRI made deals with the drug cartels which ultimately led to their rise in power.

Do the cartels also control politicians on this side of the border?

In October 2011, the now-convicted Sinaloa Cartel drug trafficker, Vicente Zambada Niebla, went on trial in Chicago, but not before making the startling claim that the U.S. government entered into a deal with the Sinaloa Cartel which allowed tons of drugs to be brought into the country for several years.¹⁸

In August 2011, attorneys for Vicente Zambada Niebla filed documents in U.S. District Court in Chicago claiming that the government allowed him to bring cocaine into the U.S., in exchange for information on rival cartels.

Although the feds denied the allegations, they also requested that all testimony from Niebla’s trial be kept hidden from the public. Prosecutors filed a motion in U.S. District Court in an attempt to invoke the Classified Procedures Act (CIPA), throughout the trial.

CIPA was enacted more than 35 years ago to prevent public disclosure of classified information.

As an incredible, possible example of cooperation with the cartels, in late 2014, it was reported that many U.S. Border Patrol agents had their M4 carbines taken away from them, and agents along the U.S.-Mexican border were actually being forced to share weapons.

What was behind this outrageous action?

Officially, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency called for a nationwide inspection of the agents’ weapons, and failed to return them.

CPB issued the following statement on the matter:

CBP’s Offices of Border Patrol and Training and Development are jointly inspecting the serviceability of M4 carbines throughout Border Patrol Sectors nationwide. Some of (the) inspected M4 carbines were deemed unserviceable and removed from inventory to alleviate safety concerns. Inspections will continue to ensure the unserviceable M4 carbines are repaired or replaced for reintroduction into the field. No further information is available at this time.

However, this action is unprecedented and agents are beginning to go public with their concerns for their own safety.

Art del Cueto, president of the Border Patrol’s Tucson Sector union, told KVOA:

There’s a lot of agents that are pretty upset

over it. We know it’s a dangerous job. We know what we signed on for but we want to have as much of the equipment as we need to perform the job.

I hope they replace these weapons as soon as possible or give us some kind of answer as to how they plan on replacing them.¹⁹

Considering the fact that the Obama administration purchased large quantities of both weapons and ammunition over multiple years, and doles out automatic weapons and armored vehicles to local law enforcement agencies, it is simply inconceivable that the federal government is unable to repair or replace our Border Patrol agents’ weapons.

Furthermore, if the rifles were truly “unserviceable,” as the feds claimed, the agents would not have been carrying them in the first place. Every law enforcement officer who has ever worked a shift checks his/her weapon before going out on patrol, and the men and women of the Border Patrol are no exception.

More than likely, it was done by the Obama administration for political reasons, at Mexico’s request.

While we know there is a great deal of corruption on both sides of the border, the question becomes...Just how far will these forces go to keep the border open and the drugs flowing?

THE BOTTOM LINE

In 2010, Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, told the Austrian magazine *Profil* that drug money has been the only thing that has kept many major banks in business.

Costa said: “In many instances, drug money is currently the only liquid investment capital. In the second half of 2008, liquidity was the banking system’s main problem and hence liquid capital became an important factor.”

Costa went on to say that UNODC has discovered that “interbank loans were funded by money that originated from drug trade and other illegal activities.” Incredibly, he said there were “signs that some banks were rescued in that way.”

The following is a short list of banks which have either been accused of or resolved cases of money laundering, to avoid prosecution (Source: U.S. Justice Department):

- 2017, Rabobank has recently been hit with a criminal complaint for allegedly laundering money for Mexican drug cartels. The Netherlands lending giant is accused of “having laundered structurally and for a long period of time, the proceeds of crimes committed by Mexican drug cartels” through a branch of a subsidiary in Calexico, California.
- 2012, HSBC, Europe’s largest bank, agreed to

pay more than \$1.8 billion in fines to the U.S. government, over charges that the bank had laundered billions for Mexican drug cartels. That figure included \$1.25 billion in forfeitures as well as an additional \$665 million in civil penalties.

- 2010, Wachovia forfeited \$110 million as well as a \$50 million fine to the U.S. government, after ties between Wachovia and money-changing firms throughout Mexico were discovered. Federal prosecutor, Jeffrey Sloan told *The Guardian*: “Wachovia’s blatant disregard for our banking laws gave international cocaine cartels a virtual carte blanche to finance their operations.”

- 2008, Sigue Corp. was alleged to be part of \$24.7 million in suspicious funds in processed remittances. They forfeited \$15 million and avoided prosecution.

- 2007, Union Bank of California was discovered to be laundering drug cartel profits through casas de cambio. The bank forfeited \$21.6 million and avoided prosecution.

- 2007, American Express International Bank failed to report \$55 million passing through the accounts of known drug traffickers. They paid \$65 million in fines and avoided prosecution.

- 2006, Bank Atlantic paid a \$10-million fine to avoid prosecution, when an undercover investigation discovered that drug profits were being laundered through one of their branch locations.

WHAT IS THE HUMAN COST?

In January 2017, *The Campe Verde Bugle* reported that since 2010, almost 67,000 people have been treated in Arizona emergency rooms for opioid-related overdoses and illnesses, according the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Because Mexican heroin is so plentiful in the border state, it is much cheaper than the prices that can be garnered by the time it reaches dealers on the east coast. As such, emergency room admissions in Arizona for overdose/drug abuse have nearly doubled from 7,753 in 2010 to 15,867 in 2015.

In April 2014, NBC News reported that heroin overdoses accounted for 258,482 of all emergency room visits involving illegal drugs in 2011, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Cocaine overdoses and related illnesses came in second with 505,224 visits.²⁰

In October 2016, News 12 reported:

In 2015, there were 238 deaths involving heroin overdoses reported by Arizona hospitals and medical centers. That number represents a 32 percent jump from the previous year and another high mark since 2012 when 90 heroin-related deaths were reported.²¹

In fact, 2015 marked the fourth consecutive year

that heroin overdoses increased over the previous year.

The fact of the matter is very simple: the federal government has tremendous law enforcement and military resources at its disposal, and if the powers that be wanted to stop drugs flowing into this country from Mexico, or even to put an end to the cartels growing dope in our own National Parks, they could do it.

So, what’s the excuse? ■

ENDNOTES

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