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**A Comparative Analysis of the "Mexican Drug Violence: Hybrid Warfare, Predatory Capitalism and the Logic of Cruelty" and "The Rise of the Narcostate (Mafia States)"**

***Mexican Drug Violence: Hybrid Warfare, Predatory Capitalism and the Logic of Cruelty: A Small Wars Journal-El Centro Book.* By Teun Voeten. Bloomington: Xlibris, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-6641-3415-7. Photographs. Endnotes. Sources cited. Paperback. 440 pages.**

***The Rise of the NARCOSTATE (Mafia States): A Small Wars Journal-El Centro Anthology.* By John P. Sullivan, Robert J. Bunker, Editors. Bloomington: Xlibris, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-9845-4392-9. Acronyms. Appendix. Notes. Sources cited. Paperback. 975 pages.**

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The drug war in Latin America and Mexico specifically is a complex conflict that involves myriad issues intertwined into one. Throughout the years, it has evolved and does not neatly fit into existing theoretical models or mono-causal approaches to warfare. Teun Voeten argues that there are seven levels of conflict simultaneously at play and traces the complexity of this war with micro and macro-level analysis and cross-cultural comparisons. John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker build a comprehensive anthology centered around the complex relationship and interaction between organized crime and states. This anthology explores the rise of the narcostate (mafia states) in Latin America. Sullivan and Bunker describe narcostates as countries where drug traffickers and criminal organizations disrupt state structures with the goal of ruling over legitimate power structures that include the political and economic realms. The anthology is composed of tactical and strategic notes from 2016 through June of 2018 that trace the evolution of cartels and gang activity.

These books complement each other well as they can trace the changing nature and multilayered and transnational aspects of drug trafficking and its effects on individuals and the state. Voeten focuses on the production of violence and touches on themes such as hybrid war and narcostates developed more in-depth in the anthology compiled by Sullivan and

Bunker. Voeten's book provides more context on the individual reasoning for violence and their participation in organized crime. On the other hand, Sullivan and Bunker's anthology is better adapted to provide specific recommendations to contain the threat produced by organized crime. Both the book and the anthology offer a chilling warning to states outside of Latin America that the developments occurring in this region are expanding across the world.

*Mexican Drug Violence* takes a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding the complexity of drug violence. He takes the middle ground in the structure/agency and nature/nurture debates. This position allows for a complex understanding of the issue that allows for the agency of actors while examining structural and environmental contexts that also affect actors. He makes cross-cultural and historical comparisons that look at Mexican *sicarios*, Western jihadists, West African child soldiers, Vietnam veterans, and World War I combatants. These comparisons provide exciting patterns that provide valuable insights into understanding what drives perpetrators of violence. His three angled approach is also beneficial as it allows for a complex understanding of the conflict. The historical and political perspective provides context on how warfare has evolved over the last centuries and how the drug war in Mexico is a form of hybrid warfare. The economic perspective points to neoliberalism as a cause of growing inequality and shows how DTOs are examples of predatory capitalist corporations that have flourished due to globalization. The anthropological perspective uses case studies to look at the individual motivations of perpetrators and provides explanations for how extreme violence can develop through facilitating mechanisms.

The book provides unique insights by combining a macro and micro level of analysis to the drug war and subsequent violence. The author's personal journey and field research across several continents allow him to provide cross-cultural comparisons that thread patterns of conflicts that would seem distant and different at first glance. His use of different perspectives to understand such a complex phenomenon serves him well as he can untangle the multilayered drug violence that continues to affect Mexico. This complex understanding of the issue also allows him to develop interesting insights and tentative policy recommendations to address drug violence in the future. This book is a valuable contribution to the literature on violence and those that study DTOs and the drug war in general.

The *Rise of the Narcostate* looks at myriad cases spanning from the evolution of the FARC into a political actor to the role of corruption in narcostates. The anthology also looks at how drug trafficking operations (DTOs) use technological developments such as drones as weapons, surveillance, and new methods to transport drugs.

Both drones and even jet skis for assassinations show how DTOs then replicate tactics used by terrorists in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Puebla's use of women and children as human shields serves as another example in which strategies are being transferred from one group to the other. These new developments show how organized crime and terror groups can learn from each other and develop new approaches to challenge states. The anthology also presents evidence that terrorist groups and DTOs have linked to expand the drug trade through the Middle East and Europe while increasing financing for both organizations. These cases compile to show how the concept of 'hybrid warfare' is the only way to theoretically contain such a complex and dynamic set of non-state actors. On the other hand, it shows how these complex non-state actors infiltrate the state and create what Sullivan and Bunker refer to as narcostates. This anthology is a valuable contribution to the literature on irregular warfare, organized crime, and for policymakers looking to develop new strategies.

The first chapter in the *Mexican Drug Violence* book "War, economics and perpetrators: The three main perspectives" contains the methodological basis for the book. The author discusses the evolution of warfare from an ideology-driven phenomenon to one driven by material gains. The author then complicates this dichotomy by exploring how many movements have individuals with varying motivations for joining or fighting.

The concept of 'Hybrid Warfare' developed by authors such as Robert J. Bunker and Frank Hoffmann explains the multilayered complexity of conflicts that involve highly adaptive non-state actors trying to gain influence.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent macro-level analysis described by the author is neoliberalism and globalization, which have increased inequality. Voeten understands drug cartels as the ultimate example of predatory capitalist corporations that thrive in a neoliberal climate a concept developed by Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda.<sup>2</sup> Voeten links inequality to creating a

perfect condition for crime to grow and flourish in Mexico. He describes three factors that lead to this condition: motives, opportunities, and weak control. Enormous inequality and poverty create a class of excluded, potential delinquents. Narco-trafficking provides the opportunity to make large amounts of wealth. Finally, the impunity, corruption, and disintegration of moral fabric culminate in weak legal and social control. The third perspective uses a micro-level of analysis to understand what drives the perpetrators of violence. Voeten uses cross-cultural comparisons of US gangs, African child soldiers, and Mexican foot soldiers of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) to identify shared patterns.

The second chapter of the *Mexican Drug Violence* book, “Drug related violence in Mexico: The historical dimension” provides a topography of drug violence and its evolution over time. Voeten traces the evolution of drugs and their acceptance in society, the development of drug production, the relationship of the narco-industry with official authorities, and drug violence. He describes the long history of drug use and drug trade, spanning through the opium trade conducted by the East India Company in China to the introduction of opium in Mexico. The author also looks at the relationship between the end of prohibition in the US and the expansion of drug trafficking in Mexico. As the ban on drugs grew, so did the relationship of authorities and organized crime that increased impunity and corruption levels in Mexico and Sinaloa in particular. The evolving complexity of organized crime and their increasing relationships with authorities showcase the adaptability and flexibility of non-state actors encapsulated under the ‘Hybrid Warfare’ concept.

Voeten’s book describes how the second half of the twentieth century saw the unprecedented growth of Mexican DTOs. Mexican DTOs took over cocaine trafficking, and drug consumption grew in the US. Military operations with US backing, such as Operation Condor, attacked DTO’s in Mexico and caused DTOs to adapt and professionalize in response. DTOs grew in power due to the Caribbean route being closed down and began to develop closer ties with authorities.

Under the seven-decade rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the arrangement between traffickers and authorities was entrenched. When the National Action Party (PAN) ended the seven-decade rule of the PRI and DTOs in 2000, they saw an opportunity to

reposition themselves and began to challenge the new authorities and compete with one another.

Drug violence also evolved and intensified in 2004 as the *Zetas* cartel (composed of former soldiers and police officers) introduced ruthless tactics that other DTOs would mimic until they became commonplace all over Mexico. Presidents Felipe Calderon and Peña Nieto followed a kingpin strategy that only caused fracturing of large DTOs and escalated violence. The current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, promised a new approach but has failed to achieve any results.

The book's third chapter "The Mexican drug war: beyond a new war?" analyzes the complexity of the drug war in Mexico using the lens of four categories: actors, goals, methods, and financing. Voeten argues that Mexican drug violence is a form of new war taken to a new realm for which hybrid warfare is the most appropriate term. He also situates ISIS as another example of hybrid warfare and compares it to Mexican DTOs while predicting that most wars in the near future will fall under this concept. The author distinguishes seven sub-wars that are waged simultaneously with unique dynamics. Voeten explains that all of these levels of war merge, interact, and influence each other to create what is known as the Mexican drug war.

Both the book and the anthology expand our understanding and applicability of the concept of "Hybrid Warfare." The anthology describes the highly adaptive nature of non-state actors that continue to develop new strategies to gain power and influence. DTOs have used unique techniques to cross their illegal products, including, but not limited to catapults, car ramps, drones, *burreros* (individuals carrying drugs that can scale or lift border fencing with jack-like devices), and pangas. These evolving strategies present new challenges to law enforcement and counter-narcotic strategy that try to catch up with DTOs' growing innovations.

Another issue included in the "Hybrid Warfare" concept developed at length in the anthology is that responses to organized crime under this context are not simple. This complexity has led to humanitarian concerns and increases in well-armed confrontations with authorities. Chapter 36 of the anthology by Robert Muggah traces how a hybrid war is playing out in

Rio de Janeiro. He notes the injuries produced by stray bullets, extrajudicial killings, and the increasing firepower that organized crime uses to combat the authorities, including heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. International humanitarian law is blatantly disregarded in these conflicts as both sides engage in increasingly devolving behavior. These new forms of hybrid warfare and the government's security forces' violent response can further delegitimize the state.

In Chapter 41 of the anthology, John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker describe how criminal organizations become political challengers to the state. They explain that the strive for impunity by organized crime leads them into becoming political challengers to the state as they seek localized control. Chapter 49 by Juan Ricardo Gómez Hecht details how hybrid warfare in El Salvador has played out. The case study in El Salvador presents detailed information on how these non-state actors affect the governability of the state in a myriad of ways and offer a critical challenge to the state's functioning. Information operations are another way in which cartels can undermine the government. In Chapter 52 of the anthology by John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker, the authors provide a specific example of how DTOs can weaponize aid. After a series of earthquakes hit southern Mexico in 2017, cartels sent humanitarian assistance to the affected areas. Taking advantage of the government's endemic corruption and inefficiencies, they were able to provide humanitarian aid, enhance their public standing and gain legitimacy at the cost of the government. This use of humanitarian aid is clearly a form of information warfare that is conducted by DTOs as a form of propaganda to gain favor with the local populations. This combination of methods by non-state actors exemplifies the complexity and multiplicity of battlefields that states are challenged by under a 'Hybrid Warfare' model.

The book describes how sets of different actors commit violence. These actors include active perpetrators, facilitators, accomplices, intellectual authors, and some that are affected by violence and influence its dynamics, like the media and human rights groups. Voeten explains how many actors may play several roles, and the high levels of corruption have produced cooperation with organized crime that facilitates this diversity of roles. This cooperation has created a symbiotic relationship between organized crime and the authorities in which parallel states coexist.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 29 of

the anthology by Magdalena Defort focuses on the effects corruption has on the weakening of state institutions and the strengthening of non-state armed actors. This chapter helps further develop the concept of a symbiotic relationship between organized crime and the state that Voeten describes. Defort describes Illicit Structures of Power (ISP) as the link between a criminal organization's wealth and political power. In this scenario, criminal organizations become invested in specific political candidates they support, and in return, they facilitate their illicit operations.

The methods of DTOs range from legal and peaceful options to ultra-violent strategies. DTOs have diversified into several new ventures, including but not limited to human trafficking, extortion, oil petrol theft, and avocado farming. The author explains DTOs prefer to conduct their business peacefully, but use violence as rational cost-benefit analysis. In particular, emerging criminal groups use violence to assert their dominance in increasingly sadistic and brutal ways. In the Mexican drug war, DTOs' goals are financially oriented. Concerning financing, DTOs conduct war to better engage in crime to make more money. In chapter 15 of the anthology, Timothy Clark provides a way to use rationality to better conceive of DTOs as acting like legitimate businesses. Clark finds several variations based on geography and the cartels involved. Still, overall, he finds that DTO's act rationally consistent with cost-benefit analyses models. Clark can thus expand the use of the rationality model beyond what Voeten describes while finding interesting variations.

The fourth chapter Voeten's book "Business as usual: Mexican drug violence from an economic angle" explores the economic perspective on Mexican drug violence. The author analyses this perspective from three different angles. The first discusses how neoliberal policies have led to inequality that produces a class of excluded people who become potential drug business recruits. The author notes that the relationship between inequality and crime is complex as many still opt for honest, decent, and conventional strategies to cope with their position. Chapter 47 of the anthology by Jacob J. Kim argues that reform in the economy and education is far more likely to produce results than the use of underpaid security forces. The author details specific reforms to address Mexico's situation from a multipronged approach.

The second angle looks at the structure of DTOs and compares them to successful corporations. Voeten examines the design of the *Zetas* cartel to show how the organization ran like a conventional business. He also points to strategies like public relations, concentric diversification, and franchising that DTOs have utilized. The main difference is that DTOs cannot rely on legal arbitration in business disputes and resort to violence or the threat of violence to resolve their issues.

The third angle in Voeten's book looks at how globalization has helped Mexican DTOs flourish as their highly flexible nature gives them a strategic advantage over law enforcement agencies. Similarly, the first chapter of the anthology by Roger J Chin provides a specific example of how globalization has helped Mexican DTOs. Chin can trace how globalization has aided in the distribution and manufacturing of methamphetamines as the Chinese Triads and Mexican DTOs have constructed a partnership. Current criminal organizations can operate as cell-like structures in international networks. Borders become business opportunities and shields for organized crime, while becoming insurmountable obstacles for national authorities.

In chapter 23 of the anthology, Nathan P. Jones provides further insights into how globalization and the transnational nature of DTOs complicate law enforcement's efforts to counter narcotics trade. Jones points out a crucial trend known as blind mules. Blind mule operations are operations in which DTOs smuggle drugs onto the cars of unsuspecting victims in various ways. This strategy helps compartmentalize operations so that the unsuspecting victims cannot provide any information on the DTO's operations. It also utilizes globalization and the legal travel of Mexicans that cross the border daily to hide their drug trafficking operations. This strategy exemplifies how legitimate business structures facilitate illicit industries. The 'Hybrid Warfare' concept is valuable to understand how organized crime has adapted to globalization and has been able to use it to its advantage in order to gain a strategic advantage against what used to be a powerful foe such as a state.

The fifth chapter "Trying to understand killers and murderers" takes an anthropological perspective to unravel the motivations that drive individual perpetrators. This perspective is not looked at in as much depth in the anthology. Voeten first looks at why people, in particular

adolescents, become armed actors. It is essential to understand that agency and structure shape, create and influence each other in a mutual interaction with a myriad of shifting motivations.

Voeten identifies religion, thrills, and joblessness as recurrent cross-cultural motivations. He then explores whether violence and aggression are inherent in humankind. He understands humanity as neither inherently good nor evil, but somewhere in between where most people hate violence but Voeten acknowledges the ease of turning them into killers. He explores the attractions of war and why some people cannot kill, and others love to kill, comparing it to having an orgasm. Voeten identifies facilitating mechanisms like creating distance, using a carrot and stick approach, and altering human psychology and one's state of mind facilitate killing.

He then explores the phenomenon of the *sicario* (assassin for hire) through six case studies of different Mexican individuals. *Sicarios* understand killing as a regular job that helps distance themselves from the violence committed. Different types of *sicario* distinguish themselves by their professional level and efficiency, but all are in a relationship of virtual slavery with their DTOs as retirement is seen as desertion. He then discusses the culture of violence in Mexico, referred to as narcoculture. A culture of violence produces and shapes violence by giving it a sense of meaning and direction. He understands narcoculture as a vital co-factor that helps to perpetuate the Mexican drug violence. Lastly, the author looks at theories that describe acts of extreme violence. He touches on concepts of evil and cruelty that see the root of evil as having material, emotional, political-ideological, and psycho-pathological roots. Others explain this violence from an individual, psychological angle focusing on emotions and micro-level analysis.

The sixth chapter "The Netherlands as a narco-state, and Antwerp as its principal cocaine hub" analyses how the Netherlands has become a narco-state as corruption, impunity, infiltration, and a parallel drug economy have become features of the drug trade in this country. The author draws interesting parallels and differences between the situation in Mexico and the situation in Holland and Belgium. As violence continues to grow in Holland and Belgium and there is a rise in the drug trade and disposable people, Voeten warns that these countries are not immune to similar

developments as those in Mexico. In chapter 3 of the anthology, Darren E. Tromblay examines how gangs in the US pose a challenge to the state's sovereignty. Tromblay exposes how gangs in the US have attempted to infiltrate security forces to extract intelligence, obtain specialized combat training and get access to weapons. Tromblay can trace how a characteristic of a narcostate such as infiltration is becoming a growing problem in the US.

The anthology provides a more in-depth look at the narcostate phenomenon. The anthology can connect by analyzing several case studies how organized crime under the concept of “Hybrid Warfare” has led to the phenomenon of the narcostate. Chapter 19 by Paul Rexton Kan looks at the functioning of prisons within the narcostate context. He analyses how prisons in narcostates go from being tools of state control to becoming institutions where criminal organizations can undermine governmental authority. The author can then build a series of recommendations to create policies that hinder organized crime’s ability to affect democratic governance. Chapter 40 by John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker focuses on how the assassination of journalists affects impunity. The chapter focuses on Mirosalvia Breach, a journalist reporting on corruption, impunity, and the links between organized crime and the state. The assassination of the journalist continues a growing trend of silencing civil society by organized crime and corrupted authorities that increase impunity.

Chapter 45 by Luz E. Nagle describes corruption as a socio-political system in Latin America. Nagle describes the widespread corruption across Latin America. She details how corruption allows organized crime to flourish while corrupt officials profit and impede the state’s ability to counter transnational organized crime. Chapter 50 of the anthology by Edgardo Buscaglia continues to develop the concept of the narcostate by looking at the diversification and economic ties of organized crime through legal business and their connection to the state. The author explains how failures of the state to provide political and civil rights will empower organized crime as they fill the void.

Additionally, organized crime diversifies and seeks a monopoly over legal and illegal economic systems that can help minimize risk and make their business more efficient. To achieve this economic domination, DTOs can

use the state's deficiencies to provide services to their advantage. For example, DTOs can provide infrastructure to secure reliable access to labor and land. This use of infrastructure is another example of information warfare as the DTOs use the state's inefficiencies to provide infrastructure to promote themselves as the legitimate source of work and services in the area. In this way, DTOs benefit from protection from the state through corruption and the state's subsequent failure to provide public goods. The author thus traces how organized crime can penetrate the political and economic structures of the state. Organized crime can penetrate the state through corruption and empower itself by providing the services the state becomes increasingly unable to deliver due to the erosion caused by corruption.

One of the most important contributions of the anthology is the development of new strategies to tackle organized crime. In chapter seven of the anthology, Julian Way and Robert Muggah explore how social media analysis can help combat cartels and gangs. They show how these strategies can help supplement ongoing investigations by mapping and monitoring organized crime's illegal activities and communications. This strategy has excellent potential to counter the strategic upper hand organized crime has to conceal its activities transnationally under the context of globalization that Voeten describes.

The anthology also provides valuable lessons from Colombia, which is in an evolving peace process. Chapter 11 of the anthology by Paul Angelo provides a historical analysis of the peace process in Colombia. This analysis points to important lessons and challenges faced in the peace process that can help build a framework for peace and reintegration for other countries in the region. In Chapter 22, Douglas Farah complicates the prospect of peace in Colombia. He points to the need to monitor compliance for both sides as a critical factor for achieving peace. He also points to the complexities of taking out an actor like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the possibility that several of its members may transition into organized crime. These are essential issues that need to be kept in mind by those that seek peacebuilding projects in the region. One of the vital tools to tackle the growing problem of narcostates in Latin America is judicial reform. Chapter 12 of the anthology by Khirin A. Bunker and Robert J. Bunker provides specific recommendations and note current pitfalls of the Mexican Judicial system.

The anthology is thus better equipped than the book to offer specific strategies to tackle the issue at hand.

In conclusion both the book and the anthology complement one another to produce a complex analysis of the consequences produced by organized crime and its relationship to the state. Both are able to trace the evolution and dynamic nature of organized crime under a globalized context and convincingly show the threat produced by these organizations. The book and anthology showcase how the problems seen in Latin America are not limited to the region and have the capability to spread across the world. Most importantly both the book and the anthology are able to give specific recommendations based on years of experience to tackle the issue at hand.

The value of the book compared to the anthology is that it is able to look at the individual and explain their logic behind committing violent acts. It is also able to go into depth about how the theoretical concept of war has evolved and the suitability of the term 'Hybrid Warfare' to understand the new challenges produced by non-state actors to states. The book is able to draw comparisons from across the world to show patterns in the use of violence by non-state actors and provide a complex understanding of its development. The book is a must read for scholars of violence, warfare and organized crime. The anthology is better suited at developing the concept of the narcostate and providing specific examples on the methods and adaptability of non-state actors as they engage in a hybrid war. The anthology also shows a better capability to come up with specific recommendations that can be used by policy makers and security forces to better engage these non-state actors in a hybrid battlefield. The anthology should be read by scholars of public policy, security studies, criminology and those interested in DTOs and their relationship with the state.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the rise of Hybrid War* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 1-72, [https://potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](https://potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf); Robert J. Bunker, ed. *Non-State Threats and Future War* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 1-226, <http://www.mylibrary.com?id=415080>.
  - <sup>2</sup> Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1-260, <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/drug-war-mexico-politics-neoliberalism-and-violence-in-the-new-narcoeconomy/>.

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- <sup>3</sup> John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, “Open Veins of Mexico: The Strategic logic of Cartel Resource Extraction as Petro-Targeting,” in *Mexican Cartel Essays and Notes. Strategic, Operational and Tactical*, ed. Robert J. Bunker, (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013), 19-27, <https://www.iuniverse.com/BookStore/BookDetails/445847-Mexican-Cartel-Essays-and-Notes-Strategic-Operational-and-Tactical>.