

Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug Wars. By Sylvia Longmire. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

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***Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug Wars.* By Sylvia Longmire. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-230-11137-0. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. x, 276. \$26.00.**

Sylvia Longmire's *Cartel* provides a concise introduction for the general reader to Mexico's drug wars and to the threat they pose to U.S. national security. The book is appropriate for college-level courses and for law enforcement— and security-related training programs.

Longmire has served as a senior government intelligence analyst in the counternarcotics and organized crime field. The book is based on her professional experience and has the merit of providing a number of case studies and realistic vignettes to illustrate key points. The case studies illustrate the methods of operation of Mexico's drug cartels from the kingpins in Mexico to the drug pusher on the streets of the United States.

The threat from Mexican and related Colombian drug cartels is not new. Back in the early 1980s, the Colombian and Mexican drug cartels became increasingly active. Longmire sketches how the threat evolved from that era to pose a major threat to U.S. national security today. One key feature of this evolution, the author points out, is the ever-changing nature of the criminal organizations involved and the murderous interaction between them.

Longmire stresses the increasing presence in the United States of many thousands of operatives of the Mexican cartels. The cartels, she points out, also maintain links to and arrangements with various street gangs operating in the United States. These gangs, with tens of thousands of members nationwide, have indigenous roots in the United States or roots in Mexico and in Central America. Cartel operatives and gangs are not confined to major urban areas, Longmire says. They are found in cities and towns, large and small, across the country and pose increasing challenges for law enforcement.

The invasion of U.S. public parks and forests by Mexican cartels is a particularly disturbing and dangerous development pointed out by Longmire. Cartels and their operatives have established networks of marijuana

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"grows" in remote areas of public land. The author notes that federal and state authorities have been ineffective in combating this threat for lack of manpower and resources.

The author briefly touches on another significant issue: money laundering by U.S. and foreign banks. More attention needs to be given to this issue, which facilitates and enables the drug cartels to conduct global operations. With the Mexican cartels amassing tens of billions of dollars in illegal gains annually, it cannot be denied that U.S. and international banks play a major role in willingly servicing these criminal organizations. In the international financial world, it would appear there is an unacknowledged nexus between supposedly legitimate bankers of the respectable "overworld" and the criminals of the underworld.

While the extreme violence of the Mexican cartels has so far been mostly south of the border, Longmire raises a concern that it may well begin to appear more frequently in the United States. She notes the contentious debate over the issue of "spillover violence." There are those who argue that there is little spillover violence and that crime statistics show a decrease in violent crime in the border region. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the definition of spillover violence is not standardized and lacks key criteria, thus underestimating the violence. For domestic political reasons, many may feel it necessary to minimize the reporting of such violence and to water down analyses, but minimizing the threat so as to be "politically correct" does not make the threat go away or make law enforcement any more effective.

Longmire argues that the threat from Mexico's drug wars should cause policymakers to give a higher priority to combating the Mexican drug cartels. Too few resources and too little manpower are committed by the federal government, which has in recent years been preoccupied and distracted by far-off, controversial foreign wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. With an increasing drug and organized crime threat from south of the border, the United States is becoming more threatened and less secure, the author warns.

Longmire addresses the issue of Mexico and the Mexican government in a remarkably restrained manner. The author asserts, hopefully, that Mexico is not a failed state yet and that effective cooperation with its government is possible. On the other hand, the overall thrust of the book would seem to indicate that the Mexican government cannot control the powerful cartels, owing essentially to the endemic corruption of the Mexican federal government and state institutions by criminal organizations awash in bil-

lions of dollars. It would appear that under such circumstances Mexico, at minimum, is a narco-state, and that it may well be heading in the direction of a failed state.

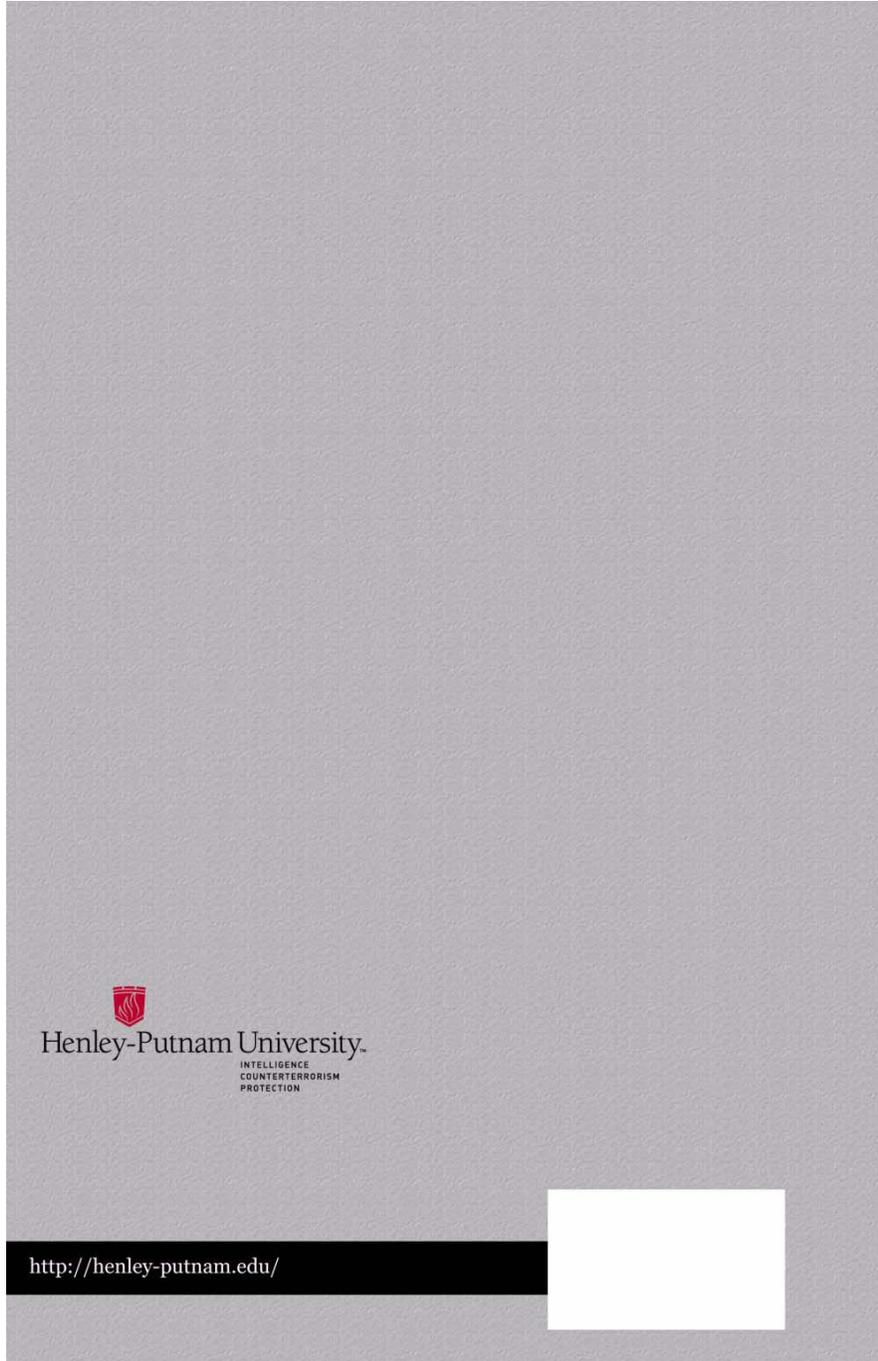
The author points out the possibility of a scenario in which the Mexican government would favor one of the major cartels, such as the Sinaloa Federation, so as to use it to eliminate a more sinister rival cartel, such as the Zetas. Recent hearings in the U.S. Congress concerning federal government involvement in the clandestine movement of weapons south from the United States to Mexican cartels could indicate that Longmire's scenario may not be farfetched. The bottom line, however, could well be that the Mexican government faces fewer opponents, who are more powerful than ever, with the consequence that U.S. national security is degraded still further.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. government has known that Mexican federal and state government has been deeply corrupted by Mexican and Colombian drug cartels. Congress has been reluctant to take effective steps in legislation and funding, and the White House has been distracted. As a result, for three decades, the situation south of the border has been getting worse and not better, Longmire warns. As prospects for effective cooperation with Mexican authorities would seem very remote based on past experience, it is imperative for the United States to prioritize efforts to counter the growing threat from the Mexican cartels.

Longmire's *Cartel* is a commendable effort to inform the general public about a mounting threat to national security.

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