

The Role of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in Mexican Drug Policy Design (1940-1968)

El papel del *Federal Bureau of Narcotics* en el diseño de la política de drogas en México (1940-1968)

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role played by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) – a law enforcement body within the U.S. Department of the Treasury – in the design and execution of drug policy in Mexico between 1940 and 1968. Drawing on primary sources from half a dozen collections of documents in Mexico and the United States, the article aims to answer two key questions: “What mechanisms did the FBN use to intervene in Mexican drug policy during the period?” and “What was its true impact and effectiveness?” This case study aims to contribute to research on drug policy in Mexico and study the influence exercised by various U.S. actors and organizations in this regard.

Keywords: 1. Drug policy, 2. drug trafficking, 3. police, 4. Mexico-U.S. relations, 5. transnational actors.

RESUMEN

El artículo examina el papel del *Federal Bureau of Narcotics* (FBN) –un cuerpo policial anclado al Departamento del Tesoro de los Estados Unidos– en el diseño e implementación de la política de drogas ejecutada en México entre 1940 y 1968. A partir del análisis de fuentes primarias –recolectadas en media docena de fondos documentales en México y Estados Unidos– el artículo busca responder dos preguntas principales: ¿cuáles fueron los mecanismos utilizados por el FBN para intervenir en la política de drogas en México?, y ¿cuál fue su alcance y efectividad real? El estudio de caso busca contribuir al campo de investigación sobre la política de drogas en México y la influencia que ejercieron en ese sector diferentes actores y organizaciones estadounidenses.

Palabras clave: 1. Políticas de drogas, 2. narcotráfico, 3. policía, 4. actores transnacionales, 5. relación México-Estados Unidos.

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INTRODUCTION

The Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), established in 1930 within the U.S. Department of the Treasury, was an anti-drugs law enforcement body and the successor of the Narcotics Division (1921-1927) and the Prohibition Bureau's Narcotics Division (1927-1930). Although not the first federal anti-drugs organization in the United States, it was – by virtue of its size, the centralization of authority, and its duration – the most important until its dissolution in 1968, when the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) was formed, which, following further restructuring in 1973, became the present-day Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).²

Although a relatively small organization, the FBN was a key actor in the legal coding of the punitive paradigm in drug-related issues in the United States, fueling the idea that addicts are harmful for society and disseminating its own interpretation of the *drug problem* to the rest of the world (Carroll, 2004; Nicholas & Churchill, 2012). Moreover, the FBN gained relative autonomy from the other bureaucracies of the central government, particularly the Department of State and the White House. A key figure in this was Harry J. Anslinger, head of the organization and commissioner of narcotics for the United States from 1930 to 1962, and a representative for the country in international drugs fora from 1930 to 1970.

This article examines the role of the FBN in the design and execution of drugs policy in Mexico between 1940 and 1968. In this regard, two secondary questions are addressed – the first regarding the mechanisms used by the FBN and the second on their true impact and effectiveness.

With respect to the first question, this work suggests that the FBN used three analytically differentiable mechanisms: 1) the work of FBN agents in Mexico in three distinct dimensions: as liaisons, policy-makers, and police officers; 2) the use of supranational organizations to exert international pressure; and 3) the *production* of anti-drugs policy experts and specialists among Mexican bureaucrats.

Regarding the actual *effectiveness* of FBN activities in Mexico, the following working hypotheses are put forward:

1. The relative power of the organization was subject to the (dis)interest shown by other relevant actors in U.S. bureaucracy.

2. Mexico's anti-drugs policy was not merely the result of imposition by hegemonic agents. Rather, it was due firstly to the desire of local elites to expand their authority over areas of the country with scant state presence by implementing the punitive anti-drugs paradigm; secondly, to a repressive and intolerant tradition with respect to psychoactive substances, which can be traced back to the colonial era (Campos, 2010); and lastly, to

²The classic reference on both reorganization processes is Rachal (1982).

fairly widespread marked racism in Mexican society, which has taken a negative view of the consumption of plants and fungi by indigenous and foreign populations (Pérez Ricart, 2018b).

3. Far from the imaginary that assumes the existence of rational bureaucracies with clear objectives, the evidence indicates that the FBN lacked a coherent policy toward Mexico. The opposite is true: its officers never implemented a policy based on full, proven information on Mexico.

This article seeks to offer relevant contributions to the study of bilateral U.S.-Mexico narcotics relations. Within this context, an attempt is made to move toward a research agenda based on original sources and able to account for the fractures and continuities that have permeated this bilateral relationship, and the relevance of specific actors in this constellation. Thus, an analysis centered on the FBN should only be read as part of a broader strategy that seeks to trace and identify the external forces that have come to shape the design, execution, and evaluation of drug policies in Mexico. Moreover, one idea prevails throughout the paper: the drug problem was played out on a complex terrain in which both domestic and external logics played a significant role; the task at hand is to determine the limitations and impact of each.

Lastly, the article addresses the recent call made by Paul Gootenberg and Isaac Campos Costero for a new drug history in Latin America. In particular, it revisits the idea that “not all drug policy originated in Washington” (Gootenberg & Campos, 2015, p. 4). It does this in two senses: firstly, by underlining the power of agency of Mexican actors in the execution, design, and evaluation of drug policies; and secondly, by questioning the idea of Washington as a powerhouse that makes drug policy decisions for the rest of the world. As this article shows, foreign policy toward Mexico regarding drugs was far from unified; indeed, it was the epicenter for internal conflicts that inevitably resulted in a fragmented and contradictory policy that was not always rational.

TIME FRAME, METHOD, SOURCES, AND STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

The analysis begins with the establishment of the FBN in 1930 and ends in 1968, when the federal apparatus for drug policy in the United States was given a complete overhaul.

The time frame for the article has been defined by what the author understands as a need to contribute to a period that has received little attention: the so-called *pre-Colombian* period (Gootenberg, 2007).³ The lack of academic work centered on the period preceding the execution of the *war on drugs*—declared by Richard Nixon in 1973—is not limited to Mexico; this shortcoming is found in drug policy research all across Latin America.⁴ In

³The idea of a “war on drugs” dates, at least, from 1910 (The Washington Post, 1910).

⁴For Mexico, exceptions are Astorga (2003) and Walker III (1978).

addition to newspapers and other periodicals, the research draws mostly from original sources found in half a dozen archives in Mexico and the United States.

The first section of the article discusses the idea of *policy entrepreneurs*, a notion that will be used to understand the work of the FBN in Mexico. Also presented are three mechanisms that will be analyzed as major contributors to the dissemination of the Bureau's drug control program. Some of the structural limits faced by the FBN to achieve its objectives will also be mentioned. The second part contextualizes the relationship between the FBN and Mexican organizations devoted to drug control. The third, fourth, and fifth parts analyze the ways in which the FBN pervaded the design, implementation, and evaluation of drug policies in Mexico, and to this end revisit – in light of what occurred in Mexico – the mechanisms discussed in the first part of the text. Lastly, the study's conclusions will be presented, together with a brief discussion on new opportunities for research opened up by this issue.

THE FBN: A POLICY ENTREPRENEUR

Drawing on the bibliography on the role played by state bureaucracies in political processes beyond territorial boundaries, this text uses the notion of *policy entrepreneur* to interpret the FBN's transnational policy.

As a concept, policy entrepreneurs are state or non-state actors with an interest in promoting policy change by promoting ideas (Mintrom, 1997, p. 739). These may be groups of actors or organizations that may act at a local, national, or transnational scale. Whether or not they are part of the state structure is irrelevant; what characterizes them is their willingness to bear, partially or in full, the costs of collective action, along with their desire to become agents of institutional change. Policy entrepreneurs seek to act at all stages of the political process – from the establishment of an agenda to the adoption, implementation, and evaluation of policies (Weible et al., 2011).

Due to the importance of idea promotion in their actions, policy entrepreneurs are particularly active in the first part of the political process: the identification and establishment of a public policy agenda. These types of actors articulate causal explanations for complex problems, *help* states to identify their interests, shape the terms of debate using their capital, propose specific policy designs, and offer input to assess policies (Haas, 1992). The bibliography agrees that policy entrepreneurs are more likely to achieve their goals in contexts in which belief systems regarding a given issue are not institutionalized or when decision-makers do not hold predefined views on a specific topic. In these circumstances, policy entrepreneurs manage to form patterns of behavior and establish logics of dependency.

This work uses the concept of *policy entrepreneurs* with the aim of interpreting the work of the FBN beyond the sphere of law enforcement. As shown below, the organization was – in more than one sense – a lawmaking body both inside and outside its national borders.⁵

The Dissemination of the Anti-Drugs Paradigm by the FBN

The FBN worked directly on spreading its agenda outside the United States using three mechanisms discussed below, which will later be reviewed in light of what occurred in Mexico: 1) the use and co-optation of supranational platforms; 2) the launching of programs to socialize foreign police officers and bureaucrats into the Bureau's own techniques, methods, and policies; and 3) work and cross-governmental relations established by agents *on the ground*.

The first aspect to review is the role of the FBN in the construction of the global prohibition regime. As identified by the bibliography, organizations with a moral inclination of some kind use international platforms as a way to ensure, by creating and sustaining global prohibition regimes, the criminalization of certain illicit activities. This is suggested by Ethan Nadelmann's outline of the history of the establishment of international regimes (Nadelmann, 1990). This article suggests that the director of the FBN, Harry J. Anslinger, promoted and encouraged the global drug prohibition regime through his active presence in U.S. delegations at the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs (OAC) of the League of Nations and, later, at the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), which continues to define drug policy today.

The second mechanism to consider is the establishment by FBN agents of informal networks with state and non-state actors around the world (McWilliams, 1989, p. 219). Far from focusing fully on law enforcement, and despite working under the formal leadership of the sitting U.S. ambassador, FBN agents were *operational*, meaning that they enjoyed the power to cultivate and pay informants, conduct undercover operations, and directly engage in the law enforcement activities of their local peers (Nadelmann, 1993, p. 129). FBN agents worked without legal frameworks restricting their operations, under a disinterested United States Congress and in a setting that enabled Anslinger to negotiate different conditions for his agents in each country (Nadelmann, 1993, p. 132). As will be shown in Mexico (although the bibliography agrees that the practice was international), FBN agents were able to influence the development of specific legislation, informally disseminate ways of working, and ensure that their priorities were taken care of by their foreign counterparts.

Lastly, the FBN disseminated its anti-drugs agenda by developing and funding workshops, seminars, and specialized schools in the United States and abroad. The ultimate

⁵The concept of *lawmaking body* to refer to a law enforcement organization is attributed to Kang (2017).

objective was to create a “new category of actors with a specific body of knowledge and a significant symbolic capital in drug policy enforcement” (Pérez Ricart, 2018a). The idea was that hundreds of foreign students who attended its schools – for whom the FBN paid for travel, accommodation, and courses – would become administrators and superiors in their respective countries. Once familiar with the ways in which the FBN operated and was organized, these *experts* would become key allies for the organization. As will be seen, this plan worked particularly well in Mexico.

The Limitations of the FBN

Despite the relative success of the FBN in distinguishing itself as a transnational organization using the mechanisms mentioned, it is worth noting some structural limitations that restricted its objectives. To begin with, its size and resources: the FBN’s budget was only ever a fraction of the federal funding received each year by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Furthermore, at one of its peaks, in 1962, its workforce was made up of no more than 400 agents, most of whom were deployed in national offices (McWilliams, 1989, p. 230). Thus, despite its extensive network of contacts in the federal government, its influence on various committees of the U.S. Congress and its remarkable international connections, in reality the FBN’s power to set the pace of the drug control agenda was severely limited.

Secondly, the FBN’s leeway to define the orientation of anti-drugs policies in foreign policy was also limited. This was not so much due to its own capacity than a saturation of the network of actors and organizations involved in decision-making on the issue. Like in any other sector, decisions on drug policy were the result of complex negotiations that included a wide range of state and non-state actors – in this case, the Department of State, the Customs Service, medical associations and conservative groups from the southern states (Frydl, 2013). Such a multiplicity of actors gave rise to a fairly vague and fragmented foreign drug policy; no actor was ever able to impose itself fully, and the FBN was no exception.

Lastly, as far as Mexico and Latin America are concerned, thought must be given to the decades-old fratricidal strife between the FBN and the Customs Service to emerge as the leading organization in the region. The conflict dates from 1934, when the Department of the Treasury granted the Customs Service jurisdiction over drug investigations in Asia and Latin America, including Mexico; the FBN was assigned the remaining regions. The ways in which this order was systematically violated by FBN agents will be discussed further on. Suffice it to say, for the time being, that the FBN engaged in a bureaucratic guerrilla war with the Customs Service. This should be seen as yet another limitation that the FBN had to overcome to participate as a policy entrepreneur in the design, execution, and evaluation of drug policies in Mexico.

The Relationship between the FBN and Mexican Authorities: Coercion and Persuasion

An agreement dated December 1925, in which Mexico committed to preventing the importation of narcotics, laid the initial foundations for cooperation between U.S. customs officers and the Mexican police force. The Narcotics Service for the Health Police, which was attached to the Public Health Directorate (*Dirección de Salubridad Pública*, DSP), was the Mexican organization appointed to enforce the terms of the agreement (*Dirección de Salubridad Pública*, 1928, p. 447). Five years later, around 1930, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico and the Mexican foreign ministry performed an initial “exchange of diplomatic notes” (Vasquez Schiaffino, 1930). This was the first document to deal exclusively with bilateral cooperation on drugs, and designates each country’s spokesman: Anslinger for the United States, and the head of the DSP’s Chemical and Pharmaceutical Services, Dr. Demetrio López, for Mexico. Among other things, it was agreed to send “photographs of offenders, fingerprints, Bertillon system measurements, and other information” (Vasquez Schiaffino, 1930).

In addition to exchanging information, samples of seized drugs, and plans for brief models of law enforcement collaboration on the border, it was the eradication campaigns that took up the two governments’ energy, as far as drug control was concerned. These initiatives began in 1938, were limited to mountainous areas of the so-called Golden Triangle in northwestern Mexico, and were partly funded by the United States Customs Service (Kennedy, 1944). Even so, it does not seem readily apparent that they were the result of U.S. pressure, but rather a combination of variables: the need to keep certain sections of the Mexican army occupied, the central government’s endeavor to control the enrichment of local elites, and an interest in maintaining state presence in areas with *limited statehood* (Pérez Ricart, 2018b).⁶ The evidence suggests that pressure from the Customs Service served to formalize these campaigns, but was not the starting point. As far as the division of labor between U.S. organizations is concerned, there is no record of participation by FBN agents in the campaigns – only a few indications of exchanges between border police in northern Mexico and agents associated with FBN district offices in San Antonio or El Paso. Customs Service agents, on the other hand, did participate actively in these campaigns.

In the late 1930s, the relationship between the federal government of Mexico and the various anti-drugs agencies in the United States was limited to border issues, organizing eradication campaigns, and law enforcement cooperation on specific issues. However, what had until then been a more or less harmonious relationship between the FBN and the nucleus of actors that took responsibility for drug policy in Mexico ended when Leopoldo

⁶For information on the conflicts between the central government and local elites, see Smith (2013).

Salazar Viniegra, a doctor from Durango, took the helm of the DSP's Directorate of Drug Addiction (*Dirección de Toxicomanías*).

THE 1940 AND 1947 RECTIFICATIONS

On two occasions in the 1940s, Anslinger and his agency used coercive means to *rectify* what they interpreted as deviations from Mexico's drug policy. In the first instance, in 1940, they put a stop to an attempt to implement an ambulatory maintenance program for addictions. Secondly, in 1947, they forced the Miguel Alemán administration to give the eradication campaign a hitherto unprecedented national dimension. These two incidents will be explored briefly below.

The Attempt to Reform the Drug Addiction Regulation in 1940

In the history of Mexico-U.S. drug policy, one of the incidents most often studied in the literature is the attempt to reform the Drug Addiction Regulation in 1940. Those who have examined the issue agree that it was a *turning point* that was instrumental in determining the range of future options regarding addiction treatment policy in Mexico (Flores Guevara, 2013).

With the aim of tackling what had become legendary corruption within the Health Police, the high cost of eradication campaigns in the northwest, and the poor results recorded in addict treatment programs, Salazar Viniegra promoted the creation of a state monopoly that would supply high-quality morphine at nominal prices to those who were addicted to opium and derivatives. Salazar's reasoning was that if drug addicts were able to procure their opiates openly, dealers' earnings would drop to such an extent that, in the long term, the drug trade would lose its appeal.

The project enjoyed the support of leading doctors, key figures in government, and even a portion of the press (Alcázar, 1939; De Alba, 1938; Segura Millán, 1939). The minutes of the Health Council, the governing body on the issue in the late 1930s, provide an account of the lack of resistance from other bureaucrats to Salazar's plan (Campos, 2017). Naturally, this does not silence the voices of conservative journalists, jurists, and doctors who opposed the proposal of the then head of the Directorate of Drug Addiction of the DSP (e.g. Barenque, 1938), some of whom were close to or friends of Anslinger.

Salazar Viniegra's proposal was very similar to what is known as ambulatory treatment elsewhere in the world, which is an attempt to reduce addiction by delivering physician-prescribed doses. However, the key focus of Salazar's proposal was not to cure addicts, which by his calculations was very difficult to achieve, but reduce the supply of the illegal drug market in Mexico City and, eventually, the rest of the country (Stewart, 1938).

On January 5th, 1940, President Cárdenas signed the reform of the Drug Addiction Regulation, which specified the curative procedures that so-called drug addicts would

undergo and which, by virtue of their specific nature, were not dealt with in the Health Code or Criminal Code. The reform was short-lived but not a dead letter. Indeed, it soon brought about institutional efforts to enforce it; in the second week of March, the first dispensary for drug addicts opened in Mexico City, which produced mixed results but operated fairly normally for a few weeks. However, on July 3rd, 1940, by order of General Cárdenas, the Drug Addiction Regulation was suspended “indefinitely” (Executive Branch, 1940), under the pretense that it was difficult to transport narcotic drugs from Europe to Mexico in the midst of war. The real reason, however, was the implementation of an embargo on medicine ordered by Anslinger. As will be seen below, it was the maneuvers of the drugs commissioner of the United States that thwarted Salazar Viniegra’s original plan. This episode represented the first open confrontation between the FBN and the Mexican government.

The Beginning of the “Permanent Eradication Campaign”

The diplomatic victory Anslinger won in the suspension of the Drug Addiction Regulation in 1940, along with his role in the production, manufacturing and distribution of narcotics during World War II, strengthened his position as a reference in drug policy both inside and outside the United States. It was against this backdrop that Anslinger launched a second offensive against Mexico.

A series of rumors – some more substantiated than others – on involvement by members of the inner circle of President Miguel Alemán in drug trafficking in Mexico, and several reports indicating an increase in opium poppy-growing in Sinaloa and Sonora, led Anslinger to criticize the Mexican government on the stands of the newly formed Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in 1947. This criticism was published in national newspapers, harming President Alemán’s image and forcing his government to pursue a new anti-drugs strategy. The most visible consequence of this change in strategy was the creation, based on a proposal by the Office of the Department of the Treasury in Mexico City, of an eradication campaign that was substantially broader and more complex than those of previous years. This meant that eradication campaigns were no longer a regional affair, becoming state policy. Among other measures, there was a substantial increase in the deployment of soldiers and officers from the Judicial Police (PJ), the operational area was expanded with the help of aircraft technology, and the budget for the anti-drugs crusade was increased (Pérez Ricart, 2018b). Furthermore, under pressure from Anslinger, a new border program was implemented, harsher prison sentences were introduced for drug trafficking crimes, and the position of General Inspector of the Republic was merged with that of Head of the Anti-Narcotics Campaign (Pérez Ricart, 2016). This firmly positioned the PJ above the health police as the main body responsible for drug control, a process that had been occurring gradually during the previous decade.

The leading factor in the set of changes made between 1947 and 1948 was none other than the pressure exerted by Anslinger through the CND. This was not, however, the only influence. As will be seen later, lobbying by FBN agents in Mexico, along with the positive relationship between these agents and a small group of Mexican bureaucrats, explains in part the lack of resistance to the changes proposed from the United States.

THE YEARS OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS, 1948-1968

This qualitative change in Mexico's anti-drugs strategy – new legislation, the revival of the eradication campaign, and a complex border plan – was welcomed by Anslinger. As recounted by an official from the Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR), at a meeting held by the CND in New York the following year, "Anslinger gave a standing ovation and requested the floor to congratulate Mexico." According to this same author, from 1948, "Anslinger became a great admirer of Mexico's efforts" (Barona Lobato, 1976, p. 43). From then on, the anti-drugs commissioner for the United States continually emphasized, year after year, the risks – "disease, infections, shootings" – that the Mexican police force and army endured during the eradication campaigns (Anslinger, 1952a).

As the PGR began to take on drug control responsibilities, tensions with the FBN eased considerably. The merging of the roles of General Inspector of the Republic and Head of the Anti-Narcotics Campaign was key. For the first time, Anslinger had a peer of similar rank to analyze the drugs *problem* from the same angle – in this case, Arnulfo Martínez Lavalle, a protégé of the attorney general Francisco González de la Vega (1946-1952). In a nutshell, the police came to replace physicians as the driving force behind drug control. Despite this, neither then nor at any other time was Anslinger ever able to put in place anything that resembled a *Mexican FBN*. Although the FBN supported the development of specialized anti-drugs organizations both within and outside the PGR, these plans never materialized. There were two reasons for this: firstly, the reluctance of senior officials in the PGR to establish an autonomous body, and secondly, the piecemeal efforts that the FBN contributed to the undertaking. In this sense, it seems safe to say that the convenience of having contacts in key positions prevailed over the FBN's desire to bring about substantial change in the coercive structure of the Mexican state with regard to the drug problem. Future research should, however, explore this hypothesis to establish greater certainty.

What is true is that, after 1948, Anslinger and the FBN reconsidered their position vis-à-vis Mexico. Although the pressure continued and disagreements were not infrequent, during the 1950s and 1960s, for the most part the relationship between the PGR and the FBN was informed by mutual understanding and collaboration. Gradually, Anslinger understood the structural limitations of the Mexican state, both in a *positive* and *negative* sense – namely, the state's inability both to control, from a body such as the Federal

Directorate of Security (DFS), the drug trade across the country, and to end once and for all the supply of drugs. His understanding of a more complex reality, based on trips to Mexico in the second half of the 1940s, led him to pursue more aggressively a personal relationship with certain decision-makers. Over time, Anslinger and the main figures in the FBN came to defend Mexico against a series of actors in the southern United States demanding a move toward a more confrontational approach with Mexicans. This was especially true in California during the 1950s, when prosecutors, local police forces, parents' associations and periodicals spouted distorted narratives on drug trafficking from Mexico (Smith & Pansters, in press).

The FBN and PGR saw the advantage of cooperating in court cases and exchanging information. The FBN had nothing but praise for Mexico; according to district agents, Mexico was stopping the exportation of drugs "*as well as it can*" (Officials Call for U.S. Action to Stop Dope from Mexico, 1959; Siragusa, 1959). Indeed, according to FBN narrative, it was the Department of State that had to make greater efforts to stem the exportation of drugs to the United States. Similar remarks can be read in most periodicals in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

During the *years of friendly relations*, some concrete forms of cooperation can be observed between the FBN and PGR. In particular, an attempt was made to close the technological gap between the two countries in their data recording systems, substance identification, training, and technical material. For example, in 1949, it was agreed to supply glass vials and marquis reagent to test opium alkaloids, following *such good results* in the United States (Aslinger, 1950, 1959). This was followed by shared anti-drugs manuals for Mexican and U.S. police officers, published with the aim of standardizing operations on both sides of the border. More importantly, from the late 1940s, Anslinger facilitated for the PGR the purchase of planes and helicopters at reduced prices, a practice that was to continue into the present day (Pérez Ricart, 2016, pp. 321-323).

At a bureaucratic level in the United States, 1963 saw confirmation of the FBN's bureaucratic victory over the Customs Service. Under pressure from the FBN, the Department of the Treasury agreed to amend the agreement that gave the Customs Service exclusive authority on drug issues in Latin America. In this context, that same year, the first FBN office was established in Mexico City under the leadership of William Durkin, a senior official in the organization. A few months later, a second office was built in Monterrey. As district supervisor for the FBN in the whole of Mexico, Durkin not only took on administrative duties. Given the lack of a broader circle of individuals in the embassy to tackle drugs, he became the *de facto* interlocutor for the U.S. government in matters regarding anti-drug cooperation with the PGR. So it was that by the mid-1960s the FBN was not only an anti-narcotics agency in Mexico, but also represented – insofar as was possible – U.S. anti-drugs foreign policy.

FBN AGENTS IN MEXICO: MORE THAN POLICE OFFICERS

The fact that the Customs Office had, on paper, primary responsibility in drug matters in Mexico and Latin America between 1934 and the early 1960s did not stop FBN agents *coming down* to Mexico to perform law enforcement and investigative operations.

Most territorial incursions featured FBN agents attached to some district office in the southeastern United States. These incursions lasted only a few days and were limited to border cities, most notably Laredo, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Juárez, Nogales, Mexicali, and Tijuana. In general, they conducted buy-and-bust operations, a police tactic by which undercover agents exchange money or illegal substances with suspected drug traffickers. Ultimately, it results in inciting a third party “to perform criminal acts, with the aim of handing the person over to the competent authority at the time he or she engages in illegal conduct” (Barrios González, 2013, p. 16). Although prohibited by criminal law in Mexico at the time, the practice had become common by the mid-1940s (Talent, 1946). Furthermore, it spread to such an extent that between late 1959 and mid-1962, agents from district X of the FBN had collaborated in at least eleven major cases in Saltillo, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey, Ciudad Juárez, and Mexico City (Gentry, 1962). In the same period, agents from district XIV – in Texas – had worked on 47 cases (Trainor, 1962). By 1960 Henry Giordano, Anslinger’s second-in-command and his successor at the helm of the FBN from 1962, acknowledged that FBN agents traveled to Mexico “on an almost daily basis” (Giordano, 1960). All this occurred in an informal atmosphere that was more or less tolerated by the Department of the Treasury and PGR. Ultimately, the objective was to *generate successful* court cases against alleged traffickers. *Generating* a case meant collecting the necessary evidence to support a charge for drug trafficking at the corresponding public prosecutor’s office in Mexico or the United States. It was said to be *successful* when the evidence led to sentencing. As there was no extradition agreement for drug-related crime at the time, often the plan was to begin undercover buy-and-bust operations in Mexico and complete them in a border city in the United States. Naturally, the federal authorities in Mexico, fearful that these practices would be interpreted as interference in the country’s domestic affairs, denied their existence.⁷ On other occasions, they participated directly in arrests on Mexican soil.

In addition to policing duties, FBN agents traveled to Mexico to obtain reliable information on the way the drug market operated south of the border. To this end, the FBN established a rudimentary, yet fairly efficient, system of informants in Mexico: “the bread and butter” of their job.⁸ From the 1940s, this task was facilitated by the considerable budget allocated to FBN agents in Mexico to buy informants, also called guides or carrier pigeons (Kennedy, 1944).

⁷See the statements made by Óscar Rabasa in Sherman (1960).

⁸To quote Omar Alemán, an anti-drugs agent established in Mexico in the 1970s (Goodsell, 1978).

In practice, even though FBN agents were prohibited from taking part in arrests and confrontations, their presence in Mexico led local police forces to change their own operation dynamics, in that they provided a *model for action* that could be immediately adopted by local police. By working hand in hand with Mexicans, and almost without meaning to, they passed on practices, techniques, and specific policing knowledge.

Did interaction with FBN agents lead to changes in the way the Mexican police approached the drugs phenomenon? The evidence found in archives and other studies suggests that prosaic day-to-day forms of collaboration became a determining factor in processes of political change in the field of drugs. The development of personal relationships led to the sharing of interpretations of what was (and was not) a problem. This was reflected in some very basic aspects: the use of proactive investigation techniques, confidence in the U.S. justice system, and an acritical attitude toward eradication programs and a police agenda centered on pursuing the supply of drugs. Further research based on case studies should determine the extent of these changes.

In addition to their role as law enforcers, FBN agents established informal relations with actors and organizations they considered important: police officers, customs officers, members of the military, prosecutors, and judges. The secondary bibliography, although somewhat lacking in empirical support as far as Latin America is concerned, provides an adequate discussion of the significance of this function (Bowling, 2009; Nadelmann, 1987). Arguably, it could be said that this relationship with the U.S. provided significant political capital for Mexicans. A connection to a foreign agent could guarantee a local police officer a degree of job stability, informal protection from arbitrary acts by senior officials and, above all, a certain rank within a task force or unit. FBN agents were aware of this, and would not miss an opportunity to offer small gifts to their Mexican peers. Giving an FBN badge to the souvenir collector and head of the Federal Judicial Police (PJF) Jiménez Delgado, for example, might make all the difference between a fantastic relationship and one that is merely institutional (Dunagan, 1967b). Other times it sufficed to give a Mexican federal officer a revolver, worth under two hundred dollars, to ensure a sense of loyalty and access to information (Dunagan, 1967a). George White, one of Anslinger's favored officers, gave his friend Manuel Rosales Miranda from the PGR an FBN badge (*charola*) after he named White "honorary officer of the Federal Judicial Police" during his visit to Mexico in 1949 (Rosales Miranda, 1949).

FBN agents were also public policy makers. One example of direct intervention in policy design and implementation is provided by Garland Williams, an FBN agent who in 1946 presented an informal initiative to reform certain articles of the Mexican Federal Criminal Code (Williams, 1946). His proposals for longer prison terms and heavier fines for drug crimes were reflected in the reform approved by the Mexican Congress 11 months after they were drafted. The result was one of the world's most repressive laws against the consumption, sale, and trafficking of drugs (Meza Fonseca & Lara González, 2011).

Williams was also a key figure in the establishment of punitive drug control laws in Iran in the mid-1950s. His strategy can be summarized in one quote: “I simply don’t stop talking long enough for them to formulate their own ideas, and after a while they accept my concept” (cited in Smith, 2007, p. 219).

As for district supervisors like William Durkin, it was hoped that they would push for the legal regulation of proactive investigation techniques or the construction of “trusted” institutions under the FBN model. In addition, Durkin himself had the authority to manage and allocate resources for the first binational project against drug trafficking, which entailed a flow of planes, helicopters, and weapons from the United States to Mexico in 1961.

Agents like Durkin and Williams are just two examples of the immense power enjoyed by some FBN officials to filter information, manage resources, and prioritize specific policies. In several ways, they acted more like *policy entrepreneurs* than police officers with mere cross-border operations.

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE USE OF SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO PRESSURE MEXICO

The first steps of the global prohibition regime were defined within the League of Nations at the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs (OAC). Following the war and the creation of the United Nations, this would become the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), part of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of the six main organs of the UN. As mentioned above, Anslinger was a U.S. delegate to the OAC and the CND throughout virtually the whole period studied in this paper.⁹ On two occasions –in 1940 and 1947– he used his position to make radical forays into Mexican drug control policy.

As far as the Drug Addiction Regulation is concerned, Anslinger clashed openly in Geneva with Mexican delegations that stood in favor of the ambulatory addiction treatment program described in previous pages.¹⁰ Salazar Viniegra himself endured substantial humiliation in public fora of the OAC at the hands of the commissioner Anslinger and the delegations that supported him (Flores Guevara, 2013, pp. 115-128). Unable to persuade Mexicans to renege on their project, Anslinger resorted to a coercive approach to thwart the

⁹Even so, Anslinger’s influence on the drafting of the 1931 Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs and the 1936 Convention for the Suppression of the Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs is a matter of historiographic discussion. Anslinger’s view on the 1931 Convention can be read in Anslinger (1933).

¹⁰Before Salazar, Mexico had fully embraced the 1931 Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs. Both the 1931 Criminal Code and the Drug Addiction Regulation of the same year include the most prohibitionist aspects of the convention.

regulation. Availing himself of a 1935 law, the Narcotic Drugs and Import Act, which authorized the commissioner to deny licenses for the legal shipment of narcotics to countries in breach of any aspect of the 1912 and 1931 international conventions, Anslinger stopped issuing permits for the exportation of narcotic drugs to Mexico in March 1940 (Anslinger, 1940b). Anslinger's decision was challenged, without success, by the U.S. ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels (Gallardo Moreno, 1940). Time turned out to be the best ally for the commissioner, who had no qualms in reiterating the foolproof logic of his plan: Mexicans would begin to backtrack as they started to run out of drugs. In a letter addressed to his Canadian colleague, Anslinger referred to the situation in Mexico in the following terms: "Evidently the shoe is pinching the health authorities, as they are using up their small stock for the addicts as such and do not have enough to take care of the sick and injured, and the hospitals, doctors, and druggists are putting the pressure on" (Anslinger, 1940a). As reviewed in previous pages, the Mexican government resolved to drop the plan, and did not even attempt to take the case to the League of Nations, as advised by officials from the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE, 1940).

This situation could have replayed itself in the fall of 1942 when, amid suspicion that the federal government was not fighting opium poppy growing, consideration was given to imposing another drug embargo on Mexico (Morlock, 1942). Five years later, in 1947, Anslinger would leverage the CND platform to demonstrate his power; specifically, Anslinger managed to get a motion of censure approved by the CND against a particular country for the first time, and refer the case to the assembly of ECOSOC. On that particular occasion, he ordered that the Mexican delegate Padilla Nervo be "squashed once and for all" (DiLucia, 1948). As previously reported, pressure from Anslinger led the Mexican government to radicalize its drug control efforts.

From 1948 and for the decades that followed, Mexican diplomats to the CND did not dare to diverge from the fundamentals of the most punitive initiatives from the U.S. delegation, which, little by little, established the global prohibition regime. Not only that, but Mexico even became a puppet for the new system, with Óscar Rabasa, a Mexican delegate to the CND from 1950 and close friend of Anslinger, serving as vice-president of the commission in 1951 and president in 1952 and 1953. Furthermore, Mexico was happy to endorse the most prohibitionist positions of the crucial Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, which ended up reshaping drug policy design in Mexico.

Rabasa's discourse and positions, compiled in Anslinger's correspondence deposited in the University of Pennsylvania and the archives of the FBN in Washington, provide an account of the unanimous support professed by Mexico and the United States for each other. Thus, for example, in the seventh session in 1952, Anslinger lavished praise on Rabasa and senior officials in the PGR. The report submitted by Mexico to the commission "was a reflection of how well Mexico is fulfilling its international obligations." Cooperation between Mexico and the United States, Anslinger went on to say, was a

“model for the world” (Anslinger, 1952b). Rabasa appeared “deeply moved” by Anslinger’s comments, returned the praise, and recalled how “fortunate” the U.S. people were to have a leader with Anslinger’s authority: “A career man fully committed to his work,” (Anslinger, 1952a).

Production of Experts and Specialists

Around the early 1960s, the FBN promoted the professionalization of Mexican officials with specific drug expertise. This was achieved using various approaches that in themselves show the importance of persuasion as a mechanism through which the FBN exerted its influence in Mexico.

The cases of Ignacio García Trejo and Manuel Martínez Valdés, two officials from the PGR, are paradigmatic. They both traveled to Washington D.C. in February 1961, with funding from the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), in order to “familiarize themselves” with the methods used by the FBN to “conduct narcotics investigations” (Maduro, 1961). To train the two officials, the FBN and ICA prepared specialized handbooks and textbooks. We know the names of two of these from an ICA order form: “Handbook of Self Defense” and “Narcotics and Narcotic Addiction” (Labouisse, 1961). García Trejo and Martínez took advantage of their visit to interview other FBN agents and bureaucrats, with whom they agreed to implement better information sharing mechanisms. Months after the trip to Washington, García Trejo was appointed general inspector of the PGR, since, in practice, this was equivalent to the position of head of the Intersecretarial Coordinating Board for the Campaign Against the Production and Traffic of Stimulants, one of various organizations that served to centralize anti-drug work in Mexico. Martínez Valdés, on the other hand, worked in the 1970s on drug testing at the customs office of Mexico City International Airport (Mexico New Conduit for Cocaine, 1974).

Similarly, in 1963, the FBN invited Juan Barona Lobato to attend specialized training programs offered by the FBN at its head office in Washington, D.C. Barona Lobato’s invitation came with the expectation that in the not too distant future he would become the next Mexican Commissioner of Narcotics (Durkin, 1963). Although he never held this position, four years later, Barona Lobato was the private advisor for attorney general Julio Sánchez Vargas. Over the years, Barona Lobato would represent Mexico in at least 15 sessions of the CND and serve as an advisor at interparliamentary meetings between Mexico and the United States and as deputy legal consultant in the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE).

Like García Trejo, Martínez, and Barona Lobato, at least two high-ranking Mexican officials in the PGR attended seminars provided by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics Training School (FBNTS): commander Guillermo Landeros Brandestein and Rodolfo Chávez Calvillo. The former worked as head of political affairs at the Directorate of Preliminary Investigations of the PGR, and the latter, after holding the position of head of

process control at the PGR in the 1970s, became director of preliminary investigations at the PGR. Chávez Calvillo also participated in the October negotiations in Washington D.C. following the border shutdown in 1969 (Operation Intercept), and was part of several Mexican delegations to the CND in the 1970s. Both were members of the inner circle of Rosales Miranda, deputy attorney general between 1973 and 1982 and one of the FBN's main contacts in Mexico from the late 1940s.

What these individuals have in common is that they received invitations from the FBN to participate in seminars, training programs, and specialized courses *before* holding important positions in the PGR or other institutions. Their profiles were of interest but not yet consolidated. With the creation of the BNDD and later the DEA, the old strategy by which attention was given to key figures was expanded to other actors. By 1971, the courses had become large-scale and were held on both sides of the border. For now, it should suffice to advance the following idea: the FBN helped to produce experts and specialists in drug issues in Mexico. It sought to consolidate a professional elite that, in the medium or long term, would assimilate the drug policy endorsed by this U.S. agency. So emerged a new category of actors with a specific *body* of knowledge and significant symbolic capital in drug policy enforcement. This did not, however, result in large-scale reshuffles of organizations in Mexico, the creation of an agency like the FBN, or reduced corruption rates in drug control organizations in Mexico.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed the role of the FBN in the design and implementation of drug policy by the Mexican state between 1940 and the late 1960s on the basis of two key focus areas – firstly, by examining the mechanisms employed by the organization to influence drug policy in Mexico, and secondly, by exploring the scope and effectiveness of the FBN's work in Mexico.

Regarding the first area of focus, evidence was shown of three distinct strategies used by the FBN to advance its political agenda in Mexico: sending FBN agents south of the border; using supranational organizations to legitimize its bilateral agenda; and, lastly, *producing* drug experts and specialists in Mexico.

As for the second area of focus, the article has provided empirical evidence to support the following claims. Firstly, while the drug problem was subject to the political arena of a reduced nucleus of actors, the FBN had an immense capacity to engage actively in decision-making in anti-drug policy in Mexico. Even so, sufficient evidence has been collected to assert that the FBN did not *arrive* in Mexico on a *blank slate*: before the agency began to act as a major player in drug-related political processes in Mexico, certain social control practices and standards with respect to drug trafficking had already been institutionalized. In other words, Mexico's path to prohibitionism had already been laid

down.¹¹ Lastly, the FBN's pervasion of drug policy in Mexico did not take place homogeneously. Just as there were periods in which its political influence in the country was greater, geographically there were also significant differences. From the late 1930s and 1940, FBN agents deployed their resources in the border area and focused their attention on collaborating with specific actors: state police and public prosecution offices. Later, as the number of anti-drug agents increased, the relationship with medium and high-ranking powers in the PGR – and in particular the General Inspectorate of the Republic, the body responsible for overseeing and monitoring public prosecutors at a federal level – took on greater importance. In this sense, future research should look more closely at how the FBN's presence manifested itself at a subnational level – a dimension that this work does not manage to address.

Valid conclusions can be drawn from this analysis to understand the work of U.S. anti-drug agencies in other regions. In contrast to the bibliography, which underscores the rationality and breadth of the FBN's transnational work, this article highlights the limitations of the organization. From this case study, it can be inferred that the structural and contingent limitations of the FBN in other countries were, if not greater, at least on a par with those the organization faced in Mexico. This inference opens up new possibilities for research on how national security bureaucracies – even with high degrees of autonomy – are heavily limited in transnational ventures.

Finally, a general reflection: Mexico was not a static recipient of paradigms, programs, and practices from the United States in drug policy. Local institutions and actors had sufficient power to expedite or prolong processes, prioritize policies, and even resist changes that, although desired in the United States, were not a priority south of the border. This premise could lay the groundwork for a research program to develop methodological tools to distinguish external and internal aspects that have shaped drug policies in Latin America.

Translator: Joshua Parker

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¹¹On this subject, the key work is Campos (2012).

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