

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: The situation in Central America: progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development

Student Officer: Thomas Sevastiadis

Position: Deputy President

INTRODUCTION



"Map of Central America." map. *wikitravel*, 31 Oct. 2010, wikitravel.org/shared/File:Map_of_Central_America.png. Accessed 12 July 2019.

Central America has suffered from a lot of criminal activity throughout its history. Starting in the late 70s, in an era of revolutions and civil wars, it evolved into one of the most pressing crises during the last few decades. Central America is composed of the following states: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. The region has been facing major security problems, such as excessive crime rates, poverty issues, unstable governments or oppression against the lower-class people. With the continuously growing influence of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and gangs and their ruthless behavior towards the population of Central America, the situation has only aggravated in the last few years. Violence and insecurity have left the population, which is constantly plagued by social inequality and unemployment, in a state of despair and hopelessness, which is further explainable due to the understaffed and unprofessional police forces in these areas but also the lack of a

competent and incorruptible government. Having a homicide rate of more than 50 killings per 100.000 residents, the governments of these countries strive for solutions to their problems. Since states in Central America lack the resources to provide their citizens with the appropriate protection and guarantee their safety, they have to rely on the aid of other nations and organizations, such as the United States or the UN.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle of Central America consists of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. It is most known for its world-wide highest homicide rate, as well as its high rate of violence, insecurity and other criminal activities. From their independence until today, these three states suffer more than any other neighboring country from the Central America crisis.

DTOs

Drug Trafficking Organizations are mostly found in Mexico, although they have expanded their branches into the Central American region spreading fear and terror amongst the civilians. This is mostly carried out with their organized drug transportations through the whole area of Central America and the occasional turf wars, which leave thousands of innocent people dead. Their job is to produce, transport and distribute large amounts of different kinds of drugs.

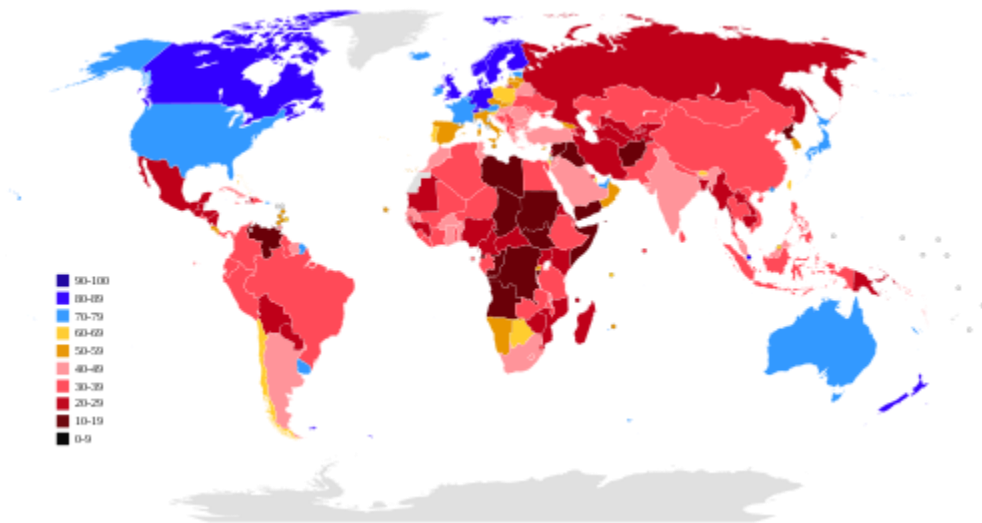
Gangs

Gangs are organized groups of criminals, which, usually, consist of close related friends or family members and participate in all kinds of criminal activity using violence.

Maras

The Gangs in Central America are referred to as Maras. They started out in the 1970s in the United States and developed into a very influential criminal network, especially in the 1990s.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



"Corruption Perception Index, 2018." map. *wikipedia*, 7 May 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_Perceptions_Index#/media/File:Corruption

_Perception_index_2018.svg. Accessed on 12 July 2009.

Governments' Structural Weaknesses

From first to last, all the Central American governments are characterized by corruption and fraud. Every country in the region is perceived as a corrupted state, since all their scores surpass 50 (apart from Belize which is not listed on the Index). The public sector of Nicaragua is believed to be one of the most corrupt in the world with a score of 25 out of 100 on the transparency level. The judicial system is commonly being manipulated by politicians and criminal gangs delivering judgments favorable to the bribers. Even though anticorruption laws have been enacted in all the Central American countries, there is no recollection of successful enforcement of these laws leading to instability in the economic sector and inability of the state to increase its own revenue. This furthermore results in an immense raise of taxation, which normally means that fewer citizens are able to afford these taxes with several negative repercussions for the economy. This has been the case for most of the countries in this area. Although Costa Rica has not been dealing with so extensive corruption, it is also prone to having many venal politicians, police officers or lawyers. Drug cartels and political parties—even the socialist ones—are mostly fostering corruption and manipulation. One example is the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), the socialist party, which remained in power between 1979 and 1990 and received massive criticism from the Nicaraguan population for abusing human rights.

Another major issue, which governments have to keep up with, is the lack of territorial control. The borders, especially in the Northern Triangle, are not secure and the border guard has not the means to establish order in case of any border crossing.

People do not trust public security forces, which consequently leads to hiring private security personnel thus outnumbering the already poorly armed police officers. All these components mean that a possible development and economic growth is out of the question, which explains the lack of confidence of Central America's population in their own governments and the high rate of migrants and asylum seekers in the northern countries.

Central American migrant caravan



the caravan route. map. 26 Nov. 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45951782.

The abovementioned situation, which has been created in the past few decades, has caused an enormous wave of immigrants seeking for international protection in the hope that they will have a better chance in the future and their children will not fall prey to the DTOs. Another serious problem is the everlasting droughts and crop failures in the dry regions of Honduras, which have massively impacted the agricultural sector and forced people away from their homes. It is more than usual for people from Central America to leave their country in the hope of finding another place to live. However, the

idea of thousands of immigrants forming a caravan and travelling together is relatively new. Thus it is more difficult to be kidnapped, robbed or raped by local gangs who target migrants. One of the biggest and most well-known caravans took place in the Holy Week of 2017 and was set up by Pueblo Sin Fronteras (Village Without Borders). These caravans usually start with a small group of 100-200 people and develop into masses of more than 1000 immigrants. Some of them come from the southern regions of Central America. The majority, though, comes from the NTCA, mainly Honduras. The desperate citizens, who are being terrorized in their home country, make their way from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and, after a journey of more than 4000 km north, arrive in Tijuana, Mexico, where they try to cross the borders to the United States seeking asylum. It is estimated that around 500.000 migrants cross the Mexican border every year, 164.000 (according to the UNHCR) of whom originate in the Northern Triangle of Central America. Once those immigrants reach their targeted destination, i.e., the USA, it is their right, according to the US law, to ask for an asylum and they cannot be deported without being heard out. The law states that the refugees deserve to be listened to and provided with food and shelter, especially those who emigrate from Central America states, where local gangs and drug cartels make their lives impossible. Evidence to back those facts up is, however, rarely provided resulting in hundreds of thousands of deportations each year. In 2016 alone, 216.000 deportations took place in the United States. The current US President, Donald Trump, stated multiple times during the mid-term elections in November of 2018 that all illegal immigrants are not welcome and will either be sent back or face prison sentences. The migrants' options remain limited as they are forced either to stay in Mexico, where the drug cartels and gangs are stronger than anywhere else, or make their way to the US, where they are expected to meet military forces and fences at the border.

DTOs

Around 70-80% of the produced cocaine in South America goes through Central America. The drug traffickers exploit the already vulnerable Central American countries taking advantage of their obvious inability to keep the DTOs at bay in part due to many other challenges these states are facing, such as the high rate of gang activity. The DTOs use them as a transit area for the actual destination, which is the USA-Mexico border. The drug transport through these countries is a real plague for them as it leads to a dramatic increase of homicides and criminality. It creates smaller drug wars, which put the citizens' lives at risk and further strengthen their mistrust in the government. The civil wars throughout the second half of the 20th century laid the foundations for an easy access to weapons which created the Weapon-Trafficking-Empire we see today, coupled with the money laundering and the rising rates of violence and crime. Additionally, the public sector is susceptible to bribery, which only facilitates the constant move of drugs through these countries. Notwithstanding the significance of this problem, the governments have achieved little to nothing when trying to tackle it. The

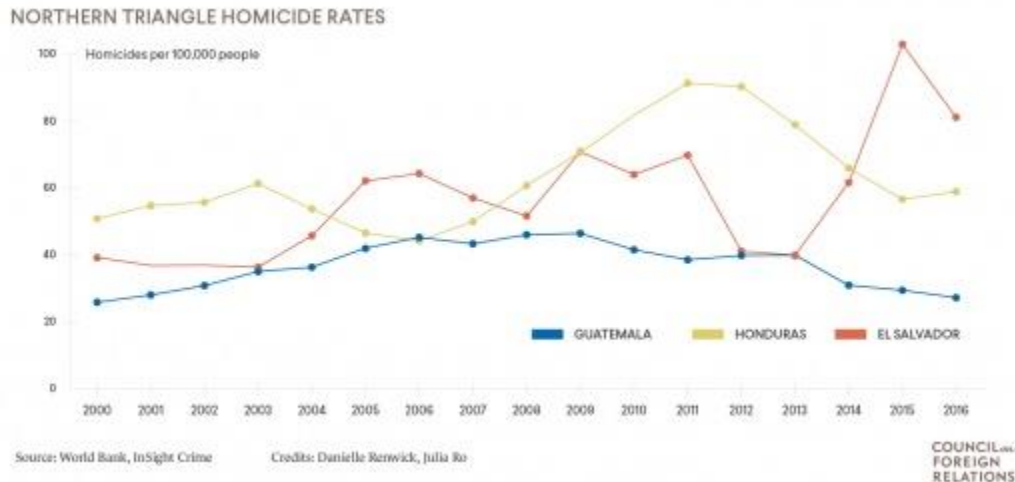
frustration of the locals is understandable, since the engagement of the politicians and institutions has been minute, while international cooperation in order to find concrete solutions, such as a centralized drug database, has failed miserably.

Gangs

Gangs (also referred to as Maras) have massively contributed over the past few decades to the destruction and destabilization of the Central American region.

The civil war in Guatemala, which lasted for more than 30 years (1960-1996), and the fight between the Salvadorian military-led government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a leftist umbrella organization (1979-1992), left more than 250.000 civilians dead. The aftermath of these wars is distinct until today, since the easy access to weapons in the late 90s made it particularly easy for anyone to push through their own laws with the help of guns. Extortions and manipulation began to rise as well as the homicide rate. The unemployed and desperate citizens formed organized groups, which are today known as gangs. The effects of the wars were not only palpable in El Salvador and Guatemala but also in neighboring countries, such as Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua, which felt the wave of criminal activity reaching their border in quick succession.

These criminal groups can be identified as Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) that persecute mostly immigrants or smaller vulnerable families. The most important, though, are the Maras. Some of the biggest Maras in Central America are the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Eighteenth Street Gang (M-18). Less known but equally influential are the street gangs (pandillas). The M-18 was formed and founded in Los Angeles in the 1960s by young Hispanics who were left out by the already existing groups in the region. The MS-13 consisted of Salvadorans who emigrated to the USA during the civil war in the 1980s and settled in Los Angeles. Their presence became more and more eminent in the following decades only to be disrupted by a wave of deportations from the US government, which forced nearly all the members of these gangs to immigrate back to their home nations. It is estimated that the members of these gangs are between 50.000 and 80.000. According to an estimate, more than 10.000 gang members are living now in the United States. In addition to the extortion, human trafficking, smuggling and corruption, the drug trade is often carried out by Gangs that cooperate with DTOs, which, in turn, causes small drug wars and adds to the violence, especially in the Northern Triangle.



"Northern Triangle Homicide Rates." graph. 26 June 2018,
www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

The United States of America is one of the main countries, which offers its constant support to the Central American region. The most memorable and recent act of aid took place in 2014 when the United States, in cooperation with the Central American governments, launched the project "Alliance for Prosperity". This project promised economic development, fighting against poverty, corruption and other forms of crime, and the improvement of local and international security. Though these plans may seem that the US government was always open to help the countries in need, this is not exactly the case. In order to solve their differences with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, President Ronald Reagan launched the Reagan Doctrine, which allowed USA to invade different parts of Central America, mainly Nicaragua, in order to contain the Soviets. Despite those past issues, Central American countries keep close relations with the US since it promotes peace and democracy in their area. The ever-rising immigrant waves from the southern borders create an extra motive for the US to help these countries.

Mexico

As mentioned before, Mexico plays a decisive role in the development of the Central American crisis. It sits between Central America itself and the United States, which means it is the only way for immigrants to reach their destination, i.e., America.

As the present Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has said several times, his country is open to any kind of immigration and willing to provide jobs to anyone crossing the southern borders as long as they respect the local laws.

A major negative impact Mexico has on Central American countries, though, is the Drug Trafficking Organizations, which are operating on its ground. Many DTOs, such as Los Zetas, have been most active in the Northern Triangle, which explains the current situation in the region. The frequent drug transit activities have led drug use, especially in the NTCA, to rising exponentially and smaller drug wars to erupting all over the region due to local gangs wanting to claim the drug routes and other territories for them.

United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR)

Even though the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees has been kept busy by the migration crisis in Europe, the recent immigration waves in Central America have forced the UN to oversee the situation in this region. According to its official website, there are approximately 170.000 refugees and asylum-seekers coming from the Northern Triangle trying to cross the Mexican borders. That is why the UNHCR is attempting to improve regional cooperation with the goal to enhance the security and the protection of the locals, to improve the reception standards for asylum-seekers and to establish possible protection networks. In cooperation with many other UN Organizations, the Central American governments, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the World Bank, they signed the San Jose Action Statement in order to address the issue and come up with solutions to improve protection for all violently displaced refugees.

United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA)

The ONUCA was founded in November 1989 after an agreement of the five Central American leaders to cease the ongoing wars. Its goal was the demobilization of the Nicaraguan Resistance in order to establish peace and democracy in a country, which had been plagued by war for years. The main aim, though, was to demobilize any irregular forces and to destroy their arsenal. The organization accelerated the process of disarmament and played an essential role in any kind of peacekeeping operations that took place during this time. The pacification of the area took many steps forward with the help of the ONUCA, while they encouraged the local parties to resolve any conflicts in the region.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1821	Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama declare independence.
1823	Guatemala declares independence.
1823	Creation of the Federal Republic of Central America; A republican democracy littered by civil wars.
1838-1841	Disintegration of the Union; Separation of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Costa Rica.
1907	Creation of a Central American Court of Justice.
13.12.1960	Establishment of the Central American Common Market aiming at political unification and implementation of the Import Substitution Industrialization policies.
1962	The start of the civil war in Guatemala between the leftist Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and the Guatemalan government, which had US backup.
15.10.1979	Beginning of the Salvadoran civil war between Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), a leftist rebel group, and the government, which had military assistance.
June 1979	After 17 years of revolution in Nicaragua, the FSLN now controlled most of the country excluding the capital.
17.7.1979	President Somoza is forced to resign and pass control of the state over to the revolutionary movement FSLN.
1981-1990	Contra War between an anti-Sandinista movement and the government consisting of the FSLN; this ended when the Tela Accord was signed in 1989, which promised the demobilization of the Contra armies and the FSLN.

16.01.1992	The Chapultepec Peace Accords are signed in Mexico City ensuring peace for El Salvador and marking the end of the civil war.
December 1996	URNG, a once guerrilla umbrella organization, becomes a legal party and ends the civil war in Guatemala, which lasted for more than 35 years, with peace treaties, while also being overviewed by the United Nations Security Council.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/50/132)

It recognized the essentiality of international support and the creation of an international framework with the goal of promoting peace, democracy and sustainable development. Implemented on 20 December 1995.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/50/226)

Establishment of the United Nations Mission for Verification of Human Rights in order to restore peace and try to preserve Human Rights in the Central American region. Implemented on 3 April 1996.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/58/117)

With the cooperation of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America and further international assistance, the Central American governments try to tackle the problem of political and economic instability in their states. Implemented on 17 December 2003.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/63/19)

Trying to resolve the ongoing crisis in the Central American region by fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development. Implemented on 16 December 2008.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Ever since the civil wars struck half of the Central American countries, they had to deal with some of the highest homicide and violence rates, as well as with drug trafficking. In response to these issues, many governments proposed radical measures to combat these problems. Military forces assisting the poorly armed and trained police officers became a daily routine. The adoption of strict and aggressive laws against gangs and DTOs, especially in the Northern triangle, led to thousands of arrests resulting in overcrowded prisons. Although the implementation of such laws caused a short-term decrease of violence, it created even more mistrust of the governments and has not helped reduce the immensely high crime rates in a long-term scheme.

The United Nations have contributed massively to improving the standard of living of the locals. Although the homicide, violence and crime rates in general have risen extremely in the last decade, it is not due to the interference of the UN. The donations to the local governments and the establishment of refugee camps all over Central America and the US with the cooperation of the UNHCR are undoubtedly one of the few glimmers of hope for Central American population.

Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

The 5 Goals of CARSI: ¹

1. Create safe streets for the citizens of the region.
2. Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband to, within, and between the nations of Central America.
3. Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments.
4. Reestablish effective state presence, services and security in communities at risk.
5. Foster cooperation between the nations of the region, international partners, and donors to combat regional security threats.

The Central American Regional Security Initiative was created by the United States Department of State aiming at the abovementioned goals. With nearly 1 billion dollars spent from the US government in order to achieve those goals, it is clear that the Central American governments have moved on from the brutal laws of the past, which have only met criticism, and are working on fixing the situation with more peaceful measures.

¹ "Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)." *InSight Crime*, 18 Oct. 2011, www.insightcrime.org/uncategorized/central-america-regional-security-initiative/.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The mission of establishing peace and democracy in a region, where homicides are more prevalent than a stable Wi-Fi connection, has come out to be quite hard. However, the assumption that the locals have not tried their best would be unfair. The lack of resources and the fact that there are many factors to be considered when looking at this issue create a very complex situation, which is not to be dealt with political naivety.

Organizations, such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), have proven to be most successful solutions to this problem. Although they are not even close to restoring normality in the region, they have indeed provided the citizens and the governments of Central America with enough resources to combat at least a fraction of the problem. If this process continues, the people of these countries are to be given a new hope. One of the main issues in Central America is the lack of transparency within its borders. Its low status on the Corruption Perception Index shows the high corruption rate of these countries. The UN could create an advisory body to monitor and discuss with other countries on how to protect the democracy from venality and corruption. This could be an effective measure against corrupt politicians and could urge people, who normally mistrust their government, to elect politicians that put the state interests first.

Public sector is a corrupt and underqualified part of Central American countries' economy, especially the police force, which, due to lack of resources, unsatisfying training and incomplete monitoring, is very ineffective. So, police officers do not really care to fulfill their tasks, because either they are scared or simply not qualified enough. The creation of national institutions in conjunction with the international aid either from the United States of America or from several NGOs could be instrumental to resolving the Central American crisis.

The main focus of all the parties should be on the immense refugee waves that are hitting Mexico's borders every day. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has already taken big steps in order to resolve the issue. The governments just need to follow their lead. As mentioned before, the creation of a legal framework would help countries develop a detailed program for the management and distribution of any resources. Data collection is paramount for a better understanding of the issue and a more effective identification of immigrants. Last but not least, the building of refugee camps all over the region, which is already being implemented, has to continue so as to help the large numbers of displaced people in Central America.

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