

Other voices: Mass murder in Mexico

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Body

Mexico's criminal gangs have entered a grisly new phase in their mad scramble to control anything and everything related to the border-area smuggling industry. Before, their turf battle seemed limited to smuggling routes for drugs, guns and laundered money. Now, with the bodies of 72 migrants discovered south of Texas in Tamaulipas, it's apparent that illicit human cargo is added to this insane mix.

When gunmen are willing to line up and shoot migrants in cold blood, for whatever reason, the terrorists have descended into an entirely new realm of inhumanity.

Migrants pay up to \$3,000 each to be smuggled into the United States -- a sum apparently too great to escape the notice of gangland criminals such as the notorious Zetas, who want a cut of whatever action is heading north. In the lucrative people-smuggling business, apparently, a new price of passage must be paid.

The numbing extent of **Mexico**'s staggering death toll -- 28,000 killed since 2006 -- adds to Americans' indifference and Mexicans sense of helplessness. Enormous amounts of territory are being virtually handed over to these gangs, and government security forces seem unable to regain control. The capture this week of one reputed drug lord, American-born Edgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal, offers a glimmer of hope but little more. It's not nearly enough.

In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Robert Bonner, former Customs and Border Protection commissioner and administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, argues that government forces can regain the upper hand in the same way Colombia did, provided **Mexico** and the United States are willing to take some difficult steps.

Bonner says that despite **Mexico**'s dire situation, its violence is not as pervasive as the drug wars that plagued Colombia in recent decades. Colombia's government prevailed, after years of bloody chaos, only after the U.S. committed money, security assistance and other significant resources to the fight. Most important, the two governments worked in tandem to root out corruption, reform the judiciary and strengthen laws to ensure that drug lords stopped behaving with impunity.

One by one, they decapitated the major cartels, depriving them of their commanders and lieutenants. The constant threat of extradition to face American courts served notice to Colombian cartel leaders that the U.S. was committed to the fight. **Mexico**'s cartels have no such impression.

American policymakers are naive to think that **Mexico** can handle this challenge alone. Our public is foolish to think that Americans can continue to consume enormous quantities of illegal drugs yet turn a blind eye to the violence their drug money funds. And when illegal migration gets pulled into this mix of guns, corruption and wanton slaughter, we're looking at an entirely new, nightmarish realm of possibilities.

-- The Dallas Morning News

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