

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Advanced Committee

Chair: John Ramos III

### Topic 1: The Use of Military Force in Combating Drug Cartels

#### **Introduction**

A drug cartel is defined as a criminal organization made up of drug lords who work together to take control of the illegal drug trade. Thousands of them exist on 6 continents and are responsible for more than 300 million individuals using illegal substances. Because of the fear of widespread distribution upon entering a country, national militia have been called to assess the threat and intervene. However, many countries and politicians have different viewpoints as to how much involvement the military should possess when investigating the cartels. Uninvited investigations can cause a war overnight, leading to a mass migration event and up to millions of individuals either dead or classified as illegal immigrants. In addition, stopping the threat is much more complex than simply detaining or killing the cartel leaders. Because some organizations have grown to unfathomable proportions, countries must dig deeper to discover the root of the problem.

#### **History**

Drug cartels have existed as early as the 1960s. However, illegal drug trading has existed for nearly 200 years. By the time governments started enforcing tighter regulations and enhanced security measures, individual drug smugglers started to band together into large organizations to combat the new regulations.



Beginning in the late 1970s, Colombia became the top producer of illegal drugs for Canadian and American markets. Led by the notorious drug lord Pablo Escobar, the country once controlled 85 percent of all narcotics entering North America. Because of his rapid rise to power, he was able to deal with the police and military in a method that would prevent him from being criminally charged. Known as *plata o plomo* (Spanish for “silver or lead”), he would propose bribes to authorities that questioned him. Had they not accepted them, he would have tortured and assassinated them. By the late 1980s, his net worth had exceeded \$30 billion and was listed by *Forbes* as one of the 10 richest people in the world. After he was killed in a standoff in December 1993, many rival organizations started to dominate the market. This coincided with the increase in military surveillance to eradicate the threats and prevent similar mistakes from occurring.

### **Past UN Actions:**

Previously, the UNODC has tried to develop the legal framework for drug trafficking on a national, regional, and global scale. The organization has allowed all member states to analyze the illegal drug trade as well as implement the three international conventions on drug control. Because this issue is multi-faceted, there is not one surefire way of solving it. The organization has also monitored multiple studies on drug production, distribution, and consumption. This has helped other UN affiliated organizations in combating this issue. Lastly, the organization has been made aware of the effects of money laundering involved with the illegal drug trade, and recognizes that the aforementioned money can be used to grow illegal crops.

### **Current Situation:**

Today, most drug cartels can be found in Latin and South America, but others exist in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Australia. They have become so powerful that they can occupy a large portion of their home country and can persuade politicians and governments to side with them in exchange for monetary rewards. The militia can only do so much before ethical values are violated, leading to large scale warfare. It is also worth mentioning that an increase in drug trafficking correlates an increase in illegal immigration, as a country's own citizens can be used as drug mules. Or even worse, when two countries turn hostile, millions of individuals can be displaced as refugees. It is the responsibility of this committee to hypothesize and propose methods and degrees of military involvement.

### **Case Study: CIA Utilizing Drones to Investigate Mexican Cartels**

The incumbent Donald Trump has recently been communicating with the CIA to send drones over the border to investigate drug cartel labs in major Mexican cities. This coincided with

his firm decision to crack down on illegal immigration and drug trade by labelling cartels as foreign terrorist threats. However, CIA director John Ratcliffe has stated that the drones would not be used for any lethal action or drone strikes. Instead, they would be used as a form of gathering intelligence. Fentanyl, which is responsible for killing nearly 150,000 Americans every year, is currently the most smuggled drug between Mexico and the USA in terms of tonnage. Last year, before Trump was sworn into office, more than 10 tons of fentanyl were apprehended by the US Border Services Agency. However, with the drug being harder to identify than ever before, that number represents merely a fraction of what goes through. Security advisor Mike Waltz, a former Green Beret, has also mentioned the use of special operators as an alternative to drones. He believed that a hands-on investigation could yield more information on smuggling methods and trade routes. The problem with his opinion is that direct action raids on Mexican soil, especially without permission from the Mexican government, can be unethical and yield unwanted consequences. For one, the government could misinterpret the raids as a signal for warfare, causing millions of citizens to illegally migrate over the southern US border. As well, prioritizing non-violent military intervention can pull away from necessary involvement for other wars.

### **Questions to Consider:**

- 1) Which method of investigation is the most effective and safe way to extract information?
- 2) How can countries negotiate ethical yet successful investigations?
- 3) How does global cooperation play a role in investigating cartels?
- 4) How should funding for military intervention be generated?

### **Important Terms:**

- 1) Drug cartel: a criminal organization that controls, promotes, and distributes narcotics.
- 2) Falcons: the lowest rank, primarily acting as scouts and reconnaissance.
- 3) Hitmen: responsible for carrying out bribes, assassinations, kidnappings, and defense.
- 4) Lieutenants: the second highest rank, responsible for supervision and low-profile murders.
- 5) Drug lords: the highest rank, responsible for industry analyzation, alliances, and high-profile murders.
- 6) Drone strike: an attack where a bomb or ammunition is dropped at a specific location.

## Topic 2: Regulating the power and role of Big Pharma in the Global Opioid Crisis

### **Introduction:**

Opioids are a type of compound that are mainly used in pain-relieving drugs sold over the counter. They can be derived from the opium poppy plant or made synthetically in labs. Opioids produce morphine-like effects upon interaction with the brain and other organs. Big Pharma are the group of major pharmaceutical organizations that play the biggest role in their given sector, such as Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, GSK, and AstraZeneca. These multibillion-dollar companies have the greatest power for fueling the opioid crisis. Since 1999, over half a million people in the United States alone have died from the endemic. Even worse, the incentive that big companies have is not curing patients, but to bill them for treatment every step of the way. This type of two-faced activity is highly unethical and denatures the medical industry's reputation of saving lives. Therefore, Big Pharma's role in this crisis has been put into jeopardy.

### **History:**

Humans have been utilizing opioids for nearly 5,000 years, dating back to the ancient Sumerian civilization. Originally, the substance has been used for humans to cross into the spiritual realm, giving a sense of euphoria that is still seen today. Much later, opioids found their way into the surgical world, being used to sedate patients in order to make surgeries more efficient. This was especially helpful during and after both World Wars, which produced an influx of soldiers in various degrees of pain. In 1995, Purdue Pharma won the FDA's approval to market OxyContin. From a financial standpoint, this was a huge success, as the drug generated around 35 billion in revenue. However, it did not take long for problems to arise. Millions of people started to become addicted to the drug, which was mostly due to the way Purdue was marketing the drug.

### **10 biggest prescription opioid manufacturers, 2006-2012**

<b>MANUFACTURER</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PILLS</b>	<b>MARKET SHARE</b>
SpecGx	28,863,435,081	37.7%
Actavis Pharma	26,476,395,830	34.6%
Par Pharmaceutical	11,996,780,871	15.7%
Purdue Pharma	2,492,496,319	3.3%
Amneal Pharmaceuticals	2,257,973,121	2.9%
Teva Pharmaceuticals USA	686,276,053	0.9%
KVK Tech	580,825,207	0.8%
West-Ward Pharmaceuticals	384,200,988	0.5%
Kaiser Foundation Hospitals	366,492,050	0.5%
Endo Pharmaceuticals	297,306,324	0.4%

They also placed the blame on the patients themselves for becoming addicts, but it was later found that the Purdue fabricated evidence regarding the drug's duration: they stated that the drug's effects would last for up to 12 hours. In reality, the effects lasted for only a couple hours. By the early 2000s, Purdue was facing several multimillion-dollar lawsuits that they would settle in out of court settlements, well before any incriminating evidence would ever make it before a jury. Today, Purdue Pharma and other large companies continue to subsidize nonprofit groups promoting opioid use.

### **Past UN Actions:**

In 2018, the UNODC conducted a study regarding deaths from prescription drug overdose. The result was that 76 percent of deaths were from opioids. They were aware that despite the drugs being necessary in moderate amounts for treating pain, traffickers still found ways to push huge quantities of the drug into illegal markets. Two years earlier, the UNODC reported 87 tons of seized pharmaceutical opioids intended to be sold illegally. As a response to these shocking findings, executive director at the time Yury Fedotov stated that the UNODC is not only committed

to collaborating with countries to seek straightforward and efficient solutions to drug challenges, but that from these solutions our world can make progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (particularly 3 and 17).

### **Current Situation:**

Currently, only 1 in 11 people who are addicted to opioids are in treatment. However, given the way that Big Pharma operates, individuals are billed more than they are treated. This is considered a massive inequality, as it does not reflect the medical industry's reputation of curing individuals. Several "pill mills" are still operating, who just administer antibiotics and leave it at that. It is the responsibility of this committee to determine the role that Big Pharma corporations should play when it comes to combatting the opioid crisis.

### **Case Study: Opium Ban in Afghanistan**

For the longest time, Afghanistan has been the number one global producer of opium. Around 90% of the product found worldwide could have been traced back to Afghanistan, with around 233,000 hectares of land specifically used to grow the plant. However, leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's pharmaceutical industry was declining, despite the several connections with Big Pharma corporations. Around 4 out of every 5 people in Afghanistan depended on the production of the drug for financial reasons, but in 2023, the UNODC altered several farming regulations to divert the economy away from opium. Production seemed to dramatically decrease almost overnight, with less than 11,000 hectares and a 95% decrease in profitability in that industry. Ghada Waly, the executive director of the UNODC has stated that "Over the coming months, Afghanistan is in dire need of strong investment in sustainable livelihoods, to provide Afghan farmers with opportunities away from opium". Since then, the



country has shown a keen interest in more favorable agriculture and even in higher quality food production.

### **Questions to Consider:**

- 1) Should Big Pharma increase or decrease their role in the opioid crisis?
- 2) Which methods of agriculture are safer, yet just as profitable?
- 3) How can countries collaborate to spread awareness of the crisis?
- 4) Should Big Pharma corporations invest more in other favorable sectors of healthcare?

### **Important Terms:**

- 1) Opioid: a compound derived from opium that is used as a painkiller.
- 2) Big Pharma: large corporations with the most power in the healthcare sector.
- 3) Out of court settlement: a legal agreement to resolve a dispute without a trial.
- 4) Epidemic: a widespread occurrence of a disease over a period of time.

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