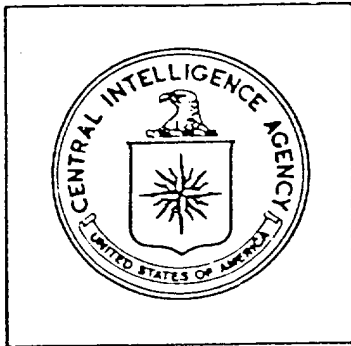


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Latin America

**REGIONAL AND
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Operation Condor I: Mexican Military's Anti-Narcotics Campaign

Operation Condor I, a special military task force assembled to augment the Mexican government's opium eradication program, appears to be making a contribution to Mexico's overall drug control effort. Working in conjunction with Attorney General Oscar Flores Sanchez, who is responsible for narcotics suppression in Mexico, Secretary of Defense General Galvan Lopez has deployed approximately 1,200 troops into the tri-state region of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango. The mission of the task force is to disrupt drug trafficking and curtail the general lawlessness which prevails throughout the northwest sector.

The operation has been besieged by a host of problems. The difficult terrain and limited airlift support has hampered the effectiveness of Galvan's campaign from the outset.

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A general lack of supplies has added to the military's difficulties, as have limited intelligence and communications capabilities.

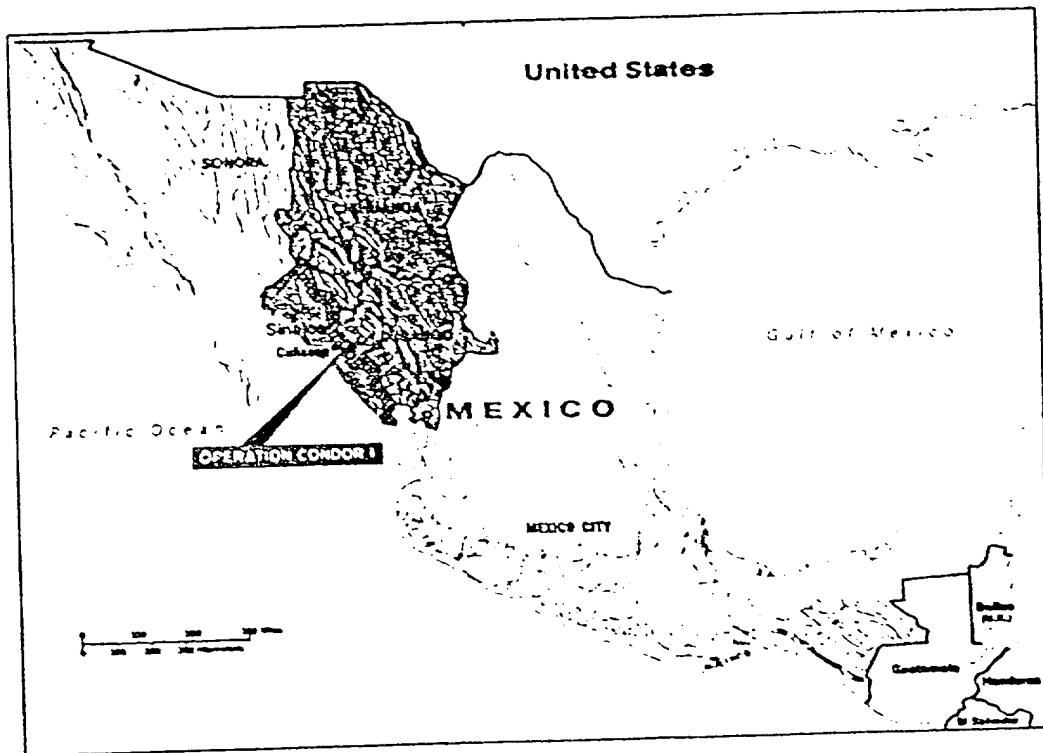
In spite of the serious obstacles, the military has demonstrated certain strengths which have enabled Condor I to achieve some success. The task force is under the able command of General Jose Hernandez Toledo, an honest and disciplined leader who enjoys a hero-like reputation in the army. He and his subordinate commanders constantly move throughout the tri-state area analyzing operations, critiquing junior officers, and correcting deficiencies.

Organized in five-man assault squads called *pelotones*, the troops are systematically destroying smaller poppy fields which were not chemically sprayed by helicopter. They are also guarding clandestine airfields, dismantling illicit processing laboratories, and operating extensive, mobile roadblocks throughout the crop-growing sectors.

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A recent new rash of gangland shootings in Culiacan may be a further indication that rival bands of traffickers are vying for a diminishing supply of drugs. Also, drug production "ranches" in the Sinaloan mountains reportedly are being deserted by campesinos who know of Operation Condor's activities. Construction has tapered off on new houses for Durango traffickers who have a reputation for conspicuous and lavish dwellings.

[REDACTED]

The Mexican armed forces traditionally have focused on internal security, but as narcotics trafficking has taken on more ominous dimensions the military's role has expanded to include the elimination of drug smuggling as a function of national security.

[REDACTED]

Condor I is a tactical operation, restricted to the mountains and valleys where the poppies are grown and processed.

[REDACTED]

Strategically, the long range success of Mexico's drug control program will depend on a strong endorsement by the Mexican government, effective administration of the eradication and enforcement programs, and the continuing commitment of resources to a priority problem. The military's role in Operation Condor I is an indication that Mexico is one step closer toward achieving

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that success. Operation Condor II is presently unfolding in Michoacan, and subsequent Condor campaigns may be undertaken in the regions. But as long as the drug industry's management remains relatively unaffected, the destruction of raw materials and detention of lower echelon traffickers will constitute only a partial success.

Reducing corruption to a manageable level, educating a society to the dangers of narcotics abuse, and developing alternate sources of income for the rural sectors of Mexico that have become dependent on opium poppy cultivation are some of the areas which may be outside the realm of Condor I. Nevertheless, they are issues the government will have to address if Mexico's overall anti-narcotics program is to have a lasting effect. [REDACTED]

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