



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on January 29, 2023

## DEA Mexico Director Had Cozy Relationship With Cartel Lawyers

Even as drugs pouring in through the southern border continue to kill Americans, high-level government officials tasked with combating the narcotics trade are using their positions merely to fuel their own lavish lifestyles.

Such is the case with the latest example of impropriety at the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Nicholas Palmeri, the former and short-lived regional director over Mexico, was removed from the role for maintaining questionable relationships with the lawyers of drug lords, as revealed in confidential records recently reviewed by the [Associated Press](#).



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In his position, Palmeri oversaw DEA efforts not only in Mexico, but also in Canada and Central America.

Speaking with AP about Palmeri's actions, Phil Jordan, a former director of the DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center, stressed the weight of Palmeri's role and why failure at that level is consequential to the nation.

"It's even more critical because of the deteriorating situation with Mexico," Jordan said. "If we don't have a strong regional director or agent in charge there, it works against the agency's overall operations because everything transits through Mexico, whether it's coming from Colombia or the fentanyl that flows in through China. It cannot be taken lightly."

Palmeri ultimately served in the top position for a mere 14 months before being removed for vacationing and nonbusiness-related socializing with attorneys working for narcotics traffickers. Additionally, it has come to light that he improperly used DEA funds, such as seeking to be reimbursed for his own birthday party.

These violations resulted in Palmeri being forced to step down last March. Although the DEA told AP that the agency "has zero tolerance for improper contacts between defense attorneys and DEA employees," it would not explain why Palmeri was merely allowed to retire rather than being fired.

According to the documentation examined by AP, Palmeri and his wife spent two days in the Florida Keys at the home of David Macey, an attorney representing some of the biggest drug kingpins in Latin America.

Macey was implicated last year in the case of a DEA agent and a former supervisor who were charged with leaking information to Macey and another narcotics-linked attorney in exchange for \$70,000 in cash.

Per investigators into Palmeri's actions, the stay at Macey's home, at which the Palmeri's arrived with a



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bottle of wine, was unrelated to any useful agency work and breached rules related to interactions with lawyers.

AP noted:

Palmeri, 52, acknowledged to investigators that he stayed at Macey's getaway home, that his wife worked as a translator for another prominent attorney, Ruben Oliva, and that he took an unauthorized trip to Miami with his wife in February 2021.

The purported purpose of the Miami trip had been to "debrief" a confidential source. But it took place at a private home where Palmeri showed up with his wife — and a bottle of wine, according to the internal report.

"The meeting had the appearance of a social interaction with a confidential source," the investigators wrote, "and there was no contemporaneous official DEA documentation concerning the substance of the debrief, both of which violate DEA policy."

Palmeri has described the probe into him as a "witch hunt" motivated by jealousy and driven by "an ill-conceived narrative to remove me from my position."

While Palmeri told investigators that he displayed "not the best judgment," he nevertheless maintained that his interactions with attorneys have "always been professional and ethical."

"It is ironic," he declared, "that the Department of 'Justice' would commit this injustice to the country."

Palmeri reportedly was known for making questionable decisions during his tenure, including leading the DEA along in his obsession to catch Rafael Caro Quintero, who orchestrated the killing of a DEA agent in 1985. Agents said Palmeri prioritized Caro above other goals such as stopping the fentanyl flow. Caro was eventually captured last summer — after Palmeri had been removed from his post.

Relations between the DEA and Mexico have been delicate recently. In 2020, the U.S. arrested the former Mexican defense secretary, Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos, prompting President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to disband the police unit that had played a key role in assisting the DEA and signing a law keeping DEA agents off the field in his country.

Chris Landau, Palmeri's former supervisor at the DEA, lamented the deteriorating relationship between the U.S. and Mexico.

"Unfortunately, in the absence of a broader strategy, DEA is driving the bus of U.S. counter-narcotics policy and it's a very narrow lane they drive in," Landau said to AP. "It's not going to move the needle in terms of stemming the flow of drugs into the U.S. and frequently [carries sometimes] devastating foreign policy consequences."

The Palmeri scandal is the latest blight on the DEA's record to come to light amid an external review ordered by DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. The review is a response to the case of disgraced former DEA agent Jose Irizarry, who is currently serving a 12-year federal prison sentence after confessing to laundering money for Colombian cartels.

Irizarry was found guilty of spending millions of dollars from seizures to fund a lifestyle of parties and prostitutes.

As *The New American* has [reported](#), Communist China and Mexico's drug cartels are closely working together to make vast sums of money at the cost of American lives — all with the deliberate aim of



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weakening the United States.

The situation isn't helped by the policies of the Biden administration, whose [lax stance on migration](#) has, according to residents and local government officials of border communities, allowed the southern border to fall into total control by the cartels.



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