




Uncategorized

# Robert Mazur's *The Betrayal*: An AGRC Book Review

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Terrifying. Gripping. Timely. Sorely needed. Robert Mazur's second book effort – *The Betrayal* – is a must-read if you're a compliance officer used to offices, computer work, safety, and too much ho-hum and doldrum. Looking for a page-turner while educating yourself about the internal workings of devious financial crime? This book delivers.

The recounted life story accounts of the American former undercover agent Robert Mazur – the pen name protecting the identity of this counter-narco agency man with nerves of steel – magically transport you to the high-flying 1990s, when he fought against the formidable forces of the dirty Cali drug cartel crooks and associates based in Panama.

The memoir recounts events that take place well before the financial meltdown of 2009 and the subsequent "toughening up" of the system against the activities of narco criminals.

(Today, in the years following the financial meltdown, with cyber fintech applications reigning, trillion-dollar generating cyber-crime activities have replaced or made easier many of the traditional money laundering methods used by the crooks before the Internet began to truly flourish in the 1990s. Hence, Mazur's likely comfort in describing some aspects of the money laundering methods used by the criminals in the book.)

Highly detailed, well-structured, and steeped in the jargon of American law enforcement that help make the book feel real and come alive, *The Betrayal* contains multiple accounts of nail-biting scenes and drama that deliver the thrills of the genre, while shining a light onto the money laundering processes of Colombian cartel thugs and criminals that can make savvier, and even wiser, the compliance officer also carrying out his role in checking financial crimes.

He takes open risks in the book, often both directly and indirectly highlighting the need for a clean-up of corruption on the side of law enforcement. In the epilogue, he makes an open call for more anti-corruption policies that address the attitudes of corrupt international bankers head-on, several of whom he heavily interrogated in prison.

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## Mazur's Operation, So Described in The Betrayal

The law enforcement operation of agent Mazur, under the auspices of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), had him work as a presumed professional provider of trade and finance-based money laundering services. His targets? Seasoned money launderers who worked for the Cali cartel and other high-level criminal organisations operating in Panama.

In successfully connecting with Colombian crime families and their senior staffers, Mazur and his team were eventually able to help capture some major money launderers such as the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), Bernard Cornfeld, Robert Vesco and Meyer Lansky.

*The Betrayal* is the sequel book to Mazur's first book and memoir *The Infiltrator*, which specifically details his years of infiltration, as a US Customs special agent, into the cartel of drug lord Pablo Escobar and his bribed circle of BCCI bankers, many of whom were subsequently exposed in the courts. (Mazur rendered testimony in the trials.)

Today, Mazur consults with banks and institutions, alike, on AML and offers the compliance officer who reads *The Betrayal* a more detailed understanding of the money laundering methods typically used by Colombian drug cartels in the 1990s.

These involve casino operations, the trade of precious metals and stones, trade-based forex and finance, the set-up of false-front shell companies and bank accounts, as well as "smurfing," a method that entails having each of the many, many of the cartel's minions launder smallish amounts of money in order to circumvent AML alert thresholds.

Credit Mazur for doing much to set up a successful cover that enabled him to be tested and then approved by bigwig senior cartel staffers. His identity in the eyes of the criminals? A New York City businessman of Italian-American origin who goes by the name of Robert Baldasare, the owner of a mortgage brokerage business and investment company.



## Mazur Writes with Candour

In the book's epilogue, Mazur talks of the need for a zero-tolerance policy for crooked bankers and money launderers. He joins the public in advocating for the long-term jailing of financial sector individuals responsible for directly helping to grease the wheels of the Mafia. Among the recommendations for change he makes in the book, he advocates for more punishment to crooks, not less, so that they refrain from accepting illicit cuts and bribes from the mob cartels of the world. Not enough is being done, he exclaims.

Early on in the book, Mazur addresses this large elephant in the room:

"The elephant is the routine business of hundreds, probably thousands, of private bankers in the world's biggest international banks washing trillions for Mafias, so they can control countries and the lives of ninety-five percent of the people on this planet. That's their business model — it's what they do."

His assertion here is backed up by only two pieces of data in the book. In the book, he notes: "the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) calculates that crooks seek to launder roughly two trillion dollars in criminal capital every year, four hundred billion of which comes from the sale of illegal drugs."

"Credible estimates from governments and untold professionals in the anti-money-laundering world estimate that at least 98 percent of this money goes undetected by the world's law enforcement and regulatory community. As a result, the coffers and power of organized crime grow exponentially every year."

These are staggering, jaw-dropping figures; however, in a bid to grant readers some tangible hope, Mazur would have done well to offer some qualified research and data as to what solutions have been proposed, and acted upon, by the ethical governing bodies of the world.

For example, the Basel AML Index for 2021, provides useful data as to what is working for some of the best countries fighting money laundering activities today. (According to the Index, these countries are, from first to fifth: Andorra, Finland, Cook Island, Slovenia, and Norway.)

In other words, he writes much about the pains and problems of ethical law enforcement individuals but little

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"Surveillance [agents] ha[ve] to respect the intelligence of the [Cali] cartel's ranks and never forget that the bad guys are smarter than they are. That's not an easy pill for many cops to swallow, but ignoring that reality has destroyed hundreds of potentially great cases..."

It's wonderful that Mazur has the courage to offer his true assessment of the mafia and the realities faced by law enforcement agents on the ground. On paper, he comes across as a justice-loving realist, who, in the book, expresses an eagerness to remove the wool from people's eyes as to what it will actually take to defeat the corrupt and the criminal individuals from their corrosive activities, so funded by crafty and creative money laundering practices.

This is why *The Betrayal* is an important book to read if you're a front-line officer fighting crime in the world of finance. More information about the author, his books, and the Hollywood film starring Bryan Cranston based on his life as an undercover agent can be found at: [www.RobertMazur.com](http://www.RobertMazur.com).

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