

The War Against Public Enemy Number One: U.S. Miscalculations in Mexico's War on Drugs

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Abstract

The War on Mexican Drugs is a now international security crisis continuing to threaten the stability between the US and its economically and politically significant southern neighbor. To assess how this conflict has escalated for decades and effectively respond to factors which exacerbate it, it is important to analyze early interactions between the US and Mexico. This paper responds to the historical relationship between the two nations, overviewing how US's early stance toward Colombia and NAFTA geared the US toward ambivalent cross-border policy. It then draws implications for the current security crisis, discussing how aggressive military tactics, the current Colombian state, endemic corruption, and inaccurate intelligence should help shape future policy in the region. Finally, the paper gives seven policy recommendations based on what has and has not worked in these historic interactions and how history should help shape cross-state interactions in the future of US-Mexican relations.

Key Words: Drug Cartel, Mexico, United States, Trafficking, NAFTA, Cross-Border Violence, Corruption, Colombia, Miscalculations, Preventative Policy

Introduction

The relationship between the United States of America and Mexico has long been catalyzed by the so-called "war on drugs," a battle to stabilize both countries by thwarting illegal narcotic production and trade. Since the 1970s, this international security crisis has dominated US policy toward Mexico, but early missteps and miscalculations have prevented both countries from making stable headway toward a common goal. Both the historical and contemporary approaches to Mexican drug-trafficking have proven futile due to their short-sightedness and inability to solve endemic problems in the Mexican state. To support the argument, this report analyzes the relationship between the United States and Mexico, starting in the early 1970s; it then transitions to a recent examination of the relationship, illustrating how early misgivings have led to a series of poor decision-making and ineffective policies which have exacerbated the crisis. Finally, the report suggests a shift in direction and new policy recommendations that may better suit the specific demands and constraints of the US-Mexican relationship.

The Historical Context

In 1909, Mexico signed onto the Opium Exclusion Act, the first of many drug-related agreements to which the country would conform to appease the United States (Andreas, 2001). In 1927, Mexico decreed illegal all exports of heroin and marijuana; still, the problem persisted seventy years later, and President Richard Nixon coined in 1973 the phrase “war on drugs,” declaring cross-border movement of narcotics into the United States from South America to be “America’s public enemy number one” (Carrier and Klantschnig, 2012). Since then, the United States’ battle against illegal South American narcotics has redefined its relationship with Mexico.

Starting in the 1970s, Mexican officials initiated a crackdown on marijuana production and exports to appease the US. Although the United States had encouraged the production of marijuana and hemp for wartime supplies during the first World War, President Nixon was pursuing severe anti-marijuana efforts by 1969 (Andreas, 2001). On September 21, 1969, Nixon announced Operation Intercept, an anti-drug measure intended to shut down the border to halt the flow of Mexican marijuana into the US. Although this operation ultimately failed – it hurt Mexico’s produce and tourism industries more than their drug businesses – it symbolized a drastic shift in US policy against Mexican marijuana exports. In response, presidents José López Portillo and Miguel de la Madrid began and continued Operation Condor. This program aimed to eradicate marijuana fields, assisted by US monetary resources, airplanes, herbicides, and military training. With some 25,000 US-trained Mexican soldiers involved in the eradication effort, Mexico’s share of the US marijuana market fell from 75 percent in 1976 to four percent in 1981 (Andreas, 2001). This was a sign to both Mexico and the US that mass-deployment of troops could win the war on drugs, a fatal assumption that would guide policy into the 21st century.

Despite the statistics, Operation Condor only eliminated many of the weaker, smaller smuggling groups, thereby opening drug routes and the trade market for the more sophisticated organizations that relied heavily on corruption and violence. The Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico (PRI) – a party with a history of low accountability and high corruption – established patron-client relationships with these organizations to limit violence against public officials, civilians, and other cartel members. This relationship ultimately allowed the PRI to gain the upper hand in many drug organizations, defining the rules of the illegal drug trade for years (O’Neil, 2009). In addition to the rise of sophisticated parties, the drug crisis in Colombia threatened the short-lived success of Operation Condor by withdrawing US attention from Mexican marijuana production; thus, as Ronald Regan focused on Colombia, Mexican marijuana exports to the US skyrocketed.

In the early 1980s, the security threat stemming from Mexican cocaine was minimal. It thus seemed logical to crack down on the Floridian border and the Caribbean to stem the flow of Colombian cocaine (Payan, 2006). With trade routes closing, Colombian drug lords began to look for other points of entry into the United States and found a willing partner in Mexico’s Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, a “well-known drug smuggler who had consolidated many of the small-time smugglers in the 1970s into a single organization” (Payan, 2006). Following this partnership, Mexico, which in 1980 had accounted for a negligible percentage of US cocaine imports, became a crucial actor in the cocaine trade; by 1989, nearly 33 percent of all US cocaine came through Mexico (Andreas, 2001). Thus, the United States drastically miscalculated the consequences of its war on Colombian drugs, in essence forcing Colombian drug lords to infiltrate the US through Mexico.

In 1989, Gallardo fell victim to US-Mexican anti-drug crackdowns and was imprisoned. From his prison cell, he ordered leaders in his cartel to fight against the real enemy, the United States, by dividing his vast organization into four territorial divisions which would be harder for the US to track. Thus, by 1990, the modern drug cartels in Mexico emerged: the Tijuana cartel, the Sinaloa-Sonora cartel, the Juárez cartel, and the Gulf cartel, which today move at least 70 percent of all trafficked drugs into the United States (Payan, 2006).

Under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), Mexico built up a formidable drug control apparatus – including a drug-focused national security council, a new intelligence agency, and antidrug units of the federal judicial police (Payan, 2006). During his term, drug-related arrests doubled and “seizure levels rose sharply, prompting Mexican officials to boast that they were confiscating more drugs than any other country” (Andreas, 2001). This trend was, however, unstable. As the PRI began to lose political power across the country, its ability to control cartels diminished. When the party lost its first governorship in Baja, California in 1989, drug-related violence in the state skyrocketed. Similarly, extreme violence followed an opposition takeover in Chihuahua in 1992 and only abated when PRI won back the governorship in 1998 (O’Neil, 2009). In large part to convince Congress to push NAFTA through, the US State Department downplayed the increasing violence, instead promoting optimistic statistics and reporting in 1995 to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “Mexican authorities seized over 247 metric tons of cocaine, made over 100,000 arrests, and eradicated 147,000 hectares of opium poppy and marijuana crops” (Andreas, 2001).

To dissuade increasing Congressional concerns that Mexico was too unstable to support NAFTA, Mexican officials omitted from yearly reports the increasing rate of methamphetamines imports from Mexico, the high levels of corruption undermining antidrug efforts, and increasing drug-related violence. Since Mexican drug smugglers were beginning to realize the leverage they held over their Colombian counterparts, they began to demand more profits from each cocaine shipment into the United States, and “Mexican traffickers gained more power vis-à-vis the Colombian cartels” (O’Neil, 2009). By the time Colombiás Cali and Medellín cartels collapsed in Colombia in the 1990s, more than \$30 billion in gross revenues were pouring into Mexico’s drug organizations, and cartels spent \$460 million of that revenues on bribes in that same year (Lindau, 2011). Because NAFTA was on the agenda, only \$10 million of annual cartel revenues were reported from Mexico to Congress (Andreas, 2001). In addition, Mexican officials claimed that mass firings of corrupt officials were legitimizing Mexican government in preparation for NAFTA, failing to report that in 1996, 70-80 percent of the judicial police force was corrupt (Andreas, 2001). Thus, the decade was marked by President Zedillo’s political and economic incentives to skew data and misrepresent endemic problems to pacify President Clinton and Congress and expedite NAFTA approval.

In addition to rampant corruption, drug-related crime increased in the early 1990s and into the 2000s. Conflict between the Sinaloa and Tijuana cartels engulfed the country in violence, leading to the assassinations of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and Catholic archbishop Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo. In Ciudad Juárez, bordering El Paso, Texas, inter-cartel fighting escalated as both Sinaloa and Tijuana organizations attempted to take over vital trade territory following the non-violent death of Juárez cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes. Despite downplaying the violence to Congress, US officials did strengthen border control and increase collaboration with Mexican border security counterparts which had drastically abated following the murder of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent

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Enrique Camarena in 1985 (O’Neil, 2009). To both Mexico and the US, the solution to the violence was increased police presence, military deployment, and heightened arrests.

After President Clinton certified Mexico as a “fully cooperating” country on all drug-related issues – perhaps unaware that Attorney General Enrique Alvarez del Castillo allowed Mexican officials to pay him as much as \$1 million to be assigned to notoriously profitable, high-traffic posts near the US border. In response to this somewhat misplaced rating, multiple Congressmen demanded a reevaluation of US-Mexico drug policy and cross-border cooperation, citing Operation Casablanca as proof that the United States was shirking its duties when it came to cracking down on corruption. According to a 1999 hearing of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, 15 audio and video tapes held proof that the Secretary of Defense in Mexico and other officials were helping the Juarez cartel move \$1.15 billion illicit proceeds across the border (US House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice). The Operation, named Operation Casablanca, intended to intercept the laundering and arrest those involved but was suspiciously called off despite near completion. According to on US security agent, “US officials walked away from an extraordinary opportunity to examine allegations of drug money laundering” around the same time that Clinton labeled Mexico a “fully cooperating” country (US House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice). As the *New York Times* and other publications picked up the story, corruption in US-Mexico drug relations began to be seen as a double-sided security threat.

In response to increasing domestic scrutiny – suggesting that the United States was a complicit actor in drug corruption – the Clinton Administration released in late 1999 a report entitled *Bi-National Performances Measures of Effectiveness* to outline goals for the coming year. Included in the goals were stipulations to reduce corruption: give newly hired Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents a minimum 17-hour ethics training; “increase awareness among personnel of the problem and readiness to report suspicious activities;” and “increase the abilities of [Mexican] democratic institutions to attack and root out corrupting influence of the illegal drug trade in both countries” (US/Mexico Bi-National Performance Measures of Effectiveness). Other goals included reducing the demand of drugs through information and education; focusing law enforcement efforts against criminal organizations; bringing fugitives to justice; and enhancing border cooperation (US/Mexico Bi-National Performance Measures of Effectiveness). These and other objectives would shape the US-Mexican drug-policy relationship for the next 14 years.

Implications of the Current International Security Crisis

As historical analysis suggests, both the United States and Mexico made several key errors, which have contributed to an increase in corruption, violence, and overall disorder in the post-2000 US-Mexican war on drugs. This trend has not only threatened the stability of Mexican-US relations but has also thwarted overall success of the international war on drugs, and it is important to consider the implications of this trend when suggesting future policy.

Military Deployment and Aggressive Criminal Justice Tactics

First, every Mexican president since Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) has resorted to mass military deployment, aggressive seizures and arrests, and hard-lined criminal justice tactics to control drug-related violence. None have been more aggressive than Felipe Calderón, who deployed 6,500 military troops in 2006 alone to fight the war on drugs. Since then, numerous

leaders of Mexico's largest cartels have been arrested, including Javier Arellano Felix, alleged head of the Tijuana cartel; Osiel Cardena Guillen, alleged head of the Gulf cartel; Pedro Roberto Velaquez Amador, alleged leader of the Beltran Leyva cartel; and Flavio Mendez Santiago, founder of Los Zetas. In total from 2006-2012, CNN reports that 40 major cartel members were arrested under the aggressive drug policy of Felipe Calderón. In addition, Calderón fired numerous federal police commanders and governmental officials on charges of corruption, dismissing 284 in June 2007 alone (CNN, 2014).

Despite the deployment of 45,000 troops over a six-year period, arrests of cartel leaders, and seizures of more than 54 total tons of methamphetamine in North America from 2002-2011, drug-related crime has skyrocketed since Calderón initiated his assault on drug terror (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). According to some estimates, there were 12 states in Mexico that each had more than 1,000 cartel-related murders from 2006-2012; of these states, half – Baja, California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas – share a border with the US. In total, between 2010 and 2011 alone, there were almost 24,000 drug-related deaths in Mexico. Although that number abated in 2013 – there were 2,119 drug-related deaths by November 15 of that year – states like Chihuahua are still averaging between 21 and 25 drug-related deaths per week, according to the latest statistics (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). In addition, cross-border crime has increased, threatening the security of US officials. By 2007, an estimated 60 kidnappings of American citizens had been reported in Nuevo Laerdo (Lindau, 2011).

The reasoning behind this trend is simple: arresting high-level drug lords is an extremely short-term solution. When Mexican officials take out top leaders in competitive cartels – a policy encouraged by the US since Operation Condor – a scramble for power ensues as the second and third-in-command vie for territory and control. Inter-cartel violence rises as aspiring leaders resort to extreme force to gain control over a now fragmented and disrupted drug business (O'Neil, 2009). Thus, by militarily eliminating the heads of the most powerful cartels – a policy still promoted in the Obama Administration's National Drug Control Strategy – police officials are dangerously upsetting the balance of power and the flow of business, igniting violence between medium-level cartel members that now have to fill the roles of their arrested leaders.

The Colombian Distraction

As highlighted as early as the late 1990s, Colombia poses an increasing and often distracting security threat to the United States. Decades ago, US officials made the fatal error of simply aiming to close Floridian entry points into the United States to thwart Colombian cocaine imports. In pursuing such short-term objectives in Colombia, the United States pushed Colombian drug lords into Mexico, strengthening the latter's resources. By the time the US shifted its focus back to Mexico, Mexican drug cartels had diversified their product mix to include cocaine in partnership with their Colombian counterparts. It can therefore be argued that the United States placed disproportionate emphasis on the Colombian crisis, allowing the Mexican security threat to increase while the spotlight was diverted.

In a similar sense, Plan Colombia – initiated in 1999 and continued through the presidency of Barack Obama – grants twice as many funds to Colombia for anti-drug efforts than are designated to the Mexican Merida Initiative. Although the United States pledged “\$1.4 billion worth of equipment, software, and technical assistance to Mexico's military, policy, and judicial forces over three years,” Plan Colombia gave a staggering \$2.8 billion to Colombia

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between 2000 and 2005 (O'Neil, 2009). Furthermore, the Merida Initiative only targets the federal level, which accounts for only 10 percent of the nation's police force. This virtually ignores the remaining 90 percent of local forces which more likely to be bought out by cartels (O'Neil, 2009). This suggests that the United States is once more disproportionately emphasizing the Colombian security threat, a much less proximate and much less dangerous public enemy. Perhaps inspired by 1980s policy objectives which systematically targeted Colombia, Barack Obama's allocation of monetary resources to Mexico's Merida Initiative is not proportionate with the security threat emanating from the nation. This is especially true when considering that Mexican – not Colombian – cartels are now active in some 230 US cities, with evidence suggesting that they are increasing their relationship with prison and street gangs like the Latin Kings and Mara Salvatrucha in the US in order to facilitate drug trafficking (Lindau, 2011).

Endemic Corruption

When Vicente Fox, a leader of the National Action Party (PAN), was elected to the presidency in 2000, the PRI monopoly on power was disrupted, meaning that drug-trafficking organizations were no longer deterred on PRI dominance. Instead, they turned even more toward “buying off or intimidation local authorities in order to ensure safe transit of their goods” (O'Neil, 2009). But increased corruption of Mexican officials was not only exacerbated by a reduction in PRI power. Mexico's inability to find political cohesion amongst its legislative, executive and judicial branches - each often dominated by different parties – had led to political gridlock in the decision-making process for years, allowing cartels to grow more powerful as the government remained unable to coordinate policies against them (O'Neil, 2009). For instance, under pressures from the US to cut down on marijuana production, President Salinas merely expanded the size of his justice system despite the known fact that the system was already corrupt and unable to cooperate with the other branches. When he appointed as attorney general a man who had previously been governor of Jalisco and “under whose governorship the drug trade had thrived,” Salinas allowed corruption to proportionally increase with the system's enlargement instead of fixing the then manageable shortcomings of a failing judicial system (Andreas, 2001).

Under more than 60 years of PRI leadership, politics in Mexico were accustomed to corruption and foul competition, undermining anti-drug efforts for decades. Thus, despite the US designating a large portion of its annual \$12 billion anti-drug effort to end corruption, cartels have more than 60 years of experience evading the law by relying on already corrupt and easily-manipulated officials (Payan, 2006). Unlike bureaucracies – with rigid hierarchies and strict rules of operation – drug cartels are exceptionally fluid and adaptive, allowing leaders extremely mobility in corruption tactics, membership recruitment, and obstacle removal (Payan, 2006).

Because drug cartels have decades of experience buying off already illegitimate PRI officials who had bought off elections, manipulated constitutional reform, and enacted patronage systems, today's cartel leaders know which officials are easiest to target and which methods of manipulation prove most effective. As cartel budgets have rapidly increased over the year's cartel leaders can now afford to buy off US customs officials as well. According to some reports, a Point of Entry (POE) agent typically earns between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year, depending on rank and location of the POE along the border. Drug cartels are now consistently offering these agents \$10,000 to \$20,000 for each shipment that passes through a POE unnoticed (Payan, 2006). By failing in the 1970s to address key problems of corruption in Mexican problems –

issues prevalent in PRI long before drugs became a salient issue – the country exacerbated the system of already illegitimate politics to set the stage for future corruption; decades later, corruption once confined to PRI institutions has leaked across the border, and hundreds of American security agents have been arrested and charged with accepting illegal funds.

Inaccurate Intelligence

Since Mexico has relied on US economic support for decades, the country has also exhibited willingness to skew drug-related data to secure positive economic ties. This trend was most prevalent in the years leading up to NAFTA, when Mexico intentionally submitted faulty data to the United States to assuage Congressional concerns; but this wasn't just a trend in Mexican intelligence. According to some reports, officials as high up as President Bush, Sr. and Clinton “deflected concerns that opening the border to legal trade might unintentionally open it to illegal drugs” by “presenting data to prove that drugs in Mexico were on a downward trend” (Andreas, 2001). Although a system of misleading data is commonplace where economic benefits are at stake, the “misleading measurements of effectiveness [regarding drug control] has escalated, and the political stage on which they are displayed has significantly expanded” (Andreas, 2001). Since 1972, the number of Congressional committees focused on drug policy has increased 240 percent, and now even more US policymakers and officials are being fed inaccurate information, drastically hindering their ability to understand the true security implications of Mexico's drug trade.

The same misinformation that led President Clinton to declare Mexico a “fully cooperating” nation is still helping Mexico receive economic benefits despite slow movement toward narcotics objectives. Because the United States accounts for over 90 percent of Mexican exports, the latter has high incentive to remain a “cooperating” country with the former (O'Neil, 2009). According to Representative Gilman (R-NY, 1999), a country labeled “not cooperating” with US drug interests can lose US financial aid and, as a result, the US is required to vote against the country in multinational development banks. In addition, trade sanctions are available against the country at the discretion of the president (US Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, 1999). Since Mexico is the second-largest export destination for the US, accounting for 11 percent of its export market – the United States also has an incentive to preserve the economic status quo, even if that means operating under skewed or false information (O'Neil, 2009). Thus, what started as a pattern in the 1990s to expedite NAFTA has been preserved, and both countries have little economic incentive to operate under complete and accurate information (US Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, 1999).

The Way Forward: Policy for the Future of the International Drug War

Given the historic relationship between Mexico and the United States that has shaped current policy and today's drug-related threat, it is important to draw policy proposals based on what has and has not worked in the past and present. Because cannabis and marijuana account for 90 percent of current US drug consumption, counternarcotic efforts have concentrated on eradication and interdiction of drug shipments, primarily through border security (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). These short-term efforts have proved highly ineffective, as most drugs today are smuggled into the US on what is known as the “NAFTA connection”; that is, the 4.23 million trucks with 2.6 million containers loaded with legal Mexican exports – only a

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fraction of which are inspected – carry over 70 percent of illegal narcotics into the US (Payan, 2006). Thus, instead of short-term strategies which are ultimately failing to stem the flow of Mexican narcotics into the United States, the future of North America’s war on drugs should include long-term policies implemented by both Mexican and US officials.

Increase Preventative Education Programs

In line with the 2013 National Drug Strategy, prevention in both the United States and Mexico should be a priority to decrease the demand for illegal drugs. The United States has implemented a number of federally-sponsored programs – such as Above the Influence, Red Ribbon Week, and Prevention Month – which focus on disseminating evidence-based drug prevention programs to America’s youth (The White House, 2013). Mexico, however, is lagging behind. Although suggesting such campaigns as “Vive sin Droga” (Live Without Drugs) and “¿Tú, qué Quieres?” (You, what do You Want?), the federal government began leaving educational programs to the discretion of community education systems, many of which have opted out of prevention-based programs due to funding deficiencies for decades (US/Mexico High Level Contact Group on Drug Control, 1997). There remains a “consistently small amount of investment in early childhood education” in Mexico, especially with children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Arias et al., 2014). Gaps in skill and IQ levels emerge early in life, between ages 4 and 6, but “can be remediated by early intervention (Arias et al., 2014). It is therefore imperative that a larger portion of the roughly billions of US dollars spent in this war on drugs be allocated to mandated educational programs in all Mexican states to promote healthy lifestyle alternatives as early in a child’s formative years as possible.

Offer Alternative Development Program

The United States must sponsor a program similar Andean Counterdrug Initiative which encourages farmers to switch production from illicit to licit crops. Neither the United States nor Mexico funds such programs in Mexico. Because recent statistics report that over half a million men remain unemployed in Mexico, it is rational to assume that eradication of drug farms will only push farmers to other high-paying, drug-related jobs; otherwise unemployed citizens in Mexico have nowhere to turn but illicit drug fields (Payan, 2006). Providing poor farmers with a reasonable alternative to illegal drug production is necessary. The Andean Counterdrug Initiative failed in large part due to the unwillingness of the region to sacrifice political autonomy to the West. As a result, it is imperative for the United States to work alongside local Mexican authorities in this matter and to frame the project as a Mexican initiative. The Mexican government ought to extend conditional case transfer programs like *Progresa* to apply to this initiative, providing cash benefit for farmers based on quantities of licit crops produced. This may dissuade drug farmers from opium poppy and marijuana production.

Revise Target Strategy

Both Mexican and US authorities should work together to target the second and third-in-commands in Mexican drug cartels. The current Drug Threat Assessment indicates that cartel leadership should still be prioritized targets in the war on drugs (US/Mexico Bi-National Performance Measures of Effectiveness). As explained in the previous section, eliminating cartel

leaders exacerbates inter-cartel fighting and increases violence along import US export routes. These leaders will be replaced, and they will be replaced violently. It is thereby a more suitable alternative to systematically decrease the number of individuals in the cartels while educating the most susceptible generation – high school students - toward cleaner, safer lifestyle practices. In time, this may decrease the overall numbers of active cartel members with less bloodshed than targeting leaders alone.

Improve Gun Control

The US must increase cross-border gun control, an initiative Mexico has been demanding for years (Lindau, 2011). Over 90 percent of all guns seized and inspected in Mexico were transported from the US despite the US “prohibiting the sale of weapons to foreign nationals who use clean criminal records to buy arms for others” (O’Neil, 2009). In addition to increased training and monitoring of gun salesmen, US POE agents must increase traffic inspections of vehicles and individuals leaving the United States. Utilizing resources at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the United States must focus border security efforts on North-South traffic as well as South-North traffic. The Zetas and the Sinaloa cartels remain heavily armed with US firearms, and reduction in prevalence of US-sponsored violence can only occur with increased firearm security and domestic firearm education programs.

Cut Cartel Finance

US security agents must work to decimate financial assets of the largest cartels. Incarceration of cartel members is a temporary fix which promotes inter-cartel violence. Cutting financial supplies to cartels will drastically reduce their ability to finance operations, buy firearms, pay off government officials and US security agents, and transport large amounts of illegal drugs into the United States. Programs like the Foreign Terrorist Asset Tracking Center – built to thwart terrorist activity by monitoring and interrupting money flows in terrorist organizations – are strong models for this necessary effort. In addition to halting financial flows, it is imperative to disrupt cartel technology resources through cyber warfare. Although the Obama Administration promises increased security and groundbreaking technology across the US-Mexico border, sophisticated cartels have enough money to keep up with and circumvent current security technology (Three Wars, 34). Now, a small portion of the Obama Administration’s National Drug Control Strategy is devoted to this objective; to truly dismantle powerful cartels, this must change (The White House, 2013).

Promote Democracy

The United States must promote in Mexico long-term democratization to overcome decades of political corruption and institutional gridlock. A substantial portion of US budget has been devoted to aggressive military training of Mexican officials, but a negligible portion of the budget is centered on democratization efforts. Because “the drug war engenders a host of practices that challenge democratic governance...and democratic institutional development,” it remains important to long-term success to emphasize sustained democratization as a solution to cartel violence (Payan, 2006). Although a former Bi-National Drug Threat Assessment detailed the importance of providing all Mexican and US officials with “at least 17 hours of ethics

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training” to thwart corruption, 17 hours is simply not enough to replace more than 60 years of commonplace illegitimacy with transparency and accountability (US/Mexico Bi-National Performance Measures of Effectiveness). Partnerships with Mexican civil societies should be promoted as a way to endorse complete democratization.

Encourage Economic Development

Long-term economic development must be promoted in Mexico to provide citizens with an alternative to drug profits. To some, aggressive drug policy “rather than the substances it seeks to control, can be seen as the root cause for many development harms” (Carrier, 2012). Human development is still incredibly low in Mexico. The majority of the labor force remains unskilled and highly vulnerable to cartel employment. Since the United States has economic incentive to stabilize Mexico economically, barriers to trade must be decreased; development aid, increased. In 2013, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Robert Jacobson, reported that the decline in US development aid to Mexico was a result of the Mérida Initiative (Meyer and Sullivan, 2012). Since the Mérida Initiative seeks to abate drug-related insecurity through military efforts, it ignores the fact that poverty is systematically linked to involvement in drug cartels. Allocations of aid should thus be reexamined to promote human development and increased economic production in Mexico through increased, and freer, trade with the United States. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, Mexico suffers from weak infrastructure, poor quality of public services, a rigid labor market, pervasive anti-competitive elements, and stagnation of workforce productivity (Arias et al., 2014). Reversing these trends with economic remodeling and development can provide a higher quality of life for more individuals, thereby deterring both illegal immigration and drug-related activities in the long term.

Conclusion

Although Mexico’s war on drugs has endured for years, its long-term effects have yet to encourage long-term strategy from either the United States or Mexico. Starting in the 1970s, US intervention in Mexico’s illegal drug trade has led to a series of short-sighted policy decisions and security measures. Although noticeable progress in the war on drugs has occurred since President Nixon coined the phrase in 1973, drug-related violence and corruption in the Mexican state and along the US border persist. Abandoning policies which are dependent on military intervention, the Colombian distraction, misrepresented information – policies which ignore Mexico’s 60-year endemic corruption – is necessary for progress in the fight against drug-related insecurity. As discussed in this report, there are myriad policy alternatives which may better thwart this international security in the long run, finally defeating and preventing against North America’s public enemy number one.

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