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**DRUG VIOLENCE ALONG THE
SOUTHWEST BORDER: ANOTHER
AMERICAN PUNITIVE
EXPEDITION?**

BY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**DRUG VIOLENCE ALONG THE SOUTHWEST BORDER:
ANOTHER AMERICAN PUNITIVE EXPEDITION?**

by

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ABSTRACT

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Since 2005, the drug-related violence along the border with Mexico has steadily increased. The increasing crossover violence from the border is threatening our national security. The main variable associated with this increase in violence is the recent involvement of paramilitary organizations within organized crime and the drug cartels in Mexico. Many of these organizations are led by former Mexican Army officers with special operations and counter drug/terrorism training. In an effort to curb the growing border violence and its threat to our national security, President Obama announced in May 2010 that 1200 National Guard troops would be sent to the southwest border to support the border patrol and other law enforcement agencies. Although the U.S. military does not have the primary responsibility to secure our borders, the armed forces generally provide support to law enforcement and immigration authorities through the Posse Comitatus Act (PCA). The continued escalation in violence along the southwest border and its crossover into the U.S. will require an expanded role of our military mission on the southwest border. This mission may eventually expand as part of a coalition force to confront the forces of the drug cartel organizations.

DRUG VIOLENCE ALONG THE SOUTHWEST BORDER: ANOTHER AMERICAN PUNITIVE EXPEDITION?

The assault by the drug cartels on the Mexican government and its authority over the past several years has also recently come into focus, and reminds one how critical stability in Mexico is for the security of the United States and indeed the entire region. Mexico has the 14th largest economy on Earth, significant natural resources, a growing industrial base, and nearly free access to the biggest export market in the world immediately to its north.¹

—The Joint Operating Environment 2010

Drug trafficking and its associated violence along the southwest border is a very serious threat to our national security and is slowly eroding the positive relationship we have developed with Mexico over the last 70 years. Since 2005, the drug related violence along the border with Mexico has steadily increased, putting further strain on our “friendly yet fragile” relationship. The path taken by the U.S. in addressing this strategic threat will be critical to the relationship of both countries and may send second and third order effects into our hemisphere for the next century.

Over the past 160 years, our relationship with Mexico has not been the best among our North American neighbors/allies. Mexico’s animosity toward the U.S. began with the American concept of —Manifest Destiny” and westward expansion across North America into territory owned by Mexico. The subsequent creation of the —Texas Republic” followed by the Mexican War in 1846 resulted in a great loss of Mexican territory and a greater loss of its prestige in Europe and the rest of Latin America.²

The Mexican Revolution and the resulting border instability in the early 20th century eventually led to the U.S. Army’s Punitive Expedition into Mexico. This was in retaliation for cross border raids on American citizens and Soldiers. The last U.S.

military action in Mexico occurred in 1919 in the city of Juarez when the Army garrison at Ft. Bliss, Texas successfully attacked elements of Pancho Villa's army to assist embattled Mexican federal troops.³

Since the end of the revolution in 1920, organized crime and the drug trade has been linked with the various government institutions in Mexico. Organized crime flourished under the one party political system installed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).⁴ For over 70 years a “gentleman's agreement” between the government and organized crime existed. As long as organized crime operated within the parameters given by government officials they would not be prosecuted. Political changes in Mexico over the last two decades began a trend in government that was less friendly to organized crime and the drug trade. The final break in the agreement came with the PRI's loss of the Mexican presidency in 2000 to the National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox and failure to regain it in 2006 (Calderon-PAN) has forced organized crime throughout Mexico to decentralize and transition to a more violent drug trafficking strategy.

The decentralization of the drug cartels led to an internal fight among the crime organizations for control of the drug trafficking routes to the U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico. The cartels have even developed their own paramilitary organizations and “private armies” to fight other criminal organizations, law enforcement and the Mexican military. The cartels have also formed relationships across the U.S. border with street gangs, prison gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs in over 230 cities in the U.S. to facilitate distribution of the sale of illegal drugs and to carry out enforcement of cartel justice.⁵ The associated crossover drug related criminal activities such as kidnapping, human

trafficking and “on running” across the southwestern border has raised much concern in our major cities along the border. For example, in 2009, the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) reported 357 drug trafficking related kidnappings for ransom in Phoenix, AZ during 2008. In 2007 there were 358 and nearly every incident was drug related.⁶

No state in the hemisphere is more important to U.S. security than Mexico. President Calderon’s government is fighting for its life against a cartel led criminal insurgency throughout the Mexican state. Mexican drug cartels are beginning to dominate hemisphere-wide criminal networks.⁷ Failure to defeat the cartels would result in greater levels of crime and lawlessness above what already exists throughout the state. Criminal elements, as well as terrorist organizations would have a more secure base of operations in which to export crime and terrorism to the Americas.

Regardless of the current government progress against organized crime and the drug cartels, President Calderon and the PAN party, must make more headway during his remaining two years in office. Results from the recent congressional elections in Mexico indicate that the once hegemonic PRI stands a strong chance to recapture the presidency in 2012.⁸ It is doubtful that the PRI, with its previous relationship with organized crime, will show the same commitment as Calderon to “the war on the cartels.”

This paper discusses whether the escalated violence along our southwestern border and its spillover/crossover effects will require an expanded role for our current military support mission to the Department of Homeland Security (i.e. customs and border patrol) and the Merida Initiative or will Congress need to authorize further military

action in support of our Homeland Defense. Direct action by our armed forces may eventually lead to joint U.S.-Mexican operations in Mexico similar to the assistance given to Columbia in its fight with the drug cartels.

Background

Following the Latin American wars for independence in the early 1800s, U.S./Latin American relations quickly got off to a troubled start. American statesmen generally viewed Latin America, as a backward, inferior and underdeveloped region in constant need of supervision and oversight.⁹ Expanding on this perception, in 1844 President Polk claimed —~~that~~ U.S. expansion should be given greater attention, especially in the territories of Texas, Oregon and California.” When European powers, especially the British, questioned his intentions in the Oregon territory (where they had considerable interests), Polk pulled out the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and claimed —~~that~~ was all the justification the U.S. needed to expand into any area in North America, including annexing Texas or claiming the Oregon territory.”¹⁰ Relations with Mexico suffered from this approach which eventually led to military engagements and a war which significantly affected the future relationship between both nations for the next century. During this time, Mexico was hoping for assistance from Britain whose North American policy was to block the westward American continental expansion; but due to British intervention in other areas of the world, Great Britain did not want to fight to prevent the U.S. from acquiring Oregon or Texas or California. ¹¹

In the 1820s, in order to offset U.S. territorial expansion/aggression along the northern Mexican frontier, the Mexican government decided to invite and encourage foreign immigration in the —Texas frontier” as a way to quickly populate the area with Mexican citizens. The majority of the settlers, who came from the U.S., saw this

opportunity as their destiny.¹² The Mexican government under General Santa Anna tried to dissuade the growing American influence in northern Mexico (Texas) by abolishing slavery and emancipating all slaves living in Mexico and its territories (Texas). This was an attempt to curtail the number of American settlers who were crossing the border illegally and bringing their slaves with them into Mexico. Santa Anna also attempted to make it illegal for American settlers in Texas to own firearms (which was impossible to enforce) and he established presidios along the frontier in an attempt to monitor and curtail the American settlements in Mexican territory. In 1833, the mostly American, Texans petitioned for independent statehood in Mexico which was subsequently rejected by the General Santa Anna led government. On October 1, 1835 the Texans openly revolted against the Mexican government and eventually won independence from Mexico on April 21, 1836 at the Battle of San Jacinto.¹³

Following the independence of the Texas Republic, Mexico was deeply concerned over the quick recognition of Texas by the U.S. government and the eventual annexation into the United States by President Polk. These actions combined with the British reluctance to intervene in California and Oregon, along with U.S. government insistence on purchasing the California territory, sent an aggressive message to Santa Anna and the Mexican government. Both governments were “~~o~~ edge,” one ready to reclaim and the other to expand the Texas territory.

The War with Mexico began in 1846 as an “~~acc~~ident” due to the dispute over the actual location of the border between Texas and Mexico. For Mexico, the war was a devastating loss that included the occupation of Mexico City by U.S. forces and the surrender of half of its national territory to the United States (New Mexico, Arizona,

Colorado, California and portions of other western states). In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo¹⁴ ended the conflict but had a major negative effect on U.S. - Mexico relations well into the next century. The course and consequences of “the North American Intervention of 1847”¹⁵ still remains a source of mistrust with some parts of the government and population. To add insult to injury, in 1853, General Santa Anna signed the Gadsden Purchase with the U.S. This “purchase” sold 30,000 square miles of Mexican territory on the southern border of New Mexico and Arizona to the U.S. for \$10 million.¹⁶

Prior to World War I, the U.S. sent troops into Mexico on several occasions in 1913-1914 to protect American interests. These incursions eventually culminated with General Pershing’s Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916-17. The expedition was primarily in retaliation for Pancho Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico. President Wilson also wanted to stabilize the southwest border and prevent further violence caused by the Mexican Revolution.

World War I also had an effect on U.S. – Mexico relations with the publication of the Zimmerman Telegraph. In January 1917, British intelligence successfully acquired and decoded a telegram sent from Germany to Mexico. The Germans proposed a truce between Mexico and Germany in the very likely event that the U.S. should declare war on Germany. In return for Mexican support against the U.S., the German government pledged to help Mexico regain the territory it lost to the U.S. as a result of the Mexican War. Mexico did not respond to Germany’s offer and remained neutral during the war,¹⁷ but this did little to improve relations between both countries.

The last U.S. military action in Mexico occurred in 1919 in the borderland town of Juarez/El Paso. Elements of Pancho Villa's army (Villistas) were attacking the Mexican federal garrison when stray shots killed and wounded some Americans in neighboring El Paso, Texas. The Army garrison at Ft. Bliss, Texas (El Paso) crossed the border to assist the Mexican troops and successfully attacked and scattered the Villistas.¹⁸

Since WWII, U.S. military engagements with Mexico have greatly improved.¹⁹ Military engagements between the senior military leaders from both countries continue to be the driving force for more partnerships in counter drug training and assistance. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Joint chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen traveled to Mexico along with Secretary Clinton in March 2010 to offer increased military assistance and collaboration with their Mexican counterparts.²⁰ Current working relationships at the national level, as well as the operational, combatant command, service and various staff levels, have established successful working military relationships such as: pilot and maintenance training, surveillance aircraft operations and various other training activities.²¹

The Mexican Government and Organized Crime

Before 2000 organized crime in Mexico basically consisted of trafficking drugs into the United States. Some of the less powerful criminal groups were dedicated to kidnappings and auto theft.²² The one party system (IPR) imposed for more than seventy years allowed a set of rules to be established concerning organized crime and the government. The governments –informal” rules allowed no participation in the political system, prevented drugs transported through Mexico from being diverted to domestic markets and demanded that government decisions be followed. As the IPR and the one-party system began to lose power, the new National Action Party (PAN) led

by Vicente Fox declared —all deals were off”. The drug traffickers began to develop a greater autonomy from political power base.

Drug Trafficking in Mexico has evolved into the transnational organized crime groups reminiscent of the Columbian cartels of the 1980s. There are seven major drug cartels operating out of Mexico: Juarez Cartel, Tijuana Cartel, Los Zetas, the Beltran-Leyva Cartel, the Sinaloa Federation, the Gulf Cartel and La Familia Cartel. Each has numerous organizational branches similar to large corporations and small nation-states. The drug cartels are situated between the world’s largest producer of cocaine (Columbia) and the world’s largest consumer of cocaine (United States), leading Mexico to be a natural transshipment route between the two countries.²³ Alliances and coalitions are constantly changing in the fight to control the most lucrative routes to the U.S and Canada. Another development is that drug traffickers are also expanding their control to include other lucrative markets such as kidnapping and extortion, human trafficking, prostitution and the sale of pirated merchandise.²⁴

Drug trafficking to the U.S. is not a new endeavor in Mexico. Drug trafficking originated with the cultivation of the opium poppy in northern Mexico during WWII where heroin derived from the poppies would become a source for pharmaceutical needs and created work and wealth in Mexico, which was the only opium producing country in Latin America. In the 1950s, the crisis in the mine industry in the northern states of Chihuahua and Sonora compelled some workers to cultivate marijuana and opium. As legal restrictions in the U.S. appeared in the 1960s, cartels began to facilitate the movement of illicit drugs to urban, suburban and rural areas of the United States.

The principle challenge to U.S. supported Mexican military and law enforcement security forces has been spearheaded by well equipped paramilitary organizations led by former special operations trained military. These heavily armed, well trained forces are the chief combatants in the struggle for control of the drug trade. Cartel leaders have recruited former military and police officials, criminals and security guards to serve as foot soldiers in their private armies. Many of these Para-military organizations are generational with grandfathers, sons and grandsons working within the organizations. They have freedom of movement and action anywhere within Mexico and the border regions.

Paramilitary Organizations. The Zetas (Los Zetas) are the gold standard for the paramilitary organizations. They are the first paramilitary/criminal organization in the western hemisphere to be made up of former military personnel from a regular army.²⁵ They are former members of the Mexican Army's elite Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFES) who originally defected to the Gulf Cartel. The Zetas are capable of rapid deployment, aerial assaults, marksmanship, ambushes, intelligence collection, counter-surveillance, prisoner rescues, sophisticated communication and the art of intimidation. They collect cartel debts, secure new drug trafficking routes at the expense of other cartels, discourage defections from other parts of the cartel organizations and track down particularly "worrisome" rival cartel and other gang leaders throughout Mexico.²⁶ Their activities have recently expanded to kidnapping, arms trafficking, money laundering and creating their own "independent" routes to and from the U.S and access to cocaine sources from South America.²⁷

Los Negros is a criminal organization that was once the armed wing of the Sinaloa Cartel and after a switch of alliances became the armed wing of the Beltran Leyva Cartel. The group was originally formed to counter the Los Zetas and government security forces. However, since early 2010 it has gone independent and has been contesting the control of the Beltran Leyva Cartel.²⁸

Los Negros has been known to employ gangs such as Mexican Mafia and MS-13 to carry out murders and other illegal activities. The group is involved in fighting other cartels in the Nuevo Laredo region for control of the drug trafficking corridor. Its operational area was originally Tamaulipas and later extended its influence to Nuevo León and Coahuila states.²⁹

Mexico's Security Forces

Law Enforcement. Mexico's traditional law enforcement, especially at the municipal level, is poorly paid, trained and equipped. They have low morale and are prone to bribery. What should be a first line of defense against criminal gangs is anemic and easily compromised.³⁰ Federal police reform is progressing but serious questions remain as to when and how the federal police will take over the anti-drug functions currently carried out by the Mexican military. In order to help facilitate police reform and restore public confidence in law enforcement a pilot project in the state of Chihuahua and the city of Juarez has begun with U.S. funded police training and prison reform. Thus allowing Mexican military forces to withdraw from Juarez and leaving primary security responsibilities to 5,000 federal police.³¹

It remains to be seen how federal reform efforts will be expanded to include state and municipal police forces. Police corruption in federal, state and municipal police forces has presented additional challenges to the government's campaign against the

cartels in Mexico. Coordination between Mexico's two federal and more than 2000 local and state police forces is weak and inconsistent, complicating efforts to mount large scale operations. Not enough manpower to remain at all drug hotspots indefinitely, cartels wait out the departure of the police before resuming operations. DEA Agents calls this the —wack a Mole Effect".³² President Calderon has taken steps to reform Mexico's federal, state and municipal police forces by enhancing the training at the federal level, creating a national database through which police can share information and intelligence and accelerate implementation of national police registry. Thus far, state and local police reform has lagged behind federal police reform efforts.

In Sept 2009, the Calderon government put forth a proposal to have the country's municipal police forces absorbed by state-level police agencies. This is due to the fact that local police often help the cartels.³³ Unfortunately, the reform package has been stalled in the Mexican congress because of disagreements at the state and local levels, where reform was seen as a competition for resources. The approval process must pass a majority of the Mexican legislature and then a majority of the state legislatures, a process that could take up to a year.³⁴

Military. The only non-corrupt tool available to fight the cartels is the Mexican military which must hold the line against the cartels until law enforcement can reorganize. The military is outgunned but has several recent victories against the cartels. Resourcing from the Merida Initiative is beginning to help the military and law enforcement. Military are trusted by the Mexican people more than any other national institution. It is likely that the armed forces will continue to be tasked to carry out more law enforcement type duties.

The military is trusted by the Mexican people more than any other national institution. Polling consistently shows that Mexicans have more confidence in the armed forces than in the police or the justice system. Despite negative media coverage during the Chiapas uprising in the 1990s and allegations of corruption,³⁵ Mexicans still have a high level of trust for the military. It is likely that the armed forces will continue to be tasked to carry out jobs that in other countries would be police or judicial responsibilities, simply to get things done.

To combat the escalating violence, Mexico's armed forces have grown in size and developed a growing law enforcement and counterdrug role. The Secretariat of National Defense (Sedena) has increased the size of the military to over 250,000 troops. As part of its military expansion, Mexico began to increase the number and capabilities of its Special Forces units; particular attention was given to capabilities of the company size airmobile and amphibious Special Forces units (GAFES),³⁶ units that are deployed in most states around the country. In a further expansion of Special Forces type units, the Sedena also formed 36 Special Forces Amphibious groups for counter drug operations. The GANFES³⁷ are the naval/marine counterparts to the army GAFES and they are tasked to carry out riverine and coastal operations.³⁸

The real challenge for Mexico as it consolidates its democratization is the strengthening of its civil institutions so this is no longer necessary. While it is true that the military's involvement in the fight against drug trafficking has given its members opportunities to engage in corrupt practices, successive administrations have been diligent in addressing the problem. To limit the temptations that might arise if an

individual were to develop intimate links in any one location, officers are rotated from one garrison to another regularly.

Border Violence and U.S. Initiatives

As stated earlier, the conflict between the drug cartels for control of the smuggling routes (plazas) to the U.S. has increased the drug related violence along the southwest border. Originally, the Mexican cartels had a policy of tempering overt violence north of the Rio Grande, but since the Mexican presidential elections in 2000, this policy has slowly eroded away. Three factors influencing this are the Mexican Government's war on the cartels, a new decentralized cartel leadership and its inability to maintain control of the various paramilitary organizations and branch organizations that work for the cartel network. This changing environment is visible with an increase in firefights pertaining to drug loads coming over the border and "lifebreak events",³⁹ such as the May 2009 assassination of a Juarez drug cartel leader (Galena), in front of his El Paso safe-house. The actual shooter was a U.S. Army Soldier stationed at nearby Fort Bliss, thus raising concern about cartel military recruitment.⁴⁰

Further crossover violence has been witnessed in Texas, Arizona and California. In September 2010 at Falcon Lake, Texas a Colorado couple went on a personalized watercraft excursion to the Mexican side of the lake. They accidentally crossed into the cartel territory of the Los Zetas paramilitary group. Three "Zetas" fishing boats fired upon the couple, killing the husband and chasing the wife to the "Texas side" of the lake. It is believed the couple was attacked by young boys called zetistas, who are gophers for the Zetas.⁴¹

In Arizona, the Sinaloa Cartel from Mexico is responsible for the majority of the drug related kidnappings in Phoenix. The Sinaloa Cartel from Mexico is responsible for

most of these crimes in Arizona. In one incident, cartel-gang members, dressed as Phoenix police officers using high powered weapons and military tactics, stormed a drug dealer's house in a barrage of gunfire, killing him and taking his dope.⁴² In Cochise County, Arizona a rancher was shot and killed on his property adjacent to the border. Police followed the tracks of the suspected killers back to Mexico, about 20 miles south. Authorities think the shooter was either a drug cartel scout or a member of a known gang of border thieves that has terrorized the area's remote ranches.⁴³

In San Diego, California the August 2009 arraignment of members of the Mexican drug, kidnapping and murder group Los Palillos (the Toothpicks) highlighted what had been a four year period of brutal drug related murders, abductions and torture. This four year crime spree included the killing of a U.S. police officer.⁴⁴

NAFTA. The effect of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on Mexico and the Mexican economic situation has also benefited the drug cartels. NAFTA, in effect since January 1994, plays a very strong role in the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States. NAFTA brought economic and social benefits to the Mexican economy, such as the growth of a viable middle class, but the benefits have not been evenly distributed. For example, the agricultural sector experienced a higher amount of worker displacement after NAFTA because of increased competition from the U.S. and Mexican domestic agricultural reforms.⁴⁵ Agriculture worker displacement provides a "ripe" recruiting pool for the cartels to be used as marijuana or opium growers, transporters or even part of the paramilitary organizations or gangs.

Merida Initiative. In 2007, President Bush introduced the Merida Initiative, originally developed as a partnership program with Mexico, Latin America and various Caribbean states. The programs' intent was to confront the criminal organizations in our hemisphere that are engaged in drug trafficking and to prevent its spillover violence into the U.S. The Obama administration revamped the program in 2010 with the majority of the Merida funding (\$1.5B) supporting programs in Mexico. This new strategy is designed to compliment other U.S. counterdrug and border security efforts, including those funded by the DOD with an emphasis on training and equipping Mexican military and police forces engaged in counterdrug efforts.

The new four-pillar strategy for Merida focuses on: 1) disrupting organized criminal groups, 2) institutionalizing the rule of law, 3) building a 21st century border and 4) building strong and resilient communities. The first two pillars are largely building upon existing efforts, whereas pillars three and four broaden the scope of Merida Initiative programs to include new efforts to facilitate —secure flows” of people and goods through the U.S. – Mexico border and to improve conditions in violence-prone border cities. The fourth pillar” programs consist of pilot programs to strengthen communities in Ciudad Juarez-El Paso and the Tijuana- San Diego areas.⁴⁶

DOD. In contrast to Plan Columbia, the Merida Initiative does not include an active U.S. military presence in Mexico, largely due to concerns about national sovereignty stemming from past conflicts with the U.S.⁴⁷ This is true even though DOD did not play a primary role in designing the Merida initiative and is not providing Merida funded assistance. However DOD is administering assistance provided through the foreign military accounts. As an implementing agency, DOD's role has largely involved

overseeing the procurement and delivery of Merida-funded equipment for Mexican security forces.

Despite its limited role in the Merida Initiative, DOD assistance to Mexico has been increasing; as has military cooperation between the two countries and Mexican participation in DOD training programs in the U.S. Apart from the Merida Initiative the DOD has its own legislative authority to provide certain counter drug assistance. Future training programs may focus on how to work with police forces, conduct anti-drug operations and investigations and pursue cartel leaders. Experts have urged the U.S. —not to focus too much on military assistance and neglect other more effective forms of aid such as the development, training and professionalization of Mexico's law enforcement officers."⁴⁸

DOD programs in Mexico are overseen by the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM). One of NORTHCOM's priorities is to build a very close partnership with Mexico's military and police to provide training and equipment. In addition, NORTHCOM is working with Mexico to establish a shared intelligence/fusion center like those formed by the U.S. military in Asia and Europe.⁴⁹

Other DOD initiatives have also facilitated coincidental maritime operations between Mexico and the United States and have resulted in greater cooperation between the two countries, particularly with respect to boarding, searching and seizing suspected vessels transiting Mexican waters.⁵⁰

Operation Jump Start. In May 2006, President Bush announced a program, Operation Jump Start, to aid the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) mission along the southwest border with Mexico. This operation allowed for the deployment of up to

6000 National Guard troops to assist with the enforcement of border security and construction of a border fence (still under construction). National Guard Soldiers were not involved in actual law enforcement activities, but were supporting the CBP with administrative, observational and intelligence gathering support and civil engineering projects. This support enabled the CBP to push more agents to its field units patrolling the border. Operation Jump Start officially came to an end on 15 July 2008.⁵¹

In May 2010, President Obama authorized the deployment of 1200 National Guard troops from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California (under the control of each state's governor) to the southwest border in support of the border patrol and other U.S. law enforcement agencies. Although our armed forces do not have the primary responsibility to secure our borders, the military generally provides support to law enforcement and immigration authorities through the Posse Comitatus Act (PCA). The PCA prohibits use of the armed services to execute U.S. domestic law except when authorized during a national crisis.⁵²

A New Strategy

National Southwest Border Counter Narcotics Strategy. The original National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy (NSBCS) was published in 2007 and focused primarily on what the entities of the U.S. Federal Government could do to prevent the illegal trafficking of drugs across the border with Mexico. As a result of the changing situation on the border, the 2009 NSBCS has expanded its focus beyond stemming the inbound flow of illegal drugs from Mexico. It also recognizes the role that the outbound flow of illegal cash and weapons plays in sustaining the cartels.⁵³ For example —Project Gunrunner” was developed by the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) to stem the flow of firearms into Mexico and thereby deprive the

narcotics cartels of weapons.⁵⁴ The strategic goal of NSBCS is to substantially reduce the flow of illicit drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence across the Southwest border. The main objective of this strategy is to improve U.S. – Mexico cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts using enhanced intelligence capabilities and counterdrug technologies for drug detection and interdiction along the Southwest border.

DHS. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) mission is to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure and resilient against terrorism and other hazards.⁵⁵ A subset of this mission is to secure and manage our borders by disrupting transnational criminal and terrorist organizations. Historically, along the Southwest border, this was accomplished using the assets of the U.S. Customs and Border Protections (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) services.⁵⁶

In 2005, DHS announced the launch of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a multiyear, multibillion dollar program aimed at securing U.S. borders and reducing illegal immigration. CBP's SBI program office is responsible for managing the SBI program and for developing a comprehensive border protection system. The current focus of the SBI program is on the Southwest border areas between ports of entry that CBP has designated as having the highest need for enhanced border security because of serious vulnerabilities.⁵⁷ As many as 500,000 to 1 million undocumented immigrants are estimated to cross into the U.S. every year.⁵⁸ In the aftermath of 9/11, the Bush administration responded to the enormous political pressure to close what was seen as a dangerous open door with a seemingly simple, some say simplistic solution: a fence dividing the U.S. from its southern neighbor. Approved by congress under the Secure

Fence Act of 2006, the fence was constructed at a cost of more than \$3 billion. The fence only covers about 1/3 of the almost 2000 mile border. A patchwork of materials ranging from corrugated steel and concrete to chain link fence and railroad ties, it stops abruptly in some places, leaving long stretches of open space that the government has no plans to seal off.⁵⁹

The Way Ahead

The U.S. and Mexico have a history of security partnerships along the border. In west Texas along the eastern edges of the Sierra Madres, Mexican *rurales*⁶⁰ rode with Texas Rangers who were pursuing Comanche Indians. In the Arizona territory, Mexican and American Soldiers mounted joint campaigns against Apache warriors and Chinese immigrants. This cooperation came to an abrupt end during the Mexican revolution and was replaced by the creation of the U.S. Border patrol in 1924.⁶¹

In the past, the six Mexican states bordering California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas have developed varying degrees of security partnerships with their neighboring U.S. States. Many agreements were initially informal but some have been formalized with bi-lateral type agreements. For example, Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora have an official police partnership, which once enabled authorities to share information, coordinate investigations, listen in on common radio frequencies and develop joint operations at a direct state to state level outside of federal supervision.⁶²

Considering the past success of these partnerships between U.S. and Mexican security forces perhaps it is worth revisiting some other successful security assistance plans that have involved U.S. forces.

Plan Columbia. Plan Columbia significantly increased the U.S. support to the Colombia military and the national police. The plan brought a wide variety of military and

intelligence support in the form of hardware and training to assist the Government of Colombia in their efforts against the narcotics terrorists and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC). Plan Colombia aid packages took many forms such as: helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, counter terrorism and organized crime training at the platoon and company level. The plan also provided intelligence training to improve collection and production of tactical and strategic intelligence. Colombian law enforcement and judicial officials who received U.S. training through Plan Colombia are now sharing their expertise with counterparts in Mexico.⁶³

Plan Columbia integrated strategy to meet the challenges confronting Columbia such as: promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the economy and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society. The U.S. provided assistance in five areas to assist with this strategy: 1) Improving governing capacity and respect for human rights, 2) expansion of counter narcotics operations into southern Columbia, 3) alternative economic development, 4) increased interdiction in Columbia and the region, 5) assistance for the Columbian National Police.⁶⁴

Mexican ISAF or IASF. An alternate plan worth considering for Mexico is based upon NATO's International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. An Inter- American Security Force (IASF) organized and operated by the Organization of American States (OAS)⁶⁵ would operate much the same as NATO forces presently in Afghanistan.

The OAS uses a four pronged approach toward providing stability in the Western Hemisphere: Democracy, Human rights, Security and Development. Its security approach is multidimensional with priorities toward reducing the production, trafficking

and use of drugs in the Americas; prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in the Americas; combat organized crime and the trafficking of firearms, explosives, people and criminal gangs in the Americas.⁶⁶ A fusion of this ISAF/IASF approach would provide security forces to conduct stability and security operations in Mexico provide support to the Mexican Army, support the Mexican government to defeat the cartels and support to the Mexican Federal Police including state law enforcement.

In conjunction with the Merida Initiative, OAS, U.S. and Mexican officials could establish a series of joint operating regions in urban, agricultural or drug trafficking areas. The IASF would also function both as a deterrent and a humanitarian presence. The use of military/security forces in this capacity allows Mexico the time to rebuild and train a more professional law enforcement capability. Western Hemisphere law enforcement and police units can partner in the cities, while joint military forces guard the badlands.⁶⁷

The ISAF mission was an integral part of the international community's approach to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. The same —goal of stability” can be provided to Mexico with an IASF provided by the independent states of the Americas.

Conclusion

The increased drug related violence along our southwestern border is the result of a wicked problem⁶⁸ that has been growing in Mexico over the past ten years. Since 2006 President Calderon and the Mexican military have waged a war against the cartels that is beginning to show signs of success. Calderon leaves office November 30th, 2012; allowing him less than two years to reduce the power of the drug cartels and rebuild Mexico's law enforcement system. The resurgence of the PRI political party in the

presidential elections would set the stage for a negotiated peace with the cartels and a return to —business as usual” in Mexico.

The U.S. and other nations in our hemisphere cannot afford to lose the positive gains made by Mexico and the Merida Initiative. Implementing a —Plan Mexico,” similar to Plan Columbia may work, but considering our history with Mexico, it is doubtful that U.S. forces will be allowed to operate within Mexico’s borders.⁶⁹ The government of Mexico seems to be open to the idea of U.S. Federal Law enforcement, such as the DEA, fulfilling more of this security assistance role; however, law enforcement cannot bring the organizational structure, maneuver and firepower that is required to defeat the cartels and their paramilitary organizations.

The next two years are critical to Mexico in its fight against the cartels. Failure would guarantee an escalation of violence that would not only expand across the border with the U.S., but would also be projected throughout the Americas. In order to continue the positive changes generated by President Calderon and the Merida Initiative, the OAS may need to consider a punitive expedition (IASF) against the cartels and paramilitary organizations. The IASF would provide security forces which would facilitate a stable environment in Mexico, thereby maintaining stability and confidence within the Americas and Western hemisphere.

Endnotes

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