Strategy Research Project

MÉRIDA INITIATIVE: THE ANSWER FOR MEXICO?

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Prior to September 11, 2001, internal strife and drug trafficking increased immensely in Colombia. After September 11, 2001, the same trend began in Mexico—evident mostly in drug cartel violence. The problem has escalated rapidly since 2006 after Mexico's most recent presidential election. Both these countries—especially Mexico, which shares a 3,000 mile border with the United States—present a security threat to the United States. Since 9/11, the United States has been tightening up the borders. The newly created Department of Homeland Security has given border security a higher priority by providing equipment, intelligence, and personnel as part of a new initiative in the security plan. This SRP discusses US security plans for both countries. It explains how they were devised and points out their differences. It considers whether Plan Colombia should be the model for Mexico as the Mérida Initiative is still in its infancy. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening the Mérida Initiative.

MÉRIDA INITIATIVE: THE ANSWER FOR MEXICO?

"We will outstretch the hand if you unclench your fist."

— Barack Obama

Introduction

Prior to September 11, 2001, internal strife and drug trafficking increased immensely in Colombia. After September 11, 2001, the same trend began in Mexico—mostly evident in drug cartel violence. The problem has escalated rapidly since 2006 after Mexico's most recent presidential election. Both these countries—especially Mexico, which shares a 3,000 mile border with the United States—present a security threat to the United States. Since 9/11, the United States has tightened its borders. The newly created Department of Homeland Security has given border security a higher priority by providing equipment, intelligence, and personnel as part of a new initiative in the security plan.

To fulfill the President's vision, the State Department has taken the lead to avert any further deterioration in Colombia and Mexico by executing two plans: Plan Colombia (1999-present) and the Mérida Initiative to aid Mexico and Central America (2008-present). But are these plans successful? Are they meeting the US objectives? Are these southern neighbors more secure? Is the US more secure? Should Plan Colombia, given its longevity, be the model for Mexico and any other state or non-state entity with similar characteristics?

This SRP discusses the plans individually. It explains how they were devised and points out their differences. It considers whether Plan Colombia should be the model for

Mexico, since the Mérida Initiative is still in its infancy stages. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening the Mérida Initiative.

In this SRP, the term “terrorist” refers both to narcotic traffickers and other groups who aim to overturn the governing bodies and principals in their own country or in countries they have targeted.

US Interests

Cooperation with Mexico will be a key factor to stability and security for the United States. Mexico, just like Canada, has very strategic importance to the United States in both commerce and national security due to proximity. The border shared by Mexico and United States extends over 3,000 miles. In Mexico, transnational criminal threats and threats to governance continue to grow at a rampant rate; this disruption spills over onto sovereign US territory. These national security challenges undermine stability, delegitimize government institutions, and cause fear amongst the population. As transnational criminal organizations accrue enormous wealth through drugs, weapons, and human trafficking, they are infiltrating and corrupting the US way of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness and imposing crime and disorder among the United States, neighboring countries, and partners abroad. In addition, terrorists use criminal networking for their logistical requirements, so they undermine the international financial system and cost consumers billions of dollars annually by compromising US security measures.

To counter this security challenge, President Obama has identified five major pillars in the National Security Strategy based on “shared efforts to indentify and interdict threats:”

> **Deny** hostile actors the ability to operate within our borders; **Maintain Effective Control** of our physical borders; **Safeguard** lawful trade and travel into and out of the US; **Disrupt and Dismantle** transnational terrorist, and criminal organizations; and **Ensure Our National Resilience** in the face of the threat and hazard.[1]

It is imperative for the United States to refocus attention from the Middle East to their Southern border and Central America to address this security challenge in its own backyard. If the focus is readjusted, the success close to home will in turn complement the efforts abroad of denying and disrupting terrorists worldwide. Central America along with Colombia and Mexico are major suppliers of drugs to the United States. Disrupting their logistical supply chains and distribution centers will create a tremendous ripple effect across the terrorist network by disrupting their movement of goods and cutting into their profits. They will have less to spend on bribes, weapons, supplies, and traveling venues.

However, these terrorists are very resilient and very adaptable to changing environments. So these disruptions will cause only temporary setbacks. But continuous disruptions create pressure by forcing networks to increase their spending on operating and set-up costs at different locations. Disruption also complicates communication within the network, which in turn causes turmoil within. Continual pressure on the networks is disruptive. These pressures could cause the organization to implode, thereby increasing security within the United States and abroad.

Plan Colombia

In 1999, the Government of Colombia developed a $7.5 billion program to reshape its country. President Andrés Pastrana supported this plan by committing $4 billion; he pleaded with the international community to provide the additional funding of $3.5 billion. The plan, dubbed Plan Colombia, focused on four main areas: “promoting

the peace process; combating the narcotics industry; reviving the Colombian economy; and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society."[2] The United States answered the call and agreed to provide aid based on five components: "improving governing capacity and respect for human rights; expansion of counter-narcotics operations into Southern Colombia; alternative economic development; increased interdiction in Colombia and the region; assistance for the Colombian national police."[3]

This was not the first time that the United States answered Colombia's call for help. The United States and Colombia have shared a relationship dating back to the 1970s. Even though the two countries had a history, it was not until 1990 that Colombia took a prominent role as part of US foreign policy; Colombia moved to center stage after the introduction of Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia has endured over a decade of trials and tribulations; it has foiled the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia {Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia} (FARC) guerrillas and the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia {United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia} (AUC) agenda to make Colombia a failed state. Plan Colombia's history can be viewed through four time periods.

The first period began in the latter part of the 1990s. The United States severed ties with Colombia's "scandal-tarred" President Ernesto Samper's government.[4] However, the United States continued to communicate and provide funding through Colombia's National Police. During this period, FARC and AUC paramilitaries' power increased at an alarming rate. Then the US Republican Congress feared the repercussions and doubled the aid in 1997, 1998, and 1999 to preserve the fragile

security of the country. The aid focused on counter-narcotics, relying on aerial interdiction program in conjunction with a fumigation program. [5]

In 2000-2003, the second period, the United States responded to President Pastrana's plea for international support and more aid. The Clinton Administration moved an emergency bill through the Congress to provide a $1 billion "emergency supplemental" aid package that included planes, helicopters, and boats and expanded fumigation program. However, the fumigation program turned out to be very ineffective. This second period set a precedent for continuous appropriations of $500-700 million per year, which continues today.[6]

The next phase, 2003-2006, designated "Plan Patriota," centered on the September 11, 2001 attacks and their aftermath. It focused on preventing further terrorist attacks and wrestling the advantage from the terrorists. The Bush administration spun counter-drug aid in Colombia to be used for counter-terrorism. The new President of Colombia, President Alvaro Uribe, formed new mobile military units and provided an aggressive offensive on the FARC to take back territories that were considered FARC strongholds. Violence decreased, but the cartels simply adapted and the cocaine production did not falter.[7]

The final phase 2006 to the present is the "consolidation" period. It focuses less on military activity and more on building a civilian government. United States Southern Command and the Defense Minister Juan Manuel are working toward moving non-military institutions into previous FARC stronghold to provide alternatives to criminal activities. This is referred to as the "Integrated Approach."[8]

Since the start of the Clinton Administration's aid, Colombia has remained the "Western Hemisphere's number-one recipient of US military and policy aid."[9] This era of financial largess, often referred to as the "Plan Colombia era," may be in jeopardy—depending on the Obama Administration's 2012 foreign policy plan. The Obama Administration has to make some difficult decisions in their foreign policy. Given the nation's stagnating economy, its commitments in the Middle East, and Mexico's security issues in its backyard, the Obama Administration may have to reset priorities. Some Colombians are fearful if the United States withdraws substantial funding, progress over the past decade may regress. The United States reassured the Colombian government in October 2010 that they are not reducing their commitment, but would like to enter a "High-Level Partnership Dialogue"—thereby making Colombia a partner rather than a recipient. With partnership comes equality in all aspects, including financial burdens, and possibly an expectation to expand their successes to help their neighbors. In addition, the United States is emphasizing human rights and good governance along with energy, science, and technology to position Colombia to proactively counter narcotics trafficking rather than using US resources to react to these problems.[10]

After a decade of making Colombia the number one recipient of US aid in the Western Hemisphere has the United States meet its objective? Can the United States afford to refocus its assistance on human rights, governance, and future technologies in the science and energy fields? Is Colombia strong enough to stand on its own against the cartels?

After auditing the performance of Plan Colombia, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2008 determined that Plan Colombia did not fully meet the specified

goals, but nevertheless increased the elected government's presence and increased security in the country. The GAO determined the goal of a 50 percent reduction in drugs was almost achieved, but now the drug trade has again increased. This is not necessarily due to the failure of the Plan, but due to the resilience of the drug cartels. Also, US Agency for International Development (USAID) programs are not currently able to infiltrate the areas of concern to fully develop their overall objectives of the programs. Once these areas are accessible and safe to operate in, USAID will be able to deliver programs throughout the country and actually make contact with the most oppressed and vulnerable citizens to avoid their recruitment into the cartels' activities.

Significant strides have been made throughout the country in security and training, which has significantly reduced FARC and AUC profits as well as their overall strength. To counter the additional training and equipment that the Colombian security forces have obtained, the FARC in particular has changed its tactics and now avoids contact with Colombian officials.[11] In addition, a USAID and Colombian government program has offered members of the FARC and AUC the chance to leave the organization in exchange for information and minimal punishments for their crimes. As a result, many insurgents have signed up to reintegrate into society to work for the good of the country. Unfortunately, this process is proceeding very slowly as the judicial system is being rebuilt. Persistent corruption continues to hinder the process. Despite these obstacles, the FARC has had a significant decline in their end strength numbers. In 2001, the FARC had an estimated 17,000 members. As of 2008, they are at 8,000 or less. In addition, a governmental counter-drug initiative has dropped their profit per kilogram of cocaine by more than one hundred dollars.[12]

Also, a peace accord with the AUC was reached with the Government of Colombia, requiring them to demobilize and lay down their arms.[13] This accord appears to be a great success; however, noting the very slow reintegration of former members of the FARC and AUC, the GAO has discovered that former AUC members have turned toward “regional criminal bands.” The number of these bands has grown from 3,000 to 9,000 members with a majority of them former AUC members.[14] With this growth gang rivalries have increased. The current uptick in homicides and kidnappings has been linked to gang activities.

Despite the hurdles that still need to be overcome—corruption, human rights issues, and governing in all areas of the country—Plan Colombia has been very much a success. However, persistence is essential in this continuous struggle with terrorism and drug cartels. No matter how powerful a government is, it will never have the resources and networking that terrorist networks and drug cartels have developed. These types of organizations will move and adapt and continue. But the success for the government lies in its on-going ability to disrupt them and keep them on the move—hopefully to move out of country. But their movements then present a problem to the neighboring countries. Therefore, collaboration is needed to secure a region. For example, the United States and Colombian efforts have for the most part shut down the Southern Florida routes into the United States. The cartels adjusted and now filter their supplies through Mexico. Now Mexico, like Colombia, is in a battle to restrain drug cartels and prevent terrorists from threatening their governance of the country. The Mérida Initiative was undertaken to restore effective governance in Mexico.

Mérida Initiative

In 2007 the Mérida Initiative led to an agreement between the United States and Central America (to include Mexico). It was designed to combat drug cartels and reduce violence in order to maintain the integrity of the governing body in each country. This $1.4 billion initiative had four goals: "break the power and impunity of criminal organizations; assist the Mexican and Central American Governments in strengthening border, air, and maritime controls; improve the capacity of justice systems in the region; and curtail gang activity in Mexico and Central America and diminish drug demand in the region."[15] Most security analysts argue that the Mérida Initiative has failed to reach these goals.

In 2010, 15,273 people had been killed in Mexico's conflict with organized crime. Since President Calderón declared war on the drug cartels in 2006, the violence has continued to rise, totaling over 34,612 during the last 4 years. Noticeable escalation started in 2008 with 5,400 murders and than a dramatic increase of 77 percent in 2009 with 9,600 murders. 2010 followed with an alarming increase of 59 percent.[16] President Calderón and the Mexico Congress have made great strides in their effort to reform the police and judicial system. Even with some arrests of cartel leaders, the strategy to conquer the drug cartels by fragmenting and conquering them has turned into fragmenting and realigning them—even if it requires the drug factions to realign with a longtime enemy.

In addition, the US Congress has appropriated $1.4 billion to support the Mérida Initiative, but the United States has only spent $212 million of these appropriated funds.[17] Furthermore, the State Department has withheld $26 million in funding until

they are satisfied with the Mexican government's initiatives on some human rights issues.[18]

With the Mérida Initiative in its infancy, it is premature to determine if the plan is working. However, there have been some indicators that this initiative is putting Mexico on the right path. Increased cooperation between United States and Mexico has led to arrests of major cartel players; to increased training and education of Mexico's Federal Police force; to reforming its judicial and security institutions; and to purchasing and delivery of critical equipment to include Bell 412 helicopters and UH-60M Black Hawks helicopters.[19]

From the US perspective, joining in the Mérida Initiative has forced the United States to take a closer look at its own contribution to the problem. As of March 2009, US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officers began searches of South-bound vehicles—a new initiative. During these inspections, the CBP has seized over $50 million in illicit currency and hundreds of illegal firearms.[20] Since "over $10 billion in bulk cash [is] crossing the border illegally," and with weapons from "over 12,000 gun shops between Mexico, Arizona and Texas, coming from the United States and feeding into organized crime,"[21] the United States appears to be a significant part of the problem. Over 90 percent of the homicide weapons in Mexico can be linked back to the United States.[22] After taking this hard look, the United States has developed the *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* which outlines in further detail how the *National Security Strategy* will be executed. This document focuses on six areas that complement the Mérida Initiative:

> The President's National Drug Control Strategy seeks to disrupt the illicit drug industry as close to the source as possible. This Strategy aims to

> improve Federal counterdrug efforts on the Southwest Border in the following areas: intelligence collection and information sharing, interdiction at and between ports of entry, aerial surveillance and interdiction of smuggling aircraft, investigations and prosecutions, countering financial crime, and cooperation with Mexico.[23]

Because of the perception that this initiative has stalled, based on allegations of human rights violations and the "slow rolling" of money from the State Department, in May 2010, the Obama administration reframed the Mérida Initiative and dubbed the new initiative "Beyond Mérida" or "Mérida 2.0." This new approach refocuses efforts on "institution building" more than technology sharing. US efforts to support Mexico with a "soft power" approach assures the Mexican government that the United States understands the complexity of the problem and is just as committed to a solution. It provides a partnership environment and eases the perception of a superpower bailing out a failing state.

Based on the outline of the plans, critics are tempted to say the Obama Administration is relying on a "cookie cutter solution." Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative both address drug trafficking and attendant violence, weak and corrupt governance, and the need to build up or support the host country's economy. The pillars of each plan are similar: Both focus on building institutions (strengthening democratic pillars), on disruption of criminal organization and narcotics trafficking, and on reforming the justice system.

Both countries face the same types of problems:

- Both are denied (or purposely avoid) certain areas because of strongholds by cartels, guerrillas, or other illegal security threats.

- Both plans fail to provide a plausible solution to overcome the resilience of cartels or guerillas.
- Both plans are led by the State Department. This is especially important to Mexico, given its sensitivity about maintaining sovereignty.
- Both plans primarily target the drug cartels, and include provisions for institution building, for providing equipment and training for both military and police forces.

But all these similarities do not negate the fundamental differences between Mexico and Colombia. These differences explain why a "cookie-cutter" approach is insufficient. Each country's enemies have different motives. Until the United States accepts and understands the motivation of each disruptive element, then it will have problems realizing the full benefits of the two partnerships.

The Los Angeles Times article *"Why Mexico is not Colombia"* does a very good job laying out the differences. The article responded to Secretary of State Clinton's comparison of Mexican drug cartels with the "Colombia-style insurgency." It claimed Secretary Clinton was comparing "apples to oranges":

> The nature of the foe: Colombia's decades-long conflict with the FARC rebel group and with powerful drug cartels is motivated, at least on the rebel side, by a Marxist ideology aimed at overthrowing the state. In Mexico, the drug war is motivated by the cartels' basic goal of moving narcotics into the US without government interference, and collecting profits.
>
> Targets and tactics: Terrorist-style attacks have occurred in Mexico's drug war (a remote controlled car bomb in Ciudad Juarez, a grenade attack on civilians in Michoacan) but they have not occurred with the frequency and scope as such tactics in Colombia. The Mexico drug war is mostly a conflict between feuding cartel groups.[24]

To understand that one country's battle is about an ideology while the other one is about profit is a significant factor in determining the appropriate strategy for a country's future. The United States cannot approach an enemy with the same strategy, especially when the enemies have very different motivations. In addition, the tactics need to be assessed in order to understand how the war is being fought and who is the enemy. In Colombia, the FARC and AUC are trying to undermine security in populous cities. In Mexico, even though they use similar terrorist-style tactics, the targets are other cartel groups. But they have little sympathy for civilian causalities, which are considered collateral damage.

In *"Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative: Policy Twins or Distant Cousins?"* John Bailey argues "Colombia is a case of a complicated internal war in which drug production and trafficking play a significant role; Mexico is a case of hyper-violent criminal organizations that use terrorist-like methods to challenge the government and society."[25] So the causes of violence and instability in these two countries are very different.

Likewise, there are vast differences in the kind and amount of support the United States has offered these two countries. Plan Colombia has been supported by over $4.6 billion (over a decade with a continuing supplement of $500-$700 million per year from US Congress); most of these funds have gone directly to Colombia's government. On the other hand, the $1.3 billion (over two years) slated for Mérida Initiative is being spread not only between Mexico and Central America but also has been earmarked for Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In addition, the Colombian government has welcomed US troops on their territory to help with training and operations. But the

Mexican government is very reluctant to have US troops on their soil in fear of compromising their sovereignty. So Mexican soldiers come to the United States to be trained and then return to their country.

Human rights have been a major impediment to the Mexican government receiving its full funding. Although human rights were a major part of Plan Colombia, the State Department minimized the issue. Based on available public records, the State Department has never withheld funding for Plan Colombia because of human rights issues. But Mérida funding has been held up for long period because of alleged bureaucratic processes. Such delays would give any country pause to wonder if the United States was really committed to a partnership of cleaning up the borders and preserving the ability for governing bodies to enforce the rule of the law.

Should Plan Colombia be the model for Mexico and the Mérida Initiative? The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) argues that Plan Colombia should not be a model for Mexico because it primarily focuses on military support, rather than governance and services to the population. Mexico's governance is hindered by state and local corruption, which enables the drug cartel organizations to undermine the governing bodies. In addition, Mexico's judicial system is very corrupt and the cycle from initial investigation to final punishment runs for an inordinate amount of time.

Furthermore, Mexico does not have a great track record in human rights issues. Mexico's state and local police must be reformed to restore the people's confidence in their ability to secure the country. Unfortunately, Mexico's President Calderon has been forced to use the Mexican Army to secure the nation because they were the least

corrupt and capable of matching the cartels' weapons. But the Mexican citizens have little trust in the Army, which historically has protected tyrants and despots.

Based on the WOLA research, Plan Colombia's focus on the military and national police has been a success story of disrupting cartel strongholds and influencing farmers throughout the region. The presence of government was a lot more successful than attempts to fumigate the coca productions. Colombian Defense Ministry statistics document the success of the "Democratic Security" policy, but they only show part of the story. Since 2002-2009, homicides have been reduced by 36-45%, kidnappings reduced 36%, terrorist attacks down by 92%, strength of the FARC reduced by 50%, and number of military personnel increased by 42%.[26] However, this success has been tainted by human right violations, corruption in the inner circle of government, and refusals to convict criminals and similar delays in justice. In March 2010 elections, a pro-government party with ties to the National Integration Party (PIN) won nine Senate seats and 12 House seats. The "para-politics" party has links to the narcotics-trafficking since the 1980s and has been responsible for killing tens of thousands of non-combatants in the 1990s and early 2000s.[27] Now these people with a lack of respect for human rights are infiltrating a government that is struggling for legitimacy and to prove themselves in the human rights arena.

Mexico cannot afford to make those same mistakes. Already President Calderon's use of the Mexican Army to confront the cartels is causing much consternation among the people. The military at this point was the least corrupt and enjoys some respect. As the President continues to train more police, he will need to remove the Army after the cartels are manageable at a state and local level. With

billions of dollars at the cartels' disposal, the government must use all means to combat them. Dollar for dollar the country cannot keep up. One of Mexico's three greatest money producers has been tourism. In 2009, Mexico tourism declined by 15 percent caused by the swine flu (H1N1 virus) alert and drug cartel violence. This decline was the worst on record since the 11 September 2001 attacks.[28] Countries like Canada and United States are cautioning travel to Mexico based on the increase of violence and lack of security. Furthermore, the "day-trippers" have decline by a fifth in since the President's declaration of war against the drug cartels in 2006.[29] To entice tourism, Mexico has slashed the prices of hotel and resort packages resulting in tourist spending less than 5 percent of what they spent in 2008.

On that basis, Plan Colombia is arguably not the right model for the Mérida Initiative. However, lessons learned from Plan Colombia should definitely be applied as the United States continues to partner with Mexico. Therefore, the United States should consider the following elements in ensuring the success of its Mérida Initiative with Mexico:

- Expedite the funding and do not put restrictions on it. Monitor the progress and continue to build relations.
- Restructure the Mérida Initiative to increase the resources, training, and equipment to compete with the resources of the drug cartels by developing a joint task force border team with the Mexican government that gives both countries authority (within a specified jurisdiction) to clean up the border towns and enforce security policies and continuing to build relations with a soft power approach to building trust with the Mexican government.

- Review and revise the *Posse Comitatus Act* to provide flexibility by ensuring the right type and required amount of manpower; and
- Focus on increasing cross-border trade and reducing violence in the border towns. Commit more personnel on both sides, from intra-agencies and military. Consider aggressive economic programs on the border to reduce the temptation to engage in illegal activities.

The success of all of the above elements depends on commitment from the Mexican government to engage using the same standards. If each country uses different security standards to monitor the border, this disparity would frustrate efforts and possibly impede legitimate trade and commerce between the countries. Without trained personnel and monetary support, Beyond Mérida will not be sufficient to offset the wealth of the drug cartels and possible terrorist activity.

Unlike Beyond Mérida as currently constituted, incorporating the above elements provides a holistic approach to this national security issue. It provides a strategy for aggressively targeting the drug cartels, restoring order and security. In addition, the soft strategy of this initiative provides for rebuilding communities to break the cycle of the youth thinking they have “zero choices.” Committing economic resources to rebuild the social infrastructure in targeted border communities will keep a vulnerable group from aiding the cartels.[30]

Furthermore, this strategy does not allow for withholding funds and resources on the basis of narrow human rights judgments. However, it demands progress, cooperation, and collaboration from the Mexican government. It accepts that there will be setbacks and practices that may not be aligned with US values.

This strategy along with any other strategy still entails some risk. However, the risk is relatively small in respect to national security on the Southern border. Human rights violations in Mexico based on US standards will have to be tolerated by the US government in the short-term. The United States will have to set aside judgment as the Mexican government continues to purge the corruption and instill the values of proper conduct while enforcing their laws and constitution. In addition, the commitment of monetary aid supporting both resources and manpower will be competing against well established commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hard choices will have to be made by the Obama Administration and Congress to ensure the right focus and aid is directed to protect the Southern border. This commitment is pivotal in building a joint task with a solid foundation between governments that last well beyond defined presidential terms.

Conclusion

The Beyond Mérida needs to be furthered refined to fit Mexico's situation similar to where after several revisions Plan Colombia as currently constituted works for Colombia. Even though one of their commonalities are centered around the target enemy which uses drugs as their source of power and money, the two enemies' political and economical agendas are completely different. When enemies have different political agendas, it is unproductive to apply the same tactics to defeat and disrupt their operations. However, lessons learned from Plan Colombia are invaluable and should be applied appropriately to shape the Mérida Initiative for future success.

Overall, the US support to Mexico is on the right track, but only in the context of further refinements to the Beyond Mérida. The State Department and the inter-agencies should continue the forward press on implementing programs and delivering monetary aid. The United States needs to be more understanding and willing to accept some

setbacks. But the United States should not turn a blind eye; rather it should attempt to correct those setbacks without disrupting a partnership that is pivotal in correcting the situation. The United States should exercise oversight, but not be overbearing.

If the United States does not fully commit to this issue, then the drug cartels will likely continue to prosper and disrupt with impunity. If this trend continues the United States may see an increase in security threats from the Southern border and may not be able to protect the security of US border towns. If this national security issue is not positively addressed, it will likely become a larger national burden.

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