

Coordinated like the Criminals:
A Policy Analysis of the Current and Future
U.S. Responses to Drug Cartels

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ABSTRACT

The presence of drug cartels within Mexico impacts U.S. national security, foreign policy, U.S. crime rates, and public health policy. Due to the direct and indirect effects that the cartels have on the United States, this paper examines the Mérida Initiative, the current U.S. anti-cartel policy, and makes several recommendations for future policy directions. Using official documents as well as current academic research, this paper examines the outcomes of past comparable policies that the United States has implemented in Colombia and Afghanistan to address the issue of drug trafficking. The paper then builds on the present successes of the Mérida Initiative by recommending several policies in the areas of international cooperation, agricultural development, Mexican targeting and enforcement, and U.S. law enforcement. This paper recommends that information sharing between countries should be increased to reduce the likelihood that pressure placed on cartels will cause displacement; crop eradication cease and alternative crop development be implemented to reduce illicit crop growth; the joint Mexican-U.S. enforcement focus should move from high-value targets to more highly connected members; the United States should increase vetting for gun purchases to help keep guns out of the hands of cartel members; and domestic drug policies should shift toward treatment and demand-focused policies. By implementing the recommended policies, this paper suggests that the influence of cartels within Mexico as well as the United States may be reduced.

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Due to Mexico's proximity to the United States as well as its position in U.S. foreign and economic policy, current events in Mexico have a unique impact on U.S. security. The presence and dominance of drug cartels in Mexico is of special importance to the United States (Bonner, 2010; Lindau, 2011; Pan, Widner, & Enomoto, 2012). Although cartels have had a significant presence in Mexico for decades, the beginning of the Mexican drug war in 2006 heralded a period of increased activity on the part of these trans-national criminal organizations (TCO's) (Bonner, 2010; Cook, 2007). The past few years have seen an increase in drug addiction in Mexico as well as the continued presence of corruption and unrest throughout the country (Chabat, 2002; Willoughby, 2003). Since 2006, an estimated 60,000 individuals in Mexico have been killed by violence associated with drug cartels (Hope, 2013).

The United States and Mexico are highly interconnected in a number of realms and the manners in which the issue of drug cartels is handled will have an impact on both countries' crime rates, public health, national security and political relationship. American citizens are the primary clientele of the Mexican drug cartels and 90% of the drugs that enter the United States come from Mexico (Bronk & González-Aréchiga, 2011; Cook, 2007; Department of State, 2009; Pope, 2009; Willoughby, 2010; Valeriano & Powers, 2010). Although the cartels pose a threat to the United States, the U.S. has a large role in their continued existence and growth within Mexico. The cartels are headquartered in Mexico, but they purchase their guns and make their money within the United States. Essentially, the cartels are armed and funded on the U.S. side of the border. Domestically, with nearly a million individuals arrested each year for drug use

within the United States and thousands of deaths each year due to drug overdoses, the issue of drugs within the United States and their source is an important national policy concern (CDC, 2010; Shepard & Blackley, 2004). Further, the Mexican drug cartels currently pose the number one crime threat to the United States and, due to the high crime rates concentrated in the border regions of Mexico, should the cartels go unchecked, violence from Mexico could spill over the U.S.-Mexican border (del Bosque, 2009; Longmire & Longmire, 2008; Yeh, 2012). Beyond the threat that the cartels pose domestically to the United States, they create a problem when dealing with Mexico, a close political and economic ally. The level of corruption within the Mexican government propagated by the cartels makes dealings with the Mexican government challenging and the level of violence within the country creates difficulties for U.S. companies attempting to operate in and cooperate with Mexico (Bonner, 2010; Carpenter, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Lindau, 2011; Willoughby, 2003). By helping Mexico deal with its cartel problem, the United States will, in turn, help create a more stable political situation between the two countries as well as create a more stable trade situation. The problem of the cartels has a basis on both sides of the border and the United States has to recognize its own role in the problem when dealing with the Mexican cartels.

Although the U.S. has taken a role in addressing the current situations within Mexico, there has been little examination of the current U.S. response to drug violence in Mexico. This policy paper will examine the current U.S. policy toward Mexico, the Mérida Initiative, and explore potential future directions that the policy can take to better address the presence of drug violence and the presence of organized crime entities within

Mexico through a review of official government documents and current research on past and current U.S. drug policies as well as the present situation in Mexico. The question at issue is how can U.S. policy effectively respond to the dangers posed by Mexican drug cartels?

Background

Drug cartels are far from a new phenomenon. Cartels have been active in countries like Mexico and Colombia for decades. The rise of the present-day Mexican cartels originated with the fall of the cartels in Colombia (Bonner, 2010; Chepesiuk, 2003; Cook, 2007; Kellner & Pipitone, 2010; Willoughby, 2003). The Cali and Medellin cartels were the primary trans-national criminal actors in South America in the 70's, 80's and 90's (Brookings Institute, 2010; Chepesiuk, 2003). The cartels controlled the Colombian government through widespread corruption and bribes and intimidated the people of Colombia using terrorist-like tactics (Chepesiuk, 2003; Dolan, 2005; Gray, 2012). In conjunction with the government of Colombia, the United States implemented Plan Colombia, a policy designed to strengthen the Colombian government while routing the leaders of the large cartels and dispersing their power (Chepesiuk, 2003; Fukumi, 2008; Gray, 2012; Johnson, 2001; Livingstone, 2004). Although this plan successfully diminished the power of the Colombian cartels, U.S. actions in Colombia inadvertently increased the strength and power of the Mexican cartels (Chepesiuk, 2003; Cook, 2007; Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). Prior to U.S. intervention in Colombia, the Mexican cartels acted as distributors for the more powerful Colombian cartels (Chepesiuk, 2003). As pressure on Colombian cartels increased, they began paying the Mexican cartels in drug

product rather than cash, allowing the Mexican cartels to gain their own foothold in the U.S. drug market (Bonner, 2010; Chepesiuk, 2003; Cook, 2007; Kellner & Pipitone, 2010; Willoughby, 2003). The level of drug consumption within the United States funded the rise of the Mexican cartels.

Mexican drug cartels' primary clientele are U.S. drug users. Because 90% of the drugs that enter the U.S. come from Mexico, U.S. drug use is the primary source of funds for the cartels (Bronk & González-Aréchiga, 2011; Cook, 2007; Department of State, 2009; Pope, 2009; Willoughby, 2010; Valeriano & Powers, 2010). Although many would view U.S. drug use as an independent issue, the Mexican cartel problem and the U.S. drug war are intrinsically linked. Since the rise in crime of the 1970's and 80's and the beginning of the U.S. "War on Drugs," U.S. drug policies have focused on enforcement, targeting the supply side of the supply and demand drug sale equation (Sevigny, Pollack & Reuter, 2013; Tonry, 1994). Rather than emphasize treatment, U.S. policies have traditionally focused on arresting the dealers and distributors at the top of the ladder while, at the same time, imprisoning users and dealers (Benson, Rasmussen, & Kim, 1998; Corsaro & Brunson, 2013; Sevigny, Pollack & Reuter, 2013; Shepard & Blacklet, 2004; Spohn, 2007; Sung, 2003; Tonry, 1994). Incarceration-focused drug enforcement does not decrease recidivism and has, in some cases, actually been shown to increase both crime and drug use (Benson, Rasmussen & Kim, 1998; Corsaro & Brunson, 2013, Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009; Pluge, Yudkin & Douglas, 2008; Sevigny, Pollack & Reuter, 2013; Spohn, 2007; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; Sung, 2003). The U.S.

policies and their failure to reduce drug consumption have continued to feed the cartels and bolster their presence within Mexico.

While the United States has focused on fighting the presence of drugs through enforcement, the Mexican government has been busy fighting the presence of corruption within their political structure. The political climate in Mexico was one that permitted the acceptance of bribes and corruption. The PRI party ruled the Mexican government for 70 years (Bonner, 2010; Carpenter, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Lindau, 2011; Willoughby, 2003). The party largely allowed the cartels to flourish and operate with impunity while accepting bribes from multiple parties. The PRI's fall from political power created a power vacuum that permitted the cartels to further increase their power (Bonner, 2010; Carpenter, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Lindau, 2011; Willoughby, 2003). The corruption extended through both the military and the police force; members of both of which were often threatened with death should they refuse cartel bribes or orders (Cook, 2007; Kellner & Pipitone, 2010; Lindau, 2011; Pan, Widner, & Enomoto, 2012). Future presidents who attempted to move away from the system of corruption faced an uphill battle due to how ingrained such practices were within the Mexican culture (Bonner, 2010; Carpenter, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Lindau, 2011).

While crime and corruption were part of Mexican society prior to the 1990's, 1994 marked an increase of 70% in the overall crime rate of Mexico (Willoughby, 2003). From 1989-1994, the Mexican cartels had begun to gain power due to the pressure being put on the Colombian cartels and during this time period, they began a series of over 400 political assassinations to increase their influence (Willoughby, 2003). Most of these

assassinations took place in the state of Michoacán (Willoughby, 2003) By the time Felipe Calderon took office in 2006, violence had increased dramatically in several areas of the country, particularly his home state of Michoacán (Cook, 2007; Gonzalez, 2009; Negroponte, 2009). Within weeks of his election, Calderon sent over 6,000 troops to Michoacán to combat the organized crime groups in the state who were responsible for the deaths of over 500 people that year and who controlled large portions of the state (Bonner, 2010; Cook, 2007; Pan, Widner, & Enomoto, 2012; Weinburg, 2008).

Operation Michoacán is widely considered the beginning of the current Mexican Drug War (Bonner, 2010; Cook, 2007; Pan, Widner, & Enomoto, 2012; Weinburg, 2008). Since the start of the drug war, over 60,000 deaths have occurred in connection to the country-wide drug conflict (Hope, 2013). Under Calderon, the Mexican government began the long process of attempting to reduce and eliminate corruption within its ranks (Cook, 2007; Gonzalez, 2009). Drug enforcement in Mexico has focused less on users and more on the big name leaders at the head of some of the country's largest cartels (Felbab-Brown V. , 2011). The idea behind this strategy was that, as occurred in Colombia, taking out cartel leaders would lead to the dismantling of the cartels themselves. However, as there were many cartels operating in Mexico, the elimination of cartels leaders has led to violent territory battles and the splitting of larger cartels into smaller ones (Felbab-Brown V. , 2011). Further, while cartels have traditionally relied on drug sales and profits for their income, they are fundamentally business entities (Chepesiuk, 2003). When the U.S. and Mexico took a greater interest in their drug business, the criminal organizations began to expand their business into extortion and

kidnapping for ransom to generate additional income (Longmire & Longmire, 2008; Pan, Widner, & Enomoto, 2012).

When President Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI came into power in 2012, he promised to reduce violence in Mexico and to cease following the targeted enforcement strategies of the prior president, however, many of the changes he has made appear to be cosmetic (Hope, 2013). The current administration is still using many of the Calderon administration's tactics to address the cartel issue. With some reluctance, the administration has continued to pursue enforcement-focused tactics such as the targeting of high-profile targets and a military-centered response to the presence of cartels (Hope, 2013). The administrations differ largely in how much coverage and importance they lend to the Mexican Drug War within the context of their verbalized policies. During his first year in office, homicides decreased by 15%, but kidnappings and extortions are higher than they were during the worst years of the Calderon administration (Hope, 2013). Further, while states such as Chihuahua, previously the most violent in the country, have seen decreases in violence and homicide, the violence appears to have moved to states such as Jalisco and Guerrero (Hope, 2013). While Peña Nieto has avoided making fighting cartels a public goal of his administration, it is clear that behind the scenes it remains a priority and that little has changed since the Calderon administration (Hope, 2013).

Given the background on the formation and presences of drug cartels in Mexico and the impact that these cartels have on the United States, the following literature review will focus on further defining drug cartels and policy responses to them. The review will

explore, in-depth, the current theories of cartel formation and evolution, followed by a review of the Mérida Initiative to date as well as two other prominent U.S. foreign drug policies that have been enacted in Colombia and Afghanistan.

Review of Literature

Although the U.S. has enacted drug policies in regard to other regions and countries, those implemented in Colombia and Afghanistan are some of the most prominent instances of U.S. drug policy abroad. Additionally, due to Colombia's position as a precursor country for the Mexican cartels, the presence of narco-terrorism in Afghanistan, and the rural nature of many of the drug sources in both countries, the policies within the two countries can be examined and compared to those that would be suited for Mexico. While it is important to examine the policies enacted in both Afghanistan and Colombia, both have had their failings. Colombia's policies were successful overall, but displaced the drug trade to Mexico; and Afghanistan's policies have been unsuccessful in curbing the opium originating within the country. The review of literature will conclude by examining the past and current iterations of the Mérida Initiative. While the Mexican-U.S. partnership has had some level of success, it has not succeeded in routing the cartels or reducing the drug trade out of Mexico. Further, it is yet to be seen how the policy will change as it enters a new phase under President Peña Nieto.

Cartels Defined

Before examining the U.S. policy responses to drug-trafficking organizations that have been enacted in Colombia, Afghanistan and Mexico, it is necessary to conduct a

more in-depth review of cartels and their structure and evolution. Drug cartels are business entities motivated by power and wealth (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Profit serves as a motivator for them and drugs and criminal activities merely represent commodities and business ventures (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Violence is not an end, but only a byproduct of the type of business marketplace in which these cartels operate (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Although they are business entities, these cartels operate somewhat like an insurgency, working to win the hearts and minds of the people to better sell their product and allow an ease of operation (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). In order to operate successfully within a county, the cartels need a certain level of political dominance, pitting them against the government (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). While several Mexican cartels engage in kidnappings, beheadings and assassinations of government officials, cartel actions as a whole appear designed more to gain respect for cartel leadership rather than alter political positions (Carpenter, 2010; Pacheco, 2009). As a whole, although the cartels are not motivated by an ideology, like stereotypical terrorists, they are engaged in an insurgency within Mexico. The cartels are fighting the government for political dominance. The difference lies in motivation, rather than tactics.

Some researchers are now using the three-phase model to describe different types of cartels, their evolution and the responses necessitated by each. A Phase One cartel is an aggressive competitor (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). This typology of cartel is exemplified by the Colombian cartels of the 80's, such as the

Medellin cartel, that grew out of the U.S. cocaine demand (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Phase One cartels are highly hierarchical and display a willingness to use extreme violence to challenge the state in which they operate for control; however, due to their structure and violent nature, these cartels tend to be ultimately organizationally suicidal (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). The Medellin Cartel embodied the Phase One typology. The cartel was hyper-violent and due to their focus on terrorist-like tactics and their hierarchical structure, became a target for law enforcement and, after the capture of their leader Pablo Escobar, were unable to endure (Chepesiuk, 2003). Phase Two cartels, exemplified by the Cali cartel, are subtle co-opters (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). These cartels retain more anonymity than Phase One cartels and are more distributed and network-based, relying on a terrorist-like cell structure (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Because of the more anonymous and less hierarchical leadership structure, these cartels are less susceptible to attacks that focus on eliminating the leadership structure of the cartel (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). This structure was also present in some early Mexican cartels such as the Sinaloa cartel and Juarez cartel, both of whom utilized gangs, enforcers and other subsidiaries to distribute product and, at times, carry out violent actions to allow for a degree of separation from the cartel. Phase Three cartels have not yet fully emerged in the world (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). This type of cartel is referred to as the criminal state successor and has the potential to pose a significant threat to nation-states (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Their primary tools are corruption and the co-optation of political and

state institutions and they operate primarily like warlords (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). There is some concern that the criminal insurgency in Mexico could produce a Phase Three cartel, particularly as some Mexican cartels, such as Los Zetas and the Knights Templar have attributes of both Phase Two and Phase Three cartels.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia was the name given to the U.S.-Colombian partnership that sought to combat the cartel presence on Colombian soil. The initiative aimed to stabilize Colombia and create peace while fighting to destabilize the drug trafficking industry (Livingstone, 2004). There were ten essential elements of the original plan including,

- (1) an economic strategy to counterbalance narco-trafficking, (2) a fiscal and financial strategy to recover from financial crisis, (3) a military strategy to modernize armed forces and police to fight against organized crime and armed groups, (4) a judicial and human rights strategy to reaffirm the rule of law, (5) a counter-narcotics strategy to combat production and consumption of illegal drugs, (6) an alternate development strategy to promote agricultural activity for rural farmers and their families, (7) a social participation strategy aimed at creating accountable businesses and government to combat corruption, (8) a human development strategy to promote efforts to guarantee adequate education and health, (9) a peace strategy involving a peace agreement with insurgencies, and (10) an international strategy that aimed to involve the international community in the plan (Livingstone, 2004).

As initially envisioned, the plan would have involved aid from the U.S. as well as Europe to combat poverty within Colombia while building the infrastructure (Livingstone, 2004; Fukumi, 2008). United States gave \$1.3 billion for eradication and interdiction, the EU was asked to commit \$2 billion for alternate crop development and government reform and Colombia committed to give \$4 billion (Johnson, 2001; Dolan, 2005). Were the plan executed ideally, USAID would have assisted the Colombian government with the

development of infrastructure and local farmers with the development of alternate crops to replace drug crops (Fukumi, 2008). Unfortunately, the aid expected to come from Europe never materialized and the eventual implementation had a low emphasis on development (Dolan, 2005; Colombia's War on Drugs, 2007; Fukumi, 2008; Johnson, 2001). The farmers were also subject to retaliation by local insurgents and forced eradication programs created some level of resentment among the Colombian peasants (Dolan, 2005; Fukumi, 2008; Gray, 2012). Despite the faults of the agricultural policies, the large cartels of the 1980's have been dismantled and broken into smaller more manageable cartels (Chepesiuk, 2003). The intelligence, military aid, training, and technology provided to Colombia by the United States combined with the improvement of Colombia's extradition process allowed for a significant reduction in organized crime in Colombia (Rempel, 2012). During Colombia's Uribe Administration, kidnappings were reduced by 72 percent, terror attacks by 63 percent and homicides by 37 percent (Burns, 2006).

Although Plan Colombia was not implemented as initially envisioned, the policy still successfully reduced the presence of organized crime and drug trafficking in Colombia. Overall, it was a successful operation. However, the policies did not go far enough to protect the people of Colombia from retaliation and the intended agricultural development plan was not successfully implemented. The overall issue with Plan Colombia was that it only addressed a small portion of the drug cartel problem. While the joint policy successfully reduced the presence of cartels in the country itself, as there was still a demand for the product, the drug business merely migrated to countries such as

Mexico. Plan Colombia routed the cartels domestically, making them the problem of another country; it did not eliminate them or the problems they pose on a larger scale.

Response in Afghanistan

Opium has been a persistent problem in Afghanistan for decades (Manfredi, 2008; Yamin, 2013; Clemens, 2008; Chouvy, 2010; Felbab-Brown V., 2013a). Since the beginning of the War in Afghanistan, the U.S. has worked with Afghan officials to reduce the prevalence of poppy crops in the country. Currently, 90% of the world's opium originates in Afghanistan and the industry employed 2.4 million Afghans (Manfredi, 2008; Yamin, 2013; Clemens, 2008; Chouvy, 2010; Felbab-Brown V., 2013a). The U.S. Initiative in Afghanistan rests on five pillars: public information, judicial reform, alternative livelihood development, interdiction, and eradication (MacDonald, 2007). The public information programs raise awareness about the dangers of narcotics use. Judicial reforms strive to improve narcotics case processing (MacDonald, 2007).

Alternate development projects have been used by NGO's with government backing to encourage farmers to cease growing poppies while providing them with alternate sources of agricultural income (Clemens, 2008; MacDonald, 2007). Voluntary and forced eradication programs that use crop dusting to eliminate the poppy crops are commonly grown in Afghanistan (Clemens, 2008; Chouvy, 2010; MacDonald, 2007; Felbab-Brown V., 2013a; Dolan, 2005). Beyond this farmer-targeted policy, the U.S. also assists with the implementation of interdiction programs to intercept opium on its way out of the country (Clemens, 2008; MacDonald, 2007). Unfortunately, less than 2%

of the opium created in Afghanistan is estimated to be impounded by Afghan and NATO forces on its way out of the country and, opium production in Afghanistan has actually increased since 2001 (Yamin, 2013). In 2008, the country produced 40 times more opium than was produced in 2001 (Yamin, 2013; MacDonald, 2007; Felbab-Brown V. , 2013a; Dolan, 2005). Interdiction has increased opium production as farmers are forced to grow and provide more opium to meet global demand to compensate for that which is unable to leave the country (Clemens, 2008; Dolan, 2005). Further, eliminating the crops has had terrible impacts on the farmers as they have no alternate source of income (Chouvy, 2010; Felbab-Brown V., 2013a). Alternate development programs have been short lived due to corruption and implementation difficulties, and the large infusion of billions of dollars in foreign aid has generated a large amount of corruption in the country (Felbab-Brown V. , 2013a).

Although U.S. interference in the Afghan opium trade was well-intentioned, due to a lack of planning and the unsuccessful implementation of several components of the plan, the opium trade has continued to grow. Interdiction has proved ineffective (Yamin, 2013). Alternative development, while initially promising, was not implemented rapidly or effectively (Felbab-Brown V. , 2013a). Rather than reduce the presence of opium in Afghanistan, U.S. drug policy within the country has caused an increase in the trade to compensate for the eliminated or confiscated opium. The lack of success that the U.S. has had in Afghanistan emphasizes the need for careful consideration of the potential side-effects of well-intentioned drug policies prior to implementation.

Mérida Initiative

The Mérida Initiative is the U.S.-Mexico Partnership, signed into law in 2008, which seeks to counter cartel activity in Mexico. Rather than a U.S.-led program, the Mérida Initiative is a partnership between the two countries' governments that involves cooperation on both sides of the border (U.S. Department of State, 2009). Mexico has invested a significant amount of its own money in the Initiative as well (Security, Committee on Foreign Affairs & Committee on Homeland, 2011; Office of the Spokesperson, 2012). The four primary pillars of the Mérida initiative are to disrupt organized criminal groups, to strengthen institutions, to build a 21st century border, and to build strong and resilient communities (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2012). The program, which began in 2008, provided \$1.6 billion to accomplish these objectives by providing equipment and training to Mexican law enforcement (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2012). Funds help link information databases pertaining to narcotics as well as establish accredited law enforcement institutions to train Mexican federal police and correctional staff (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2012; Government Accountability Office, 2010). The overall focus is on improving intelligence collection abilities, assisting with money laundering and interdiction investigations, and putting pressure on all aspects of cartels business operations (U.S. Congress, 2010; Government Accountability Office, 2010).

Under the Obama administration, the initiative has increased the emphasis on institutional capacity building and training as well as support and intelligence sharing (Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 2012; Office of the Spokesperson, 2012;

Jacobson, 2010). Using a “train-the-trainer” model, part of the U.S. initiative aims to teach police, military officials, and prosecutors skills that will allow for more advanced action against cartels while avoiding a situation where the institutions would be reliant on the U.S. government (Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 2012; Security, Committee on Foreign Affairs & Committee on Homeland, 2011). The Obama administration has also decreased the emphasis on purchasing equipment for Mexican military and police institutions (Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 2012).

The Initiative was slow to get off the ground due to an extensive amount of red tape and a lack of initial cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico. Further, funding has historically applied funds unevenly across the goal categories. An evaluation of the Mérida Initiative in 2010 found that only 2% of the funds that had been appropriated to the initiative had actually been used on the ground in Mexico (U.S. Congress, 2010). As of 2012, more funding was cleared for use in Mexico, hitting a stride of \$500 million annually (Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 2012). From 2007-2010, 72 percent of U.S. assistance to Mexico has been spent on military and security expenditures for Mexican military and law enforcement (Carpenter, 2013). In the 2011 foreign assistance budget for Mexico, only .6 percent went to fund education and only 6 percent funded development assistance (Carpenter, 2013). Of the present funding, 84 percent has been allocated to International Narcotics and Law Enforcement who manages many of the in-country programs and an additional \$9.1 million was dedicated for training and assistance to the military. Only in recent years has USAID begun using US funding to provide education and job training to youth in high-risk areas, forming partnerships

between local government and NGOs (Carpenter, 2013). Cooperation between the Mexican and U.S. government is slow and both funding and programs have faced significant wait times prior to implementation (Government Accountability Office, 2010; House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011).

Policy Recommendations for the Mérida Initiative

Under President Obama, the Mérida Initiative entered a new phase. The partnership continues to develop under the new leadership of Mexican President Peña Nieto. This next phase is intended to build on the law enforcement groundwork laid during Phase One and to pave the way toward a Post-Mérida future. Phase One was not as effective at reducing organized crime in Mexico as could be desired and, as such, additional changes may be warranted for the next phase of the program. The following recommendations include policies to be enacted on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border as the cartels operate in both countries and the policies and events in both countries impact the other.

International Cooperation within the Americas

American anti-drug policies in Latin and South American should work to improve integration and coordination. Current plans targeted at the reduction of organized crime and cartel influence in the Americas tend to target one country or region at a time (i.e. Plan Colombia, Mérida Initiative, Andean Counterdrug Initiative, etc.). This, however, does not match the reality that Mexican drug cartels are largely transnational criminal organizations that operate across borders and have bases of operation and spheres of influence in multiple countries. Creating a center that would promote cooperation or some

level of coordination between the initiatives and the individuals involved in each operation could allow for increased information sharing on criminal activity between countries, an increased database of missing persons, and could allow for smoother enforcement responses to the cartel presence in each country (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Additionally, such a plan would inhibit the cartels' usual pattern of moving regions and countries when they are routed in one (House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Working to ensure that cartels do not just move from Mexico to another location when pressure is placed on them in one country is vital to creating a long-term solution to the present problem. Although, as with any such plan, integrating so many moving parts or even just improving communication between the different operations would likely involve a significant amount of work and time. Considering the trans-national scope of cartels and their tendency to move from country to country when threatened, increasing the coordination and information sharing between countries would permit preventative groundwork to be laid. Such a policy would have the added benefit of reducing the chances that policies enacted in Mexico would inadvertently negatively impact or alienate the surrounding countries as it would open a communication pipeline.

Agriculture

Although, in the past, a mixture of forced eradication via crop dusting and voluntary eradication of drug crops have been used to combat drug product, the Mérida Initiative should move toward a reliance on voluntary eradication combined with alternative development. Under voluntary eradication, farmers are paid to eliminate their drug crops and, either the government or partner NGO's, help the farmers to maintain a

living wage by assisting with the plantation of cash crops or the improvement of infrastructure to reduce the costs of bringing crops to the market (Chouvy, 2010; Felbab-Brown V., 2013a; Fukumi, 2008; Livingstone, 2004; Felbab-Brown V. , 2009). As a U.S. policy, it would primarily involve the financing of such an option to be executed by an NGO or the Mexican government. Such an option would allow the farmers to maintain a livable wage while reducing the prevalence of drug crops; however, voluntary crop eradication can be politically unfeasible (Chouvy, 2012). Poverty in rural Mexico has allowed cartels to cultivate more support among the rural populations as they turn to drug cultivation for income and, as a cause of increased cartel influence, must be addressed. From a United States political standpoint, forced crop eradication via crop dusting would allow for clear and definable results; however, such an option could be seen as an invasion of Mexican sovereignty and is not sustainable over time. From a human standpoint, such an option would be costly and could serve to drive Mexican citizens into a position where they have to support cartels to survive. Many of the farmers who are growing drug crops use the crops to supplement their income in order to make enough to feed their families (Chouvy, 2010; Fukumi, 2008; Chouvy, 2012). Eradicating these crops could leave many starving and the pesticides that are used for crop eradication can leave farm workers ill (Chouvy, 2010; Livingstone, 2004). Some scholars assert that forced eradication targets a symptom of overall poverty in a country rather than the root cause of illicit crop production (Chouvy, 2010; Fukumi, 2008). Overall, while crop eradication may be a direct solution to one problem it may cause a host of others.

Implementing voluntary eradication and alternative development, however, does require that a significant amount of groundwork be laid before the policy is implemented, much of which would have to be done by either the Mexican government or NGO's. While farmers may immediately destroy drug crops, getting past red tape to improve infrastructure or help with crop diversification can be difficult to implement in a timely fashion, leaving farmers disillusioned with the alternative (Felbab-Brown V. , 2013a; Fukumi, 2008). To be really effective, all parts of the policy would have to be executed swiftly and some agreement would have to be negotiated with either the Mexican military or Mexican police to help prevent cartel retaliation against farmers participating in the program (Chouvy, 2012; Felbab-Brown V., 2009). Additionally, the policy would have to heavily involve the local and national branches of the Mexican government. Due to the history between the United States and Mexico, any policies implemented must be part of a partnership between the two countries and must avoid the impression that the United States is infringing upon Mexican sovereignty. As such, an infrastructure development policy would have to be done in conjunction with domestic entities in Mexico.

Enforcement Response

The current approach of pursuing high value targets is commonly utilized and very popular, but social network analysis may serve as a more information-driven way to dismantle cartels. The United States could train Mexican crime analysts on the usage of social network mapping, a technique that allows analysts to map out connections within networks, criminal or otherwise, using information already on file within police departments. Rather than using the information gained from a network analysis or

intelligence information to only focus on high value targets, network analysis information could be utilized to capture or kill the middlemen of the cartel organization. Those individuals who are most highly connected within the cartel organization, who connect the top of the chain to the bottom may be far more difficult to replace as their status is based on personal connections rather than power. As most currently existing cartels are Phase Two cartels and have a more terrorist-like networked structure, this approach would be more tailored toward addressing the current realities of cartel organization. The current enforcement response spearheaded by the Mexican-U.S. partnership focuses on eliminating big name cartel leaders under the assumption that eliminating cartel leadership will lead to the disbandment of the cartels. Continuing to target these high value targets can, as we have seen in Colombia, successfully break up large cartels; however, doing so has the potential to cause infighting and violence within cartels as new players vie for the lead position within the organization, as we have seen in Mexico (Felbab-Brown, 2011; House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). As cartels are broken up and targeted by the Mexican government there has been a corresponding increase in violence until a clear victor emerges (Felbab-Brown, 2011; House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 2011). Although continuing this enforcement technique would cost little as it is already the policy of the current government and has a certain level of political appeal, it has not led to a clear decline in cartel activity in Mexico. Further, implementing a network analysis-focused approach would require little extra funding on the part of the United States as training for Mexican police agencies is already part of the Mérida Initiative.

U.S. Domestic Responses

Although cartels are primarily a problem on Mexican soil, they clearly have an impact on the United States. U.S. domestic policy may be able to impact cartel dominance in Mexico without interfering with Mexican sovereignty.

Increase vetting on gun sales in U.S.

Considering that 60,000 Mexican deaths have been connected to the drug violence in Mexico, gun control is clearly a large issue. As purchasing a gun in Mexico for anyone who is not a member of the military or police is difficult, cartels have turned to the U.S. Border States for their supply of guns (Weinburg, 2008). Cartel members use straw buyers in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to purchase weapons for them and then run them over the border (Cottam & Marenin, 2005; Pacheco, 2009; Weinburg, 2008). Although licensed dealers are required to check ID's and perform background checks, private gun show sellers are not subject to the same requirements (Cottam & Marenin, 2005; Weinburg, 2008). Considering that 40% of all gun sales in the U.S. take place within this second-hand market, the lack of firm regulation makes gun shows an easy target for Mexican gun runners (Cottam & Marenin, 2005; Weinburg, 2008). Implementing increasingly critical vetting purchases for gun buyers and increasing security regulations at gun sales in these states could reduce the proliferation of guns to the Mexican cartels. Considering the fact that between 80%-90% of the guns used in Mexico's crimes originate in the United States it appears nearly irresponsible to not implement such measures (Carpenter, 2010; Cottam & Marenin, 2005; Weinburg, 2008; Willoughby, 2003). Unfortunately, such regulation may prove politically challenging

due to political realities within the United States as any attempt to regulate this market may be viewed as a violation of Second Amendment rights (Weinburg, 2008).

Target demand

Cartels are, fundamentally, illicit corporations fueled by their profits. As the profit source (drug users) is primarily located within the United States, a domestic policy may be a more appropriate vehicle for addressing this portion of the cartel issue.

Demand-focused strategies produce long-term incentives for producers to quit the market since suppliers operate within the realm of illicit business, the activity no longer becomes profitable (Kanjilal, 2002). Current policies largely focus on the supply; however, these policies do not appear to have largely reduced drug use within the U.S. While enforcement strategies that focus on prison time and criminal sanctions are politically popular, they have been largely found to lead to increased recidivism and continued drug use (Benson, Rasmusen & Kim, 1998; Corsaro & Brunson, 2013, Nieuwebeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009; Pluge, Yudkin & Douglas, 2008; Sevigny, Pollack & Reuter, 2013; Spohn, 2007; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; Sung, 2003). Enforcement strategies for drug use have been linked to higher rates of property and violent crime across geographical areas as well as increased emergency room visits and deaths due to overdoses (Benson, Rasmusen & Kim, 1998; Shepard & Blackley, 2004) Focusing on the treatment of drug users to allow them to fight their addiction would rob cartels of customers to continue fueling their profits. Incarcerating users only removes them from the drug market for a short period of time and may actually increase drug use in the long run (DeBeck et al., 2007; Sevigny, Pollack, & Reuter, 2013; O'Connell et al., 2011; Spohn, 2007; Spohn &

Holleran, 2002). Treating them and giving them tools to fight drug use within their own lives may serve as a more long-term solution to their drug use (O’Connell et al., 2011; Sevigny, Pollack, & Reuter, 2013; Spohn, 2007; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). While this solution may appear attractive, it is not popular within the U.S. as such policies are not consistent with the popular “Get Tough on Crime” policies. Although some would argue that it is not the responsibility of the U.S. to curtail its citizen’s drug use to help Mexico reduce cartel influence, the impact that drug use has on the United States indicates otherwise. In 2001 alone over 1.5 million individuals were arrested for illegal drugs, with the majority for possession as opposed to sales or manufacture (Shepard & Blackley, 2004). Millions of dollars in productivity are lost each year in the workplace due to drug use and arrest and drug overdoses are responsible for nearly 40,000 deaths in 2010 (CDC, 2010). The influx of drugs to the United States clearly impacts the country in a tangible manner. Demand reduction has been shown to be one of the most effective manners of reducing drug use and, in addition to addressing multiple social, economic, and crime issues within the United States, it will help reduce the profit margin of the cartels.

Discussion

As new administrations have come into power in both the United States and Mexico, the future direction of the Mérida Initiative is in a state of flux. This paper offers five principle recommendations for the Mérida Initiative and the U.S.-Mexican partnership as it continues to change and evolve under the Obama and Peña Nieto administrations.

- The U.S. should spearhead a movement toward increased cooperation and information sharing between countries in North and South America. Due to the

international nature of the Mexican cartels as well as the precedent set by their Colombian predecessors, an international partnership is necessary to share information and combat the cartels in a multi-national effort to reduce the likelihood that the cartels will relocate to a country where they are under less pressure.

- Cease the use of forced eradication and crop dusting to deal with the presence of illicit crops in the Mexican country side. Instead, the U.S. government should partner with NGO's to increase the prevalence of alternative development projects in Mexico to address the poverty that has pushed many rural farmers to work with cartels.
- In conjunction with the Mexican government, the United States should transition from a focus on capturing or eliminating high value targets to focusing enforcement efforts on the most highly connected cartel members. These connectors are less easily replaced than cartel heads and their absence from the network will likely not lead to a power struggle within the cartel, avoiding some of the violence that results from the removal of cartel heads.
- On the domestic front, U.S. policies should be implemented to increase the vetting of purchasers in second-hand gun sales. Such a policy does little to limit second amendment rights and has the added bonus of making the U.S. as well as Mexico more secure by reducing the likelihood that felons as well as cartel operatives can use a straw-buyer to buy weaponry.

- U.S. domestic drug policies should be altered to focus on targeting the demand side of the supply and demand drug market equation through the increased use of treatment rather than incarceration as a response to illicit drug use. Providing treatment for drug users within the United States will reduce the number of offenders in jail, decrease some types of crime, decrease overdose deaths and will provide a disincentive for drug cartels to continue their business as such an action will rob them of a measure of their profit.

U.S. policy action is necessary to help the Mexican government in the fight against cartels, in turn helping the U.S. fight their own war on drugs. Mérida, until this point, has focused primarily on building the law enforcement and judicial capacities of the Mexican government, increasing the chance that justice will be carried out within Mexico. Despite the improvements within the country, the next phase of Mérida must build on this groundwork by focusing on the other factors within Mexico and the United States that continue to fuel the presence of cartels within Mexico. The current policies being implemented by Mérida are necessary, but, as they have not been entirely successful in the reduction or eradication of the cartel presence, these policies should be augmented and, in some cases, should change their focus. Cartels are caused by multiple societal factors and, as a consequence, any effective solution must take a multi-pronged approach.

Although cartels are considered the largest current organized crime threat to the United States, some assert that taking no political action could eventually allow the cartels to fight themselves out and come to an uneasy peace with the government. The

worst period of violence in Mexico have come when Mexico has been working to combat the cartels head on rather than allow them to operate. Eventually, while fighting each other and the government for territory, the cartels may become so fragmented that they cease to be a threat. This outcome, however, does not appear effective in terms of policy objectives or, for that matter, likely. The cartels have faced less interference under President Peña Nieto, but extortions and kidnappings have increased, indicating that while reducing interference may reduce homicides, it will likely not mediate the criminal influence of the cartels (Hope, 2013). Even if, hypothetically, violence were to decrease, criminal activity in Mexico as well as the influx of drugs to the United States would likely increase given the decreased opposition the cartels would be facing at the hands of both governments. Given the threat posed by the cartels as well as their link to drug use and human trafficking in the United States, some action should be taken.

Policies and actions taken by U.S. policymakers domestically have as much of an impact on cartel presence as those taken abroad. Due to U.S. gun sales and drug consumption, the U.S. plays a major role in Mexico's continuing and persistent cartel problem. The policies go beyond the erection of a fence to keep drugs in Mexico and cartels out of the U.S. Policies that focus on the problem as a Mexican one cannot be successful. Policies focused only on enforcement in one country or on addressing the surface cases of cartel presence have, historically, only succeeded in pushing cartels from one country to another or increasing crime rates and drug use in the source country (Chabat, 2002; Chepesiuk, 2003; Willoughby, 2003). In addition to the impact of U.S. policy on Mexico, these policies are necessary to reduce the impact that the Mexican

cartels have on U.S. national security concerns, foreign policy, crime rates, and health policy. As long as the cartels continue to operate within Mexico, the threat of violent spillover on the U.S.-Mexican border will exist and the cartels will continue to pose an organized crime threat to the United States. Although its presence is long-standing, the corruption within the Mexican government is a byproduct of cartel operation and will continue to be a problem for as long as the organized crime presence in Mexico continues to operate with such strength. By helping reduce the scope of cartel operations and corruption in Mexico, the United States can secure a more stable political relationship with our close economic and political ally, Mexico. Beyond the foreign policy implications, the cartels, as international entities, operate within and directly impact the United States as well as Mexico. Reducing their influence and implementing specifically demand-focused anti-drug policies within the U.S. will help reduce drug use within America; which will, in turn, address the lost productivity from drug use and incarceration. Further, reducing drug use within the United States will assist in decreasing emergency room visits and deaths due to overdoses. Overall, reducing the influence of cartels in Mexico will help the United States.

In today's globalized society, no country operates within a vacuum and the operation of the Mexican cartels impacts the United States regardless of where they geographically base their operations. The recommended policies are a necessary step to combat the threat that the cartels pose to the United States while, in turn, assisting Mexico.

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