# Security in Mexico

## Implications for U.S. Policy Options

Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Benjamin Bahney, K. Jack Riley

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# Preface

Violence in Mexico has spiked over the past four years and is increasingly affecting the United States. In response, both the Mexican government and the U.S. government are searching for ways to improve security in Mexico. This monograph examines the security situation in Mexico and assesses its impact on the United States. In addition, it outlines a number of policy options that the United States can consider in its efforts to assist the Mexican government in improving internal security in Mexico.

This monograph should be of interest to U.S. and Mexican policymakers and analysts involved in efforts to improve security policy in Mexico, as well as to those interested in security reform in general. The multidisciplinary project team of researchers brought to the study an array of expertise in security policy, international relations, and economics, as well as Spanish language skills. The study was a companion to a larger RAND study that examined a range of social and economic issues in Mexico. This monograph results from the RAND Corporation's continuing program of self-initiated research. Support for such research is provided, in part, by the generosity of RAND's donors and by the fees earned on client-funded research.

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# Summary

Against the backdrop of a deteriorating security situation in Mexico and the recent change in administration in the United States, this study assessed the security situation in Mexico and its impact on the United States. Drawing from the study's findings, this monograph outlines a range of policy options that the U.S. government can use to assist the Mexican government in improving Mexico's internal security. Its release is particularly timely because the new U.S. administration is beginning to address the security situation in Mexico and formulate strategies to prevent violence from spilling farther into the United States.

## Mexico's Security Structure

Since its first opposition president was elected in 2000, Mexico has struggled to articulate a cohesive national security strategy. This lack of a cohesive security strategy has led to shifting responsibilities, the duplication of services in a number of agencies, and general instability in Mexico's security structure. These ambiguous, shifting, and overlapping responsibilities have led, in turn, to uncoordinated efforts (and often animosity) across federal, state, and local security forces (particularly among police forces).

While trust in Mexican public institutions has historically been low, confidence in the police is particularly low. According to opinion polls, the police are considered corrupt by 80 percent of Mexico's population, while the armed forces are the most highly respected public

institution in that country.[1] With crime and distrust of officials such widespread phenomena, bribery is a part of daily life in Mexico.

## The Deteriorating Security Situation in Mexico

The security situation in Mexico began to deteriorate in 2005 and became precipitously worse in 2008, when drug-related killings more than doubled from 2,275 in 2007 to 6,290 in 2008.[2] One of the major drivers of this decline in security is increased violence associated with the drug trade. According to the Mexican daily *Reforma*, in 2007 and 2008, more than 8,000 people died from drug violence, including more than 500 police officers in 2008 alone.[3] While Mexico has experienced occasional spikes in drug violence over the past two decades, this recent uptick in violence differs from previous episodes of drug violence. First, the drug cartels are deliberately targeting high-level police forces in unprecedented numbers because government forces are focusing law enforcement efforts on the cartels like never before. Second, violence is more public than it has been, and citizens are sometimes caught in the cross fire between cartels or between the cartels and the police or military. Third, drug cartels have access to more sophisticated weaponry (mostly smuggled from the United States) and are now enlisting the protection of special operations forces, such as the Zetas (former Mexican military special operations forces) and Kaibiles (former Guatemalan special operations forces). The security situation in Northern Mexico has deteriorated so precipitously that President Felipe Calderón's government has deployed more than 40,000 troops to fight the drug cartels and bring order to areas that are dominated by the cartels.[4]

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1 See Diego Cevallos, "Police Caught Between Low Wages, Threats, and Bribes," Inter Press Services, June 7, 2007.

2 Justice in Mexico Project, "New Report, January 2009," Transborder Institute, January 2009; "Mexican President: We're Not Losing Drug War," MSNBC, February 26, 2009.

3 Justice in Mexico Project, 2009.

4 "Mexican Troops Swoop on Police HQ," BBC News, February 10, 2009.

In addition to traditional threats to national security, issues of "personal insecurity" (such as crime and lawlessness, police corruption and abuse, and transnational street gangs) are also currently major concerns in Mexico. In one large survey conducted by the Citizens' Institute for Security Studies (Instituto Ciudadano de Estudio Sobre la Inseguridad, or ICESI), 71 percent of respondents reported not feeling safe in their homes and 72 percent reported not feeling safe in the city in which they live.[5] Improving personal security was a cornerstone of Calderón's presidential campaign and continues to be a high priority for his administration.

## Security in Three U.S. Priority Areas

While the overall internal security situation in Mexico has deteriorated over the past few years, our analysis of the literature and our interviews with U.S. government officials and nongovernmental experts indicate that three areas are priorities for the United States: (1) organized crime (including drug trafficking and arms trafficking), (2) illegal migration and human trafficking, and (3) terrorism and rebel insurgencies. These three areas are intertwined, making them difficult to assess individually.

### Organized Crime

Almost all of the U.S. government officials, academics, and nongovernmental organization representatives with whom we spoke agreed that organized crime (including drug trafficking and arms trafficking) is the primary security threat to the United States from Mexico. Organized crime has infiltrated all levels of government and the police forces in Mexico. Organized criminal elements are also involved in a variety of illegal activities, including drug trafficking, human smuggling, and arms trafficking. Thousands of citizens have been killed each year, and

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5 Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad [Citizen's Institute for Security Studies], *Cuarto Encuesta Nacional Sobre Inseguridad/Urbana* [*Fourth National Security Survey, Urban Areas*], Mexico City, 2006.

the targeting of police and military officers has increased over the past two years.

**Drug Trafficking.** It is estimated that $25 billion–$30 billion worth of illegal drugs comes into the United States through Mexico each year. According to the U.S. State Department's 2009 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, about 90 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States is trafficked through Mexico.[6] According to U.S. government estimates, approximately 15,500 metric tons of marijuana were produced in Mexico in 2007, primarily for export to the United States, making it the United States' primary foreign supplier. In addition, the vast majority of methamphetamine produced in Mexico is exported to the United States.[7] Drug trafficking in Mexico has historically been dominated by four major drug trafficking organizations (DTOs): the Gulf Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and the Tijuana Cartel. However, the constellation of DTOs in Mexico is changing as these larger cartels break into atomized units. These smaller, decentralized DTOs have waged an increasingly violent turf war over key trafficking routes and "plazas" (border crossings for trafficking drugs into the United States), ports of entry, and territory. In response, Calderón has deployed an estimated 40,000 troops since 2006.[8] However, this unprecedented use of the military has raised concerns from both domestic and international human rights organizations.

Violence associated with drug trafficking is increasingly affecting the United States. While border cities bear the brunt of the spillover effects of drug violence, the U.S. government has found the footprints of Mexican smuggling operations in all but two states: Vermont and West Virginia. These operations include kidnappings and murders.

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6 U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2009.

7 U.S Department of Justice, National Drug Intelligence Center, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 2008.

8 "Mexican Troops Swoop on Police HQ," 2009.

In addition, the number of corruption investigations involving U.S. border patrol agents is increasing.[9]

**Arms Trafficking.** Mexican authorities are increasingly outgunned by well-armed traffickers, and nearly all illegal guns seized in Mexico have been smuggled from the United States. In many ways, the characteristics of the arms trade mirror the dynamics of the drug market. Drugs flow north from Mexico to the United States and guns flow south from the United States to Mexico. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives indicate that 90 to 95 percent of the guns used in drug-related violent crimes in Mexico enter illegally from the United States.[10] As with drug smuggling or kidnapping, it is not unusual to find police officers, military personnel, and customs agents involved in the illegal arms trade. Over the past few years, several government officials have been arrested on both sides of the border for participating in the arms trade.

### Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking

Illegal movement into the United States from Mexico is clearly a threat to U.S. national security. Terrorists could use human trafficking networks to gain entry into the United States; however, the likelihood that terrorists might use the U.S.-Mexico border is highly contested. There has not been a single report of a terrorist entering the United States from Mexico. More generally, human smuggling and human trafficking feed into crime in the United States. In 2003, it was estimated that there were at least 100 human smuggling organizations and gangs active in Mexico. Like other facets of organized crime, there have been credible reports that police, immigration, and customs officials are involved in human trafficking.

### Terrorism and Rebel Insurgencies

Since September 11, 2001, there has been speculation about al-Qaeda's interest in using Mexico as a gateway for entry into the United States

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9 Randal C. Archibold and Andrew Becker, "Border Agents, Lured by the Other Side," *New York Times*, May 27, 2008.

10 U.S. Department of State, 2009.

or as a launching point for an attack on the United States. This view is extremely controversial but has received significant media attention, though there have been no reports of known or suspected terrorists arrested along the U.S.-Mexico border. However, operatives detained elsewhere have reported that Mexico has been considered by terrorist organizations as a staging and entry point to the United States. While most U.S. government officials with whom we spoke indicated that there was no current evidence of strong al-Qaeda ties to Mexico, we include the possibility in our list of priority areas because it remains a continuing area of potential concern.

Within Mexico, the Popular Revolutionary Army (Ejército Popular Revolucionario, or EPR), a Marxist guerrilla group formed in the mid-1990s, could cause disruptions and challenge the Mexican government. On July 6 and July 10, 2007, the EPR blew up natural-gas pipelines belonging to state oil giant Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), cutting off gas supplies across central Mexico. On September 10 of that year, the EPR struck again, setting off 12 simultaneous explosions on gas pipelines. According to Mexico's leading manufacturers' association, the estimated lost economic output was about $1.6 billion. While the insurgents have thus far operated independently of the DTOs, a concern is that the insurgents either align with one another or become one and the same. Other insurgency groups in Latin America have become involved in the drug trade to fund their activities, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army in Colombia, and Shining Path in Peru.

## Mexican Domestic Concerns: Crime, Corruption, and Street Gangs

In addition to the U.S. concerns already discussed, our research also identified broader domestic concerns within Mexico, including crime, corruption, and street gangs. These issues have a direct impact on many Mexicans' everyday lives and can erode their trust in public institutions, such as the police and the judicial system. In deciding how it might move forward in assisting Mexico, the United States should consider issues beyond those outlined in the prior section and ask how it can also support Mexico's efforts to address the following domestic concerns.

### Crime

According to an August 2007 Mexican congressional report, in the first half of 2007, the rates of major federal crimes, which include homicides, kidnappings, and arms trafficking, rose 25 percent above the rates of the same period of the previous year. From 2005 to 2006, the rates of these same crimes had risen 22 percent. Gangland-style executions have risen 155 percent since 2001.[11] On August 30, 2008, public concern over crime spilled into the streets when at least 13 anticrime groups planned demonstrations in all 31 Mexican states. The protests were inspired by the abduction and murder of Alejandro Marti, the 14-year-old son of a wealthy businessman.[12] The case provoked public outcry when it was learned that a police detective was a key participant in the kidnapping for ransom.

### Corruption

Police corruption is widespread in Mexico at all levels of the police forces—federal, state, and local. In fact, President Calderón has, at times, ordered the federal police to take over entire municipal police forces in an attempt to weed out corruption. Such takeovers once again highlight the lack of a cohesive national security strategy and the failure to delineate responsibility and authority across police forces.

### Transnational Gangs (*Maras*)

The United States is becoming increasingly concerned about the transnational impact of gangs. However, reliable data on the extent of the gang activity in Mexico are extremely difficult to find. According to interviews conducted by the U.S. Agency for International Develop-

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[11] Jay Root, "Mexico Crime Continues to Surge," McClatchy Newspapers, September 22, 2007.

[12] There was a similar anticrime demonstration in Mexico in 2004 in which 250,000 people marched.

ment (USAID), in October 2005, it was estimated that 17,000 gang members (predominantly members of the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, and 18th Street gangs) operated in the border city of Juárez in Mexico.[13] Mexico's attorney general has said that nearly 1,100 gang members were arrested in Mexico in 2004 and 2005.[14] The Secretaria de Seguridad Publica, Mexico's public security ministry, has a permanent antigang operation called Operación Acero that dates back to 2003. However, to date, it does not appear that Mexico has adopted national anti-*mara* legislation as some other counties have.

## Potential Priorities for the New U.S. Administration

Given the impacts of organized crime, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, illegal migration, and human trafficking and the threat of terrorism, the new U.S. administration will have to address the deteriorating security situation in Mexico. In addition, it will need to decide which security issues should be addressed when allocating U.S. aid to Mexico and how U.S. aid should be prioritized. Four potential priorities emerged from our study:

- Help the Mexican government streamline and rationalize the delivery of security services.
- Encourage the Mexican government to bridge the coordination gap between federal and local security.
- Support Mexico's efforts to address domestic concerns, such as ordinary crime and personal insecurity.
- Focus less on technology transfer and more on building trust in institutions.

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[13] USAID, *Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment*, April 2006.

[14] Kevin Sullivan, "Mexico Battles Influx of Violent Gangs," *Washington Post*, January 21, 2005.

## U.S. Policy Options for Improving Security in Mexico

The future of U.S.-Mexico relations will depend largely on the approach that the new U.S. administration chooses to take. While some, including the former deputy foreign minister of Mexico, Andrés Rozental, advocate the legalization of drugs in the United States as a solution to the violence in Mexico, we have not included a discussion of this option because it is not broadly supported, especially with respect to cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.

Based on how much the new administration wants to prioritize long-term reform in Mexico, we have identified three policy options that the administration can use to address security issues in Mexico:

- Engage in a strategic partnership with Mexico that emphasizes reform and longer-term institution building.
- Maintain the status quo approach, which focuses on ad hoc, issue-specific cooperation but does not emphasize reform or longer-term institution building.
- Institute a retrenchment approach by focusing on U.S. domestic efforts to combat security threats from Mexico and disengage from any partnerships with Mexico.

As Table S.1 indicates, the strategic partnership option places the greatest demands on the U.S. government, the status quo option places medium degrees of demand on the U.S. government, and the retrenchment option places the fewest burdens on the U.S. government.

The three policy options address the four potential priority areas in different ways. As shown in Table S.2, the strategic partnership option is the only option that has a high level of impact on all four potential priority areas. On the other side of the spectrum, the retrenchment option is the only option that has a low level of impact on all four potential priority areas. The status quo option has varying degrees of impact on the potential priority areas, depending on the particular issue or area of cooperation that is being examined.

**Table S.1**
**Demands Created by the Three Policy Options**

| | Policy Option | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Area of Demand** | **Strategic Partnership** | **Status Quo** | **Retrenchment** |
| U.S. institutional commitment | High | Medium | Low |
| U.S. interagency cooperation and planning | High | Low | Low |
| Domestic U.S. support for reform in Mexico | High | Medium | Low |
| Need for metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. aid | High | Medium | Low |

NOTE: High, medium, and low indicate degree of demand for U.S. government resources, personnel, and time.

**Table S.2**
**Impact of the Three Policy Options**

| | Policy Option | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Priority Area** | **Strategic Partnership** | **Status Quo** | **Retrenchment** |
| Develop cohesive security strategy and reform the security structure to meet that strategy | High | Low | Low |
| Bridge the gap between federal and local security forces | High | Low | Low |
| Support Mexico's efforts to address domestic concerns | High | Low | Low |
| Focus aid less on technology and equipment and more on increasing transparency in government institutions | High | Medium | Low |

NOTE: High, medium, and low indicate degree of impact on the four priority areas.

In assessing which policy option to pursue, the U.S. government should also be sensitive to the potential reactions of the Mexican government. The United States and Mexico have had a unique relationship that has given rise to unique historical sensitivities. For instance, the Mexican government has always been wary of U.S. involvement in Mexican internal affairs. These Mexican sensitivities could result in barriers to the implementation of the policy options. The strategic partnership option asks the most of both the United States and Mexico, whereas the retrenchment option is the most potentially damaging option to U.S.-Mexico relations. The status quo option is the safest option for both countries.

Ultimately, whichever policy option the United States pursues, its success will hinge on whether or not the United States can demonstrate that Mexico's sovereignty will be respected. As our research indicates, the stakes are high and none of the issues examined can be resolved without cooperation from across the border. The new U.S. administration should take advantage of this historic window of opportunity and further engage the Calderón government in a deeper and broader relationship that strives to establish a long-term strategic partnership.

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This monograph was informed by interviews with numerous U.S. and Mexican government officials, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations. These interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis, and interviewees were granted anonymity. We are deeply grateful for the interviewees' insights and candor.

The content and conclusions in this monograph are solely the responsibility of the authors.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AFI | Agencia Federal de Investigación [Federal Investigative Police] |
| ATF | U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives |
| DTO | drug trafficking organization |
| EPR | Ejército Popular Revolucionario [Popular Revolutionary Army] |
| ICESI | Instituto Ciudadano de Estudio Sobre la Inseguridad [Citizens' Institute for Security Studies] |
| MS-13 | Mara Salvatrucha |
| PAN | Partido Accíon National [National Action Party] |
| PEMEX | Petróleos Mexicanos |
| PFP | Policía Federal Preventiva [Federal Preventive Police] |
| SEDENA | Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional [Ministry of National Defense] |
| SSP | Secretaría de Seguridad Pública [Ministry of Public Security] |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |

CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

## Need for This Study

In response to a deteriorating security environment in Mexico, the governments of both Mexico and the United States are searching for policy options to improve internal security in Mexico and reduce violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. This study assessed the security situation in Mexico and its impact on the United States. Drawing from the study's findings, this monograph outlines a range of policy options that the U.S. government can use to assist the Mexican government in improving Mexico's internal security. Its release is particularly timely because the new U.S. administration will need to address the security situation in Mexico and formulate strategies to address it before violence from Mexico spills farther into the United States. Mexico's recent willingness to engage the United States presents a window of opportunity to expand and deepen U.S.-Mexico security relations.

### The Deteriorating Security Situation in Mexico

The security situation in Mexico has deteriorated, particularly since 2007. The situation had already grown so serious by the end of 2006 that the international organization Reporters Without Borders ranked Mexico as the second-deadliest country for reporters (Iraq was the deadliest).[1] One of the major drivers of this decline in security is

[1] Reporters Without Borders, "Vera Cruz Crime Reporter Becomes Seventh Journalist Murdered This Year in Mexico, Making It Second-Most Dangerous Country for Press, After Iraq," November 22, 2006.

increased violence associated with the drug trade. With the breakup of Colombian cocaine cartels, Mexican drug cartels have increasingly diversified beyond transshipment into all aspects of drug trafficking and the trafficking of different types of drugs.[2] The result is violent turf wars in which the Mexican police and civilians are often caught in the middle or deliberately targeted.

Mexico has a population of more than 108 million people and an area of more than 758,000 square miles. In 2007 and 2008, more than 8,000 people died from drug violence, including more than 500 police officers in 2008 alone.[3] In 2008, 6,290 murders were linked to drug violence (compared with approximately 2,275 drug-related deaths in all of 2007).[4] The Mexican daily *Reforma's* tally of 167 murders (including 27 police officers) during the last week of August 2008 marks the deadliest week since President Calderón took office in December 2006.[5] The 58 homicides reported on November 10, 2008, made it the deadliest day in Mexico in 2008.[6]

The Mexican state of Chihuahua has been particularly hard hit by drug violence. The state of Chihuahua saw 1,026 drug-related murders from January to August 2008, or approximately 35 percent of the country's total homicides. In one 20-day period alone (July 15 to August 5, 2008), there were 326 slayings in the state.[7] In the border city of Juárez (which is in the state of Chihuahua) alone, 1,600 people were killed as a result of drug violence in 2008.[8]

While drug violence in Mexico has surged from time to time over the past two decades, the most recent uptick in violence differs

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[2] Interview with a U.S. government official, May 2008.

[3] Justice in Mexico Project, 2009.

[4] "Mexican President: We're Not Losing Drug War," 2009; Justice in Mexico Project, 2009.

[5] Sara Miller Llana, "Can Mexico's Calderón Stop the Killings?" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 2008b.

[6] STRATFOR, "Mexico Security Memo: November 10, 2008," November 10, 2008c.

[7] "In 8 Months Mexico Drug-Linked Killings Top 2007 Total," Associated Press, August 16, 2008.

[8] "U.S. Families Feel Sting of Mexico's Drug Violence," CNN, February 27, 2009.

from previous episodes. First, the drug cartels are deliberately targeting high-level police forces in unprecedented numbers (often in the form of hit lists posted in public places). In May 2008, several prominent government officials were assassinated, including Edgar Millán Gómez, the acting chief of the federal police; Roberto Velasco Martínez, the head of the organized crime division of the federal police; and José Aristeo Gómez Martínez, the administrative head of the military body in charge of the president's personal security. In addition to high-level police officers, line-level police officers have also been targets. In May 2008, the police chief in Ciudad Juárez was assassinated after 24 hours on the job; his predecessor had also been assassinated. The entire municipal police force quit after the attack, and 300 military troops and 16 state police officers were deployed to the city.[9] The daily *Milenio* newspaper reported that 71 police officers had been slain nationwide in the month of August 2008 alone.[10]

Second, violence is more public than during previous cycles, and citizens are often caught in the cross fire between cartels or between the cartels and the police or military. One of the most public displays of violence is decapitations, a tactic that was almost never used by the drug cartels previously but that has been steadily increasing in prevalence. In 2006, gunmen rolled five severed heads across the dance floor of a nightclub in Michoacán.[11] During the last week of August 2008 alone, a total of 21 decapitated bodies were found throughout Mexico, 18 of which were found in a span of three days.[12] Kidnappings are also on the rise. According to federal officials, in 2007, the number of kidnappings nationwide increased about 35 percent over the 2006 level,

[9] James C. McKinley Jr., "After Massacre, Mexican Town in Terror of Drug Violence," *New York Times*, May 31, 2008a.

[10] Ken Ellingwood, "Drug War Bodies Are Piling Up in Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 2008a.

[11] "Calderón Sends Troops to Michoacán," *El Universal* (Mexico), December 12, 2006.

[12] "Mexicans Protest After More Decapitations," *Herald Sun* (Australia), September 1, 2008.

to 438.[13] According to a report by *Milenio*, a review of federal statistics showed that only one in eight kidnapping victims was a business executive; about half were in the middle class or below.[14]

Third, drug cartels have access to more sophisticated weaponry (mostly smuggled from the United States) and are now enlisting the protection of special operations forces, such as the Zetas (former Mexican military special operations forces) and Kaibiles (former Guatemalan special operations forces). These highly trained forces serve to intimidate local citizens and other cartels.[15] In May 2007, Luis Astorga, a drug trafficking expert at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, told the *Houston Chronicle,* "We're seeing a transition from the gangsterism of traditional hitmen to paramilitary terrorism with guerrilla tactics."[16]

The security situation in Northern Mexico has deteriorated so precipitously that the Calderón government has enlisted an estimated 40,000 troops to fight the drug cartels and bring order to areas that are under the foothold of the cartels.[17] The Mexican military has been used by previous Mexican administrations to help fight the drug war and has been deployed in counterdrug operations in Mexico since at least the 1960s. However, the Calderón administration has used the military in unprecedented numbers to fight drug traffickers. As a result, the military's engagement in counterdrug operations has also raised concerns among both domestic and international human rights groups.[18]

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13 Oscar Avila, "Mexico Reels After Spate of Kidnappings," *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 2008.

14 Ken Ellingwood, "Fear of Kidnapping Grips Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2008b.

15 There is also speculation that the cartels are enlisting the protection of street gangs, or *maras*. See Sullivan, 2005.

16 Stephanie Hanson, *Mexico's Drug War*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, June 28, 2007.

17 "Mexican Troops Swoop on Police HQ," 2009.

18 See Diego Cevallos, "War on Crime Triggers Activists Suspicions," Inter Press Service, December 15, 2006. See also Sara Miller Llana, "Military Abuses Rise in Mexican Drug War," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 2008.

In July 2008, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission released a report documenting a total of 983 complaints against the Mexican army since Calderón took office on December 1, 2006. Seventy-five percent of those complaints were tied to the military's fight against organized crime. The commission recommended that the military not conduct police work and urged Calderón to set a date for the military's removal from such duties.[19]

In addition to traditional threats to national security, issues of "personal insecurity" are also current major concerns in Mexico. In recent years, the concept of "national security" has shifted from the idea of strategic defense to that of human safety.[20] Between 1998 and 2000, the percentage of Mexicans claiming that the "protection of citizens" was an important national security concern more than doubled, while the portion citing the importance of the "protection of the country" declined.[21] At the same time, political rhetoric also evolved from a focus on military strategy, articulated in the 1995–2000 National Development Plan, to a "softer" interest in the preservation of individual security, articulated in the Vicente Fox administration's 2001–2006 plan.[22] The Calderón administration has continued in this vein

[19] "Mexico's Human Rights Commission Documents 8 New Cases of Human Rights Abuses," Associated Press, July 11, 2008.

[20] For more discussion of insecurity in Mexico, see Wayne A. Cornelius and David A. Shirk, eds., *Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico*, Notre Dame, Ind., and La Jolla, Calif.: University of Notre Dame Press and Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2007. For a discussion of criminal impunity in Mexico, see Guillermo Zepeda, *Crimen sin Castigo: Procuracion de Justicia Penal y Ministerio Publico en Mexico* [*Crime Without Punishment: Prosecution of Criminal Justice and Public Ministry in Mexico*], Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Economica, Centro de Investigacion para el Desarrollo, 2004.

[21] José María Ramos García, "Seguridad Ciudadana y la Seguridad Nacional Mexico: Hacia un Marco Conceptual" ["Public Safety and National Security in Mexico: Toward a Conceptual Framework"], *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Politicas y Sociales*, Vol. 47, No. 194, May–August 2005.

[22] Office of the President of Mexico, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* [*National Development Plan*] *1995–2000*, 1995, and *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* [*National Development Plan*] *2001–2006*, 2001.

by making the fight to improve personal security one of the cornerstones of its National Development Plan.[23]

Personal security concerns include increased crime and lawlessness, police corruption, and street gangs. These concerns are apparent in available survey data. For instance, in one large survey conducted by the Citizen's Institute for Security Studies (Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad, or ICESI), 71 percent of respondents reported not feeling safe in their homes and 72 percent reported not feeling safe in the city in which they live.[24] In many cases, these issues intersect with traditional security concerns, such as drug trafficking, organized crime, and smuggling, but they are often underemphasized as threats to U.S. security. However, these issues have direct links to U.S. security, including increased migration pressure, increased corruption of U.S. and Mexican border officials, and increased violence on both sides of the border. In addition, personal security issues directly affect the Mexican people, have the potential to undermine the public's trust in Mexican institutions, and threaten the overall stability of Mexico. Improving personal security was a cornerstone of President Calderón's presidential campaign and continues to be a high priority for his administration. In September 2008, Calderón told representatives from a number of civic groups, "We know the biggest problem in Mexico is public insecurity."[25]

## The Importance of U.S.-Mexico Relations

The relationship between the United States and Mexico is particularly important and unique. The two countries share not only a border that is almost 2,000 miles long, but also increasing cultural and economic ties. Former Mexican President Vicente Fox's election in 2000 ended 71 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party and marked a

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[23] Office of the President of Mexico, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* [*National Development Plan*] *2007–2012*, 2007.

[24] Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad [Citizen's Institute for Security Studies], 2006. The survey had a sample size of more than 26,000 people.

[25] Alexandra Olson, "Mexican Leader Meets Anti-Crime March Organizers," Associated Press, September 1, 2008b.

new era of democracy in Mexico. A new era of U.S.-Mexico relations was also ushered in with the election of U.S. President George W. Bush in 2000. Mexico was a priority for the Bush administration, and, as such, the Bush administration was anxious to engage with Mexico. Just five days before the 9/11 attacks, President Bush stated,

> Mexico is an incredibly important part of the United States' foreign policy. It is our most important relationship, because Mexico is our neighbor, and neighbors must work together.[26]

Since 9/11, this relationship with Mexico became even more important to the United States, especially with regard to border security issues. During Fox's 2000–2006 term, U.S. military and police aid to Mexico nearly tripled, from $15.7 million in 2000 to $45.8 million in 2006.[27] Warranted or not, there is a recurring concern about the possibility of al-Qaeda using Mexico as a staging point for an attack on the United States or as a transit route into the country.[28] In addition, other border security issues (such as border violence, arms trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal migration) have all received increased attention since 9/11. There is a potential terrorist connection to all of these activities, but, more immediately, these activities also feed into crime in the United States—including drug-related crimes and corruption of U.S. officials. The recent change of administration in the United States presents another opportunity to redefine U.S.-Mexican relations.

### Defining the Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations

When President Calderón came into office in December 2006, the issue of security was a major priority on his agenda. This priority has been

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[26] White House, "Presidents Bush, Fox Discuss State Visit," press release, September 6, 2001.

[27] Chris Hawley, "Mexico's Drug Control Initiative Reflects More Trust," *USA Today*, October 29, 2007.

[28] While the threat of terrorism has captured the media's attention, all of the U.S. government officials with whom we spoke agreed that the issues of drug trafficking and organized crime are the most important threats to both the United States and Mexico.

elevated further as the security situation in Mexico has severely declined over the past two years. On the domestic front, Calderón is relying on the Mexican military to fight drug traffickers in unprecedented numbers. In addition, on the international front, he has approached the United States and proposed a historic joint effort to cooperate in the fight against drug trafficking. According to former Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon, when Mexico's foreign minister presented him a proposal in 2007 for a U.S.-Mexican military and police alliance against drug lords, "We all immediately grasped the historic nature of the moment. It represented a dramatic departure in our bilateral relationship."[29] The United States has been supportive of Calderón's proposal, and Congress and the Bush administration finalized the Mérida Initiative, an assistance package that will provide $400 million in aid to Mexico in 2009 and $1.4 billion over three years (primarily for technical assistance and equipment to combat drug trafficking).

Our study was particularly timely in light of the deteriorating security situation in Mexico, the unprecedented levels of cooperation between the United States and Mexico on security issues, and the recent change in administration in the United States. The new U.S. administration will face many choices with regard to security in Mexico. Thus, a reassessment of the security issues in Mexico, their impact on the United States, and the policy options available to the U.S. government seem both warranted and necessary.

## Methodology

This study was guided by a number of research questions:

- What are the major security issues facing Mexico?
- How do these security issues affect the United States, and why should the United States be concerned about them?

[29] Hawley, 2007.

- What actions has the government of Mexico taken to address these security challenges, and what have been the outcomes of those actions?
- What policy options are available to the U.S. government to aid the Mexican government in improving security in Mexico?

### Data Sources and Method of Analysis

A comprehensive assessment of the current security situation in Mexico was developed by

- reviewing the current literature in both English and Spanish regarding security issues in Mexico
- identifying the size and scope of Mexico's security institutions and the challenges to those institutions
- interviewing Mexican and U.S. government officials in various government agencies involved with security in Mexico.

We began our study by conducting a broad review of the English and Spanish literature on security issues in Mexico. Our analysis included a review of primary Mexican and U.S. government documents, Mexican media reports, and the publications and Web sites of nongovernmental organizations. In addition, we reviewed Mexican and U.S. academic publications and publications produced by nonacademic research organizations and think tanks in both Mexico and the United States.

From this literature review, we identified the major challenges to Mexican security institutions, examined how those security challenges affect the United States, and conducted an in-depth analysis of the structure of Mexican security institutions. Next, we conducted a more detailed literature review, focusing on the major challenges to Mexican security institutions. We examined the challenges, noted the actions taken by the Mexican government to combat those challenges, and assessed the outcomes of those actions.

Next, we conducted interviews with Mexican and U.S. officials in various government agencies that are tasked with addressing security issues in Mexico,[30] and we conducted a historical review of joint Mexican-U.S. security efforts. From the information derived from our historical analysis and subsequent interviews, we identified three priority areas for the United States: (1) organized crime (including drug trafficking and arms trafficking), (2) illegal migration and human trafficking, and (3) terrorism and rebel insurgencies. Finally, we formulated a range of policy options that the new U.S. administration could use as it moves forward in addressing the security situation in Mexico, and we assessed the needs and potential outcomes of those policy options.

## Organization of This Monograph

This monograph is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two provides background on the current security situation in Mexico. In that chapter, we examine the security structure in Mexico by identifying the main federal, state, and local government security institutions and their responsibilities. In addition, we examine the scale of the security effort in Mexico by examining quantitative measures, such as the number of police per capita and spending on public security. Next, we provide an overview of security in the three U.S. priority areas that we identified: organized crime, illegal migration and human trafficking, and terrorism and rebel insurgencies. Finally, we examine crime indicators and the state of the judicial system in Mexico.

Chapter Three focuses on the Mexican government's actions to address security issues in Mexico. The chapter begins by providing an overview of President Fox and President Calderón's respective policies. It then examines the actions taken by the Mexican federal government to address the three U.S. priority areas identified in Chapter Two. Finally, the chapter examines what the Mexican government is doing at the state and local levels to address security concerns.

Chapter Four examines the U.S. government's response to security issues in Mexico. The chapter begins by providing an overview

[30] The interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis, and the interviewees were granted anonymity.

of the impact of instability in Mexico on the United States. Next, it examines U.S. efforts to aid Mexico in improving its internal security, the areas that U.S. aid has historically targeted, and potential target areas for additional future U.S. aid. Finally, the chapter examines the barriers to the effective monitoring of future U.S. aid to Mexico—in particular, the lack of performance metrics for measuring improvements in security.

Chapter Five presents conclusions and recommendations, outlining four potential priorities and three policy options for the new U.S. administration as it works to help improve security in Mexico. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the needs and demands created by each of the policy options, as well as how they address the potential priorities of the new administration.

CHAPTER TWO

# Assessment of the Current Security Situation in Mexico

This chapter provides an overview of Mexico's security structure, focusing on the structure of the federal security apparatus, the scale of the policing effort in Mexico, and the tension among federal, state, and local security forces in Mexico. Next, it examines three U.S. priority areas (organized crime, including drug trafficking and arms trafficking; illegal migration and human trafficking; and terrorism and rebel insurgencies). The chapter concludes by examining the increase in crime and violence in Mexico, a major concern at the local level but one that is not a focus of U.S. aid to Mexico.

Since its first opposition president took office in 2000, Mexico has struggled to articulate a cohesive national security strategy. With the election of President Fox in 2000, there were expectations that the government would implement major national security reforms; however, those reforms never came to pass. The events of 9/11 in the United States proved to be an important test of Mexico's national security structure.

When the United States asked for Mexico's assistance in fighting terrorism, there was much disagreement within Mexican security institutions as to how to respond to the United States' request.[1] Because President Fox had not yet conceived of a national security plan, there was disagreement as to what Mexico's security priorities should be. In January 2002, Fox's national security adviser, Adolfo Aguila Zinser, was named ambassador to the United Nations, thus leaving a vacuum

[1] Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano, "Mexico's Insecurity in North America," *Homeland Security Affairs*, Supplement No. 1, 2007.

in Mexico's national security apparatus. This vacuum led to several problems:

> First, Mexico lost a golden opportunity to develop a democratic national security agenda. Second, the government did not take advantage of its chance to conceptualize a national strategy. Third, the lack of an institutionalized, conceptually coherent strategy, combined with national security law, revealed Mexico's vulnerabilities.[2]

Due to political infighting in his cabinet, as well as between his administration and the Mexican congress, President Fox was unable to implement national security reform during his six-year term.

When Felipe Calderón began his term as president in 2006 after a closely contested and controversial election, there were again high hopes for the reform of Mexico's national security apparatus. While Calderón has made fighting the drug cartels, crime, and corruption a cornerstone of his administration, a cohesive national security strategy has, again, yet to be articulated. Such a national security strategy would identify the nature of new security threats, determine how the threats have changed, prioritize the threats, describe how the country is responding to the threats, and delineate responsibilities across agencies and levels of government. Calderón has articulated his National Development Plan; however, there is no explicit link between national security priorities and that plan or among the various national security institutions.[3] In March 2007, President Calderón announced a major initiative that he called the Comprehensive Strategy for Preventing and Combating Crime. While this initiative was a major leap forward in the administration's strategy to fight organized crime, it is not linked to other national security priorities or threats.

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2 Sumano, 2007.

3 "Seguridad y Estado de Derecho" ["Security and Rule of Law"], in Office of the President of Mexico, 2007.

## Mexico's Security Structure

The lack of a cohesive security strategy in Mexico has led to shifting responsibilities, the duplication of services in a number of agencies, and general instability in Mexico's security structure. In addition, this has created a situation in which the military is more involved in internal security than is the case in most countries. The Mexican military is generally viewed to be less corrupt than the police and is seen as the institution of last resort when all others have failed.[4] These ambiguous, shifting, and overlapping responsibilities have also led to uncoordinated efforts (and often animosity) across federal, state, and local security forces (particularly among police forces).

### The Federal Security Structure

The security structure in Mexico is extremely complex. Figure 2.1 provides an organizational overview of the major federal security agencies in the Mexican government. As shown in the figure, national security responsibilities are split between the president and eight cabinet departments.

Security services in Mexico are often duplicated across agencies because roles, responsibilities, and authority are not clearly defined. For instance, drug interdiction activity is implemented by the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of National Defense (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, or SEDENA), the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Public Security (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, or SSP), and the state and local police. Investigations into drug crimes are carried out by municipal police, the Federal Agency of Investigation (Agencia Federal de Investigación, or AFI), or SEDENA, in a few cases. While overlapping roles may provide checks and balances across agencies, the main issue is that there seems to be confusion with regard to authority, roles, and responsibilities, and this had led to bureaucratic turf battles across agencies. President Calderón seems to recognize the need for reform across the national security apparatus. SEDENA was recently given sole

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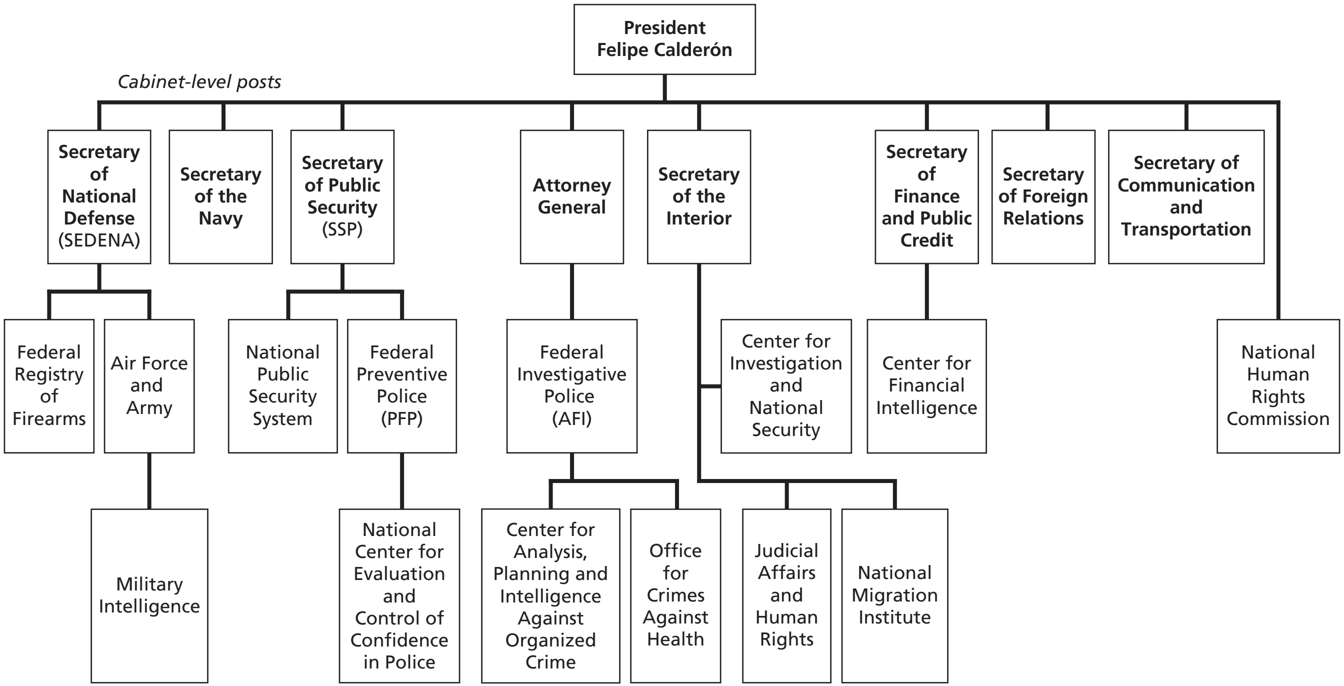
[4] See Cevallos, 2007.

**Figure 2.1**
**Mexico's Federal-Level National Security Structure**




NOTE: The figure shows major federal security agencies only.

RAND *MG876-2.1*

responsibility for drug eradication,[5] and the Federal Preventive Police (Policía Federal Preventiva, or PFP) and AFI recently merged into one organization.

Until the summer of 2008, Mexican federal police forces were under two separate commands and carried out separate functions: The PFP did not have investigative authority and reported to the SSP; the AFI was charged with investigating crimes and reported to the attorney general's office. In September 2008, more than 100 AFI agents held a protest outside the federal attorney general's Office in Mexico City and later occupied the building. The demonstration appeared to stem from opposition to the PFP-AFI merger. Several days later, several hundred PFP agents were called in to forcibly remove the AFI agents. The AFI agents eventually withdrew but threatened not to work for a few days.[6] Such actions demonstrate the historical bureaucratic turf battles that occur across the Mexican national security apparatus because roles and responsibilities are not clearly articulated within and across national security agencies.

### Scale of the Policing Effort in Mexico

As shown in Figure 2.2, the scale of the Mexican policing effort is comparable to neighboring countries. Mexico has 370 police officers per 100,000 people, whereas the United States has 225 police officers per 100,000 people.

Although the scale of the Mexican policing effort seems comparable to that of other countries, the efficacy of this policing effort is compromised by shifting and overlapping responsibilities. As shown in Figure 2.3, spending on the public security system is concentrated mostly on equipment, technology, and infrastructure rather than on salaries or training. In Mexico City, the average beat police officer is paid $700 per month, compared with $900 per month for a payroll clerk

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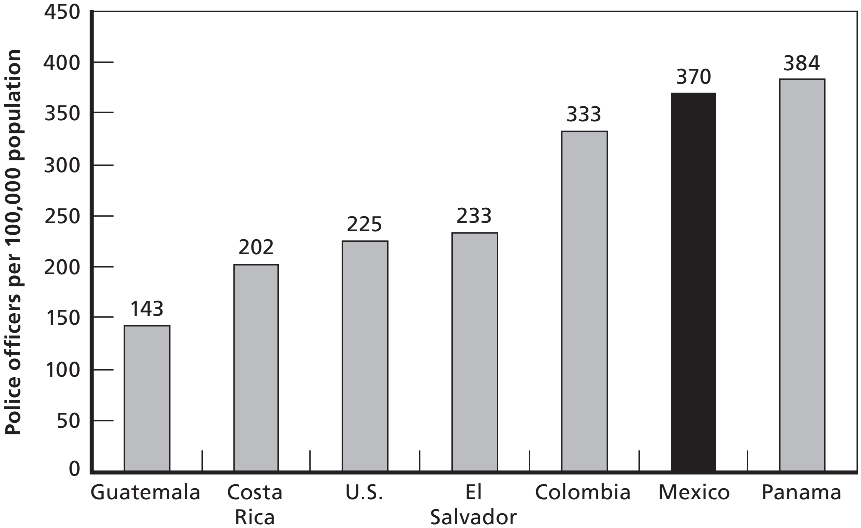
5 SEDENA, hearing before the Chamber of Deputies, Committee on National Defense, April 26, 2007.

6 STRATFOR, "Security Memo: Sept. 29, 2008," September 29, 2008b.

**Figure 2.2**
**Scale of the Mexican Policing Effort**




SOURCE: 2008 Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments.
**RAND** *MG876-2.2*

in the city government.[7] Police in the more rural areas of Mexico make even less money. While corruption is rooted in systemic problems relating to recruitment, supervision, and ineffective internal investigation, these low wages are often cited as another reason that state and local police are so vulnerable to corruption.

As discussed in Chapter Four, U.S. aid to Mexico has also historically concentrated on equipment, technology, and infrastructure at the federal level.

### Little Coordination Among Federal, State, and Local Security Forces

In total, there are more than 1,661 independent police forces in Mexico, with jurisdictions at the federal, state, and municipal levels. Most policing services are provided at the state and local levels. Mexico

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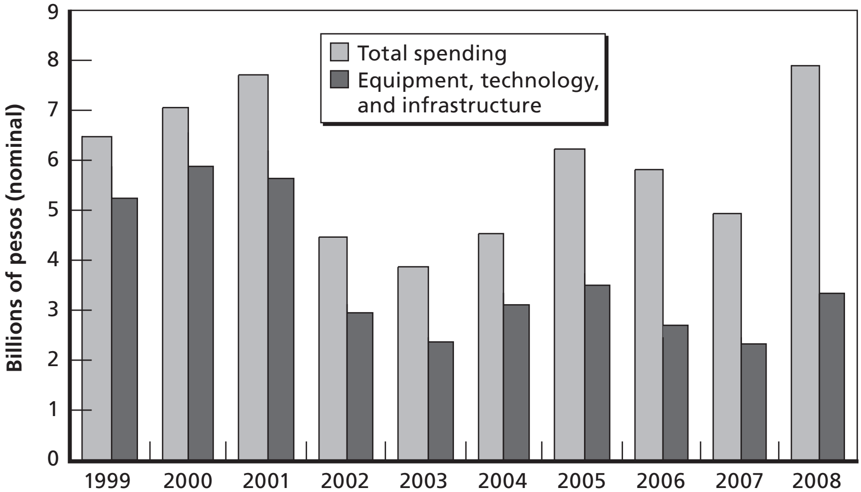
[7] Chris Hawley and Sergio Solache, "Mexico Focuses on Police Corruption," *USA Today*, February 5, 2008. See Cornelius and Shirk, 2007, for a wider range of comparisons.

**Figure 2.3**
**Federal and State Spending on Public Security**




SOURCE: "Anexo Estadístico" ["Statistical Annex"] in Office of the President of Mexico, *Segundo Informe de Gobierno* [*Second Government Report*], 2008.
NOTE: Amounts for 2008 reflect appropriations only, not spent funds.
**RAND** *MG876-2.3*

has approximately 350,000 federal, state, and municipal police officers, but about 90 percent (317,000) are governed by state and local authorities.[8] The remaining 33,000 officers are under federal control.

Each unit of the Mexican federation (31 states and the federal district) has its own police force, and most municipalities have their own municipal police forces. It is not uncommon for federal, state, and local police to keep information to themselves and fail to inform one another of operations.[9] According to Mexico's Secretary of the SSP, Genaro García Luna, "There is no coordination among the 1,661 police corporations that operate in this country."[10]

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8 Hawley and Solache, 2008; Cevallos, 2007.

9 Interview with a U.S. government official, May 2008.

10 Shelley De Botton, "Mexican Police: Unify to Optimize," Comunidad Segura, August 11, 2008.

**Public Distrust of Mexican Security Institutions and Security Forces**

While trust in Mexican institutions has historically been low, confidence in the police is particularly low. According to opinion polls, the police are considered corrupt by 80 percent of the population, while the armed forces are among the most highly respected institutions in Mexico, along with the Catholic Church.[11] With crime and distrust of officials such widespread phenomena, bribery is a part of daily life in Mexico. Transparencia Mexicana, a branch of Transparency International, estimates that 8 percent of a Mexican household's income is spent on bribes. Another Transparencia survey considered the "national corruption index" score for Mexico, defined as the percentage of daily transactions that were conducted with some sort of bribe. In 2007, about 10 percent of all transactions required a bribe (down from 10.6 percent in 2001), and certain types of transactions had a particularly high rate of bribery. Averting being towed or reclaiming one's car from an impound facility, for example, required a bribe in 50 percent of instances. In Mexico City, the corruption index score was 12.7 percent in 2007, and nearly 50 percent of towing and automobile reclamation cases required a bribe.[12]

## Security in Three U.S. Priority Areas

While the overall internal security situation in Mexico has declined over the past two years, our analysis of the literature and our interviews with U.S. government officials and other nongovernmental experts indicate that three areas are priorities for the United States: (1) organized crime (including drug trafficking and arms trafficking), (2) illegal migration and human trafficking, and (3) terrorism and rebel insurgencies. These three areas are intertwined, making them difficult to assess individually.

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[11] See Cevallos, 2007.

[12] Transparencia Mexicana, *Indice Nacional de Corrupcion y Buen Gobierno 2007* [*National Index of Corruption and Good Governance 2007*], April 2008.

### Organized Crime

Almost all of the U.S. government officials and nongovernmental experts with whom we spoke agreed that organized crime and drug trafficking are the two main security threats to the United States from Mexico. In addition, while organized crime and drug trafficking are related, they are not the same. Organized criminals are commonly involved in a variety of illegal activities in addition to drug trafficking—including human smuggling and arms trafficking. As such, organized crime in Mexico is closely intertwined with the issues that are most important to the United States. Organized crime has infiltrated all levels of government in Mexico as well as the police forces. These criminals also exact bribes and intimidate the general public. Thousands of citizens are killed each year, and the targeting of police and military officers has increased over the past two years. In addition, organized criminal elements are increasingly using beheadings and gangland-style murders to send a message to their opponents or the public. In one particularly prominent case, on September 12, 2008, 26 people were found bound and shot execution-style in Atlapulco, south of Mexico City. It was suspected that they were victims of organized crime.[13]

Organized crime in Mexico is a growing concern for the United States because these criminal organizations are increasingly projecting their force into U.S. territory. For instance, Mario Espinoza Lobato, a businessman, city councilman, and outspoken critic of criminal gangs in the border city of Acuña, sought refuge in the United States and was gunned down in 2007 in Del Rio, Texas.[14] In August 2008, security was heightened along the southern U.S. border because U.S. authorities "received credible information that drug cartels in Mexico have given permission to hit targets on the U.S. side of the border."[15] In addition, some Americans have become involved in organized crime in Mexico.

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13 "Bodies of 24 Shooting Victims Found in Mexico," CNN, September 13, 2008.

14 Root, 2007.

15 "Police: Mexican Cartels Give OK to Hit U.S. Targets," Associated Press, August 25, 2008.

In January 2008, after a firefight between police and Zetas in Tamaulipas, two men from Detroit and one from Texas were arrested.[16]

**Drug Trafficking.** It is estimated that up to $25 billion–$30 billion worth of illegal drugs comes through Mexico into the United States each year.[17] According to the State Department's 2009 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, about 90 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States is trafficked through Mexico.[18] In addition, Mexico is the United States' largest foreign supplier of marijuana, and 99 percent of all methamphetamine produced in Mexico is exported to the United States.[19]

Drug trafficking in Mexico has been dominated by four major drug trafficking organizations (DTOs): the Gulf Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and the Tijuana Cartel. Drug trafficking in Mexico has become increasingly decentralized and atomized, with new, smaller DTOs emerging. These cartels have waged an increasingly violent turf war over key trafficking routes and "plazas" (border crossing areas), particularly around Tijuana, Juárez, Sinaloa, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros, as well as ports of entry and territory. As Figure 2.4 shows, large areas of northern Mexico, southwestern Mexico, and the Yucatan peninsula are disputed.

Several factors have contributed to increased violence among the Mexican drug cartels, including the breakup of the Colombian drug cartels (which allowed the Mexican cartels to increase their market share), a reduction in cocaine trafficking routes through Florida (which increased the Mexican DTOs' roles in cocaine trafficking), the capture of several Mexican cartel leaders (which has created competition to take over those leadership positions), and increased domestic drug use in Mexico (which has caused the cartels to refocus on the domestic Mexican drug market).

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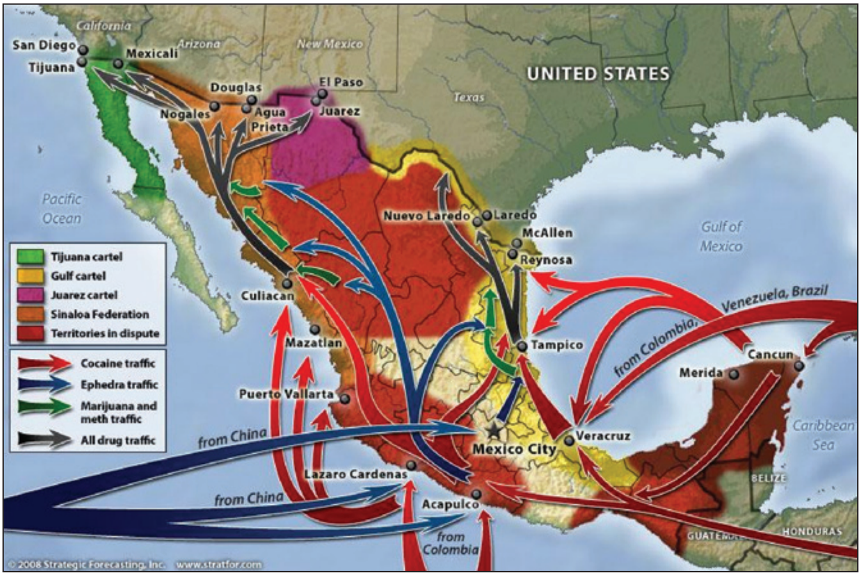
[16] Lawrence Iliff, "Mexico Takes Fight to Zeta Drug Gang," *Dallas Morning News*, January 10, 2008.

[17] STRATFOR, "Organized Crime in Mexico," March 11, 2008a.

[18] U.S. Department of State, 2009.

[19] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *2007 UN World Drug Report*, 2007.

**Figure 2.4**
**Mexican Cartel Territories and Drug Routes**




SOURCE: STRATFOR, 2008a. Used with permission.
**RAND** *MG876-2.4*

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Mexican DTOs have recently hired other groups to provide security and intimidate other cartels and the public. The Zetas (former Mexican military special operations forces) act as assassins for the Gulf Cartel. In response, the Sinaloa Cartel established its own heavily armed gangs, the "Negros" and "Pelones." In October 2007, the U.S. Congressional Research Service reported findings of a Mexican federal investigation that the Gulf Cartel is recruiting Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang members and Guatemalan Kaibiles. However, Mexican and U.S. law enforcement officials deny that there are significant ties between the Mexican cartels and MS-13. They indicate that, instead, the cartels work with Central American gangs on specific tasks but that the cartels have not deepened their ties with these gangs.[20]

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[20] Colleen Cook, *Mexico's Drug Cartels*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34215, October 16, 2007.

**Arms Trafficking.** Mexican authorities are increasingly outgunned by well-armed traffickers, and nearly all illegal guns seized in Mexico have been smuggled from the United States. The arms trade in many ways mirrors the dynamics of the drug market. Drugs flow north from Mexico to the United States, and guns flow south from the United States to Mexico. In 2004, it was estimated that there were 16.5 million illegal weapons in Mexico. U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) data show that 90–95 percent of the guns used in drug violence in Mexico enter illegally from the United States.[21] Official numbers reveal that, from December 2000 to December 2005, Mexican customs officials were able to confiscate a mere 1,791 weapons: not even one per day.[22] In 2007, the number of guns confiscated jumped to 9,000.[23]

As with drug smuggling and kidnapping, it is not unusual to find police officers, military personnel, and customs agents involved in the illegal arms trade. Over the past few years, several government officials have been arrested on both sides of the border for participating in the arms trade.[24] On September 12, 2007, three high-ranking Mexican police commanders from Baja California states were arrested by ATF agents in Phoenix for illegally purchasing weapons at a gun show.[25] (U.S. law prohibits foreigners from buying weapons.) In addition, attempts to stop the flow of guns into Mexico have also been hampered by technological limitations. For example, until recently, Mexi-

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21 "ATF: Most Illegal Guns in Mexico Come from U.S.," *USA Today*, August 11, 2008; see also David McLemore, "U.S. Officials Praise Mexico for Anti-Drug Efforts," *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 2008.

22 Sergio Aguayo Quezada, "Mexico: A War Dispatch," *Open Democracy*, June 25, 2007.

23 Arturo Sarukhan, Mexico's ambassador to the United States, "Real Solutions for Challenges Along the U.S. Mexico Border: The Merida Initiative," lecture, Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., Heritage Lecture No. 1095, April 28, 2008.

24 Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, "Mexico: Dynamics of the Gun Trade," STRATFOR, October 24, 2007.

25 "Mexican Officers Arrested at Gun Show," *USA Today*, September 12, 2007.

can authorities lacked X-ray equipment to inspect vehicles entering the country, and inspection capacity remains limited.[26]

One of the most significant barriers to stopping the flow of guns is the U.S. government. Some Mexican government officials have accused the U.S. government of taking a lax stance against arms smuggling. "The firepower we are seeing here has to do with a lack of control on that side of the border," said Mexican Assistant Secretary of State Patino in May 2007.[27] Their argument is that they need the help of the United States in curbing arms trafficking just as much as the United States needs Mexico's help in curbing drug trafficking.

### Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking

Illegal movement into the United States from Mexico is a clear threat to U.S. national security. Terrorists could use human trafficking networks to gain entry into the United States. More generally, human smuggling and human trafficking feed into crime in the United States and present additional opportunities for organized criminals to expand their operations and territories in the country.[28]

In 2003, Mexico's National Migration Institute, SEDENA, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, and attorney general released a report acknowledging that trafficking in human beings—and the smuggling of human beings through Mexico into the United States—pose serious risks to Mexican national security. According to the report, this situation is especially true as organized smugglers (popularly known as *polleros*) and trafficking gangs branch out into other criminal activities, including kidnapping, child stealing, trafficking in human organs, money laundering, and counterfeiting. The report also asserts that traf-

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[26] Burton and Stewart, 2007.

[27] Mark Stevenson, "Mexico Asks U.S. to Help Stop Arms Flow," Associated Press, May 16, 2007.

[28] The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-386) makes a distinction between *trafficking* and *smuggling*. Trafficking victims do not consent to their situation, and they do not necessarily need to be physically moved. Smuggling involves consent by those who are smuggled and is always transnational.

ficking encourages the corrupt involvement of municipal, state, and federal officials.[29]

As is the case for other facets of organized crime, there have been credible reports that police, immigration, and customs officials are involved in human trafficking. In 2003, it was estimated that there were at least 100 human smuggling organizations and gangs active in Mexico.[30] In 2004, the Fox government had 12 cases in progress against trafficking organizations in various Mexican states, and some 664 suspects had been detained for trafficking-related offenses between January 2004 and September 2004. During the same period, the government reported the rescue of 2,747 victims.[31]

While much attention is focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexico's border with Guatemala is also problematic. The border is quite porous and, thus, serves as a route for Central Americans to enter Mexico and, in many cases, to continue on to the United States. Magdalena Carral Cuevas, former director of Mexico's immigration agency, said in 2005 that her agency had about 300 immigration officers to patrol the entirety of Mexico's 720-mile border with Guatemala.[32] In 2006, the Mexican city of Tapachula (in the extreme southwestern corner of Mexico along the Guatemalan border) was a center for the country's human smuggling enterprise, "enjoying little attention from authorities who are focused on the northern border with the U.S."[33]

### Terrorism and Rebel Insurgencies

Since 9/11, there has been speculation about al-Qaeda's interest in using Mexico as a gateway for entry into the United States or as a launch-

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[29] Bernard Thompson, "People Trafficking, a National Security Risk in Mexico," Mexidata.info, November 17, 2003.

[30] Thompson, 2003.

[31] "Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment: Annex 4—Southern and Northern Border of Mexico Profile," in USAID, 2006.

[32] Sullivan, 2005.

[33] Samuel Logan, "Illegal Migration and Mexico's Maras," International Relations and Security Network, November 7, 2006.

ing point for an attack on the United States. This view is extremely controversial but has received significant media attention.[34] Although there have been no reports of suspected or known terrorists entering the United States through Mexico, operatives detained elsewhere have reported that Mexico has been considered as a staging and entry point to the United States. Most U.S. government officials with whom we spoke indicated that there was no current evidence of strong al-Qaeda ties in Mexico and that Mexican organized criminal groups would probably not want to risk trying to smuggle al-Qaeda members into the United States. As one official put it, "They would not want the attention or the publicity." In September 2008, this view was reinforced when Mexican officials said they had arrested 12 people on terrorism charges in the years since the 9/11 attacks, but none had been linked to Muslim extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda, nor were any planning to strike in the United States.[35]

Within Mexico, the Popular Revolutionary Army (Ejército Popular Revolucionario, or EPR) could cause disruptions and challenge the Mexican government, which, it believes, is holding two missing EPR activists. The EPR is a Marxist guerrilla group formed in the mid-1990s in the state of Guerrero. On July 6 and 10, 2007, the EPR blew up natural-gas pipelines belonging to state oil giant Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), cutting off gas supplies across central Mexico. In August 2007, the EPR claimed responsibility for a small bomb that damaged a Sears store in Oaxaca and for a bomb outside a Banamex bank that police were able to successfully defuse. On September 10, the EPR struck again, setting off 12 simultaneous explosions on gas pipelines. The attacks cut gas supplies for days to some 3,000 companies, idling the plants of Nissan Motor Company, Honda Motor Company, and others. According to Canacintra, Mexico's leading manufacturers' association, the estimated lost economic output was about

[34] See Adam Zagorin, "Bordering on Nukes?" *Time*, November 14, 2004; J. J. Green, "Al-Qaida Suspect Arrested in Texas," FederalNewsRadio.com, March 31, 2005.

[35] Eduardo E. Castillo, "Mexico, U.S. Find No Al-Qaeda Links Since 9/11," Associated Press, September 12, 2008.

$1.6 billion.[36] Such actions by insurgents could threaten other critical infrastructure, such as Sempra Energy's vital liquid natural-gas terminal in Baja California.

## Increased Domestic Crime

Crime has steadily increased in Mexico over the past two years. According to a Mexican congressional report released in August 2007, major federal crimes, which include homicides, kidnappings, and arms trafficking, rose 25 percent in the first half of 2007 over their level in the same period of the previous year. In 2006, rates of the same crimes had risen 22 percent over the previous year's rates. Gangland-style executions have risen 155 percent since 2001.[37]

Although President Calderón's overall approval rating hovers above 60 percent, according to an August 2008 poll by the Mexican daily *Reforma*, his ratings in specific areas have dropped sharply: Current approval levels are only 34 percent for public security, 31 percent for jobs, and 25 percent for efforts to combat kidnapping.[38] Confidence in the security forces is also low. Although 48 percent of those polled continued to have high levels of confidence in the army, only 10 percent felt the same way about the attorney general's office. Confidence in the judicial police sank to a low of 7 percent.[39]

On August 30, 2008, public concern over crime spilled into the streets, when at least 13 anticrime groups planned demonstrations in all 31 Mexican states. The protests were inspired by the abduction and murder of Alejandro Marti, the 14-year-old son of a wealthy business-

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[36] Jose De Cordoba, "Guerillas in the Mist: In a Modernizing Mexico, Blasts Reveal Shadowy Side," *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 2004.

[37] Root, 2007.

[38] "Oh Rose, Thou Art Sick," *Economist*, September 4, 2008.

[39] "Losing the Anti-Drug Fight?" *Economist*, June 8, 2008.

man. The case provoked public outcry when it was learned that a police detective was a key participant in the kidnapping for ransom.[40]

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[40] Alexandra Olson, "Hundreds of Thousands of Mexicans Protest Crime," Associated Press, August 30, 2008a.

CHAPTER THREE

# The Mexican Government's Response

This chapter examines how the Mexican government has responded to the deteriorating security situation in Mexico and what actions it has taken at the federal, state, and local levels. Here, we pay particular attention to the Mexican government's actions to address the three U.S. priority areas: organized crime (including drug trafficking and arms trafficking), illegal migration and human trafficking, and terrorism and rebel insurgencies.

## Recent Actions and Federal Responses

Both President Fox's and President Calderón's responses to the deteriorating security situation in Mexico have focused on the federal level. During his presidency, Fox increased the role of the military in countertrafficking and preventing organized crime while at the same time pursuing a long-term strategy of institution and accountability building at the federal level. The Fox administration started attacking corruption early on its first term. Because the federal judicial police were known to be highly corrupt, Fox's administration dissolved the organization and created a new one, the AFI, in 2001. In addition, Fox signed the first national freedom of information law in June 2002.

On June 11, 2005, President Fox began his first major antidrug operation, Operation Mexico Seguro (Operation Safe Mexico), in several Mexican states that were particularly hard hit by narcoviolence, including Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, and Baja California. The operation tried to coordinate actions by federal, state, and municipal authorities and involved resources of the internal affairs, justice, finance, and defense (the Army and Air Force) ministries and the Navy.[1] Fox tried to initiate other security reform initiatives, including intelligence reform, but these initiatives did not gain enough support in the Mexican congress to move forward.[2]

Mexican officials with whom we spoke indicated that public safety is as important now as democracy was in the 1990s. In the short term, President Calderón has focused on an offensive campaign against organized crime. As part of this campaign, the military and federal police have taken over local police functions as well as customs enforcement in some key areas. In the long term, Calderón has focused on judicial reform, bolstering the interagency communication and information infrastructure, consolidating the federal police under the SSP, and crime prevention.

President Calderón has presented several national security reform plans during his time in office. Early on in his term, he presented a "federal pact" that included

> the adoption of a single penal code for the entire Federation; the possibility for federal judicial police to carry out wiretapping of telephone conversations and to perform entry and search without a warrant; and transfer to the public domain of property confiscated from criminals in order to modernize the resources available for the national struggle.[3]

Like those of President Fox, President Calderón's reform proposals have met resistance from the Mexican congress, but a major penal reform did ultimately pass. It is difficult to isolate why Calderón has been more successful in implementing security reforms, but one factor

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1 Jean-Paul Huste, "Is Mexico Under Mr. Calderon at the Point of No Return in Its Conflict with Organised Crime?" European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, Background Analysis, June 12, 2007.

2 Christopher Leroy, "Mexican Intelligence at a Crossroad," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Winter–Spring 2004.

3 Huste, 2007.

may be that the public is more interested in these reforms because of the deteriorating security situation.

In March 2007, President Calderón announced what he called the Comprehensive Strategy for Preventing and Combating Crime. This strategy sets guidelines for federal policy in seven functional areas: (1) alignment of Mexican government structures and competencies against crime, (2) crime prevention and social involvement, (3) institutional development, (4) the penitentiary system, (5) tackling corrupt practices, (6) technology, and (7) federal police performance indicators in coordination with civil society.[4] Mexican officials with whom we spoke indicated that the strategy has provided coherent guidance for combating organized crime.

In response to planned anticrime protests throughout Mexico, in August 2008, President Calderón proposed his next and widest-ranging set of national security reforms. A summit meeting was held in Mexico City on August 21, 2008, and included representatives of the three branches of the federal government, the 31 state governments, the chief of the capital (federal district) government, unions, churches, businesses, civil organizations, and the news media. The representatives signed an anticrime pact that defined crime as "a matter of national security" and consisted of 75 commitments,[5] including the following:[6]

- transferring all organized-crime suspects to high-security prisons within 30 days
- a new, more secure national ID card to be introduced within three years
- the establishment of a single, nationwide emergency number for reporting crime and a national database of cell phone users

4 Genaro García Luna, Mexico's Secretary of Public Security, "Comprehensive Strategy for the Prevention and Fight Against Crime," presentation, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., January 31, 2008.

5 "Anti-Crime Pact Signed by All Levels of Government," *El Universal* (Mexico), August 25, 2008.

6 "Public Outcry vs. Violence Spurs Mexico to Set Anti-Crime Reforms," Associated Press, August 23, 2008; see also Olson, 2008b.

- increased testing, training, and vetting of Mexico's approximately 376,000 police officers
- the creation of a citizens' panel to monitor government progress in fighting crime
- better police recruiting and oversight systems
- equipping officers with more powerful weapons.

### Organized Crime

The fight against organized crime has been at the forefront of President Calderón's agenda, both during his presidential campaign and during his presidential term. Calderón has made the fight against organized crime one of the cornerstones of his national security agenda because organized crime is intertwined with so many of the country's other security threats, including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, smuggling, and corruption. Calderón's current policy is to go after "specific targets" or heads of criminal syndicates, and this strategy was ramped up further in 2008. "Since the first of January [2008] we have changed our operations," said Mexico's deputy minister for intelligence and strategy that same month. "It's no longer just patrolling, but rather a direct fight, a direct fight against specific objects, against specific targets that has grown out of important intelligence work."[7] A U.S. law enforcement official said of the strategy, "They [authorities] realize that putting out small fires isn't going to help them very much. They're now entering the gates of hell as they try to dismantle the organization by targeting the key figures."[8]

**Drug Trafficking.** The U.S. State Department's 2008 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* praised the Calderón administration's efforts to fight drug trafficking. According to the report, "In 2007, Mexico made unprecedented efforts and achieved unprecedented results in attacking the corrosive effects of drug trafficking and consumption during the first complete year of the Calderón Administration."[9]

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[7] Iliff, 2008.

[8] Iliff, 2008; bracketed text in original.

[9] U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Washington, D.C., March 2008a, Vol. 1, p. 75.

Calderón has deployed an estimated 40,000 troops since December 2006,[10] launching his first military antidrug operation—Operation Michoacán—on December 11 of that year. Michoacán was particularly hard hit by narcoviolence in 2006: There were more than 560 murders and 17 beheadings, and six police officers were assassinated. This combined operation involved 7,000 personnel, 5,300 of whom came from various forces, and included armored cars, aircraft, and surface vessels.[11] Also in 2006, Mexico launched the Northern Border (Frontera Norte) initiative, a federal-state effort to fight violence that included the deployment of 800 PFP officers to Nuevo Laredo, who joined the 300 federal officers already deployed there under Operation Safe Mexico.[12]

The Calderón administration has made great strides in arresting and extraditing members of DTOs to the United States. From January 2000 through September 2006, the Mexican government arrested more than 79,000 people on charges related to drug trafficking. From December 2006 (the beginning of the Calderón administration) through August 2007 alone, Mexican authorities arrested nearly 10,000 people on drug-related charges.[13] In addition, a record number of criminals have been extradited to the United States since President Calderón came into office (see Table 3.1).

In October 2007, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy reported that the Mexican government's increased pressure on cartels coincided with cocaine shortages in 37 U.S. cities and a 24-percent increase in the retail price of cocaine, from $95.89 to $118.70 per gram, from January to September 2007.[14] During that same period, the price of methamphetamine also increased by 73 percent, from $141.42 to $244.53, and the purity of methamphetamine

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[10] "Mexican Troops Swoop on Police HQ," 2009.

[11] Huste, 2007.

[12] Huste, 2007.

[13] Cook, 2007.

[14] Office of National Drug Control Policy, "White House Drug Czar Releases Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy," press release, October 2, 2007a.

**Table 3.1**
**Extraditions from Mexico to the United States, 2000 Through Mid-October 2007**

| Extraditions | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 (through mid-Oct.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total, by year | 12 | 17 | 25 | 31 | 34 | 41 | 63 | 68 |

SOURCE: U.S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but the Flow of Illicit Drugs into the United States Remains High," testimony by Jess T. Ford, director, International Affairs and Trade, U.S. Government Accountability Office, before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, GAO-08-215T, October 25, 2007b.

dropped by 31 percent.[15] These figures remain controversial, however, and other sources indicate that the price of cocaine has stabilized.

Mexican government officials with whom we spoke stated that they believe that the uptick in violence is a direct result of the government's more aggressive actions against the cartels. The government has seen indications that drug routes and territory have been shut down along the Pacific and the Gulf coasts and that this explains why violence has increased along the interior spine of the country.

**Arms Trafficking.** President Calderón is using many of the same tactics against arms trafficking that he has used against drug trafficking. The military has taken over several key border areas, and authorities have begun to use X-ray technology at some border crossings. Data indicate that Calderón's policies are having an impact. Official numbers reveal that, from December 2000 to December 2005 (prior to Calderón's presidency), Mexican customs officials were able to confiscate a mere 1,791 weapons: fewer than one per day.[16] In 2007 (Calderón's first full year in office), the number of guns confiscated jumped to 9,000.[17]

[15] Office of National Drug Control Policy, "New Data Show Significant Disruptions in U.S. Methamphetamine, Cocaine Markets," press release, November 8, 2007b.

[16] Quezada, 2007.

[17] Sarukhan, 2008.

Because 90–95 percent of all illegal guns in Mexico are smuggled from the United States, the Mexican government has also been appealing to the United States to help curb the tide of illegal weapons entering the country. The United States has given Mexico access to the ATF's eTrace system, and, from FY 2006 to FY 2007, the number of trace requests from Mexico increased by almost 100 percent.[18] In addition, in 2007, the ATF started Project Gunrunner, an effort to stop the smuggling of guns to Mexico. In FY 2005, ATF reported that more than 6,400 guns had been sent illegally into Mexico from the United States. By the end of September 2007, after Project Gunrunner had been implemented, that estimate had dropped to about 3,200.[19]

### Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking

As discussed in Chapter Two, in 2003, a Mexican government report acknowledged that trafficking in human beings poses a serious risk to Mexico's national security. This broad acknowledgement of human trafficking gained some bite when federal legislation to prevent and prosecute human trafficking was passed in November 2007.[20] The legislation prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons at the federal level and carries penalties of between six and 12 years in prison. The penalty increases to nine to 18 years in jail when the victim is a child or a person lacking mental capacity. If the defendant is a public official, penalties increase by one-half and include loss of the official's job.[21]

In addition to enacting legislation during the Calderón administration, Mexico has also made some changes to its public security apparatus to take into account human trafficking. In February 2008, the

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[18] William Hoover, assistant director for field operations, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, February 7, 2007.

[19] Julian Aguilar, "The Hunt for Guns; Fed Agents Busy Trying to Stymie Local Weapons Trading," *Laredo Morning News*, May 26, 2008.

[20] International Organization for Migration, "IOM Mexico Provides Assistance to Victims of Trafficking," press release, February 12, 2008.

[21] U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report,* Washington, D.C., June 2008b.

attorney general formed a new antitrafficking prosecutorial unit: The Crimes Against Women and Trafficking in Persons Unit will prosecute all federal human trafficking cases except those involving organized crime, which will be handled by the attorney general's office.[22]

It is difficult to evaluate the impacts of Calderón's policies because illegal migration, human trafficking, and human smuggling are such underground operations. We were unable to find credible statistics on how much of an impact these policies have had on identification of human trafficking victims and prosecution of human traffickers. However, one indication of progress may be that Mexico showed improvement in the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report*. For four years, Mexico was listed on the tier 2 watch list in that report, meaning that the country was cited as being at risk of slipping to tier 3 status.[23] But in 2008, Mexico was promoted to tier 2 because it had enacted a comprehensive antitrafficking law in 2007, constructed shelters for trafficking victims, and sponsored a public awareness campaign on human trafficking.[24]

### Terrorism and Rebel Insurgencies

The Calderón administration seems to have adopted a very broad definition of terrorism, often referring to organized crime syndicates and drug traffickers as terrorists. The Calderón administration was also sensitive to the Bush administration's concerns about terrorists crossing into the United States from Mexico. Calderón has argued that his overall campaign against organized crime and drug trafficking will ultimately diminish the opportunity for terrorists to use criminal networks to smuggle people or materiel into the United States.

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[22] U.S. Department of State, 2008b.

[23] Governments that are making significant efforts to meet the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 are placed in tier 2. Governments that do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so are placed in tier 3. Finally, the special watch list criteria are considered and, when applicable, tier 2 countries are placed on the tier 2 watch list. See U.S. Department of State, 2008b.

[24] Clare Ribando Seelke and Alison Siskin, *Trafficking in Persons: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34317, August 14, 2008.

With regard to rebel insurgencies, the EPR remains at the top of the list of internal rebel groups that may threaten the Mexican government. Following the PEMEX bombings by the EPR in 2007, Calderón sent an elite military unit consisting of 5,000 troops to protect energy facilities and other strategically important sites.[25] In April 2008, the Mexican government agreed to talks with the EPR if the group promised not to commit future violence.[26] No major bombings or other incidents were attributed to the EPR in 2008.

## What Mexico Is Doing at the State and Local Levels

### Police Corruption

Police corruption is widespread at all levels of Mexico's police forces—federal, state, and local. For instance, in April 2007, more than 100 state police officers in the northern state of Nuevo León were suspended due to corruption concerns. In June 2007, President Calderón purged 284 federal police commanders, including commanders of all 31 states and the federal district. The commanders were suspended and subjected to drug and polygraph tests. The Mexican government immediately named replacements for all 284 dismissed commanders.[27]

President Calderón has ordered the federal police to take over entire selected municipal police forces in an attempt to weed out corruption. For instance, in January 2007, one month after assuming office, Calderón ordered that the 2,300 police officers in Tijuana be confined to barracks and disarmed; he entrusted control of the city to the army and the federal police.[28] In March 2007, Mexican soldiers and federal police officers took over the police headquarters in Tabasco state and forced state police to hand over their weapons for registration.[29] Such

[25] Hector Tobar, "Mexican Troops Sent to Guard Energy Facilities," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2007.

[26] "Mexico Accepts Talks with Leftist Rebels," Reuters, April 29, 2008.

[27] Cook, 2007.

[28] Huste, 2007.

[29] "Mexican Soldiers Take Over Tabasco State Police," Reuters, March 17, 2007.

takeovers once again highlight the lack of a cohesive national security strategy and the failure to delineate responsibility and authority across police forces.

President Calderón's public security reform proposals include professionalizing the police force by raising salaries and adding mandatory training modeled on the programs of such countries as the United States and Chile.[30] One program that has been implemented is the new national police academy. The new academy promotes internationally accepted policing techniques and logistics and is trying to develop a new way of thinking among the police forces. Thus far, 1,000 new police officers have graduated from the academy, and the plan is to implement similar academies at the state and municipal levels. To fight corruption, the National Assessment and Reliability Control Center was also created, with a view to ensuring that every person working in a police institution is reliable and matches the profile required by the new police model.[31] The plan is for every state in Mexico to have a similar center. Finally, in the summer of 2008, Mexico's federal investigative and preventive police forces were combined into a single unit to minimize corruption.

Local municipalities are also taking action against corruption. In August 2008, Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard announced that the city would create a new police investigative agency to replace its old, corruption-ridden detectives' unit. In addition, the city hopes to name as many as 300,000 neighborhood anticrime representatives to evaluate law enforcement efforts.[32]

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[30] Hanson, 2007.

[31] Felipe Calderón, "Message to the Nation from the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, on the Occasion of His First State of the Union Address," transcript, September 2, 2007.

[32] "Mexico Announces Anti-Kidnapping Reforms," CNN, August 13, 2008.

### Transnational Gangs (*Maras*)

The United States is becoming increasingly concerned about the transnational impact of gangs.[33] However, reliable data on the extent of gang activity in Mexico are extremely difficult to find. According to interviews conducted in October 2005 by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it was estimated that 17,000 gang members (predominantly members of the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs) operate in the city of Juárez.[34]

In November 2005, the Mexican government, responding to public anger about growing gang activity, deployed 1,200 agents in a multiregion sweep that led to the arrests of about 200 gang members. According to Eduardo Medina Mora, Mexico's attorney general, nearly 1,100 gang members were arrested in Mexico in 2004 and 2005.[35]

The SSP oversees a permanent antigang operation, called Operación Acero, that dates back to 2003. This operation has been implemented once per year for the past three years and has detained 179 gang members.[36] However, to date, it does not appear that Mexico has adopted national anti-*mara* legislation as some other countries have. While the federal government has taken little action against gangs or developed policy to counter gangs, in Chiapas, the state government has changed criminal legislation to target *maras*.[37]

### Judicial Reform at the State Level

Survey data indicate that Mexicans feel that crime is very high, and that authorities are ineffective and even corrupt in combating this pervasive problem.[38] While most crimes in Mexico go unreported,[39] of the

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[33] Celinda Franco, *The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?* Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34233, November 2, 2007.

[34] USAID, 2006.

[35] Sullivan, 2005.

[36] USAID, 2006, Annex 4.

[37] Logan, 2006.

[38] For a discussion of criminal impunity in Mexico, see Zepeda, 2004.

[39] See Cornelius and Shirk, 2007.

approximately 200,000 crimes that are reported to police each year, the number of arrests is on the order of 10,000 per year. Calderón's well-publicized drive to increase arrests has thus far had little effect on these figures.[40]

A major judicial backlog means that even those victims who decide to report and initiate judicial proceedings for a crime face long waits and the necessity to bribe officials. Moreover, independent sources, such as Global Integrity[41] and the Mexican media outlet *El Universal*,[42] cite intimidation, physical harm, and killing of judges as major concerns in Mexico. It frequently takes more than a year to bring a suspect to trial, resulting in prison overcrowding and permitting some arrested cartel members to continue operating their businesses while incarcerated. According to Mexican officials, there is currently a deficit of 50,000 prison beds in Mexico, and the rate of overcrowding is 32 percent.

In response to concerns that the process of written trials was secretive and vulnerable to corruption, the state of Chihuahua instituted judicial reforms in late 2006.[43] These reforms included a change from written to oral trials, potentially cutting down on corruption because written trials involve a secretive process in which the judge reviews written evidence in private and then renders a decision. The reforms also included the change from the presumption of guilt to the presumption of innocence. We were told by several government officials that, in addition to academics, nongovernmental organizations, and the European Union, USAID assisted the state of Chihuahua in assessing its options for reform. This is an important example because it could potentially serve as a model for how institutional reform can be supported externally and initiated at the state level rather

[40] Mayolo Lopez, "Descarta el Ejecutivo Titubeo Contra Crimen" ["Rejecting Executive Hesitation to Counter Crime"], *Reforma*, October 13, 2007.

[41] Leonarda Reyes, "Reporters Notebook: Mexico," Global Integrity, 2006.

[42] Eduardo Alonso and Francisco Gómez, "Matan a Juez Encargado de Casos del Narcotráfico" ["Judge in Charge of Drug-Trafficking Cases Killed"], *El Universal*, August 18, 2006.

[43] Sean Mattson, "Chihuahua Pioneers Judicial Reform," *San Antonio Express News*, March 8, 2008.

than at the federal level.[44] Similar judicial reforms were finally passed at the federal level in June 2008 after delays due to opposition in the Mexican congress.[45]

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[44] See Thomas Carothers, *Promoting the Rule of Law Abroad: In Search of Knowledge*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.

[45] Jens Erik Gould, "Mexico's Calderón Signs Law to Boost Judicial System Efficiency," Bloomberg, June 17, 2008.

CHAPTER FOUR

# Impact on the United States and the U.S. Government's Response

Clearly, the United States is concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Mexico. Violence on the southwestern border continues to spill over into the United States, and crime and violence in Mexico feed into crime and violence in the United States. The current spike in violence in Mexico and the recent change in U.S. administration provide an opportunity for the United States to reevaluate its current strategy for providing aid to Mexico. This chapter discusses some of the most immediate impacts of security issues in Mexico on the United States and provides a brief overview of U.S. aid to Mexico. It also outlines the recent Mérida Initiative and examines some barriers to monitoring U.S. aid to Mexico.

## Impact on the United States

In its 2009 *National Drug Threat Assessment*, the U.S. Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center states that "Mexican DTOs represent the greatest organized crime threat to the United States. The influence of Mexican DTOs over domestic drug trafficking is unrivaled."[1] Mexican organizations affiliated with the so-called Federation smuggling network were identified in 82 U.S. cities, mostly in the Southwest. Elements of the Juárez Cartel were identified in at least 44 cities, from western Texas to Minneapolis. Gulf Cartel affiliates were

1 U.S. Department of Justice, 2009.

operating in at least 43 cities, from South Texas to Buffalo, New York. And the Tijuana Cartel, active in at least 20 U.S. cities, is extending its network from San Diego to Seattle and Anchorage.[2] It seems that the spread of the Mexican DTOs is also having an impact on U.S. security personnel: The number of corruption investigations involving U.S. border patrol agents is increasing.[3]

Drug trafficking violence is increasingly spilling over into U.S. communities. In Pearsall, Texas, just outside San Antonio, a tow-truck driver was abducted and taken across the border in 2007 by thugs allegedly connected with Mexican drug traffickers.[4] In 2008, cartel members pleaded guilty in federal court to charges related to a murder-for-hire and kidnapping ring that stretched from the Rio Grande to northern Texas. Several men and two teenage boys on the U.S. side of the border were killed as part of a war that pitted the Gulf Cartel against the Sinaloa Cartel over the lucrative drug trafficking route to northern Texas and beyond. Hit men were paid in drugs and cash to help carry out the slayings.[5]

While border cities have been hardest hit by this violence, it has been far-reaching, with even Anchorage, Alaska, reporting activity by a Tijuana drug cartel.[6] In San Diego, a rogue faction of the Arellano Félix organization has been accused in connection with as many as a dozen murders and 20 kidnappings over a three-year span.[7] In September 2008, authorities announced that 175 alleged members of Mexico's Gulf Cartel had been rounded up across the United States and abroad, including 43 who had had been active in the Atlanta area.[8]

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2 Sam Quinones and Richard A. Serrano, "Mexico's Drug War Spills Across the Border," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 2008.

3 Archibold and Becker, 2008.

4 Quinones and Serrano, 2008.

5 Quinones and Serrano, 2008.

6 Quinones and Serrano, 2008.

7 Quinones and Serrano, 2008.

8 Jason Trahan, "175 Arrested in Crackdown on Notorious Gulf Cartel," *Dallas News*, September 18, 2008.

There has also been an increasing number of high-profile kidnappings in the United States related to drug violence. For instance, in November 2008, three armed men disguised as police officers broke into a Las Vegas home, tied up a woman and her boyfriend, and abducted the woman's six-year-old son. Authorities said that the men were tied to a Mexican drug smuggling operation and were trying to recoup proceeds allegedly stolen by the child's grandfather.[9]

The increasing violence is receiving more attention from U.S. policymakers and strategists. For instance, the U.S. Joint Forces Command's 2008 *Joint Operating Environment* report states that, in terms of worst-case scenarios, two large and important states are at risk of rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico.[10] In January 2009, Michael Chertoff, the outgoing secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, announced that the department had developed contingency plans against significant spillover of drug violence or a surge of people trying to escape the drug violence in Mexico. Chertoff also said that he had advised then-Governor Janet Napolitano of Arizona, who would later succeed him as homeland security secretary, that he had "put helping Mexico get control of its borders and its organized crime problems" at the very top of the list of national security concerns.[11] In February 2009, Texas Governor Rick Perry called for the deployment of National Guard troops along the U.S.-Mexico border.[12] It is within this context that the new U.S. presidential administration will need to decide which policy options can be utilized to address the security situation in Mexico.

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[9] Nicholas Riccardi, "Kidnapped Boy Is Safe; Vegas Police Shift Their Focus to Unraveling the Abduction Scheme, Purportedly Linked to a Mexican Drug Cartel," *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 2008.

[10] U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment: Challenges and Implications for the Joint Future Force*, Suffolk, Va., 2008.

[11] Randal C. Archibold, "U.S. Plans Border 'Surge' Against Any Drug Wars," *New York Times*, January 8, 2009.

[12] Evan Perez and Cam Simpson, "U.S. Still Evaluating Mexican Border Issue," *Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2009.

## Overview of U.S. Aid to Mexico

As a middle-income country, Mexico has not been a major recipient of U.S. foreign assistance. Annual foreign-aid allocations to Mexico are typically between $60 million and $70 million. In FYs 2006 and 2007, the United States allocated $68 million and $67 million, respectively, in aid to Mexico.[13] The majority of U.S. assistance to Mexico is for international narcotics and law enforcement programs. In FY 2006, nearly $39 million, or 58 percent, of aid to Mexico was designated for international narcotics and law enforcement programs. An estimated $37 million was spent on narcotics and law enforcement programs in FY 2007.[14]

Table 4.1 outlines the division of funds allocated to Mexican counternarcotics activities between 2000 and 2006. In total, almost $400 million was allocated to Mexico over the six-year period.[15] As the table indicates, most of these funds supported port and border security ($72.7 million) and counternarcotics programs ($51.2 million). Of the four agencies that provided assistance, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs provided the most funding, and USAID provided the least.

Much U.S. counternarcotics aid to Mexico has concentrated on training. The U.S. government's Law Enforcement Professionalization and Training Project provided 275 training courses to 6,269 Mexican law enforcement agency personnel. The U.S. government has also provided training to new SSP polygraph operators.[16] In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard provided several training courses for the Mexican navy in 2007, including seven maritime law enforcement courses

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13 Connie Veillette, Mark P. Sullivan, Clare Ribando Seelke, and Colleen W. Cook, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2006–FY2008*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34299, December 28, 2007.

14 Veillette et al., 2007.

15 The new Mérida Initiative promises this same amount—$400 million—in FY 2009.

16 U.S. Department of State, 2008a.

**Table 4.1**
**U.S. Support for Mexican Counternarcotics Activities, FY 2000–FY 2006**

| Agency and Activity | Cost ($ millions) |
|---|---|
| U.S. Department of State (Bureau of Int'l Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) | |
| Port and border security | 72.7 |
| Law enforcement infrastructure | 28.4 |
| Interdiction and eradication | 23.3 |
| Aviation | 22.2 |
| Training | 14.8 |
| Other | 7.5 |
| Subtotal | 168.9 |
| U.S. Department of Justice (Drug Enforcement Administration) | |
| Mexico field offices | 123.9 |
| Intelligence and enforcement groups | 8.9 |
| Special support and administrative support units | 7.2 |
| Subtotal | 140.0 |
| U.S. Department of Defense | |
| Counternarcotics support programs (National Defense Authorization Act §1004) | 51.2 |
| International Military Education and TrainingProgram | 6.6 |
| Subtotal | 57.8 |
| USAID | |
| Rule of law | 15.6 |
| Anticorruption | 13.0 |
| Financial transparency | 1.3 |
| Subtotal | 29.9 |
| Total, all agencies | 396.6 |

SOURCE: U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States*, Washington, D.C., GAO-07-1018, August 17, 2007a.

focused on maritime boarding tactics and procedures for more than 250 Mexican navy personnel.[17]

In addition to its counternarcotics initiatives, the U.S. government has also increased its efforts against organized crime, arms smugglers, and street gangs. For instance, the United States has used the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime to secure an extradition that otherwise would not have taken place under an existing bilateral extradition treaty and to obtain provisional arrest warrants.[18] As mentioned in Chapter Three, the ATF is operating Project Gunrunner in an effort to stop the flow of illegal guns into Mexico from the United States. U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies also recently unveiled a joint effort, called Armas Cruzadas (Crossed Arms) to disrupt cross-border weapon smuggling through the sharing of databases and better monitoring of illicit sales at gun shops and gun shows. And the Federal Bureau of Investigation is engaged with Mexican police in a binational antikidnapping task force.[19]

In an effort to address street gangs, on July 18, 2007, at a security meeting of the seven Central American countries, a U.S. delegation announced the release of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico. The new U.S. antigang strategy builds on cooperative efforts already under way and will amplify both prevention and enforcement programs.[20]

Our analysis of U.S efforts to address the three priority areas (organized crime, including drug trafficking and arms trafficking; illegal migration and human trafficking; and terrorism and rebel insurgencies) found four trends in U.S. aid to Mexico:

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[17] U.S. Department of State, 2008a.

[18] David T. Johnson, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "Combating Transnational Crime and Joint Efforts to Safeguard the Western Hemisphere," speech to Ministers of Justice or Attorneys General of the Americas, Washington, D.C., April 28, 2008.

[19] McLemore, 2008.

[20] White House, "Statement on the U.S. Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico," press release, July 20, 2007.

- The U.S. response has focused on counterterrorism and counternarcotics.
- The U.S. response has focused on federal-to-federal cooperation.
- The U.S. response has focused mostly on technological aid.
- The U.S. response has focused little on institution building.

### U.S. Response: Counterterrorism and Counternarcotics

As shown in Table 4.1, U.S. aid to Mexico has focused primarily on counterterrorism and counternarcotics. With U.S. assistance, extraditions of criminals to the United States increased, thousands of Mexican law enforcement personnel were trained, and controls over chemicals to produce methamphetamine were strengthened.[21] However, since so much law enforcement assistance has been directed toward counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts, the goal of improving everyday security for Mexicans has not been a target of U.S. assistance to Mexico.

### U.S. Response: Federal-to-Federal Cooperation

U.S. efforts to address the primary threats from Mexico have largely involved federal-to-federal cooperation across countries. For instance, recent U.S. efforts to combat corruption have focused on the vetting of federal (rather than state or local) police units. Given that this sort of aid does not address the root of corruption in state and local police forces, the United States may want to reconsider whether aid should be redistributed, with more allocated to the state and local levels. If direct aid at the state and local levels is not palatable to the Mexican government, such aid could be funneled through and administered by the Mexican federal government, with the provision that the aid would reach the state and local levels.

### U.S. Response: Technological Aid

Most U.S. aid to Mexico has focused on technological aid and equipment. For instance, the United States has provided Mexico with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. The U.S. Department of Homeland

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[21] U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007b.

Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, has also loaned non-intrusive inspection equipment to Mexican customs for use during surge operations along Mexico's northern border. This equipment complemented three mobile units that were provided to the government of Mexico in 2005.[22] A large portion of the initial request in the Mérida Initiative consisted of equipment and technological assistance.

### U.S. Response: Institution Building as a Secondary Focus

Perhaps due to Mexican resistance, institution building has been a secondary focus of U.S. aid to Mexico. Assistance for institution building is probably the least palatable to the Mexican government due to concerns over issues of sovereignty. As indicated in Table 4.1, rule of law, anticorruption, and financial transparency initiatives have not received much funding in comparison to counternarcotics programs and border security. There seems to be a disconnect between current U.S. counternarcotics aid and institution building. The reasons for this may include the cost and difficulty to sustain institution building and resistance from entrenched interests.

## The Mérida Initiative

On June 30, 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-252), which provided Mexico with $352 million in FY 2008 supplemental assistance and $48 million in FY 2009 supplemental assistance.[23] Mérida will increase the Mexican counternarcotics budget by 20 percent.

During the debate surrounding the Mérida Initiative, the issue of human rights took center stage. Several human rights groups advocated including strong human rights provisions in the Mérida Initia-

[22] U.S. Department of State, 2008a.

[23] Colleen W. Cook and Clare Ribando Seelke, *Merida Initiative: Proposed U.S. Anticrime and Counterdrug Assistance for Mexico and Central America*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RS22837, July 7, 2008.

tive.[24] However, the language in the final enacted measure reduced the amount of funding subject to human rights conditions, from 25 percent to 15 percent. It also removed conditions that would have required the Mexican government to try military officials accused of abuses in civilian courts and to enhance the power of Mexico's National Human Rights Commission.[25]

Like previous aid packages to Mexico, the Mérida Initiative focuses on technological aid. The first stage of funding in the package will provide[26]

- helicopters and surveillance aircraft to support interdiction and rapid response by Mexican law enforcement agencies
- nonintrusive inspection equipment, ion scanners, and canine units for Mexican customs, the new Mexican federal police, and the military to interdict trafficked drugs, arms, cash, and persons
- technologies and secure communication systems to improve data collection and storage, thereby ensuring that vital information is accessible to law enforcement agencies
- technical advice and training to strengthen institutions of justice and improve vetting for the new Mexican police force, case management software to track investigations through the legal process, support for offices to oversee citizen complaints and professional responsibility, and assistance in establishing witness protection programs.

Mérida may broaden the scope of cooperation between the United States and Mexico, and it will provide stronger human rights protections than previous aid packages. In addition, it may improve transparency via technology and equipment (e.g., polygraph machines) and may help fight corruption in the federal police by providing the equip-

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24 Renata Rendon, "U.S. Aid Package to Mexico Raises Human Rights Concerns," *Amnesty International Magazine*, Spring 2008.

25 Cook and Seelke, 2008.

26 U.S. Embassy in Mexico, "Law Enforcement at a Glance," Web page, undated.

ment to vet police units and track officers who move from one unit to another.

However, Mérida may fall short for the following reasons:

- It does not address the gap between federal and local police forces.
- It does not provide assistance at the local level to address everyday security issues.

## Barriers to Monitoring the Effectiveness of Aid

To measure the progress of national security reforms, there must first be agreement on what the indicators of progress should be. Our research and interviews indicate that there is no agreement on those indicators, and, as a result, much attention is paid to the outputs of the aid rather than the outcomes of the aid. While there are effective performance measures in place to measure outputs (e.g., the number of helicopters or trucks provided or the number of police officers trained with funds from the aid package), measuring outcomes (e.g., institutional reforms, increased government capacity) is much more difficult. Increased trust in government may be one indicator of the public's acceptance of institutional reforms, but it is a weak proxy for measuring long-term improvements in government capacity.

Our research and interviews indicate that there is much work to be done in developing appropriate indicators of progress as well as performance measures to monitor outcomes of aid. Given increased pressures on U.S. government agencies to account for the impact of the aid that they disperse, there has also been a tendency to focus on outputs rather than outcomes because outputs are easier to measure and account for. Therefore, if effective performance metrics are developed for measuring outcomes, some U.S. government agencies might be able to make a stronger argument for more aid to be given for the purposes of institution building and reforms.

Another barrier to monitoring U.S. aid to Mexico is the Mexican government's weak data collection infrastructure. Without these data, the United States lacks the information needed to assess whether its aid is targeted to the appropriate areas or whether its aid strategy needs to be reassessed. By providing training and assistance to the Mexican government on data collection methods and systems, the United States can assist in building the institutional infrastructure that will ultimately make it easier to monitor the effectiveness of U.S. aid to Mexico.

CHAPTER FIVE

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The events of the past two years have proven to be a mammoth test for Mexico's national security structure. Mexico has not had a cohesive security strategy since President Fox came to office in 2000. The lack of a cohesive security strategy has led to shifting responsibilities, the duplication of services in a number of agencies, and general instability in Mexico's security structure. Ambiguous and overlapping responsibilities have created gaps (and often tensions) among federal, state, and local security forces. This situation has resulted in the Mexican military becoming more involved in internal security issues than is the case with most countries' militaries because it is seen as the trusted institution of last resort. Given Mexico's proximity and the impact of its security situation on the United States, the new U.S. administration will need to set priorities and strategies for slowing or stopping the progressive decline in Mexico's internal security.

## Potential Priorities for the New U.S. Administration

Given the impacts of organized crime, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, illegal migration, and human trafficking and the threat of terrorism on the United States, the new U.S. administration will have to address the declining security situation in Mexico. In addition, the new administration will need to decide which security issues to address through U.S. aid to Mexico and how that aid should be prioritized. Four potential priorities emerged from our study:

- Help the Mexican government streamline and rationalize the delivery of security services.
- Encourage the Mexican government to bridge the gap between federal and local security.
- Support Mexico's efforts to address domestic concerns, such as ordinary crime and personal insecurity.
- Focus less on technology transfer and more on building institutions that can be trusted.

### Help the Mexican Government Streamline and Rationalize the Delivery of Security Services

The lack of a cohesive security strategy has led to shifting responsibilities, the duplication of services in a number of agencies, and general instability in Mexico's security structure. This instability has created a situation in which the military is more involved in internal security because the Mexican government has come to rely on the military as the institution of last resort that can address issues that other security institutions cannot.

The United States should encourage the Mexican government to develop a cohesive security strategy and reform its security structure to meet that strategy. While the country must develop this strategy on its own, U.S. aid could provide assistance with institutional reform. The clear definition and streamlining of security responsibilities would eliminate overlap and duplication of services, and, more importantly, it could bolster the public's trust in Mexico's security institutions.

### Encourage the Mexican Government to Bridge the Gap Between Federal and Local Security

Ambiguous and overlapping security responsibilities have also created a gap among federal, state, and local security forces. At each of these levels, security forces are unsure of their roles and responsibilities, and, in many cases, they do not share information with one another because their relationships are contentious.

The U.S. government should encourage the Mexican government to bridge the gap between federal and local security forces. The development of a cohesive security strategy that defines the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, and local security forces would go a long way toward bridging this gap. The issue of corruption is clearly one of the barriers to the sharing of information across levels of government. For this reason, longer-term efforts to address corruption should be undertaken.

### Support Mexico's Efforts to Address Domestic Concerns

Most U.S. aid has been focused on the federal government in Mexico to address the major issues, such as drug trafficking or organized crime. While these issues certainly warrant U.S. attention, the U.S. government should not neglect assistance for everyday security, including combating crime and corruption. These are the issues that affect Mexican citizens on a day-to-day basis, and, consequently, these are the issues that largely define the public's level of trust in Mexican institutions.

The United States should either encourage the Mexican government to allocate more assistance for local security institutions or stipulate in its aid agreements that more aid should be funneled to local security institutions. Some U.S. officials with whom we spoke thought that federal-to-federal cooperation was the most prudent strategy in Mexico, given the degree of corruption at the state and local levels. However, we would encourage the new U.S. administration to think about creative ways to funnel U.S. assistance to the state and local levels in Mexico.

The case of USAID's support for judicial reform in the state of Chihuahua may be a model for this type of assistance. A second model may be to provide money to the Mexican federal government with the stipulation that a certain amount be allocated to the state and local levels, but the Mexican federal government would maintain oversight of the money. The U.S. Office of Community Oriented Policing Services within the U.S. Department of Justice could serve as a template for this type of program. The agency provides grants to local law enforcement agencies, but the Department of Justice maintains oversight over the grant money. A third model may be to create cross-border collaborations between Mexican and U.S. states. There are a few such collaborations already in place for emergency management and humanitarian assistance, but they could be expanded and deepened.

While it is understandable that both the U.S. and Mexican governments have take the position that reform must begin at the federal level before it can take hold at the local level, the majority of security services in Mexico are provided by local institutions (such as local preventive police). Therefore, reform at the local and state levels should not be ignored for the sake of reform at the federal level. We believe that U.S. aid should emphasize reform at all three levels of government and that reforms should feed into one another.

### Focus Less on Technology Transfer and More on Building Trust in Institutions

While most U.S. aid to Mexico has historically focused on technology, equipment, and training, less aid has focused on longer-term institution building and reform of the security structure in Mexico. Without clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, Mexican security institutions at the federal, state, and local levels will continue to lose the public's trust.

The U.S. government should focus aid less on technology and equipment to serve an immediate need and instead on how that technology can instill trust in public institutions. Some U.S. and Mexican officials make the argument that technology and equipment lead to increased transparency in government institutions (e.g., administering polygraph tests to police officers will decrease corruption). However, we believe that technology and equipment are effective in the long term only if they work in tandem with institutional reforms. The Calderón government seems to recognize this. The United States may want to consider whether aid should be concentrated more on improving transparency and accountability at all levels of government, including state and local police forces.

## U.S. Policy Options for Improving Security in Mexico

The future of U.S.-Mexico relations will depend largely on the approach that the new U.S. administration chooses to take. While some, including the former deputy foreign minister of Mexico, Andrés Rozental, advocate the legalization of drugs in the United States as a solution to the violence in Mexico, we have not included a discussion of this option because it is not broadly supported, especially with respect to cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. Based on how much the new administration wants to prioritize long-term reform in Mexico, we have identified three policy options that the U.S. administration can use to address security issues in Mexico:

- Engage in a strategic partnership with Mexico that emphasizes reform and longer-term institution building.
- Maintain the status quo approach, which focuses on ad hoc, issue-specific cooperation but does not emphasize reform or longer-term institution building.
- Institute a retrenchment approach by focusing on U.S. domestic efforts to combat security threats from Mexico and disengage from any partnerships with Mexico.

These policy options can be mapped as shown in Table 5.1.

### Strategic Partnership

A strategic partnership would entail a long-term commitment by the U.S. government to support reforms and institution building in Mexico. In addition, a strategic partnership would require the United States to take on shared responsibility for the drug problem and address domestic demand. The United States should also take measures to stem the illegal flow of three things into Mexico: arms, bulk cash, and chemical

**Table 5.1**
**Policy Options for Improving Security in Mexico**

| Policy Option | Impact | Time Horizon |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic partnership | High | Long term |
| Status quo | Medium | Medium term |
| Retrenchment | Low | Short term |

precursors (such as those used in the manufacture of methamphetamine). This approach would also consist of more bilateral approaches to addressing security issues in Mexico, including, for example, more U.S. training and assistance to Mexican security forces across all levels of government. Such a partnership requires the United States to view Mexico as a full partner that is capable of both institutional reform and maintaining stability within its borders.

Such an approach also requires the United States to take a comprehensive approach to security. This includes deemphasizing technology and equipment as solutions to security problems in Mexico, prioritizing institution building, and making security reforms in Mexico an interagency priority across the U.S. government. Finally, a strategic partnership would emphasize reforms and institution building across all levels of Mexico's government, not just the federal level. Such a strategic partnership could be a U.S.-Mexico bilateral partnership, or it could be a greater North American security collaboration involving the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

### Status Quo

The status quo option maintains current U.S. priorities for addressing security issues in Mexico. U.S. aid would continue to emphasize technology and equipment, and that aid would continue to be targeted mostly toward federal-level reforms in Mexico. Under this option, the U.S. government would not foster comprehensive security reform, but, rather, would cooperate with Mexico on an ad hoc basis. Examples of such issue-specific cooperation include U.S.-Mexico cooperation on counterdrug or law enforcement operations. While this option has a medium time horizon, it does not emphasize reform and institution building to the same extent as the strategic partnership option.

### Retrenchment

Retrenchment is the option in which the U.S. government disengages from Mexico and instead focuses inward on such issues as securing U.S. borders and keeping threats from Mexico at bay. This isolationist option rises from the perspective that Mexico is a failed partner and that it is not capable of securing its own border or maintaining order.

Therefore, according to this view, the United States must unilaterally do all it can to minimize threats to its security.

## Assessment of the Three Policy Options

As Table 5.2 shows, the strategic partnership option places the greatest demands on the U.S. government. This option requires a high degree of institutional commitment by the U.S. government because it focuses on long-term, tough, institutional reforms that perhaps will not be achieved even within the term of a presidential administration. The strategic partnership option also requires a high degree of interagency coordination and planning because it requires a more comprehensive approach that includes agencies from across the U.S. government. For the new administration to make strategic partnership a feasible option, it will need to ensure a high degree of domestic U.S. support for reform in Mexico and realize that such reforms take time. Finally, this option creates a need for performance metrics that can measure the effectiveness of security reforms—in particular, long-term, institutional reforms. As discussed in the previous chapters, current metrics measure outputs well, but they are much less capable of measuring outcomes.

**Table 5.2**
**Demands Created by the Three Policy Options**

| | Policy Option | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Area of Demand** | **Strategic Partnership** | **Status Quo** | **Retrenchment** |
| U.S. institutional commitment | High | Medium | Low |
| U.S. interagency cooperation and planning | High | Low | Low |
| Domestic U.S. support for reform in Mexico | High | Medium | Low |
| Need for metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. aid | High | Medium | Low |

NOTE: High, medium, and low indicate degree of demand for U.S. government resources, personnel, and time.

Table 5.2 also shows that the status quo option places a medium degree of demand on the U.S. government in terms of U.S. institutional commitment, domestic support for reforms in Mexico, and need for performance metrics. It also requires low levels of interagency cooperation, since most ad hoc issues are handled by single agencies.

Finally, Table 5.2 shows that the retrenchment option places the fewest burdens on the U.S. government. Since it entails selective disengagement from Mexico, the retrenchment option requires very little institutional commitment from the U.S. government, low levels of interagency cooperation and planning, and low levels of domestic support for reforms in Mexico. The U.S. government would likely not be interested in measuring progress if it chose this option, so there might not be a high degree of need for performance metrics.

These three policy options address the four potential priorities areas in different ways. As Table 5.3 shows, the strategic partnership option is the only option that has a high level of impact on all four potential priority areas. On the other side of the spectrum, the retrenchment option is the only one that has a low impact on all four potential

**Table 5.3**
**Impact of the Three Policy Options**

| | Policy Option | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Priority Area** | **Strategic Partnership** | **Status Quo** | **Retrenchment** |
| Develop cohesive security strategy and reform the security structure to meet that strategy | High | Low | Low |
| Bridge the gap between federal and local security forces | High | Low | Low |
| Support Mexico's efforts to address domestic concerns | High | Low | Low |
| Focus aid less on technology and equipment and more on increasing transparency in government institutions | High | Medium | Low |

NOTE: High, medium, and low indicate degree of impact on the four priority areas.

priority areas. The status quo option has varying degrees of impact on the potential priority areas, depending on the particular issue or area of cooperation that is being examined.

## Mexico's Reaction to the Three Policy Options

In assessing which policy option to pursue, the U.S. government should be sensitive to the potential reactions that the Mexican government may have to the policy options. The United States and Mexico have a unique relationship that has given rise to unique historical sensitivities. For instance, the Mexican government has always been wary of U.S. involvement in Mexican internal affairs. These Mexican sensitivities will create different barriers to the implementation of the policy options.

While the strategic policy option may not have been a feasible option before the election of President Fox in 2000, this option is more possible than ever before. As our interviews with Mexican officials substantiated, indications are that the Calderón administration is interested in longer-term reform and institution building. However, as the negotiations surrounding the Mérida Initiative have demonstrated, the Mexican government is sensitive to the United States pushing too hard on human rights and institutional reform issues. As long as a strategic relationship can be forged in which the Mexican government feels that it is not ceding any of its internal authority by accepting U.S. assistance, the strategic partnership option may be palatable to Mexico.

As evidenced by the Mérida Initiative, the current Mexican administration wants more from the United States than the status quo. Throughout the Fox and Calderón administrations, the Mexican government has slowly shifted the definition of *status quo* closer to what is characterized by the strategic partnership option. Therefore, the status quo option is somewhat risky for the Mexican government because it opens the door for cooperation on issues that may infringe on national sovereignty. As we saw during the U.S. congressional debate over the

Mérida Initiative, President Calderón and his administration were very sensitive to issues of sovereignty. Calderón said,

> My government will defend at all times its national sovereignty and the interests of Mexicans and we will act strictly in accordance with the Constitution, and, of course, we will not accept conditions that simply are unacceptable.[1]

In the end, the Mexican government accepted the human rights stipulations that accompany the Mérida Initiative. "The terms that were approved are respectful of the sovereignty and jurisdiction of both countries," said Mexico's interior minister, Juan Camilo Mouriño.[2]

Perhaps the option to which Mexico would be most receptive is the status quo option (again, as long as it does not threaten the country's sovereignty). This is a safe option for the Mexican government because it does not require any longer-term commitment, and the Mexican government can choose the issues that it wants to pursue in close collaboration with the United States. The downside of this option is that the Mexican government's relationship with the United States is sporadic and uneven, depending on the issue. The Calderón administration seems to recognize this and, in turn, seems to be moving beyond the status quo toward more stable and ongoing cooperation on a wider set of national security issues.

The most risky and potentially damaging option is the retrenchment option. If the United States chooses to entrench itself against threats from Mexico and disengage from that country, such retrenchment may trigger reciprocation from Mexico. Our analysis demonstrates that U.S.-Mexico border security issues are extremely complex and intertwined. None of those issues can be solved unilaterally or without the cooperation of the other country.

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[1] James C. McKinley Jr., "Conditions on U.S. Aid in Drug Fight Anger Mexico," *New York Times*, June 7, 2008b.

[2] Marc Lacey, "Mexico Accepts Anti-Narcotics Aid from U.S.," *New York Times*, June 28, 2008.

## The Future of U.S.-Mexico Security Relations

All of the U.S. and Mexican officials with whom we spoke indicated that they felt that the Calderón administration is serious about implementing reforms and tackling security issues in Mexico. If the United States does not build on the unprecedented levels of U.S.-Mexican cooperation, the strides forward in U.S.-Mexico relations during the Fox and Calderón administrations may dissolve. Therefore, the new U.S. administration should take advantage of this historic window of opportunity and further engage the Calderón government in a deeper and broader relationship that strives toward a long-term strategic partnership.

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