

**Written Testimony of Assistant Secretary William R. Brownfield  
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere and House  
Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Management  
Joint Hearing: Mérida Part II: Insurgency and Terrorism in Mexico”  
October 4, 2011**

Chairman Mack, Chairman McCaul, and other distinguished Representatives, thank you for your support of the Mérida Initiative and for your attention to the important security challenges in Mexico. I recognize that there may be confusion among some as to what the Mérida Initiative represents. I'd like to frame the initiative today for anyone who might not be as familiar with Mérida as you are. As a foreign assistance program, the Mérida Initiative was not intended to be, nor does it represent, a U.S. operation to counter Mexican drug cartels or criminal actors. Nor was Mérida intended as the panacea for the illicit activity that fuels violence in Mexico. Rather, the Mérida Initiative was crafted by our two governments to strengthen Mexico's institutional capacity to counter crime and enforce the rule of law. Successful outcomes from our programming are not often highlighted in the media, but behind the scenes, they have empowered Mexico's federal authorities to confront drug cartels where they once operated with near impunity.

When it was launched in 2007, the Mérida Initiative aimed to utilize our foreign assistance mechanisms to provide specific equipment and training that the Government of Mexico identified. These resources requirements were designed to endow many of Mexico's federal authorities with specific tools necessary to confront cartels where they operate and to enable the provision of justice at the federal level.

Today the Mérida Initiative is organized around a four pillar strategy that aims to: 1) disrupt the capacity of organized crime to operate; 2) institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and respect for human rights; 3) create a 21st century border; and 4) build strong and resilient communities. We are now moving away from big ticket equipment and into an engagement that reinforces progress by further institutionalizing Mexican capacity to sustain adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights, build strong institutions, promote full civil society participation, transform the nature of our borders, and by providing intensive technical assistance and training.

### **Mérida Implementation and Successes**

We've come a long way since the concept of the Mérida Initiative was first introduced. Only one high-level cartel member had been arrested by Mexican authorities from 2003 to late 2009 and the start of Mérida programming. Since that time, the initiative has provided training to over 50,000 Mexican Federal police and government officials, provided fourteen helicopters that Mexican authorities use to carry out anti-cartel operations, and other significant equipment to secure information sharing, and counter illicit crime. Our assistance has helped to create the foundation of a strong and responsive federal police and security apparatus. The successes are notable. Since December 2009, Mérida equipment and capacity building have helped Mexico to

remove or arrest 33 high level priority targets, including four of the top seven most wanted criminals designated by the Mexican government.

In December 2010, the Mexican Federal Police conducted a successful operation, supported by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Mérida-provided air assets, against the cartel La Familia Michoacána, which dealt a severe blow to the organization by killing one of its founders and leaders. Mérida funded equipment and training touched several aspects of this operation, which was Mexico's first combined ground and air assault and involved more than 800 police personnel. Further, this September, using Black Hawk helicopters that had just been provided, the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) carried out a raid on an alleged Zetas training base in Nuevo Leon, resulting in the arrest of 19 people and the seizure of rifles, ammunition and military uniforms.

Mérida programs have also been used to assist in the development of Plataforma Mexico, one of the largest integrated criminal information databases in the world. Mérida assistance has also helped to develop a voice and fingerprint identification system in Mexico, which was put to use following the recent bombing at a casino in Monterrey. As a result of the new capability, Mexican authorities were able to lift a single fingerprint that led to several arrests that cracked the case wide open.

Technology alone without expert operators is useless. So under Mérida, we have paired the provision of critical non-intrusive inspection equipment with trained officers. That advanced technology, as well as specially trained canine teams also provided by Mérida, has dramatically increased overall seizures of illegal narcotics, cash, weapons and other contraband in Mexico. In his most recent state of the union address, President Calderon announced that since 2006, 108,900 kilograms of cocaine, 9,351 tons of marijuana, 3,651 kilograms of opium, and 798 kilograms of heroin has been confiscated.

In one of our more innovative and successful programs, the State Department is working with the State Corrections Training Academies in Colorado and New Mexico, and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, to provide training and technical assistance for all levels of corrections staff – from management to support personnel. This program was designed to meet needs for hands-on training as they increase the number of their federal correction facilities from 6 to 22 by the end of 2012. Mexico's new facilities will take back tens of thousands of federal prisoners currently housed in Mexico's state prisons, thereby greatly relieving the state facilities of severe overcrowding. Where Mexico's infrastructure has limited ability to support training in a real-life environment, corrections officials who take part in Mérida-supported training receive certification to international standards by prison experts here in the United States. So far, 180 trainers and officials have been trained and certified by U.S. trainers, and these newly graduated trainers have already gone on to train 1,737 Mexican federal correctional staff.

Mexico is also undertaking a profound transformation of its existing civil law-based inquisitorial judicial system to introduce an oral advocacy system where prosecutors, defense lawyers, and the accused appear before a judge to present testimony and evidence in an open court. The nature of these reforms is very challenging: Mexico is making the huge shift from the inquisitorial to the accusatorial system, and the states are also making changes independent

of progress at the federal level. Our collective efforts under Mérida have therefore been closely coordinated, with the U.S. Department of Justice helping to familiarize trainees with the accusatorial system at the federal level, and USAID leveraging its long-term experience at the state level. This assistance program will be critical in syncing up judicial reforms with policing efforts to ensure that cartels can be confronted and justice administered under the rule of law.

Mérida is also helping to build strong and resilient communities in Mexico that can better resist the influence of the cartels. For example, Mérida support is enabling a local NGO, Mexico United Against Crime, to teach young people about the culture of lawfulness. 600,000 students in 24 states are already receiving three hours of instruction per week throughout an entire year. The goal is to make this a part of Mexico's standard curriculum by 2014. Drug cartel money will continue to exert a powerful negative influence on young adults, but that influence can be diminished by sowing the seeds of community growth and prosperity based in the common good.

Any large-scale effort to combat criminals raises human rights concerns and requires a clear-eyed assessment of how our efforts impact the rights of citizens. Eight thousand Federal police have already been trained to understand better human rights, victim response, and methods to report corruption and bribery. The Federal Police have made this training mandatory for all recruits and plans to train its entire force, focusing on the ethics and values of public service and trustworthiness.

While there are less than 40,000 Mexican federal police officers, Mexico's state and local police are ten times that number. Accusations of corruption against many of Mexico's state and municipal police forces is common and the appearance, let alone the reality, of collusion undercuts law and order and empowers cartels. In order to strike at the heart of cartel operations, the state and local police forces must be further professionalized, developed, and mentored. Massive efforts are underway at the federal and state levels across Mexico to ensure that all existing police and future recruits are vetted through drug testing, background investigation, and polygraph examination. Mérida Initiative assistance is providing equipment and subject matter expertise at the federal level to shape this process. Similar assistance at the state level is also being undertaken.

## **Mérida Today**

This past April, senior leadership from the United States and Mexico met to reaffirm planning for the next phase of Mérida, which will inject assistance to support Mexican state authorities, who are often the first responders to or victims of cartel activity and related violence in their communities.

The Mérida Initiative will support the Government of Mexico's vision for building state-level law enforcement capacity, through the creation of Model Police Units (MPUs). Conceived by Secretary of Public Security Génaro García Luna, the 422 officer strong MPUs are built around a commanding officer who leads three components: Intelligence Analysis, Criminal Investigations, and Tactical Operations. The three priority Mexican States for our initial assistance will be Nuevo León, Chihuahua, and Tamaulipas, each of which has committed to creating five MPUs (2000 officers) with Mérida assistance.

To meet this goal, we will leverage best practices and lessons learned from our federal-level programs and are working to craft an implementation plan that delivers training using a combination of existing state and federal facilities, creating a police training infrastructure that will be sustained for future train-the-trainer instruction. MPUs will be an important law enforcement element within the Mexican states to leverage future training for other partnering state and local police units.

## **Conclusion**

The U.S.-Mexico strategy for Mérida programming has been designed to be a top-down program that Mexico's federal government will ultimately sustain. It is not a quick-fix: it is an ambitious, multi-year effort to address long-standing problems by building sound institutions that together will strengthen the rule of law and reduce impunity.

It is critical to note that U.S. support under Mérida is just a small fraction compared to the resources that the Government of Mexico has invested itself. For every one dollar of assistance the United States has provided through the Mérida Initiative, we believe that the Government of Mexico has dedicated roughly \$13 to combating cartels and improving its security. Mexico's investment is just one more important indicator underscoring the importance of state sovereignty and Mexico's intent to sustain and build its capacity to affect justice under the rule of law.

The courageous parallel efforts by President Calderon to reform Mexico's justice sector are also absolutely necessary and critical. Neither reform effort is swift or absolute. They are difficult, complex and dangerous enterprises. The drug trafficking organizations are today battling one another for operational space that was once relatively uncontested and is today being squeezed by the Government of Mexico with U.S. assistance.

There is no single answer or silver bullet that will bring a quick end to the barbaric violence that we are seeing today in Mexico. But we will continue to carry out our multi-pronged approach in support of the Government of Mexico, to build its capacity to counter threats and enhance cross-border criminal justice programs and information sharing.

Thank you, Chairman Mack, Chairman McCaul and other distinguished Representatives for your time. I will do my best to address your questions.