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## Real Solutions for Challenges on the Mexico–U.S. Border: The Mérida Initiative

*The Honorable Arturo Sarukhan*

I'm very glad that I have the opportunity to come to The Heritage Foundation to talk about this critically important issue. I'd like to start by underscoring what the Mérida Initiative is and what it seeks to do.

Let me start with one very simple but profound fact. From day one, Mexican President Felipe Calderón underscored that he needed to confront organized crime head on and roll it back. The inroads that organized crime had achieved over the past six years in Mexico were such that we suddenly found ourselves in a position where not only had drug trafficking organizations been able to exponentially expand their operations in Mexico, but they also started gaining control of small municipalities of certain corridors of trafficking patterns and routes in Mexico.

### A Stopgap Measure

From day one, President Calderón decided to take organized crime head on, and he made a very brave, though sometimes controversial, decision of using the armed forces as a stopgap measure to shut down the drugs flowing through Mexico to the United States. Why stopgap? Because one of the challenges that Mexico faces today—and which Mexico has faced a long time—is the corruption that has plagued civilian institutions, especially the police forces and especially at the municipal and state levels. And one of the problems was that, given the President's decision to move in and shut them down, he had to use the army as a stopgap measure.

I say stopgap measure because, for good reason, in the United States you have something called *Posse*

### Talking Points

- The U.S. and Mexico should become strategic partners to shut down the drugs flowing through Mexico to the United States.
- The Mérida Initiative will provide for that strategic grounding in the relationship.
- As we tackle this very complex conundrum of providing common security and common prosperity along our border, we must also ensure that that border remains open to the free flow of goods and services, so that the partnership that we've built in North America since the North American Free Trade Agreement was approved continues to flourish.
- The Mérida Initiative should provide Mexico and the United States an opportunity to think strategically and to understand how enhanced cooperation and security will provide Mexico and the United States with a strategic platform for the next 10 or 15 years of our bilateral relationship.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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*Comitatus*—the fact that armed forces should not be put into law enforcement missions makes sense. When you've got \$8 billion of bulk cash being trafficked into Mexico across the border from the United States, when in one single operation you can seize \$206 million in cash in a safe house in Mexico City—that is the amount of money that is out there corrupting, bribing, paying for killers in the fight against drugs in Mexico.

An institution that has had, so far, a squeaky-clean record in terms of its ability to withstand corruption from organized crime in Mexico is the armed forces. We needed to ensure that the corruption did not penetrate the armed forces in Mexico. So this is why the President is using them as a stop-gap measure, but the intention is to pull them out as quickly as we can and as soon as the civilian police forces are ready to roll.

### **A Three-Pronged Approach**

President Calderón came up (as president-elect) to Washington, D.C., in November 2006, and his initial discussions with President George W. Bush underscored the importance of Mexican efforts against organized crime. In a certain way, he told President Bush that Mexico was willing to invest its own Churchillian quota of blood, sweat, and tears in the fight against drugs, but that Mexico was not going to be able to fight this fight on its own. We needed the support of the United States. And so, as a result of President Bush's travels to Latin America and his pit stop in Mexico at the end of his 2007 trip to Latin America, President Bush went to Mérida, Yucatan.

As a result of that meeting and at the behest of the Mexican president, both presidents decided to move ahead with a new approach to fighting drugs and thugs: a three-pronged approach built upon what Mexico needed to do within its own territory to shut down organized crime; what the United States needed to do in its territory to shut down organized crime and bring down consumption; and what both countries needed to do together—especially along the border region of both countries—to shut down organized crime.

The Mérida Initiative plays into the first and the third prongs; that is, what Mexico needs to do inside

its own territory to shut down drugs, and what both countries are doing to shut down patterns of trafficking across that border, based on one very important premise—co-responsibility. You need two to tango, as with most things in life. As Mexico seeks to shut down the flow of drugs coming through Mexico from Colombia and into the United States, Mexico needs the support of the United States in shutting down its side of the border to the flow of weapons, bulk cash, and chemical precursors coming into Mexico across the U.S. border.

### **Weapons, Cash, and Chemicals**

Let me pause here for a minute. The impact of these three issues—bulk cash, precursors, and weapons—in how Mexico fights drugs and thugs is critically important. Number one is because, as I mentioned, we've got approximately \$10 billion in bulk cash crossing that border illegally into Mexico every year. This is the money that is used to buy new technology, to bribe, to corrupt, to buy weapons, to allow the drug syndicates in Mexico to roll back the power of the Mexican army and the Mexican civilian police forces, to shut them down.

Second, weapons. It's not a surprise that with 12,000 gun shops along the border between Mexico and Arizona and Texas, the influx of weapons coming from the United States and feeding into organized crime is huge. I'll give you the numbers in a while. And in no way does Mexico want to tangle with the Second Amendment or with the National Rifle Association, but what we have said is that we do need greater capabilities on this side of the border to detect organized groups that are using straw purchases in gun shows or gun shops to amass weapons that are then handed over to Mexican criminals or weapons that are coming into the United States illegally and then are being re-diverted to Mexico over the border.

The issue of chemical precursors: As you well know, as the patterns of consumption in the United States moved away from cocaine into methamphetamine, one of the results of that was that some of the labs that were dismantled in the heartland of America crossed the border and opened shop in Mexico. And these so-called "super labs" are, allegedly, the ones that are providing important volumes of methamphetamine back into the U.S. consumer market.

The only glitch in this is that Mexico does not produce the essential chemicals that you need to produce methamphetamine. There are three countries in the world that basically produce pseudoephedrine and ephedrine, which are the essential chemicals that you need to produce methamphetamine: India, China, and Germany. Most of the pseudoephedrine or ephedrine that comes into the North American market comes in through one port, Long Beach. From there it moves into the North American region.

And it's a big problem for us, because as of this year, Mexico will become a pseudoephedrine-free territory. What we have done is convinced, cajoled, or coerced the industries—whether it's pharmaceutical or fertilizers—in Mexico to move away from pseudoephedrine and ephedrine as active components and use other active components to make everything from flu medicine to chemical processes to fertilizers. So, as of this year, all licit imports of pseudoephedrine or ephedrine into Mexico will be banned. What we need now is to ensure that pseudoephedrine and ephedrine that comes into, say, the United States, is not crossing the border into Mexico.

### **The Need for the Mérida Initiative**

This is one of the basic premises of why the Mérida Initiative was put on the table now. Another one is how the patterns of drug trafficking have been moving since the mid-1980s, and this is a story most of you in this crowd know. It's the old water-filled balloon story. You squeeze here and it bulges out here.

When the United States successfully dismantled the routes coming through the Caribbean, especially into Florida and Miami, those trafficking patterns moved out into Central America and through Mexico; it was the point of least resistance. Since then, we've been fighting to shut down that air bridge between Colombia and Mexico, which, during the 1990s, provided Mexican drug syndicates with a huge power, especially because Colombian cartels decided that they weren't going to pay their Mexican counterparts in cash but were going to pay them in kind. That is, they would give them cocaine so that Mexican syndicates could place that cocaine in the U.S. market.

What we've been doing since then is trying to break that bridge, land or air, that comes from Colombia through Central America into Mexico, and this is what has been happening. This was 2003. These are the traces of flights that either Key West or Riverside or Epic provide Mexican authorities to trace flights coming from Colombia into southern Mexico. And this is what is happening now: As Mexico has shut down that air bridge, look at what has happened to the traffic and the patterns of flights leaving Colombia. They're heading into the Caribbean, basically into Hispaniola—mainly Haiti, but also into the Dominican Republic—and from there they're moving out either into the U.S. market or into the new, more lucrative markets in Europe or Asia.

### **Alternative Markets**

It is not surprising what is happening, and this will take me to the third trend, which explains why we need the Mérida Initiative now. As a combination of this effect plus the fact that consumption patterns in the United States have apparently moved away from cocaine and into methamphetamine, we have seen a huge expansion of violence along the border. And it's not gratuitous. It's not only a response to heightened Mexican law enforcement efforts to shut them down, it's a response to these factors. Given that cocaine does not sell for what it used to sell for in the U.S. market because of how it's being displaced by methamphetamine, three things are happening.

Number one, Mexican trafficking organizations are dumping cocaine in the Mexican market, so consumption in Mexico is shooting up. Mexico is no longer just a transit country; Mexico is becoming a consumer country of cocaine. If you can't place the merchandise across the border, you place it domestically in Mexico at much lower prices, but still enough to make an important profit. The second trend is that if you can't turn a buck from the kilo of cocaine that you used to, Mexican drug syndicates are moving on to other lucrative criminal enterprises like, for example, human smuggling.

The operations that we see now on the border are no longer the mom-and-pop "coyote" operations that that border has seen for decades. These are

organized criminal groups that are muscling in, getting rid of these small operations of coyotes, of human smugglers, and they're muscling into this trade. This not only explains why the costs of bringing someone across the border have skyrocketed from \$1,500 to \$2,000 to \$5,000, but also explains the violence that is taking place as drug syndicates are ensuring that their rivals are being eliminated in the human smuggling trade.

But they're also dealing in stolen cars, kidnaping, and extortion, so the level of violence along the border is increasing. As law enforcement authorities on both sides of the border try and shut them down, what has happened is that those trafficking routes that existed along the border are being eliminated, and so you have gang-to-gang violence over the control of those last remaining corridors of trafficking patterns along that border in both directions. So border violence has gone up.

The third phenomenon that we're seeing is that, given that the Mexican drug syndicates can't place that cocaine in their primary market of choice, which was the United States, they're finding new, more lucrative markets. It's not rocket science. If a kilo of wholesale cocaine would sell for about \$22,000 in New York, that same kilo, wholesale, might go for about \$56,000 in Hamburg, and that same kilo wholesale could go for about \$96,000 to \$100,000 in Moscow or Tokyo. So we're suddenly starting to see new patterns of trafficking of cocaine from Central and South America and Mexico into these new areas where we're starting to see very important law enforcement and consumption problems.

This is one of the reasons why Mexico came up to the table with the United States and said, "We need to fight this together. We need your help. We are willing to change the paradigm with which Mexico has traditionally approached law enforcement with the United States."

### **Funding the Mérida Initiative**

What does the Mérida Initiative involve? It is a multi-year program, a three-year program, of \$1.4 billion with an initial request of \$500 million, which has been placed as part of the Iraq supplemental, which hopefully will be debated in the coming days and weeks in Congress.

If you look at the package in total, it has a 60/40 ratio, civilian to military in the first year (2008) It is *not* a military program. It has a very well-balanced ratio of civilian versus military. Why does it have a military component? Because today the armed forces are in the front seat of the fight against drugs, and those are the institutions that are most capable right now of capitalizing some of the support that is in the package. But if you look at the 2008 \$500 million package, it breaks down like this: Roughly 61 percent is for counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, and border security; 20 percent for institution-building; 11 percent for public safety and law enforcement; and 8 percent for program support.

In many ways, a lot of comparisons have been made between the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia, and I would say that probably the Mérida Initiative is a second generation Plan Colombia. That is, the things that have worked and worked adequately in Plan Colombia have been built into this, and the Mérida Initiative has also learned from either the mistakes or the things that have not worked in Plan Colombia so that we do not repeat them in the Mérida Initiative. I know it's easy to say, "Well, Mexico's not Colombia," so the types of requirements for military mobilization that you saw in Plan Colombia are certainly not there for Mexico.

Whereas Plan Colombia was hardware heavy, the Mérida Initiative is software heavy. That is, most of what is in the package for Mexico and Central America is software encryption equipment, monitoring devices—that is, the wherewithal for Mexico to consolidate a communications control and intelligence platform that will allow Mexican institutions to link and process information and then, too, with the linkup with our partners in the U.S. enforcement agencies, to be able to provide endgame to the intelligence that is being running for our mutually vetted units.

So there is a bit of a different approach. There's also an important package of funds in the Mérida Initiative for civil society—Mexican civil society watchdog capabilities—to ensure that human rights are not being violated in the process of fighting drugs. And two, of institution-building, which is probably the most challenging and vexing problem that we face as we ensure that as we pull the military



out, we can move in civilian institutions that are vetted, that are capable of withstanding the corrupting power and influence of the drug trade. Moreover, this is not a handout, it's not charity, and it's not foreign aid. As I said, the fiscal year 2008 \$500 million that is included in the Iraq supplemental will complement the \$2.6 billion that Mexico spent in counter-drug efforts in 2007 and the \$3.9 billion that we're spending this year to fight—again—drugs and thugs in Mexico.

### **Successes: Drugs and Cash**

I give you these figures so that those \$500 million have a much larger context than what Mexico is doing on its own to fight drugs and thugs. Let me give you some of the results of what Mexico's been doing in this past year. It's not always great to say that we have world records in an area as complex as this, but I think some of the results that Mexico has produced this past year are very impressive. We have seized 2,588 tons of marijuana from December 2006 to March 2007; 13 tons of pseudoephedrine in that same period; 51.9 tons of cocaine, with the largest-ever seizure of cocaine in one single operation in the port of Manzanillo, Colima in October of last year. This amount is equivalent to approximately 145 million individual doses of cocaine, worth \$1.4 billion in the consumer market.

We seized the largest world record of cash ever in one single operation—\$206 million in cash. It was a safe room about half the size of this room and the dollar bills were stacked up to here. It took them three days to count those dollar bills and, by the way, it wasn't five and ten dollar bills, which are the denominations of drug traffickers—these were \$100 bills. And this was an operation linked to precisely one of the important pseudoephedrine and ephedrine operations in Mexico, the famous Zhen Li Yegon case in which we, with the support of our U.S. law enforcement agencies, were able to nab this gentleman—I think it was in a Thai restaurant in Rockville, Maryland. He was having a nice dinner there when U.S. law enforcement caught up to him and arrested him, where he is now facing charges.

### **Successes: Weapons Seizures**

The most important aspect of what we've been doing is weapon seizures. Almost 9,000 weapons

have been seized during 2007, about half of them semiautomatic and automatic assault rifles; 528 grenades; and more than 600,000 rounds of ammunition. This is some of the weaponry that has been seized in Mexico. As you can see, not all of this is the sort of mom-and-pop guns and things that you find in gun shows. The Barrett .50 millimeter sniper rifle is not an item that you easily find in a gun shop. Most of them are AK-47s and Colts, but also light anti-tank weapons and automatic grenade launchers and rocket-propelled grenades. We're not seizing pea shooters. And this is the type of weaponry and ammunition that Mexican law enforcement agencies are up against in their fight against drug syndicates in Mexico.

This is why we need the full-fledged support of the United States to be able to shut this down, and I must say that I think the results are starting to show. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) is moving more manpower and resources into the border area. I think the cooperation that we're seeing between ATF and other U.S. law enforcement agencies in Mexico is moving ahead in the right direction.

Congress is also starting to pay attention. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), with the co-sponsorship of Senators Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), and Representatives Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), Henry Cuellar (D-TX), and Eliot Engel (D-NY) have now introduced legislation to provide more resources to ATF and to ensure that U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies are working together to shut down this flow of weapons into Mexico.

### **Extraditions**

There have been important costs, obviously—record-breaking numbers of extraditions to the United States. As you well know, extraditions have always been a complex and delicate issue in law enforcement cooperation between the United States and Mexico. In 2007, Mexico rendered into U.S. authorities' hands 81 significant kingpins or gatekeepers, as we call them, individuals who are in charge of the specific roles and missions of how organized crime is atomized in Mexico. That is, the individuals who are in charge of laundering the money or getting the weapons to the killers or ensuring that the marijuana gets bundled just

before it crosses the border into the United States—these are the guys we’re going after, and in 2007, we’ve extradited 81 of them to the United States.

Now, there are costs, and we have lost 2,800 people in the fight against drugs. We have lost almost 300 police and military officers last year in the fight against organized crime. There are results that a lot of this is working. If you look at the trends in consumption and trafficking in the United States, last year the Office of National Drug Control Policy provided, I think, very concrete proof that what Mexico is doing is having an impact on consumption and distribution in the United States. The price per gram of cocaine increased last year by 44 percent, and its purity decreased 15 percent. The price of methamphetamines increased 73 percent, and their purity decreased 31 percent. So there is a connection between what Mexico is doing and the record seizures that we have achieved and the disruption of how some of these operations are being run in Mexico with what you can see on the street in terms of consumer markets in the United States.

## Conclusion

In ending, I’d like to remind friends in Washington that last year was the 20th anniversary of what I think is one of the most important books that has been written on the U.S.–Mexico bilateral relationship. It is a book written by a then-*New York Times* correspondent who spent five or six years in Mexico. It is a book called *Distant Neighbors* by Alan Riding. Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the publication of the book, and I always use it as a good way to try and gauge where Mexico and the United States are, where the relationship is. Are Mexico and the United States still distant neighbors or have we become something else? And I would probably say the kosher response is we’re a bit of everything.

But certainly in areas such as trade, we have become strategic partners. I think this is one of those areas where, having been distant neighbors, we’re moving into a strategic relationship with the United States, and I certainly think that the Mérida Initiative will provide for that strategic grounding in the relationship—that this is a win-win equation for the United States and Mexico. As we seek to tackle this very

complex conundrum of providing common security and common prosperity along our border—that is, as we seek to shut down the border to organized crime and potential terrorists—we also ensure that that border remains open to the free flow of goods and services, so that the partnership that we’ve built in North America since the North American Free Trade Agreement was approved continues to flourish.

In this very complex dynamic, the Mérida Initiative, I think, provides a crucial cornerstone in our ability to think strategically ahead. As I have said also, *ad nauseam*, at the end of the day, I think Mérida should provide Mexico and the United States an opportunity to stop playing checkers and start playing chess, to think strategically and to understand how enhanced cooperation and security will provide Mexico and the United States with a strategic platform for the next 10 or 15 years of our bilateral relationship.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Since you didn’t mention the number one border security issue that so many Americans are irritated about, the illegal immigration issues, I’m just wondering if you don’t agree that our two governments could work together on some sort of practical work visa program and the border security that goes with that. Don’t think that would also go a long way toward solving the border issues you’re talking about?

**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** I did not mention immigration because I don’t think immigration is a security challenge for the border. Immigration is another type of challenge for the border, not only in terms of the legality of the people who are on this side of border and who cross the border illegally, but we don’t think in Mexico that undocumented migrants are a challenge or a threat to the security of the United States. They may be another type of challenge to socioeconomic well-being, to how these communities integrate or do not integrate into the fabric of America, or what it means for the rule of law in the United States, but we certainly don’t think that immigration is a threat to the security of the United States.

Having said that, I do believe that Mexico and the United States need to find ways to solve this crit-

ically important issue. There is no more divisive or polarizing issue in America today as this one, and I think it has to do with not only an issue of legality, but also because I think more and more Americans today are feeling threatened by the effects of globalization. I think there are many families in America today that feel that their lives and the lives of their children the day after tomorrow are not going to be better than what they are today. They feel, or some of them feel, that things like free trade or tainted goods from China or undocumented migrants are part of that challenge.

Let me say that at the end of the day, the end-game for Mexico has to be that every single Mexican migrant that crosses the border into the United States does so legally. But that also means that we have to come up with ways together to ensure that we bring back circularity in the labor movement between Mexico and the United States, and that we do it in a legal, orderly, transparent, and safe fashion—that we can allow people who so wish to come to the United States to work to be able to do it through a visa program that provides them with certainty, that provides them with documents, and that allows them to come back and forth in a regular, ordained fashion. That is the challenge of the day.

Mexico will have to do its task. We have to continue to grow at a much faster rate than what we've been growing in the past. Unless we provide for that type of growth, Mexico will not be able to bridge the economic divide between Mexico and the United States, and, quite frankly, our loss is your gain. Mexico cannot grow if we're losing 300,000 men and women every year who, because of lack of good-paying jobs in Mexico, are crossing the border into the United States. We can't grow as a society. But at the same time, we need an immigration system on this side of the border that makes sense, which provides that mobility in labor movement, which allows people to come in with documents, but which also allows those who are here to come out of the shadows.

This is clearly one issue where I think both our countries need to continue working together. I think we will have to wait some time until this issue can come back to the table in a more objective fashion.

ion. I think this is an issue where we have seen a lot of heat but very little light.

**QUESTION:** Earlier this morning, Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, who is now in Washington, was making some comments about the Mérida Initiative, and there is certainly a component within the Mérida Initiative for Central America. I wonder if you could comment about Mexico's relationship with the Central American neighbors in that aspect of this initiative.

**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** Mexico has been working very closely with some of our Central American partners, not only because, again, we face the conundrum of the water-filled balloon. Let's say Mexico is widely successful in shutting off the flow of drugs through Mexico into the United States. It's a fact that it's going to penetrate a lot of the Central American nations, and that Central America is going to become the next springboard of those drugs coming into the U.S. market.

So, we need to work in tandem with our Central American friends. With Costa Rica we have been doing a lot of work in terms of training, of police vetting; with Guatemala, with Belize, how we shut down that border to the flow of drugs. There's a lot of institution-building that Mexico is putting into its relationship with Central American nations, and it was President Calderón, with President Bush in Mérida, that discussed the imperative of not only thinking of how Mexico and the United States shut off drugs, but of thinking of a much larger holistic regional context. Again, as I said, if we shut it down here it's going to move somewhere else. We need to be prepared to be able to work in tandem with our Central American partners, and that is why the Mérida Initiative has a very strong Central American component to it, too.

**QUESTION:** You set out very dramatically that this is a national security, a homeland security issue, between strategic partners. I agree with that, and I think it's vitally important. What is the threat to our national security and your national security by this loose chatter during this nasty election season, where normally correct-thinking people presumably attack foreigners, free trade, globalization, and NAFTA? Isn't that a threat to the national security of the United States and of Mexico?

**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** Flies and politicians—in this case, diplomats—have one thing in common, and that is we can both get killed by a newspaper, so I'll try and gingerly step around this one. Certainly, I think campaigns are characterized sometimes by silly comments and issues that make a lot of sense politically, but then in terms of policy, once you're on the ground, make very little sense. I certainly do hope that a lot of what we've been hearing, especially in terms of free trade, will die down after this election is over. We do believe that NAFTA—the way Mexico, Canada, and the United States have engaged one another in terms of free trade—is a success story. It's not the panacea that many oversold it to be, but it's certainly not the giant sucking sound that Ross Perot famously promised would occur if NAFTA were to be approved.

I think that all in all there are winners in NAFTA, and there are also losers, certainly. I think each one of our governments has to be able to ensure that those governmental policies of either rewiring labor or ensuring that we have mitigation policies in the countryside to bring down or to diminish the social dislocation effects, for example, of agribusinesses in NAFTA—these are challenges that all of our countries face. But I think that the strategic underpinnings of NAFTA are all too clear, and I hope that they remain a very, very clear premise for whomever sits in the White House come January 2009.

In regard to some of the pundits, I have always said that the biggest challenge that our two countries face is that over the years we have lost the ability to ensure that our societies are co-stakeholders to the relationship, that they understand why this bilateral relationship is so critically important. The United States may be engaged in more pressing geopolitical issues today, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East and Afghanistan, potentially North Korea, now Syria. But if you look at the day-to-day impacts on the socioeconomic well-being and on the security of Americans, there's no other relationship that I can come up with than Mexico that has such a profound effect on these issues.

We have to use the bully pulpit to talk to our societies and explain to them why this relationship is so important to each other. Look, we've all got

loonies. You've got loonies. We've got loonies on our side. But I hope that the bully pulpit will be used by academia, by think tanks, by the private sector, and by the governments to underscore how the last 13 years of North America have been a success story in how a rising tide is lifting all boats on both sides of these borders.

**QUESTION:** Would Mexico accept a modified version of the Mérida Initiative if the Democratic majority currently at Congress strips it out of the military hardware equipment, especially helicopters for the police force and military?

**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** The Mexican government will obviously voice that opinion once it's clear what has happened, both in markup and, more importantly, in conference. I think it's a bit premature for me to speculate on what our position would be. Most of us in this room probably know that the foreign ops bill, as with most other appropriations bills, will not be taken on by this Congress. I think most of us understand that this Iraq supplemental is probably going to be the last appropriations bill until we have new government in town come January.

But the components that provide air mobility in the Mérida Initiative are a critical cornerstone for Mexico's ability to shut down drugs. Why? Because they are the ones that provide Mexican civilian and military elements the wherewithal to provide endgame. If the United States provides, for example, tracking information of flights coming into Mexican air space in tandem with the Mexican armed forces, those helicopters provide our civilian and military units the ability to arrive at a certain point in time to be able to seize the plane, arrest the pilot, and seize the merchandise. If we don't have that air mobility, our ability to provide endgame diminishes.

So all I would say is that I hope Congress understands that this is a fundamental cornerstone of the strategy behind the Mérida Initiative.

**QUESTION:** Could you address the issue of terrorism and whether you think what you've talked about affects the influx of Middle Eastern people who come into the United States through Mexico, perhaps through false documentation and all that? Or what you have to say doesn't really touch on that?



**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** Certainly with a country that has a 3,000 kilometer border with Mexico and a—I don't know the dimensions—a 3,000-plus kilometer border with Canada and with the type and the profile of these borders, it is always enticing to use those borders to try and undermine the security of the United States. Now, may I remind the auditorium that most of the terrorists involved in the September 11, 2001, attacks were already in the country through visas. I say this to put some of these issues in context.

As of today, there hasn't been a single instance of an individual arrested in Mexico trying to cross that border with the intent of undermining U.S. national security. There have been efforts by individuals in other parts of the world to try and come into Mexico to come across the border, but there hasn't been a single instance of one actually being able to do so, or arrested on his way across the border into the United States. This, I think, speaks volumes about the profound cooperation that was developed after 9/11 between Mexico and the United States to ensure that the southern border was not used to undermine the security of the United States.

Look, we have to say this plain and clear: Post-9/11, a threat to the security of the United States or a potential threat to the security of the United States will have a profound impact on the bilateral relationship with Mexico, so it behooves Mexico to ensure that the border is secure with the United States.

**QUESTION:** I don't want to detract in any way from the significant accomplishments that you've been describing, but you refer at one point to the Mexican military as having a squeaky-clean reputa-

tion, and that is not totally in accord with the impression that I have. I'm just wanting to ask whether or not the Mexican government may be looking at this issue through rose-colored glasses in assuming that the Mexican military is not also corruptible by all of this money.

**AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN:** I think that none of us would deny that the Mexican military is a juicy target for corruption, simply because of the volume of money in the system. If you have corporals or sergeants who are being paid wages which are, in terms of even U.S. standards, low, just having \$206 million sitting in a safe house in Mexico City tells you the amount of money that is in the system that can be used to bribe and corrupt.

I would not say that there haven't been cases in the past where certain elements of the armed forces have been involved, but if you look in total, if you look at the record and the history of the Mexican armed forces compared to civilian law enforcement agencies, it's a night-and-day story. I think that this is the reason why the president decided to put them in this shotgun position in the fight against drugs. And obviously, I think the armed forces are the first ones that understand the magnitude of the challenges they face because of the role they've been asked to play by the president. I think all of us are looking at this carefully. That does not mean that it could not happen or that it has not happened in the past, but I think if you look at the big picture, the instances of penetration of the armed forces by drugs and the drug trade are very small.

—*The Honorable Arturo Sarukhan is Ambassador of Mexico to the United States.*