Negative Brief: Mexico

By Kirstin Erickson

***Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.***

The case to decrease arms sales to Mexico is, on its face, quite strong. There aren’t very many reasons *not* to pass the plan, which is why most of this brief focuses on mitigating arguments. First, the problem isn’t nearly as significant as the affirmative would have you believe. The United States doesn’t sell that much to Mexico in weapons, and most of Mexico’s arms aren’t even from America at all. The most developed argument, however, is solvency. There are multiple strong reasons that decreasing our weapons sales wouldn’t have much of an effect on the supposed problem in Mexico; rather, we’d simply lose the benefits that we currently gain from our arms exports.

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Negative: Mexico Arms Sales

MINOR REPAIRS

1) Mexico reforms.

Mexico should reenact former preventative measures

Dr. Viridiana Rios 2018. (Visiting Assistant Professor, Harvard; Commissioner, Mexico's National Anticorruption System. Former adviser to Mexico’s Minister of Finance and to the Mexican President’s Spokesman. Ph.D. from Harvard Univ.) “New Crime, Old Solutions: The Reason Why Mexico is Violent Again.” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum chartered by Congress) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/new-crime-old-solutions-the-reason-why-mexico-violent-again>

Mexico also needs legal reforms so that individuals detained for possession of a firearm can be held in preventive custody. Prior to the judicial reform of 2008, Mexico’s penal code provided that civilians carrying large-caliber firearms designated for the exclusive use of the Army had committed a serious crime that required immediate preventive detention. Yet, since the adoption of the new adversarial criminal justice system, firearms possession does not merit preventive detention. Local authorities have argued that this is a severe limitation on the fight against organized crime, especially since the prohibition of possession of large-caliber firearms was one of the most effective ways to keep organized criminals off the streets.

2) Better tracking

Arms sales are supposed to be tracked, but aren’t

John Lindsay-Poland 2018. (California Healing Justice Associate of the American Friends Service Committee.) “How U.S. Guns Sold to Mexico End Up With Security Forces Accused of Crime and Human Rights Abuses.” April 26, 2018. The Intercept. (an award-winning news organization) <https://theintercept.com/2018/04/26/mexico-arms-trade-us-gun-sales/>

The State Department is supposed to track end users of U.S. arms exports, to ensure that they don’t go missing or end up in the hands of criminal elements – exactly as is feared is the case in Mexico. But the methods for tracking gun shipments have systemic problems, State Department officials admit behind the scenes. And with the Trump administration’s proposed changes, the process could be undermined even further.

More controls & tracking are needed

John Lindsay-Poland 2018. (California Healing Justice Associate of the American Friends Service Committee.) “How U.S. Guns Sold to Mexico End Up With Security Forces Accused of Crime and Human Rights Abuses.” April 26, 2018. The Intercept. (an award-winning news organization) <https://theintercept.com/2018/04/26/mexico-arms-trade-us-gun-sales/>

The exponential growth in sales to Mexico has not been accompanied by controls to track where the guns go or to ensure that they do not land in the hands of police or military units that are credibly alleged to have committed gross human rights abuses or colluded with criminal groups – the very groups that security forces are being armed to combat.

INHERENCY

1. Status Quo policies are moving in the right direction

US/Mexico cooperation is improving and policies are being enacted to reduce arms trafficking

RICHARD H. GLENN 2020 (DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS) STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY, AND TRADE, 13 Feb 2020 <https://www.state.gov/assessing-u-s-security-assistance-to-mexico/> (brackets added)

Critical to our efforts is an articulation of U.S. and Mexican shared goals, alongside a mutual understanding of our shared threats.  In the first year of his presidency, President Lopez Obrador publicly committed to reduce violence through the establishment of a new National Guard, eliminate corruption, stop arms trafficking in Mexico, and target illicit proceeds from criminal activities.  INL [BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS] appreciates the President’s emphasis on these critical issues, wholeheartedly agrees they are important, and hopes to see a specific and strategic set of objectives to advance progress along those broader promises.  INL is well-positioned to build Mexican capacity to tackle all these issues.

SIGNIFICANCE / HARMS

1. Guns in Mexico aren’t the real problem

Concerns about American guns in Mexico is political rhetoric rather than fact

Scott Stewart 2011. (vice president of tactical analysis at Stratfor; former special agent with the U.S. State Department and deputy regional security officer in Guatemala City. He has also consulted on terrorism issues for the Texas Department of Public Safety.) “Mexico's Gun Supply and the 90 Percent Myth.” February 10, 2011. Stratfor. (the world’s leading American geopolitical intelligence platform and publisher) <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/mexicos-gun-supply-and-90-percent-myth>

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects to watch has been the way in which the Mexican government has tried to deflect responsibility for the cartel wars away from itself and onto the United States. According to the Mexican government, the cartel wars are not a result of corruption in Mexico or of economic and societal dynamics that leave many Mexicans marginalized and desperate to find a way to make a living. Instead, the cartel wars are due to the insatiable American appetite for narcotics and the endless stream of guns that flows from the United States into Mexico and that results in Mexican violence. Interestingly, the part of this argument pertaining to guns has been adopted by many politicians and government officials in the United States in recent years. It has now become quite common to hear U.S. officials confidently assert that 90 percent of the weapons used by the Mexican drug cartels come from the United States. However, a close examination of the dynamics of the cartel wars in Mexico — and of how the oft-echoed 90 percent number was reached — clearly demonstrates that the number is more political rhetoric than empirical fact.

Gun availability in Mexico isn’t the problem: US has far more guns per capita than Mexico, but far fewer homicides

Ryan McMaken 2018. (senior editor at the Mises Institute. Ryan has degrees in economics and political science from the University of Colorado, and was the economist for the Colorado Division of Housing from 2009 to 2014.) “Stop Blaming Mexican Violence on American Guns.” February 23, 2018. The Mesis Institute. <https://mises.org/wire/stop-blaming-mexican-violence-american-guns>

There are some problems with this logic. Even if we account for all the black-market guns in Mexico, gun totals are still much higher in the US. That is, according to the 2007 Small Arms Survey, it is estimated that there are around 15 million privately-held guns in Mexico, on the high end. Even accounting for an additional increase since 2007, we're looking at a rate of fewer than 20 guns per 100 people in Mexico. In the United States, on the other hand, that total is around 100 guns per 100 people. So, if one is going to pin Mexico's violence problem on "more guns," they have to account for why there are more than five times as many guns in the US, with only a small fraction of the homicides.

“Guns near the border” aren’t the cause of homicides: Neighboring US states and border towns do not have nearly as high homicide rates as Mexico

Ryan McMaken 2018. (senior editor at the Mises Institute. Ryan has degrees in economics and political science from the University of Colorado, and was the economist for the Colorado Division of Housing from 2009 to 2014.) “Stop Blaming Mexican Violence on American Guns.” February 23, 2018. The Mises Institute <https://mises.org/wire/stop-blaming-mexican-violence-american-guns> (brackets added)

It requires quite a bit of creativity to then take these facts and twist them into a narrative which concludes "too many guns in Texas leads to more Mexican homicide." If Texan guns are fueling homicide in neighboring jurisdictions, why aren't US states close to Texas experiencing similar problems?  New Mexico, after all, is next to Texas. But New Mexico's homicide rate of 6.7 per 100,000 is a mere fraction of its neighbor to the south — Chihuahua state — where the homicide rate is over 40 per 100,000. Chihuahua is also next to Texas.  **[END QUOTE**] Moreover, increases in gun totals over time in the United States have not shown increases in homicides. In fact, the opposite is true. According to statistics from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, new guns manufactured in the United States, since 2011, have been more than double what they were throughout most of the past thirty years. Total gun production rapidly increased from 2001 to 2013, yet, homicide rates were cut in half from the 1990s to today. Although homicide rates have trended up in the past two years, they remain near 50-year lows.  [**HE GOES ON TO SAY QUOTE:**] Indeed, some American border towns have persistently low homicide rates, even by American standards. The homicide rate in El Paso, Texas, for example, was a very low 2.7 per 100,000 in 2016. Just across the Rio Grande, the city of Juarez is one of the murder capitals of the world. Moreover, 80 percent of El Paso residents are of Hispanic — primarily Mexican — origin, meaning we can't even resort to a bigoted explanation about how Mexican ethnicity leads to more violence.

2. Gun exports exaggerated – it’s not “$123 million/year”

Arms exports from U.S. to Mexico in 2018 was $18 million

USA TODAY 2019 (journalist Thomas Frohlich, Assistant Managing Editor of 24/7 Wall St., a Delaware corporation which runs a financial news and opinion company with content delivered over the Internet.) “Saudi Arabia buys the most weapons from the US government. See what other countries top list.” March 26, 2019. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/03/26/us-arms-sales-these-countries-buy-most-weapons-government/39208809/> (brackets added)

**Mexico**
**• Arms imports from US, 2008-2018:** $899 million, 51.2 percent of arms imports
**• Arms imports from US, 2018:** $18 million, 69.2 percent of arms imports

3. Misleading statistics about percent of guns in Mexico coming from the US

Most of Mexico’s arms are not from the U.S. The “70% or 90% of guns coming from USA” statistic only applies to guns tracked by ATF

Ryan McMaken 2018. (senior editor at the Mises Institute. Ryan has degrees in economics and political science from the University of Colorado, and was the economist for the Colorado Division of Housing from 2009 to 2014.) “Stop Blaming Mexican Violence on American Guns.” February 23, 2018. The Mises Institute <https://mises.org/wire/stop-blaming-mexican-violence-american-guns> (brackets added)

Moreover, the often-quoted statistic allegedly showing that as much as 70 percent, or even 90 percent, of guns seized in Mexico come from the US is not true. That statistic is based only on seized guns that are also traced by the ATF. [US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives] How many of all guns seized in Mexico come from the US? According to Stratfor, "almost 90 percent of the guns seized in Mexico in 2008 were not traced back to the United States." Nor does the Mexican government ask the ATF to trace all guns seized in Mexico. This is because many of those arms can be traced back to the Mexican government itself.

A/T “Almost 90% of guns in Mexico came from USA” - Statistic is misleading, calculated incorrectly

Scott Stewart 2011. (vice president of tactical analysis at Stratfor; former special agent with the U.S. State Department and deputy regional security officer in Guatemala City. He has also consulted on terrorism issues for the Texas Department of Public Safety. He is also regularly featured as a security expert in leading media outlets, including The New York Times.) “Mexico's Gun Supply and the 90 Percent Myth.” February 10, 2011. Stratfor. (the world’s leading American geopolitical intelligence platform and publisher) <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/mexicos-gun-supply-and-90-percent-myth>

This means that the 87 percent figure relates to the number of weapons submitted by the Mexican government to the ATF that could be successfully traced and not from the total number of weapons seized by Mexican authorities or even from the total number of weapons submitted to the ATF for tracing. In fact, the 3,480 guns positively traced to the United States equals less than 12 percent of the total arms seized in Mexico in 2008 and less than 48 percent of all those submitted by the Mexican government to the ATF for tracing. This means that almost 90 percent of the guns seized in Mexico in 2008 were not traced back to the United States.

Almost 90% of seized guns were not traced to the U.S.

Scott Stewart 2011. (vice president of tactical analysis at Stratfor; former special agent with the U.S. State Department and deputy regional security officer in Guatemala City. He has also consulted on terrorism issues for the Texas Department of Public Safety. He is also regularly featured as a security expert in leading media outlets, including The New York Times, CNN International, NPR.) “Mexico's Gun Supply and the 90 Percent Myth.” February 10, 2011. Stratfor. (the world’s leading American geopolitical intelligence platform and publisher) <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/mexicos-gun-supply-and-90-percent-myth>

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Data limitations from the 70% statistic

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

In 2008, of the almost 30,000 firearms that the Mexican Attorney General’s office said were seized, only around 7,200, or approximately a quarter, were submitted to ATF for tracing. **[END QUOTE]** U.S. and Mexican government and law enforcement officials indicated Mexican government officials had not submitted all of the firearms tracing information due to bureaucratic obstacles between the Mexican military and the Mexican Attorney General’s Office and lack of a sufficient number of trained staff to use eTrace. For instance, at one point, State officials told us, the Government of Mexico had only one staff person collecting gun information and entering it into eTrace. [**THEY GO ON TO SAY QUOTE:]** Further, as ATF pointed out, not all guns seized in the United States are submitted by U.S. entities to ATF for tracing either, due to some of the same type of bureaucratic and resource challenges faced in Mexico.

Misleading data from Mexican government causing confusion about firearms in Mexico

Colby Goodman 2011. (independent consultant engaged in research and advocacy on arms export control issues. For five years, led Amnesty International USA’s research and advocacy on issues related to conventional arms control. Master’s degree in International Policy Studies from the Monterey Institute of International Studies)“Update on U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Report.” April 2011. Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/update\_us\_firearms\_trafficking\_to\_mex.pdf

Since the publication of the Mexico Institute’s first report on the issue, there is some new data and information on the specific problems. According to new statistics provided by the U.S. and Mexican governments, Mexico has submitted a total of 78,194 firearm trace requests to the United States from FY 2007 to FY 2010. During approximately the same time frame, President Calderon said Mexico had seized about 90,000 arms. Looking at these numbers, it may appear Mexico is providing ATF with information on a large number of the firearms it has seized since the start of the Calderon Administration, but ATF now reports that tens of thousands of the trace requests are duplicates. In some cases, ATF has received information on the same firearm up to five times as Mexican police, a crime lab, the military, and the Attorney General’s office all write down information on the same firearm, and the individual in the Attorney General’s office in Mexico City submits trace requests on all of them.

Because of data limitations, only 8% of firearm trace requests can be used

Colby Goodman 2011. (independent consultant engaged in research and advocacy on arms export control issues. For five years, led Amnesty International USA’s research and advocacy on issues related to conventional arms control. Master’s degree in International Policy Studies from the Monterey Institute of International Studies)“Update on U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Report.” April 2011. Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/update\_us\_firearms\_trafficking\_to\_mex.pdf

While the Mexican government has been successful at seizing large numbers of firearms and ammunition from OCGs, the key challenge that Mexico has yet to effectively address is providing quality information on firearms seized in Mexico to the U.S. government.  ATF has said that information from firearm trace requests is the single most important data to stopping U.S. firearms traffickers.  After the Mexican government handed ATF a list of tens of thousands of firearms in late 2009, there was hope that this list would provide the U.S. government with much needed information on U.S. buyers and lead to improved firearm trace request submissions by Mexico. Although the list did provide ATF with helpful information, it turned out to be of much less value than originally thought, and many of the problems ATF faced with the list has continued with Mexico’s firearm trace requests last year. In particular, Mexican authorities are not providing information on enough of the firearms they seize, with enough detail, and in a timely basis.  For these reasons and the fact that most of the firearms ATF has information on were purchased more than five years ago, ATF officials have said they have only been able to use about eight percent of Mexico’s firearm trace requests to initiative investigations in the United States.

SOLVENCY

1. Doesn’t address the root causes of violence in Mexico

War against drug cartels was a problem because of a lack of law enforcement tools

Dr. Viridiana Rios 2018. (Visiting Assistant Professor, Harvard; Commissioner, Mexico's National Anticorruption System. Former adviser to Mexico’s Minister of Finance and to the Mexican President’s Spokesman. Ph.D. from Harvard Univ.) “New Crime, Old Solutions: The Reason Why Mexico is Violent Again.” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum chartered by Congress.) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/new-crime-old-solutions-the-reason-why-mexico-violent-again>

A war against drug cartels from 2006 to 2012 left Mexico with a fragmented organized crime landscape and with significant changes in the geography of violence. Security operations were concentrated in large cities, forcing criminal organizations to move to the periphery and to more rural areas. Controlling this increasingly disorganized and geographically dispersed crime required a distinct set of tools that Mexico lacked. The country required a constant and robust strategy of territorial control and proactive intelligence to identify, not only new areas where organized crime operated, but most importantly, to foresee and contain the negative effects of capturing new criminal leaders. The fragmentation of criminal groups required a police force that operated in local and flexible departments, linked to civil society, and capable of capturing petty criminals. Mexico possessed none of these capacities.  The slight benefits obtained from concentrating security operations in urban areas reached its limit, and the country was not capable of designing a strategy that could contain new criminal actors that emerged in their place.

Not enough investment in local police and prosecutors

Eric L. Olson 2018. (Senior Advisor, Mexico Institute & Deputy Director, Latin American Program, and Director of the Central America-D.C. Platform, Seattle International Foundation) “Why are Homicides on the Rise Again in Mexico? What Can Be Done About It?” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum.) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-are-homicides-the-rise-again-mexico-what-can-be-done-about-it>

To date, the security strategy has relied heavily on a “top down” approach to respond to the national security threats posed by organized crime, and convert threats into a more manageable local public security matter.  But local capacity to address the problems of a fractured organized crime is extremely limited, and there has not been sufficient investment in strengthening local police, prosecutors, and governance overall.  Local problems fester and can eventually become extremely violent again.

Recent upsurge in violence due to lack of local law enforcement

Dr. Viridiana Rios 2018. (Visiting Assistant Professor, Harvard; Commissioner, Mexico's National Anticorruption System. Former adviser to Mexico’s Minister of Finance and to the Mexican President’s Spokesman. Ph.D. from Harvard Univ.) “New Crime, Old Solutions: The Reason Why Mexico is Violent Again.” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum chartered by Congress.) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/new-crime-old-solutions-the-reason-why-mexico-violent-again>

The second increase in violence took place after 2012 and was fueled, for example, by the withdrawal of the Army from Michoacán in 2014, and the lack of local enforcement in the new trafficking routes that emerged after larger criminal groups were fractured. Similarly, violence increased when the Jalisco Cartel Nueva Generación organization grouped together many fragmented cells to fight against a Sinaloa Cartel that was also partially fragmented.

Nothing will change without increased accountability and decreased corruption

Max Fisher and Amanda Taub 2017. (Max Fisher writes The Interpreter, a news column and newsletter that explore the ideas and context behind major world events. Amanda Taub is a writer for The Interpreter.) Oct. 28, 2017. “Mexico’s Record Violence Is a Crisis 20 Years in the Making.” The Interpreter, in The New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/28/world/americas/mexico-violence.html> (brackets added)

Democracy, as intended, undercut the party’s once all-encompassing power. But the old system built around the assumption of a strong central authority remains in place. This has weakened the state while cementing many of its old problems, creating what Ms. Langston called a “nightmare scenario” in which “the institutions of accountability and transparency are extraordinarily weak even after 17 years of democracy.” For example, voters have little opportunity to kick out bad leaders or reward good ones, giving officials little incentive to push through difficult reforms. And criminal groups are able to fill the pockets of notoriously underpaid policemen and other civil servants — often providing the wrong kind of incentives. “At the end of the day, this is all an issue of accountability,” Mr. [Alejandro ]Hope [a security analyst] said. “That is the key point of failure in Mexico.” “Nothing happens if a police officer does not do their work,” he added. “Nothing happens if a mayor fails to transform local law enforcement. Nothing happens if a governor fails to invest in prosecutorial services. Nothing happens.”

Advocacy: The correct solutions are to solve for the root causes

Eric L. Olson 2018. (Senior Advisor, Mexico Institute & Deputy Director, Latin American Program, and Director of the Central America-D.C. Platform, Seattle International Foundation) “Why are Homicides on the Rise Again in Mexico? What Can Be Done About It?” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum.) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-are-homicides-the-rise-again-mexico-what-can-be-done-about-it> (ellipses in original)

What can be done? Develop long-term state policies so there is continuity between governments. Rethink the current “top down” security strategy to develop a “bottom up” approach that takes seriously the security concerns and needs of local populations and communities living with violence on a daily basis. Rebuilding the social fabric and establishing social cohesion is essential in a context of extreme violence. Intensify the reform process and strengthen institutional capacity especially at the local level. Local police and prosecutors need the resources and support to be able to address the local threats posed by criminal groups. The fight against impunity and corruption, and strengthening the justice system, have to be priorities. State capacity to investigate and prosecute crime is weak so “public officials need to overcome their reluctance to accept international assistance and cooperation…” Corruption weakens institutions and their ability to fight crime, and the ability to solve homicides is directly affected. Rethink the global anti-drug strategy to place greater emphasis on reducing consumption. Develop specific, data-driven approaches to address the different forms of violence and causes of homicide. A narrow focus on drugs and drug trafficking does not address other forms of violence and criminal activity. Crime prevention efforts should be targeted and prioritized. Funds for crime prevention are often used for political ends, or quickly reduced when budgets are restrained. Maintain sustainable long-term funding for crime prevention programs is essential.

2. More study needed

Many factors regarding violence in Mexico are not fully understood

Eric L. Olson 2018. (Senior Advisor, Mexico Institute & Deputy Director, Latin American Program, and Director of the Central America-D.C. Platform, Seattle International Foundation) “Why are Homicides on the Rise Again in Mexico? What Can Be Done About It?” February 4, 2018. The Mexico Institute, of The Wilson Center. (. The Wilson Center is a non-partisan policy forum.) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-are-homicides-the-rise-again-mexico-what-can-be-done-about-it>

The complex nature of violence and the drivers of homicides are not fully understood or taken into account.   There are multiple causes of homicide – conflicts between trafficking organizations; between security forces, criminal groups, and civilians; intra-family violence; violence associated with local drug markets and street gangs; and violence associated with extortion and kidnapping.

“Do Something” is useless and potentially counterproductive until we know the right thing to do

Jeffrey Tucker 2019 (Editorial Director for the American Institute for Economic Research) 8 Aug 2019 “'Do Something' Is a Dangerous Demand to Make of Politicians” <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/article/do-something-dangerous-demand-make-politicians>

Do Something, goes the suddenly popular chant. In response to the wave of mass killings this year, it’s being shouted at any available political figure. Be careful what you ask for.  It’s hard to imagine anything good can come of this slogan. To demand the state do something, anything, is short sighted and even dangerous. A politician is always willing to do something. Do the right thing is another matter entirely.

3. Arms embargos are ineffective

Withholding arms as an instrument of coercion doesn’t produce desired benefits

Ray Rounds 2019. (U.S. Air Force F-15E pilot; Ph.D. candidate at Georgetown Univ. in International Relations.) “The Case Against Arms Embargos, Even for Saudi Arabia.” April 16, 2019. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/the-case-against-arms-embargos-even-for-saudi-arabia/>

Whether it is delayed approval, as in the recent Kuwaiti F-18 purchase, an outright embargo, like Egyptian F-16s in 2013, or denial of technology transfer, as in the 2016 Turkish Patriot missile request, using the withholding of arms sales as a blunt force instrument of coercion is unlikely to produce desired strategic benefits and often backfires.

Arms sales have useful benefits but are not meant for coercion

Ray Rounds 2019. (U.S. Air Force F-15E pilot; Ph.D. candidate at Georgetown Univ. in International Relations.) “The Case Against Arms Embargos, Even for Saudi Arabia.” April 16, 2019. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/the-case-against-arms-embargos-even-for-saudi-arabia/>

Arms sales are useful tools for maintaining communication, strengthening relationships, and keeping potential adversary states at bay. Conversely, as a blunt instrument of coercion (i.e. if you do not do X, we will suspend Y), they are likely losers.

Arms embargo motivates target to diversify sources rather than change behavior

Ray Rounds 2019. (U.S. Air Force F-15E pilot; Ph.D. candidate at Georgetown Univ. in International Relations.) “The Case Against Arms Embargos, Even for Saudi Arabia.” April 16, 2019. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/the-case-against-arms-embargos-even-for-saudi-arabia/>

Senior U.S. government officials involved in the arms transfer process that I interviewed over the past year during the course of my research have echoed similar sentiments. This is also borne out by previous research providing evidence that using arms transfers as situationally coercive tools is rarely successful. Interestingly, coercion attempts using arms transfers are least likely to be successful when used as a punishment or threat against an autocratic regime, such as Saudi Arabia. Instead, punishments in the form of an embargo can often push a client to diversify sourcing rather than to change behavior.

4. Alternate sources

Drug cartels would still be able to obtain weapons from elsewhere

Scott Stewart 2011. (vice president of tactical analysis at Stratfor; former special agent with the U.S. State Department and deputy regional security officer in Guatemala City. He has also consulted on terrorism issues for the Texas Dept of Public Safety.) “Mexico's Gun Supply and the 90 Percent Myth.” February 10, 2011. Stratfor. (the world’s leading American geopolitical intelligence platform and publisher) <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/mexicos-gun-supply-and-90-percent-myth>

To really understand Mexico's gun problem, however, it is necessary to recognize that the same economic law of supply and demand that fuels drug smuggling into the United States also fuels gun smuggling into Mexico. Black market guns in Mexico can fetch up to 300 percent of their normal purchase price — a profit margin rivaling the narcotics the cartels sell. Even if it were somehow possible to hermetically seal the U.S.-Mexico border and shut off all the guns coming from the United States, the cartels would still be able to obtain weapons elsewhere — just as narcotics would continue to flow into the United States from other places. The United States does provide cheap and easy access to certain types of weapons and ammunition, but as demonstrated by groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, weapons can be easily obtained from other sources via the black arms market — albeit at a higher price.

Other countries, not the U.S., are the main sources of Mexico’s gun-related violence

Larry Keane 2017. (Senior Vice President and General Counsel for the National Shooting Sports Foundation) “The Mexican Gun Control Model.” June 2, 2017. National Shooting Sports Foundation. (an American national trade association for the firearms industry) <https://www.nssf.org/the-mexican-gun-control-model/>

According to U.S. State Department cables, the most lethal weapons used by Mexican cartels come from Central American arsenals. Grenades, now the number one choice of the cartels to attack military, police and civilians, come mainly from Mexico itself and Guatemala.  Another significant source of weaponry is Colombia and its Revolutionary Armed Forces (“FARC”). And according to a 2006 report by Amnesty International, China was actively supplying arms to Latin American countries, which have subsequently been seized in Mexico. Clearly FFLs in the U.S. are not the main source of Mexico’s gun-related violence problem.

5. Illegal sales. Plan addresses only legal exports, not illegally trafficked firearms

U.S. and Mexican officials agree that illegally trafficked firearms are fueling the violence

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

Combating arms trafficking has become an increasing concern to U.S. and Mexican government and law enforcement officials, as violence in Mexico has soared to historic levels, and U.S. officials have become concerned about the potential for increased violence brought about by Mexican DTOs on the U.S. side of the border. However, while this violence has raised concern, there has not been a coordinated U.S. government effort to combat the illicit arms trafficking to Mexico that U.S. and Mexican government officials agree is fueling much of the drug-related violence.

Only a small number of seized firearms in Mexico are from legal sales

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

A small number of the firearms seized in Mexico have been traced back to legal sales of weapons from the United States to Mexico or a third country, according to ATF. For instance, firearms traced back to the Government of Mexico, from 2004 to 2008, constituted 1.74 percent, or 403 firearms, of the total number of trace requests made during that time. This included 70 .223 caliber AR-15-type semiautomatic rifles and one machine gun. In addition, 39 guns were recovered in 2008 that had been sold legally by the United States to a third party country, including 6 guns each from Germany, Belize, and Guatemala and 1 from El Salvador. These 39 guns included 21 semiautomatic pistols, and nothing larger or more powerful than the Colt 45.

Most seized firearms are trafficked from gun dealers and pawn shops

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

From fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2008, most of the firearms seized in Mexico and traced came from U.S. Southwest border states. In particular, about 70 percent of these firearms came from Texas, California, and Arizona. Figure 5 provides data on the top source states for firearms trafficked to Mexico and traced from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2008. Most of the firearms seized in Mexico and successfully traced come from gun shops and pawn shops, according to ATF gun trace data. According to ATF, there are around 6,700 retail gun dealers—gun shops and pawn shops—along the Southwest border of the United States. This represents around 12 percent of the approximately 55,000 retail gun dealers nationwide. These gun dealers, or FFLs, can operate in gun shops, pawn shops, their own homes, or out of gun shows. From fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2008, of those firearms ATF was able to trace back to a retail dealer, around 95 percent were traced back to gun shops and pawn shops—around 71 to 79 percent from gun shops and 15 to 19 percent from pawn shops, according to ATF. In addition to these firearms that are successfully traced back to a retail dealer, some ATF officials told us, based on information from their operations and investigations, many seized guns also come from private sales at gun shows, though it is impossible to know this exact number due to the lack of records kept for such purchases, which is discussed further below.

Firearms can be easily purchased and trafficked from gun and pawn shops

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

The illicit purchase of firearms in the United States happens in various ways depending upon where the purchase takes place. *Gun shops and pawn shops*. Firearms purchased at gun shops and pawn shops for trafficking to Mexico are usually made by “straw purchasers,” according to law enforcement officials. These straw purchasers are individuals with clean records who can be expected to pass the required background check and who are paid by drug cartel representatives or middlemen to purchase certain guns from gun shops. Because the straw purchasers are legitimately qualified to purchase the guns, they can be difficult to identify by gun shop owners and clerks, absent obvious clues that would signify that a straw purchase is happening.

Firearms can be easily purchased and trafficked from gun shows

United States Government Accountability Office 2009. “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Arms Trafficking to Mexico Face Planning and Coordination Challenges.” June 18, 2009. Publication number: GAO-09-709. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/291223.pdf>

According to ATF officials, individuals can use straw purchasers as they would at gun shops to acquire guns from gun shops with booths at gun shows. In addition, individuals can also purchase guns at gun shows from other individuals making sales from their private collections. These private sales require no background checks of the purchaser and require no record be made or kept of the sale.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Hurts US/Mexico relations

Link: Pressuring Mexico on human rights hurts US/Mexico relations. They don’t want the US telling them what to do

Agnes G. Schaefer, Benjamin Bahney and K. Jack Riley 2009. (Schaefer -  associate director of the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center . Bahney - political scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory  . Riley - Vice President, RAND National Security Research Division; Director, RAND National Defense Research Institute)   Security in Mexico Implications for U.S. Policy Options <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG876.pdf>

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.

Link: US/Mexico cooperation is key to stopping drug kingpins and violence

Ana Quintana 2014 (Senior Policy Analyst, Latin America and the Western Hemisphere) 8 July 2014 “U.S. Foreign Assistance to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador” https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/us-foreign-assistance-mexico-guatemala-honduras-and-el-salvador

Following the State Department and USAID, the DOD represents the largest foreign assistance provider. Concerns about violence levels in Mexico and drug-related violence in the U.S. has prompted high levels of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexican security forces. Joint operations have resulted in numerous arrests of high-profile drug kingpins and record-breaking seizures.  In addition to joint operations in Mexico, the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Joint Task Force-Bravo operates out of the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras, conducting and supporting activities against transnational organized crime and joint military engagement activities.

Brink: US/Mexico have some tensions, but right now is critical opportunity to cooperate on security issues

Christine Clark 2019 (public relations, U.C.-San Diego) New Report Creates Roadmap for U.S.-Mexico Cooperation on Security, Drug and Border Policy 16 Apr 2019 <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/uc_san_diego_releases_roadmap_for_u.s_mexico_cooperation_on_security_drug_and_border_policy>

López Obrador, who assumed office in Dec. 2018, and U.S. President Donald Trump have divergent views on security policy priorities; however, both Mexico and the U.S. have shared security interests. **[END QUOTE**] López Obrador, for example, has declared an end to the war on drugs in Mexico. Meanwhile, Trump seeks to construct a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border, casting serious doubt on burgeoning security cooperation. **[SHE GOES ON LATER TO SAY QUOTE:]** “Despite these challenges, we see this as an opportunity to resume a dialogue at the highest level around bilateral security,” Fernández de Castro [director of the [Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies](https://usmex.ucsd.edu/)] added. “Our report offers concrete and implementable policy recommendations over the next six years of López Obrador’s presidency, ensuring policymakers are informed and prepared to continue cooperation efforts in a difficult phase in the bilateral relationship.”

Link & Impact: Stability & prosperity of the US and Mexico depend on security cooperation

Christine Clark 2019 (public relations, U.C.-San Diego) New Report Creates Roadmap for U.S.-Mexico Cooperation on Security, Drug and Border Policy 16 Apr 2019 <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/uc_san_diego_releases_roadmap_for_u.s_mexico_cooperation_on_security_drug_and_border_policy>

At the event, Mexican Ambassador to the United States Martha Bárcena Coqui delivered the keynote remarks and for the first time, spoke publicly on López Obrador’s security strategy. In her remarks, Bárcena noted, “cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. is fundamental for the stability and prosperity of both countries and the whole North American region. We have both been affected by the illegal trafficking of drugs, people, money and guns, which is why we will continue to work on the principle of shared responsibility.”

2. U.S. national security compromised

Link: [in general] US arms sales are purposeful and beneficial

Thomas Frohlich 2019. (Assistant Managing Editor of 24/7 Wall St., a corporation that runs a financial news and opinion company.) “Saudi Arabia buys the most weapons from the US government. See what other countries top list.” March 26, 2019. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/03/26/us-arms-sales-these-countries-buy-most-weapons-government/39208809/> (brackets added)

The United States selects its clients based on well-established partnerships, as well as for strategic reasons related to the leverage it could gain during conflicts. Of the 25 countries buying the most weapons from the U.S., 10 are either NATO member nations or part of other alliances formed with the United States since the Cold War.

“The US transfers to these countries are meant to ensure allies security, as arms transfers from the US brings with it security guarantees, which basically entail diplomatic and military assistance in case of troubles,” said [Aude] Fleurant [director of the arms and military expenditure program with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute].

Link: Arms sales to Mexico support national security interests

Sharyl Attkisson 2011. (CBS News investigative correspondent based in Washington.) “Legal U.S. gun sales to Mexico arming cartels.” December 6, 2011. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/legal-us-gun-sales-to-mexico-arming-cartels/>

The National Shooting Sports Foundation's Larry Keane, who speaks for gun manufacturers, said he understands the potential for abuse. "There have been 150,000 or more Mexican soldiers defect to go work for the cartels, and I think it's safe to assume that when they defect they take their firearms with them," Keane told CBS News.

But Keane said the sales help the U.S. "These sales by the industry actually support U.S. national security interests," Keane told Attkisson. "If they didn't, the State Department wouldn't allow them."

Link: We must work closely with Mexico on security cooperation or else we undermine solutions to threats to security and prosperity

RICHARD H. GLENN 2020 (DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS) STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY, AND TRADE, 13 Feb 2020 <https://www.state.gov/assessing-u-s-security-assistance-to-mexico/>

INL is under no illusion that we have achieved yet what we set out to accomplish through the Merida Initiative.  Security assistance programs have not yet contributed to a substantive reduction in the availability of drugs in the United States or adequately contributed to reducing the levels of violence in Mexico.  The challenges ahead still loom large.  However, these examples demonstrate how U.S. investments, when coupled with Mexican political will, can yield improvements that can add up over time.  We will seek opportunities to make the greatest changes for our investment, while mitigating risk and ensuring sustainability.  The situation demands we continue to work closely with Mexico to develop more successful and enduring solutions to the threats that undermine both countries’ security and prosperity.

Link: US national security harmed without aid to Mexico. Cutting security aid to Mexico would harm US national security and global influence

Ana Quintana 2014 (Senior Policy Analyst, Latin America and the Western Hemisphere) 8 July 2014 “U.S. Foreign Assistance to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador” https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/us-foreign-assistance-mexico-guatemala-honduras-and-el-salvador

In recent years, chronic insecurity in Mexico and Central America has threatened regional stability and U.S. security interests. This recent crisis on the southwest border has raised concerns about not only U.S. immigration policy and border security, but also the utility of foreign assistance. When used wisely, foreign aid is a key national security tool. It ensures U.S. partnerships, promotes like-minded democratic institutions, and provides the U.S. with leverage abroad. Congress should understand that as security conditions in the region continue to deteriorate, cutting foreign aid would undermine the U.S.’s security interests.

Impact: Big global impact if US security capabilities not upheld

Brook Manville 2018 (Principal of Brook Manville LLC, consulting on strategy and organization) Why A Crumbling World Order Urgently Needs U.S. Leadership 14 Oct 2018 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brookmanville/2018/10/14/why-a-crumbling-world-order-urgently-needs-u-s-leadership/#7bafd4e12e61> (brackets added)

But most important, he [Robert Kagan, Senior Fellow at Brookings Institute] called for new American leadership that can rally tomorrow’s citizens around what our fathers’ generation collectively and intuitively knew—that the world is fundamentally dangerous; that peace and prosperity are not natural; that preserving an international liberal community depends critically on America’s political will to invest money and lives to keep open markets, and prevent violence against our allies and values. Kagan closed with a blend of pessimism and aspiration. “It’s very difficult to explain all this to the American people. Even the gifted FDR struggled with the challenge. But we need a president now who can convince Americans that preserving our global liberal system is absolutely worth doing. That the cost of letting it come undone will be so much more than saving it. We have to find leaders who can motivate tomorrow’s generation to join this cause, and do whatever it takes, so our nation can reassert our fundamentally benign—even if self-interested—hegemony in the world.”

3. Crime & Violence in Mexico

Link: Cutting off aid to Mexico would: 1) reduce Mexican law enforcement 2) allow more immigrants from Central & South America 3) strengthen drug cartels

USA TODAY 2017 (journalist Donovan Slack) 27 Jan 2017 “U.S. provides aid worth $320 million a year to Mexico; experts say yanking it could hurt” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/01/26/us-aid-320-million-mexico-wall-trump-specialists-backfire/97103024/>

The largest chunk of U.S. aid goes toward law enforcement — including helping Mexican authorities capture drug lords — supporting improvements to the Mexican judicial system and security, including along Mexico’s southern border, helping stem the flow of immigrants from Central and South America. “If we cut off aid to Mexico, we strengthen the drug cartels, we make our border region a lot more lawless place, and we make it easier for undocumented immigrants from Central America to reach the U.S.-Mexico border,” said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University who specializes in Latin America.

Brink: Mexican authorities can just barely stop the rush of migrants. Even with heavy police presence, they still rush the border and some get through

USA TODAY 2018. (journalist David Agren) 19 Oct 2018 Thousands of caravan migrants stopped at Mexico border with Guatemala clash with police <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/10/19/migrant-caravan-mexico-trump-guatemala-border/1696425002/>

The Associated Press initially reported that the thousands of migrants stopped about two blocks from the Guatemala-Mexican border crossing before turning around, saying they would wait another hour or so. The border post was guarded by a heavy security force and tall metal gates, reported the AP. On the Mexican side of a border bridge, the migrants were met by a phalanx of police with riot shields. About 50 managed to push their way through before officers unleashed pepper spray and the rest retreated.

Impact: Crime. Organized crime coming across the Mexico/Guatemala border

Eric Olson 2017. (associate director of the Latin American Program and senior advisor on security to the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center) THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN U.S.-MEXICO SECURITY RELATIONS, Winter 2017, WILSON QUARTERLY https://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/after-the-storm-in-u-s-mexico-relations/the-m-rida-initiative-and-shared-responsibility-in-u-s-mexico-security-relations/

 Increasing migrant flows and the relative ease with which organized crime groups can transit international boundaries such as the Guatemala-Mexico border has been a growing concern for U.S. policymakers for some time and reflects the increase in funding directed to southern Mexico.

Impact: Drug cartels. Most US aid to Mexico is for law enforcement. Canceling it will strengthen drug cartels

USA TODAY 2017. (journalist Donovan Slack) 27 Jan 2017 “U.S. provides aid worth $320 million a year to Mexico; experts say yanking it could hurt” https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/01/26/us-aid-320-million-mexico-wall-trump-specialists-backfire/97103024/

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Impact: Violence. Immigrants trying to cross illegally into Mexico from Guatemala are violent and aggressive

Megan Keller 2018. (journalist) Mexico deploys hundreds of police to reinforce border with Guatemala THE HILL 30 Oct 2018 https://thehill.com/policy/international/413836-mexico-deploys-hundreds-of-police-to-reinforce-border-with-guatemala

Mexico has deployed hundreds of police, helicopters and boats to its southern border with Guatemala on Monday in an attempt to stop the approaching immigrant caravan from entering illegally. "Members of this group are much more violent and aggressive” than the earlier immigrants who are now crossing southern Mexico, the head of Mexico’s migration agency, Gerardo Elías García, [told The Wall Street Journal](https://www.wsj.com/articles/honduran-migrant-dies-in-clashes-at-mexicos-southern-border-1540793695).