



The Merida Initiative- An Overview

In December 2008, Mexico and the United States signed the first Letter of Agreement (LOA) for the Merida Initiative, marking a new era of bi-national cooperation. Now, ending its second year, the Initiative has led to a new architecture for bilateral security cooperation, provided tangible support to Mexico's new security and judicial institutions, and helped galvanize efforts on the U.S. side of the border to stop the flow of weapons, money and the demand for drugs. To date, some \$404 million in equipment and training has been delivered under Merida. The United States and Mexico have worked together to accelerate Merida Initiative related activities. In 2011 roughly half a billion dollars in equipment and capacity building programs will be delivered, including an estimated \$60 million for non-intrusive inspection equipment to help law enforcement and customs agents detect illegal arms and money moving into and within Mexico.

Achievements:

I. New Bilateral Security Architecture

- The strategic framework for implementing Mérida Initiative programs is referred to as the Four Pillars: 1) disrupt the capacity of organized crime to operate, 2) develop the capacity of judicial and security institutions to sustain the rule of law, 3) build a 21st century border that facilitates legitimate trade and movement of people while thwarting the flow of drugs, arms and cash, and 4) build strong and resilient communities.
- Increased coordination and information sharing between the US and Mexico has led to the capture of many of the world's most dangerous criminals (please see "Law Enforcement Achievements" fact sheet).
- Active anti-money laundering and arms trafficking bilateral working groups have been established.
- A bilateral implementation office ("BIO/OBS") has been established in Mexico City that allows for daily exchanges between technical staffers from the U.S. and Mexico, with the purpose of fully implementing equipment transfer and training programs under the Merida Initiative. Officials from Mexico and the United States working in the BIO/OBS do not engage in intelligence or operational activities, they focus on Merida program implementation.

II. Stronger Mexican Judicial and Security Institutions

- The Government of Mexico is actively reforming its judicial and security institutions and the Merida program is supporting these efforts.
- The Federal Police now have 4,500 college educated investigators, trained by U.S. and Mexican experts, who are able to collect and process evidence and break up criminal activity proactively.
- The federal penitentiary system now has a functional academy that has trained 1,737 new corrections officials in up-to-date techniques for holding, classifying, and transporting prisoners. The U.S. trained Mexican trainers in New Mexico and Colorado and has several corrections experts in Mexico collaborating with Mexican officials.
- More than 3,000 Mexican prosecutors have been trained by U.S. officials on how an accusatory judicial system works.
- A robust canine program across three Mexican agencies effectively uses canines that have been trained by U.S. experts in interdicting narcotics, firearms, and ammunition. A total of 52 canine handlers have been trained and 78 canines have been donated to date.
- Critical tools to curb the activities of transnational criminal organizations have been delivered by the U.S., including 8 Bell 412 helicopters (SEDENA), 3 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters (SSP), 318 polygraph machines, 78 canines, 32 non-intrusive inspection (NIIE) vehicles, 13 armored vehicles, biometric equipment for Mexico's immigration agency (INAMI), and case tracking software for the Attorney General's Office (PGR).

III. Renewed Efforts in the United States

- The U.S. released a new National Drug Control Strategy that reflects a comprehensive approach to reducing drug use and calls for a 15% reduction in the rate of youth drug use over the next five years. \$5.6 billion has been committed to this effort this year alone.
- U.S. law enforcement led "Operation Coronado," broke up a major U.S. drug distribution ring of the La Familia Michoacana cartel, and "Project Deliverance," led to the arrest of 2,200 illegal drug distributors from various international cartels in U.S. communities. In July, a southern California court convicted 43 defendants with ties to international drug cartels based in Mexico. Last summer a court in Tucson convicted 12 Americans of smuggling arms to the Sinaloa cartel.
- Beginning March 2009, U.S. CBP officers began conducting targeted, intelligence-driven inspections of southbound vehicles for the first time. To date, CBP has conducted over 3.47 million inspections of southbound vehicles going into Mexico, seized over \$50 million in illicit currency, and interdicted hundreds of illegal firearms. Additionally, 100% of southbound rail cargo was screened.