

TESTIMONY OF  
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BEFORE  
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“U.S.-MEXICO SECURITY COOPERATION:  
AN OVERVIEW OF THE MERIDA INITIATIVE 2008-PRESENT.”

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, along with my State Department and USAID colleagues, on the U.S. – Mexico security relationship and five years of the Merida Initiative. It has been my privilege to serve at our embassy in Mexico on two occasions, first in the days and months after 9/11 when we were forced to re-examine how neighbors must confront the horrors of terrorism in democratic societies; and most recently from 2009-12, when we and our Mexican partners truly transformed our security and commercial relationships in service of the American and Mexican peoples.

I must thank the U.S. Congress for its consistent, bipartisan, strong support of the U.S. – Mexico relationship in general, and the Merida Initiative in particular. Merida is a success story, and this Committee’s commitment to and stewardship of this new paradigm in bilateral cooperation has been a cornerstone of that success. Since 2009, 15 Congressional delegations have visited Mexico to engage with U.S. and Mexican officials and helped evolve Merida bi-national cooperation.

Begun under the Bush - Calderon administrations, and reaffirmed and strengthened now in the Obama - Pena Nieto administrations, the United States and Mexico coordinate and cooperate to vouchsafe our mutual security in ways unimaginable when I first reported for duty in Mexico City over a decade ago. This commitment to our shared security goals transcends political parties and extends across both governments’ interagency communities. It has enriched and broadened our relationship. It has sustained us in moments of adversity, such as when, on occasion, our cooperation encroached upon the tired shibboleths of outdated sovereignty redlines and we saw Calderon administration officials justify

our bilateral cooperation in front of their own Congress, as it pursued its legitimate oversight role. In short, both governments' executive and legislative branches, and most importantly, both societies have dedicated themselves to the difficult business of modernizing and deepening a neighborly partnership, with full respect for each other's sovereignty, but with as full an understanding of the grave asymmetric threat to our people posed by the transnational criminal organizations.

On May 2, President Obama traveled to Mexico City to meet with President Enrique Peña Nieto. The Presidents reaffirmed their commitment to improving the lives of all citizens in both our countries, building upon our deep ties, and working with mutual respect and mutual responsibility across a broad range of issues. These include our economic relationship, clean energy, and climate change, building a 21<sup>ST</sup> century border, education, and our security cooperation. In this context, President Obama emphasized our co-responsibility for the violence associated with the illicit flows of drugs, guns and cash.

### Merida Initiative

When President Bush announced the Merida Initiative in 2007, it was a partnership among the governments of the United States, Mexico, and the countries of Central America. Its goal was to confront the violent transnational gangs and organized crime syndicates that plague the entire region and directly undermine U.S. security interests. In time, we broadened our focus to include the Caribbean under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) and we strengthened our Central America efforts through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). We are focusing on ways to improve citizen safety throughout the hemisphere—something consistently ranked high among societal concerns in all countries of the region. Our efforts to advance security, the rule of law, and social and economic development in Colombia continue.

In this comprehensive, whole-of-government approach, we have developed a consistent strategic vision, with a series of supporting documents through which we implement our security engagement in the Western Hemisphere. The National Drug Control Strategy, coordinated by the Office of National Drug Control Policy, serves as the United States government's multiyear interagency strategy to address narcotics. The essential core of this strategy, as well as that of the National Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, is to enhance the citizen security apparatuses of our partners throughout the hemisphere in a coordinated effort to institutionalize the rule of law agencies and offices, while empowering average citizens to collaborate with police, prosecutors, and judges, as well as

teachers, community activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights advocates. Our principal mechanisms for implementing this strategic vision are the four mutually reinforcing rule of law, citizen security initiatives: the Colombian Strategic Development Initiative, the Merida Initiative, CARSI, and CBSI.

We have grounded our initiatives in this common strategic vision and coordinated through interagency meetings and working groups that ensure comprehensive and coherent planning and implementation. One coordination mechanism we employ is the Executive Committee for citizen security in the Western Hemisphere, which I chair. This interagency group includes all interagency stakeholders in each of the initiatives. I bring us together quarterly to discuss lessons learned, opportunities for enhanced implementation, and opportunities for coordination across the initiatives. Sub-regional groups meet more frequently to work on planning and coordination issues. I should add that while I have only held this position since last year, it was through the foresight and constructive contribution of the U.S. Congress that this senior-level coordinating role was envisioned in 2010.

The Merida Initiative, now exclusive to Mexico and the United States, is based on the recognition that our countries share responsibility for combating transnational criminal networks and protecting our citizens from the crime, corruption, and violence they generate. We have based this initiative on mutual respect, and it reflects our understanding of the tremendous benefits derived from this collaboration. In other words, neither country can “solve” the problem of transnational criminal organization trafficking and crime alone. We have forged strong partnerships to improve civilian security in affected areas to fight drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, illicit arms trafficking, money laundering, and demand for drugs on both sides of the border.

The four pillars that the United States and Mexico agreed to in 2010, and that presidents Obama and Pena Nieto confirmed as recently as President Obama's recent trip to Mexico City remain our flexible organizing construct:

- 1) Disrupting the operational capacity of organized criminal groups;
- 2) Institutionalizing reforms to sustain rule of law and respect for human rights;
- 3) Creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century border; and
- 4) Building strong and resilient communities.

Under these pillars, we are accelerating our efforts to support more capable institutions – especially police, justice systems, and civil society organizations; expanding our border focus beyond interdiction of contraband to include facilitation of legitimate trade and travel; and cooperating in building strong communities resistant to the influence of organized crime, with a focus on the youth population.

The U.S. government promotes respect for human rights through our Merida Initiative and other programming in Mexico. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) trains Mexican state and municipal police officers and state prosecutors on gender-based violence. INL also supported a Department of Justice project to provide training and technical assistance to law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges to combat violence against women and children. The Department of Defense includes modules on human rights in all mobile training events conducted through USNORTHCOM which address issues such as torture and the appropriate use of lethal force. They also bring Mexican officers to the United States for specialized training on human rights and use staff Judge Advocates to teach classes in Mexico on human rights and the Law of Armed Conflict. In 2012, USAID launched a distance-education Master's degree program on human rights and security in partnership with the Mexican Federal Police, and the first 300 students are about to graduate. USAID is poised to launch an on-line certificate course in human rights expected to reach 590 federal police and is in the process of developing human rights training videos for the federal police.

### Merida Successes

Our success under the Merida Initiative is due in large part to the commitment and brave efforts of the Mexican government and the Mexican people to combat transnational criminal organizations. Our Mexican partners have spent at least ten dollars to every one dollar that we have contributed to our Merida goals in Mexico. That is as it should be, however, the U.S. contribution – none of it in cash and none of it lethal – is vitally important.

Our assistance has provided crucial support to the Mexican government in building the capacity of its rule of law institutions and advancing justice sector reforms, while enhancing the bilateral relationship and extent of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexican governments through provisions of equipment, technical assistance and training. A variety of U.S. federal agencies - including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Homeland Security, the

Department of Justice, and the Department of Defense - are working with the Mexican government to implement Merida projects.

By 2011, we began to move away from big-ticket equipment and toward intensive technical assistance and training activities that further Mexican capacity to uphold the rule of law, respect human rights, strengthen institutions, enhance civil society participation, and secure borders. We continue to expand this support to the state and municipal levels in several program areas.

Merida is a success, and we have a wide range of accomplishments to our credit. I will allow my colleagues in INL and USAID to discuss in more detail the successes of our programs, but I would like to mention a few examples.

Mexico needed to improve the air mobility of its public security services, and Merida has helped them do just that, not just through the provision of aircraft, but by creating training opportunities and opportunities to share best practices. Today, the Mexican services take justifiable pride in how they use these aircraft to support counternarcotics and other security operations.

Merida funding has provided \$111 million in fixed and mobile non-intrusive inspection equipment (NIIE) and small detection devices; discussions about how law enforcement and inspection services can best use these tools strongly influenced Mexican decision-making about how to deploy them, and – just as important – how Mexico would make its own very substantial investments in the same sort of technology. Using NIIE technology, the Government of Mexico has seized more than \$3 billion of narcotics and illegal currency.

Merida has allowed us to participate in the training of over 8,500 federal and 22,500 personnel from the state-level justice sector, important support for Mexico's transition to an accusatorial system. Just as important, our cooperation in this area has helped Mexico as it has made important decisions about how to continue that effort, and broaden it.

At the federal level, Merida has delivered training to nearly 19,000 federal law enforcement officers, largely from the Federal Police and the Attorney General's Office (PGR), including more than 4,400 Federal Police investigators deployed throughout Mexico. Merida has provided equipment and technical assistance to the Federal Police Federal Academy in San Luis Potosi to facilitate the delivery of training courses, such as Terrorism, Explosives, Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering, and Criminal Investigations.

USAID has supported the Mexican government in developing and implementing crime and violence prevention strategies in nine communities in target areas in the states of Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, and Baja California, each significantly affected by drug-related crime and violence. We can take pride in that, while recognizing the far-broader efforts Mexico is itself taking. President Pena Nieto is making this sort of engagement a cornerstone of Mexico's national crime prevention strategy.

Finally, while the Merida Initiative does not fund law enforcement operations, the enhanced cooperation and coordination that result from this enhanced bilateral relationship contributes to our fight against transnational criminal organizations.

### Future of the Merida Initiative

President Pena Nieto and his team have consistently made clear to us their interest in continuing our close collaboration on security issues, most recently during President Obama's visit this month. The Pena Nieto government has stated that it intends to give particular emphasis to crime prevention and rule of law. The United States fully supports this further refinement of our joint strategic partnership and we continue our ongoing transition from major equipment purchases toward training and capacity building and an expansion from assistance solely for federal institutions to an increasing emphasis on state and local government.

On April 16, President Pena Nieto spoke in Monterrey about his security strategy and received proposals from civil society groups related to the "Mexico at Peace" component of the 2013-2018 National Development Plan, which was released a few days ago. President Pena Nieto outlined his six lines of action related to public security and justice: planning, social prevention, human rights, inter-governmental coordination, justice reform, and evaluation and feedback. He stated there were no easy solutions or "short cuts" to reduce violence in the short term, instead emphasizing long-term goals such as the rule of law and trust in judicial institutions. He also voiced commitment to Mexico's transition to an adversarial oral justice system and to advancing penal code reforms, and has spoken previously of the need to professionalize the police at all levels. In February, Pena Nieto launched a national multi-tiered crime prevention plan - known as Mexico's National Crime and Violence Prevention Program - which will

include programs to combat poverty, recover public spaces, and increase youth employment.

The United States and Mexico, working together, have transformed bilateral engagement over the last ten years, and the Merida partnership has been an important component of this broader evolution in the relationship. With regard to our common interest in addressing crime and violence and enhancing citizen safety, what we do and how we do it will continue to evolve and will reflect the views and priorities of both governments. Mexican authorities agree that our cooperation must continue and that the Merida Initiative provides a comprehensive, flexible framework under which our partnership can move forward to the benefit of both Americans and Mexicans.

As President Obama said in Mexico City on May 2:

*Obviously, these are serious challenges, and President Pena Nieto and I discussed them in depth today. I agreed to continue our close cooperation on security, even as the nature of that cooperation will evolve. As I told the President, it is obviously up to the Mexican people to determine their security structures and how it engages with other nations, including the United States. But the main point I made to the President is that we support the Mexican government's focus on reducing violence, and we look forward to continuing our good cooperation in any way that the Mexican government deems appropriate."*

Thank you again for your support of the Merida Initiative. Your support has helped make this a catalyst for a dramatically improved bilateral security relationship. I look forward to continuing to work with the Congress and I will be happy to answer any of your questions.