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**"U.S.–MEXICO SECURITY COOPERATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MERIDA INITIATIVE 2008-PRESENT"**
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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, other distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of CRS to provide background on the development, implementation, and potential future of the Mérida Initiative, a security partnership with Mexico for which Congress has appropriated $1.9 billion since FY2008.

Designed to support the aggressive security strategy of former Mexican President Felipe Calderón (December 2006-November 2012), the Mérida Initiative is now being adapted to complement new President Enrique Peña Nieto's prioritization of violence reduction. This testimony examines the successes and limitations of bilateral security cooperation under the Calderón Administration and then discusses how that cooperation might evolve under the Peña Nieto government.

## Background: Public Security Challenges in Mexico

For several years, violence perpetrated by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) has threatened citizen security and governance throughout parts of Mexico and overwhelmed the country's judicial institutions.[1] Although estimates vary, some 60,000 individuals may have been killed as a result of organized crime-related violence during the Calderón Administration.[2] Many analysts argue that the Calderón administration's military-led anticrime strategy contributed to the violence.[3] Between 2006 and 2012, some TCOs were largely dismantled, while fragments of other TCOs formed new criminal organizations. Two TCOs in particular, Sinaloa and Los Zetas, have become the dominant criminal organizations in Mexico today. Drug trafficking remains the primary activity of the TCOs, but they also increasingly participate in other criminal activities such as extortion, kidnapping, and oil theft. Some

[1] See: CRS Report R41576, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Violence*, by June S. Beittel.

[2] Cory Molzahn, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2012*, Trans-Border Institute (TBI), February 2013.

[3] President Calderón made combatting transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) the centerpiece of his domestic policy. He called the increased organized crime-related violence a threat to the Mexican state and sent thousands of military troops and Federal Police to combat the TCOs in "hot spots" throughout the country. This federal crackdown was met with violent resistance. During the Calderón Administration, the government had success in capturing and arresting record numbers of top drug leaders, but its so-called "kingpin strategy" is viewed by observers as having created more instability and, at least in the near term, more violence. Shannon K. O'Neil, "Drug Cartel Fragmentation and Violence," Council on Foreign Relations Blog, August 9, 2011.

analysts see evidence that the number of organized crime-style homicides in Mexico reached a plateau in 2012, while other observers suggest that the number of killings since 2012 has declined.[4] Experts maintain that organized crime-related violence rates remained relatively stable during the first four months of the Peña Nieto government, despite its claims that violence had decreased.[5]

## The Mérida Initiative: Development and Evolution[6]

In October 2007, the United States and Mexico announced the Mérida Initiative, a package of U.S. assistance for Mexico and Central America that would begin in FY2008.[7] The Mérida Initiative was developed in response to the Calderón government's unprecedented request for increased U.S. support and involvement in helping Mexico combat drug trafficking and organized crime. Prior to that time, U.S.-Mexican counterdrug cooperation had been limited and mistrust hindered bilateral security efforts. As part of the Mérida Initiative, the Mexican government pledged to intensify its efforts against crime and corruption and the U.S. government pledged to address drug demand in the United States and the illicit trafficking of firearms and bulk currency to Mexico.

The Mérida Initiative, as it was originally conceived, sought to (1) break the power and impunity of criminal organizations; (2) strengthen border, air, and maritime controls; (3) improve the capacity of justice systems in the region; and (4) curtail gang activity and diminish local drug demand. U.S. funds provided for the first goal far surpassed all other aid categories and included $590.5 million worth of aircraft and helicopters. The U.S. government also provided extensive intelligence-sharing and operational support for Mexican military and police personnel engaged in anti-TCO efforts.

Acknowledging that Mexico cannot effectively confront organized crime with tactical victories alone, in March 2010, the Obama Administration and the Mexican government agreed to a new strategic framework for security cooperation under the Mérida Initiative.[8] Whereas U.S. assistance initially focused on training and equipping Mexican security forces for counternarcotic purposes, it has shifted toward addressing the weak government institutions and underlying societal problems that have allowed the drug trade to flourish in Mexico. The new strategy focuses more on institution-building than on technology transfers and broadens the scope of bilateral efforts to include economic development and community-based social programs, areas where Mexico had not previously sought significant U.S. support. The four pillars of the current strategy are:

1. **Disrupting organized criminal groups.** Pillar one includes equipment provided to federal and state law enforcement, bilateral intelligence-sharing and law enforcement operations, anti-money laundering efforts, and support for forensics laboratories.
2. **Institutionalizing the rule of law.**[9] Pillar two involves law enforcement reform (police, forensics, and prisons) at the federal and increasingly, state levels; anti-corruption efforts

[4] Beittel op. cit.

[5] Alejandro Hope, "Mexico's Violent Crime Numbers Don't Add Up," *InsightCrime Organized Crime in the Americas*, April 24, 2013.

[6] For more on the Mérida Initiative, see: CRS Report R41349, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin M. Finklea.

[7] In FY2008 and FY2009, the Mérida Initiative included U.S. assistance to Mexico and Central America. Beginning in FY2010, Congress separated Central America from the Mexico-focused Mérida Initiative by creating a separate Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).

[8] U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement of the Mérida Initiative High-Level Consultative Group on Bilateral Cooperation Against Transnational Organized Crime," March 29, 2010.

[9] See: CRS Report R43001, *Supporting Criminal Justice System Reform in Mexico: The U.S. Role*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

(helping institutions install better vetting and internal controls); and support for federal and state level judicial reform.

3. **Building a 21st century border.** Pillar three focuses on enhancing public safety via increased information sharing, screenings, and prosecutions; securing the cross-border flow of goods and people; expediting legitimate commerce and travel through investments in personnel, technology, and infrastructure; engaging border communities in cross-border trade; and setting bilateral policies for collaborative border management.
4. **Fostering strong and resilient communities.** Pillar four aims to strengthen federal support for civic planning to prevent and reduce crime; bolster the capacity of state and local governments to implement crime prevention and reduction activities; and increase engagement with at-risk youth. It also includes drug demand reduction and "culture of lawfulness" programs.[10]

From FY2012 forward, the largest amount of funds requested has shifted to pillar two. There is also increasing support at the sub-national level for Mexican states and municipalities.

U.S. and Mexican officials have described the Mérida Initiative as a "new paradigm" for bilateral security cooperation. As part of Mérida, the Calderón government put sovereignty concerns aside to allow extensive U.S. involvement in Mexico's domestic security efforts. In 2009, the Mexican government identified the country's 37 most wanted criminals, and by October 2012, at least 25 of those alleged criminals had been captured or killed.[11] The Calderón government extradited record numbers of criminals to the United States, including 93 in 2011; however no top TCO leaders captured were successfully tried and convicted in Mexican courts.[12]

Many observers have also praised the Mérida Initiative for increasing cooperation between U.S. and Mexican officials at all levels through the establishment of a multi-level working group structure to design and implement bilateral security efforts. On September 18, 2012, U.S. and Mexican cabinet-level officials met for the fourth time to review the results of five years of Mérida cooperation, reaffirm their commitment to its strategic framework, and pledge "to build on and institutionalize the cooperation the Mérida Initiative has established."[13] It appears that those cabinet-level meetings will continue to occur during the Peña Nieto government.

While bilateral efforts have yielded some positive results, the apparent weakness of Mexico's criminal justice system seems to have limited the effectiveness of anti-crime efforts. Ineffective and often corrupt police forces, weak and unaccountable prosecutors, and an overcrowded and disorganized prison system have undermined Mexican and bilateral anticrime efforts. On average, fewer than 20% of homicides have been successfully prosecuted with convictions, suggesting high levels of impunity.[14] While many Mexican

[10] U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement of the Mérida Initiative High-Level Consultative Group on Bilateral Cooperation Against Transnational Organized Crime," March 29, 2010. Culture of Lawfulness (CoL) programs aim to combine "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to educate all sectors of society on the importance of upholding the rule of law. Key sectors that CoL programs seek to involve include law enforcement, security forces, and other public officials; the media; schools; and religious and cultural institutions. The U.S. government is supporting school-based "culture of lawfulness" programs, as well as "culture of lawfulness" courses that are being taught to federal and state police.

[11] "Mexico's Drug Lords: Kingpin Bowling," *The Economist*, October 20, 2012.

[12] William Booth, "Mexico's Crime Wave has Left About 25,000 Missing, Government Documents Show," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2012.

[13] U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement of the Mérida Initiative High-Level Consultative Group on Bilateral Cooperation Against Transnational Organized Crime," September 18, 2012.

[14] See: Guillermo Zepeda, *Seguridad y Justicia Penal en los Estados: 25 Indicadores de Nuestra Debilidad Institucional*, Mexico

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analysts welcomed the Mérida Initiative's 2010 shift in focus toward border modernization and municipal crime prevention, most Mexicans continue to associate Mérida with the anti-TCO efforts under pillar one that contributed to record levels of violent crime in the country. Some continue to argue that border modernization and community building programs have received insufficient attention.[15] Both the U.S. and Mexican governments have also struggled to fulfill their domestic pledges under the Mérida Initiative.

**Funding, Implementation, and Evaluation of the Mérida Initiative**

Congress, with the power of the purse, has played a major role in determining the level and composition of Mérida funding for Mexico. From FY2008 to FY2012, Congress appropriated more than $1.9 billion for the Mérida Initiative. In the beginning, Congress included funding for Mérida in supplemental appropriations measures in an attempt to hasten the delivery of certain equipment. Congress has also earmarked funds for specific purposes in order to ensure that certain programs are prioritized, such as efforts to support institutional reform in Mexico. Congress has sought to influence human rights conditions and encourage efforts to combat abuses and impunity in Mexico by placing conditions on Mérida-related assistance to the Mexican military and police. There appears to be strong support in both the Senate and House for maintaining U.S. support to Mexico provided through Mérida Initiative accounts.[16] However, sequestration and future budget constraints could limit the amount of aid provided.

Over the past few years, Congress has maintained an interest in ensuring that Mérida-funded equipment and training is delivered efficiently. After initial delays in 2009-2010, deliveries accelerated in 2011, a year in which the U.S. government provided Mexico more than $500 million worth of equipment, training, and technical assistance. As of November 2012, some $1.1 billion worth of assistance had been provided. That total includes roughly $873.7 million in equipment (including 21 aircraft and at least $100 million worth of non-intrusive inspection equipment) and $146.0 million worth of training. Deliveries seem to have remained at roughly the same level over the past seven months.

Little information is publicly available on what specific metrics the U.S. and Mexican governments have used to measure the impact of the Mérida Initiative and analysts have debated how bilateral efforts should be evaluated.[17] How one evaluates the Mérida Initiative can largely depend on how one defines the goals of the program. While the U.S. and Mexican governments' long-term goals for the Mérida Initiative may be similar, their short-term goals and priorities may differ. For example, both countries may strive to ultimately reduce the overarching threat posed by the TCOs—a national security threat to Mexico and an organized crime threat to the United States. However, their short-term goals may differ. Mexico may focus more on reducing drug trafficking-related crime and violence, while the United States may place more emphasis on aggressively capturing DTO leaders and seizing illicit drugs.

One basic measure by which Congress has evaluated the Mérida Initiative has been the pace of equipment deliveries and training opportunities. A December 2009 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report

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Evalua, March 2012.

[15] Shannon K. O'Neil, *Refocusing U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation: Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 27,* Council on Foreign Relations, Dec. 2012.

[16] The Senate Appropriations Committee's version of the FY2013 foreign operations appropriations measure, S. 3241 (S.Rept. 112-172), would have provided $10 million in additional funding in Mérida accounts for economic development projects in the border region than the Administration had requested. The House Appropriations Committee's version of the bill, H.R. 5857 (H.Rept. 112-494), would have increased funding by $49 million.

[17] See, for example, Andrew Selee, *Success or Failure? Evaluating U.S.-Mexico Efforts to Address Organized Crime and Violence*, Center for Hemispheric Policy- Perspectives on the Americas Series, December 20, 2010.

identified several factors that had slowed the pace of Mérida implementation.[18] It is unclear, though, whether more expeditious equipment deliveries to Mexico have resulted in a more positive evaluation of Mérida. Moreover, if equipment is not adequately maintained, its long-term impact could be reduced. Measures of the volume of training programs administered, including the number of individuals completing each course, have also been used to measure Mérida success. This measure is imperfect, however, as it does not capture the impact that a particular training course had on an individuals' performance. U.S. agencies are generally not currently measuring retention rates for those whom they have trained; some agencies have identified high turnover rates within the agencies as a major obstacle for the sustainability of Mérida-funded training programs.[19]

U.S.-funded antidrug programs in source and transit countries (of which Mexico is both) have also traditionally been evaluated by examining the number of TCO leaders arrested and the amount of drugs and other illicit items seized. The State Department has attributed increased arrests and seizures of certain drugs (i.e., cocaine and methamphetamine) to success of the Mérida Initiative.[20] However, a principal challenge in assessing the success of Mérida is separating the results of those efforts funded via Mérida from those efforts funded through other border security and bilateral cooperation initiatives.

President Enrique Peña Nieto has vowed to reduce organized crime-related killings, as well as kidnappings and extortion. While analysts remain divided on whether the Mérida Initiative could impact levels of violent crime in Mexico, they agree that measuring citizen perceptions on crime and violence could prove useful. They have also suggested that success in pillars two and four would be evidenced by, among other things, increases in popular trust in the police and courts.[21]

More information on the State Department's metrics for evaluating Mérida may eventually be made available to Congress now that State is establishing a monitoring and evaluation office in Mexico City.

**The Peña Nieto Administration and the Future of the Mérida Initiative**

Recently, the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a nationalistic party that governed Mexico from 1929 to 2000, retook the presidency after 12 years of rule by the conservative National Action Party (PAN). The party also controls a plurality (but not a majority) in Mexico's Senate and Chamber of Deputies. PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto, a former governor of the state of Mexico, took office on December 1, 2012, pledging to enact bold structural reforms and broaden relations with the United States beyond security issues.

Upon his inauguration, President Peña Nieto announced a reformist agenda with specific proposals under five broad pillars: (1) reducing violence; (2) combating poverty; (3) boosting economic growth; (4) reforming education; and (5) fostering social responsibility. Leaders from the PAN and leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) signed on to President Peña Nieto's "Pact for Mexico," an agreement aimed at advancing the reform agenda. The Pact paved the way for the enactment of historic education

[18] Government Accountability Office, *Status of Funds for the Mérida* Initiative, 10-253R, December 3, 2009.

[19] U.S. Agency for International Development, Justice Studies Center of the Americas, and Coordination Council for the Implementation of the Criminal Justice System and its Technical Secretariat (SETEC); Executive Summary of the General Report: Monitoring the Implementation of the Criminal Justice Reform in Chihuahua, the State of Mexico, Morelos, Oaxaca, and Zacatecas: 2007-2011, November 2012.

[20] U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, "Fact Sheet: Law Enforcement Achievements," press release, May 2011, http://photos.state.gov/libraries/mexico/310329/16may/Law%20Enforcement%20May%202011%20Final.pdf.

[21] Diana Negroponte, *Pillar IV of 'Beyond Merida:' Addressing the Socio-Economic Causes of Drug Related Crime and Violence in Mexico*, Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute, May 2011.

and telecommunications reforms; energy and fiscal reform are expected to be introduced in the fall. Two of the thirteen priority proposals Peña Nieto mentioned at his inauguration included introducing a proposal for a unified code of criminal procedure for the country to advance judicial reform and launching a national crime prevention plan. Significantly, both of those proposals have been accomplished.

On December 17, 2012, President Peña Nieto outlined a strategy that aims to achieve a "Mexico in Peace" where human rights are respected and protected by implementing a "State" security policy that involves binding commitments from all levels of government. The six pillars of the strategy include (1) planning; (2) prevention; (3) protection and respect of human rights; (4) coordination; (5) institutional transformation; and (6) monitoring and evaluation.[22] Six months later, analysts and U.S officials maintain that many details of the Peña Nieto government's security strategy—particularly how it plans to combat TCOs without exacerbating violence—are still being fleshed out.[23]

In order to better plan, integrate, and evaluate security efforts, President Peña Nieto secured approval from the Mexican Congress to place the Secretariat of Public Security (Federal Police) and intelligence functions under the authority of the Interior Ministry. That ministry is now the focal point for security collaboration and intelligence-sharing with the United States, as well as with coordination with state and municipal authorities. The states have in turn been divided into five geographic regions and are being encouraged to stand up unified state police commands to coordinate with federal forces. Some critics appear to be concerned that too much power is concentrated in the Interior Ministry.[24]

In addition to strengthening the role of the Interior Ministry in security efforts, the Peña Nieto government envisions a revamped and modernized Attorney General's Office. Peña Nieto's security strategy calls for accelerated implementation of the judicial reforms passed in 2008, a key priority of pillar two (institutional reform) of the Mérida Initiative. It also calls for a reduced usage of preventive detention and prison reform based on rehabilitation and reinsertion into society.

Peña Nieto's security strategy explicitly prioritizes crime prevention, citizen participation, and human rights; this could portend an increase in bilateral efforts under Mérida's pillar two and pillar four (building resilient communities). The government has launched a national prevention program with a $9 billion budget for 2013. Many of the projects it supports (drug treatment, urban renewal, and culture of lawfulness programs) also received funding during the Calderón government. In the area of human rights, Peña Nieto's strategy pledges to increase victims' assistance and to create a national human rights program, protocols for the use of force, and policies for handling enforced disappearances and finding missing persons. Human rights groups and U.S. policy makers are closely monitoring the extent to which those pledges are translated into specific actions.

While U.S. and Mexican interests have recently coalesced around certain security concerns along the border, analysts maintain that there is currently potential for even broader cooperation focused on economic growth and dynamism under pillar three of the Mérida Initiative. [25] In the past, President Peña Nieto has expressed support for creating a border police force, using technology and risk analysis to speed

[22] The strategy is outlined in some detail in Spanish on the Mexican Presidency's website: http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/articulos-prensa/ii-sesion-extraordinaria-del-consejo-nacional-de-seguridad-publica.

[23] CRS interviews with State Department officials and Mexican analysts in Mexico City, May 6-8, 2013.

[24] Julián Aguilar, "In Mexico, a New Approach to Stanching Drug Violence," *New York Times*, December 29, 2012.

[25] Arizona State University Center for Transborder Studies, *Realizing the Strength of Our 21st Century Border: Trade, Education, and Jobs*, Conference Report, October 2012.

up border crossings, and developing a regional fund for North American infrastructure development.[26] Hastening bilateral plans to reach the goal of developing a "21st Century Border"[27] could dovetail well with Peña Nieto's goal of bolstering U.S.-Mexican trade and competitiveness. The Peña Nieto government has also asked for U.S. support in improving security along its porous southern borders with Guatemala and Belize.[28]

Many details of Peña Nieto's security strategy that will have implications for U.S.-Mexican cooperation under pillars one and two of Mérida have yet to be announced, much less implemented. For example, the strategy envisions a continued role for the Mexican military in public security efforts through at least 2015; whether and how the role of the military will be different than under the Calderón government still needs to be clarified. According to one security analyst, some 30% of the military forces that had been deployed to conduct antidrug operations under the Calderón government have gone back to the barracks. As a result, security conditions have reportedly deteriorated in some of those areas.[29]

Peña Nieto also plans to reform, rather than dismantle, the Federal Police, but how the force will be reconfigured to focus on investigations and combating key crimes (such as kidnapping and extortion) remains to be seen. In addition to a reconfigured Federal Police, President Peña Nieto also proposes to create a new militarized police entity, the National Gendarmerie, whose forces are initially being drawn from the military but placed under the control of the Interior Ministry.[30] The strategy envisions the Gendarmerie, rather than the Federal Police, replacing military forces currently charged with assisting municipalities overwhelmed by violence and guarding border crossings, ports, and airports. It is as yet unclear what type of arrest authority the force would have.

In general, President Peña Nieto and his cabinet appear more wary of overt U.S. involvement in security operations in Mexico than Calderón's government. The Interior Ministry has notified U.S. agencies operating in Mexico that all requests for *new* Mérida-funded training or equipment made by Mexican government entities must be approved by a central office in that ministry. Ongoing programs are not affected by the new procedure. According to U.S. officials, this process has thus far proven to be slow and cumbersome.[31] The Peña Nieto government has also removed some U.S. personnel from fusion centers established by the previous government and centralized the handling of sensitive intelligence, reportedly prompting concern from U.S. law enforcement personnel that cooperation could suffer.[32] Despite these changes, the Peña Nieto Administration has pledged to maintain the multi-level working group structure

[26] Miriam Castillo, "Peña Quiere Patrulla Fronteriza Mexicana," *Milenio*, October 9, 2012; Enrique Peña Nieto, *México, la Gran Esperanza* (Mexico, D.F.: Grijalbo, 2011), p. 149.

[27] On May 19, 2010, the United States and Mexico declared their intent to strengthen existing border cooperation with the goal of developing a "21st Century Border" under pillar three of the Mérida Initiative. To head this initiative, they established a Twenty-First Century Border Bilateral Executive Steering Committee (ESC) that met in December 2010, December 2011, and April 2013 to develop bi-national action plans. The plans are focused on setting measurable goals within broad objectives: coordinating infrastructure development, expanding trusted traveler and shipment programs, establishing pilot projects for cargo pre-clearance, improving cross-border commerce and ties, and bolstering information sharing among law enforcement agencies.

[28] CRS interviews with State Department officials and Mexican analysts in Mexico City, May 6-8, 2013.

[29] CRS interview with Raul Benitez Manaut, National Autonomous University of Mexico, May 7, 2013.

[30] The Gendarmerie is to begin with roughly 10,000 forces, 8,500 drawn from the Army and 1,500 from the Navy. It may expand, however, to include some 40,000 officers. Questions remain, however, about how responsibilities would be divided between the Federal Police and the Gendarmerie, including whether the gendarmes would only operate in rural areas (as they customarily have in many countries), or in urban zones as well. Presentation by Dr. Carlos Humberto Toledo Moreno, Inspector General of the National Commission on Public Security in the Interior Ministry, May 7, 2013.

[31] CRS interviews with State Department officials in Mexico City, May 6, 2013.

[32] Dana Priest, "U.S. Role at a Crossroads in Mexico's Intelligence War on the Cartels," *Washington Post,* April 27, 2013; Nick Miroff, "In Mexico, Restrictions on U.S. Agents Signal Drug War Shift," *Washington Post*, May 14, 2013.

(including a yearly cabinet-level meeting) used to design and implement bilateral security efforts that began during the Calderón government.[33]

As Mexico has experienced a shift in power from a PAN Administration focused on combating organized crime to a PRI government focused on bolstering competitiveness, security issues also appear to be taking a back seat to economic and trade issues on the bilateral agenda for the first time since 9/11. Analysts have urged President Obama to work with President Peña Nieto on issues that are of critical importance to both countries, particularly those aimed at boosting trade and job creation. At a pre-inaugural meeting in late November 2012, President Obama embraced President Peña Nieto's desire to strengthen economic ties and to focus on a broad array of bilateral issues rather than focusing predominantly on security matters.[34] On May 2, 2013, President Obama traveled to Mexico for a trip focused on enhancing economic cooperation and expanding educational exchanges between the two countries.[35] When asked about changes in Mexico's security strategy, President Obama said "it is up to the Mexican people to determine their security structures and how it engages with other nations, including the United States."[36] He reaffirmed his Administration's support for the Peña Nieto government's efforts to reduce violence.

**Issues for Congress**

When examining the future of the Mérida Initiative, Congress may first consider defining the desired end state of the Mérida Initiative and how long it may take to get there. Congress may then seek to ensure that those who are implementing the Initiative have developed adequate metrics to measure progress over the short, medium, and long term. Given the level of progress that has been made thus far, the current strategy may be deemed sufficient or insufficient. If it is judged insufficient, Congress may consider how it might be improved. When considering future assistance for the Mérida Initiative, Congress may compare how much funding programs in Mexico, an upper middle income country, are receiving from the Peña Nieto government, and whether U.S. funding is complementing or duplicating Mexican efforts.

As President Peña Nieto implements his security strategy, the 113th Congress may wish to examine how the Mexican government's priorities align with U.S. interests. Congressional approval will be needed should the State Department seek to reprogram some of the funding already in the pipeline for Mérida, or shift new funding to better align with Mexico's new priorities. Should conflicts occur between Mexican and U.S. priorities, Congress may weigh in on how those conflicts should be resolved. For example, President Peña Nieto has said that the success of his strategy will be measured in reductions in homicides and other crimes, rather than in drugs seized or kingpins arrested. This shift could potentially create some tension with U.S. efforts to combat TCOs. Any move by the Peña Nieto government to negotiate with criminal groups, as the Salvadoran government has done,[37] and/or legalize certain drugs could prompt congressional concerns. If the Peña Nieto Administration no longer has the same goals as the United States or Congress sees a significant change in Mexican cooperation, Congress may consider reevaluating some types of Mérida Initiative funding.

[33] CRS interview with State Department official, April 24, 2013.

[34] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks of President Obama and President-Elect Peña Nieto of Mexico Before Bilateral Meeting," Press Release, November 27, 2012.

[35] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "White House Fact Sheet on U.S.-Mexico Partnership," Press Release, May 2, 2013.

[36] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and President Peña Nieto of Mexico in a Joint Press Conference," Press Release, May 2, 2013.

[37] CRS Report RS21655, *El Salvador: Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.