THE WAR ON DRUGS AND THE MERIDA INITIATIVE

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the successes and failures of a supply-oriented drug policy through the case of Mexico. It examines the Merida Initiative’s goals and achievements since its adoption. Special attention is devoted to the Initiative after 2010, when the Obama Administration sought to shift the focus of the assistance towards strengthening rule of law, enhancing the capacities of democratic institutions, primarily the justice sector, and also improving the human rights status of the country. To assess the achievements and failures, David Baldwin’s (2001) guidelines are adopted: effectiveness, cost to user and target, stakes for user and target. The assessment might provide valuable insights for future policy implications. In either case (before and after the shift), however, it seems that the supply-oriented drug policy is associated with too high of a cost to be labeled as successful.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
2.1 International Regime of Narcotic Drugs .......................................................................................... 2
   2.2 The War on Drugs ......................................................................................................................... 2
   2.3 Previous Operations under the War on Drugs .............................................................................. 3
3. Economic reasoning .............................................................................................................................. 4
4. Dynamics of Narco-Trafficking in Latin America .............................................................................. 5
   4.1 Regional Trends .............................................................................................................................. 5
   4.2 Mexico ........................................................................................................................................ 8
5. Merida Initiative ................................................................................................................................... 11
   5.1 The Merida Initiative: Adoption and Early Stages .................................................................... 11
   5.2 The Merida Initiative after 2010 ................................................................................................. 13
6. Achievements and Failures .................................................................................................................. 14
7. Assessment ........................................................................................................................................... 16
8. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 18
References ............................................................................................................................................. 19
1. Introduction

The War on Drugs, since introduced by US President Richard Nixon in 1971, has drawn much attention both in academic literature and policy debates. Little has changed in terms of approach, how particular states deal with narcotic drug production and trafficking. In general, harsh security measures have been adopted with special focus on the supply of illicit drugs in general, disrupting production and trade in particular.

After Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico has become the central focus of combatting drug trafficking organizations. Former Mexican President, Philipe Calderon has started his own war on drugs in 2007, and thus requested assistance from the United States to combat organized crime. To this cause, the Merida Initiative was established, providing Mexico with necessary aid. Mexico is a particular interest of the United States as it is one of the major cannabis and opiates producer and serves as a primary transit zone (Seelke et.al., 2011), and thus poses increased security threat to the United States and its interests. However, a systemic evaluation of the Merida Initiative is needed to assess the degree of success, in order to draw policy implications for further cooperation between the United States and Mexico. In my paper, I am adopting Baldwin’s (2000) guidelines to accomplish this task, which could serve as a more general tool that has been missing for long in foreign policy evaluation.

To understand the broader context of the Initiative, I will first present the international regime regulating drug policies, then I will look briefly at the deployment of the war on drugs in the United States and what it meant, which aims to supplement the understanding of the context. I will then present two influential cases as well (Bolivia and Colombia), but only in short, with the aim to outline similarities between previous operations and the Merida Initiative. In the second part of my paper, I will present the context of the region and Mexico, as it is important to outline trends in illicit drug production and trade where the Initiative has been adopted. I then present the Merida Initiative, and aim to highlight the change that has taken place during the Obama Administration. Lastly, I present achievements and failures and assess them by using Baldwin’s (2000) framework in order to highlight the need for change in drug policy.
2.1 International Regime of Narcotic Drugs

How we think about narcotic drugs and how policies are made today are still influenced greatly by the first comprehensive internationally binding UN treaty that was adopted worldwide in 1961. In the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs it is stated in the Preamble that “addiction to narcotic drugs constitutes a serious evil for the individual and is fraught with social and economic danger to mankind” (UNODC, 1961, pg. 1.). The primary aim of the Convention was to eliminate narcotic drugs: opium within fifteen, coca leaf and cannabis within 25 years (UNODC, 1961, pg. 23.; Article 49(2) d),e),f) points respectively) for the health and welfare of the mankind. To achieve these goals, party states were required to adopt “effective national action” (UNODC, 1961, pg. 6.; Article 9(5)), thus implementing laws that would prevent manufacture and illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs. To oversee the actions of the states, a comprehensive system of licensing, reporting and certifying was established under the UN1. Nadelmann (1990) labels this process of norm institutionalization and enforcement, such as the prohibition of production and distribution of narcotic drugs, a global prohibition regime (emphasis mine; pg. 479). The actors who do not comply with these norms are classified as deviant and thus must bear the consequences for their actions, which usually include withdrawal of foreign aid.

2.2 The War on Drugs

The United States has been a key supporter and proponent for this international regime on narcotic drugs. Among many attributes, the regime has a clear supply focus (eradicating the naturally occurring crops), coupled with a very strong moral (narcotic drugs as evils) and security approach (responsibility in eradication lies with security forces, such as border guards, police, military).

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1 The regime constitutes of further international treaties, among which the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (UNODC, 1971) and the Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (UNODC, 1990) are the most prominent ones. For more, see: https://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1971_en.pdf; https://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1988_en.pdf
Only ten years after the Single Convention had been adopted, President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs, naming narcotics as number one public enemy in his famous speech in 1971, Nixon called for a “new, all-out offensive (...) a worldwide offensive” for which “money will be provided to the extent that is necessary and to the extent that it will be useful” (Nixon, 1971:7).

Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush have followed the course. The former declared narcotics trafficking in 1986 US national security concern (National Security Decision Directive 221, 1986), while the latter has called for greater counternarcotics efforts in the Andean region (National Security Directive 18, 1989), as drugs not only cripple the economy, but affect the social fabric of the society.

These remarks have changed little since Nixon’s declaration in terms of US involvement outside its territory. Policy implications have been: to provide financial aid, the key component of counterdrug strategy, to countries involved in production and distribution of narcotic drugs; to equip them with US military software, hardware, intelligence; and eventually help them to uphold compliance and achieve the goals set out by the international regime regulating the narcotic drugs (Seelke et.al., 2011). Although, addressing economic, social and institutional was present, the central premise was to disrupt production and trafficking at the foreign source.

2.3 Previous Operations under the War on Drugs

Two cases prior to Mexico stand out, in terms of US assistance to combat organized crime. Bolivia, next to Peru, the biggest coca leaf grower, was among the first countries to receive aid from the United States to counter narcotics. First through Operation Black Furnace, which was followed by Operation Snow Cap. The aim of these operations was to disrupt cocaine processing and trafficking by targeting high profile traffickers. American military personnel, advisers, Black Hawk and Huey helicopters were provided in order to achieve the goals. One of the main objectives was to decrease the price of coca leaves. In four years’ time, the value of 100 pounds of coca leaf plummeted from 800 dollars to 15-30 dollars (Kerr, 1988:120). However, only after a year the Operation Black Furnace was launched, CIA (1986) has published a report, stating that lasting effects cannot be realized in light of the goals set out. The CIA highlights that “under these
conditions the drug trade will rebound to previous levels, bringing with it an escalation of narcotics related violence” (pg.2). Others have already emphasized the dangers of a possible shift of coca production and manufacture from Bolivia to Colombia (Kerr, 1988).

Launched in 2000, Plan Colombia was and has been the greatest US counter-narcotic operation in the region. With similar aims to that of operations in Bolivia, it has been considered as a successful initiative by many decision-makers both in the US and Colombia. The US has spent nearly 10 billion dollars since the program’s start (Brodzinsky, 2016:3), funds were allocated mostly to security sector (building up military capacity) with a focus on counter-narcotics (massive drug crop spraying mostly) rather than social and economic development (Shifter, 2012). Although, the collapse of the government, which was highly probable in the late 1990’s due to the operation of paramilitary groups (FARC and AUC respectively), was avoided, Colombia has paid high costs economically and in human lives as well. Approximately 1.1% of annual GDP was allocated to the war on drugs since 2000, and nearly 25% of intentional homicides was drug-related (Mejija, 2016, pg.1). Nonetheless, Colombia is currently facing a twenty-year record in coca cultivation (The Guardian, 2017).

As it will be presented in the case of Mexico, same patterns can be analyzed in terms of US assistance. Before jumping however to the Merida Initiative, it is also important to examine recent trends in the region in general, and in Mexico in particular as it provides the second half of the context to the establishment and operation of the Initiative.

3. Economic reasoning

The War on drugs has focused in so far on the supply side of the drug market. The Merida Initiative fits well into this framework. Although, the new objectives in the shift fall into somewhat a grey zone, ultimately, they aim to establish some form of order where drug traffickers will be dealt with by stronger and more effective institutions. The objectives will be discussed in greater in length in chapter 5, and the dynamics of narco-trafficking in Latin America will be addressed in chapter 4. Before presenting the case of Latin America and Mexico, particularly, I would like to introduce a simple economic notion of how drug markets work.
Avoiding the most fundamental market forces, supply and demand, can lead to unsolicited results. Reducing the supply for good without decreasing the demand for it first, will produce an increase in price. For goods that are not price-sensitive, such as drugs (or alcohol, or cigarettes), the move will create perverse incentives: it will encourage the production of more drugs, and will also result in more recruitment, and thus easier availability and potentially enhance the purity. Sadly, this argumentation is largely missing from the policy-making discourse in high circles. The results and effects can be demonstrated in Latin America and Mexico as well.

4. Dynamics of Narco-Trafficking in Latin America

The region’s vulnerability to drug trafficking stems from not only its proximity to the greatest drug consuming state, but also from structural factors, such as poverty, inequality, lack of economic opportunities. In addition, the security sector (police, prisons, judicial system) being relatively underfunded, bolster corruption, which results in low impunity rates as well. Furthermore, some organizations might possess relatively more power and capabilities compared to governments. (Seelke et.al., 2011)

4.1 Regional Trends

According to Rosen (2015), illicit drug trafficking poses a systemic threat not only to the region, but to the international security as whole. Revenues from narcotics production and trade empower drug trafficking organizations to evade government detection, undermine legitimate political, economic and social structures through corruption, money laundering, and excessive use of violence (pg.7).

Furthermore, the Department of Defense (2011), while acknowledging the rapidly changing international security environment as partly the result of increased organized crime operation, highlighted the fragmented nature of these new, resilient and fluid organizations. The difficulty lies not only in identifying such individuals and groups, but to map their connections with other organizations, even governments, as they are emerging and vanishing constantly along
political and criminal gains. In many places, the hierarchical organizational structure has been disrupted, mainly as the result of the kingpin strategy pursued within counternarcotics efforts, creating “dispersed and decentralized global networks of criminals and terrorists” (pg.4).

HOMICIDE RATE IN THE WORLD (2012)

One of the most apparent consequences have been the homicide rates that make Latin America the deadliest region in the world. It accounts for more than a third of the world’s homicides, whereas it is only home to 8% of the population. (Igarapé Institute, 2013:4; Figure 1.)

Violence is particularly associated with the protection of drug trafficking routes, making transit zones highly vulnerable. Compared to the 1980’s, a major shift has occurred in terms of trafficking routes. Instead of relying on the Caribbean region, today, the bulk of the illicit commodities enter through the approximately 3100 kilometer long US-Mexican border that is difficult to patrol. Nonetheless, the balloon-effect might take place once again, as much attention has been devoted to Mexico, resulted in the re-emergence of the Caribbean route, which might in turn ease the pressure on Mexico (Figure 2.). (Seelke et.al., 2011)
Figure 2. Major Routes of Illicit Drug Trade. Source: Seelke et.al (2011). pg.3.
4.2 Mexico

The Department of Justice (2009) has labelled the Mexican drug trafficking organizations as the “greatest drug trafficking threat to the United States (pg.45)\(^2\) due to their large control over US illicit market.

Mexico has been a major producer and supplier of opiates, methamphetamine and cannabis (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2011, pg. 234-237). Additionally, it serves as a major transit zone for cocaine. According to some estimates (Seelke et.al., 2011, pg.14), 95% of cocaine sold in the US enters from Mexico.

Mexico is among the countries that appear most frequently in the Pentagon’s Counternarcotics Strategy (Department of Defense, 2011). Primary focus has been devoted to reducing, first and foremost, the quantity of illicit drugs from Mexico (Objective 1, Strategic Goal 2; pg.13).

Since President Phelipe Calderón has announced his own war on drugs in Mexico, increasing security pressure on drug trafficking organizations resulted in steep escalation of violence, not only between drug trafficking organizations and the state, but between cartels themselves, as disruption of one organization or its leadership caused rivalry for the control of territory and trafficking routes. Mexico saw a fragmentation and rivalry taking place between cartels (Figure 3.). Mexican police, military, government officials and civilians have been deliberately targeted. Many US officials fear the spillover of violence (Archibold et.al., 2011), especially from neighboring state of Chihuana, that has been among states most affected by violence (Figure 4.).

\(^2\) In terms of substance, the Department of Justice has rated cocaine as the most dangerous. See DOJ (2009) pg. 1
AREAS OF CARTEL INFLUENCE IN MEXICO (2016)

Figure 3. Areas of cartel influence in Mexico. Source: Beittel (2017) pg.26.
Some debate has spurred whether the ongoing violence perpetrated by drug trafficking organizations shows signs of terrorism and whether these organizations should be labeled accordingly, which in turn would have its policy implications. The Morelia grenade attack on Mexico’s Independence Day may be seen as a form of retaliation for the harsh law enforcement strategy adopted by the President in 2007 (Lacey, 2008). Intimidation and political violence is used as tactic, however, there is no consent whether the ideology or the will to overthrow the government is clearly present. (Rollins and Wyler, 2013)
5. Merida Initiative

As these trends have occurred in the region, more specifically in Mexico that is bordering the United States, the US government had a responsibility to act in some form. Drawing upon the previous cases, in 2008 it increased its foreign assistance to both the region and Mexico, through the Merida Initiative adopted in 2007 with the aim to enhance counternarcotic efforts and anticrime assistance. The Merida Initiative is a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico to fight organized crime and associated violence. The US Congress has appropriated $2.8 billion since the program has been launched. Supported activities include a comprehensive justice sector reform, police capacity building, establishment of anti-corruption programs, engagement with Mexican civil society and promotion of the rule of law, delivery of specialized aircraft for Mexican police forces, establishment of drug treatment courts. (Department of State, s.a.)

5.1 The Merida Initiative: Adoption and Early Stages

The Bush Administration prioritized three aspects within its National Drug Control Strategy (from now on: National Strategy): prevention - stopping drug use before it starts; treatment - intervening and healing America’s drug users; and supply reduction - disrupting the market for illegal drugs (National Drug Control Strategy, 2008, pg.4.). The President has requested overall 14.1 billion dollars for the strategy to be implemented, from which approximately two-thirds were devoted to interdiction, domestic law enforcement and international usage, a supply-oriented focus supplemented by mostly security measures (pg.5.).

The National Strategy’s third chapter discusses the newly implemented Merida Initiative in great length. It welcomes President Calderon’s efforts to eliminate the drug cartels, highlighting the 24% increase in spending, deployment of 12,000 troops, adoption of anti-corruption initiatives, institutional reforms leading to capture of Tijuana, Gulf and Sinaloa Cartels, and thus extraditing a record number of fugitives to the US (pg.47) that sustained its volume in the years coming (Figure 5.). In addition to the National Strategy, the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2008, pg.176) notes that Mexico succeeded in seizing twice the amount of cocaine (48 metric tons) to that of previous year.
These remarks mirror the security narrative that has been coupled with US drug policy. It is noted in the strategy that it is “essential that the United States does all that it can to partner with Mexico as it aggressively counters the drug trafficking threat” (National Drug Control Strategy, 2008, pg.47).

The Merida Initiative was adopted in response to the Mexican President, Philipe Calderon’s request for cooperation and assistance in countering narco-trafficking. Initially, the program had four pillars (Seelke et.al., 2011, pg.11):

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;
4. curtail gang activity and diminish local drug demand.

The Initiative, as its four pillars show, had a strong security approach. The US provided equipment (helicopters, surveillance aircraft, technical resources), training and technical advice for primarily military and law enforcement officials, additionally $1.5 billion in aid between 2008 and 2010,
whereas Mexico allocated approximately $25 billion of its own resources. (Seelke et.al., 2011, pg. 15; Rosen, 2015, pg. 14)

5.2 The Merida Initiative after 2010

As shown above, the US has historically focused on supply reduction, such as crop eradication, and on interdiction and seizure of narcotics. However, these measures only produced temporal advancements, as organizations have managed to cope with the challenges posed by counter-narcotics efforts, avoiding detection by modifying cultivation methods and places, production techniques and trafficking methods. Due to this phenomena, recognized as the balloon-effect, the availability of illicit drugs and violence in general have not been reduced, neither in the region, nor in Mexico.

In 2010, separate initiatives have been created for Central American (CARSI - Central America Regional Security Initiative), and Caribbean states (CBSI - Caribbean Basin Security Initiative), leaving the Merida Initiative to operate in Mexico. In March 2010, the two governments mutually agreed to continue the cooperation. The Obama Administration, however, sought to shift its counter-narcotics policy from a harsh security-driven policy to concentrate rather on strengthening the rule of law. (Seelke, 2013)

The new pillars of the Merida Initiative have been adjusted accordingly (Rosen, 2015, pg. 14):

1. disrupt and dismantle organized criminal groups;
2. institutionalize justice sector reforms to sustain the rule of law and respect for human rights;
3. create an efficient, economically competitive border crossing that ensures “secure two-way flows” of travelers and trade;
4. support Mexican government efforts to build strong and resilient communities through community organizations, civil society participation, sustainable economic opportunities, community cohesion, and violence reduction.

These goals show a longer-term commitment to rule of law compliant institution-building, with special attention devoted to the justice sector. New emphasis has been placed also on enhancing
social cohesion, strengthening human rights status, empowering civil society. This shift has been apparent also in the structure of allocated funds. The requested security assistance for 2017 made up 34% ($598,8 million), whereas development programs and promotion of special US interests account for 36% and 30% respectively (Meyer, 2017, pg.6).

However, in 2017, Mexico would only be the third largest beneficiary of US aid in the region. The majority of funds would be allocated to the northern triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras³, indicating the balloon-effect taking place. The request for Mexico would amount to $134,7 million, which is a 16% decrease and is likely to continue to decline, according to Meyer (2017, pg.8-9).

6. Achievements and Failures

The ongoing war on drugs in Mexico has produced mixed results. On the one hand, the Mexican government emphasizes its achievements, which are in alignment with the requirements presented by the international drug regime in general, the 1961 Single Convention in particular. On the other hand, Mexico has seen a surge in violence, death, kidnappings, torture, misconduct by security forces, emergence of vigilante groups in the period when US-Mexican assistance was highly increased.

The government of Pena Nieto emphasizes three achievements in particular. First, 25 cartel leaders have been arrested from the previous President’s, Phelipe Calderon’s initial list of 37 (Lakhani and Tirado, 2016:9). Among those arrested is, Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, former head of the Sinaloa Cartel, who was assumed to be the most powerful kingpin in Mexico at a time. Second, apart from imprisoning major cartel leaders, Mexico has arrested an unprecedented number of fugitives connected to production and trafficking of illicit drugs. The overall prison population has reached its peak in 2014, when it accounted for more than 255 000 detainees (World Prison Brief, 2016). Third, according to the government, it has seized a historical amount of illicit drugs as well (BBC, 2010).

³ Colombia remains the largest single recipient, but the aid aggregated for the northern triangle exceeds Colombia’s.
On the other hand, Mexico has experienced grave consequences since the war on drugs was launched in 2007. Regarding the capture of drug kingpins, fragmentation of cartel groups has taken place. As noted in the Defense Department’s (2011) Counternarcotics Strategy, these so called *cartellitos* became less identifiable, violence increased along fragmentations with the aim to control the resources left behind by the cartel leaders. In addition to the incarcerations, the conviction rate does not reach 5%, coupling that with the fact that roughly 7% of the crimes is being reported, as Bargent (2016:2-3) argues, it results in an astonishing 99% impunity rate. Lastly, the accessibility has of narcotic drugs have not been reduced, while prices stagnate, and purity has been increasing, the prime result of supply-oriented drug policy (Buxton, 2017).

Additional consequences are manifold. The most visible is the escalation of violence. Homicide rates reach 232,000 since the start of the war (Statista, 2016). In 2017, average intentional homicide reached 69 per day (Euronews, 2017:1). Mass graves have been discovered, extrajudicial executions have enjoyed impunity, torture by state security forces have gone unpunished (4715 torture investigation cases under revision at federal level), enforced disappearances have been rising with 29,917 cases reported in 2016 alone, human rights defenders, journalists were specifically targeted, threatened and harassed (Amnesty International, 2017, pg. 250-254).

The country’s rule of law situation has been almost steady during the years of Merida Initiative. Except, Mexico has lost its “free” status to “partly free” due to the government’s inability to protect the rights of the citizens in the light of criminal violence, which can be seen also a major setback as well (Freedom House, 2011). Furthermore, Mexico’s corruption numbers have been also sliding. Its corruption perception index decreased 5 points since 2014, ranking 126 out of 178, making Mexico one of the most corrupt country to be perceived (Transparency International, 2016).
7. Assessment

To assess the US policy towards Mexico adopted in terms of drug policy, it is important to provide a framework through which successes and failures can be gauged. Baldwin (2000), however, notes that no universal framework has been created for a rigorous systematic analysis. He, nonetheless, provides guidelines, which can be useful for the task.

First, he argues, effectiveness should be examined. Baldwin (2000) notes that as in every policy-making, in foreign policy as well, there are multiple goals and multiple targets. However, achieving the primary goal does not imply automatic success. Furthermore, when it comes to goals, one must think in terms of degrees, rather than in dichotomy of success and failure. Second, like in the business sector, in foreign policy as well, costs need to be weighed in, where a general rule would be that goal satisfaction exceeds goal costs. Third, costs need not to be assessed only to the user, but to the target as well. Higher the costs for the target, the more successful a policy is. Fourth, it is also important to assess stakes for both users and target. Higher the stakes, the more valuable are the degrees of achievement. Baldwin (2000) also highlights the need for comparative evaluation of costs and benefits in terms of policy alternatives, as policies examined alone might produce a false picture.

With these five criteria in mind, I would like to provide an assessment of the US drug policy towards Mexico. Prior to 2010, the strategy’s prime goal was to disrupt narco-trafficking so that illicit drug production and trade does not reach the United States. In terms of the Merida Initiative’s specific goals, the power and impunity of criminal organizations has not been broken, justice systems have hardly strengthened, gang activity has not been reduced (Seelke, et.al. 2011). These are apparent from the most visible consequence of the war on drugs, the escalation of violence. Even though, most of the cartel leadership was arrested (and extradited to the US), it only led to fragmentation of the organizations and thus leading to even more violence (Department of Defense, 2011). In regard of the amount of narcotic drugs reaching the US, there have been no sign of decrease. Interdiction of narcotics furthermore, creates perverse incentives as it results increased retail price and thus greater profit for the organizations (Rosen, 2015).
After 2010, more attention has been devoted to improving human rights, the rule of law, and institutions’ capacity. Although homicide rates have declined at first after 2010 (World Bank, s.a.), they have rose again, making 2017 the deadliest year since the war has been launched (Euronews, 2017). Furthermore, Mexico has been rated as partly free country by the Freedom House (2011) right after the shift in the Merida Initiative has occurred, and its rate remained the same since (Freedom House, 2017). The astonishing impunity rate also shows no sign of advancement in the justice sector, which has been among the prime goals of the renewed Merida Initiative. Some observers argue that “unless foreign police organizations recognize and internalize what the rule of law means, what its key characteristics are, and why the rule of law is necessary to accomplish their mission, no amount of aid will get the job done” (Godson, R. 2007; in: Rosen, 2015, pg. 31). Costs have been grave in terms of human lives and human rights abuses that is highlighted in detail in Amnesty International (2017) reports. At the same time, it is not evident, what costs have been bestowed upon the drug trafficking organizations, apart from suffering the costs of violence themselves.\(^4\)

In the light of the above mentioned, it is reasonable to acknowledge that the degree of success has been low. This is underlined by the Congress’ decision as well, to attach conditionality to Mexico’s aid. As a result of the failures, Mexico is not to receive 25% of the Foreign Military Financing aid until its government investigated and prosecuted human rights violations, enforced prohibitions against torture, and searched for victims of forced disappearances (Meyer, 2017, pg.14).

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\(^4\) It would be absurd to assume the policy deliberately aims to impose such costs without regard to the value of human life, and to broader implications.
8. Conclusion

In 2010, the Obama Administration’s Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy explicitly stated that contemporary counter-narcotics strategy “has not been successful.” and added that “Forty years later, the concern about drugs and drug problems is, if anything, magnified, intensified” (Serrano, 2013; in: Rosen, 2015, pg. 9). In 2014, William Brownfield, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, has further highlighted that the legalization of marijuana in US states creates double standards in the international arena (Baum, 2016).

The Administration’s remarks are in line with implications of this paper. Although, these remarks refer to the broader question of whether counter-narcotics strategy based on primarily supply side can be successful, in my assessment, by adopting Baldwin’s (2000) framework of analysis, I come to the same conclusion in regards of the Mexican war on drugs and the assistance that has been provided through the Merida Initiative. Even though, there has been a shift in approach towards more longer-term commitments during the Obama Administration, strengthening the rule of law, improving human rights conditions, enhancing the capacity of justice sector, considerable changes have yet to come.

Remarks of the previous Administration’s officials in general, and my conclusions regarding the conditions in terms of the drug war in Mexico and the assistance provided by the United States in particular, are twofold. First, these clearly imply a need for change, where a shift from supply to demand-oriented drug policies might bring about needed improvements. Second, these can serve as guidelines for the new administration, which has already decreased the funds of the Merida Initiative by 38.8% compared to the requested aid in 2017 (Seelke and Finklea, 2017, pg. 12), and their reallocation is yet to be decided.

It is time to abandon a policy that has been adopted in 1971 and still shows no sign of improvement in terms of its stated goals.
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