

## **Briefing for the Mexican Consejo Ejecutivo de Empresas Globales on the Need to Modernize U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation, 8/28/20**

Mexico and the United States have an outdated framework for public security cooperation, with immense costs on both sides of the border.

For more than a decade, cross-border criminal activity has contributed to tens of thousands of homicides in Mexico and tens of thousands of U.S. drug overdose deaths each year, with all the social and economic burdens that accompany those deaths.

There is an urgent need for the U.S. and Mexican governments to forge an updated, comprehensive strategy to: 1) disrupt and diminish transnational organized crime; 2) build capacity of law enforcement and justice institutions; 3) agree on focused crime prevention programs that produce better

results for both countries; and 4) establish effective, durable mechanisms to guide this strategy. They also need to actively explore innovative ways to attack the enduring problems which are overwhelming capacity in both countries.

Twelve former U.S. and Mexican Ambassadors reached broad agreement on this approach in a new [report](#), “A Vision for a Stronger U.S.-Mexico Partnership,” sponsored by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute.

The [report](#) reflects the Ambassadors’ recommendations for stronger U.S.-Mexico partnership across economic, security, border and migration issues. Of these, I have no doubt that failing to act on public security will be enormously costly.

The Ambassadors agreed that public security and rule of law demand action from both countries. Neither country can solve the problems alone, and they must share responsibility for forging solutions.

Soon after President Lopez Obrador (AMLO) took office in December 2018, experts urged a [comprehensive review](#) of security cooperation, but the Mexican government hesitated, in part because AMLO had promised to implement a [different model](#) for public security.

U.S.-Mexico cooperation continued but improved only following the late 2019 killings of American women and children and ensuing threats from President Trump. New cooperation focuses on high value targets, including top traffickers and financiers, and drug more seizures. These are good steps, but overall cooperation is still piecemeal and

inadequate to deal with the longer-term challenges.

In their [report](#), the twelve ambassadors urge a modernized framework for security cooperation and a comprehensive strategy that includes mapping the supply chains, distribution networks and business and finance structures of the crime groups, and conducting a joint threat assessment.

At the core of the work, there has to be trust building between law enforcement and justice authorities, as well as improving the efficacy of the institutions and the mechanisms charged with assuring good coordination between the countries and agencies on both sides of the border. This entails boldly taking on the impunity and corruption that mar cooperation. This problem is highlighted by recent U.S. criminal [charges](#) against former top Mexican officials for taking drug cartel payoffs.

A new strategy needs a specific focus on tackling the challenges from synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl. It must include reinforced efforts against other drug threats (heroin and meth), as well as serious, targeted work against gun smuggling from the U.S., laundering of illicit proceeds, and corruption.

The two governments should achieve consensus on an updated set of technical assistance programs that will bolster Mexico's ability to arrest and convict criminals and support its judicial and related reforms to strengthen Mexico's institutions. A new strategy must also better integrate work with sub-federal law enforcement entities.

The Ambassadors' [report](#) argues that the two governments need innovative and effective approaches to upholding rule of law. This includes oversight mechanisms that accurately

track and evaluate progress and that adapt to lessons learned. A new strategy should consider new law enforcement approaches as well as programs that can diminish drug demand and support for gangs and cartels.

Success will require strong political support, long-term vision and robust cooperation mechanisms. This approach can give a fresh start to tackling the deadly effects of transnational crime across Mexico and the United States. Leaders should put a comprehensive and dynamic strategy in place now.

Earl Anthony Wayne was U.S. Ambassador to Mexico (2011-2015) and is Board Co-Chair of the Wilson Center's Mexico Institute. He is a Diplomat in Residence at American University's School of International Service.