

## **Peter Bensinger and the Mexico Drug War**

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Mexican cartels are the greatest narco-trafficking threat to the United States. Accounting for over \$30 billion in drug sales, mostly from marijuana, and operating in over 230 American cities, the Mexican drug cartels and the ongoing drug war is a serious problem for U.S.-Mexico security.

Peter Bensinger, former DEA Administrator, offered several options for fighting the drug war when he addressed the National Strategy Forum on May 5, 2010.

First, the U.S. and Mexico must work to reverse the flow of money and goods that transit the border as a result of the drug trade. Part of the problem is that police and government officials are linked to the cartels. With the massive drug profit and potential for reinvestment of drug money into the Mexican economy, corruption is an obstacle for stemming the money flow. For this to work, the U.S. and Mexico must work together to: address corruption; reform the legal system and improve investigative and prosecutorial activities; and find ways to track and stop illicit money flows from the drug trade.

Second, the issue of border security and immigration continues to perplex policymakers. Building fences along the border is only a temporary, costly remedy. Even with fences, illegal immigrants and drug traffickers can either climb over, dig under, or pass through the fences by a variety of means. Instead, more border patrol agents using sophisticated surveillance methods and coordinating with increased manpower from the Department of Homeland Security and the National Guard will help to improve the security at the border.

Third, the debate over the demand for illegal drugs in the U.S. continues in the public sphere. While some suggest that legalizing marijuana would lower illegal drug demand from Mexico, others see this as futile given the regulatory hurdles that would be difficult to overcome – including drug potency and age limitations. In addition, the negative health effects to the nation could outweigh the positives of lower illegal drug demand. Consequently, Mr. Bensinger continues to oppose drug legalization policies, and suggests that the Presidents of Mexico and the United States meet regularly to discuss coordinating their anti-drug policies and regulations.

President Obama's action to send 1,200 National Guard soldiers to the border for support is a step in the right direction. The drug war will be protracted, and in the long-term, both the U.S. and Mexico must continue to cooperate and coordinate their security and legal policies to achieve a stabler border and an end to the drug war.