

**Opening Statement  
of the Honorable Edolphus Towns  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
  
Hearing on The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels  
and U.S. National Security**

**July 9, 2009**

Good morning and thank you for being here.

Mexico has long been an important ally and friend of the United States. It is this country's third-largest trading partner, has one of the largest economies in the Americas, and remains the third-largest source of foreign oil for the U.S. market.

Unfortunately, over the past few years, organized crime has made Mexico a major producing and transit state for illegal drugs trafficked into the U.S. As much as 90 percent of all cocaine entering the U.S. comes through Mexico. Criminals in Mexico are now the largest foreign suppliers of marijuana and major suppliers of methamphetamine.

Apparently, crime pays: this criminal enterprise is estimated to produce annual revenues ranging from \$25 to \$40 billion.

In December 2006, shortly after taking office, Mexican President Felipe Calderón began a major crackdown on the drug cartels operating in his country. Since then, almost 11,000 people in Mexico have been killed in drug-related violence. Almost daily, reports from Mexico depict killings, acts of torture, and kidnapping. And it is getting worse. This past June was the deadliest month on record, with over 800 killed in drug-related violence.

In short, in Mexico, drugs and violence are a growth industry.

As a result, Mexico is facing one of the most critical security challenges in its history. Many who have had the courage to confront the drug cartels have been threatened or killed. This includes policeman, soldiers, judges, journalists, and even the clergy.

However, there is some basis for optimism. The courageous efforts of President Calderón have resulted in

important changes. Law enforcement agencies and other Federal officials have reported positive developments in their working relationships with their Mexican counterparts. They say these changes are having a significant effect in addressing the drug threat posed to both countries.

At the same time, there is a front page article in today's Washington Post which reads, "Mexico accused of torture in drug war: Army using brutality to fight trafficking, rights groups say." As the effort in Mexico to address the drug threat continues, we must be mindful that abuses from the state are equally intolerable. I will seek to understand more about the facts relating to this article as the Committee's investigation continues.

Nevertheless, I believe the drug cartels and their associated violence constitute a major threat to security and safety along the Southwest border, and have caused major disruptions to commercial activities, including international trade.

Because of my growing concerns about this problem, I sent a bipartisan team of committee investigators to the Southwest border to get a first-hand look at what is

happening on the ground. Our investigators met with numerous Federal, state, and local officials, including law enforcement, military intelligence, and others, and observed field operations in both daylight and at night.

This hearing was designed as a follow-up to the staff field investigation, to provide the Committee with an overview of Federal efforts to disrupt and dismantle the Mexican drug trade and to examine whether Federal agencies have sufficient tools and capabilities to do the job.

Over the past few years, there have been nagging questions about the effectiveness of Federal policy with regard to the southwest border. While it is clear that this Administration takes the drug cartel threat very seriously, questions remain.

Just one month ago, the Administration published a document entitled, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*. This is a blueprint on how the Administration will address the threats posed by Mexican drug smuggling.

The Administration's Strategy is strong on proposals, but lacks specifics. Most importantly, the key issue remains, "Who is in charge?"

We know who is leading the fight in Iraq. We know who is leading the fight in Afghanistan. What we don't know is who is leading the fight on our own border. Is it the Border Czar? Is it the Drug Czar? Will it be the National Guard?

Perhaps we will obtain a better understanding of this question today.

One more thing before we begin. With us today are top representatives from key law enforcement agencies involved in the ongoing struggle to address Mexican drug trafficking. The work they do is critical both to U.S. national security and in helping Mexico in its progress to turning the corner on the threats it now confronts. I commend their efforts and I look forward to working with them on this critical national security matter.

Thank you.

