

# Building Institutional Capacity: Knowledge Production for Transnational Security Governance in Mexico

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Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Finkenbusch, P 2018, 'Building Institutional Capacity: Knowledge Production for Transnational Security Governance in Mexico' *Global Crime*, vol. 19, no. 3-4, pp. 211-227.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2018.1477599>

DOI 10.1080/17440572.2018.1477599

ISSN 1744-0572

ESSN 1744-0580

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

*This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Global Crime* on 29/05/18 available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17440572.2018.1477599>*

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# **Building Institutional Capacity: Knowledge Production for Transnational Security Governance in Mexico**

## **Abstract**

This article engages with institutionalist-knowledge production in US-Mexican security relations, demonstrating how anti-crime governance in the Americas has shifted from a heavy-handed military rationale to a good governance and civil society-centred approach. This shift has been facilitated by the newly emerging resilience discourse which advocates turning local communities from passive beneficiaries of government-sponsored law enforcement into pro-active security partners. It will be argued that the rise of good governance and society-centred policy thinking has enhanced the epistemic authority of a heterogeneous, but ideologically aligned set of human rights advocacy groups, think tanks, policy-oriented academics and for-profit development NGOs—both in Mexico and the United States. This transnational expert community has been instrumental in inserting the issue of drug-related violent crime in Mexico into a globally dominant statebuilding framework. In consequence, security governance in Mexico has taken on a more transnational character and become the object of a highly-intrusive international monitoring regime.

**Keywords:** intervention, statebuilding, Mexico, security governance, organized crime

**Word count:** 8434

## **Introduction**

This article reconstructs how international policy discourse about governing drug-related organized crime in the Americas has evolved from a traditional War on Drugs logic—centred on supply interdiction and militarized law enforcement—to a focus on promoting good governance and engaging civil society. It argues that by reorienting policy towards anti-corruption, human rights and the rule of law as well as by including civil society as an active partner in security governance, Mexico has been integrated into an international statebuilding framework.<sup>1</sup> In the wake, security governance in the country has been further transnationalized and the Mexican government has been put under increased external scrutiny. While international policy assistance might have provided the Mexican government with much needed military and policing capabilities, it has also raised the level of expectations in terms of protecting human rights and improving good governance. The analysis foregrounds

the role of US and Mexican advocacy groups, think tanks, policy-oriented academics and international human rights NGOs in catalysing this process. It sees Merida's transnationalizing effect as complimenting preceding domestic strategies of internationalization which had emerged during the transition to democracy in the 1990s and were directed at promoting human rights protection and transparency in public policy.<sup>2</sup> The study builds on new empirical material gathered through field interviews in Washington, DC in February 2017 and Mexico City in October/November 2017 with US diplomats, security experts and advocacy groups. A wide range of official US documents has been used, including congressional hearings, USAID and congressional reports as well as internal cable reports by the US Embassy in Mexico City.

As the first section draws out, the escalation of drug-related organized crime has prompted the governments of Mexico and the United States in 2008 to significantly increase their level of security cooperation as part of the Merida Initiative.<sup>3</sup> To begin with, the Merida Initiative is important for financial reasons. In its first year of funding, the US Congress appropriated \$440 million for the agreement, corresponding to the total amount of US security assistance to Mexico in the previous twelve years.<sup>4</sup> It is now considered the 'centrepiece of the US Government's security cooperation with Mexico'<sup>5</sup>. While the Mexican side was motivated primarily by concerns over US drug demand, policymakers in the United States supported the agreement out of fear that violence might 'spill over' into border areas.<sup>6</sup> The US rationale of preventing 'spill over' has prompted both academics and policy commentators to critique the Merida Initiative for establishing a 'North American security perimeter'<sup>7</sup> or 'expand[ing]' NAFTA 'into security'<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, the analysis in this article emphasizes how—driven by US and Mexican expert and advocacy knowledge—policy thinking evolved from a repressive military doctrine to a more sophisticated strategy aimed at improving civil society participation, good governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption. What was once considered a critical counter-discourse has become the new mainstream policy framework. The recently emerging resilience discourse has facilitated this paradigm shift, as section two discusses.<sup>9</sup> It draws out how the resilience discourse emphasises the need for local communities to actively participate in enforcing the law. Importantly, although the resilience discourse presents local residents as 'in the driver's seat'—underlining the critical importance of their knowledge and agency—the ultimate goal is to strengthen government control. In this way, the resilience discourse may be situated within a preceding and larger concern with institutional capacity. The final section elaborates on the way in which good governance promotion and civil society participation in the Merida Initiative have helped to place Mexico

‘in the focus of international commentators—including journalists, academics, politicians, security practitioners and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)’<sup>10</sup>. In particular, international, US and Mexican NGOs and advocacy groups have joined forces with the US government in monitoring and evaluating the Mexican government’s human rights record. This heterogeneous, but ideologically cohered set of actors is now routinely engaging with the most intimate affairs of Mexican security governance, such as the authority of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). It would appear as if, through the Merida Initiative, Mexico has given up a long-standing foreign policy tradition based on national sovereignty and non-intervention. Thus, apart from raising the US budget for security assistance to Mexico, the Merida Initiative has been important for reshaping international governance efforts against drug-related organized crime and violence in North America because through it the Mexican political elite effectively gave up ‘claims of legal equality and autonomy in internal affairs’<sup>11</sup>. What has taken its place is a new ‘sense of collaboration and joint solution of problems’<sup>12</sup>. Traditional forms of bilateral cooperation have been sidelined and security governance has taken on a decidedly transnational character. In the process, international expectations *vis-à-vis* the Mexican government to fulfil its human rights and good governance obligations have grown. While this process has been driven by both domestic and international actors, this article focuses on the external dimension. It argues that an institutionally diverse, but ideologically cohered set of international actors has contributed to the transnationalization of security governance in Mexico. Similarly, the article does not claim that the Merida Initiative effectively moved Mexican security policy from law enforcement to good governance. Rather, it argues that the Merida Initiative provided an alliance of national and international producers of institutionalist knowledge with an opportunity to entrench their discursive authority and place Mexican security governance under increased outside scrutiny.

### **The Merida Initiative: From the War on Drugs to Good Governance**

Since the mid-2000s, drug-related organized crime in Mexico has escalated radically, attracting widespread international attention.<sup>13</sup> Especially during the presidency of Felipe Calderón, homicide rates ‘spiked dramatically’ from 10,452 in 2006 to 27,669 in 2011: ‘No other country in the hemisphere has seen such a large increase in the number or rate of homicides over the last decade’.<sup>14</sup> During Calderón’s time in office 121,669 people were killed—more than 55 per day—most of them in instances related to organized crime.<sup>15</sup> In reaction to this development, in October 2008, the Mexican and US governments engaged in

an historically unprecedented degree of security cooperation as part of the Merida Initiative. Initially conceived as a \$1.4 billion US assistance programme, the Merida Initiative ‘has become the cornerstone of US-Mexico security cooperation’<sup>16</sup>. In a ‘situation of growing ungovernability’<sup>17</sup> the Mexican government considered increased collaboration with the United States an acute necessity. According to the Mexican Foreign Office, the key motive behind the rapprochement was that ‘the challenges that Mexico confronts are to a large extent expressions and results of phenomena which occur beyond [its] borders’<sup>18</sup>, by which it was referring to the role of US demand in sustaining illegal drug markets. As for the United States, the immediate concern was ‘spill-over’, i.e. the desire to ‘make sure that potential threats are stopped in Mexico well before they reach US borders or communities’<sup>19</sup>. At the time, Representative Gene Green was a prominent spokesperson for those in Congress who feared that violence in Mexico might cross over into the United States and, therefore, needed to be contained:

Whatever Mexico has been doing in their country is actually protecting those of us in Texas and California [...], because if they slow that situation down or win that battle, it makes our citizens and our people a lot safer. [...] Whatever they do in their own country to take care of this problem will make us safer in our own.<sup>20</sup>

The US rationale of preventing ‘spill over’ is closely related to the critique of the Merida Initiative as establishing a ‘North American security perimeter’<sup>21</sup>. For example, Paul Ashby has opposed the Merida Initiative for reflecting a strategic interest on the part of the United States to ‘sustain[...] an open economically integrated investment environment in the NAFTA zone’<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, Richard Coughlin has argued that US policy engagement under the Merida Initiative serves to ‘maintain[...] economic liberalization while managing the security risks that go along with it’<sup>23</sup>. It is a process of ‘ordering societies that have been disordered by neoliberal economic restructuring’<sup>24</sup>. In the advocacy realm, Laura Carlsen has popularised this perspective, arguing that Merida ‘officially expanded’ NAFTA ‘into security’<sup>25</sup>. For Carlsen, the two-fold goal of the Merida Initiative is to place Mexican security institutions ‘under closer US control and surveillance and to protect investment and business throughout the region’<sup>26</sup>. This critique seems well-founded. For example, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Thomas Shannon pointed out that North America was ‘a shared economic space’ and that as such ‘we need to protect it’ beyond ‘our frontiers’: ‘To a certain extent, we’re armouring NAFTA’<sup>27</sup>. Or, as leading Mexican policy analyst and

former National Security Advisor Sigrid Arzt put it, '[t]he future of US-Mexico national security cooperation should be looking at consolidating a scheme similar to the North American Free Trade Agreement, in which security cooperation would be well-established and institutionalized'<sup>28</sup>.

While the academic discussion of the Merida Initiative has so far dealt with how it might serve US strategic and economic interests, this paper foregrounds the peculiar coincidence of policymakers, advocacy groups, think tanks and policy-oriented academics in critiquing the traditional War on Drugs approach—with its emphasis on supply interdiction and door-busting law enforcement—and in demanding a 'more holistic and long-term security strategy'<sup>29</sup>. From its very beginning, human rights NGOs, like Centro ProDH, had opposed the Merida Initiative for 'reinforc[ing] a dysfunctional public security paradigm based on militarization and the use of force'<sup>30</sup>. What is striking about this well-worn critique is the extent to which it is now shared by main-stream policy thinkers, both in the United States and Mexico. For instance, research at the US Army War College argues that a repressive military strategy is ineffective: 'Hammering the problem like a nail won't work'<sup>31</sup>. Fighting sophisticated illegal networks with crude military force 'will only distort the problem, escalate risks and costs and change the entire equation'; it will actually 'make things worse'<sup>32</sup>. As John Walsh from the influential Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) put it in an interview with the author, 'the energy [of] the War on Drugs has certainly dissipated'<sup>33</sup>. What has taken its place is a new willingness to 'recognize the complicated realities of Mexico's drug war and the limitations of military hardware in changing the tide'<sup>34</sup>.

In line with this pervasive critique, US policy underwent a major shift in early 2010. As part of the Beyond Merida strategy, US assistance moved from professionalizing Mexican counterdrug forces to 'addressing [...] weak institutions and underlying societal problems'<sup>35</sup>. If Merida had started as a 'fairly straightforward foreign assistance program with a focus on equipment purchases', it was turning into a 'much broader security partnership'<sup>36</sup>, involving efforts to sustain the rule of law, promote respect for human rights, build strong institutions and increase civil society participation.<sup>37</sup> Rather than narrowly conceived technical assistance, Merida's policy discourse began to revolve around improving Mexican state-society relations and 'offer[ing] direct support to society itself'<sup>38</sup>. This transformation was animated by an awareness of socio-cultural context and 'root causes'<sup>39</sup>. It was increasingly understood that US policy action did not 'operate in a vacuum'<sup>40</sup> and that 'Mexico's problems are exceedingly complex and deep-seated'<sup>41</sup> which is why 'any real solution to these problems will have to be no less encompassing'<sup>42</sup>. According to this view, the paramilitary power of the cartels and

‘operational deficiencies’<sup>43</sup> of the Mexican police and justice system were merely the symptoms of a larger malaise ‘extending into numerous realms of Mexican governance’<sup>44 45</sup>. Paradigmatically, in a flagship publication by the Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute on *Shared Responsibility* leading policy analysts Eric Olson, David Shirk and Andrew Selee claimed that institutional reform to improve transparency and accountability would have to cover ‘all aspects of Mexico’s governing apparatus’<sup>46</sup>. Crucially, the Beyond Merida policy change first introduced the resilience discourse into US-Mexican relations and security governance in Mexico.<sup>47</sup>

It bears special emphasis that the Beyond Merida consensus remains fragile. As Eric Olson pointed out in an interview with the author in 2010: ‘Still there is enormous pressure in Congress to see this narrowly as a security issue that is about support to law enforcement and the military. All this rethinking [...] is very vulnerable [...]’<sup>48</sup>. And David Shirk saw Merida’s good governance focus as limited to the Obama administration.<sup>49</sup> In addition, it needs to be stressed that Merida’s influence on Mexican domestic politics is circumscribed. As well-known defence expert Raúl Benítez pointed out, there is comparatively ‘little money’ involved to ‘affect [Mexican] sovereignty’<sup>50</sup>. Thus, there is still a strong tendency in Mexico to see public security issues from a traditional law and order perspective. However, this study argues that the Merida Initiative significantly changed US-Mexican security discourse and helped consolidate the authority of institutionalist knowledge production.

### **Community Resilience in Mexico as International Statebuilding**

The resilience discourse figures prominently in key US government documents on Mexico, such as USAID’s *Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2014-2018*<sup>51</sup>, and has become hugely productive in cohering US-Mexican governance knowledge.<sup>52</sup> In stark contrast to the heavy-handed policies of the War on Drugs, community resilience—broadly understood as the social cohesion and vitality of neighbourhoods, families and other small-scale groups—is today considered ‘really important and fundamental’<sup>53</sup>. In an edited volume on *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico*, it is presented more precisely as the ‘capacity for society to withstand and recover from hazards, stresses and shocks’<sup>54</sup>. This Wilson Center publication demonstrates how improving security governance necessarily entails a more pro-active part for civil society. Arguing against the ‘natural tendency’<sup>55</sup> to turn exclusively to government agencies, Georgetown University professor Daniel Sabet claims that the ‘role of ordinary, everyday citizens’<sup>56</sup> in addressing security problems is often neglected. In Sabet’s view, security is not a public good that can be produced by state officials and consumed by the

citizenry: ‘Instead it is necessary for citizens to play a role in the ‘production process’’<sup>57</sup>. Security needs to be “‘co-produced’’<sup>58</sup>. In the contributions to this widely cited volume, the call for more ‘robust civic responses’<sup>59</sup> to crime and violence is intimately linked to the idea of governing security through a public private partnership. Community resilience is really about setting free the ‘potential for collaboration’<sup>60</sup> between state agencies, local citizens and civil society organisations in providing security. Here, the main role of the community is to support state agencies on the ground by providing operational information. Importantly, in the resilience discourse the local community figures as both the source of the problem and its solution. While it is clear that effective and legitimate policy action has to be ‘directed and monitored by communities themselves’<sup>61</sup>, it is equally apparent that resilience needs to be ‘buil[t]’ deliberately through ‘complex, multidisciplinary and long-term’<sup>62</sup> (international) interventions. Hence, the proposition to make local communities ‘equal partners’<sup>63</sup> rings rather hollow because this is a framework to ‘incentivis[e]’<sup>64</sup> appropriate responses and ‘construct[...] [...] autonomy’<sup>65</sup>. Put differently, the resilience discourse places the ‘burden’<sup>66</sup> of developing viable coping strategies onto local residents, at the same time as it opens up the way for comprehensive, long-term (international) policy involvement. What is more, in this joint venture, the state engages with the local population in a purely instrumental way ‘harnessing [its] insights, knowledges and capacities’<sup>67</sup>. The ultimate goal remains enhancing government capacity.<sup>68</sup> The reasoning behind acknowledging ‘more complex human realities’<sup>69</sup> and ‘start[ing] from the necessities and problematics of each community’<sup>70</sup> is to ‘enlist the community’<sup>71</sup> in a routinised exchange of ‘information gathering and problem solving’<sup>72</sup> between security forces and the populace. In this way, “‘soft-side’’<sup>73</sup> policy programmes working on Mexico’s ‘weak social fabric’<sup>74</sup> reflect an internationally sponsored statebuilding project and, thus, may be located within a broader concern with institutional capacity.

The notion of Mexican state capacity has been central to the policy debate on public security in Mexico and US assistance to improve it. According to Raúl Benítez, policy elites in Washington DC and Mexico City tend to agree on the ‘centrality of state capacity’<sup>75</sup> in ameliorating Mexico’s security situation. In fact, Benítez strongly foregrounds this issue in his own writings, claiming that ‘the weakness of security, intelligence and defence institutions in the region has had a clear winner: organized crime’<sup>76</sup>. In so doing, Benítez’ work has been key for creating a popular perception of violence and homicides in Latin America as ‘indicators of governability and government efficiency’<sup>77</sup>. For example, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has argued that international drug trafficking could



‘easily [take] hold in Mexico against a backdrop of weak, corrupt police forces and judicial institutions’<sup>78</sup>. Here, it is the existence of ‘ungoverned or poorly governed areas’<sup>79</sup> which attracts organized crime; rather than organized crime undermining state institutions. In this perspective, building effective and legitimate institutions appears as the ‘core [...] challenge’<sup>80</sup> in fighting organized crime. In so doing, the institutionalist analysis systematically obscures the role of US drug demand in sustaining organized crime in Mexico.<sup>81</sup>

In the wake, security governance in Mexico has been articulated as a statebuilding problematic according to which ‘Mexican institutional weakness’ constitutes ‘a menace to regional security’<sup>82</sup>—an ‘emerging risk[...] to international order’.<sup>83</sup> The escalated variant of this discourse—‘state failure’—caused major diplomatic turmoil in 2008 and 2009 when the US Joint Forces Command warned of Mexico’s (possible) ‘rapid and sudden collapse’<sup>84</sup> and (former) SOUTHCOM commander and White House Drug ‘Czar’ General McCaffrey saw Mexico ‘on the road to becoming a failed state’<sup>85</sup>. Again, internationally renowned commentators echoed this view. For instance, George Friedman spoke of the ‘serious possibility of a failed state in Mexico’<sup>86</sup>. And Ted Carpenter asserted in his popular science book *The Fire Next Door* that Mexico was about to turn into ‘a Latin American version of Somalia’<sup>87</sup>. The government of Mexico was quick to ‘set[...] the record straight’<sup>88</sup> through a public relations campaign that argued that Mexico had a ‘functioning state’<sup>89</sup> and, therefore, a ‘relatively low risk profile’<sup>90</sup>. Similarly, debates in the US Congress about applying a counter-insurgency logic to Mexico did not take root. In 2011, at a ‘coincidence in time’<sup>91</sup> with problems in Afghanistan and Iraq, former Representative Connie Mack was at the forefront of an attempt to reframe security governance in Mexico in counter-insurgency terms.<sup>92</sup> His proposal to apply a ‘completely different way of looking’<sup>93</sup> at violence in Mexico was given purchase by practitioner academics like the editor of the *Small Wars Journal* Robert Bunker who suggested that Mexican cartel activity qualified as a criminal insurgency.<sup>94</sup> In this case, the US expert community—cohering around the Wilson Center<sup>95</sup>—successfully reoriented the debate onto a good governance agenda. As Eric Olson said in an interview with the author, the insurgency debate ‘has died out, thankfully’. Olson explained that

the notion that you can adopt a war [and counter-insurgency] motive to address all these problems is really mistaken. [...] It mostly comes from people with a defence and intelligence background who are not Latin Americanists. [...] The people who were strongest about that were not Latin Americanists. They were taking an experience from elsewhere and [said] that fits what’s happening in Mexico<sup>96</sup>.

What matters here is how the resilience discourse as well as the controversies surrounding ‘state failure’ and ‘criminal insurgency’ in Mexico have entrenched an international policy discourse on institutional (in-) capacity, strengthening the political leverage of an ideologically aligned set of advocacy groups, think tanks and policy-oriented academics. As the next section demonstrates, this process has helped transnationalize security governance in the country and boosted international expectations.

### **Transnationalizing Security Governance in Mexico: Raising International Expectations**

The key consequence of policy discourse zooming in on Mexican institutional capacity is that it undermined notions of ‘absolute state sovereignty’<sup>97</sup>. The fact that the Mexican government had to openly ‘recognize [its] incapacity to face up to a threat’<sup>98</sup> facilitated a questioning of long-standing foreign policy doctrine: ‘In other times it would have been difficult, because Mexican public opinion perceived that cooperating with the United States on security issues could undermine national sovereignty’<sup>99</sup>. In this sense, Merida represented a major ‘ideological evolution’<sup>100</sup>. And it was not lost on US policymakers. Thomas Shannon welcomed the Merida Initiative because the Mexicans were ‘asking [...] for assistance in a way that they have never asked for assistance before’ and were ‘prepared to coordinate [...] with us in a way that they have never coordinated before’<sup>101</sup>. According to Shannon, Mexico ‘had never opened itself up to this kind of dialogue’, ‘never proposed this kind of cooperation’<sup>102</sup>. He showed himself pleased with the fact that US policy had ‘finally broken through some longstanding taboos’<sup>103</sup> and that Mexico was willing to embark on ‘a deeper, different kind of relationship’<sup>104</sup>.

This dramatic departure in the bilateral relationship was perceived as an ‘unprecedented opportunity’<sup>105</sup> to influence Mexican reform efforts, in terms of policy and specific cases. Increased ‘engagement with civil society organizations’<sup>106</sup> was an important element in this endeavour. In a cable report by the US Embassy, Mexican civil society figures as a ‘nascent force with significant but unrealized potential for bringing about needed social and political change’<sup>107</sup>. And in a human rights report to Congress, the State Department ‘underscored’<sup>108</sup> the relevance of working with Mexican civil society organizations. Conversely, international NGOs—working closely with Mexican advocacy groups—have used mandatory human rights reporting by the State Department to ‘press for measurable progress’<sup>109</sup> by the Mexican government in preventing torture, increasing police accountability and abolishing separate military jurisdiction. In a controversial and internationally received report entitled *Neither Rights Nor Security*, Human Rights Watch saw

the conditions imposed by the US Congress on the Merida Initiative as a ‘key opportunity to measure Mexico’s human rights progress, and to pressure the Mexican government to address abusive practices’<sup>110</sup>. The Merida Initiative has brought international, US and Mexican NGOs together with the US Department of State in a common effort to monitor and evaluate the Mexican government’s human rights performance. The US Embassy, for instance, ‘consults regularly’ with local NGOs and civil society organizations and has established a working group to ‘build[...] trust and strengthen[...] dialogue’ between the Mexican government and NGOs to ‘reduce hostility [...] [and] identify[...] benchmarks and joint Government of Mexico-NGO mechanisms to track and measure progress on human rights complaints and cases’<sup>111</sup>. Similarly, both the US Department of State and international human rights NGOs, like Human Rights Watch, have lobbied for strengthening specific Mexican state institutions. In this context, the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH) has been particularly popular. In one of the few instances in which US funds were actually held back due to negative human rights reporting, the US Department of State wanted to ‘strengthen CNDH’s enforcement authority’<sup>112</sup>. And Human Rights Watch paid special attention to CNDH in *Neither Rights Nor Security*, lamenting that ‘[t]oo often the commission[...]’s proven capacity is not put to use’<sup>113</sup>.

Merida’s human rights regime illustrates how US intervention has contributed to a project of state transnationalization in Mexico.<sup>114</sup> In this project, traditional diplomatic channels are circumvented and US agencies ‘engage[...] in direct liaison with experts across the board’<sup>115</sup>. New actors make their way into Mexican national security decision-making—the US Congress, the US military, civil society, and the state governments of the southern United States.<sup>116</sup> It would seem that through this process Mexico has become the object of much international policy and advocacy attention. As Benítez rightly points out, the promoters as well as the critics of the Merida Initiative ‘have raised the level of expectations of Mexico’<sup>117</sup>. If this is indeed the case, Mexico might be moving along the same trajectory that Graham Harrison projected for the ‘governance states’ of sub-Saharan Africa—although in the opposite direction.<sup>118</sup> Rather than becoming a ‘responsible sovereignty’, in the future Mexico might be seen as having an increasingly problematic sovereignty.<sup>119</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Drawing on the Merida Initiative, this article has argued that US policy thinking on drug-related organized crime and violence in the Americas has moved from a repressive military model to an emphasis on improving governance and including civil society. Heavily promoted

by US and Mexican advocacy groups, think tanks, policy-oriented academics and security experts, good governance and society-centred security provision have become the new policy mainstream. To be sure, large amounts of US funding continue to be dedicated to counternarcotics aid and *mano dura* policies are hugely popular in many Latin American countries. Thus, US security discourse and policy practice remain diverse. However, this article has tried to draw out how good governance and civil society-oriented security frameworks have been gaining traction through international policy endeavours like the Merida Initiative. In particular, the resilience discourse has propelled this shift by claiming that government efforts to enforce the law on their own are insufficient and need the active input of the population.<sup>120</sup> Importantly, although the resilience discourse underscores the relevance of local knowledge and agency, it is fundamentally geared towards increasing government control.<sup>121</sup> Seen from this perspective, the resilience discourse may be situated within a wider interest in Mexican institutional capacity. Calls for local ownership and bottom-up policy formulation are actually about refining state social control. The ulterior motive is to ‘enlist the community’<sup>122</sup> in enforcing the law. The rise of good governance and civil society policy has brought the non-state producers of security knowledge on both sides of the border closer together. It has reinforced the working relationship between key Washington-based think tanks and human rights NGOs, such as the Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute and the Washington Office on Latin America, and Mexican advocacy groups such as Centro ProDH. The Merida Initiative has offered this set of actors an unprecedented opportunity to influence not only US security policy, but also issues in Mexico which were previously off-limits, including the improvement of human rights protection, the reform of the security apparatus and the abolishment of military jurisdiction. Through this process, security governance in Mexico has been further transnationalized and the Mexican government has been put under increased international scrutiny. It would appear as if through the Merida Initiative—and the rise of good governance and civil society-centred knowledge production—Mexico has been incorporated into a highly intrusive international statebuilding dispositive.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hameiri, *Regulating Statehood*.

<sup>2</sup> Müller, 'De-Monopolizing the Bureaucratic Field'; Interview with Humberto Guerrero, Fundar, Mexico City.

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- <sup>3</sup> US Department of State, *The Merida Initiative: United States - Mexico - Central America Security Cooperation*.
- <sup>4</sup> Benítez, *The Merida Initiative: Challenges in the Fight against Crime and Drug Trafficking in Mexico*, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Assistant Secretary Alan Bersin, Department of Homeland Security, in US Congress, *The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels and US National Security*, 47.
- <sup>6</sup> Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Puntualiza La SRE Características*; Seelke and Finklea, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative and Beyond,' 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Ashby, 'Solving the Border Paradox?,' 503.
- <sup>8</sup> Carlsen, 'NAFTA's Dangerous Security Agenda,' 443.
- <sup>9</sup> Shirk, Wood, and Olson, *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico*; USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios*.
- <sup>10</sup> Müller and Hochmüller, 'Encountering Knowledge Production,' 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Hernández, 'When Cooperation and Intervention Meet,' 66.
- <sup>12</sup> Hernández, 69.
- <sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Neither Rights Nor Security*; International Crisis Group, *Back from the Brink*; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Spiralling Drug Violence in Mexico.'
- <sup>14</sup> Heinle, Molzahn, and Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, 7, 27, vi.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>16</sup> Office of the Spokesman, US Department of State, *Joint Statement on the Merida Initiative*; Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State, 'International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I. Drug and Chemical Control,' 389; see also Assistant Secretary Alan Bersin (DHS), in US Congress, *The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels*, 57; Seelke, 'Mexico: Issues for Congress,' Summary.
- <sup>17</sup> Palacios and Serrano, 'Colombia y México,' 144, author's translation.
- <sup>18</sup> Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Puntualiza La SRE Características*, author's translation.
- <sup>19</sup> Cuellar et al., *Five Perspectives on the Mérida Initiative*, 5; see Walser, 'Mexico, Drug Cartels, and the Merida Initiative,' 1; Astorga and Shirk, 'Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the US-Mexican Context,' 31; Seelke and Finklea, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation,' 5.
- <sup>20</sup> in US House of Representatives, 'Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime Authorization Act of 2008,' 5137–38.
- <sup>21</sup> Ashby, 'Solving the Border Paradox?,' 503.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.
- <sup>23</sup> 'NAFTA's Future and Regional Security Cooperation.'
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; see Cruz, 'Plan Colombia e Iniciativa Mérida,' 360; Mohr, 'The Merida Initiative: An Early Assessment of US-Mexico Security,' 76; generally Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*.
- <sup>25</sup> 'NAFTA's Dangerous Security Agenda,' 443.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> cited in Carlsen, *A Primer on Plan Mexico*.
- <sup>28</sup> Arzt, *US-Mexico National Security Cooperation against Organized Crime*, 6.
- <sup>29</sup> Centro Prodh, 'Merida Initiative,' 5.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> Jarosz, *The Merida Initiative*, 29.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with John Walsh, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington DC.
- <sup>34</sup> O'Neil, 'Prepared Statement of Shannon O'Neil,' 87.

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- <sup>35</sup> Seelke and Finklea, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation,' 1; for policy, see US Embassy Mexico City, 'Mexico: 2010 INCSR Part 1, Drugs and Chemical Control,' 8.
- <sup>36</sup> former Assistant Secretary of International Affairs (DHS), Mariko Silver, in US Congress, *Next Steps for the Merida Initiative*, 23.
- <sup>37</sup> see Assistant Secretary William Brownfield, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), in US Congress, *Merida Part Two*, 10.
- <sup>38</sup> Bow, 'Beyond Mérida?,' 94.
- <sup>39</sup> Representative Lee, in US Congress, *Assessing the Merida Initiative*, 6; see US Senate, 'Making Supplemental Appropriations for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2009, and for Other Purposes,' 90.
- <sup>40</sup> Representative Lee in US Congress, *Assessing the Merida Initiative*, 6.
- <sup>41</sup> Brands, 'Mexico's Narco-Insurgency,' 21.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>45</sup> This study takes a governmentality perspective. It is interested in understanding how those in power reflect 'on the best possible way of governing' (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2). It intends to capture 'government's consciousness of itself' (Foucault, 2). Whether a particular problematization represents reality accurately or is able to inform effective policy responses is less relevant for this kind of enquiry.
- <sup>46</sup> 'Introduction,' 27.
- <sup>47</sup> Olson, Shirk, and Wood, 'Building Resilient Communities in Mexico,' 13.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with Eric Olson and David Shirk, Wilson Center, Washington, D.C..
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with David Shirk, University of San Diego, Mexico City..
- <sup>50</sup> Benítez and Rodríguez, 'Iniciativa Mérida , Seguridad Nacional y Soberanía,' 54, author's translation.
- <sup>51</sup> *Country Development Cooperation Strategy, FY 2014 - FY2018 (Mexico)*, 17.
- <sup>52</sup> USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Conceptos y Estrategias de Gestión Local*, 39.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with Eric Olson, Wilson Center, Washington DC.
- <sup>54</sup> Olson, Shirk, and Wood, 'Building Resilient Communities in Mexico,' 11; for policy, see USAID, *Community Resilience*, 1.
- <sup>55</sup> Sabet, 'Co-Production and Oversight,' 245.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 246.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Olson, Shirk, and Wood, 'Building Resilient Communities in Mexico,' 2.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>61</sup> Davis, *Urban Resilience*, 97.
- <sup>62</sup> USAID, *Building Resilience to Recurrent Crisis*, 24.
- <sup>63</sup> Davis, *Urban Resilience*, 91.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 115.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>66</sup> USAID, *Community Resilience*, 26.
- <sup>67</sup> Shirk, Wood, and Selee, 'Conclusion: Toward a More Comprehensive and Community-Based Approach to Public Security,' 269.
- <sup>68</sup> Wilson and Weigend, *Plan Tamaulipas*, 18; for policy, see former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson, in US Congress, *Next Steps for the Merida Initiative*, 16.
- <sup>69</sup> USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios*, 11, author's translation.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 78, author's translation.

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- <sup>71</sup> Acevedo, ‘Stepping Up the Merida Initiative,’ 255.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.
- <sup>73</sup> Seelke, ‘Merida Initiative for Mexico and Central America: Funding and Policy Issues,’ 14.
- <sup>74</sup> Shirk, Wood, and Selee, ‘Conclusion: Toward a More Comprehensive and Community-Based Approach to Public Security,’ 270.
- <sup>75</sup> Benítez, ‘Geopolitics of Insecurity,’ 37.
- <sup>76</sup> Benítez, ‘México: Seguridad Nacional, Defensa y Nuevos Desafíos,’ 186, author’s translation.
- <sup>77</sup> Benítez, ‘México 2010. Crimen Organizado, Seguridad Nacional y Geopolítica,’ 26, author’s translation.
- <sup>78</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, ‘Spiralling Drug Violence in Mexico,’ 1.
- <sup>79</sup> former Assistant Administrator and Chief of Intelligence Anthony Placido (DEA), in US Congress, *US Obligations*, 41.
- <sup>80</sup> US Senate, *S. 3172 To Support Counternarcotics*, 4.
- <sup>81</sup> Washington Office on Latin America, *The Merida Initiative and Citizen Security in Mexico and Central America*; Hristoulas, ‘Algo Nuevo, Algo Viejo,’ 40; Abu-Hamdeh, ‘The Merida Initiative: An Effective Way of Reducing Violence in Mexico?,’ 44–45.
- <sup>82</sup> Rodríguez, ‘Un Enfoque Institucional y Regional,’ 315, author’s translation.
- <sup>83</sup> Kenny and Serrano, ‘Introduction. Security Failure versus State Failure,’ 10.
- <sup>84</sup> US Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2008*, 36.
- <sup>85</sup> cited in Kellner and Pipitone, ‘Inside Mexico’s Drug War,’ 37.
- <sup>86</sup> Friedmann, *Mexico: On the Road to a Failed State*.
- <sup>87</sup> Carpenter, *The Fire Next Door*, 113.
- <sup>88</sup> Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Mexico and the Fight Against Drug-Trafficking and Organized Crime*.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>91</sup> Interview with Evan Ellis, US Army War College, Washington DC.
- <sup>92</sup> in US Congress, *Has Merida Evolved?*, 2, 70.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 29.
- <sup>95</sup> Interview with Susan Minushkin, Management Systems International (MSI), Washington DC.
- <sup>96</sup> Interview with Eric Olson, Wilson Center, Washington DC; see Benítez, ‘‘Estado Fallidos’ e Insurgencias Criminales.’
- <sup>97</sup> Benítez and Rodríguez, ‘Iniciativa Mérida , Seguridad Nacional y Soberanía,’ 54, author’s translation.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, author’s translation.
- <sup>99</sup> Velázquez and Schiavon, *La Iniciativa Mérida En El Marco de La Relación México-Estados Unidos*, 19.
- <sup>100</sup> Velázquez and Prado, ‘Conclusiones,’ 388, author’s translation.
- <sup>101</sup> in US Congress, *The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels*, 45.
- <sup>102</sup> in US Congress, *Antidrug Package for Mexico*, 22.
- <sup>103</sup> in *ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>104</sup> Mariko Silver, in US Congress, *Next Steps for the Merida Initiative*, 23–24.
- <sup>105</sup> former Assistant Secretary for International Affairs (DHS) Marisa Lino, in US Congress, *US Obligations*, 14.
- <sup>106</sup> US Department of State, *Joint Statement of the Merida Initiative High-Level Consultative Group*.
- <sup>107</sup> US Embassy Mexico City, ‘Civil Society Weighs In.’

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<sup>108</sup> US Department of State, *Joint Statement of the Merida Initiative High-Level Consultative Group*.

<sup>109</sup> Amnesty International et al., *Open Letter*.

<sup>110</sup> *Neither Rights Nor Security*, 24; see Interview with Maureen Meyer, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington DC.

<sup>111</sup> US Department of State, *Mexico - Merida Initiative Report*, 6.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> *Neither Rights Nor Security*, 13; see Shirk, Heinle, and Daly, *Armed with Impunity*, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Hameiri, *Regulating Statehood*, 12; see Müller, 'De-Monopolizing the Bureaucratic Field.'

<sup>115</sup> US Embassy Mexico City, 'The Mexico Merida Initiative at Eight Months,' 4.

<sup>116</sup> Benítez, 'Estado Fallidos' e Insurgencias Criminales,' 39.

<sup>117</sup> Benítez, *The Merida Initiative: Challenges in the Fight against Crime and Drug Trafficking in Mexico*, 2; see Interview with Maureen Meyer, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington DC.

<sup>118</sup> Harrison, *The World Bank in Africa*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 128–31.

<sup>120</sup> Shirk, Wood, and Olson, *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico*; USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios*.

<sup>121</sup> Wilson and Weigend, *Plan Tamaulipas*, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Acevedo, 'Stepping Up the Merida Initiative,' 255.