

Mexico steps up army aid to fight cartels

by UPI

PETALAN, Mexico -- Mexican President Felipe Calderon is rapidly increasing his army's role in fighting drug traffickers, officials say.

Calderon has deployed about 45,000 troops, nearly 50 percent of Mexico's combat-ready military personnel, along the U.S. border and throughout the country to deal with the drug cartels, described by officials as a widening narco-insurgency, The Washington Post reports.

Meanwhile, retired army officers are taking command of local police forces and the military supplies civilian authorities with automatic weapons and grenades.

The four major drug states average a total of 12 killings a day, characterized by ambushes, gun battles and decapitated bodies left by the roadside.

Daily life in villages and cities where traffickers have control mirrors round-the-clock patrols, pre-dawn raids and roadblocks manned by masked young soldiers, the Post said.

Previous administrations relied on Mexico's traditionally weak police agencies to combat the traffickers.

After he became president in December 2006, Calderon said the use of the military against the cartels would be limited and brief. But, it is now reported the centerpiece of his anti-narcotics strategy, the Post report said.

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