

U.S. support of Mexico against cartels is starting to pay dividends

by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

By now, a lot of Americans have figured out that, like it or not, they have a substantial investment in the Mexican drug war. But do they realize that there's an increasingly good chance it could pay off?

The fact that drugs are flowing north into the United States and guns are flowing south into Mexico, the reality of spillover violence on this side of the border, the possibility that National Guard troops might yet be brought into the fray and placed along the border, and the \$1.4 billion appropriated by Congress to fund the Merida Initiative to assist Mexico should make it clear that the United States is heavily invested in Mexican President Felipe Calderón's unprecedented war on the drug cartels.

However, the dominant narrative seems to be that this war is a lost cause, and that Calderon is the modern-day Don Quixote tilting at windmills, with no chance to destroying the cartels.

Is that so? Someone should tell the cartels. They're running scared and growing more crafty and desperate by the day. When they're not firing off rounds of ammunition and throwing grenades, they're staging mock protests against the military and plotting to manipulate the political process. They're doing all this not because they worry about extinction. They're doing it because their business, like any other, depends on maintaining the kind of profit margins to which they have become accustomed. The Calderon government is seizing so much drugs, and arresting or killing so many cartel members that their business is going down the drain. The drug merchants have to buy more guns, and they have to channel more of their drug shipments to Mexican customers who won't pay the extravagant prices that Americans would if the drugs were getting through to the United States. None of this is good for the cartels' bottom line.

If that wasn't enough, there have been a series of high-profile arrests of high-level drug suspects — three in the last two weeks. The latest to fall was Vicente Carrillo Leyva, one of Mexico's most-wanted criminals and allegedly the second in command of the powerful Juarez cartel. The Attorney General's Office of Mexico had named Carrillo Leyva to a list of the country's most-wanted narcotics suspects and offered a reward of 30 million pesos (\$2.1 million) for his capture.

Don't look now. But, as far as the drug war is concerned, Felipe Calderon and the rest of the Mexican government are obviously in it to win it. That's good news. The Mexican president has already done more than any of his predecessors to crack down on drug-traffickers. The man has guts and integrity, and he ought to be able to count on the complete support of the United States for as long as this war drones on.

Americans need to understand that their investment is secure — and already showing returns.

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