

Leandra Paulino Rosario

Transatlantic Studies-M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

U.S.-Mexican Counter-Drug Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative A Possible Solution

2017

Leandra Paulino Rosario is one out of a total of four M.A. students in the Transatlantic Studies program, which is slowly winding down. Overall, I enjoyed teaching Leandra, who is a very astute student. My task now is to evaluate her M.A. dissertation, which addresses the issue of U.S. Mexican counter-drug security cooperation. The work is aptly researched and written. In addition, the referencing is good. Leandra has divided her treatise into an Introduction, three main chapters, and a Conclusion. In the following paragraphs, I shall comment upon each part of the dissertation.

In the Introduction, Leandra spells out the aim of the dissertation, which is basically to evaluate the effectiveness of the so-called *Merida Initiative* from a number of perspectives. The *Merida Initiative* is a joint program of the United States and Mexico regarding counter-drug security cooperation. Overall, the Introduction is satisfactory.

Chapter 1 represents an analysis of U.S.-Mexican relations and the issue of drug trafficking. Leandra's description of the population and other demographic details of Mexico is useful, as is her discussion of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the immigration issue concerning the U.S.-Mexican frontier. Leandra rightly points out the problem of drug trafficking and the friction it has caused to

U.S.-Mexican relations. As she writes, the drug trafficking problem is nothing new and she therefore provides some historical background to the issue. Most interesting is her brief portrayal of the many drug cartels and gangs involved in smuggling drugs to the United States. This chapter prepares the reader for the ensuing chapters, which furnish a more in-depth account of recent events in the drug trafficking sphere.

In Chapter 2, Leandra deals specifically with the *Merida Initiative* signed by Presidents George W. Bush and Felipe Calderon. In order to remind the reader that the *Merida Initiative* is not the first attempt to tackle the problem of drug trafficking, Leandra briefly discusses previous attempts to deal with the matter. Her depiction of Calderon's declaration of war against the Mexican drug cartels and the violence that followed is quite precise and praiseworthy. The signing of the *Merida Initiative* by Bush and Calderon was a landmark event. The United States agreed to provide badly needed funds to the Mexicans so that the Mexican armed forces could effectively prosecute their war against the drug mafias. The main goals of the *Merida Initiative* were to "deliver equipment, promote the rule of law, and enhance judicial reform emphasizing border issues as well as border policies." (pp. 56-57) Therefore, the *Merida Initiative* was just as much about enhancing the bilateral Mexican-American relationship as it was about bolstering security. After Obama assumed the United States presidency, four pillars were added to the *Merida Initiative*, namely 1) "disrupt the capacity of organized crime to operate"; 2) "institutionalize capacity to sustain the rule of law"; 3) "create a 21st century border structure"; 4) "build strong and resilient communities." (p. 61) Leandra indicates the degree of progress made

regarding each pillar. When Enrique Peña Nieto replaced President Calderon, the second phase was initiated, which largely involved strengthening existing commitments. This chapter clearly illustrates the progression of the agreement. I am quite pleased with Leandra's work.

The overall outcomes and effectiveness of the *Merida Initiative* form the subject of Chapter 3. Insofar as the accomplishments are concerned, Leandra has carefully outlined issues of 1) "funding and equipment"; 2) "border security and money laundering"; 3) "extraditions"; "promoting the rule of law and building resilient communities"; 4) "reforming the Mexican judicial system." (pp. 71-74) The account of the "Wachovia Scandal" involving money laundering through American banks is well written and illustrative of just how crafty drug traffickers are. In general, the funding for each individual aspect of the *Merida Initiative* has been uneven, which means that certain things have been underfunded. Later in the chapter, Leandra mentions the lack of set indicators to measure the effectiveness of the *Merida Initiative* and, therefore, there is debate among observers as to the effectiveness of the program. Her point-by-point analysis on the basis of individual points/pillars paints a mixed picture. This chapter is the most analytical and informative of the treatise.

In the Conclusion, Leandra states that the best aspect of the *Merida Initiative* is the sharing of responsibility by the United States and Mexican governments. However, she shows the shortcomings of the program, which she blames on

insufficient funding and an unwillingness to consider incorporating other perspectives/strategies into the fight against drugs.

I think that Leandra has produced a laudable dissertation, which demonstrates solid research and independent thought. My only quibble is the use of the English language. As Leandra is not a native speaker of English, I will not hold grammatical errors against her. I would like to pose the following question for the oral defense: What do you think the impact of President Trump's plan to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border will have on joint U.S.-Mexican counter-drug efforts? If she performs well in the oral defense, I recommend an **EXCELLENT** mark.

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