

Border Battleground – Day Five

U.S. funding increased border security efforts in Mexico

By SERGIO CHAPA
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MEXICO CITY, August 18, 2005 American funding for anti-drug, anti-crime and border security programs in Mexico has more than tripled in the last three years, federal figures show.

According to figures from U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs, the annual budget for security programs based out of the American Embassy in Mexico City have grown from \$12 million in fiscal year 2002 to \$40 million in fiscal year 2005.



The increased funds come at a time when Mexico is caught in the middle of an ongoing war between rival drug cartels vying for control of lucrative smugglings routes into the United States.

More than 800 people have been killed in cartel-related violence since January with more than 100 deaths reported in Nuevo Laredo.

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Tony Garza said the increased funds also come at a time when cooperation between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border has reached record levels under Mexican President Vicente Fox.

“Fifteen years ago, we could have had 10 times the budget, but no willing partners to spend it on,” Garza told The Brownsville Herald. “Now, we have more budget and more capacity to utilize it because there are more willing partners.”

Garza, who described the fight against border violence as a shared responsibility between the two nations, said the increased funds support American anti-crime programs as well as provide training and other resources for Mexican law enforcement officials.

Although Garza reported no significant increase of American federal agents working in Mexico, he said almost every federal law enforcement agency has as presence there.

Garza said American federal agents work with their Mexican counterparts though intelligence gathering and sharing, training and other joint efforts.

“We don’t come into Mexico to work unilaterally, we collaborate,” said Garza, who was appointed as ambassador to Mexico by President George W. Bush in 2002.

However, Garza said the spirit of cooperation between the nations has not always been as high.

During the 1980s, the U.S. war on drugs created tension between the law enforcement communities of both nations.

The attitudes were so different the sense was that we were engaged in a lot of finger pointing, Garza said. It reached a critical flash point with the whole Kiki Camarena ordeal.

Camarena, who worked as an agent for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, was kidnapped and executed by drug traffickers in Guadalajara in 1985.

But Garza said those tensions melted under the North American Free Trade Agreement and after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Although Mexico did not support the war in Iraq, it is considered an ally in the war against terrorism prompting law enforcement officials on both sides of the border to work together and share intelligence.

“Now its hard to point to a single initiative because were doing so many things together at so many levels,” Garza said of security programs. “A lot of that quite frankly is in the wake of the urgency we attached to terrorism.”

schapa@brownsvilleherald.com