



Highlights of [GAO-10-837](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Crime and violence related to drug trafficking in Mexico and Central America have increased in recent years and pose a threat not only to those areas but to the United States as well, particularly along the Southwest border. The Mérida Initiative, announced in 2007, provides about \$1.6 billion in law enforcement support to Mexico and Central American countries. The Department of State (State) manages the Initiative while other U.S. agencies play key roles in implementation. This report examines (1) the status of Mérida program implementation; (2) State's strategy for implementation; and (3) coordination mechanisms in place for Mérida. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed agency documents; interviewed officials at State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defense, and other relevant agencies; and conducted fieldwork in Mexico and Central America.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State incorporate into the strategy for the Mérida Initiative outcome performance measures that indicate progress toward strategic goals and develop more comprehensive timelines for future program deliveries. State agreed with the recommendations.

[View GAO-10-837 or key components.](#)
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MÉRIDA INITIATIVE

The United States Has Provided Counternarcotics and Anticrime Support but Needs Better Performance Measures

What GAO Found

The United States has delivered various equipment and training to Mexico under the Mérida Initiative. While the pace of delivery has been slowed by a number of implementation challenges, it has increased recently. As of March 31, 2010, 46 percent of Mérida funds for fiscal years 2008 to 2010 had been obligated, and approximately 9 percent had been expended. In Mexico, U.S. agencies have delivered major equipment including five Bell helicopters, several X-ray inspection devices, law enforcement canines and training for their handlers, and training for over 4,000 police officers. In Central America, U.S. agencies have delivered police vehicles and non-intrusive inspection equipment, and have provided various courses, including workshops on combating arms trafficking, and training on handling evidence from clandestine criminal laboratories. Deliveries of equipment and training have been delayed by challenges associated with an insufficient number of staff to administer the program, negotiations on interagency and bilateral agreements, procurement processes, changes in government, and funding availability. U.S. agencies are working to address these challenges. For example, the Embassy Narcotics Affairs Section in Mexico City has more than doubled its staff resources since Mérida was launched.

While State has developed some of the key elements of an implementation strategy for the Mérida Initiative, including a mission, strategic goals, and a resource plan, its strategic documents lack certain key elements that would facilitate accountability and management. For example, its strategic documents do not include outcome performance measures that indicate progress toward achieving strategic goals. In addition, State has not developed a comprehensive set of timelines for all expected deliveries, though it plans to provide additional equipment and training in both Mexico and Central America.

State has primary responsibility for coordinating the Mérida Initiative. GAO identified several mechanisms that incorporate decision-makers at various levels of government that facilitate coordination between State headquarters and posts, within posts, and bilaterally with foreign governments. For example, several State bureaus regularly coordinate with other U.S. agencies on Mérida policy and programmatic issues. State headquarters and U.S. embassies in Mexico and Central America have established mechanisms to coordinate and communicate on implementation. U.S. agencies at posts also have developed and adapted mechanisms to coordinate efforts within the U.S. Embassy community in Mexico and Central American countries. Moreover, State has established formal bilateral mechanisms to coordinate with Mexican authorities.