

# To halt cartels, block cash flow

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If you want to stop a monster, cut off its head. Simple logic.

If you want a secure the border, go after the crime syndicates that routinely penetrate our southern border for their own nefarious purposes. Go after the leaders of the Mexican cartels. Go after their money.

The minions of these sophisticated international criminal organizations smuggle in drugs and people at will. They take back tens of billions of dollars in dirty profits. We put manpower and technology on the border. They find ways around it.

They take their profits out in shrink-wrapped bundles of hundred-dollar bills. Electronic transfers. Money schemes. Prepaid value cards that can store and transport money.

Joaquin "Chapo" Guzman, leader of the Sinaloa cartel, regularly appears on Forbes list of the world's wealthiest people.

"If U.S. forces can find Osama bin Laden, I am sure, with Mexican help, they can find and arrest Chapo," former Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard wrote in an article for the Immigration Policy Center. "That arrest would do more to stop the flow of contraband into the U.S. and the slaughter in Mexico than all the billions spent so far."

Through the Merida Initiative, the U.S. has provided money and expertise to Mexico to fight the cartels, but time is not on our side if we hope to engage in a more vigorous assault on these criminal gangs that breach our borders. Mexican President Felipe Calderon, who runs an aggressive campaign against the cartels, will leave office in December. He cannot run in Mexico's July presidential election. His successor may take a more conciliatory approach to the cartels. Mexico is weary of a drug war that has cost more than 47,000 lives in the past five years.

Instead of discussing the cartel threat, the U.S. has been focusing on fences, immigration sweeps and deportations. These are politically popular responses that do not weaken criminal organizations in Mexico.

Instead of Joaquin the kingpin, we go after Juan the gardener.

But Goddard says the United States needs no one's permission to go after cartel profits. Estimates of the amount of money flowing to Mexico from the sale of illegal drugs in the United States range from \$19 billion to \$65 billion a year.

The cartels are a major international threat, Goddard told The Republic, but "we treat them like an illegal-immigrant taxi service."

There are steps that can be taken now: For example, travelers are not allowed to take more than \$10,000 out of the country in cash or monetary instruments without declaring it at the border. This rule is designed to combat money laundering. Yet prepaid value cards are not included in this prohibition. They can be used to transport any amount.

Wire transfers are another way the cartels do business. Goddard, as attorney general, successfully targeted cartel use of Western Union. But the federal government has not built on that success, even

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though a U.S. Governmental Accountability Office report said that is exactly what it should do. Goddard says the Department of Homeland Security has only recently begun to focus on seizing bulk currency going south, and the Treasury Department is not productively engaged in a concerted national effort to target cartel money laundering.

Much of what needs to be done in terms of coordinating federal agencies to stop money laundering does not require congressional approval. The administration can do this now. And it should.

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