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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov <OpsNewsTicker@state.gov>
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Subject: Report: Mexico let U.S. question detained migrants (AP)

MEXICO CITY (AP) - Newly released diplomatic cables indicate Mexico let U.S. agents question undocumented migrants held in Mexican detention centers as part of anti-terror efforts, despite the country's traditional sensitivity about national sovereignty.

The latest round of WikiLeaks cables released over the weekend paint a picture of a nation extremely eager for U.S. aid in security matters, in the face of its own disorganized intelligence sector and threats from drug cartels.

Those threats included a report that a crime gang plotted to bring down President Felipe Calderon's airplane with a grenade launcher, though no such attack ever took place.

A May 2008 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico expressed concern about Mexico being used as a "potential transit point for terrorists intending to launch attacks against the U.S."

"On a positive note," the cable noted that Mexico's domestic intelligence agency "has allowed U.S. government officers to interview foreign nationals detained at Mexican immigration detention centers dispersed around the country for potential CT (counterterrorism) information."

Most people held at Mexican immigration facilities are undocumented Central American migrants, but the Americans were apparently worried that terrorists from other continents might be using established human smuggling routes and networks.

A February 2010 cable said Calderon "is also concerned that organized criminal groups may try to establish contacts with terrorists." It said Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano responded that "although we have not seen evidence to this effect, the potential is there."

U.S. and Mexican officials have refused to comment on the specifics of leaked communications. In December, Mexico's federal security spokesman Alejandro Poiré said "the contents of the cables, in many cases, reflect personal points of view, are inexact, or taken out of context."

Other cables display a grim assessment of Mexico's ability to fight drug cartels, saying the country has limited intelligence-gathering capacity and quoting Calderon as saying politicians could be tempted to return to a tacit policy of tolerating the gangs.

According to an April 2009 cable, a U.S. official asked him "if there was political momentum to go back to the old practice of looking the other way."

"Calderon replied, 'There is a serious risk,'" the document said. "Certain sectors in the past made informal agreements with criminals in exchange for a degree of security, and they are arguing for that again."

The same cable said Mexico is very grateful for U.S. aid.

"Thanks to equipment the U.S. had provided, the government had managed to thwart a planned assassination of a key politician in one state," it said, without identifying the politician.

The 2010 cable also said Calderon requested U.S. help in clamping down on violence in Ciudad Juarez, where about 6,000 people have died in drug-related killings in the last two years.

According to the document, Napolitano replied that the multi-agency El Paso Intelligence Center "can help to identify the right organized crime targets, but that Mexico must move beyond military deployments and establish a police capacity in Ciudad Juarez capable of policing every block and street."

Calderon apparently favored implementing a "zero-tolerance" policy targeting even minor crimes, a strategy Mexico has not yet put in place. But he expressed wariness about committing army troops to tasks like border control, fearing that in the long term they would be corrupted.

A November 2009 cable described Mexico's intelligence services as "fractured, ad hoc, and reliant on the United States for leads and operations."

"Many successful captures of important cartel figures are often backed by U.S. assistance," it said.

As an example, it cited the Mexican military's poor communication with its own locally deployed troops: Army intelligence units see "local military commands as often penetrated by organized crime," it said. "Military units deployed to hotspots operate virtually blind except for anonymous tips."

The cables also noted interagency mistrust between federal police, the military and prosecutors, fueled by personal rivalries among top officials.

One mentioned fears that the United States, which has provided training for 4,952 Mexican soldiers and officers since 1996, might have inadvertently trained future members of the ultra-violent Zetas drug gang, which was founded by deserters from an elite Mexican army unit.

But the Embassy said a search of databases turned up only one case in which someone who was forcibly recruited to a Zetas plot may have received some U.S. training years before.

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