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Mexico's Tragedy Is a U.S. Concern

By Richard Stengel

The drug-related violence in Mexico is harrowing and depressing. It poses a growing danger to Mexican civil society, the Mexican economy and the U.S. We are Mexico's largest trading partner, and only part of that business is drugs. The simple equation has always been one of supply and demand: America's insatiable demand drives the drug business in Mexico. But the huge increase in violence and lawlessness in Mexico over the past five years vastly outstrips the rise in drug use in the U.S.

That said, America's war on drugs — which has its 40th anniversary this summer — is anything but a success. Americans consume \$65 billion annually in illegal drugs, which are a bigger business than professional sports and Hollywood combined. This state of affairs, alas, is not going to change anytime soon. But as Tim Padgett's powerful story makes clear, Mexico is approaching a danger zone. Tim, who has been covering the Mexican drug wars for more than two decades, finds the present moment a perilous but hopeful one. "While the drug-cartel brutality is the worst we've ever seen," he says, "the clamor for the rule of law among victims' groups is the loudest we've ever heard."

President Felipe Calderón's war on drugs has been brave and bold but sometimes misguided. Meanwhile, as Jorge Castañeda, Mexico's former Foreign Minister, writes in an accompanying essay, the absence of a functional judicial system hampers Mexico's fight against its powerful and ruthless drug lords. As Hillary Clinton suggested, Mexico's tragedy has become an issue of international human rights. And it is one in which the U.S. has a profound national interest.

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