

# When Politically Expedient Ideas Go Bad: How the War on Drugs has intervened in the US-Mexico security relationship

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## **Abstract:**

The US-Mexico relationship is problematic when viewed from a security studies viewpoint. Here, US behaviour towards Mexico seems inconsistent. Why, for example, does the 'war on drugs' seemingly take precedent over Mexican domestic stability? In a similar vein, Mexico is the third biggest energy supplier to the US, yet rarely features in the energy security discourse in the way that distance threats such as Iraq and Iran do. How can we reconcile this outwardly contradictory hierarchy of strategic priorities through a security lens?

This paper uses a neo-classical realist framework to address this, arguing that the US has a history of using "soft" issues such as drug trafficking and political insurgencies to enable hard power outcomes in the Mexican setting. It does this firstly to maintain influence in the region, and secondly to manage domestic sentiment intervening into a critical security relationship. Using this framework, I first identify and trace how certain ideas are *inflated* and *deflated* in both the Mexican and US domestic settings in order to obfuscate more practical security considerations. Second, I assess the war on drugs as an intervening variable, and find that this inflated idea has intervened so strongly in regional security through *over-inflation*, that it in itself has become a substantial security threat to the US.

## **Selected Stream:**

International Relations