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To Solve the Opioid Crisis, Go to War

By Matt A. Mayer

Experts estimate that as many as [500,000 Americans could die](#) from opioids over the next 10 years. Nearly all of the [heroin and fentanyl hitting our streets is coming from Mexico](#), across the porous southern border. Mexico is also becoming, in some parts of the country, [the main supplier of methamphetamine](#) to the U.S., with [overdose death rates increasing as the supply has surged](#).

We will spend tens of billions of dollars on addiction treatment, overdose responses, law enforcement activities, criminal justice processes and the ancillary costs associated with caring for the children of those who die from overdoses. Regardless of how much we spend, if we cannot substantially reduce or stop the flow of opioids and other death drugs across our southern border (and to a lesser extent through our mail system via China), we will continue to see tens of thousands of Americans die each year due to opioid and meth overdoses, with enormous damage to their families and communities.

When the media and pro-immigration groups talk about opposing the extension of the southern border wall, they focus on the illegal migrant workers who cross the border in search of work and a better life for themselves and their families. No reasonable proponent of extending the border wall believes we should spend over \$20 billion in order to keep out a bunch of agricultural, construction and hospitality workers.

Rather, educated proponents of extending the southern border wall know the purpose of a longer wall is focused on three far more important goals: first, make it harder for the Mexican cartels to send death drugs into the heart of America; next, aim to reduce the human trafficking of forced prostitutes from Central and South America; and lastly, stop terrorists from getting into our country with a weapon of mass destruction.

To slow or stop the flow of opioids and other death drugs into our communities, we must secure the border with Mexico and methodically dismantle the distribution networks that the cartels have established in cities in all 50 states. The cartels are adaptive entities that will alter their strategy and tactics to counter each border and interior enforcement action we take to shut them down in the United States. Though the Mexican government makes some efforts to help with the cartels, [corruption within the Mexican government and law enforcement is rampant](#). We simply can't rely upon the Mexican government for the kind of actions needed to crush the cartels.

This unfortunate reality raises a very uncomfortable question:

Do we need to go to war with Mexico to ultimately win the war against opioids and other death drugs? By "go to war," I mean a formal declaration of war by Congress against Mexico in which we use the full force of our military might to destroy the cartels, the poppy fields and all elements of the drug trade. Ideally, as our fight is not with the Mexican government, its military or its people, [which try to weaken the cartels](#), we would try to partner with those entities against the cartels, much as we partnered with the South Vietnamese government and military against the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Army.

It sounds crazy, I know – unless you acknowledge we are already fighting a war with Mexico.

Short of such an all-out military effort, has anyone offered a realistic way to defeat the drug cartels and stop the flow of death drugs? Crushing the supply of opioids and other death drugs from Mexico will allow our treatment activities to gain ground against the epidemic and one day get ahead of it. If inexpensive heroin laced with fentanyl, or carfentanil, continues to be easily accessible in our communities, the wave of the opioid epidemic will simply continue to build. We must do something to force the wave to crest and to crash.

Let me put this issue in perspective. Since the first al-Qaida terrorist attack in Yemen in 1992, fewer than 5,000 Americans have died in terrorist attacks, with many of the deaths occurring on Sept. 11, 2001. In response to terrorist attacks, we waged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and spent hundreds of billions of dollars on external and internal security measures to detect and to prevent future attacks.

If we did all of that in response to radical Islamic terrorism, why is it so crazy to consider using our military power to defeat the Mexican drug cartels which have inflicted far more death, mayhem and costs on America than al-Qaida and the Islamic State group combined? Unlike terrorists living in far-off places, halfway around the globe, the Mexican drug cartels are operating right next door and within our communities, pushing enormous amounts of heroin, meth and other death drugs across the southern border and into the veins of our communities.

War with Mexico may sound crazy, but allowing militarized drug cartels to run drug production facilities aimed at supplying opioids and other death drugs to Americans within 1,000 miles of our southern border is even crazier, especially as the death count hits 50,000

people per year. We can continue to fight this war for decades with walls and arrests, or we can win this war in years with aircraft carriers, jets, bombs and the United States Marines.

Imagine how many lives we can save of those 500,000 Americans predicted to die because of Mexican opioids and meth. War with Mexico doesn't sound so crazy anymore, does it?

Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio and Contributor to U.S. News & World Report.