

Republicans Rally Behind the Stupidest Possible War

The drug war is already an endless failure, and the introduction of U.S. forces into Mexico would just make it more destructive.

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The "peace president" is [at it again](#):

Now a candidate, Trump is reviving his hawkish instincts toward the drug lords. He has already vowed to deploy U.S. special forces to take on drug cartels, "just as we took down ISIS and the ISIS caliphate."

In one [policy video](#) released by his campaign, Trump said that if reelected, he would "order the Department of Defense to make appropriate use of special forces, cyber warfare, and other overt and covert actions to inflict maximum damage on cartel leadership, infrastructure and operations."

As I have [said](#) before, attacking the cartels would achieve nothing. Anyone that calls for military action as a "solution" in this case automatically discredits himself. It is telling that Trump and many other Republican hawks have latched on to one of the [stupidest policy ideas available](#). Some of the cheerleaders for a cartel war are the usual reflexive hawks, and some cosplay as antiwar politicians, but they are united behind the absurd belief that the drug war needs even more militarism. Even if you knew nothing else about their foreign policy views, this would be enough to confirm that their judgment is abysmal.

Trump likens a cartel war to fighting terrorists, but this ignores how terrorist groups have often flourished and spread during the "war on terror." Look at the Sahel to [see how](#) militarized "solutions" have contributed to making the region much less stable and much more violent. Military action can weaken and even destroy a certain group, but it does nothing to address the conditions that cause people to join radical armed groups. It would be even less effective in stopping the supply of illegal narcotics, since it can't do anything

about the demand that drives the drug trade. The drug war is already an endless failure, and the introduction of U.S. forces into Mexico would just make it more destructive.

When otherwise hawkish politicians feign skepticism about U.S. involvement in a war somewhere, it seems as if they have to compensate for this by jumping on the bandwagon for even more reckless and indefensible interventionism. We saw a lot of this in the '90s when Republicans that were generally a lot more hawkish than Clinton used the Balkan interventions as occasions to complain that he was ignoring the "real" threats, by which they usually meant Iraq or Iran. We see some of it again today when quasi-skeptics of U.S. policy in Ukraine are quick to remind us that they want the U.S. to gear up for a much bigger direct conflict with China. They are deeply concerned about being in the frying pan because it will prevent the U.S. from jumping straight into the fire.

The problem here isn't just that there are hardly any consistent opponents of senseless and unnecessary military interventions in the Republican Party, but that these politicians follow through only on their threats of escalation. You can't trust that Trump will ever get the U.S. out of any war, but can believe him when he says he wants to "bomb the hell" out of this or that target. When it comes right down to it, the antiwar talk from these people is just empty talk, but their threats of escalation are in earnest. If Trump and others are agitating for launching attacks inside Mexico, we should assume that they intend to act on this if they get the chance.

The article reminds us that this isn't just a Trump problem. One might think Trump's talk of attacking targets in Mexico would create an opening for someone in the potential field of Republican presidential candidates to criticize Trump for his deranged militarism, but instead the only ones talking about this basically agree with Trump:

Ramaswamy also said he backs an authorization for the use of military force for "specific" groups: "If those cartels meet the test for qualifying as a domestic terrorist organization for the purpose of freezing their assets, I think that qualifies them for the U.S. president to view them as an eligible target for the use of authorized military force."

Asa Hutchinson, the former Arkansas governor and among the more moderate foreign policy voices in his party, openly supports the foreign terrorist organization label for the cartels. "They meet the definition," he said weeks before announcing his entrance into the 2024 field this month.

The supporters of attacking the cartels have unsurprisingly not thought through the predictable negative consequences that their war would have. Among other things, it would cause huge numbers of people to flee the areas where the U.S. launches attacks, and many of them would probably try to seek refuge in the United States. If they think the migrant crisis is bad now, this would be practically guaranteed to make it much worse. The intensified violence and displacement would further destabilize Mexico, and it would likely make U.S. cities along the border much less safe. The U.S. is usually insulated from most of the worst spillover effects of its unnecessary wars because it has fought almost all of them on the other side of the world, but that won't be possible when the war is on our doorstep. Even if many Americans don't care that intervening in Mexico would be flagrantly illegal and wrong, they will care when it blows up in our faces.

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Featured image: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador from MILENIO broadcast of press conference on July 4, 2022

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