



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 10, 2011

Army's Westphal Backs Off on Need for U.S. Troops in Mexico

During a speech to the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics on Monday, Undersecretary of the Army Joseph Westphal (left) called the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border an "insurgency." An unnamed Mexican official condemned Westphal's remarks, as did a university assistant professor of political science and Latin American studies. The next day, CNN U.S. reported the Undersecretary was backing off his comments, expressing his regrets for his "inaccurate statements."



Westphal, the second-highest ranking civilian official in the U.S. Army, was lecturing on the complicated challenges, and economic and bureaucratic obstacles faced by decision-makers in the Middle East and South Asia. He responded to a student's question about blind spots in U.S. foreign policy, claiming his personal opinion that:

One of them in particular for me is Latin America and in particular Mexico. As all of you know, there is a form of insurgency in Mexico with the drug cartels that's right on our border.

This isn't just about drugs and about illegal immigrants. This is about, potentially, a takeover of a government by individuals who are corrupt.

He added that he didn't want to see "armed and fighting" American soldiers sent to combat an insurgency "on our border, in violation of our Constitution, or to have to send them across the border."

The *Salt Lake Tribune* (SLT) reported on Feb. 8 that professor Claudio Holzner called Westphal's words "incendiary," adding:

... [I]t's an overstatement to call the drug war an insurgency, primarily because the drug cartels are not seeking control of the government — they are seeking safe passage for their merchandise.

The *SLT* continued:

Westphal is the most senior U.S. official to publicly compare Mexico's drug cartels to an "insurgency" since Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a similar assessment last September.

Clinton stated at a Council on Foreign Relations event that the network of drug cartels was such a threat that it resembled the Colombian situation 20 years ago and could be considered an insurgency.

At the time, Mexican officials strongly reacted to her words because they implied that U.S. intervention in Mexico was a policy option. This time, the Mexican government claimed Westphal's remarks "went



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way beyond what the Secretary of State said.”

CNN reported Westphal’s regrets:

My statement also mistakenly characterized the challenge posed by drug cartels to Mexico as “a form of insurgency.” My comments were not and have never been the policy of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government toward Latin America.

I did not speak on behalf of the president, national security adviser, secretary of Defense or any other officials charged with establishing and articulating U.S. policy. I regret that my inaccurate statements may have caused concerns for our partners and friends in the region, especially Mexico.

Utah’s professor Holzner believes it would be a bad idea to send U.S. troops into Mexico:

I think the solution is not a military one. The best thing the United States can do is to enforce its own laws and change the laws that are not working, to stem the demand for drugs in the U.S. and to stop the flow of U.S. weapons across the border.

Border conditions are deplorable, but the U.S. hasn’t sent troops to the border since the Mexican revolution in the 1910s. Border states, however, continue to plead for just what Professor Holzner asked for — enforcement of existing U.S. laws.



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