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Reviewed by DON/AA DRMD
IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
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SUBJECT

U.S. Search and Rescue Problems with Mexico

HIGHLIGHTS

From the United States' point of view, there is a long history of problems associated with Search and Rescue (SAR) operations involving Mexico. The most serious problem has been that of obtaining rapid emergency clearance for SAR aircraft to enter Mexican territorial airspace in cases not falling under the 1936 Assistance and Salvage Treaty. Even under the provisions of the Treaty, a SAR aircraft cannot land in Mexico for fuel without a special clearance.

DISCUSSION

Except in cases noted, above, it is necessary to obtain specific prior clearance in each case of SAR unit entry into Mexican airspace. This situation is further complicated, for SAR aircraft, by the Mexican requirement that only five U.S. military aircraft may be in Mexico at any one time, and that specific clearance can only be obtained from very high level government officials. This can, and does, cause serious delays in cases where lives are at stake, especially on weekends and holidays.

The U.S. government position is that designated SAR aircraft are unarmed and their purpose is lifesaving, therefore Mexico should delete them from the limitation of five U.S. military aircraft. Also desired is a blanket clearance to designated SAR aircraft subject only to the filing of an advance flight plan or, if this is not possible, delegation of authority for clearing SAR aircraft into Mexico to a 24-hour operations center.

The U.S. government has proposed to Mexico that a conference be held between the authorities of the two countries to attempt to solve SAR problems in both the short and long term.

Other areas of cooperation which U.S. SAR agencies will be interested in exploring if Mexico agrees to the proposed conference are:

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IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
Date: NOV 07 2017

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- improvement of direct communications channels between U.S. and Mexican agencies;
- coordination measures when the two countries' SAR agencies are operating together on a distress case;
- exchange of information on SAR organization, policies and procedures; and
- the ultimate negotiation of a modern comprehensive SAR agreement.

RECOMMENDATION

Suggest that, since designated SAR aircraft are unarmed and their purpose is lifesaving, Mexico might see fit to delete them from the limitation of five U.S. military aircraft. Also, it would be helpful if Mexico could grant blanket clearance to designated SAR aircraft subject only to the filing of an advance flight plan. If the latter is not possible then Mexico might consider delegating the authority for clearing SAR aircraft into Mexico to a 24-hour operations center.

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