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## Senate Approves Use of Mexican Troops on U.N. Missions

by LADB Staff

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The Senate overwhelmingly approved an amendment to Article 76 of the Mexican Constitution allowing the Mexican president to commit troops to international combat and noncombat missions. The initiative, approved by a vote of 78-18, also allows foreign troops to traverse Mexican soil and foreign navies to be stationed inside Mexican waters if they are involved in international peacekeeping or humanitarian missions.

The measure requires Senate approval for the president to use the Mexican Army, Navy or Air Force for any combat-related peacekeeping missions. The executive, however, does not need permission to send military units for humanitarian missions. The overwhelming support for the measure was surprising, given the strong opposition last September to a request by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that Mexico consider contributing peacekeeping forces to international missions (see SourceMex, 2004-09-22).

The initiative received strong support from an overwhelming majority of senators from the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) as well as the entire delegations from the governing Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM). The initiative was promoted by PRI Sen. Ramon Mota Sanchez, who chairs the defense committee (Comision de la Defensa Nacional) in the upper house. Mota is an army general on leave from his post while he serves in the Senate.

### *Center-left PRD opposes initiative*

The entire delegation from the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) voted against the measure, as did PRI Sens. Manuel Bartlett Diaz, Jorge Eduardo Franco, and Laura Alicia Garza Galindo. PRD Sen. Raymundo Cardenas Hernandez said the center-left party favored allowing the president to commit Mexican military personnel to humanitarian efforts, such as the disaster caused by the tsunami in South Asia in December. Mexico sent a team of civilians to assist with recovery efforts in the region (see SourceMex, 2005-01-19).

More recently, the Mexican Navy ship Zapoteco arrived in Indonesia at the end of February with relief supplies. "We support allowing the president to commit troops in these instances without the permission of the Senate," said Cardenas.

The PRD senators objected, however, to wording in the amendment that allows the president to unilaterally commit troops for war-related purposes even if combat is not imminent. The party was especially concerned about a proposal by the US government that Mexico and Canada conduct joint exercises with US troops as part of a North American defense scheme. "We are opening the door for the executive to make the sole decision to allow Mexican armed forces personnel to participate in joint military exercises with the US," said Sen. Jesus Ortega Martinez. "We see this is a great risk."

Administration sources said, however, that Fox does not intend to have any Mexican troops participate in any military exercises but is keeping its options open on peacekeeping operations and missions involving humanitarian assistance. "There are circumstances where Mexico needs to participate at all levels to assist in natural disasters and international insecurity," said deputy foreign relations secretary Lourdes Aranda. One of the PRI dissenters, Sen. Garza, raised concerns that Mexico could lose its sovereignty. "I do not support allowing foreign warships or military units to enter our territory," said Garza. "I also oppose any instances where our soldiers are sent to other countries for peacekeeping missions that really have interventionist purposes." (Sources: La Crisis, La Cronica de Hoy, 02/25/05; La Jornada, 02/25/05, 02/26/05; Notimex, 02/24/05, 03/01/05; El Universal, 02/25/05, 03/01/05)

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