

10-17-2007

## U.S., Mexico Prepare to Implement Anti-Drug Program Similar to Plan Colombia

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

---

### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "U.S., Mexico Prepare to Implement Anti-Drug Program Similar to Plan Colombia." (2007).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5154>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **U.S., Mexico Prepare to Implement Anti-Drug Program Similar to Plan Colombia**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 2007-10-17*

The administrations of Mexican President Felipe Calderon and US counterpart George W. Bush have reached agreement on a comprehensive program to combat drug trafficking in Mexico. The program, which will be known as the Joint Strategy to Combat Organized Crime, includes the allocation of US\$1 billion to US\$1.4 billion in aid to Mexico for use in drug interdiction activities over a two-year period. Critics on both sides of the border immediately attacked the proposal, which they said is very similar to Plan Colombia, which the US has employed in South America over the past seven years.

The US government has not officially announced the new program, which some critics have dubbed "Plan Mexico" because of its similarity to Plan Colombia, which was launched in 2000 as part of a US effort to eradicate coca production and fight Marxist rebels in the South American country.

Under the Colombia aid package, the US has allocated US\$600 million to US\$700 million a year. Plan Colombia has come under strong criticism because of its high cost and relative ineffectiveness and the damage it has caused to local communities (see NotiSur, 2003-07-25, 2005-08-26 and 2007-03-09).

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was expected to make an official announcement of the Mexico aid program at the end of October, said Mexico's Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora.

Still, details of the program were already widely known, with Carlos Rico Ferrat, Mexico's deputy foreign relations secretary for North American affairs, discussing the proposal during a speech at the Colegio de Mexico (Colmex) in Mexico City on Oct. 4. Rico Ferrat has been working on the proposal with ONDCP director John Walters. According to Rico Ferrat, the US government has proposed to initially fund the program for two years. "We don't see any complications that would prevent expansion of the program in ensuing years," Rico said. Even though details have yet to be released, some information was leaked to news outlets.

According to press reports, the plan would place a strong emphasis on the areas of gathering and sharing intelligence, interdiction at ports of entry, aerial monitoring and intervention, investigation and legal processing of suspected drug traffickers, measures against money laundering, and cooperation with Mexico.

According to the Mexico City daily newspaper La Jornada, which quoted official sources in the Mexican government, about 60% of the funds in the program would be allocated to the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) and the Secretaria de Seguridad Publica (SSP) to acquire airplanes

and helicopters. The remaining funds would be destined for the Secretaria de Defensa Nacional (SEDENA) to conduct anti-drug activities via the Mexican army and navy.

### *US Congress must approve proposal*

One potential complication for the program even before it goes into effect is that funding would still require the approval of US lawmakers. This approval may not come easily because the US Congress is preoccupied with the high cost of President Bush's foreign policy initiatives, particularly the war in Iraq. Still, some experts believe that US legislators will ultimately approve the package because of strong pressures at home to expand the battle against drug trafficking. And several members of the US House who represent districts along the US-Mexico border have endorsed the proposal, including Reps. Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX) and Ed Pastor (D-AZ).

Reyes, who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, strongly praised the proposed Plan Mexico as an initiative that will fight organized crime "in a manner that we have never seen before." Even with the support of Congress likely, the ONDCP is not taking any chances. At the beginning of October, the anti-drug office issued a report praising the Calderon administration for its efforts to reduce the flow of drugs into the US.

At the start of the year, the Mexican president launched an ambitious military offensive against drug-trafficking organizations in more than a dozen Mexican states (see SourceMex, 2007-01-24). The offensive includes the arrest and extradition of the heads of major drug cartels to the US (see SourceMex, 2007-05-16).

The initiative has not been without its share of critics, who say the Calderon campaign, particularly the use of military personnel, has contributed to increased violence in many Mexican cities (see SourceMex, 2007-05-30). In fact, critics point to several instances where soldiers have engaged in criminal activity and violation of human rights.

Still, the ONDCP insists that Calderon's campaign has tightened the supply of cocaine circulating on US streets, which in turn has greatly increased the price of the drug. The US drug-control office said a shortage of cocaine in 37 cities has caused the price of the drug to increase from a nationwide average of US\$95.89 a gram during the first quarter of this year to US\$118.70 in the second quarter. "After 25 years of cocaine coming into the United States, there has never been the kind of disruption of this magnitude for this long," ONDCP director John Walters said at a news conference in San Diego. "The real challenge, and I think the real opportunity now, is to continue it."

But critics said the ONDCP conclusions are misleading because the statistics were reflecting a seasonal trend. "The long-term trend is prices remaining constant or going down," said Larry Birns, a spokesperson for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), a frequent critic of US drug policy. "Law enforcement agencies claiming successes in this anti-drug battle is somewhat illusory."

### *Critics concerned plan would infringe on Mexico's sovereignty*

The biggest fear in Mexico is that the new drug program is going to infringe on Mexico's sovereignty, especially since the US Congress will likely have some level of oversight. "The creation of a Mexican version of Plan Colombia represents an unacceptable step backwards in terms of

our national security, our sovereignty and the protection of human rights within our borders," La Jornada said in an editorial.

Analysts said the main problem is that the aid will come with major strings attached. "There will be an enormous amount of scrutiny and a lot of questions on how the money is used and how effective Mexico's anti-narcotic strategy is," said Ana Maria Salazar, a Mexico City analyst and former US deputy assistant secretary of defense for drug enforcement policy and support. "That will always be an uncomfortable factor." Sergio Aguayo, a political analyst at Colmex, agreed on this point. "The assistance made available via Plan Mexico is subject to the rules and laws of the US," Aguayo said in a column published in the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma.

Some members of the center-left opposition Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) who serve on the national defense committee (Comision de Defensa Nacional) in the Chamber of Deputies suggested that the US Congress could go as far as to summon Mexican officials to offer testimony on how the money would be spent. The officials that could be summoned include Attorney General Medina Mora, Foreign Relations Secretary Patricia Espinosa, and Public Safety Secretary Genaro Garcia Luna.

PRD Deputy Alfonso Suarez del Real said there was a real possibility that Calderon himself would appear before US legislators. "This would be an absurd and unprecedented situation," said PRD Deputy Cuauhtemoc Sandoval Ramirez. "They will have to explain [to the US Congress] how US\$1 billion will be spent.

Other critics have raised concerns about the possibility that US soldiers or armed agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) would be deployed into Mexican territory as part of the drug interdiction operations. "Greater US presence in Mexico will occur, at US taxpayers' expense and to Mexican citizens' chagrin," said Laura Carlsen, director of Latin America policies for the Washington-based Center for International Policy. "DEA agents have already requested offices in two more Mexican cities and it is very unlikely that all the proposed training will take place in the United States."

"Both Mexican and US officials have gone to great lengths to explain that the Mexican counter-narcotics plan will not be a repeat of the disgraced Plan Colombia. While ignoring the overall failure of that plan, they have emphasized that Plan Mexico will not include US troops in Mexico," said Carlsen. "Concern in Mexico on this point has run so high that Minister of Foreign Relations Patricia Espinosa has repeatedly made public statements denying that US troop presence forms part of the new package. In addition to Espinosa's comments during interviews, the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) has issued special statements emphatically denying that law-enforcement personnel and members of the US military would be operating on Mexican soil. "There will be no US troops nor law-enforcement agents in any operations on Mexican territory," the SRE said, noting that all activities will be based on shared responsibility, reciprocity, and mutual respect for each other's sovereignty.

But Carlsen said the real threat to Mexico lies in the fact that the plan proposes that the US government be the funder and co-creator of a such a major element of the country's national

security strategy. "Already [the US] claims to be working with Mexico to build a central command to coordinate the work of internal agencies and facilitate binational coordination," she said.

### *Experts say Mexican Senate should also have input*

Despite the reassurances from the Calderon government and the Bush administration, some critics are proposing an additional layer of oversight in Mexico. "Once the details of the agreement with the US are confirmed, the Mexican government should come clean on the conditions imposed by the US," said Jose Luis Pineyro, a specialist on security issues at the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana (UAM) in Mexico City.

Former PRD Deputy Manuel Camacho Solis, in an opinion piece published in the Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal, suggested that any agreement with the US should have the approval of the Mexican Senate. "In any democracy, decisions of this magnitude have to receive approval from Congress and in some instances be put to a referendum," said Camacho.

In an editorial, El Universal offered a mixed reaction to the proposed program, calling the Mexican government's efforts to obtain US assistance in the fight against drug trafficking "reasonable." But the newspaper questioned the rush to obtain the funding before the US Congress concludes its current session on Nov. 15. "It is difficult to accept that the US and Mexico can come together on such a plan this quickly," said the newspaper. "Mexico does not even have its own internal operations well coordinated."

### *Potential for human rights violations also a major concern*

One major concern is that an intense war on drug trafficking will result in significant violations of human rights, particularly those of innocent bystanders. There are some fears that the aircraft acquired by Mexico with the funds will be used to conduct massive fumigations on drug plantations, similar to those that have taken place in Colombia. The fumigations are blamed for health problems not only in Colombia, but also in neighboring Ecuador (see NotiSur, 2005-08-26 and 2007-08-17).

"Fumigations have been a social and environmental disaster and proved ineffective in Colombia, leading to dead rivers, devastated lands, and contributing to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of villagers," said Carlsen. A still greater concern is that the new anti-drug initiative will strengthen the hand of the Mexican military, which has been the target of complaints about criminal activity and human-rights violations since Calderon launched his war on drug cartels earlier this year. "We could be entering a spiral in which we strengthen the presence of the military," said UAM analyst Pineyro.

Jose Luis Soberanes, president of the Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH), said the Calderon government should be reducing, not increasing, the role of the military in the war on drugs. In a report issued in late September, the CNDH president released details of four high-profile cases in which military personnel were involved in the drug war committed crimes against civilians.

In one case in May, soldiers seeking information about drug traffickers raped two women and sexually assaulted two minors after entering homes without a warrant in Nocupetaro, Caracuaro, and Huetamo in Michoacan state.

A second case in May also involved attacks by military personnel on civilians. In that case, soldiers were accused of torturing seven civilians and a child after an army patrol came under attack by unknown assailants in the city of Apatzingan in Michoacan.

A third case occurred in June, when soldiers shot and killed three school teachers and two children riding in a pick-up truck near the community of Sinaloa de Leyva in Sinaloa state after they failed to stop at a checkpoint. In a fourth case, which took place in July, soldiers went on a rampage, raping 14 women in Castanos, Coahuila state, after a local police chief briefly arrested a soldier. "It is time that the government develop a plan to return the military personnel to barracks and not force them to embark on missions for which they are not prepared," said Soberanes.

The US-based international human rights organization Amnesty International also condemned the Mexican military for violating human rights during the recent drug war. The organization urged lawmakers from both countries to meet before the plan is finalized to ensure that the agreement guarantees a respect for human rights.

"US aid should assist Mexico in addressing deep flaws in the criminal justice and public security system, which have allowed violent crime to flourish and human rights violations to go unpunished for many years," Amnesty International said in a press statement. "Without addressing these vital concerns, drug related violence will continue and human rights violations by members of the police, military and judicial officials could be exacerbated."

-- End --