

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
October 22, 2007

The Merida Initiative: United States, Mexico, Central America Security Cooperation

Today President Bush announced his request to fund a new security cooperation initiative with Mexico and the countries of Central America in order to combat the threats of drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism in the Western Hemisphere. President Calderón of Mexico has taken decisive action to fight drug trafficking and criminal organizations operating on both sides of the border. The Presidents of Central America have clearly expressed the political resolve to join forces to strengthen regional security and seek additional tools and capacity to execute such will.

This partnership would support coordinated strategies to:

- * Produce a safer and more secure hemisphere where criminal organizations no longer threaten governments and regional security; and
- * Prevent the entry and spread of illicit drugs and transnational threats throughout the region and to the United States.

To achieve these goals, President Bush has requested \$550 million as part of a multi-year program to provide:

- * Non-intrusive inspection equipment, ion scanners, canine units for Mexican customs, for the new federal police and for the military to interdict trafficked drugs, arms, cash and persons.
- * Technologies to improve and secure communications systems to support collecting information as well as ensuring that vital information is accessible for criminal law enforcement.
- * Technical advice and training to strengthen the institutions of justice & ndash; vetting for the new police force, case management software to track investigations through the system to trial, new offices of citizen complaints and professional responsibility, and establishing witness protection programs.
- * Helicopters and surveillance aircraft to support interdiction activities and rapid operational response of law enforcement agencies in Mexico.
- * Initial funding for security cooperation with Central America that responds directly to Central American leaders' concerns over gangs, drugs, and arms articulated during July SICA meetings and the SICA Security Strategy.

* Includes equipment and assets to support counterpart security agencies inspecting and interdicting drugs, trafficked goods, people and other contraband as well as equipment, training and community action programs in Central American countries to implement anti-gang measures and expand the reach of these measures in the region.

The President's Commitment to Regional Security Strategy

“The United States is committed to this joint strategy to deal with a joint problem. I would not be committed to dealing with this if I wasn't convinced that President Calderón had the will and the desire to protect his people from narco-traffickers. He has shown great leadership and great strength of character, which gives me good confidence that the plan we'll develop will be effective.”

President George W. Bush, August 21, 2007 Montebello

“Our countries are working together to fight transnational gangs. And the President (Berger) was right. I suggested we think about this issue regionally. You've got to understand that these gangs are able to move throughout Central America and up through Mexico into our own country, and therefore, we've got to think regionally and act regionally.”

President George W. Bush, March 12, 2007 Guatemala City

Drug Demand Reduction

The United States has done more than any other industrialized nation to reduce illegal drug use among its population. Through a broad array of efforts, it has succeeded in reducing cocaine use among 18-25 year olds by nearly 60% since its peak in 1979, and overall youth drug use has fallen by 23.2% since 2001. The President's FY2008 budget dedicates \$4.6 billion to an array of new federal prevention and treatment initiatives. Since 2001, the Administration has spent \$16.7 billion on drug demand reduction.

The National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy

United States federal agencies along the Southwest border are coordinating their efforts to implement 68 objectives under this new strategy in the following areas: intelligence collection and information sharing, interdiction at and between ports of entry, aerial surveillance and interdiction of smuggling aircraft, investigations and prosecutions and countering financial crime. It is estimated that U.S. is spending \$1.9 billion to implement this strategy in addition to funds being requested for the Security Cooperation

Initiative. On October 2, 2007 John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy said that this balanced strategy will serve as an effective response against violent drug trafficking organizations that work to undermine democracy and rule of law.

Reduction in Trafficking in Arms

In 2005, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms launched its Southwest Border Initiative to attack the firearms-trafficking infrastructure of criminal organizations working across the border. New programs to share tracing capabilities with the Mexicans, close off trafficking corridors, expand actionable, real-time intelligence cooperation and aggressively pursue prosecution have resulted in marked increases in interdictions and arrests of individuals seeking to move firearms across the border.

2007/905

Released on October 22, 2007

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