

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Senator Robert Menendez**  
**Opening Statement**  
**The Anti-Drug Package for Mexico and Central America: An Evaluation**  
**November 15, 2007**

I have called this hearing to review the President's proposed "Plan Mexico" – a plan that raises serious questions about our nation's priorities within the hemisphere. To begin with, this request has been categorized an emergency when some of us have known for years the problems and needs of our southern neighbors. But while we've been ringing the alarm bells, the administration has repeatedly hit the snooze button. Now they're finally awake, but running late, so they come to Congress without any consultation declaring an emergency.

With "Plan Mexico" the president is requesting emergency supplemental funding to help combat the drug and gang problem in Mexico and Central America to the tune of 500 million dollars for Mexico and 50 million dollars for Central America. I take a backseat to no one in my ongoing efforts to increase resources for development assistance and the protection of human rights in Latin America, but this proposal is long on military support and falls far short when it comes to support for the people in the region.

And as a long-time leader on Latin America, I find it particularly disturbing that this plan was negotiated and developed without any consultation with Congress.

That being said, the area where we seem to have some agreement is in recognizing that the current drug-related killings, insecurity and fear continue to pose major problems for Mexico and for the United States. The current level, and senseless manner, of violence in Mexico is both alarming and disturbing, especially considering the common border we share. Unfortunately, corruption continues to plague institutions at all levels. And on top of that, Mexico now faces an increasing consumption and production problem.

Further south, Central America continues to grapple with gangs and gang-violence as well as increasing rates of drug-trafficking. There is no question help is needed. The question is how we go about it in the most effective way to reach our goals. And that is the question I hope will guide the hearing today and how we debate and amend this package in the future.

On that note, while this proposal has certainly brought the problem to the forefront, I am not convinced it is the most effective solution to reach our goals. There are some serious shortcomings which I will address today.

First, I believe this package takes a one-dimensional approach to a multi-dimensional problem. In your own budget justification you cite a quote from former-United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan which rings true to me and is worthy of mention. He says;

*"...we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed."*

I couldn't agree more. But as I look at this funding request, I see a very one-sided approach to a very multi-faceted problem. That means this proposal fails to deal with many of the components that must be addressed in order to successfully tackle this problem. I see things like eight new helicopters, two new surveillance planes, new gamma ray scanners, communications equipment, etc. All of which are important catalysts for security, but have little to do with development or human rights. In fact, the State Department itself has stated that 40% of the assistance in this supplemental request will be provided to the Mexican military. I'm already concerned about Mexico's increased reliance on its armed forces for counter-drug activities because increased militarization does not address long-term development and reform needs. Not to mention the human rights implications of militarization and of giving money to Mexican institutions which, according to Amnesty International, "have a long history of serious human rights violations, lack of independence, transparency and ineffectiveness." Finally, it's ironic to me that the

genesis for this request was during the president's March 2007 trip to Latin America -- a trip in which he emphasized the need for more social and development assistance to our southern neighbors.

Secondly, I'm surprised by the nature of this request. To come and ask Congress for this money in an emergency supplemental request is akin to rushing now to fix the levies in New Orleans. This problem has existed for a while in both Mexico and Central America, and I certainly hope this emergency request is not just a way for the administration to avoid the obligation of paying for what we should have been doing for years.

The emergency nature of the request raises other serious questions. What is the expected length of this package? 2 years? 3 years? President Calderón will be in office for 5 more years, are we expecting to end this aid before his term is over? Finally, and most importantly, how will this package affect overall funding to Latin America in the FY09 budget? I, for one, cannot support a package that cuts further into funding for a region that has the highest social inequity in the world and that has seen proposed cuts for funding every year since 2001.

The fact that this request is considered an emergency goes to what I believe is the core problem -- we have no comprehensive policy in Latin America. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here today, we would have been doing the right thing all along and avoided this "emergency" all together.

I have several other concerns but I will wait until the questioning to pursue them. I hope today will be the beginning of an honest and forthright debate on this package. And I hope this discussion will prompt a broader debate about our foreign assistance priorities to Latin America.

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