



Written by on March 25, 2009

Clinton Visits Mexico to Discuss Drugs, Other Issues

The *Post* quoted a senior State Department official who spoke under conditions of anonymity as stating: "The idea of this trip is to not allow Mexico to be pigeonholed by one or two issues." The statement countered complaints by some Mexican officials that Mexico had become stereotyped as a lawless nation unable to stem the influence of the drug cartels.

Upon her arrival in Mexico City, Clinton accepted blame on behalf of the American people for Mexico's drug cartel problems, telling reporters: "Our insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade. Our inability to prevent weapons from being illegally smuggled across the border to arm these criminals causes the deaths of [Mexican] police officers, soldiers and civilians."

"I feel very strongly we have a co-responsibility," she told added.

The Clinton visit will be followed up by visits south of the border by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Attorney General Eric Holder in early April. President Barack Obama is expected to meet with President Felipe Calderon in Mexico just before he travels to attend the Fifth Summit of the Americas that will be held in Trinidad and Tobago from April 17-19.

AP quoted U.S. officials who said "they do not want relations with Mexico to be dominated by the violence, which has spread from the border region on the Mexican side into some U.S. border states." The cited officials stated that Clinton plans to discuss trade, climate change, and the global financial crisis in meetings with Mexican officials.

The day before the Clinton trip, the Obama administration unveiled a multi-agency border protection plan, which will deploy nearly 500 federal agents and support personnel. During a press conference explaining the plan, President Obama said: "If the steps that we've taken do not get the job done, then we will do more."

Obama said that the United States must do more to prevent guns and cash from flowing across the border to the Mexican drug cartels, stating: "That's part of what's financing their operations. That's part of what's arming them. That's what makes them so dangerous. And this is something that we take very seriously and we're going to continue to work on diligently in the months to come."

In response to the announcement of an increase in border security, Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa called the move "consistent with the bilateral cooperation in the fight against organized crime."

A Mexican drug wars analyst with contacts in the Obama administration told AFP on the condition of





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anonymity: "I think this issue has caught up with [the new administration] quicker than they expected. I think they knew Mexico was important, but I don't think they were prepared to be as intensely engaged right now on this issue."

"They're not quite sure how to get all the moving parts of the government working together," the analyst added, stating that efforts had to be coordinated among the departments of State, Homeland Security, Justice and Defense.

The official statement about Clinton's Mexican visit included "cooperation under the Merida Initiative" among the topics the secretary would discuss. Those unfamiliar with the initiative may be interested in the testimony made on March 17 before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Foreign Affairs Committee by Assistant Secretary of State David T. Johnson. Delivering his statement, "Guns, Drugs and Violence: The Merida Initiative and the Challenge in Mexico," Johnson described the Merida Initiative as "a security cooperation partnership to combat transnational narcotics trafficking and organized crime in Mexico, Central America, and [the] Caribbean."

During his briefing, Johnson stated that "our domestic [anti-drug] efforts must be complemented by *regional cooperation* to confront what is increasingly a transnational problem" and that the governments of Mexico, Central America, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic are demonstrating a willingness to work with us and each other to address these issues. He said "This is a compelling opportunity to advance our *common national security interests*." [Emphasis added.]

Because of this regional approach, Johnson said that it was not enough to eliminate the Mexican drug cartels and that "Organized crime ... should not simply be displaced further south to Central America or into the Caribbean, and therefore the Merida Initiative includes assistance to Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic."

Johnson did not mention whether, once the drug lords were removed from Central America, Merida might then be extended to South America, as well. However he did state that Congress appropriated \$465 million in July 2008 for the first phase of the Initiative — \$400 million for Mexico and \$65 million for Central America and the Caribbean.

While it is easy to understand the need for Mexico and other Latin American nations to dedicate more resources to fighting the drug cartels, it is impossible to find authorization in our Constitution for money to be sent to any foreign government for this purpose. The reasons most often used to justify the expenditure of taxpayer funds for such purposes are that most of the illegal drugs consumed in the United States come from Mexico, and that the increasing violence fomented by Mexico's drug cartels has started spilling over the border into the United States.

Obviously, our government must do something, but what type of action is constitutional? Article IV, Section 4 specifies that the United States (federal government, as opposed to "several states") is to protect the states against invasion. That we are being invaded is undeniable: we are being invaded not only by drug runners, but also by a tidal wave of illegal immigrants.

Therefore, whatever money is spent on Merida or similar initiatives must be spent on securing our borders. In addition to the Merida money, the federal government might also use whatever funds it is spending on the many agencies tracking down illegal guns and drugs to help secure our borders, whether by beefing up the U.S. Border Patrol or building more physical barriers. With secure borders, drugs will not flow in, and arms will not flow out. With the flow of foreign drugs reduced to a trickle, the states could handle drug enforcement on their own, using the powers reserved to them under the Tenth



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