

Mexico asks U.S. for more help vs. drugs

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MEXICO CITY --

Mexican and American officials are talking about how the U.S. government can do more to help Mexico battle drug trafficking, but the Mexicans aren't asking for a billion-dollar aid program involving U.S. soldiers.

Mexico's ambassador to Washington, Arturo Sarukhan, told the newspaper Milenio in comments published Sunday that the U.S. aid might include "training courses, the transfer of resources and the exchange of intelligence information."

But Mexico doesn't want another Plan Colombia, a mostly military anti-cocaine plan that has cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$5 billion since 2000.

"There could not be any Plan Colombia for Mexico, because the two countries' realities are very different," Sarukhan said.

Mexico - which lost half its territory to the United States in the 1846-48 Mexican-American War - has always been loath to even consider the presence of U.S. troops on its soil.

"At no time has there been any request to the United States similar to the one made at one time by Colombia," Sarukhan told the newspaper Reforma.

Since taking office on Dec. 1, President Felipe Calderon has sent more than 24,000 soldiers and federal police to battle heavily armed drug gangs. The traffickers have been blamed for more than 1,000 deaths this year, often decapitating their victims and leaving the heads with threatening messages in public places.

Mexico wants the U.S. to do its part by reducing drug consumption, fighting money laundering and stopping the southward flow of high-powered weapons and chemicals used to make illegal drugs.

Calderon's administration has "energetically demanded that the U.S. government assume its responsibility," the Foreign Relations Department said late Saturday. "Mexico has experienced growth in drug trafficking and the violence associated with it, in large measure, because of increasing consumption in the United States."

In a rare acknowledgment of the gravity of the problem, Mexico's top domestic security official, Interior Secretary Francisco Ramirez, said Sunday that the government had lost control of the situation before the current offensive was launched.

"None of us had control," Ramirez told reporters. "Everything was lost, and today we are recovering it ... We are engaging in controlling territory, now we are starting to recover territory for the citizenry."