

Document Details U.S. Aid Proposed For Mexico

Aircraft a Major Focus Of Anti-Drug Package

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TIJUANA, [Mexico](#), Oct. 26 -- More than a third of the Bush administration's proposed counternarcotics aid package for [Mexico](#) would be spent on aerial surveillance and the rapid deployment of troops, according to a breakdown of the plan.

[President Bush](#) is proposing the purchase of eight transport helicopters and two surveillance planes. The \$500 million aid package also would include \$60 million to revamp the information management and forensics systems of the Mexican attorney general's office and to train police, court personnel and prison managers.

The plan breakdown, titled "Overall Justification Document" and obtained by [The Washington Post](#), is the most detailed glimpse yet of a secretly negotiated aid package that some members of Congress say should have been shared with them long ago.

The plan, which Bush announced Monday, is part of a \$46 billion war funding bill that the [White House](#) is pressing Congress to approve before its holiday break. While the breakdown, which has been given to key congressional offices, provides a list of spending proposals, it has rankled some congressional aides because it lacks crucial details about how the aid would be managed and how information would be shared between Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies.

"There are still a lot of questions," a senior Republican congressional aide said in an interview. "The real enemy is that it's going to get amended to death."

The White House breakdown lists "counternarcotics, counterterrorism and border security" as the largest segment of the package, accounting for \$306.3 million. It does not explain how the money will be used to combat terrorism. Bush administration counterterrorism officials have long feared that terrorists could slip into the United States from Mexico; beefing up border security could be interpreted as a counterterrorism effort.

The breakdown does not specify which agencies would be given aircraft, which have long been among the most coveted items on Mexico's wish list. The helicopters are Bell 412 models, a workhorse aircraft that would be used to deploy rapid-response forces. The surveillance craft are CASA CN-235-300 models that would be equipped in the same fashion as [U.S. Coast Guard](#) planes.

Several previous U.S. programs that provided aircraft to Mexico have run into trouble. Operation Halcon, a successful helicopter-based border surveillance program, was canceled

in November 2006 because the United States and Mexico could not resolve accident liability issues. The White House's breakdown of costs for the current plan does not address liability.

A program that provided [Vietnam](#)-era helicopters to Mexico in 1990 was recently criticized by the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#). A GAO report said that 13 of 41 helicopters given to Mexico since 1990 are no longer operable, that the craft didn't meet Mexico's needs and that U.S. mechanical support for the aging craft is being discontinued.

The Mexican attorney general's office appears to be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the proposal. Besides getting millions to revamp its information management and forensics systems, it is also slated to receive \$19.9 million to "digitalize all aspects of prosecutors' functions, provide a case-management system and rebuild its database structure," plus \$5 million in unspecified "support" for its forensics unit and \$2 million to expand its efforts to prosecute human smugglers.

But the attorney general's office is not the only Mexican agency that would get large sums under the blueprint. Mexico's health secretariat would get a computer system to help it communicate with nongovernmental organizations engaged in anti-drug campaigns and rehabilitation. Mexico's National Migration Institute, which focuses primarily on migration into Mexico, is to get \$31.3 million to "modernize its immigration database and document verification system," as well as train and equip rescue crews working along Mexico's southern border with [Guatemala](#). Tens of thousands of Central American migrants cross Mexico's southern border on their way to the United States.

Shortly after Bush's plan was announced, the nonprofit group [Human Rights Watch](#) urged lawmakers to reject the proposal unless measures are included to end alleged rights abuses by Mexican military forces in the drug war. According to the breakdown, \$15 million would be tapped for anti-corruption, transparency and rights programs.

Bush's plan has gotten a frosty reception in Washington. Within hours of his announcement, Sen. [Robert Menendez](#) (D-N.J.) and Rep. Eliot L. Engel (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, which held a hearing on the plan Thursday, had issued written statements complaining that Congress was not consulted during development of the plan.

"With 'Plan Mexico,' the devil will be in the details," Menendez said.

Mexican officials dislike the Plan Mexico nickname for the aid package because of its similarity to Plan [Colombia](#), the name of the 7-year-old effort to battle drugs and Marxist rebels in Colombia. A key component of Plan Colombia involved dispatching U.S. troops to the Andean nation. But Mexican and U.S. officials have insisted that U.S. troops will not operate on Mexican soil. The White House's breakdown makes no mention of U.S. troops.

In [Mexico's Congress](#), opponents of Mexican President Felipe Calderón, who sought the aid deal, have also complained that they were not included in negotiations. Some Mexican lawmakers have said the Mexican Congress should be given oversight of the program.

The breakdown also details a proposed \$50 million aid package for [Central America](#). The biggest items are \$12.6 million to implement anti-gang strategy, including "diplomacy" and community-based prevention, and \$13.1 million for police training and equipment. A budget of \$7.7 million is earmarked to improve management of courts, prisons and prosecutors' offices and support community policing programs.