

# The News

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wednesday march 25, 2009 • MEXICO CITY

Year 59 Number 260 32 pages \$15.00

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## Officials laud Obama's border reinforcements

Despite aversion to militarization, Mexican leaders praise new effort

BY JONATHAN CLARK  
The News

A U.S. plan to reinforce security at its southwest border with more federal agents and technology drew praise from officials in Mexico, who said the move showed a new willingness from Washington to accept responsibility in the nation's drug war.

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced Tuesday that the White House would confront a surge in drug violence at the border by adding nearly 500 federal agents, boosting intelligence capability and improving coordination with Mexican law enforcement authorities.

"First, we are going to do everything we can to prevent the violence in Mexico from spilling over across the border," Napolitano said. "And second, we will do all in our power to help President Calderón crack down on these drug cartels in Mexico."

New measures that affect operations in Mexico include increasing the number of U.S. agents working in troubled areas such as Ciudad Juárez and Hermosillo from 24 to 36, and quadrupling the number of officers assigned to cross-border law enforcement efforts from 10 to 40.

On the U.S. side, a Department of Homeland Security statement said Napolitano would add personnel and improve screening and technology to help Mexico target illegal guns, drugs and cash.



Soldiers check the identity of a man during an anti-cartel operation in the border city of Reynosa. The White House says it will do more to fight the cartels on its side.

While the Mexican government has long complained of Washington's "militarization" of its border as a means of stopping illegal immigration, it has also increasingly criticized the United States for failing to confront the narcotics consumption and illicit arms trade that fuels Mexico's drug war.

On Tuesday, the eve of a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, officials here cheered Napolitano's announcement as a sign that the White House is ready to do its part.

Speaking at a news conference, Foreign Relations Secretary Patricia Espinosa said the plan signified "a new era of cooperation" in fighting the drug war, and noted "the determination of both governments to stamp out the trafficking of weapons, chemical precursors and cash from the United States to Mexico."

Santiago Creel, a senator from Calderón's National Action Party and former interior secretary under ex-President Vicente Fox, told reporters that the move was a welcome change

from the George W. Bush administration, which he said had done "the minimum" in helping to combat organized crime.

"The United States bears an important part of the responsibility for ... what has been happening in Mexico," Creel said in comments published on El Universal's Web site.

### REACTION AT THE BORDER

Napolitano said she was still considering whether to deploy the National Guard, as some U.S. governors have requested. But the fact that no troops are included in the immediate plan pleased some human rights activists at the border.

"This appears to be a smarter, more strategic approach to combating drugs and violence," said Jennifer Allen, director of the Border Action Network, based in Tucson, Arizona.

"What we've been dealing with is this one-size-fits-all [philosophy] that tries to deal with national security, criminal activity and immigration all with one broad, sweeping – and failing – approach [of militarizing the border]."

In order to avoid conflicts and abuses, Allen cautioned, the new border personnel must be trained to respect the civil rights of people in the region.

Cecile Lumer, director of a migrant resource center in Naco, Sonora, also expressed concern that an increase in agents in the Arizona desert could lead to more abuses against undocumented border-crossers.

"Maybe the numbers of people crossing are down, but not at our center," Lumer said. "And the abuses by the Border Patrol are worse and worse."

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