

## FEATURED Q&A

### *Should More US Counterdrug Aid be Directed to the Caribbean?*

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**Q** Critics of the Merida Initiative, a three-year \$1.4 billion counterdrug aid package for Mexico and Central America proposed by the Bush administration, worry the Initiative will not halt the flow of drugs to the US and instead re-route the flow through the Caribbean, with damaging consequences for the region. Do you agree? Should more US counterdrug aid be directed to the Caribbean as well?

**A** **Guest Comment: Ronald Sanders:** "The Merida Initiative is focused on law enforcement and on technical training and equipment. Mexico alone will get the bulk of the funds in 2008—\$500 million of \$550 million. Seven Central American countries—though more in need of help than Mexico—will share \$50 million. The 17 countries of the Caribbean, excluding Cuba, get nothing from the Initiative; they are allocated \$0.5 million in counternarcotics assistance and \$0.5 million in antiterrorism assistance in 2008. This will sting as much as the bite of a half-dead ant on an elephant's back. To the extent that the Initiative has some deterrent effect, it will undoubtedly push more of the activities of drug traffickers to the weakest link in the transit chain, the Caribbean. And as the governments of these small countries are forced to spend more of their scarce resources on countering drug-trafficking, the economic needs of their countries will be under-funded, pushing more of their people into the drug trade. The US will also spend \$45.7 million in 2008 on propaganda and support for dissidents in Cuba, which poses no military or narcotics threat. That money could have been spent helping hundreds of banana farmers on small islands such as Dominica who have been displaced by a US challenge in the World Trade Organization of the preferential market they enjoyed in Europe. It is no accident that two weeks ago in St Vincent and the Grenadines—also dependent on bananas—marijuana fields with a value of \$1 billion had to be destroyed."

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