

Obama-Calderon summit

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

President Obama and Mexican President Felipe Calderon certainly have a lot to talk about, and they will have a chance to do it face-to-face this week when Obama arrives in Mexico City. The two will also likely see each other again a few days later at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, to be held in Trinidad and Tobago.

Although there might be some discussion of trade and immigration â€” we're sure Calderon is as confused as we are by Obama's straddling of those touchy issues â€” most of the talk will probably revolve around what Calderon has classified as his No. 1 priority: an escalating drug war with the cartels that has claimed nearly 8,000 lives since Calderon took office.

The United States has pledged \$1.4 billion in funding over the next few years via the Merida Initiative, but Mexican officials are getting tired of being told that the check is in the mail. To date, very little of the actual funding has made its way south of the border. It takes more than promises and photo-ops to fight drug traffickers. We need to speed delivery of Merida funds, and Obama can make that assurance during his visit.

Meanwhile, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, who last week made her own trip to Mexico, has dispatched a contingent of law enforcement officers to the U.S.-Mexico border to increase the southbound interdictions of vehicles in search of two commodities heading south: guns and drug money. You can bet Obama will mention this to Calderon as proof that Americans take their role in this crisis quite seriously.

Lastly, if Obama really wants to back Calderon's play, there are other options still on the table. They range from sending the National Guard to the border to help combat drug and gun smugglers to using special forces troops within Mexico in counterinsurgency operations, with Calderon's permission. The two presidents should discuss these options and others.

During his recent trip to Europe for the G-20 summit, Obama said he had gone to listen and not to lecture. We hope he does the same thing in Mexico. Calderon probably has a lot on his mind, and Obama should listen and offer to help wherever possible. At the same time, Obama should share his concerns with Calderon, in the hopes of building a better relationship.

The Mexican leader is a hero for our time, putting his own life in danger to save his country from an army of ruthless killers. Calderon needs to know who his friends are as he makes his brave stand against the drug cartels. Obama must assure him he doesn't stand alone.

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