



Priorities for Central America and Beyond

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The surge of migrants coming from Mexico and Central America through the southern border poses a continuing challenge to the wellbeing and sovereignty of the United States. It cannot be ignored and needs to be tamed, especially since it is likely that the exodus will keep growing as our COVID-19 pandemic eases, and our job market strengthens much quicker than in the many countries south of the border.

The Biden Administration needs to come up with a range of incentives that will help alleviate the immediate causes of outmigration, especially from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This includes everything from providing funding and technology for Mexico to better defend its own southern border, to funneling more food and cash assistance to the people most impacted by either prolonged drought in some regions or by flood damage from severe tropical storms in others.

It must also come up with funding that will help to prevent other, underlying reasons from outmigration from parts of Central and South America where organized crime and corruption – namely, lawlessness – are rampant. They, too, have contributed to the climate of insecurity and hopelessness that drives refugees to the United States.

Here are four priority areas for stepped-up foreign aid that is clearly in our national interest:

- Start donating surplus vaccines against the COVID-19 pandemic as supplies become increasingly plentiful in the United States. The United States has already begun shipping some doses to Mexico but not

further south, while Russia and China have been making “vaccine diplomacy” incursions elsewhere in the region.

- Increase funding through USAID, the State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy for the local civil-society organizations, independent investigative reporters, and academics that are exposing crime and corruption while pushing for expanded government accountability and transparency.
- Augment funding, including partnering with the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, for local government and civil society projects that expand access to justice, strengthen the independence of the courts, and professionalize civilian law enforcement, discouraging corruption and political interference.
- Expand budgetary support for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, part of the Organization of American States, so it may staff up and reduce its huge backlog of investigations into human rights violations.

The Biden Administration’s ambitious U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would provide new pathways to citizenship for “Dreamers” and farmworkers while offering billions in aid to Central American countries, was well intentioned but will not pass muster in Congress. Therefore, it is best to unbundle it as soon as possible, giving top priority to legislation funding initiatives such as those listed here that can make a difference in slowing the current surge and future exodus of migrants from the most desperate parts of Central and South America.

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