

The Associated Press. – 01.02.2024

## Mexican president suggests US talks on migration and drugs may suffer after drug money allegations

*Президент Мексики припускає, що переговори з США щодо міграції та наркотиків можуть постраждати після звинувачень у продажі наркотиків*

*Президент Мексики Андрес Мануель Лопес Обрадор запропонував офіційним особам США вибачитися за те, що він назвав безпідставними звинуваченнями, і сказав, що буде важко сісти й обговорити деякі з найнагальніших питань у двосторонніх відносинах, доки цього не станеться. Президент Мексики припустив, що переговори з урядом США щодо міграції та торгівлі наркотиками можуть постраждати після повідомлень ЗМІ про розслідування в США ймовірних пожертвувань грошей від торгівлі наркотиками для його кампанії 2006 року.*

<https://apnews.com/article/mexico-president-us-accusations-drug-campaign-donations-41a026b2de9ab45f6f10b449de091ecf>



*FILE - President Joe Biden meets with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperative summit, Nov. 17, 2023, in San Francisco. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File)*

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico’s president suggested Thursday that talks with the U.S. government on migration and drug trafficking could suffer after [media reports of a U.S. investigation into alleged drug money donations for his 2006 campaign](#).

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador suggested U.S. officials should apologize for what he called baseless allegations, and said it would be hard to sit down and talk about some of the most pressing issues in bilateral relations until that happens.

“I don’t accept this, what I want is for the U.S. government to take a stand,” López Obrador said at his daily morning press briefing. “If they have no proof, they have to apologize.”

“President (Joe) Biden has to find out about this,” López Obrador said. “How are we going to sit down at a table and talk about fighting drugs if one of their agencies is leaking information and damaging me? How are we going to talk about migration, how are we going to talk about fighting drugs or fentanyl?”

The Biden administration has relied for some time on Mexico’s willingness to accept the return of migrants from third countries as a way of quickly returning migrants and asylum seekers at the U.S. southwest border.

It would be a political problem for Biden if Mexico refuses to continue doing so, or loosens up on its already weak efforts to control the flow of deadly opioids made in Mexico and smuggled into the United States.

López Obrador — who pointedly called [former president Donald Trump](#) “my friend” later in the briefing — did not specify who he wanted to apologize, but suggested that the U.S. State Department should say something.

“Don’t the state department, the justice department, have any information?” he said, calling the media reports “interventionism” in Mexico’s domestic affairs.

López Obrador has denied old allegations that drug traffickers may have given about \$2 million to his first, failed bid for the presidency — he lost in 2012 and finally won in 2018 — and called the reports a U.S. attack on his government and his Morena party before [Mexico’s June 2 presidential election](#).

[Claudia Sheinbaum](#), the presidential candidate for López Obrador’s Morena party, holds a commanding lead in opinion polls for the June 2 election. But Mexico’s continued high rates of violence — and Sheinbaum’s pledge to continue López Obrador’s policy of not confronting drug cartels — are one of the governing party’s most vulnerable flanks.

According to reports by ProPublica, Insight Crime and Germany’s Deutsche Welle, in 2010 the DEA investigated claims by a cooperating drug trafficker and a former campaign adviser that leaders of the Beltrán Leyva drug cartel gave the money to close confidants of López Obrador in 2006.

But a wiretap of a conversation between the DEA informants and one of López Obrador’s top aides didn’t really confirm the donations, and U.S. officials later ordered the politically sensitive case closed.

Mike Vigil, former head of international operations for the DEA, feared that the latest dispute could damage U.S.-Mexico cooperation on fighting drug trafficking, in much the same way as the 2020 U.S. [arrest of a former Mexican defense secretary](#), Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos.

López Obrador has long complained about the actions of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents in Mexico, and following the arrest of Cienfuegos, he imposed restrictions on U.S. agents in Mexico.

“It’s just terrible, it’s going to mean more drugs heading to the United States and more violence in Mexico,” Vigil said. “It’s worse than when Cienfuegos was arrested.”

“This is a direct attack against him. Secondly, he views it as an impact on the presidential campaign or the presidential elections that are coming up,” Vigil said. “Now, if we thought the relations with Mexico were bad, they are going to go from worse to almost nonexistent.”

López Obrador has long been angry at perceived American interference. He claimed that the U.S. arrest of Cienfuegos, the former defense secretary, was part of a DEA plot to weaken Mexico’s armed forces and allow U.S. agents free reign in Mexico.

Cienfuegos was arrested at a Los Angeles airport in 2020, accused of participating in an international drug trafficking and money laundering network.

Mexico demanded Cienfuegos’ release, reportedly threatening to expel U.S. agents unless he was returned. The United States [dropped the charges and returned him](#). Mexico quickly absolved Cienfuegos of any wrongdoing and later held up visas for U.S. agents and restricted the work they could do in Mexico.