

Los Angeles Times

Main News; Foreign Desk

The World; Travel Advisory Offends Mexico; Officials lash out after a U.S. warning to citizens about a recent spate of abductions in the north.

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732 words

28 January 2005

Los Angeles Times

Home Edition

A-12

English

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MEXICO CITY

Mexico reacted with indignation Thursday to U.S. criticism of its border policing efforts, producing one of the sharpest public disputes between the two countries since President Vicente Fox took office.

"The Mexican government does not accept the judgment or labels of any foreign government about the political actions it carries out to face its problems," Fox's office said in a written statement, joining a chorus of responses by Cabinet officials.

The flap started Wednesday with a U.S. State Department travel warning to travelers to beware of a "deteriorating security situation" in northern Mexico, where at least 27 U.S. citizens have been abducted in the last six months. It was coupled with the release of a letter to Mexican officials by U.S. Ambassador **Tony Garza**, who worried that Mexico's "inability ... to come to grips with rising drug warfare, kidnappings and random street violence will have a chilling effect" on cross-border commerce.

The tone of the exchange recalled the frequent flare-ups between a string of U.S. administrations and the nationalists who ruled Mexico for 71 years under the banner of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI. Sensitive to the loss of half their country's territory to the United States in the 19th century, Mexican leaders were often quick to accuse Washington of bullying and interference.