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Panel OKs \$21 million to fight Latin terrorism

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The Senate Foreign Relations Committee — eager to help reform Latin American democracies' police forces but wary of funding human rights abuses — yesterday approved a scaled-back \$21 million program to train police to battle terrorism.

Committee chairman Sen. Richard Lugar, Indiana Republican, scuttled the administration's request for \$54 million that was to be divided between military and civilian police forces in five Latin America nations.

That move, and other restrictions on how the funds would be spent, drew bipartisan support.

Only one Democrat, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, opposed Mr. Lugar's substitute, and the committee sent the bill to the floor on a 15-1 vote.

Because House members have opposed the administration plan, especially the police aid section, Mr. Lugar plans to attach the bill to the continuing resolution, forcing likely passage of the bill, an aide said.

The funds — about twice the amount approved for U.S. counterterrorism aid worldwide — would be distributed to El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala where the United States says leftist terrorists are likely to repeat attacks.

The committee cut out the fifth nation, Panama, because of a change in rule there, and placed restrictions on the use of money in Guatemala. Funds could not be used in Guatemala until the president certifies the new government has control over its military and security forces which, in the past, have been notorious for kidnappings and murder.

The bill also includes a condition that all

the countries must make substantial progress in upholding human rights and work toward fair judicial systems. It also provides \$1 million for a witness protection fund.

The compromise prohibits the purchase of electrical shock instruments, known as cattle prods, and restricts activities of U.S. intelligence agencies.

Congress halted police training programs in Latin America 10 years ago because security forces were allegedly torturing and murdering opponents. But Mr. Lugar said progress has been made in the Latin America countries and it may be a crucial time to try to encourage the governments there to reform their police forces. "This is not a blank check," he said.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, Connecticut Democrat, said, "If we are to have reform in these countries, the security forces have to be part of it." But he noted, "It's risky ... We are taking a chance."

Sen. Claiborne Pell, Rhode Island Democrat, said he was very reluctant to vote for the bill because of the past abuses, but said Mr. Lugar had the votes to pass the administration's original proposal with the Democrats. "We wanted to make it as palatable as possible. A half a loaf is better than a whole loaf," Mr. Pell said.

Mr. Kerry said he could not vote for the measure because it is putting money "in the very hands of the people" who are killing government opponents.

Mr. Lugar said "enormous problems" still exist in Latin America democracies and that elected officials face a "tortuous dilemma" on how to reform the forces. He said the measure "was a gamble of sorts, and one with very high odds," but would help to prod the governments to have fairer systems of justice.