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By Andrea Lobo
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Trump threatens to designate Mexican cartels as “terrorists”

US President Donald Trump threatened to designate Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations on Tuesday, a step that would open the door for US military operations on Mexican soil.

“I’ve been working on that for the last 90 days,” he said in a radio interview with Bill O’Reilly. “Designation is not that easy, you have to go through a process, and we are well into that process.”

While not responding to a question as to whether direct military operations will follow, Trump added: “I don’t want to say what I want to do... I like the [Mexican] president very much. I actually get along with this president much, much better than the previous president. In theory, this president has Socialist tendencies, but I think he is a very good man. I actually offered him to let us go in and clean it out, and he so far has rejected the offer.”

He then portrayed the cartels as a major threat to US families as part of his narrative to cultivate a far-right base of support and to claim dictatorial powers, such as extralegally deploying the military to the US-Mexico border and anti-constitutionally re-assigning funds from the Pentagon to build his border wall.

Since coming to power last December, Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) has responded to such threats by insisting on “President Trump’s respect toward Mexico.”

Yesterday, citing Thanksgiving (today), he stated: “I want to send a hug to Americans. This is not a good day for political confrontations. I just want to say: yes to cooperation, no to interventionism. We’ll leave it there.”

Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, who had said the previous day that AMLO’s government would oppose such a designation, responded by requesting a meeting with US authorities.

Under the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act issued under the Bill Clinton administration, such a designation could be invoked to deploy US security forces, ostensibly to combat drug cartels that operate all across Mexico, as well as more widely in Latin America and other continents. Other legislation points to financial sanctions that could be used to browbeat public and private institutions or individuals by alleging ties to the cartels.

The threats to send US troops to Mexico occurs amid an explosive growth of strikes and social unrest across Mexico and Latin America, with US-backed governments in Ecuador, Chile and—since the November 10 coup—in Bolivia responding through military repression. US pressures on the Morena administration are aimed at escalating preparations for such repression in Mexico.

In a broader historical sense, such a designation would mark a new stage in the subjugation of the Mexican state to US imperialism, which has increasingly sought to offset its economic decline through the use of military force.

The US annexed half of Mexico’s territory in the Mexican-American war of 1846–48 and invaded Mexico in 1916–17 in a failed attempt to capture “Pancho” Villa during the Mexican Revolution. During the 1980s, the US carried out widespread military operations in Central America against left-wing guerrillas, including making deals with drug cartels to arm the CIA-organized “contras” attacking Nicaragua.

A new precedent was established by the US Supreme Court in 1991, which ruled in favor of sending US agents to Guadalajara to capture the suspected killer of a covert US agent, Enrique Camarena.

Then, in 2007, the US began its Merida Initiative, granting \$3 billion in military aid since then under the cover of the “war on drug cartels.” The program has involved sending CIA operatives and military personnel for training, as well as drones to collect intelligence.

Facing mass popular opposition to the Mexican military's record of extrajudicial killings and ties to the cartels, which greatly increased after the 2014 "disappearance" of 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students, the US and Mexican financial oligarchies saw in the popular illusions created by López Obrador's "left" demagoguery a means of furthering US-sponsored militarization.

A change in the Constitution to allow the internal mobilization of the military and the creation of a new military National Guard were among the first policies of the Morena administration. The deployment of 25,000 troops of the National Guard to Mexico's border regions was carried out when López Obrador bowed to Trump's threats of tariffs and closing the border unless Mexico did "more to stop migrants."

While Trump significantly cut the Merida disbursement for 2020, this follows a pledge of \$4 billion to fund a new plan to militarize the poorer southern region of Mexico under the cover of "development"—a plan concocted by López Obrador himself.

The Mexican president's subservience has only emboldened Trump, whose military deployment along the US-Mexico border last year was justified by depicting caravans of Central Americans chanting "We are not criminals, we are international workers!" as "hardened criminals" tied to drug cartels and gangs. Similar excuses could be conjured up to justify sending soldiers to Mexico.

On October 17, the Mexican National Guard captured and released Ovidio Guzmán, son of the Sinaloa Cartel's "Chapo" Guzmán, when heavily armed cartel members surrounded the soldiers. Then, on November 4, nine women and children, all US citizens of Mormon origin, were ambushed and killed, presumably by the same Sinaloa Cartel that controls the area.

These events have since been exploited by the Mexican and US ruling classes to demand stepped-up US involvement and a greater role for the Mexican Navy. As explained by *El Financiero* this week, "For 15 years, the Navy has developed the closest ties with the US security agencies and elite bodies," citing their training by US SEALs and willingness to "annihilate all criminals, literally, in Veracruz and other areas of the country."

López Obrador paid tribute last week to the secretary of the Mexican Navy, José Rafael Ojeda. Then, on Sunday, in an event on the killing last month of activist Arnulfo Cerón Soriano, who led protests against the Ayotzinapa disappearances, the president extraordinarily declared: "In the case of Arnulfo, the case of the Ayotzinapa youth and many other cases, you cannot speak of state crimes because the representative of the

Mexican state, the supreme commander of the Armed Forces, the president of the Republic, he who speaks, will not allow any injustice, will not allow any authoritarian state.”

In the current context, these statements can only be interpreted as reassurances that he will obey US demands. This includes the execution and cover-up of such repressive crimes against the growing social opposition to social austerity, historic corporate tax cuts and continued corporate abuses also overseen by Morena.

The fact that this militarization is aimed against the working class and carries a strategic importance for US imperialism was stressed by the influential US think-tank Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). “The government isn’t selling Mexico,” it wrote in September, warning that the US geopolitical confrontation against China requires greater incentives for US investments in Mexico. “Strikes are on the rise, making Mexico’s reasonable wages and skilled workforce less attractive,” the CFR adds. “For any company looking to bring in Asian parts to feed a new Mexico-based link in its supply chain, these disruptions are dire.”

In a separate piece in October denouncing López Obrador’s “Hugs not Bullets” approach, the CFR explains: “Violence and crime can also slow or disrupt the flow of parts that help make ... [American] industries globally competitive. Dozens of U.S. companies, including General Motors Co., Honeywell International Inc., Nordam Group Inc., and Medtronic Plc, depend on the speedy delivery of Mexican-made components to keep their operations running in Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina and Oklahoma.”

A political movement uniting workers in Mexico with their brothers and sisters in the US, Canada and Latin America is more urgent than ever to oppose imperialism and the drive toward dictatorship, but this can only be done in opposition to Morena, the trade unions and all pro-capitalist and nationalist organizations.

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