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Leading Republicans call for US military intervention against Mexico

Following the kidnapping of four Americans last week in the Mexican border city of Matamoros, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a close ally of former president Donald Trump, vowed to introduce a bill to declare Mexican drug cartels foreign terrorist organizations and prepare the use of military force in Mexico.

Two of the four Americans were killed, along with one Mexican civilian, when their vehicle was intercepted allegedly by members of the Gulf Cartel on March 3. The other two were found alive by Mexican security forces on Tuesday in “joint operation” with US intelligence. According to Mexican authorities, three of the four Americans had been prosecuted in the US for drug-related offenses, including drug trafficking and manufacturing.

“If you continue to give safe haven to drug dealers, then you are an enemy of the United States,” Graham said to Fox News. Speaking like a mafia boss himself, he added, “If you don’t clean up your act, we’re going to clean it up for you.”



Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., listens during a confirmation hearing for Secretary of State nominee Antony Blinken before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2021. [AP Photo/Alex Edelman/Pool via AP]

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, condemned such statements as an “aggression” against Mexico and a threat to invade. “Why don’t you attend to your grave problem of social decomposition and mitigate drug consumption?” he said in a press briefing.

At the same time, however, he has repeatedly minimized these threats by portraying them as mere “political games” played for electoral purposes and retorted in a bankrupt fashion that if they continue he’d call for Mexican Americans to vote against the Republicans.

Graham’s threats have been echoed by numerous leading Republicans and are not new. In November 2019, several Republican legislators and then president Trump also threatened to send troops to Mexico after the massacre of nine American women and children in Sonora. More generally, one of the main Republican tropes has been the fascistic amalgamation of migrant workers and cartel members as one invading army.

Trump’s Attorney General William Barr told Fox News that the Mexican government is being held hostage by terrorist organizations that “control Mexico” and concluded that, “We have to deal with this group like we dealt with ISIS” by using “every tool.”



US military exercise at Fort Bliss, Texas near the Mexican border. [Photo: US Department of Defense]

Among other similar tweets and statements by leading Republican officials, James Comer, chair of the House Oversight Committee, declared that the US should have a “military presence” across the border, claiming that Trump had ordered the bombing of fentanyl and crystal meth labs in Mexico but “for some reason the military didn’t do it.”

In a meeting of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on Wednesday, Senator John Cornyn compared the situation in Mexico to the September 11 terrorist attacks, blaming the country for the deaths of an estimated 108,000 Americans last year from drugs allegedly brought across the US-Mexico border. “Just like 9-11, just like we would react to the falling out of the sky each day for a year, we would react in an overwhelming fashion,” he said hysterically.

Tellingly, Cornyn cited China as the source of the precursors of fentanyl, which is behind a majority of those deaths.

The response of the White House to these pressures only confirmed that these threats are no mere electoral games by “small fry,” as claimed by AMLO.

On Tuesday, Biden’s press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre evaded the question on whether Biden would consider using the US military against Mexican cartels. “I’m just not going to get into the military and how it’s being used,” she said.

However, responding to Cornyn during the hearing Wednesday, Biden’s Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines said without hesitation, “I could not agree more with your characterization of it and the importance that it holds.” CIA director William Burns then referenced recent “successes” against the Sinaloa Cartel by Mexican authorities, only to agree with Cornyn about the severity of the issue.

The United States stole more than half of Mexico's territory during the 1846-48 war, carried out two military incursions during the Mexican Revolution in 1914 and 1916, and has continuously sought to dominate the country as a source of cheap labor and natural resources for American corporations.

Given this history, the response by Biden administration officials to nod along the Republican threats to invade America's oppressed neighbor, no differently than Hitler threatening Poland, explode any claim that the White House defends democratic rights or national sovereignty anywhere.

The Republican threats and Democrat acquiescence communicate their shared willingness to do anything necessary—up to and including an invasion—to secure US imperialism's control over the political regime in Mexico.

While triggered by the kidnapping of Americans in Matamoros, the threats are part of an incipient but growing campaign in the US and European corporate media to portray AMLO as another authoritarian villain along the lines of Milosevic, Hussein, Gaddafi, Putin or Xi.

The corporate media and the Biden administration backed the February 26 protests organized by Mexico's political right against electoral changes approved by the Mexican Congress, which is controlled by AMLO's party Morena and its allies. The changes include an 85 percent reduction in the technical staff of the electoral body Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), less funding for parties, a greater access to voters abroad, and new penalties for fraud.

In a typical article in the US press, the *New York Times* described the measures as a “challenge to democratic institutions” ahead of next year's general elections.

An editorial in the *Financial Times* claimed that AMLO seeks to re-establish the “perfect dictatorship” that existed before 2000, as part of “a state-centric, oil-powered economy.” Such a caricature of the AMLO administration, which is entirely false for a country whose exports are overwhelmingly advanced manufacturing products sent to the United States, demonstrates the intention of preparing the public for a regime change operation.

“How can there be ‘friendshoring’ to a country that is growing intolerant of political opposition and a free, open society?”, asks the *Financial Times*, whose columnist Gideon Rachman has gone on the offensive to expose AMLO's “autocratic tendencies.”

None of these claims hold any water. Beyond the widespread practice of buying votes, the INE was used by the right-wing political parties to perpetrate fraud against AMLO in 2006 and 2012. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the US State Department, Google,

Facebook and Twitter openly worked with the INE to manipulate the elections against AMLO in 2018, but the ruling elite ultimately decided to install AMLO to use his populist demagoguery to divert the explosive intensification of the class struggle, especially after the mass Gasolinazo protests in 2017.

The references to a “free and open” society and elections are nothing but codewords for total subordination to US geopolitical interests. The nearshoring of production from China and Asia to the cheap labor platforms in Mexico and Latin America have become a core component of US war plans against Russia and China.

Under the veil of supposed concerns about drug deaths in the US and the integrity of elections in Mexico, the representatives of US imperialism are responding aggressively against AMLO’s attempts to balance the country’s predominant economic ties to US capital with relations to Washington’s geopolitical rivals. AMLO has vocally embraced Chinese investments, which now represent the second highest source of foreign capital in Mexico, while challenging US foreign policy, in particular by criticizing the shipment of weapons and other escalatory measures by NATO in Ukraine and offering Julian Assange asylum.

The AMLO administration is, in fact, attacking democratic rights and laying the foundations for a dictatorship, including through a massive build-up of the military, which has a long record of violations of democratic rights, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and spying on activists, journalists and other civilians.

However, these measures have had the support of both the Trump and Biden administrations, which have worked to turn the new Mexican National Guard into an extension of the US border patrol to crack down on migrant workers. During the hearing Wednesday, CIA director Burns said “Section 702” of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act was a key component of US operations in Mexico, referring to a provision that allows for warrantless spying on foreigners by the CIA.

As is usually the case with calls for US wars, the purported “terrorists” or enemies are themselves the byproduct of previous US aggressions. The recent conviction by a US court of Mexico’s former security chief Genaro García Luna, who accepted hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel, demonstrates this. The trial conspicuously avoided the massive evidence that the cartels maintain working relationships with both the US and Mexican governments.

García Luna was the key official in Mexico behind the establishment in 2007 of the Merida Plan, under which the US government has given over \$3 billion in security aid to

the Mexican state. He and his right-hand man, Luis Cárdenas Palomino—currently under custody for torture— received several prizes and recognitions from the Bush and Obama administrations and were the darlings of the US government, as confirmed by several cables released by WikiLeaks

A 2008 U.S. diplomatic cable applauded Garcia Luna, stating that his “real focus has been on vetting.” It continued: “It’s worth noting that much of Mexico’s success over the past year, scoring the arrest of major cartel leaders and making significant seizures, has been the product of close cooperation with the US,” while stressing that “unprecedented cooperation ... would not be possible without our ability to work with vetted units supported by USG agencies including DEA and ICE.”

Throughout this period, as demonstrated by witness testimony during the trial, the official “line was [to protect] Chapo” of the Sinaloa Cartel. And US agencies backed this policy. Journalist Anabel Hernandez, for instance, has reported that the DEA held over 100 meetings with the Sinaloa Cartel chief Mayo Zambada’s own lawyer to exchange information for protection. His son’s lawyer, “Fernando Gaxiola explained to me that, thanks to the collaboration with the DEA, Mayo and Chapo were able to practically exterminate their main rivals, the Arellano Felix [Tijuana Cartel],” she wrote.

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