

Mexican government prepares a dirty war

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As Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration approaches its third month in power, it is rapidly escalating the militarization of Mexican society. A combination of commando special operation forces and paramilitary death squads, both equipped by and in close contact with the US military, is being placed at the service of Mexican big business and transnational corporations. Increasingly Mexico is operating under an unofficial state of siege.

Since Peña and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) took over from President Felipe Calderón and the National Action Party (*Partido de Acción Nacional*, PAN) on December 1, 2012, a long-standing relationship between the Pentagon and the Mexican Government has intensified.

On January 17, the Associated Press reported that the US military will open a new operations center in Colorado to train Mexican security personnel that will confront criminal drug and smuggling syndicates—utilizing the same counterinsurgency methods as the US military in combating Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The announcement followed the news that US special operations forces have helped the Mexican Government establish its own CIA-like agency, the National Intelligence Center (*Centro Nacional de Inteligencia*, CNI), in Mexico City.

The military training center will be under the command of NORTHCOM, the division of the Pentagon for North American operations. In addition to other duties, Mexican police and army officials will be trained in setting up a network of intelligence agencies, similar to those that carry out the criminal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Then-US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta established the program on December 31.

Both Mexican and US officials went out of their way to present the program as business as usual, except that from now on the US commander of the program will have the rank of general. In a written statement, Navy Captain Jeff Davis declared, "We are merely placing a component commander in charge of things we are already doing."

The current training at the NORTHCOM station in

Colorado is part of a 2008 military-to-military agreement. That program will now be expanded and upgraded to accommodate up to 150 students at a time; presently, it trains 30.

Under the Merida initiative—which provided \$2 billion in military resources to Mexico—the government of Felipe Calderón gave free rein to US agencies such as the CIA, DEA, FBI, the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms) and to private contractors under their supervision.

Their agents would routinely carry out activities banned in the United States, such as money laundering and torture training; they also provided criminal drug cartels with weapons. By 2011, there were hundreds of US operatives inside Mexico.

Also in operation throughout Mexico is USAID (Agency for International Development). This last agency was instrumental in setting up and supporting military-fascist regimes in Uruguay, Chile, Argentina and Brazil in the 1970s. The agency supposedly is in Mexico for other reasons, such as criminal judicial reform and the mitigation of crime and violence.

Although Calderón is no longer in office, this close relationship with the US State Department and the Pentagon is escalating under the PRI government. It has the support of all the parties in the Legislature that signed the Pro Mexico Agreement (*Pacto por México*, in Spanish), the PRD (*Partido Revolucionario Democrático*), the Green Party (*Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano*, PVEM) the PAN and PRI.

In August of 2012, a WikiLeaks cable revealed that a secret agreement has existed between the Pentagon and the Mexican Navy (*Secretaría de Marina*, SEMAR). The agreement specifies that all exchanges of "national security" information between those two bodies would be kept confidential; no government authority, corporation, institution or organization would have access.

Dubbed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), the pact was signed in September 2008. Admiral Francisco Saynez, who headed SEMAR

under Calderón, had signed it behind the backs of the Mexican people. Once the WikiLeaks cable became public, the official story became that this secret pact was to protect Mexican borders against drug contraband.

The agreement led to an unprecedented exchange of information between NORTHCOM and SEMAR on the drug war and on the war on terrorism. The Obama administration defines the drug cartels as examples of “narco-terrorism,” and by doing so places Mexico under the umbrella of the Bush Doctrine of preemptive war.

The American military involvement in Mexico is part of a broader policy of military intervention in the region. At any one time, some 4,000 US military personnel operate in Central America and the Caribbean, allegedly to interdict the flow of drugs into the US. In Mexico alone, over 2,000 US personnel were involved in the training of Mexican military forces.

The war on organized crime provides a pretext to expand military policing, though use of the military as a repressive tool against the working class is not new in México. It was a feature of the PAN’s 12-year rule (under Vicente Fox in 2000 and Calderón in 2006).

For this purpose, the government counted on the collaboration of both the PRI, the PRD as well as the CT (Mexican Labor Federation, *Congreso de Trabajadores*) against Oaxaca teachers and public employees, in 2006 and 2011, as well as against striking miners and steel workers in Michoacán in 2006. In Michoacán, a combined federal and state force of 1,000 attacked striking workers at the Lázaro Cárdenas steel mill, accusing the workers of “terrorism.” Two young workers were killed and 30 others injured.

During the Calderón presidency, the drug war was always the reason given to further institutionalize the army as a repressive force; to pass legislation that outlawed social protests and legitimized the violation of human rights; and to carry out, with legal impunity, the disappearance, torture and death of thousands of innocent citizens. Complaints of torture increased fivefold between 2006 and 2012.

In May 2012 twin documents by Amnesty International and by the US State Department cited “multiple reports of forced disappearances by the army, navy, and police.”

Peña has appointed Ardelio Vargas Fosado to head the National Institute of Migration (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, in Spanish, INM), a man with a well-established reputation as a violent repressor of the working class. The INM deals with the hundreds of thousands of Central American immigrants that each year

travel north through Mexico on their way to the United States and who routinely fall prey to criminal gangs and corrupt police officials. As Chief of the Federal Preventive Police, Vargas had led—under Peña’s orders—the savage attacks on the people of San Salvador de Atenco in 2006, plus the repression of Oaxaca teachers the same year.

According to Vargas, the movement of Central Americans through Mexico has become a “national security issue” that must be handled “with precision.”

In addition to special and regular military forces, Peña is proposing setting up paramilitary squads made up of former soldiers and police officers in order to carry out more “surgical campaigns.”

Phrases like “surgical campaigns” and “with precision” echo the language used by Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s to describe the kidnapping, torture and disappearance of political opponents and the suppression of class struggle.

Vargas’s Colombian counterpart, Police Chief Oscar Naranjo, himself a notorious violator of human rights, has been tapped by president Peña to help set up the paramilitary forces. As a police chief in Cali, and as chief of the National Police, Naranjo was instrumental in setting up the paramilitary death squads that terrorized Colombian workers and peasants.

Recounting Naranjo’s intimate ties to the DEA and other US police agencies, an investigative article by the Mexican daily *La Jornada*, described the ex-Colombian police chief as having been turned into “Washington’s export product to the subcontinent,” bringing with him expertise in the organization and cover-up of dirty wars.

Then candidate Peña tapped Naranjo to serve as an “adviser” in the face of pressure from Washington that he provide assurances that the PRI—out of power for a dozen years after its uninterrupted 71-year-long rule—would escalate the militarization of Mexico pursued under the PAN and Calderón.



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