

Mexican president deploys military in Jalisco state

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At the urging of the US government, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has seized on acts of violence in Guadalajara, Mexico—the country’s second-largest city and the capital city of Jalisco state—to re-escalate the discredited and deeply unpopular militarization policies associated with his predecessor Felipe Calderon.

A May 2 *Wall Street Journal* article reported that the governor of Jalisco, Aristoteles Sandoval, stated in a press briefing that “presumed gang members” had engaged security forces in several firefights. Most seriously, he noted that on May 1, when an army helicopter spotted a convoy of “presumed gang members,” the helicopter was fired on. Three soldiers were reported killed, 12 were said to be wounded and others missing, according to Monte Alejandro Rubido, Mexico’s commissioner of national security. In addition, the presumed gang members blocked roads in the neighboring states of Colima, Guanajuato and Michoacán, according to Rubido.

The violence was immediately attributed to the New Generation cartel of Jalisco, which media outlets describe in the most frightening terms as startlingly powerful and holding a broad area of the country. Indeed, New Generation is said by the *Journal* to be carrying out simultaneous operations in the states of Veracruz, Colima, Guanajuato and Michoacán, thereby encompassing the entire central region of Mexico between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and surrounding the nation’s capital.

The newspaper described the cartel as having “received paramilitary training from foreign military veterans, including elements from the United States.” Like another Mexican criminal group known as the Zetas—which is said to have been formed by army deserters previously trained by the United States—New Generation has also allegedly been trained by foreign mercenaries.

“Former members of the Kaibiles, Guatemala’s feared army special forces, and Mexican military veterans have given strategic and paramilitary training to the gang,” said Alejandro Solorio, state public security commissioner. Allegedly, captured cartel members have said that an

American veteran— “a very aggressive, very wild US Marine”—has been training the group’s gunmen. “We believe he was paid a fortune to give them training,” says Solorio. “They have ranks and a hierarchy like armies do. ... They are very united behind their leader and have made loyalty a supreme value,” added Alfonso Quintero, a retired Mexican air force captain who now specializes in intelligence issues, according to the *Journal*.

The newspaper further quotes unnamed officials who say the cartel’s weapons—rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles and 50-caliber sniper rifles—come mainly from Central American and US black markets and that soldiers have seized makeshift factories in Jalisco’s mountains where cartel members manufacture their own assault rifles.

Another article ran in *Forbes* magazine shortly after the incident entitled, “Washington Toughens Warning for Jalisco, Home to Thousands of Americans, as Mexico Fights Cartel.” It detailed the US response to the fighting noting, “The unprecedented level of violence last week that struck parts of the Mexican state of Jalisco persuaded the Obama Administration to update its travel warning for Mexico on May 5.” The article goes on, “Without naming the Jalisco Nueva Generación (New Generation) cartel the State Department warned that ‘violent clashes between criminal organizations and government authorities, and related disturbances including barricades of burning vehicles blocking major roads and highways, are ongoing concerns that typically occur without notice.’”

According to *Forbes*, the Mexican government was expected to launch an “all-out offensive” against the cartel in response.

By May 13, the *Wall Street Journal* declared, “Thousands of troops, backed by armored personnel carriers and quasi-military federal police, are pouring into Jalisco.” The Mexican government has since announced that that the military will now take over the regional “war” against the cartel and has gone as far as appointing an experienced general to lead the war effort.

Sergio Aguayo, professor at El Colegio de México and

visiting professor at Harvard University, told the *Journal*, “a major offensive is about to happen. The military will spare nothing. The problem is that they have a poor history with respect to human rights of non-combatants.”

Ominously, Diego Petersen, a columnist with the Guadalajara newspaper *El Informador*, noted, “The helicopter incident was a declaration of war... The coming months are going to be very hard in Jalisco.”

The response to the spate of violence in Jalisco indicates the Nieto government and his backers in Washington want nothing less than a complete and open-ended military deployment throughout central Mexico. But this could prove difficult for, as the *Journal* points out, Nieto and the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) returned to power in large part by obscuring their support for domestic drug war militarization. Nieto “attempted to distance himself from his predecessor Felipe Calderon’s strategy of deploying troops against the gangs. That six-year effort had left some 100,000 Mexicans dead, more than 20,000 others missing and the Mexican public terrified.”

Indeed, until the slaughter of student protestors in Ayotzinapa last year, the Nieto administration had some mild success in distancing itself from the domestic military excesses of its predecessor. Since 2012, in place of the overt use of military force against the population, Nieto and his PRI party have opted to render more subtle—but no less critical—political services to US imperialism, primarily by denationalizing the country’s oil industry.

Such political services are, in a manner of speaking, the party’s historic specialty. It has almost single-handedly dismantled—or as it is referred to euphemistically in the bourgeois press “reformed”—all the social gains won through the Mexican revolution over the last several decades. The opening of the oil industry to US multinationals in 2013 was its crowning achievement.

However, US imperialism requires much greater tribute from the Mexican ruling class. Nieto is now expected to show that he can develop the iron fist of the Calderon administration to guarantee the investment of oil multinationals.

Violent drug gangs do exist in Mexico, but their roots lie in the desperate conditions that prevail in large portions of the country and the lack of any means through the political system for workers and youth to address mass unemployment and poverty. Moreover, as the state murder of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa demonstrated last year, drug gangs often operate in conjunction with Mexico’s political elite.

The “war” against the cartels is a dress rehearsal for a far more dangerous enemy: Mexico’s increasingly restive working class.

As early as January 2015, these concerns were expressed in an essay by Kathryn Haarh of the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute, entitled, “Addressing the Concerns of the Oil Industry.” Haarh notes, “The December 2013 Constitutional Reform and August 2014 secondary legislation to permit private investment in Mexico’s oil and gas sector represent significant opportunities for private oil and gas companies. While the overall geopolitical risk landscape in Mexico is low, cartel-related violence and other criminal activities continue to draw concern from international oil companies and other foreign investors. As foreign energy companies prepare to bid on Round One contracts, the Mexican Government, state security entities, and civilian security organizations have begun to put in place the elements of a more secure operational environment.”

Although Haarh uses mildly coded language in her essay, it is clear that profits, not public safety, are the foremost concerns of the government and military. While the paper carefully couches everything in terms of dealing with drug cartels, it notes in the “key observations” section, “Negative public opinion over fracking in Veracruz, the impact of the Energy Reform bill on Pemex labor contracts and the oil and gas sectors marginally increased vis-à-vis the government’s public relations campaign representing the commercial and security benefits of energy liberalization.”

The Mexican bourgeoisie behind Pena Nieto and the PRI has worked quickly to allay any and all concerns before the bidding starts. On February 12, 2015, *La Jornada* published an article stating that legislative deputies “approve regular suspension of rights and guarantees.” The article notes a unanimous approval of the new interpretation of article 29 of the Mexican constitution designed to facilitate the declaration of martial law by the executive. This new, more malleable version of article 29 was already approved in the Senate in 2014. In an article on the Senate passage, *La Jornada’s* Victor Ballinas noted that the new legislation was not in any way limited to the drug war and would in fact allow a declaration of martial law in cases of, “... serious disturbances of the peace, revolutions, violent social explosions, general strikes. ...”



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