

Mexican defense secretary calls for more troops, greater powers in waging “war on drugs”

Kevin Martinez
31 October 2016

Mexico’s Secretary of Defense, General Salvador Cienfuegos, has called for the country’s military to intervene even more directly into the 10-year-old “war on drugs.” Speaking at a seminar entitled “National defense and international humanitarian law,” Cienfuegos asked the government to recruit more troops and create a legal framework to allow the military to operate with impunity.

“There is a drain [on the army], and it’s obvious why: we are working all over the country, at all times, in the mountains and in the cities,” Cienfuegos declared. He warned that if the government wanted the army to do more, it would have to supply “more people.”

While the ostensible target of the Mexican police and military has been the drug cartels, in reality this conflict has served as a pretext to clamp down on social opposition. Large sections of the Mexican government of President Enrique Peña Nieto and the Mexican ruling class as a whole are among the beneficiaries of the drug trade and are intimately tied to both the drug cartels and US imperialism.

Given that the Mexican military has until now operated with *carte blanche* in the towns and countryside, Cienfuegos’ “legal framework” can only mean blanket immunity for soldiers who commit abuses. The general’s demand that the military have a more direct say in shaping government policy can only be taken as a grave warning to the Mexican working class.

In his comments General Cienfuegos remarked that the army had suffered from “fatigue” in its 10-year war against various drug gangs. When reporters asked about the lack of a legal body to monitor the army he

contemptuously declared, “Ask the legislators, not me; I do not make the laws.”

The Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* noted that the three main political parties were taken aback by the general’s blunt comments, calling them “unusual.” Patricio Martinez, senator of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was quoted as saying, “We need to correct, amend the Constitution so that the army can assist with civil authority.”

In comments last March, Cienfuegos called the deployment of the military in the drug war a “mistake” and said that corruption in the police force had to be stopped, adding ominously, “If we don’t do it, there is no one else who will.”

The army is responsible for much of the violence wracking Mexico today. It has now been revealed that an army unit was on the scene the night that 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students were kidnapped by police and presumably murdered in 2014. The 17th Army battalion protected the police and refused to help the survivors.

Cienfuegos also absolved the army of any responsibility for the Ayotzinapa massacre, as well as the army operation in Tlataya in which 22 civilians were massacred. In the Ayotzinapa case, Cienfuegos declared that the army had “absolutely no responsibility.” In the Tlataya massacre, Cienfuegos noted that four soldiers had been released without charges, while another three had yet to be tried.

Since the beginning of the drug war under President Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), 80,000 have died and 30,000 have disappeared. The Obama Administration has been instrumental in making sure the Mexican military is armed with the latest weaponry and logistics,

providing more than \$1.5 billion in US arms, equipment and training between 2008 and 2015.

The militarization of Mexican society is being presented as a crusade against not only drugs, but corruption and human rights abuses as well. In Veracruz, Governor Javier Duarte of the PRI was issued an arrest warrant on suspicion of ties to organized crime and money laundering. Guillermo Padres, a member of the PAN who was governor of Sonora, was also accused of corruption and has been pursued by authorities. President Peña Nieto is trying desperately to refurbish his image as an enemy of political corruption, especially after his own complicity in the Ayotzinapa massacre and other state attacks against teachers and workers becomes public knowledge.

In a related development, a federal judge based in Mexico City, Vicente Antonio Bermudez Zacarias, was shot dead in broad daylight while jogging. Zacarias was involved in legal rulings in the case of the 43 missing students. The media has accused gangs of being behind the killing; however, given the political sensitivity of Zacarias' rulings, a government assassination cannot be ruled out.

The former police chief of Iguala, Felipe Flores, was also detained by the government after more than two years on the run. Flores had disappeared after the events of September 26, 2014, when the students were last seen in the custody of police. In the official story, the students were handed over to a local gang who murdered them, incinerated their bodies and dumped the ashes in a nearby river. Numerous forensics experts have since concluded this story to be impossible. Flores' arrest may shed new light as to the true fate of the 43 missing students.

While the army and Cienfuegos have sought to project an apolitical public image in relation to the country's worsening violence, the military has always sought to maintain the status quo in Mexico. The intervention of the army in political life, if history is any guide, has never been in the interest of the working class. The history of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, and its CIA-backed military-police dictatorships, is a bloody reminder of this basic fact.

Mexico is not the only country to militarize its police force in the face of worsening violence. El Salvador and Honduras, two of the most violent countries in the

world, have deployed the military to ostensibly fight gangs. In Argentina, President Mauricio Macri declared a public national emergency to pave the way for the militarization of the country's anti-drug war.

In the face of worsening social inequality and rising social opposition, the Latin American bourgeoisie has sought to arm and strengthen its state apparatus to prepare for a bloody crackdown against workers, students, and peasants.



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