

Amid Mexico talks, Trump calls deportations a “military operation”

Bill Van Auken
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Two days after rolling out a draconian immigration policy that threatens the deportation of millions of undocumented workers and their families, President Donald Trump described the unfolding crackdown as “a military operation.”

Speaking to a White House gathering Thursday of top corporate bosses, including the CEOs of Dow Chemical, General Electric, Lockheed Martin and Caterpillar Inc., Trump hailed the escalation of repression on the US-Mexican border along with the recent series of Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) raids that resulted in the roundup of several hundred immigrants from coast to coast.

“We’re getting really bad dudes out of this country and at a rate that nobody has ever seen before,” said Trump, adding, “And it’s a military operation because what has been allowed to come into our country—when you see gang violence that you’ve read about like never before and all of the things—much of that is people that are here illegally. And they’re rough and they’re tough, but they’re not tough like our people. So we’re getting them out.”

Asked to clarify Trump’s remark, White House spokesman Sean Spicer argued that the president was using the word “military” as an “adjective,” meant to convey that the ICE raids were “happening with precision.”

Trump’s bullying and bellicose remarks coincided with a public appearance by his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary Gen. John Kelly in Mexico City alongside their Mexican counterparts in what was billed as an attempt to strengthen relations between the two countries following a series of blatant provocations over Trump’s proposed border wall, attacks on immigrants, threats to impose tariffs and suggestion that US troops could be sent into Mexico to wage the so-called drug war.

Mexico’s President Enrique Peña Nieto was forced to call off a scheduled state visit to Washington last month over Trump’s crude insistence that Mexico pay for his proposed wall.

Speaking before the Mexican media, Gen. Kelly, the former commander of US Southern Command, which

oversees all US military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, pledged, “There will be no use of military forces in immigration,” Kelly said. “There will be no—repeat, no—mass deportations.”

This assurance follows the leaking last week of a Department of Homeland Security memo calling for the mobilization of 100,000 National Guard troops to hunt down and detain immigrant workers. While disavowed by the White House, it is clear that a martial law crackdown was under discussion within the US administration.

Kelly’s statement on Thursday, which appeared to be directly contradicted by Trump’s boasting about the immigration crackdown to the US corporation heads, followed his attempt to walk back part of the language contained in two Department of Homeland Security memorandums laying out the Trump administration’s reactionary and repressive immigration enforcement policy.

A provision that touched off heated protests from Mexican officials calls for Border Patrol and ICE agents, to deal with detained immigrants who are not deemed a threat of “subsequent illegal entry” by “returning them to the foreign contiguous territory from which they arrived,” to await the decision of immigration courts on their removal proceedings. The provision calls for these immigrants to appear before the court via “video teleconference.”

The memo argued that this procedure would save US detention facilities for other undocumented workers caught in the planned immigration dragnet.

As most of the immigrants detained at the border are not Mexicans—220,000 out of 400,000 in the fiscal year that ended on September 30—with the largest number consisting of refugees fleeing violence and oppression in Central America, the provision essentially calls for dumping citizens of third countries into Mexico to solve an alleged problem in the US.

Mexico’s Foreign Relations Secretary Luis Videgaray rejected the new US policy. “The government and the people of Mexico will not accept the new immigration policies of the United States,” he said, vowing that Mexico

would go to the United Nations to charge Washington with human rights violations against immigrants.

Videgaray is among the more right-wing figures in the Peña Nieto government, a former investment banker with ties to Trump advisors. He was forced to resign from an earlier post because of public outrage over his arranging a visit to Mexico by then-presidential candidate Trump that had all the trappings of a state visit. Now, however, he has been compelled to denounce the Trump administration for attempting to impose a “unilateral” policy on Mexico.

He threatened that if the US went ahead with trying to send non-Mexican immigrants back across the Mexican border, Mexico would not accept them and would demand that Washington provide proof of Mexican citizenship for anyone it seeks to deport to the country. Such a policy could lead to a roadblock in front of mass deportations and force the US government to indefinitely detain huge numbers of arrested immigrants.

Others have suggested that Mexico could retaliate against Washington’s aggressive policies by halting its own repressive crackdown on Central American immigrants trying to cross Mexico’s southern border en route to the US. Last year, Mexico sent nearly twice as many Central American migrants back to their countries as the US did, doing Washington’s dirty work.

Tensions over the new immigration policy were such that Mexican government officials warned that a planned meeting between the two US secretaries and President Peña Nieto would not take place unless significant agreements were reached beforehand.

In the end, however, Tillerson and Kelly met for an hour with Peña Nieto at the Los Pinos presidential palace in Mexico City, arriving and leaving in a heavily-guarded armored convoy.

Mexico’s official news agency Notimex reported that the Mexican president told the US officials that Mexico “will always negotiate in a comprehensive manner with a firm position and in favor of the country’s interests.” He also reportedly stated that protecting the interests of Mexicans residing in the US was a priority for his government.

At the same time, he called for the “strengthening of dialogue” and said the presence of the two US cabinet members was an indication of the Trump administration’s interest “in building a positive relation that results in better conditions of security, development and prosperity for both countries.”

Neither side gave any indication that agreements had been reached on any of the issues that have brought US-Mexican relations to one of their lowest points since the Mexican-American war 170 years ago.

Peña Nieto finds himself caught between the

overwhelming popular hostility toward both Trump and his own government (his approval ratings have dipped below 12 percent), and the desire of the Mexican capitalist ruling elite that he represents to continue to secure its profit interests as a junior partner of US imperialism.

At the same time, the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) faces the prospect of defeat in the 2018 elections at the hands of the Morena (Movement for National Regeneration) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a veteran bourgeois politician who is leading the polls on the basis of a vaguely left nationalist appeal, accusing Peña Nieto of corruption and failing to stand up to Trump.

Peña Nieto and the Mexican bourgeoisie as a whole are no more concerned about Mexican immigrant workers facing a reign of fear and terror in the US than they are about the plight of masses of impoverished workers in Mexico itself. Their main aim is to prevent the return of millions of jobless deportees, along with the cutting off of remittances and a sharp escalation of already-explosive social upheavals in Mexico itself.

Disquiet within American ruling circles over Trump’s new policies found expression Thursday in an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal*, which warned that the new immigration crackdown is “so sweeping that it could capture law-abiding immigrants whose only crime is using false documents to work. This policy may respond to the politics of the moment, but chasing down maids and meatpackers will not go down as America’s finest hour.”

The editorial went on to question the spending of tens of billions of dollars on Trump’s proposed border wall, along with the hiring of 15,000 more ICE and Border Patrol agents, together with a massive expansion of detention facilities. At the same time, the *Journal* expressed fears that a “labor shortage” and the lack of any mechanism to import low-wage immigrants could adversely affect profit interests.

Trump’s anti-immigrant demagoguery and the savagely repressive policies he has introduced are aimed at scapegoating immigrants for the conditions created by capitalism in order to weaken and divide the working class. These attacks can be countered only on the basis of the fight to unify immigrant and US-born workers in a fight to block the deportations and to unite workers on both sides of the border in a common struggle against the capitalist system.



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