

Mexico's Interior Security Law: The ruling class prepares for mass uprisings

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The Mexican Senate is set to approve a new law that would mark a qualitative step in the militarization of Mexican society. The law would put the military in charge of “internal security” and give the armed forces the authority to conduct massive spying operations under the guise of fighting against organized crime. The Interior Security Law was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on November 30, will soon be voted on by the Senate, and is expected to be signed by President Enrique Peña Nieto in the coming months.

The Interior Security Law (*Ley de Seguridad Interior*) would authorize the president to deploy the Armed Forces in cases of “grave danger to the collective integrity of people and/or the functionality of institutions,” or even in situations that could “potentially become threats to internal security.” Any such operation would supposedly last up to one year. However, the bill specifies that the president can, without any congressional or judicial approval, extend this period if he or she considers that a “threat” is still present. Under current conditions of deep social and political crisis, the law opens the door to establishing what would amount to a military dictatorship. Small but substantial protests have taken place throughout the country against the law.

The phrase “internal security” is purposely vague and could encompass activities ranging from natural disasters to strikes and protests. While the law claims that the military will not be used against social or electoral activities, the law specifies that these must be “peaceful,” thereby opening the door for isolated acts of violence to be used as an excuse to crack down on entire groups or organizations. The laws are expansions of earlier state laws used to justify the military suppression of various strikes and protests that have broken out since 2006, including the “Ley Atenco”

which was passed in the aftermath of a police rampage against protesting flower vendors in San Salvador Atenco in the State of Mexico.

The armed forces will also be authorized to “use any form of data collection” to carry out “intelligence activities.” The law’s broad language has been widely interpreted as a way for the military to force service providers to establish encryption back-doors and hand over their users’ personal information. Earlier this year, the government was found to have hacked the phones of journalists and political opponents. Now, the ruling elite are expanding its scope to spy on an increasingly defiant working class.

The Interior Security Law would provide a legal framework for the Armed Forces to carry out operations for the “war on drugs,” given that the military has been carrying out such tasks informally for over 11 years.

As the country has become increasingly militarized, levels of violence have recently hit record highs. When the war on drugs began in 2006, over 6,500 members of the military were deployed nationwide. Since then, over 750,000 members of the armed forces have been given police powers across the country. Levels of violence are now worse than they were a decade ago, with 24,000 people killed in 2017 alone. This represents a higher figure than the number killed in the war-torn countries of Afghanistan and Iraq this year.

The root cause of this crackdown lies in the need for the ruling class to defend its wealth by force. However, the timing of its introduction also coincides with preparations for next year’s presidential elections. Dominant sections of the ruling elite do not want the current leader in polls—Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the “left” National Regeneration Movement (Morena)—as the next Mexican president.

Peña Nieto has single-digit approval levels under conditions in which over half of the population lives in poverty and two thirds of the country's income is held by the top ten percent of the population. The likely presidential candidate for the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, is a former finance minister who would accelerate the austerity and privatization policies he helped implement during the Peña Nieto administration.

Last summer, the country's largest gubernatorial election, in the State of Mexico, was marked by signs of fraud as the PRI's candidate narrowly defeated Morena's candidate. In case of a comparable situation during the presidential elections, the ruling elite wish to use the Interior Security Law to crack down on the inevitable social unrest that would follow.

López Obrador, however, is peddling a right-wing program that represents no real threat to the status quo. He combines populist claims of reducing the salaries of government employees and fighting corruption with promises not to raise taxes or increase social spending. He has described his platform as one of "austerity" to balance the fiscal budget. He recently pledged not to raise taxes on corporations in a video message aimed at appealing to the Mexican and US business elite.

López Obrador has opposed the Interior Security Law by offering an alternative way of centralizing the military. His proposal, known as Single Command, would combine municipal police departments into a national guard. "It was laid out in the Constitution some time ago that there could be a national guard and that all agencies, both police and military, could be integrated so that everyone could face the grave problem of insecurity in a coordinated manner," said López Obrador.

He advocates further integrating the military brass into executive decision-making by holding daily briefings with senior military officials and the president. López Obrador has also suggested granting amnesty to members of organized crime as a way of reducing violence.

Morena's program will not make any significant improvements in the lives of the Mexican masses. López Obrador opposes a class analysis of Mexican society and is looking to scapegoat government employees for the poverty facing millions. Single

Command is simply a cosmetic change that would not prevent the Armed Forces from violently cracking down on social opposition.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted, he offers a middle-class program that would leave capitalist social relations intact, and is primarily aimed at blocking the growth of social opposition, which has flared up in Mexico in the form of growing demonstrations against the Ayotzinapa massacre (2014), the Oaxaca massacre of striking teachers (2016), and the Gasolinazo tax hike (2017).

No section of the Mexican political establishment opposes the militarization of Mexican society and the preparations for the possibility of open military rule. When Arturo Alvarez, a legislator from the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico, was asked to respond to claims the Internal Security Law is unconstitutional, he said: "Blablabla."



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