

Biden administration renews agreement with Mexico and Guatemala to crack down on migrant workers

Andrea Lobo
27 January 2021

The promises of US President Joseph Biden to reverse Trump's fascistic migration policies have quickly been exposed, as the Democratic Party administration doubles down on the war on immigrants and asylum seekers.

Even as Biden was signing his migration plan minutes after the presidential inauguration, his transitional team was encouraging the crackdown on a caravan of 8,000 migrants and refugees escaping hurricane-devastated Honduras at the hands of Guatemalan and Mexican troops and police.

"Those in the region should not believe anyone peddling the lie that our border will be open to everyone next month," declared the Biden team to the media, letting the regional authorities know that they should follow the same policy imposed under Trump.

Amid a devastating pandemic and after surviving hurricanes that destroyed their homes, schools, clinics and entire towns, many children escaping the worst humanitarian crisis in the country's history were left "injured" or "with psychological trauma" from the attacks by the Guatemalan security forces, as reported by UNICEF officials.

Describing the scenes of horror, a migrant with small children said to *Deutsche Welle*, "All the cops let loose running after the Hondurans. We ran and sheltered in a house. They helped us so that the children would not get beaten up."

The repression marks a continuation of the agreement for rounding up and summarily deporting migrants and refugees reached after the Trump administration threatened to impose oppressive trade tariffs against the impoverished countries of Central America and Mexico. Ever since, the vast majority of detentions of

US-bound migrants has occurred in Guatemala and Mexico.

On Friday, after two days of beatings by the Guatemalan security forces had dissolved the caravan, and as smaller groups of refugees were being intercepted in Mexico, Biden held his first official call with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, focusing on migration.

The readout of the call indicates that Biden discussed "reversing the previous administration's draconian immigration policies," including addressing the root causes of migration, "increasing resettlement capacity," and improving processing of asylum requests. "The two leaders agreed to work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration to Mexico and the United States," it adds.

That same day, the announcement of the actual details was left to the US ambassador in Guatemala, William Popp, who met with the Mexican ambassador in Guatemala, Romeo Ruiz and the Guatemalan foreign minister Pedro Bolo.

In a joint press conference, Popp, a Trump-appointee, said that "there is a renewed effort to keep the border safe during the COVID-19 emergency" under Biden. "Regarding any intention to form a caravan, our message is clear," he added, "our border remains closed for those who try to enter illegally... Any migrants who cross the US border irregularly will be returned immediately as a matter of national health security."

In other words, the Biden administration will continue its predecessor's brutal policies of "deterrence" and effective violation of the right to asylum enshrined in international law, which were in

turn an escalation of the policies that led to a record 3 million deportations under the Obama-Biden administration before Trump.

Facing a growing backlash in Mexico, President López Obrador said Saturday that Biden had stressed his campaign promise of raising \$4 billion for “developing” the Northern Triangle— Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

The fact is that trillions of dollars are needed to rebuild the region’s social infrastructure and economy after more than a century of imperialist oppression and counter-insurrectionary civil wars at the hands of US-backed dictatorships. Just last year, economists estimate that the pandemic and hurricanes inflicted \$12.5 billion in economic losses upon Honduras alone.

Biden has said that his plan for Central America is based on the “Alliance for Prosperity and Security” developed in 2014 under his personal supervision. While compelling regional governments to provide most of the funding, the initiative focused on revamping the repressive security forces and starting infrastructure projects to enrich the local elites and improve access of transnational corporations to cheap labor at plantations, warehouses, factories and ports.

Meanwhile, local governments continued their onslaught of austerity measures, privatizations and corporate tax cuts that was greatly escalated after the 2009 military coup in Honduras, which was backed by the Obama-Biden administration.

Under capitalism, the prevailing uninsured, precarious and informal labor conditions, the generalized poverty used as a battering ram to keep wages low and the dictatorial regimes to enforce these conditions are seen as existential necessities by the oligarchies in Mexico and Central America.

Meanwhile, by continuing to agitate against migrants, the Biden administration is taking a page from Trump’s playbook to scapegoat foreign workers for the death toll and economic devastation wrought by the herd immunity policies promoted by Democrats and Republicans alike.

Facing growing social unrest at home and in its “backyard,” the American ruling class sees anti-immigrant chauvinism as a crucial tool to divide the working class, deploy and build up the security forces, coerce regional authorities to oppose US geopolitical rivals, and to continue cultivating fascist militias that

will ultimately be used as shock troops against the American working class.

Regarding Biden’s promises of a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and taking in more refugees, the White House has made clear that, despite Democratic control of both houses of Congress, significant legislation will not proceed without the support of the Republican Party.

Similar promises of immigration reform under the Bush and Obama administrations were stalled amid continuous appeals for consensus with the far-right, while Republicans in Congress, the courts and local and state governments could wreck any significant measures.

On Tuesday, Biden’s 100-day suspension of deportations was overturned by a federal judge in response to a lawsuit brought by the Republican state attorney general of Texas, opening the door for renewed raids and removals to break up countless families and communities.

Speaking to *Politico*, White House sources with knowledge of the discussions on migration said the new administration is planning on breaking its agenda into smaller pieces. “It’s not an all-or-nothing approach,” one said. “We aren’t saying you have to pass the Biden bill. But we are saying this is what we want to do and we are planning to move legalization forward.”

A lobbyist who is participating in the bipartisan discussions told CNN Tuesday that even getting all Democrats to support Biden’s plan is “wishful thinking and bluster.” The network adds that “it won’t be easy to convince every Democrat that allowing millions of undocumented immigrants to legally enter the workforce is a defensible idea...”

Under the cover of calls for “unity” and a “strong Republican Party,” Biden and the Democrats are working to enforce the imperatives of reaction and war of US imperialism. In order to facilitate this, Biden is politically accommodating the same fascist and anti-immigrant forces that conspired with Trump in the January 6 coup attempt.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact