

# In first meeting with Biden, Mexico's AMLO reaffirms allegiance to Washington

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US President Joe Biden held his first full meeting with his Mexican counterpart Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) via videoconference on Monday. Brief televised greetings were followed by closed-door discussions and the issuing of a joint declaration.

Beyond formal statements of mutual respect and equal treatment by Biden, the meeting marks a continuation of the subservience of the AMLO administration to the interests of US imperialism that was cemented under Trump.

The Mexican president, who has been tirelessly promoted as “left” and “progressive” by pseudo-left outlets like *Jacobin Magazine*, set the tone for his relationship with Biden by “correcting”—from the right—a phrase attributed to the brutal ruler overthrown by the Mexican Revolution, Porfirio Díaz, an authoritarian puppet of US and European imperialism and the landed oligarchy. “Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States,” Díaz supposedly said.

AMLO proclaimed: “But we can now say, ‘Blessed Mexico, so close to God and not so far from the United States.’ I believe our proximity will allow us to develop better in these times.” Biden responded with big smile and giggles.

This happened even though AMLO’s main proposal for the meeting, a request that the United States share its COVID-19 vaccines with Mexico, had already been rejected outright by Biden’s press secretary Jen Psaki hours before the virtual encounter.

“No,” Psaki said, “The president has made clear that he is focused on ensuring that vaccines are available to every American. That is our focus.”

A vague mention of “cooperation” in the joint statement was used to cover over the rejection of Mexico’s request. Such vaccine nationalism is unscientific and can only undermine the efforts to contain a global pandemic as new variants, which could eventually deter the effectiveness of

the vaccines, sprout in whatever corner of the planet surrendered to the virus.

Instead, both presidents made clear that, as opposed to the life-saving vaccines, their sole priority is expediting the production and flow of the lucrative goods, services and money that comprise the heart in North America of US imperialism’s economic platform.

Under the section on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement declares: “Both leaders agreed to strengthen supply chain resilience and security. The leaders also agreed to re-start the High Level Economic Dialogue to further these aims.”

Brief national lockdowns were implemented in May and June last year only after workers across factories in the United States and northern Mexico—following similar steps by European workers—carried out wildcat strikes demanding the shutdown of nonessential production.

Aided by the trade unions, the Trump and AMLO administrations soon reopened all manufacturing. Public schools remain closed in Mexico, but pressures are growing for their reopening, which is well underway in the United States and represents a core policy for the Biden administration.

In Mexico, orders to close restaurants and indoor businesses were issued in certain states when infections and hospitalizations crossed a threshold. However, the lack of economic assistance has forced small businesses and informal workers to choose between continuing operations or total deprivation.

These criminal reopenings and social austerity at the behest of the American financial and corporate oligarchy and their Mexican junior partners have resulted in the first and third highest confirmed COVID-19 death tolls in the world: over 525,000 in the United States and 185,000 in Mexico.

In Mexico, however, between March 2020 and the end of the year the government reported 335,525 excess

deaths compared to a 2015–2019 average baseline. According to the *Financial Times*, Mexico's excess mortality per million was 52 percent greater than in the US and almost twice as high as in Brazil. These figures don't include record deaths in January and February 2021, when hospitals in Mexico City were overwhelmed and oxygen tanks became scarce.

Monday's meeting follows an earlier call in January between both presidents that was focused on renewing their commitment to crack down on migrants escaping Central American countries ravaged by neocolonial exploitation, state and gang violence and devastating hurricanes. This policy was presented in the new joint statement under euphemisms about developing "legal pathways for migration."

The Mexican media reported that some controversy emerged regarding an "Electric Reform" making its way through the Mexican Congress, controlled by the ruling party, Morena. The bill would give the state-owned Federal Electricity Company (CFE) priority status in the energy market.

The US Chamber of Commerce and business groups in Mexico and Europe have opposed the legislation as a disincentive for private investments, while cynically claiming that they are concerned over its effects on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. The Biden-AMLO statement indirectly confirms that Biden lobbied against the bill by citing concerns over climate change and "the need to promote energy efficiency."

The bill, however, does not challenge the privatized market in which the state agency is still forced to operate "competitively" by cutting infrastructure and personnel costs. Nor does it stop private contractors leeching off the CFE.

AMLO has been grasping at straws to varnish his pretensions of standing up for national "sovereignty" and "development," as opposed to the submissiveness of his predecessors to imperialism. During his term, such a stance has been limited to winning the release of retired Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos from US custody after he was indicted for working with drug cartels. AMLO also proposed a new refinery for the state-owned oil company PEMEX, while not challenging the privatization drive that began under the Enrique Peña Nieto administration.

The AMLO administration's focus has been on imposing devastating social austerity to meet interest payments to the financial vultures on Wall Street and the Mexican oligarchs, at the expense of urgent social needs and infrastructure.

Public investment has fallen from 2.9 percent to 2.5 percent of GDP since he came into office. Between January and October 2020, the Economy Ministry reported that it spent 611 billion pesos (\$29.6 billion) on servicing the public debt and bailing out banks, corporations and other financial costs. This is compared to 540 billion pesos (\$26 billion) on public infrastructure, which is itself used to enrich the local bourgeoisie. Only 14.5 billion pesos (\$702 million) went to health care infrastructure.

AMLO's nationalist demagoguery reflects fears over growing social opposition in the working class against his administration's right-wing and pro-imperialist policies. On the other side of the coin, AMLO has cultivated support within the military through increased spending, infrastructure concessions and promises of legal immunity as part of a shift toward dictatorship, demonstrated above all by AMLO's backing of Trump's coup attempt.

The Mexican president joined the fascist Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro in refusing to recognize the clear electoral victory of Biden until the Electoral College ratified it on December 14, well after every other Latin American government.

Echoing Trump's co-conspirators in the Republican Party, López Obrador legitimized Trump's completely unfounded claims of electoral fraud, which were used as a cover for Trump to rally fascist militias in Washington and incite them to invade the Capitol in a coup attempt on January 6.

AMLO refused to condemn Trump's attempt to establish a presidential dictatorship based on anti-immigrant fascist agitation and "America First" imperialist bullying, which included economic sanctions and threats to send US troops to Mexico. Instead, his response was to condemn the blocking of Trump's social media accounts, which were being used in the fascist conspiracy.

Trump acknowledged the gesture and thanked AMLO in his first public appearance after January 6, calling him "a great gentlemen, a friend of mine, president Obrador."



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