US officials visit Mexico to organize intensified assault on asylum seekers

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US officials held talks in Mexico on Tuesday with the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) to discuss measures to halt the wave of asylum seekers escaping the humanitarian crisis in Central America.

The essence of the measures announced, however, is to tighten the stranglehold of US imperialism—its corporations and Wall Street—over the local governments, which has been the main historic cause of the poverty and violence underlying mass migration.

So naked was the neocolonial character of the trip by US officials that López Obrador was asked by the vetted reporters in his press conference on Tuesday whether it was "a visit to supervise" policies being taken in exchange for vaccines. López Obrador angrily responded, "We are not a colony or protectorate." He then added submissively, "We have said that Biden's immigration policy is very good."

While promising to address the "root causes" of migration, the most immediate and devastating cause of the humanitarian crisis in Central America, the pandemic, is being totally disregarded by the Biden administration.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) reported last month that the number of people going hungry in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua has quadrupled in the last two years, which has doubled the percentage of people making concrete plans to migrate.

"The COVID-19-induced economic crisis had already put food on the market shelves out of reach for the most vulnerable people when the twin hurricanes Eta and Iota battered them further," the WFP explains.

Instead of helping ease the pandemic crisis in Central America, the Biden administration has continued hoarding vaccines, while employing a limited supply to extort Mexico into agreeing to further militarize its southern border to block migrants.

After Biden announced last week that the US would send roughly 4 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Mexico, a vaccine which is still unapproved in the United States, the AMLO administration ended all non-essential travel from Guatemala into Mexico. This accompanied new deployments of National Guard troops and immigration officers with drones, night-vision goggles, and other equipment to patrol the border with Guatemala.

Following their visit to Mexico, Biden's National Security Council official Juan Gonzalez and the newly appointed special envoy to the Northern Triangle, Ricardo Zúñiga, announced in an online press conference the creation of a Regional Anti-Corruption Task Force with governments, "civil society" and the private sector.

The task force will establish a "preferential relationship with actors dedicated to anti-corruption efforts," they explained. It is an old tactic of US imperialism to look the other way when favoring corrupt politicians until they fall out of favor. This was most clearly illustrated by the falling out with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, a former CIA "asset" who was overthrown in a 1989 US invasion.

As Obama's Vice President, Biden oversaw the work of US-sponsored "anti-corruption" commissions in Guatemala and Honduras, which selectively pursued cases to pressure the local ruling elites into implementing policies favorable to US banks and corporations, while opposing the influence of geopolitical rivals, chiefly China.

These crusades were also employed to focus local politics on questions of corruption, as opposed to social inequality, austerity and exploitation. In 2015, mass protests against Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina were successfully channeled by US-backed politicians and NGOs behind the UN-sponsored "anti-corruption" commission CICIG (International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala) and its investigations of Molina,

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who was then replaced by another pro-austerity and repressive administration.

On Wednesday, Biden tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to take up his former role in working with regional governments to address migration.

Biden's new task force will directly sponsor judges, attorneys and politicians favored by Washington, instead of relying on independent commissions, which were ultimately shut down under pressure by the local oligarchies.

A planned visit yesterday to Guatemala, where US officials were reportedly going to lobby in defense of several favored judges and prosecutors, was postponed after the country's international airport was shut down because of ash clouds from the nearby Pacaya volcano.

White House officials spoke to reporters yesterday of "a sense of decency with treating migrants like human beings… and treating our neighbors with respect and dignity."

This is coming from a government that is sacrificing hundreds of thousands of lives in a pandemic to safeguard the flow of profits for Wall Street. Congress and the Biden administration, moreover, have spent the last months accommodating their policies to the Republican co-conspirators in Trump's January 6 coup, who are anti-immigrant fanatics tied to fascist paramilitary forces.

The Biden administration has responded to pressure from Republicans by escalating the assault on asylum seekers and repeating ad nauseam: "Don't come! The border is closed!"

In his first press conference, Biden boasted yesterday that "the vast majority, the overwhelming majority of people coming to the border crossing are being sent back—thousands, tens of thousands… We are trying to work out now with Mexico the willingness to take back more of those families." He then insisted on addressing the "root causes" of migration.

On a March 11 press release, Democratic Senate Pro Tempore President Patrick Leahy warned that the judicial system was being filled with "cronies of the other branches of government" in Guatemala; "corruption permeates the highest ranks of government" in Honduras; "El Salvador is becoming a one party state." He concluded that these regimes "are the antithesis of credible partners."

Allied with murderous dictatorships across Africa and the Middle East, Washington is not concerned about credible partners, but is fearful of the inability of these regimes to deal with an eruption of the class struggle.

In the 1970s, the last time Central America saw such a drop in living standards as today, mass rebellions of peasants, workers and youth broke out against the US puppet regimes. Between 1945 and 2000, Central America experienced eight times more years of violent conflict between governments and insurgents than the world average, according to researcher Fabrice Lehoucq. Central American countries spent on average 72 percent of the period from 1900 to 1980 under dictatorships and saw a total of 38 coups.

US imperialism consistently backed and trained the militaries as a bastion of its own control. Between 1946 and 1992, it provided $1.8 billion in military assistance to the region, which was used to crush left-wing movements.

During a brief interval, between 1962 and 1972, the United States spent $617 million in Central America under the Alliance for Progress initiated by John F. Kennedy, which was used to build schools, roads, hospitals and other key infrastructure.

The Biden administration's Central America Plan, just like Obama's Alliance for Prosperity and Security, will focus on building up the region's repressive state apparatus and providing greater incentives for US transnational corporations, while getting the Mexican ruling class more involved in anti-immigrant repression.

However, even Kennedy's intentions were to undermine the influence of the Soviet Union and the threat of social revolution. The American ruling class today, which is facing an existential crisis of declining global hegemony and the increasing instability of its class rule at home, will respond to the social crisis and threat of revolution in Latin America with unvarnished brutality.

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