

US announces deal with Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras to use military against migrants

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The Biden administration announced agreements this week with the governments of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras to deploy thousands of troops and police against refugees escaping a growing humanitarian crisis in the region.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki reported that Mexico agreed to keep 10,000 troops deployed across its southern border, Guatemala will deploy 1,500 soldiers and police to block migration routes, and Honduras will field 7,000 military and police personnel to stop migrants from leaving the country.

“The objective is to make it more difficult to make the journey and make crossing the borders more, more difficult,” explained Psaki.

Currently, there are 3,600 US active-duty soldiers deployed on the US southern border in support of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which requested in February that this continue for “the next three to five years, possibly more.”

The Mexican foreign ministry confirmed the deal shortly after the US announcement in a statement that pledged: “Mexico will maintain its existing deployment of federal forces along its border region...” Fearful of a domestic backlash, the Honduran and Guatemalan governments denied any official agreements.

Vice President Kamala Harris announced Wednesday that she is planning a trip to Mexico and Guatemala to discuss addressing the “root causes” of migration, including investments promised by Biden.

While the militarized crackdown is already taking place, including against two caravans this year, promises to alleviate social ills ring hollow. Economic desperation is a core component not only for maintaining Mexico and Central America as platforms

for cheap labor but for coercing workers into going into infected workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ruling elites have already demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice countless lives for profits.

While Psaki and other US officials cite concerns over human smuggling by cartels and over the safety of migrants, the White House is demanding and sponsoring a buildup of security forces known for their death squad activity against workers, peasants and youth and for being largely merged with organized crime.

Even as the militarization agreement was being announced, 30 Mexican Marines were detained for participating in the disappearance of dozens of people ostensibly as part of the “war on drugs” that has left over 250,000 people dead and 85,000 missing since 2006. So far this year, Mexican security forces are known to have murdered two migrants.

In Honduras, a trial began last week against Roberto David Castillo, a businessman and US West Point military intelligence graduate, as the alleged intellectual author of the killing of environmental activist Berta Cáceres in 2016. Two other US-trained military officials and a Honduran special forces sergeant were already found guilty for participating in the murder plot.

Beyond this notorious case, the Honduran regime has regularly massacred protesters and striking workers since being installed in a 2009 military coup backed by the Obama administration. Current President Juan Orlando Hernández has been named by US prosecutors as a major partner of Mexican and Honduran drug cartels.

More than 172,000 migrants were arrested by the US

Border Patrol in March, up 71 percent from February. More than 20,000 unaccompanied minors remain under US custody in overcrowded and jail-like detention centers, where they are forced to remain far beyond the legal limit of 72 hours.

Over 60 percent of the migrants detained last month were immediately returned to Mexico under Title 42, the same law employed by the Trump administration, using the pandemic as a pretext to abrogate the right to apply for asylum enshrined in US and international law.

Those returned to Mexico are subject to widespread extortion, kidnappings and killings by Mexican security forces and cartels, often working together.

Regarding Guatemala, the State Department's own 2020 human rights report cites "unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings arranged by government officials; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention" among other abuses. Just in June and August of last year, there was a wave of eight murders of indigenous rights activists.

The same venal oligarchies in Central America that ruled through brutal dictatorships sponsored by US imperialism during much of the 20th century are being encouraged to again escalate military and police repression to deal with growing social contradictions.

By preventing hundreds of thousands of impoverished workers and peasants from escaping the region and eventually sending money back, social tensions are being placed in a pressure cooker.

The UN World Food Program estimates that the number of people going hungry in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua has increased from 2.2 million to 8 million since 2018.

Honduras, where the crisis is particularly sharp, lost about 1.1 million jobs since the beginning of 2020. Hundreds of plantations as well as textile and electric equipment sweatshops have closed down this year, as 60 percent of corporations report issues of staying in operation.

Along with most of Latin America and the world, Honduras is entering another wave of the pandemic driven by more infectious variants and the refusal of the ruling classes to implement lockdowns and further economic assistance. Cases increased nearly 50 percent in one week, already filling hospital COVID wards. Vaccines ran out after the first lots of about 55,000 doses.

In Mexico, there has been absolutely no aid for sheltering at home, which has contributed to one of the highest COVID-19 death tolls in the world. The government has reported at least 325,000 deaths "associated to coronavirus." Another 9.8 million people have fallen below the official poverty line, bringing the total to 56.7 percent of the population. This has triggered a massive increase in migration out of Mexico. US Border agents detained 147,000 Mexican migrants in the first three months of 2020, the largest number since 2008.

As poverty and death surge for the working class, America's billionaires have seen their collective wealth increase almost 45 percent during the pandemic, while Forbes Mexico reports that the country's 36 oligarchs, each with more than \$500 million in net worth, have seen their assets increase 20 percent.

During this period, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador—celebrated as "left" and "progressive" by the pseudo-left—has repeatedly highlighted his good relationship with and the "solidarity" of Mexico's two richest oligarchs, Carlos Slim (\$55.9 billion; 7.4 percent increase) and German Larrea (\$27.1 billion; 146 percent increase).

The militarization of the region is part of a growing shift toward dictatorship by US imperialism and the ruling elites everywhere to defend the staggering levels of social and economic inequality while the working class is forced to bear the full cost of the crisis triggered by the pandemic.



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