

As US Border Police announce record arrests

Secretaries Blinken, Mayorkas travel to Mexico City to organize further crackdown on immigrants

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On Wednesday, December 27, top Biden administration officials headed up by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas will be meeting with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) to discuss further police-state crackdowns on immigrants heading to the United States.

Blinken, Mayorkas and White House Homeland Security Advisor Liz Sherwood-Randall have been dispatched by Biden to Mexico City to pressure AMLO to stop immigrants from reaching the US-Mexico border. This is deemed a critical part of Biden's efforts to secure Republican votes for a war package that includes over \$60 billion in funding for Ukraine and billions more for the Israel Defense Forces currently waging a genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Speaking on the reason for the meeting in a press conference on December 22, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that Biden called AMLO to discuss the "unprecedented migratory flows in the Western Hemisphere." Kirby revealed that the "two leaders agreed that additional enforcement actions are urgently needed."

Unsatisfied with the Mexican government's efforts to block immigrants' democratic right to apply for asylum in the US, earlier this month and for the second time in the last four months the US government shut down two major rail freight transport lines between the US and Mexico. The US claimed that immigrants were using the rail lines to illegally enter the US. The unilateral shutdowns prompted recriminations from Mexican business interests and farmers.

Detailing some of the "additional enforcement actions" the Biden administration was seeking from the Mexican government, Kirby said Biden and López Obrador discussed "what can be done inside Mexico to slow that process down ... things like checkpoints on rail lines and on highways." Kirby added that "the Mexican Armed Forces' presence in the south also can be important."

Kirby noted that the Biden administration included an additional \$6 billion for "border security" in its latest supplemental funding request.

Last week, the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) claimed that an average of 10,000 migrants were being arrested per day at the southern border. The agency added that there were more than 26,000 people in CBP custody, nearly 10,000 more than the agency said it can accommodate.

As Wednesday's meeting in Mexico City takes place, as many as

8,000 immigrants, including many families with young children, are marching north from southern Mexico to the US border, in what US officials are claiming is the largest "migrant caravan" this year.

The "Exodus of Poverty" march began on December 24 after thousands of people waited for months to receive travel visas from the Mexican government. Without the visas, immigrants are not able to secure motorized transportation, such as bus tickets, thereby forcing many to travel on foot some 2,000 kilometers, or about 1,200 miles, to the US-Mexico border.

Video and photos from multiple news agencies over the holiday weekend showed thousands of workers and their families marching north in the sweltering heat.

"I was used to my Christmas dinner with the family, not spending it in the street as we did yesterday," Edivges Arias, a migrant, told the Associated Press (AP). The AP reported that local police and the Mexican National Guard have been trailing the march since it left Tapachula, located in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

Wednesday's meeting between top Biden administration officials and the AMLO government represents a further escalation in the international attack on the democratic right of workers to live and work in the country of their choosing. That the Biden administration is seeking to enlist the AMLO government, as Trump did, to deny immigrants the right to asylum is a further refutation of claims made by fake socialists and phony progressives that Biden would enact more "humane" border policies compared to his fascist predecessor. In fact, the Democratic Party is more than willing to ride roughshod over immigrants' rights if it means securing Republican support for war funding abroad.

Wednesday's meeting in Mexico City comes just over a week after Trump-aligned Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed three anti-immigrant bills in front of a giant border wall, while flanked by police, military and border officials. While all three laws further militarize the border and criminalize allegedly "illegal" immigration, Senate Bill 4 (SB 4), stands out for unconstitutionally granting state police officers the ability to enforce federal immigration laws. This includes arresting suspected "illegal aliens" in public places such as sidewalks or even college campuses.

In response to the Texas anti-immigrant laws, several civil rights groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, have filed lawsuits seeking to get them overturned.

Even though SB 4 is not slated to take effect until next week, US citizens and immigrants alike have already been harassed and intimidated by armed Texas Department of Public Safety officers operating under Abbott's anti-immigrant Operation Lone Star. Texas Republicans have earmarked \$11 billion for the reactionary campaign, which began in 2021.

Last week, *El Paso Matters* reported that a family returning in October from visiting relatives in Ciudad Juárez were forced off the road and nearly shot by Texas agents in unmarked vehicles in an alleged case of "mistaken identity." The agents were operating as part of Lone Star.

Gerardo Ayala, 37, told *El Paso Matters* that as he was driving back to his El Paso home with his wife, mother-in-law and 13-year-old daughter, multiple unmarked vehicles surrounded his car and forced him off the road. Heavily armed officers then pointed semi-automatic rifles at him and his family and demanded that they exit the vehicle.

After the agents discovered the Ayalas were US citizens, they admitted they had made a mistake, but, according to Ayala, "nobody there actually came up and apologized." Ayala's mother-in-law has accrued about \$3,000 in medical bills since the incident, for which police have refused to compensate her. The same is true for Ayala's car, which suffered minor damage to the front and rear as a result of the police action. There is no question that should SB 4 go into effect, incidents like that inflicted on the Ayala family will only increase.

The continued militarization of the US-Mexico border under the Biden administration has led to immense human suffering and death. In October, an *El Paso Times/USA Today* investigation revealed that 148 migrant deaths occurred in the El Paso Sector in Fiscal Year 2023, the most since record keeping began. The El Paso Sector runs along the Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Mexican borders.

The number of deaths recorded last year is several times more than any other year going back to 1998, with as few as one death being recorded in the sector and no more than 40 deaths each year.

Even this tragic and entirely preventable figure is a likely a vast undercount. In a December 15 article on immigrant deaths, reporters from *El Paso Matters* wrote that the El Paso Police Department and El Paso County Medical Examiner "don't track migrant deaths and were unwilling to compile the data when asked."

An open source immigrant death tracker, the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants, has recorded 189 suspected cases of "migrant mortality" this year alone in southern Arizona.

"We need to start by recognizing that migrants are dying because of US policy and US strategy," Fernando Garcia, executive director of the El Paso-based Border Network for Human Rights, told *El Paso Matters*. "It's what I call 'death by policy.'"

This "death by policy" is bipartisan. On December 15, Arizona Democratic Governor Katie Hobbs signed an executive order

deploying an unidentified number of National Guard troops to the Arizona-Mexico border. In the order, Hobbs revealed that "approximately 2,500 National Guard" troops are "currently on federal active duty orders on the southern border."

In justifying the deployment, Hobbs cited the "absence of action by the federal government," which she claimed has led to an "unmitigated humanitarian crisis ... and has put Arizona's safety and commerce at risk."

New York Representative and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who derided socialist critiques of Biden's inhumane immigration policies as "privileged" in 2021, has yet to issue a single tweet or press release stating her opposition to SB4 or the Democratic Party and Biden administration's continued militarization of the US-Mexico border.

Ocasio-Cortez's silence underscores that the Democratic Party is unwilling and incapable of defending the democratic rights of the working class in the United States, or anywhere else. It is also further evidence, if more was needed, that the DSA and its unofficial press organ, *Jacobin*, which has yet to publish a single article on SB 4 nearly two weeks after Abbott signed it, are nationalist, pro-capitalist organizations that have nothing to do with socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, defends the right of workers to live and work in the country of their choosing and demands safe passage and legal entry for all participants in the "Exodus of Poverty" caravan.

The SEP fights for the abolition of the militarized border apparatus in every country. All the funding slated for the incarceration and detention of immigrants needs to be reallocated towards the provision of jobs, homes, healthcare and educational opportunities for all, regardless of their immigration status.



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