

Mexican president denounces election meddling after US officials claim he took drug cartel money

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Three separate articles released simultaneously on Tuesday report claims that the 2006 campaign of Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, received millions of dollars from the Sinaloa Cartel.

López Obrador, who lost the 2006 and 2012 elections likely due to fraud before being elected in 2018, denied the allegations on Wednesday. Identifying the reports as a coordinated effort to “slander” him and meddle in the June 2 general elections, he said: “I don’t denounce the journalists; I don’t denounce the outlets. I denounce the United States Government for allowing these immoral practices.”

The articles by investigative journalists Tim Golden for *ProPublica*, Anabel Hernández for the German DW, and Steven Dudley for *InsightCrime* differ only in the details.

As sources, Golden and Dudley cite unnamed US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Mexican government officials, while Hernández says she spoke to “a member of AMLO’s team and one of the Sinaloa Cartel.” Hernández, in particular, has a long record of exposures on this issue based on inside sources that have been later confirmed, especially regarding the case of former security chief Genaro García Luna, who was found guilty in New York last February of taking millions from the Sinaloa Cartel.

The charges and evidence cited, although not shown, are credible given the numerous times López Obrador and members of his party have openly indicated their ties to the Sinaloa Cartel. For instance, last November, AMLO inexplicably visited the tiny town of Badiraguato, the birthplace of drug lords “Chapo” Guzmán and Caro Quintero, as well as of the Sinaloa Cartel, for the sixth time. He had hugged in public and acknowledged being in communication with the recently deceased mother of Guzmán.

But given their timing and sources, the reports are undoubtedly part of an effort by the US state to shift Mexican politics further to the right. They play against AMLO’s handpicked candidate for the presidency, Claudia

Sheinbaum, and pressure the Mexican government as a whole to toe the line of US imperialism even more obediently.

Golden, whose article can be read as testimony by DEA officials, directly denounces the restrictions placed by AMLO on the operations of US law enforcement within Mexico and also criticizes Biden’s supposed indulgence toward AMLO.

The articles were also published a day after López Obrador denounced as “demagogic” and unacceptable the threat by Joe Biden to “shut down” the US-Mexico border in exchange for securing funding for the war against Russia in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza from the Republicans in Congress. Donald Trump, for his part, has asked for “battle plans” to invade Mexico and fight the cartels if reelected as president.

The reports are based on an investigation carried out in 2010 and 2011 by the US District Court for the Southern District of New York and the DEA.

Roberto López Nájera, the lawyer of US-born trafficker Edgar Valdéz Villarreal, alias “La Barbie,” became a DEA asset in 2008, allegedly as revenge for the disappearance of his brother. Two years later, Nájera told agents that he had participated in a meeting in January 2006 with two businessmen in Durango, northern Mexico, who requested campaign money for AMLO’s presidential bid, at the time as the candidate of the Party for Democratic Revolution (PRD). The businessmen said AMLO knew about the meeting and approved.

Nájera was then introduced to Mauricio Soto Caballero, another businessman who was working with Nicolás Mollinedo, AMLO’s driver and campaign logistics chief. In three deliveries, “La Barbie,” who at the time operated under the Sinaloa Cartel, gave the campaign \$2 million, on top of hefty donations for rallies in Durango, presumably through Soto Caballero and Mollinedo.

While Golden indicates that it is unclear whether AMLO

knew about the donations, Hernández claims that the day of the final campaign rally in 2006, “according to the U.S. government,” AMLO spoke to “La Barbie” on the phone and thanked him for the money.

Soto would later be tricked by the DEA into becoming an informant and presumably recorded Mollinedo confessing to the donations. The DEA was later going to use Soto in a larger undercover operation to prove the complicity of AMLO’s campaign but the Justice Department shut down the investigation claiming there was not enough evidence to justify it. At the time, the Obama administration was facing the fallout from the “Fast and Furious” undercover operation by DEA, which handed a huge arsenal of weapons to the cartels.

In May 2012, after his extradition to the US, the lieutenant to “La Barbie” confirmed to agents the donations to AMLO’s campaign.

Mollinedo denies the donations and left AMLO’s team after the 2012 presidential campaign. Soto Caballero was given a probation period and freed by the US District Court in Southern New York. He then worked for AMLO’s campaign in 2012 and is currently a member of Congress representing AMLO’s Morena party.

Anabel Hernández points out that the case could have been reopened in 2020, when former Mexican Secretary of Defense Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos was arrested in the United States and indicted on drug and money laundering charges based on extensive evidence of his helping a faction of the Beltrán Leyva cartel. However, López Obrador convinced then President Donald Trump to return Cienfuegos and close the case, blocking the possibility for an investigation.

The ties between the cartels and the AMLO administration demonstrate that the ongoing military buildup is aimed not against drug traffickers, but at strengthening the repressive state apparatus against the working class.

After promises to send the troops to their barracks helped AMLO get elected in 2018, his administration enshrined their deployment domestically in the Constitution, claiming it was necessary to “fight violence.” During his first four and a half years in power, however, there were more than 160,000 homicides, more than any six-year term since records began in 1994—mostly tied to conflicts between criminal bands.

More broadly, all federal governments in Mexico since the 1990s have been exposed as being in bed with the cartels, which operate as multinational business conglomerates led by billionaires. These relations have become just another instrument of bourgeois rule. The large cartels and gangs have adapted to the traditional means of buying politicians and controlling politics through campaign finance, bribes

and business opportunities. The entire ruling class, moreover, rules ultimately through violence and preys on the desperate levels of poverty, labor informality and unemployment that are fundamental for maintaining cheap labor and high profit rates.

Even to claim that cartels resort to assassination as a means of compulsion more often than other segments of the ruling class can be put into question. For over a century, US imperialism has employed—through surrogates trained and funded by the US or directly by the Pentagon—the most brutal methods of semi-colonial control, including invasions, bloody coups, mass killings and torture across the Americas.

Today, through its unanimous support for the US-Zionist genocide in Gaza, the entire American ruling class has embraced a level of barbarism that overshadows that of any cartel.

Despite the massive levels of deaths from criminal bands in Mexico, it has been AMLO’s policies integrating the Mexican economy and society with US-NATO plans for world war with nuclear-armed Russia and China that represent the greatest threat to the safety of workers in Mexico.

Moreover, as a result of the criminal policy of putting profits over lives and reopening key suppliers to US corporations, AMLO oversaw over 600,000 excess deaths during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Security for workers and their families rests not upon building up the military and strengthening ties with US imperialism. Rather, it can be achieved only through an international political struggle against all bourgeois parties and imperialism aimed at dismantling the entire political apparatus of exploitation and repression of the capitalist class.



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