

Mexican government bows to Washington despite resisting US prosecution of politicians for cartel links

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US indictments of and attempts to extradite 10 high-level Mexican political figures for allegedly protecting, if not consorting with, narcotics cartels continue to shake Mexico's political establishment.

Those figures include Rubén Rocha Moya, the governor of Mexico's central Pacific Sinaloa State and its sole senator; Enrique Inzunza Cázares; Gen. Gerardo Mérida Sánchez, Sinaloa's security minister under Rocha from September 2023 to December 2024; and Enrique Díaz Vega, its administrator and finance minister under Rocha from November 2021 to September 2024.

Díaz Vega turned himself in to US authorities in Arizona, and Mérida Sánchez in New York. Inzunza Cázares told the newspaper *La Jornada* that there was "no chance" he would turn himself in to US authorities.

Mérida Sánchez, a former commander in the Mexican Army, is accused by the US of conspiracy to import narcotics, possession of machine guns and destructive devices, and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices. His indictment alleges he "received bribes from the Chapitos" and, in exchange, provided them with, among other things, "advance notice of law enforcement raids on drug labs, so that the Chapitos could move their drugs and lab equipment before the raids." The charges against the others are along the same lines.

All four Sinaloa politicians, as well as the mayor of Sinaloa's capital city Culiacán, Juan de Dios Gámez, undoubtedly have been fingered by the "Chapitos," the sons of Sinaloa Cartel capo Chapo Guzman jailed in New York City. Like the Chapitos, Mérida Sánchez and Díaz Vega likely likewise figured that turning state's evidence is their best bet.

On May 12, Terrance Cole, the head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, warned that the accusation against Rocha is "just the beginning of what is to come in Mexico," alluding to other officials and politicians allegedly linked to drug trafficking.

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum has said on repeated occasions that her government will not shield anyone who has committed a crime. Rocha, who is now "on leave," and Inzunza, both members of Sheinbaum's ruling Morena Party, continue to deny the accusations against them.

Sheinbaum and her government say that the evidence provided to them is thus far "insufficient" to turn those accused over to Washington. However, Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit has "temporarily frozen" their bank accounts, along with the accounts of their children and several senior members of the Rocha administration.

On Thursday, May 21, Sheinbaum met with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin at the Mexican presidential palace. After the meeting, Sheinbaum shared a brief post on X saying that both nations "will maintain cooperation based on mutual respect." She claimed to "rule out" discussing the cases of the 10 indicted officials.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the Mexican Foreign Ministry

emphasized "respect for sovereignty" and "coordination without subordination" as some of the key principles agreed upon for cooperation. It also emphasized the importance of cooperation on migration. It cited the successful reduction of Mexican citizens crossing the border, which has reached a 50-year low.

Undoubtedly there are calculations by Sheinbaum that some cooperation with the US could prevent indicting bigger fish in the Mexican government. The biggest fish would be Morena's founder and "populist" president before Sheinbaum, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO.

AMLO has not been accused in the past of outright bribes from narcos but rather of receiving campaign contributions from them in return for looking the other way from cartel activity.

One early accusation involves Los Ardillos, a group that through terror—homicides, dismembered bodies, disappearances, armed clashes, and the forced displacement of entire communities—has exercised control over the central region of the southern State of Guerrero. This has extended to control over the local economy, political events and, above all, the votes.

Several journalists and corporate media outlets made claims in December 2017 that AMLO, then a presidential pre-candidate, attended an event with the leader of Los Ardillos, Celso Ortega Jiménez, to secure the votes from the "Montaña Baja" (lower mountain region of Guerrero) for the presidency, and floated an "amnesty" program. The event was allegedly videotaped, but no video has actually surfaced.

Similarly, a midlevel AMLO campaign operative and cartel figures claimed that the Beltran Leyva Organization, then allied with the Sinaloa cartel, funneled \$2-4 million to AMLO's inner circle in 2006 during his first presidential bid, in exchange for protection and a role in selecting the country's Attorney General if AMLO won. AMLO dismissed the reports as "slander" and a politically motivated smear campaign orchestrated by the US and Mexican political rivals. A detailed investigation by ProPublica concluded that AMLO himself did not know of the effort, and the DEA under Biden did not pursue it.

After his election López Obrador pursued a "hugs, not bullets" campaign, nominally concentrating on social programs to attack the sources of criminality, rather than confrontation with the cartels. During his presidency in a visit to Sinaloa's capital city Culiacán, AMLO hugged Chapo Guzman's mother in public.

AMLO, however, combined this rhetoric with a massive buildup of the military and a perpetuation of its domestic deployment. The lethality of these operations also far exceeded that of his predecessors and points to widespread extrajudicial executions, with five suspects and civilians killed for every one injured. Now, responding to US pressure, Sheinbaum boasts of even greater militarism.

The May 23 edition of *Proceso* published an interview with Guillermo Benítez Torres, the former mayor of Mazatlán (Sinaloa's second largest city and main tourist destination) and one of the founders of Morena in the state. He said he had traveled with López Obrador to promote the latter's 4T transformation program for Mexico, attributing the corruption with the cartel to Rocha Moya and derivatively, to AMLO's support for him.

Benítez Torres says:

"It could be that this event in Sinaloa is what could catapult even (Andrés Manuel) López Obrador to be taken to the United States; it could be, I don't affirm it, but I do see it as a possibility." He added, "look, I always wondered, what does Rocha Moya have that would make the federal government pardon him? What do they have, phone calls, evidence, testimonies? What do they have to bring the federal government to its knees, so they continue to support him? And I still maintain that. Could this corruption reach the current federal government? Not only López Obrador but also Claudia Sheinbaum."

These scandals threaten the Sheinbaum administration with a major political crisis. As inflation surges and industry sees mass layoffs, the claims of entrenched corruption have contributed to a decrease in Sheinbaum's approval rating from 75 percent to 68 percent since March, according to a poll conducted for *El País* and W Radio.

CIA covert operation exposed by crash in Chihuahua

US-Mexico bilateral relations were shaken after a report of the deaths of two CIA agents on April 19, along with two officials from the Chihuahua Attorney General's Office, when the vehicle they were traveling in plunged into a ravine in the mountains between Chihuahua, which borders Texas, and Sinaloa, where a clandestine synthetic drug lab had been dismantled. On April 22 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the raid involved a total of four CIA agents and marked at least the third time CIA operatives have joined Chihuahua state officials on operations this year.

The incident prompted a formal protest from the Sheinbaum administration to Washington that it had not been informed of the presence of the CIA agents in Mexico or of their activities in the opposition-governed state of Chihuahua. What seemed most to irk Sheinbaum was that the opposition right-wing National Action Party (PAN) governor of Chihuahua, Maria Eugenia Campos, was in on the operation, while Sheinbaum was not. Sheinbaum blamed the latter for the unauthorized involvement. But she emphasized that she wants to "avoid conflict" with the Trump administration over the incident.

CNN reported on May 13 that the CIA facilitated a targeted assassination of Francisco Beltrán, known as "El Payín," a member of the Sinaloa cartel, on a highway on the outskirts of the State of Mexico's Felipe Ángeles International Airport, using plastic explosives. This fueled a firestorm in Mexico. According to CNN, the Beltrán operation was part of an expanded, and previously unreported, CIA campaign inside Mexico—spearheaded by the agency's elite and secretive Ground Branch—to dismantle the entrenched cartel networks.

Absent the express authorization of the Mexican federal government, the direct participation of foreign agents in security operations is prohibited by Mexico's Constitution.

The *New York Times* later reported that Mexican forces carried out the

attack and the CIA only provided "planning and support." Sheinbaum called the CNN report a "lie." Asked about the *New York Times* report during a morning press briefing, she called it "a fiction the size of the universe."

Despite obvious knowledge, Ronald Johnson, Washington's ambassador in Mexico City and a former CIA officer, declined comment on the Chihuahua and airport bomb operations. But he was undoubtedly briefed on them.

Liz Lyons, a spokesperson for the CIA, also lambasted the CNN report on the bombing, posting on X that "this is false and salacious reporting that serves as nothing more than a PR campaign for the cartels and puts American lives at risk."

This all amounts to semantics. That is, whether or not CIA agents pulled the trigger, they were in on it.

Two weeks ago, Trump himself threatened to launch ground offensives against the cartels in Mexico, after praising attacks targeting vessels that Washington accuses—without evidence—are involved in drug trafficking. "If they're not going to do the job, we will," the president said. During a hearing in the House of Representatives, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth called on Mexico to take action against the cartels so that his country "doesn't have to do it."

CNN reports that the CIA's "deadly attacks" in Mexico have been occurring for at least a year, mostly targeting mid-level cartel members, such as El Payín. The network cites unnamed Mexican officials who claim that "the lethality of their operations has been seriously ramped up."

Mexico's Secretary of Security Omar García Harfuch has also rejected the CNN claims, asserting that cooperation with the United States takes the form of intelligence sharing and institutional coordination. He stated on X: "The Mexican government categorically rejects any account that seeks to normalize, justify, or suggest the existence of lethal, covert, or unilateral operations by foreign agencies on national territory." "In Mexico, operational actions are the exclusive responsibility of the competent Mexican authorities," he added.

The increasing US military involvement in Mexico has major political and historical implications. In the 1960s and 1970s, the CIA and Pentagon were deeply involved in Mexico's "dirty war" against left-wing student and guerrilla groups, much as it was in Operation Condor in South America. During the war, government forces carried out systematic torture, extrajudicial executions and an estimated 1,200 disappearances. For US imperialism those unfettered days are returning.

As to AMLO, for all the US complaints about his populist rhetoric, he did little to interfere with US economic, immigration or security policies. Taking him down, however, would deflate the populist impulses of the Mexican masses. So Morena is a target, no doubt.

The US focus on battling drug trafficking is a front for its larger and more fundamental goal—control of Latin America and its immense mineral resources, in an increasingly failing attempt to contain China.

The US has looked the other way as to cocaine trafficking in exchange for arming the Contras against the Nicaraguan revolution.

In December, Trump exercised his executive clemency to pardon Juan Orlando Hernández, the former president of Honduras, who was serving a 45-year sentence in a US federal penitentiary for drug trafficking and weapons offenses, because he was viewed as useful.

The aim of the Trump administration is to operate freely in a neocolonial Mexico, as shown by the treatment of Venezuela and the Honduras-gate conspiracy against any government resisting that level of subservience.

For all her rhetoric, the Sheinbaum administration is substantially permitting pursuit of that US goal.

The Mexican government's continuing capitulation on migrants, extraditions, Cuban oil, operations by US troops and spies and its approval of a US intelligence complex on the border in Ciudad Juárez has only

emboldened the Trump administration. This amounts in substance to aligning politically with US imperialism.

A report from Drop Site News states that representatives from the FBI, DEA, ATF, Homeland Security Investigations and Customs and Border Protection are expected to work from the 18th floor of Chihuahua's new Centinela Tower in Juárez, a sprawling surveillance and intelligence hub operated by the state's Secretariat of Public Security. According to four senior Chihuahua security officials, the agencies will focus on intelligence-sharing tied to drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, organized crime and migration enforcement.

Chihuahua officials confirmed to Drop Site that the collaboration surrounding the Centinela Tower has federal approval and builds on years of cross-border intelligence coordination. The surveillance system already integrates drones, license plate readers, facial recognition technology and thousands of cameras across the state.

Security analyst Patricia Escamilla-Hamm told the outlet that foreign personnel could legally conduct "intelligence, information and planning work" inside the tower. The flimsy justification is distinguishing that from direct participation in raids or arrests.



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