

US strikes on border and resignation of Sinaloa governor expose logic of Sheinbaum's endless concessions to Trump

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On Thursday, US Northern Command announced the use of an Army Multipurpose High Energy Laser to shoot down three drones in the Rio Grande Valley along the US-Mexico border late Tuesday and early Wednesday. If confirmed, it would be the first time a high-energy laser has been fired at aircraft the US military attributes to Mexican drug cartels.

The military would not say precisely where the drones were downed, which cartels they supposedly belonged to, or whether the shots were fired over US or Mexican airspace.

None of this can be taken at face value. Six months ago, in February, the same class of laser system shot down a US Customs and Border Protection drone by mistake, forcing a shutdown of airspace around El Paso International Airport.

The claims accompanying these strikes have the same character as the Trump administration's assertions about the fishing vessels it has been bombing in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific, where no evidence of drug trafficking has ever been produced. What is being established is not a counter-narcotics capability but a precedent: that US forces may fire weapons across the border.

The attack on Mexico came in the same week that Rubén Rocha Moya, the Morena party governor of Sinaloa, was driven from office as the result of a campaign launched by Washington.

On April 29, the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York indicted Rocha along with nine other Sinaloa officials and former officials, among them Senator Enrique Inzunza Cázarez, for conspiring with "Los Chapitos" to move narcotics into the United States in exchange for electoral support, bribes and control over the state's security institutions. Two days later, Rocha requested a leave of absence, declared himself the victim of foreign interference, and placed himself at the disposal of Mexican justice.

With President Claudia Sheinbaum in the lead, the ruling party Morena closed ranks. Governors and the national leadership published statements of support. In the Chamber of Deputies he had been received in October 2024 with shouts of "You are not alone!" He was presented as a symbol of national sovereignty under attack.

Then, on August 21, Rocha announced his return by tweet—without informing the presidency. His restoration lasted 33 hours. The Interior Ministry stated that the decision was "exclusively personal." Morena's national leadership, the Senate and Chamber caucuses, the Green Party and the PT in the ruling coalition all publicly disavowed him.

Sheinbaum, who in May had insisted that without evidence there was no reason to proceed "even if the United States asks for it," now called the return "imprudent, to say the least," in a signal for Rocha to step down. The 23 governors of the ruling bloc issued a joint statement declaring their "absolute and categorical" backing for the president.

On August 22, isolated, Rocha requested an indefinite leave, and Graciela Domínguez Nava was installed as interim governor.

What changed between May and August was not the evidence. What changed was the calculation of what the case would cost Morena.

The evidence against Rocha has been available for two years. The official account of the events of July 25, 2024 has been proven a complete fabrication. That evening, Sinaloa Autonomous University President Héctor Melesio Cuén Ojeda was found dead, and the official version of a shooting at a gas station, complete with video released by the Sinaloa state prosecutor's office, has been proven to be false.

Sinaloa Cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada's had claimed in a letter of August 2024 that that same day he had gone to the Huertos del Pedregal ranch to mediate a long-running conflict between Governor Rocha and Cuén over control of the Autonomous University of Sinaloa and other matters, and that Cuén was killed, when a Chapito betrayed Zambada, seized him and flew him to the United States. Rocha denied attending, or even knowing of the meeting, and said he was in the US that day.

The state prosecutor who circulated the gas station story, Sara Bruna Quiñónez, resigned on August 15, 2024, one day after the FGR made the inconsistencies public. She has never been charged. Neither has José Rosario Heras López, "Comandante Chayo," a state judicial police commander said to have entered the ranch. The US indictment alleges that former deputy state attorney general Dámaso Castro Saavedra collected some \$11,000 a month to shield the Sinaloa Cartel from arrests. And Fausto Corrales Rodríguez, a witness to both the murder and the abduction, was arrested by the Mexican authorities on August 19, 2026—nine days after Cuén's brother testified that Corrales "had already given a statement to the United States."

Sheinbaum has demanded clarification of whether the FBI participated in Zambada's abduction, which would violate Mexican law and international treaties. But Mexican authorities detained the pilot who flew that aircraft and expelled him to the United States themselves, as part of the batches of prisoners Mexico has shipped north to satisfy Trump. In April, Sheinbaum's cabinet discovered and protested CIA counternarcotics operations inside Chihuahua. The Mexican state knows perfectly well that US agencies operate on its territory at will.

What Washington's campaign is really for

The indictments are not a campaign against drug trafficking. This week the head of the DEA, Terry Cole, speaking in Buenos Aires alongside

Mexican Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch, said the Sinaloa indictment documented “government corruption in Mexico, with high-level officials working directly with the cartels.” These accusations go hand-in-hand with Trump’s statements that cartels are “running Mexico” and that after striking boats the US would “start now hitting land.”

US forces already seized Nicolás Maduro from Caracas in a large-scale military operation and flew him to New York to face narco-terrorism charges, while Trump announced that Washington would “run” Venezuela and take control of its oil. Drug indictments against foreign officials are the pseudo-legal scaffolding for such neo-colonial interventions.

Corruption is the pretext, not the motive. Trump has pardoned the Honduran ex-president Juan Orlando Hernández, convicted in the same New York courthouse of importing cocaine. His closest allies in the region—Noboa in Ecuador, whose family’s banana shipping operations have been repeatedly used to move cocaine; and officials of the Milei government in Argentina—have been implicated in trafficking without consequence. For decades Washington’s closest partner in Mexico was Genaro García Luna, convicted in Brooklyn in 2023 of taking millions from the Sinaloa Cartel while running Mexico’s security apparatus with US backing.

Sheinbaum invokes García Luna’s conviction to accuse the opposition of hypocrisy. But the continuity runs directly through her own government. AMLO secured the release of former defense secretary Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos from US custody on cartel charges. García Harfuch, the current security secretary, was the protégé of García Luna’s right hand, Luis Cárdenas Palomino; his father ran the DFS secret police that spawned the first generation of cartel leaders; his grandfather helped orchestrate the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre with the CIA.

The logic of Sheinbaum’s concessions

The Mexican ruling class, which Morena represents, has one core strategy, deepening its role as a junior partnership in the North American platform of US imperialism.

Over the weekend, Trump imposed 50 percent tariffs on \$20 billion of Canadian goods; on Thursday he signed an executive order renaming Lake Ontario “Lake America,” following the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico last year.

In the context of this major trade war, Mexican economy secretary Marcelo Ebrard stated the aim: to hold “the best position relative to all other countries.” Some 85 percent of Mexican exports still enter the US tariff-free. Meanwhile Sheinbaum made a point this week that she has held 21 calls with Trump—roughly one a month since taking office. The strategy is to trade everything else for market access.

Each concession invites the next. On Friday, The Trump administration objected to Mexico’s modernized trade agreement with the European Union, because it protects European food names—Parmigiano, feta, manchego—that US dairy producers call generic.

Mexico is being told it may not conclude independent agreements with third parties. As *El Financiero* warned this week that belonging to the US-Mexico-Canada trade bloc no longer guarantees preferential access.

Austria, 1934–1938

The Austrian bourgeoisie also believed it could manage Hitler by

accommodation. On July 11, 1936, Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg signed an agreement in which Nazi Germany formally recognized “the full sovereignty of the Federal State of Austria” and both governments pledged non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. The price was that Austria declared itself “a German state,” amnestied the Nazis imprisoned for the July 1934 putsch and admitted the Nazi intermediaries Edmund Glaise-Horstenau and Guido Schmidt into the cabinet. Sovereignty was to be bought back in installments.

Schuschnigg’s own explanation of what came next is the most instructive. Summoned by Hitler to Berchtesgaden in February 1938, he hurried to complete a further package of internal concessions beforehand, so that he could show Hitler, in his words, that Austria had already made the maximum concessions “of our own accord” and could pay no higher price.

Hitler’s method—at Berchtesgaden as at Munich seven months later—was to take what had already been conceded as the new starting point and demand far more. On February 12, Schuschnigg surrendered the Interior Ministry, and with it control of the police, to the Austrian Nazi Arthur Seyss-Inquart, and lifted the ban on the Nazi party.

The Austrian establishment pronounced itself satisfied. Vienna’s minister in Rome assured the US ambassador that Berchtesgaden had been “beneficial,” a reasonable compromise, and that Seyss-Inquart was loyal to Austria and no real Nazi.

Berlin, meanwhile, had informed Seyss-Inquart that Gestapo agents were to have freedom of action inside Austria. The agreement guaranteed in writing 18 months earlier had already ceased to exist.

On March 11, Schuschnigg was ordered to resign. The US chargé’s cable to Washington notes how in his last radio broadcast, Schuschnigg began to say the troops were ordered to offer “no serious” resistance to Germany and corrected himself mid-sentence to “no resistance.” The Wehrmacht entered the next morning unopposed.

The lesson is not that Mexico in 2026 is Austria in 1938, or that Sheinbaum is a far-right politician like Schuschnigg. It is that a national bourgeoisie, whose interest is to maximize its gains from the exploitation of the working class as it attempts to purchase its position through concessions to a far stronger imperialist neighbor will find that each concession is banked and the next demanded—and that it will not be spared in the end.

The Mexican working class has no interest in defending corrupt officials, and none whatever in the slogan of “sovereignty” as the right of the Mexican bourgeoisie to exploit it within its national borders. The consequences of this system fall on workers: Sinaloa lost 32,000 formal jobs between January and July, thousands of businesses closed and the state economy contracted 4.5 percent in the first quarter. The cartels themselves are a product of capitalism—of mass poverty, of the state apparatus that incubated them and of a market in the United States created by social despair.

The answer is not Morena’s nationalism or picking sides in a trade war, but socialist internationalism: the unification of workers across North America in a common struggle to reorganize economic life to meet social needs, not private profit.



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