Mexico-US capture of drug lord gives lie to Sheinbaum's "cooperation without subordination"

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On Friday, November 20, Mexican special forces captured Fausto Isidro Meza Flores, "El Chapo Isidro," head of the Beltrán Leyva organization and one of the FBI's 10 most wanted fugitives, in Guasave, Sinaloa .

The Army's and National Guard's special forces stormed the house where he was staying using gunfire and explosives, then flew him, his second-in-command "Serafín" and a financial operator to Mexico City aboard an Air Force plane. A US extradition order awaits him.

Helicopter gunships joined the assault and participated in subsequent fighting amid widespread narco-blockades and burning of vehicles in Ahome, Guamúchil, Guasave and Navolato. A baseball game was suspended as explosions echoed near the stadium.

Four soldiers and 16 alleged gang members were killed, according to the defense minister.

Washington claimed the operation as its own. The US Justice Department called it "a spectacular military operation." Attorney General Todd Blanche credited an interagency effort including the Homeland Security Task Force, whose "extraordinary strength and broad reach" made the capture possible, according to Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin.

The same Friday, Trump said he was working with Sheinbaum on trade and on the cartels because "the cartels are controlling Mexico." The raid came two days after the two met in Shenzhen, China.

The capture gives the lie to the formula of "cooperation without subordination" that Sheinbaum has repeated since taking office. US drones flew over Sinaloa, a Northern Command task force fed intelligence from Arizona, and Navy SEALs are training Mexican special forces on Mexican bases.

These are the same agencies, the Pentagon, CIA, DEA, FBI and Homeland Security, that are building the "Shield of the Americas" with Milei, Kast, Bukele and Noboa. This fascistic coalition is modeled after the CIA-backed Operation Condor under which the military dictatorships that ruled most of Latin America during the 1970s coordinated cross border repression against leftists.

Capturing and extraditing drug lords and bribed politicians leaves untouched the conditions that produce new ones, and each operation unleashes violence on the population and justifies the military occupation of entire states, where cartels and the state both terrorize the working class. What is being built is an apparatus of repression aimed above all at the working class.

According to the *New York Times*, US drones flew reconnaissance missions over the area for weeks, at the request of the Mexican government, transmitting live video to Mexican military analysts. They identified Meza Flores by his walk, his build and his voice, and followed his movements through messages to his mother, wife and sister. A US military official told the paper that a Northern Command task force based in Arizona sent intelligence to the "joint effort."

On Monday, Sheinbaum confirmed that Mexico requests and authorizes US drones because it lacks certain capabilities, while insisting that planning and execution were Mexican. Defense Secretary Gen. Ricardo Trevilla Trejo walked reporters through the paperwork: a request "about a week ago" through the Security Cabinet for "unmanned aircraft," presented to the National Security Council.

The explanation set off a wave of denunciations on social media of a violation of sovereignty the government finds perfectly acceptable. One widely shared post asked under what legal provision a Security Cabinet committee had acted, what it authorized and how far US participation went.

The answer lies in the government's own record. On November 10, the *Times* reported that CIA officers in Chihuahua trained state police, joined raids armed and in tactical gear, provided rifle cover outside a cartel safe house and sat in on an interrogation, until two of the agents died in April when their truck plunged off a cliff. Sheinbaum, who according to the *Times* had privately deepened cooperation with the CIA, declared her outrage, and former state attorney general César Jáuregui now faces treason charges. His crime, it turns out, was doing without federal paperwork what the federal government now authorizes through a committee.

Mexico was left out of the "Shield of the Americas," which

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Trump launched at his Doral resort in Miami on March 7 alongside far-right heads-of-state a day after War Secretary Pete Hegseth convened military chiefs from 17 countries to form an anti-cartel coalition. “The region is ready to deploy its hard power to defeat these threats to our security and civilization,” Trump wrote. In May, Hegseth told Trump’s cabinet, “We are going to war against the cartels through the Anti-Cartel Coalition of the Americas.”

Mexico is effectively being brought into this alliance through the back door. On October 28 the Senate authorized 28 members of SEAL Team 4 to enter the country until April 2027 with weapons and ammunition to train Mexican Navy special operations and intelligence personnel in close-quarters combat inside buildings, urban patrolling and breaching. US drones and Northern Command now take part seamlessly in operations inside the country.

Under the banner of fighting “narco-terrorism,” Washington is assembling a hemispheric apparatus of repression modeled on Bukele’s El Salvador, where a permanent state of exception has jailed tens of thousands without trial, and Milei’s Argentina, where protest is criminalized. Its target is the working class, as mass struggles erupt across the region against austerity and dictatorial rule.

Mexico’s armed forces need no lessons in repression. The background of Mexican security chief Omar García Harfuch, whom *El País* credits with bringing the government closer to the DEA and FBI, sums up that history. His grandfather, Gen. Marcelino García Barragán, was secretary of defense during the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre of student protesters. His father, Javier García Paniagua, headed the Federal Security Directorate, the political police of the “dirty war.” In 2014, Harfuch was a Federal Police commander in Guerrero, and in 2022 the Attorney General’s Office told a court he took part in an October 2014 meeting where officials cooked up the “historical truth” covering up the disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students. He denies it.

The strategy of decapitating cartels has a consistent record of failure. The killing of Nemesio Oseguera, “El Mencho,” leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, on February 22 set off 252 blockades in 20 states. Twenty-five National Guard members died in Jalisco alone, and nine states suspended classes. In Sinaloa, the war between “Los Chapitos” and “Los Mayos” has raged since September 2024. Journalist Anabel Hernández reports that Meza Flores exploited it to expand his territory before he was located at a family gathering. His capture merely opens a new war of succession.

The conditions that breed such organizations remain in place: the vast drug market across the border, the poverty and unemployment that supply young recruits in Mexican cities, and the businessmen and politicians who launder drug proceeds and protect the trade.

The government’s answer is to “armor-plate” Sinaloa. Trevilla reported 22,000 troops in the state and a strategic reserve, “Fuerza de Tarea México,” ready to send more on the president’s order. García Harfuch announced 150 more vehicles on top of the 100 patrol cars delivered in recent months.

Several commentators have claimed that Sheinbaum is breaking with López Obrador’s policy of distrust toward Washington. In fact, López Obrador often kowtowed to his “friend” Trump. He created the National Guard, placed policing under military command, sent troops to stop immigrants from reaching the US border under Trump’s tariff threats and, before leaving office, handed the Guard to the Defense Ministry.

Sheinbaum has placed this apparatus at the Pentagon’s disposal, as the economy is bound ever tighter to the US: GDP grew 3.3 percent in the third quarter on exports of electronics for the American AI boom.

Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution explains why Sheinbaum’s “cooperation not subordination” is a fraud. In countries of belated capitalist development, the national bourgeoisie is tied to imperialism by its markets, its credit and its armed forces, and it fears its own working class more than it fears foreign domination. It cannot win genuine independence.

Trotsky, who lived his final years in Mexico, analyzed the Lázaro Cárdenas government, whose lineage Morena claims, as a regime balancing between foreign capital and the workers. Under the pressure of imperialist war and a globally integrated economy, Sheinbaum’s has transformed this balancing act into integration with imperialism, with talk of “sovereignty” as its cover. National independence and democratic rights can be won only by the struggle of the working class for power, organized independently of Morena, all bourgeois parties, and the union bureaucracy and united with workers in the United States, against the profit system that produces both the drug trade and the war machine built under its pretext.



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