

Trump threatens “terrorist” designation for drug cartels, paving way for US military operations against Mexico

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Potential plans for US military operations in Mexico have surfaced in the media after incoming US President Donald Trump vowed to designate Mexican drug cartels as “foreign terrorist organizations.”

At a far-right AmericaFest rally on December 22, Trump promised to make the designation “immediately” as part of “a historic slate of executive orders” he will sign after his inauguration on January 20.

Under the Authorization for Use of Military Force of 2001 Act, this step would provide the legal framework, not only for financial and criminal penalties, but also for military operations in Mexico, as noted by *The Independent*.

Based on discussions with transition team officials, *Rolling Stone* followed up by reporting on military plans that have already been presented to Trump for consideration, which “included airstrikes on cartel infrastructure, assassinating cartel leaders, and training Mexican forces” as well as “covert operations and patrols just over the border to stem the flow of drugs across the frontier.”

The magazine asked active and retired military personnel what such an operation would look like. Several compared a potential offensive to dismantle the drug cartel leadership to US wars in the Middle East. One veteran said: “It’s Iraq all over again. You’re going to find and fix the HVT [high-value target] and then start gutting the networks. Take out the key leaders, and then what they’re going to do after that is they’re going to just run the middle management right off the battlefield.”

Trump has argued that a war must be waged to prevent cartels from controlling American cities and stopping overdose deaths. However, the transparent aims of designating cartels “terrorist organizations” by the government most implicated in war crimes and terrorism are well known to those familiar with the “war on terror.” Trump sees cartels as a new overarching pretext based on lies, like the “weapons of mass destruction,” Al Qaeda or the Taliban, to wage wars of aggression abroad and escalate

attacks on democratic rights at home.

As part of his mass deportation plans, Trump is presenting working-class migrant communities in the United States and incoming waves of migrants escaping the economic and social devastation caused by a century of imperialist oppression as demographics plagued by criminal organizations—claims completely belied by statistics.

At the same time, his administration wants to set a precedent for renewing Washington’s long and bloody record of military invasions during the 19th and 20th century, as a means of tightening its stranglehold over US imperialism’s key geostrategic underbelly and source of natural resources and cheap labor.

The underlying reasons were summed up in the *World Socialist Web Site* New Year’s statement:

Trump’s inflammatory statements about taking over the Panama Canal, buying Greenland and threatening to deploy the military to Mexico exemplify the imperialist ambitions of the incoming administration. The corollary to Trump’s “America First” nationalism is a global policy of “Fortress America,” in which control over the Western Hemisphere is seen as essential in the developing confrontation with China.

Similarly to how the corporate media covered the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the *Rolling Stone* report and others on the subject ignore these transparent aims and take for granted the objectives professed by incoming government officials. As such, the magazine cites comments criticizing a potential invasion merely in terms of being an ineffective strategy for fighting the cartels that could backfire politically for US imperialism.

Such statements express fears that the massacre of working-

class and impoverished families in Mexican towns destroyed by US bombing campaigns and raids would fuel the growing anti-imperialist and anti-war sentiment in the region and within the United States, on top of the ongoing US-Israeli genocide in Gaza.

But Trump's cabinet selections, like former Green Beret and CIA operative Ronald Johnson as ambassador to Mexico, make clear that these are not idle threats.

Several cabinet picks have endorsed the idea, including national security adviser nominee Mike Waltz, who as a member of Congress introduced legislation to authorize military force against drug cartels, calling for "treating them like ISIS."

The potential devastation of a US-led onslaught, whether it has the blessing of the Mexican authorities or not, cannot be overstated. The Mexican government, working with US arms and training under the Mérida Initiative, already launched a war in 2006 that has failed to stem cartel operations while leaving an estimated 450,000 dead and 100,000 missing and costing countless billions of dollars. Homicide levels remain near record highs.

Similarly, two decades of US-led counterinsurgency wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have destroyed entire societies resulted in up to 940,000 direct deaths and 4.7 million indirect deaths, according to the Brown University Watson Institute.

Rolling Stone also highlights the possibility of reprisals by cartels against both the 1.6 million U.S. citizens living in Mexico and targets in the United States.

Trump's planned onslaught against migrants and threats of trade and military aggression are shaking the foundations of bourgeois rule in every country in the region, making clear their inability to oppose imperialism.

The bourgeois nationalist President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has responded to Trump's military threats, as well as his threats to impose devastating trade tariffs, with the slogan "collaboration not subordination"—as absurd as it would sound if used by Poland in 1939 toward Hitler.

On December 23, referring to the same AmericaFest fascist speech, Sheinbaum played a clip of Trump where he called her "a lovely, wonderful woman, President Sheinbaum, a wonderful woman."

"I thank him for referring to me in this way," she said and stressed how Trump "asks for support on migration and other issues and then there is another part where he talks about defining the cartels as terrorism, but he never talks about an intervention in Mexico. Never."

Such efforts to minimize military threats by the incoming fascist commander-in-chief of a neighboring country with the most powerful military in history and responsible for countless war crimes and aggressions throughout the world

is nothing short of criminal. The United States took more than half of Mexico's territory during the 1846-48 war and has invaded its neighbor at least 10 times.

But not believing her own words, Sheinbaum has responded with one concession after another. Last Friday, Sheinbaum retracted previous warnings that her administration would refuse to receive non-Mexican deportees. "We'll receive them here," she said.

This about-turn follows the announcement that her administration plans to host a conference of Latin American foreign ministers to pressure other countries to accept deportees from the United States, with Mexican officials effectively acting as emissaries for Trump's State and Homeland Security Departments.

Sheinbaum has also escalated the efforts of her predecessor Andrés Manuel López Obrador to decouple the Mexican economy from China and better serve the geopolitical demands of Washington. On January 1, Mexico put into effect 19 percent tariffs on imported products bought on digital platforms from countries without commercial treaties, affecting mainly the Chinese platforms Shein and Temu. This follows a 35 percent tariff on textile products, mainly from Asia.

The bankrupt response by Sheinbaum demonstrates that opposition to Trump cannot be based on any form of bourgeois nationalism or any project of "global south unity." Like the other "pink tide" variants in Latin America—from Maduro in Venezuela, to Lula in Brazil and Petro in Colombia—the capitalist government in Mexico represents the interests of the venal capitalist clients of US imperialism who subordinate all democratic questions to attracting investments, credits and market access. Genuine opposition can only come from a working class revolutionary socialist movement, uniting workers across North, Central and South America to end imperialism and the capitalist profit system.



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