

Pentagon plans drone strikes, shifts resources “toward combating cartels” in Mexico

Andrea Lobo
9 April 2025

Six former and active US officials cited by NBC News Tuesday confirmed that the Trump administration is considering drone strikes in Mexico, ostensibly against the drug cartels.

According to the report, “unilateral covert action, without Mexico’s consent, has not been ruled out and could be an option of last resort.”

While NBC News reported that discussions are still in the early stages, the officials cited indicate that a list of potential targets is being developed. Moreover, the government “has already been shifting military, intelligence and law enforcement resources toward combating the cartels.”

Threats of drone strikes are part of an increasingly aggressive exercise of gunboat diplomacy to subordinate Mexico and the wider region to colonial status.

Several leading Republicans have called for military action since the last presidential campaign, while Trump reportedly brought up the idea of bombing Mexico as early as 2020, according to his then-defense secretary, Mark Esper.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has made repeated threats of military operations and deployed a Stryker Brigade combat team to the border.

Trump’s appointed ambassador to Mexico, Ronald Johnson, testified during his Senate confirmation hearing that he did not rule out military strikes without Mexico’s knowledge. A former Green Beret and top CIA official, Johnson led counterinsurgency operations during the 1980s in collaboration with the fascist military dictatorship in El Salvador, which oversaw countless massacres of civilians.

At the time of the hearing, CNN and the *New York Times* exposed previously unreported CIA surveillance flights with MQ-9 Reaper drones over Mexico.

Trump has used his administration’s designation of the cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) and anti-Fentanyl rhetoric to claim that the United States is facing a deadly invasion that, in turn, justifies a state of emergency along the border, a suspension of constitutional protections like free speech and due process under the Alien Enemies Act and other measures to establish a fascistic dictatorship.

On Tuesday, the assistant defense secretary for special operations, Colby Jenkins, testified before a Senate Committee that Trump’s FTO designation “helps us unlock the doors” for a broader approach to combating the drug trade, but it does not automatically give the US military authority to take direct action against the cartels.

Nonetheless, Jenkins noted that “now the military can provide options and be ready if Trump needs more done to protect the border,” according to AP.

Gen. Gregory Guillot, head of the US Northern Command overseeing operations across North America, told senators that the Pentagon has increased *manned* surveillance flights along the border and will request congressional authority to conduct “more advise-and-assist types of operations” with the Mexican special forces.

The Mexican government of President Claudia Sheinbaum issued a formal response to the report: “We reject any form of intervention or interference. That’s been very clear, Mexico coordinates and collaborates, but does not subordinate itself. There is no interference, nor will there be.”

A former senior Drug Enforcement Administration official under the Biden Administration said to NBC News that “Politics aside, Trump is not f—— around with this stuff” and that he believed Mexico would cave in due to “fear.” The tacit meaning was clearly fear of direct conflict between both militaries.

Sheinbaum responded to the previously unreported news of CIA surveillance flights declaring that her predecessors had agreed to these flights and that she had agreed to expand them.

Partly also to avoid tariffs, her administration then signed a military collaboration deal with the Pentagon, deployed 10,000 Mexican troops to the northern border against migrants and cartels and extradited 29 suspected cartel leaders bypassing constitutional restrictions.

Trump has made clear his administration’s neo-colonial aims toward Mexico through actions that are comparable to the measures taken by Hitler toward Austria and the

Sudetenland in preparation for world war.

His administration is already bombing Yemen almost daily, arming and assisting the daily airstrikes in the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, and preparing for military confrontations with Iran and, above all, China.

Washington has also begun a trade war against the world, imposed devastating sanctions on Venezuela, claiming it is responsible for the invasion of gangs into the United States, and threatened to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal and turn Canada into its 51st state.

Leading Democratic Party officials have expressed few and scattered criticisms of Trump's Mexico policy, including a statement by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries over the destabilizing effects of unilateral military action. However, it was the Biden administration that set the stage for the current escalation of tensions, through repeated provocations, denouncing inaction against drug cartels, carrying out unauthorized police operations in Mexican territory and seeking to influence the Mexican presidential elections.

A commentary on Al Jazeera on March 7 by two academics, Alfonso Gonzales Toribio and Murrell Brooks, sums up the historical calculations of US imperialism, which are shared by both parties:

The deployment of troops and the escalating rhetoric are creating the conditions for a US military incursion into Mexico. If one does take place, it would fit neatly into the long history of US aggression against its southern neighbour and Latin America as a whole, which began 200 years ago with the so-called Monroe Doctrine...

The US president really wants to use the military buildup at the border to intimidate the Mexican president and to curb the influence of China in Mexico.

Following the Monroe Doctrine, which claimed that the Americas were for America, the United States launched a war on Mexico in 1846. General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz, captured key cities and marched into Mexico City, resulting in a land grab of half of Mexico's territory.

During the Mexican Revolution, the US government provided key backing to its preferred factions of the Mexican ruling class, finally invading Veracruz to block weapons from April to November 1914 and threatening to take Mexico City again. In 1917, a US military expedition into Mexico failed to capture the radical peasant revolutionary Pancho Villa.

Today, the Sheinbaum administration represents a layer of Mexican billionaires and multimillionaires tied hand and foot to Wall Street and US imperialism and cannot be relied upon to oppose the immediate and existential threat of Trump's drive to establish firm US military control over the Americas.

Instead, the working class must urgently act upon the main lesson from history on how to oppose imperialist oppression: Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. This Marxist theory, which animated the Russian Revolution of 1917, established that, in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out the tasks of the democratic revolution, which includes centrally the fight against imperialist oppression. This struggle can be waged only by the working class in a fight to take power as part of an international socialist movement in vigorous opposition to all sections of the capitalist ruling class.

As Trotsky wrote on China in the 1930s:

But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict. The Chinese bourgeoisie always has a solid rearguard behind it in imperialism, which will always help it with money, goods and shells against the workers and peasants.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact