

CIA, US Military Operating Inside Mexico's "Drug War"

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The Mexican government acknowledged Sunday that US intelligence and military officials are deployed inside Mexico, but refused to confirm details of a published report on their role in the country's "drug war" for reasons of "national security."

Mexico's National Security Council issued a statement August 7 in response to a front-page article in the New York Times which reported that the Obama administration has sent "new CIA operatives and retired military personnel" to the country and is "considering plans to deploy private security contractors" in an effort to escalate the bloody war against drug cartels.

The Times article, written by Ginger Thompson, who was the paper's Mexico City bureau chief for nearly 15 years, reported that the military and intelligence officials were operating out of a military base in the north of Mexico. The paper acknowledged that it was withholding the location of the base at the request of the US administration.

The Mexican government statement claimed that the US personnel "do not engage in any operations nor do they carry weapons", and that their presence and activities were in keeping with "current Mexican legislation" and "full respect" for the country's "norms and national jurisdiction."

As the Times article made clear, however, the operation has been crafted by Washington and the right-wing Mexican government of President Felipe Calderon "to get around Mexican laws that prohibit foreign military and police from operating on its soil."

Thus, in addition to agents of the CIA and the Drug Enforcement Administration, the operation includes the participation of civilian officials and "retired" military personnel from the Pentagon's Northern Command.

The US military and intelligence operation has, according to the Times, "trained nearly 4,500 new federal police agents and assisted in conducting wiretaps, running informants and interrogating suspects." In addition, "The Pentagon has provided sophisticated equipment, including Black Hawk helicopters, and in recent months it has begun flying unarmed surveillance drones over Mexican soil to track drug kingpins."

Perhaps most ominously, the Times report cites former DEA officials as stating that Washington and the Mexican government are "considering a proposal to embed a group of private security contractors" inside an elite Mexican counter-narcotics unit that is carrying out many of the "kill or capture" operations against suspected drug traffickers. As the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan with "contractors" such as Blackwater have shown, the

use of such elements will inevitably spell a further escalation in the bloodshed that has claimed nearly 50,000 lives in the past six years.

The newspaper added that the US CIA-military “compound had been modeled after ‘fusion intelligence centers’ that the United States operates in Iraq and Afghanistan to monitor insurgent groups.”

The similarities with the counterinsurgency, “war on terror” operations being waged by the US in the Middle East and Afghanistan are also reflected in the thinking of Mexican officials quoted in the article. It cites one unnamed senior Mexican official as insisting that the US drug war intervention “can’t be a two-, three-, four, five- or six-year policy. For this policy investment to work, it has to be sustained long-term.” In other words, another “long war,” this one waged in US imperialism’s “backyard.”

Significantly, the Obama administration has named as its new ambassador to Mexico—his predecessor Carlos Pascual was forced to resign in March after embarrassing disclosures in classified embassy cables released by WikiLeaks—Earl Anthony Wayne, who was called back from Kabul, where he served as the deputy ambassador to Afghanistan, assigned to coordinate US policy with the NATO-led occupation force.

Mexican critics of the Calderon government, including attorneys’ associations, human rights groups and others, insist that the joint operation is being carried out in violation of Mexico’s laws and constitution and represents a fundamental surrender of the country’s sovereignty to its powerful imperialist neighbor to the north.

In its editorial Monday, the Mexican daily La Jornada stated that the Times report “confirms the flagrant violation of the national legal framework by foreign agents deployed on our territory, and even more serious, by Mexico’s federal authorities who have tolerated and even promoted this assault on national sovereignty and constitutional principles.”

The editorial went on to denounce US security “cooperation” as part of a “double game” in which Washington offers aid to the Mexican government’s “drug war,” while facilitating the flow of arms to the drug cartels and the profitable laundering of drug money by major US financial institutions.

The CIA-US military presence was also denounced by the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (ANAD). The organization’s president, Manuel Fuentes Muñiz, said that the Times report “reveals a heavy dependence of [the Calderon government] on the United States with respect to the investigation of crimes, in other words, colonialism in regard to criminal investigation and justice.”

The ANAD president added that the operation “is not only a demonstration of the governmental incapacity of the Mexican authorities in the struggle against transnational organized crime, but also a surrender of sovereignty and a shameless violation of the constitution.”

National Union of Jurists president Eduardo Miranda Esquivel said that the operation revealed in the Times report represented “a silent invasion of the national sovereignty by the United States government.” The Calderon government, he said was supporting the “economic, political, cultural and now police-military penetration and intervention by the United States in Mexico.”

The revelations concerning the secret CIA-US military operation came as the Mexican national legislature moved ahead with its consideration of a proposed new National Security Law which would provide a legal sanction for the kind of martial law operations—and the wholesale abuses of human rights accompanying them—that have been carried out by the Calderon government in the name of a drug war. On August 2, the Mexican Senate approved the legislation, and committees in the Chamber of Deputies subsequently endorsed it as well. It must still pass the full lower house.

The legislation, much of it similar to the Patriot Act imposed under the George W. Bush administration in the US as part of the “global war on terror,” would also facilitate electronic surveillance against Mexican citizens, warrantless searches and the detention of suspects without charges.

The legislation empowers the Mexican government to introduce martial law measures under conditions that “place in danger the stability, security, peace and order” of the country or any region, state or city within it.

These measures will inevitably be used not just in the so-called drug war, but also against resistance by the Mexican working class to the attacks on its living standards and basic rights.

The approval of the new law by the committees in the Chamber of Deputies was condemned by Javier Sicilia, the leader of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, which had initiated discussions last month with the legislative branch with the aim of blocking the repressive measures.

Sicilia, a well-known poet whose 24-year-old son was killed with six other youths in Cuernavaca last March, has led marches and protests against Mexico’s violence and the government’s drug war policy.

In voting for the legislation, Sicilia said, the Mexican legislature was “approving a law legalizing a war that is imposed by the United States and is a source of so many tears and so much pain.”

The legislators, he charged, had acted out of “disdain for not just our 50,000 dead, our more than 10,000 disappeared and our more than 120,000 displaced, but it was also out of a disdain ... for flesh and bone human beings who are living in our nation today, and who tomorrow, under the auspices of the law, will swell the graves of the dead and the criminals’ reserve army.”

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