

# Obama Backs Beleaguered Mexican President Peña Nieto

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*Facing continuing massive protests, demands for his resignation, corruption scandals and the lowest approval rating for any Mexican head of state in at least 20 years, President Enrique Peña Nieto came to Washington Tuesday to receive warm support from his US counterpart, President Barack Obama.*

The September 26 massacre in Guerrero—in which police killed six students and another 43 disappeared in the town of Iguala after Mexican cops handed them over to a brutal drug gang—was not even on the agenda of the hour and a half White House meeting. The closed-door discussions between the two presidents were dedicated to furthering capitalist interests at the expense of workers on both sides of the US-Mexican border.

In the street outside, however, demonstrators, many of them Mexican-American immigrants, carried banners bearing the images of the disappeared *normalistas* (teaching students) and chanted the same slogans that have been taken up by hundreds of thousands of protesters throughout Mexico over the past three months. Similar protests were organized outside Mexican consulates Tuesday in New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, Houston and elsewhere.

Following the meeting, both presidents delivered brief statements to a small group of US and Mexican reporters. Both stressed collaboration on the development of US capitalist investment in Mexico, expansion of trade and collaboration in a border crackdown against undocumented immigrants.

Obama made a passing reference to the Iguala massacre, speaking of the “tragic events surrounding the students whose lives were lost,” while stressing his administration’s “commitment to be a friend” to the Mexican government and “a supporter of Mexico in its efforts to eliminate the scourge of violence and the drug cartels that are responsible for so much tragedy.” He added that the task of dealing with this issue was that of Mexican “law enforcement.”

For his part, Peña Nieto made no mention whatsoever of the student massacre, stressing instead the questions of “security” and “investor confidence,” while thanking Washington for its “security collaboration and logistical support.”

The US president’s portrayal of the issue of the massacred students was false and, given the massive operations of US intelligence in Mexico, it could only have been deliberately so. The attribution of this historic crime to drug cartels and its solution to “law enforcement” flies in the face of the grim reality that the students were arrested by law enforcement and then turned over to the drug gang for execution.

The most recent investigation of the events, carried out by the Mexican magazine *Proceso* in collaboration with the University of California-Berkeley's Investigative Reporting Program, reveals that federal police and the army were directly implicated in the mass killing.

The report likewise presents a motive for the government's repression of these students—defending the US-backed education “reform” of the Peña Nieto government, which seeks the elimination of the so-called normal schools, a product of the Mexican revolution that provide a path for poor rural youth to become teachers. The schools were also well known for radicalizing a layer of youth determined to struggle against the conditions of desperate poverty and social inequality in the Mexican countryside.

For all the talk of “tragedy” and concern for the students, Obama and Peña Nieto were on the same page politically. The principal preoccupation of both is to stabilize the political and social situation in Mexico and prevent the mass upheavals of recent months from turning into a threat to profit interests.

The principal instrument for achieving that goal is repression. Under the Merida Initiative, established in 2008 under the pretext for fighting a “war on drugs”—a war that has cost well over 100,000 Mexican lives—Washington is providing the means for this repression, funneling some \$2 billion in military hardware and other forms of training and support for Mexico's security forces.

The response of the Mexican federal government to the popular outrage and unrest generated by the massacre of the *normalistas* has been a new “security plan” that escalates the militarization of the impoverished southern region, including some 36 municipalities in the states of Guerrero, Michoacan, México and Morelos, with the deployment of a combined force of army, marines and federal police. The US ambassador to Mexico, Anthony Wayne, traveled to Guerrero last month to offer US “cooperation” in this plan in the framework of the Merida Initiative.

The Obama administration brushed aside appeals by human rights groups to place the Iguala massacre and other crimes of the Mexican state, from last June's massacre of 22 by the army to reports of systemic torture by security forces, at the center of Tuesday's White House discussions. US law requires that the government certify Mexico's compliance with human rights standards before disbursing at least a portion of the aid under the Merida Initiative. The Obama administration made this certification one week before the Iguala massacre, and it has said it has no intention of reviewing the matter.

On the eve of the visit, a Mexican official made a telling remark in likewise rejecting any substantive discussion about the recent state killings. Violence, the undersecretary of foreign relations for North America, Sergio Alcocer, told reporters, “is not confined solely to our country. We have cases of violence taking place in different parts of the world. Within the United States itself, we know that there has existed this type of phenomenon of violence in the area of Missouri, to mention one case.”

The comparison of the police state repression against the protests over the police killing in Ferguson, Missouri and the massacres in Mexico was apt. Both cases involve governments responding with naked repression to mounting unrest generated by social inequality.

The other major issues discussed in the US-Mexico White House summit Tuesday were trade and economic integration, Cuba and immigration.

Within the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico's economy has been tied closely with that of the US, which sent \$226 billion worth of goods across its southern border in 2013—second as an export market only to Canada. At the same time, Mexico has become a cheap labor platform for US-based transnationals.

Now Washington hopes to realize some of the greatest profits from the 20-year-old NAFTA, with the so-called “energy reform” implemented by Peña Nieto paving the way to the privatization of the state-owned oil giant, PEMEX.

Parallel to the White House meeting, US Vice President Joe Biden and Mexican Treasury Secretary Luis Videgaray chaired a session of the US-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue, a forum that bills itself as dedicated to “promoting competitiveness and connectivity” and “partnering for regional and global leadership.”

Biden spoke in terms of the US-Mexican relationship turning North America into the “most competitive region in the world” and “the manufacturing capital of the world.” Meanwhile, he predicted the new integration of US-based energy giants and PEMEX making it the world's “energy epicenter.” The clear implication is one of fully subordinating Mexico to US imperialism's struggle for global domination against its European and Asian rivals.

On Cuba, Obama indicated that he and Peña Nieto had discussed coordinating their efforts to further capitalist interests on the island and bring it back under Washington's wing. Mexico has recently sought closer ties with Cuba, forgiving a portion of its foreign debt and setting up a foreign trade office in Havana.

Finally, on immigration, Obama praised Peña Nieto for his government's crackdown on Central American refugees attempting to reach the US border by crossing Mexico. Peña Nieto reciprocated by praising Obama—who has deported more Mexicans than any president in US history—for his “intelligent and audacious” executive action on immigration, which will potentially delay deportation and provide temporary work permits for less than half of the undocumented Mexicans currently residing in the US.

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