

The First US Invasion of Mexico...of the 21st Century

Iván Fariás Pelcastre

Posted to The World Orders Forum: 14 January 2026

Iván Fariás Pelcastre holds a PhD in Political Science and International Studies from the University of Birmingham; an MA in International Relations from the University of Warsaw; and a BA in International Relations from the Tecnológico de Monterrey. He is currently a Consultant in Migration Law and Policy for Sabanci University. He has been a Vacation Visiting Research Fellow at the Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford, and an Academic Visitor at St Antony's College, also at Oxford; as well as a Postdoctoral Scholar and Visiting Fellow, at the University of Southern California.

E-mail: ivan.farias@icloud.com

X: @ifapel

Academia.edu: <https://uw.academia.edu/IvanFariasPelcastre>

Last week, there was a common theme in my chats with my friends living in Mexico. Among them, there is a growing (and, I would say, *well-founded*) concern that our country will be the next target of US President Donald Trump's neo-imperialist foreign policy.

As an International Relations scholar, my preliminary assessment would be that of Greenland or Colombia as the geographies most likely to witness the next wave of US interventionism – even if to different extents and in different circumstances.

Yet, [today's public declaration by Trump](#), on his intention to “start now hitting land, with regard to the [Mexican drug] cartels”, along with his (*not entirely inaccurate*) perception that “the cartels are running Mexico”, suggest that our country is also rapidly moving to the foreground of his hit-list.

Trump seems determined to take any actions that will cement his presidential “legacy” and validate his self-fashioned image as “the best real estate dealmaker” in US history. In this self-serving understanding of legacy, territorial expansion is seen as a fitting “celebration” of the United States' upcoming [250th anniversary](#).

In Trump's personal imaginary, annexing Greenland “[whether they like it or not](#)”; announcing that the US will “[run](#)” Venezuela and take control over the country's most valued natural resource “[indefinitely](#)” (turning it into a de facto colony); [retaking the Panama Canal](#); and reasserting direct US dominance over the societies and economies of its continental neighbours, are (or would be) all presented as *personal* triumphs worthy of *national* commemoration and *global* awe. If successful (to the US, that is), that they would all be cast

as vindications of Trump's [personal myth](#) as a successful businessman. "[A real American dream come true](#)".

If these goals were to be realised, we should all be as concerned as my friends in Mexico are, as Trump would be getting closer to what *I think* is his ultimate objective: [updating the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, which aimed at making of the Western Hemisphere the exclusive sphere of influence of the United States](#), to something more perverse... That is, making of the Western Hemisphere, Trump's *personal* sphere of influence —[much in the way that Leopold II established the "Congo Free State" as his personal land possession](#), to plunder its resources and subjugate its people. This might be the 21st century, but Trump's ideas are deeply rooted in the 19th century idea that "might makes right".

These are, of course, scenarios at the global level. Yet, the anxieties on the ground in Mexico go beyond abstract international relations analyses. My family, friends, and acquaintances residing in central and northern Mexican states —regions where political life and social order are heavily influenced, if not outright controlled, by powerful drug cartels— perceive a far more immediate threat. They speak of a growing fear that their communities could become targets of direct US military action, either through large scale strikes of the sort that we all [helplessly witnessed in Venezuela](#), or the deployment of US troops to Mexican towns and cities. In both scenarios, the picture is bleak: Mexico has *no* capacity to respond effectively to any of these actions.

It was long time ago that both Canada and Mexico abandoned serious contingency planning for countering a US invasion, largely because such a scenario came to be regarded as implausible in the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras. Canada, for its part, eventually discontinued formal preparations for repelling a potential US attack as bilateral defence cooperation deepened and the prospect of armed conflict between the two countries appeared implausible. Mexico, meanwhile, having been subjected to [about 10 invasions by its northern neighbour](#), and having had roughly half its territory annexed by the US after the 1846 invasion, quickly came to assume that the remaining half of our country would not be again at risk of being transgressed.

Those assumptions now appear outdated. The US military is still far better funded and far more technologically advanced than any other in the world. And US leaders seem more willing nowadays to use it less as a policy instrument and more of an actual, material source of global power.

At a time when the US is eager to disengage from the rest of the world, the Latin American countries —including Mexico, appear to become (once again) likely targets of military intervention. Sadly, they lack the military capabilities to offer any meaningful resistance to "special military operations" by the US. At a moment in which Trump is seeking a convenient stage where to write a new chapter in the book of [US imperial power in the 21st Century](#), Mexico is being [actively reframed not as a neighbour, friend, and partner to the US, but as an adversary](#). It is now up to the Mexican government and people to determine whether he will be able to do so.