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U.S. OFFICIAL'S DIPLOMATIC LINE IN MEXICO DIFFERS FROM TRUMP'S

Mexico angry over new U.S. immigration, deportation rules

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MEXICO CITY—U.S. Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said Thursday the U.S. wouldn't use military force in immigration operations, even though President Donald Trump earlier in the day described U.S. efforts to enforce immigration laws as "a military operation."

Mr. Kelly spoke to reporters Thursday alongside Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Mexico's Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray and Mexico's Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong in Mexico City, where Mr. Trump sent the U.S. officials to explain the implementation of tougher U.S. immigration and deportation policies.

Mr. Kelly also said there would be "no mass deportations," adding that both statements were intended to correct inaccurate reporting by journalists. Opponents of Mr. Trump's immigration policies often refer to expanded U.S. efforts in such terms.

Meanwhile Mr. Trump on Thursday described U.S. efforts to crack down on illegal immigration in starker terms. "All of a sudden for the first time we're getting gang members out, we're getting drug lords out, we're getting really bad dudes out of this country at a rate that nobody's ever seen before," the president said. "And it's a military operation because they're allowed to come into our country."

Mr. Kelly offered a different view. "There will be no use of military forces in immigration," Mr. Kelly said. "At least half of you try to get that right, because it routinely comes up in the reporting."

Messrs. Videgaray and Osorio said they expressed Mexico's strong concerns about increased deportations from the U.S. and about the White House's plan to send non-Mexicans to Mexico to await deportation proceedings.

Mr. Videgaray called Thursday's meetings a good step but said differences still existed between the sides. Mr. Osorio said Mexico emphasized the importance of maintaining an "orderly" deportation process.

After the four high-ranking officials met and spoke to reporters, the Americans were due to meet with Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto. A senior Mexican official earlier had warned Mr. Peña Nieto might scrap the meetings with Messrs. Kelly and Tillerson.

Mr. Trump, speaking at a meeting with manufacturing CEOs in Washington, said it was vital for the U.S. to take tougher immigration and trade stances toward Mexico.

"We're going to have a good relationship with Mexico I hope. And if we don't, we don't," Mr. Trump said. "Seventy billion in trade deficits, and that doesn't include the drugs that are flowing across the border. Like water. But we can't let that happen."

He went on to describe U.S. efforts to crack down on illegal immigration as "a military operation" and blamed immigrants for what he described as a surge in gang activity and violence.

"You see gang violence in America like never before, much of that is people that are here illegally and they're rough and they're tough, but they're not tough like our people," he said. "So we're getting them out."

The Trump administration earlier this week unveiled new U.S. immigration and deportation policies, based on an executive order issued by Mr. Trump last month. The policy calls for enlisting local U.S. authorities to enforce immigration law, jailing more people while they wait for their hearings, and trying to send border crossers back to Mexico to await proceedings, even if they aren't Mexican.

Mr. Videgaray said Wednesday that Mexico rejects the U.S. plan, which would establish a way to return illegal migrants to Mexico, regardless of their nationality, pending deportation proceedings. He described the U.S. policy as unilaterally imposed. He also voiced concern for the rights of Mexican migrants in the U.S. in light of the new enforcements steps.

The White House described the mission of Messrs. Tillerson and Kelly as intended to "talk through" the new immigration directives. Mr. Tillerson met with Mr. Trump at the White House before traveling to Mexico – an indication, one official said, of the importance the president puts on the relationship between the two countries.

Seven Democratic senators sent a letter to Messrs. Tillerson and Kelly late Wednesday to urge the officials to try to repair the important relationship with Mexico.

"President Trump's commentary – both during the campaign and since his inauguration – is damaging this critical bilateral relationship and endangering U.S. national security," said the letter by Sen. Ben Cardin (D., Md.), the top Democrat on the foreign relations committee, and six other Democrats.