New Mexico City Airport – A Few Days Away from the Inauguration.

by Jessi Saba.



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Mexico's most controversial airport is set to initiate operations on March 21, 2022. We are only a few days away from the inauguration of the project that has been fiercely pushed by Mexico's president, Mr. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, and has caused billion-dollar losses for Mexico. It is estimated that, between the construction of the new airport and the indemnifications paid given the cancellation of the prior airport project these losses surpass the 10-billion-dollar mark.

The current Mexico City International Airport ("AICM") has been saturated for years. On March 3, 2022, the Official Gazette of the Federation published a resolution declaring the official saturation of the AICM terminals. As explained in such resolution, during the past 10 years, the fleet of airlines has shifted to wide body aircraft (from 65% to 85%) which has shown an increase in the number of passengers that can be transported. Therefore, the same airport had to accommodate an increase of 47% in passengers transported between 2014 and 2019. The AICM is saturated in airspace, operations, and on terminals space[1]. Said resolution establishes a process for the reduction of operations at the AICM, which is certainly detrimental to the connectivity of the country.

Since 2019, several authorities including the Federal Agency of Civil Aviation ("AFAC"), Navigation Services in Mexican Air Space ("SENEAM"), the Ministry of Communications and Transport, and the Ministry of Environment have been conducting studies, reviews, and analyses to evaluate and determine the viability of the construction and simultaneous operation of the Felipe Angeles International Airport ("AIFA"), considering the existing infrastructure associated with the Metropolitan Airport System, which includes the AICM and Toluca International Airport. The construction of the AIFA is a controversial project that was awarded directly to the Ministry of Defense ("SEDENA"), who have no experience whatsoever in the construction or civil airports and the very specific needs of these. The requirements of a military air base differ widely from those required for a civil airport to operate. This was one of the most critiqued points since Mexico's president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, announced the construction of AIFA. The government even went as far as creating a company called "AIFA SA de CV" for the construction of management of this new airport, which of course, is managed by SEDENA.

One of the most difficult points for the relevant authorities, including SENEAM and AFAC, was the redesign of the airspace in order to accommodate the simultaneous operations of all airports, more specifically, AIFA and AICM. The redesign has been widely criticized, the main argument is that it is not possible to safely operate both AIFA and AICM simultaneously without compromising the safety of crew and passengers. Some news reports have also been issued insisting that the new redesign has caused more than twenty aircraft to almost collide in the air, causing the emergency systems of the aircraft to be activated[2]. Since the redesign of the Mexican airspace, more and more incidents have occurred, and the authorities in Mexico have not taken accountability for these. A few months ago, communication between the Control Tower from AICM was lost for almost 10 minutes[3], increasing the possibility of a fatal result. The government reassured the public claiming that this was not as delicate as it sounds, as it was only for a "few minutes". This is worrisome to say the least, as the government appears to be willing to do and say whatever it takes to make AIFA and the redesign of the airspace look and feel safe. Experts have repeatedly stated that simultaneous operations are not safe, and that the AIFA is not a plausible option for the saturation problem that AICM faces. AIFA faces geological and meteorological conditions that make it less than ideal for it to operate at its intended level. It is no secret that for years, many administrations have sought alternatives to the AICM, AIFA being one of those option. Nonetheless, this option was never validated in the past. The problem is that in order to corroborate this, experts need access to information. We are only a few days away from the inauguration, and the government has not provided any information on the actions undertaken, if any, to solve the redesign of the airspace. Authorities insist, that only a few "details" are missing from AIFA, which are not "relevant" for operations to commence.

1.- DOF - Diario Oficial de la Federación
2.- https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/dario-celis/2021/12/14/documentan-24-incidentes-por-rediseno-de-espacio-aereo/
3.- https://a21.com.mx/la-caja-negra/2021/11/29/pierde-centro-de-control-comunicacion-durante-10-minutos

"One of the most difficult points for the relevant authorities, including SENEAM and AFAC, was the redesign of the airspace in order to accommodate the simultaneous operations of all airports..."

The lack of transparency by the government to provide information regarding the redesign of the airspace, the environmental impact implications, and the safety concerns made public by several experts, have caused an increasing concern among the population for the use of this new airport. There is insufficient information regarding the infrastructure of AIFA, and the government is not planning on providing any information. The truth is that no one knows for sure if AIFA complies with all requirements, if the construction and infrastructure are well done, if the redesign of the airspace will not result in an air accident or collision. No one knows, and unfortunately, it will be very difficult to know before operations start.

Only a few weeks ago the AIFA was habilitated by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport as an international airport, with the facilities and equipment required for an international operation, making it possible for AIFA to attend national and international aircraft, passengers, and cargo. In addition, it is important to know if the AIFA meets the standard and recommended practices as set out by the Chicago Convention, specifically in Annex 14. Now that the AIFA will start operations, a study should be conducted to determine if, and how, the AIFA meets these requirements.

Three national airlines have confirmed passenger operations from and to AIFA, including Viva Aerobus, Aeromexico and Volaris. The only international airline that has announced operations is Conviasa, a Venezuelan airline.

Unfortunately, given that in May 2021 Mexico was downgraded by the FAA to category 2 given that several security aspects were breached, and considering the inability of the Mexican government to regain the category 1 status, no international operations from AIFA are possible at this time. As usual, the authorities have not advised nor have they provided public information in respect to any specific actions undertaken, or to be taken, in order to regain the category 1 status.

The government is going above and beyond to make AIFA a reliable and considerable option for passengers. Since AIFA is located a few hours away from Mexico City and heavy traffic is regular in Mexico, the government has taken actions such as offering ground transportation to and from AIFA, as well as offering the possibility of arriving only an hour before the flight. This is certainly not enough, and the government is aware of that. A rapid train is also being built which will supposedly be able to arrive from a specific point in Mexico City to AIFA in about 40 minutes. Of course, this will not be ready until 2023. In addition to all of these factors, we must consider that as of the date of this article, the government has not yet reached an agreement with private companies for local transportation, which means that once a passenger arrives at AIFA, there will only be one single option of ground transportation for all passengers. Just one, provided by AIFA.

"The government is going above and beyond to make AIFA a reliable and considerable option for passengers."

All these measures are set to impulse the population to consider flying via AIFA, and the recent resolution on the Official Gazette of the Federation mentioned above will certainly serve as a foundation for the justification of the AIFA, which is not a first option for most. We are only a few days away from the inauguration, and all of these questions and uncertainties will only be resolved as time and operations go by. We are all hoping that the government is right, that the required measures were taken to ensure the safety of all users of AIFA, that the connectivity will grow, that AIFA will in fact aid in the desaturation of the AICM and that more and more airlines start operations from AIFA. We are all hoping for that, because the alternate scenario could be fatal.

Mexico expands its battle against arms trafficking and seeks EU complicity for a common front.

Mexico has proposed to intensify its fight against arms trafficking with the campaign promoted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard. The EU- ATT Arms Export Control Program was formally established. It is a communication channel "based on the vision that international cooperation and the principle of shared responsibility are necessary to face the challenges posed by illicit transfers, diversion and illicit trafficking of firearms within the framework of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)". The aim is to achieve the opposite, i.e. legality: "lawful, responsible, transparent and secure trade and transfers". Ultimately, they point out, the most important thing is "to contribute to the establishment of conditions of peace and well-being in the country and in the American continent". *www.elpais.com/mexico/2022-02-03/mexico-amplia-su-batalla-contra-el-trafico-de-armas-y-busca-la-complicidad-de-la-ue-para-hacer-frente-comun.html 02/02/2022.*

Difficult for Mexico to support war response against Russia.

In a press conference this morning, the Mexican Foreign Minister stated that it is difficult for Mexico to support an attempted war response against Russia, stressed that the Mexican position has always been to reject the use of force and to seek diplomatic mechanisms and dialogue to resolve the conflict. he emphasized that Mexico has supported Ukraine's independence and the integrity of its territories. *www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/conflicto-ucrania-rusia-dificil-que-mexico-apoye-respuesta-belica-ebrard 24/02/2022.*

Mexico's trade with Russia and Ukraine is low, but strategic.

Mexico's trade with Russia and Ukraine is mostly in deficit; the country imported Russian goods for 2,251 million dollars during 2021; with Ukraine they totaled 302 million dollars, according to data from the Ministry of Economy. Although the level of trade is modest, the type of goods indicates that the exchange is strategic; the main Mexican imports with these European nations are fertilizers, which are of great importance for the booming agricultural sector. *www.economista.com.mx/empresas/El-comercio-de-Mexico-con-Rusia-y-Ucrania-es-bajo-pero-estrategico-20220228-0056.html 28/02/2022.*

"He is not well informed", says AMLO about Blinken's comment on the murders of journalists in Mexico.

After the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, expressed his concern for the number of journalists murdered in Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador asked the U.S. officer, to be well informed and not to act in an interfering manner because Mexico is not a U.S. colony. "What he is arguing is not true, it is very regrettable that there are murders of journalists, we already know that, nothing more than that in all cases action is being taken, there is no impunity, they are not State crimes and if the head of the State Department of the US government intervenes, I think he does not know, he is not well informed of this situation because there are no State crimes". He pointed out that if Blinken has an opinion on the situation of journalists in Mexico, he would like to know why they are financing a group that opposes his government, which is legal and legitimate. "Why are they giving money to Claudio X. González's group, let him answer me". declared López. *www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/amlo-blinken-no-esta-bien-informado-dice-sobre-preocupacion-por-periodistas-asesinados 23/02/2022.*

Hydroelectric, coal and fuel oil: Mexico's options in the face of rising gas costs.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador dismissed that Mexico will suffer a shortage of electric energy in the event of an eventual increase in gas prices due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and also denied that the price of gasoline has already shot up due to the increase in the cost of crude oil. In a press conference at the National Palace, the President indicated that Mexico has the resources to supply the country with energy through hydroelectric plants and in extreme cases through fuel oil and coal. He also reiterated Mexico's position on Russia's non-intervention in Ukraine, as it is contrary to international law, and called on the nations involved in the conflict with Ukraine to leave aside the hegemonic culture, as it obeys the past. *www.forbes.com.mx/nuestra-revista-vitro-sucesion-bajo-la-lupa/ 23/02/2022.*

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