

Has anything changed? Report on Mexican 'Dirty War' Details Abuse by Military

PREFATORY NOTE—Hemispheric issues

Mexico: «So far from God, So Close to the United States»

—Epigram credited to Porfirio Díaz, Mexican dictator (1830-1915).



As is the case in many parts of the world where poverty is widespread and institutionalized, a terrible status quo enforced by the government's police and armed forces, representing the national and international bourgeoisie (the capitalist class), and normally assisted and bolstered in its repressive savagery by the United States, eventually sparks rebellions. These "insurgent" movements, sometimes led by socialists or communists and just as often simply by people driven to the limit of their endurance, are routinely pushed back by "counterinsurgency" campaigns that often qualify as genocidal. The main object of such campaigns is to keep a profoundly unjust order going at any cost. It's a damn shame but many of our highly trained special forces are engaged in this criminal task around the globe. Such men apparently never figured out what fighting for "the American Way" means in the global context. Equally bad, aside from these "in country" instructors and fighters, we also train foreign murderers and torturers in our own military establishments, to date the most

notorious being the School of the Americas. ⁽¹⁾

This sordid history is well documented and irrefutable, even if the American people, as usual, practically have no idea what their government is up to beyond its borders and, some cynicism aside, usually swallow whole the glowing chauvinist rhetoric employed to keep them in their habitual state of functional political stupidity. Mexico, a great nation and culture with deep fissures separating the rich and the poor could not escape this framework. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that its leaders, in conjunction with the US, would conspire to take whatever measures were deemed necessary to put out the flames of popular resistance and stifle any political party or movement capable of mobilizing the Mexican masses toward true democracy. The methods of the “dirty war” to fight “subversives” first inaugurated and perfected in the Americas’ “Southern Cone” in the mid-1970s (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay), under the auspices of US-led “Operation Condor,” later extended to other nations, including Mexico.

This is the backdrop to the materials presented below. For the benefit of our bilingual readers as well as International public, we are also making available a special report on the origins of the modern guerrilla movement in Mexico. [Click here to download it](#). Meanwhile, *viva el pueblo Mexicano!*—The Editors

The New York Times
Expect the World®

By [GINGER THOMPSON](#)

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Correction Appended

MEXICO CITY, Feb. 26 – A secret report prepared by a special prosecutor’s office says the Mexican military carried out a

“genocide plan” of kidnapping, torturing and killing hundreds of suspected subversives in the southern state of Guerrero during the so-called dirty war, from the late 1960’s to the early 1980’s.

The report, which was not endorsed by the government of President Vicente Fox but was leaked by its authors last week, says that the genocide plan was ordered by President Luis Echeverría in 1970, and devised by Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, who was defense minister at the time.

It is based partly on declassified documents from the Mexican military and for the first time provides names of military officers and units involved in destroying entire villages that the government suspected of serving as base camps for the rebel leader Lucio Cabañas.

In those towns, soldiers rounded up all the men and boys, executed some on the spot and detained others, and then used violence, including rape, to drive the rest of the people away, the report says. Most of those detained suffered severe torture, including beatings, electric shock and being forced to drink gasoline, at military installations that were operated like “concentration camps.”

“With this operation, a state policy was established in which all the authorities connected to the army – the president, ministers of state, and the presidential guard, commanders of the military regions in Guerrero, and officers and troops in their command – participated in the violations of human rights with the justification of pursuing a bad fugitive,” the report says. “Such an open counter-guerrilla strategy could not have been possible without the explicit consent and approval of the president.”

President Fox and the special prosecutor, Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, however, did not endorse the report, which was presented to Mr. Fox in December. Mr. Carrillo, who was

appointed by Mr. Fox four years ago, said the government refused to make it public without changes. The report is an unedited draft of a document called The White Book, which is to be the government's historical accounting of the egregious abuses by the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

In an interview on Friday, Mr. Carrillo said the draft of the report, prepared by a team of 27 researchers, including former student militants and advocates for the victims, was filled with bias and sprinkled with loaded language. He said it put too much of the blame for the abuses of the "dirty war" on the military, without describing the abuses committed by rebel groups. He said an edited version of the report would be presented to Mr. Fox on Monday, and later to the public.

"There are assertions in the draft that the army conducted the operations alone," Mr. Carrillo said. "But they did not conduct them alone. They conducted them in response to orders from civilians above."

The dispute over the draft of The White Book tore a deep rift in the special prosecutor's office. The handful of international human rights investigators who have seen the report said that it offered a glimpse of the chaos that has crippled the special prosecutor's efforts and that it raised new questions about Mr. Fox's commitment to bring officials responsible for past abuses to justice.

Mr. Fox, whose rise to power ended seven decades of authoritarian rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, began his presidency with soaring promises to end impunity. So far, he has delivered very little.

An effort to indict Mr. Echeverría, accused of genocide in the killings of students in 1968 and 1971, failed when the Supreme Court found that the statute of limitations for murder had passed and that there was not enough evidence to prove genocide.

At the end of 2003, however, the Supreme Court opened the way for prosecutions for “dirty war” crimes when it found that no statute of limitations applied to political “disappearances,” presumed deaths in which no body has been found, opening the way for former government officials to be prosecuted in these cases.

The government’s National Human Rights Commission reported that up to 74 government officials could be liable for the disappearances of about 275 people. The unedited draft of The White Book lists more than 500 missing people.

But the disputes over the document’s contents, human rights investigators said, make clear that there remain serious obstacles standing in the way of winning justice.

Authors of the unedited draft of The White Book leaked parts of it to several prominent Mexican writers. The authors said that they were disgruntled because the government fired them without paying them for the last eight months and that they were worried the report was going to be sanitized.

A copy of the document was also obtained by a Mexican magazine, Eme-Equis, which published a report about the document on Sunday, and by the National Security Archives, a private nonpartisan research group based in Washington.

Kate Doyle, director of the security archives’ [Mexico](#) Project, said the report was posted on the archive’s Web site on Sunday to give victims and relatives access to the information. She provided a copy of the report last week to The New York Times.

“The fact that a version of the Special Prosecutor’s final report is circulating among a handful of prominent people yet is still closed and inaccessible to those most affected by the violence is a state of affairs reminiscent of Mexico’s past,” said a note on the Web site, “when citizens were routinely shut out of civic participation by a government determined to keep them in the dark.”

Mr. Carillo acknowledged that his office had been unable to pay its workers, saying that Attorney General Daniel Cabeza de Vaca was trying to "asphyxiate" his efforts by withholding his budget. But he said that the authors of the report had been hired under contract, and that their contract ended when the report was complete.

"We are attacked from above and below," Mr. Carillo said. "From the front and from the back."

He said the editing of the document was aimed at correcting it, not "watering it down."

"Of course the violations were committed as part of a policy of the state," Mr. Carrillo said, referring to the principal conclusion of the report, "but it was not one that was orchestrated by the armed forces. It was individuals and groups inside the armed forces that were always accompanied by civilians."

"For us, it is important to make that distinction."

His comments echoed the official position of Mexico's military, which, unlike militaries in Argentina and Chile, has never publicly acknowledged the institution's leading role in this country's "dirty war." Instead, a succession of defense ministers, including the current one, Gen. Gerardo Clemente Vega, have said only that certain officers and units operated out of a sense of duty to stop a violent rebel uprising, and that abuses were committed by soldiers and the guerrillas alike.

"This army did what it was told to do by the state," General Vega said in a speech in February 2002.

Daniel Wilkinson of Human Rights Watch said the report provided the "clearest picture to date of the state's repressive machinery at work." The military documents do not describe tortures and killings, Mr. Wilkinson said, and they

use coded language to describe illegal detentions. Still, Mr. Wilkinson said, the military documents fill in blanks left by an already large trove of declassified documents from the police and other government agencies.

Mr. Wilkinson said, "The question now for the Fox administration is: when are we going to see results in the prosecutions of these cases?"

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Antonio Betancourt contributed reporting for this article.

Correction: Mar. 3, 2006, Friday:

An article on Monday about a report that detailed abuses of suspected subversives by the Mexican military during the country's "dirty war" from the late 1960's to the early 1980's misstated the name of the private research group that posted the report on its Web site. It is the National Security Archive, not Archives.

⁽¹⁾ The School of the Americas (SOA) is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers, located at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 2001 renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). It was initially established in Panama in 1946 however it was expelled from Panama in 1984 under the terms of the [Panama Canal Treaty](#) (article iv) and reinforced under the [Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal](#) (article v).

Former Panamanian President, Jorge Illueca, stated that the School of the Americas was the "biggest base for destabilization in Latin America." The SOA have left a trail of blood and suffering in every country where its graduates have returned. For this reason the School of the Americas has been historically dubbed the "School of Assassins". (Source: [SOA Watch](#))