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Secrets of the Tamaulipas Massacres Come to Light in Proceso Magazine

Posted on November 4, 2013 *by* MICHAEL EVANS

In this week's edition of Proceso magazine, award-winning journalist Marcela Turati uses a set of declassified U.S. diplomatic cables from our Mexico/Migration Project collection to shed new light on what she calls “the collusion of Mexican municipal, state and federal officials” with the murders of hundreds of migrants in and around San Fernando, Tamaulipas, by a criminal organization known as *Los Zetas*. The declassified reports detail horrifying acts of violence perpetrated by rival Mexican drug cartels in the last several years, including the San Fernando massacres of 2010 and 2011, which took the lives of more than 250 people, most of them migrants on their way to the United States. Scores of migrants and other travelers were kidnapped from intercity buses and later killed as part of a drug cartel turf war in northeastern Mexico, and hundreds of corpses have since been recovered from mass graves in the area.



Mexican authorities oversee the transfer of corpses from the August 2010 San Fernando massacre. (Photo courtesy Proceso)

“The diplomatic reports...show that the cartels controlled part of Tamaulipas, the suffering of the local population, the submission of the press and the pantomime of a government that pretends to hold the reins,” according to Turati’s report, which hit newsstands around Mexico this morning.

A [previous report on Migration Declassified](#) revealed Mexican efforts to minimize “[the state’s responsibility](#)” for the massacres. These reports described how Zetas gunmen [pulled groups of victims from commercial bus lines](#), killing those who refused to work for the cartels and dumping many of the bodies in mass graves. The [Embassy cited information](#) indicating that “migration authorities and local police” in Mexico “often turn a blind eye or collude in” the kidnappings and massacres carried out by the drug cartels. Mexican officials [told the U.S.](#) they believed “that the majority of the victims discovered were migrants heading to the US who were intercepted en route and unable to pay what was demanded of them.”

Turati’s report digs into additional declassified U.S. diplomatic, intelligence and law enforcement documents describing the inability Mexican military and law enforcement officials to cope with the turf war that erupted in Tamaulipas between the Zetas and its former ally, the Gulf Cartel. Narcotrafficking organizations “operated with near total impunity in the face of compromised local security forces,” according to one of the cables, an [April 2010 report](#) from the U.S. Embassy’s Narcotics Affairs Section.

Others now seem like ominous warnings of the carnage that was to come. A [March 2010 report](#) from the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas, said that city “may be the scene of a confrontation in the near future,” and that Matamoros, as “the accepted headquarters of the Gulf Cartel,” was “a high-value target for any future Los Zetas offensive.”

REPORT THIS AD

Another document highlighted by Turati shows that the Zetas, many of whom were recruited from an elite Mexican Army unit known as the *Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales* (GAFE), maintained ties with the *Kaibiles*, a Guatemalan Army special forces group that was responsible for unimaginable acts of cruelty during the conflict that consumed that country in the 1980s. Written less than three months before the August 2010 massacre, the heavily-redacted [Drug Enforcement Administration report](#) describes a shootout in Tamaulipas that resulted in the deaths of four Zetas and the arrests of four others. “It was determined that some of them were members of the Zetas and the subjects from Guatemala were members of the Fuerzas Especiales de Guatemala (Kaibiles),” according to the DEA report. The Archive will publish the complete set of San Fernando documents in the coming days on the [National Security Archive Website](#). Watch this blog or [follow us on Twitter](#) to keep up with all the new developments in this case.

<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB499/>

Mexico: *Los Zetas* Drug Cartel Linked San Fernando Police to Migrant Massacres

Ordered to Declassify Human Rights Information,
Prosecutor Releases First Document from San Fernando
Case File

Accused Cop: Instead of Jail, Police Delivered Detainees
to *Los Zetas*

***Proceso* Article Explores Similarities between San Fernando, Ayotzinapa**

National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 499

Posted December 22, 2014

Edited by Michael Evans

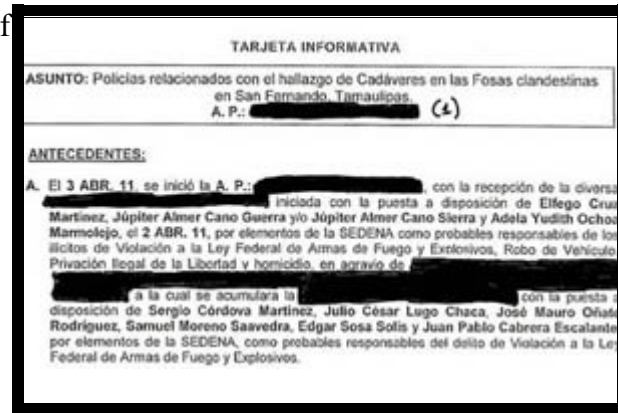
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Washington, DC, December 22, 2014 – With the Mexican government facing widespread public outrage over the [alleged role of police and other officials](#) in the September forced disappearance of 43 students, and the killings of at least six others, from Ayotzinapa Normal School, the country's federal prosecutor (PGR) has for the first time declassified a document on the suspected participation of police in the kidnapping and massacre of hundreds of migrants in San Fernando massacres of 2010-11.

The new revelations, along with key U.S. documents on how violent drug cartels gained control of local police forces in parts of Mexico during the last decade, are the subject of [“San Fernando-Ayotzinapa: las similitudes”](#) (“San Fernando-Ayotzinapa: the similarities”), an article published online today in Mexico's *Proceso* magazine in collaboration with Michael Evans and Jesse Franzblau of the National Security Archive.

According to declarations from members of the *Los Zetas* drug cartel named in the newly-declassified “[Tarjeta Informativa](#)” (“informative note” or “information memo”), the police acted as “lookouts” [“*halconeos*”] for the group, helped with “the interception of persons,” and otherwise turned a blind eye to the Zetas’ illegal activities.



Those crimes included the summary execution of 72 migrants pulled from intercity buses in San Fernando in August 2010 and an untold number of similar killings that culminated in the discovery, in April 2011, of hundreds more bodies in mass graves in the same part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. The victims were mainly Central American migrants making their way to Texas, which borders Tamaulipas to the north. The state’s highways are at once primary avenues for migrants and highly-contested narcotrafficking corridors.

One of the police detainees cited in the memo, Álvaro Alba Terrazas, told investigators that San Fernando police and transit officials were paid to deliver prisoners to the Zetas:

I know that police and transit officials in San Fernando help the Zetas organization, because rather than take detainees to the Pentágono, which is to say the municipal jail, they would deliver them to the Zetas. The truest one [“mero bueno”] is an elderly police officer and another named Óscar Jaramillo, who receive money from the organization to collaborate.

If the facts surrounding the San Fernando case seem eerily familiar, it is because they follow a pattern seen over and over again in recent years. Like the Ayotzinapa case, the San Fernando massacres are symptomatic of the dirty war of corruption and narcopolitics that has consumed parts of Mexico over the last decade. Killings like these are disturbingly common, and the forces behind the mayhem—usually drug cartels counting on the collaboration of, at a minimum, local police—are remarkably consistent.

This relatively limited release of new information from the PGR also leaves many questions unanswered. What happened to the police officials detained in connection to the San Fernando massacres? Where are they now? Why didn’t the prosecutor’s office locate and release any more responsive documents? And how to explain the fact that two of the people listed as among the 17 detained police officials, Álvaro Alba Terrazas and Oscar Jaramillo Sosa, were [subsequently](#) listed in [media reports](#) as members of the Zetas?

Human Rights vs. Investigative Files

Nevertheless, the release of even one document from the San Fernando case file marks a huge step forward for transparency on human rights violations in Mexico, and on this massacre case in particular. The prosecutor has long refused to release any information from the file, claiming protection under an exemption in Mexico's transparency law that permits agencies to withhold information pertaining to an ongoing investigation.

But these protections are overridden by another provision in the law requiring the release of information on grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law and barring agencies from invoking any of the exemptions to deny information in such cases. This is the central issue in a pair of access to information cases that will soon come before Mexico's Supreme Court.

The [Foundation for Justice](#), which represents some of the victims in the case, and the Mexico City office of [Article 19](#), which defends freedom of expression, are [asking the prosecutor](#) to produce a "releasable copy" of the investigative files relating to the San Fernando cases, arguing that the events at issue—by virtue of their scale and the likely involvement of state officials—clearly constitute human rights crimes. The problem is that, until recently, no Mexican federal agency had declared the massacres to be violations of human rights.

But earlier this year, and in response to an information request from the National Security Archive, the [National Migration Institute \(INM\) made its first declassification on the case](#). Now, in releasing this document to the Archive, the prosecutor seems to have accepted the argument—now also [ratified by Mexico's panel of federal information commissioners \(IFAI\)](#)—that it is [obliged to release human rights information](#), even when those records form part of an ongoing investigation.

Still, the declassification by PGR in this case leaves much to be desired. The agency even withheld the case file number ("A.P. [Redacted]") despite the fact that the information commissioners ordered INM to release the case number from the 2010 San Fernando massacre earlier this year.

"Zeta Territory"

Declassified U.S. documents, including a number of cables from the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey (along with a few diplomatic cables published by Wikileaks), provide an intriguing look at how the Zetas established control over the police and other officials in the state of Nuevo Leon (which borders Tamaulipas to the east) and how corrupt police officers were often the main targets of the rival cartels. Indeed, the available documentation leaves little doubt that municipal police in Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Ciudad Juárez and elsewhere were in many cases little more than cartel enforcers, caught up in—and often the main casualties of—the inter-cartel violence that plagues northern Mexico. Some of these documents were published in ["Mexico's San Fernando Massacres: A Declassified History,"](#) the source files behind a previous Archive collaboration with *Proceso* and journalist Marcela Turati.

Highlights from the documents listed below include:

- In April 2005, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in Little Rock, Arkansas, requested that the Bureau open a “control file” to “administratively capture information about the Los Zetas organization.” [\[DOCUMENT 01\]](#) A subsequent FBI report said the Zetas had “established control over Nuevo Laredo, Mexico” and “effectively controlled the city’s police force.” [\[DOCUMENT 02\]](#)
- The staff at the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey had front-row seats as the Zetas went on to consolidate control over other parts of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. By 2010, Monterrey was “Zeta territory,” according to a Consulate cable from February. The city was a “safe-haven, source of revenue (mainly from extortion), and supply center for the Zetas.” The Consulate said it had “long connected former Nuevo Leon Director General of State Investigation Hector Santos (now serving in the same post in Coahuila) with the Zetas, and many other local and state police and government officials have ties to organized crime.” [\[DOCUMENT 12\]](#)
- A separate report from the U.S. Consulate described a chaotic atmosphere in Monterrey, with Zeta-controlled police forces under attack by the rival Gulf Cartel trying to force them to “switch sides” in the inter-cartel conflict. The Consulate’s Emergency Action Committee said, “It is now clear that the ongoing war between the Gulf and Zeta drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) has reached Monterrey.” [\[DOCUMENT 13\]](#)
- In March 2010, the Consulate noted that the governor of Nuevo Leon had suspended 81 police officials after admitting “that the Zeta drug trafficking organization (DTO) had co-opted some state and police officials” in setting up roadblocks around the city. [\[DOCUMENT 14\]](#)
- In April 2010, the U.S. Embassy’s Narcotics Affairs Section said that Mexican authorities had failed to manage the widening conflict, highlighting how “[Drug Trafficking Organizations] have operated fairly openly and with freedom of movement and operations...In many cases they operated with near total impunity in the face of compromised local security forces.” [\[DOCUMENT 16\]](#)
- An April 2010 cable from Monterrey noted an alarming increase in narcotics-related killings in Nuevo León, reporting that drug trafficking groups “have targeted military, state, and municipal police by killing corrupt officers affiliated with the opposing cartel, or as retaliation for military operations against them.” [\[DOCUMENT 17\]](#)
- In May, just five months before alleged Zetas members executed 72 migrants pulled from an intercity bus line, the Monterrey Consulate issued a prescient warning about the dangers of highway travel in northeastern Mexico, noting that, “Intense fighting between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas has made travel chancy on roads north from Monterrey to the U.S. border.” Of particular concern to the Consulate were the high levels of official corruption in Monterrey, where “165 out of approximately 1,000 state police have been dismissed in recent months due to ties to [drug trafficking organizations].” The problems facing Monterrey were “typical

of those faced by...neighboring municipalities,” according to the Consulate, which cited several other instances where police officials from Monterrey and other towns participated or assisted in kidnappings and killings perpetrated by organized crime. [[DOCUMENT 18](#)]

- Three months after the August 2010 San Fernando massacre of 72 migrants, FBI authorities in Mexico report information connecting police officials in Saltillo, Coahuila, to the Zetas and to “drug trafficking and homicides.” A list of officers who “provided support and information to Los Zetas” is redacted from the document. [[DOCUMENT 26](#)]
- Summing up information taken from official sources, the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros reports that a total of 36 grave site containing 145 bodies had been discovered in the San Fernando area and that 17 Zetas and 16 members of the San Fernando police have been arrested in connection with the deaths. The police officials are being charged with "protecting the Los Zetas TCO members responsible for the kidnapping and murder of bus passengers in the San Fernando area." [[DOCUMENT 33](#)]
- Off the record, Mexican officials tell Matamoros consular staff that "the bodies are being split up to make the total number less obvious and thus less alarming." Consulate officers also comment that, "Tamaulipas officials appear to be trying to downplay both the San Fernando discoveries and the state responsibility for them, even though a recent trip to Ciudad Victoria revealed state officials fully cognizant of the hazards of highway travel in this area." [[DOCUMENT 33](#)]
- A June 2011 Embassy report notes the sacking of seven top INM officials "amid allegations that some agents had been involved in the kidnapping of migrants." It adds that "Immigrants from Central America (namely from El Salvador and Guatemala) accused the immigration agents of pulling them off buses and handing them over to drug gangs in the state of Tamaulipas." [[DOCUMENT 37](#)]
- In a message transmitted through the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, the DEA reports in October 2011 on the arrest of a “Zeta plaza boss” who was formerly a police officer in two different municipalities of Nuevo León. [[DOCUMENT 39](#)]

THE DOCUMENTS

[DOCUMENT 01](#)

April 22, 2005

Los Zetas; ITAR – Violent Gangs

U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, memorandum, classification unknown, 2 pp.

An FBI official in Little Rock, Arkansas, requests that the bureau open a “control file” to “administratively capture information about the Los Zetas organization.” The memo notes

that, “The original Zetas are former members-turned-deserters of Mexico’s elite Airmobile Special Forces Group (GAFE), trained in the U.S. at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, GA. The Zetas’ organizational structure includes counterintelligence, intelligence and tactical enforcement units.”

The memo cites allegations “that members of Los Zetas are responsible for numerous murders along the Nuevo Leon-Tamaulipas/U.S. border over the last two years” and “numerous other crimes the Zetas are likely involved in, to include money laundering, racketeering and public corruption.”

DOCUMENT 02

July 15, 2005

Los Zetas: An Emerging Threat to the United States

U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Intelligence Assessment, Unclassified/For Official Use Only, 15 pp.

As far back as 2005, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had reliable information indicating that the Los Zetas group was “undermining Mexican law enforcement officers in Nuevo Laredo,” which the FBI said was “the primary location of recent drug-related violence.” In the face of extensive corruption among local officials, the FBI intelligence assessment, dated July 15, 2005, expressed doubt that the Mexican government would be able to restore order:

In June 2005, the Government of Mexico sent federal forces to Nuevo Laredo to restore order to the city. As Los Zetas has corrupted many Mexican public officials in the Nuevo Laredo area, the government will likely achieve limited success at controlling their activities.

“Los Zetas has established control over Nuevo Laredo,” according to the FBI, and “effectively controlled the city’s police force.”

The FBI also explores the origins of Los Zetas in 2002 as part of an effort by the Gulf Cartel to establish control over the state of Tamaulipas: “The Gulf Cartel’s leader... hired a small group of Mexican military deserters as assassins and security specialists. Known as Los Zetas, they quickly developed into well-trained, brutal cartel enforcers.”

Los Zetas emerged from the Grupo Aeromovil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE), a Mexican army unit created in the mid 1990s to combat drug trafficking organizations along the US/Mexico border. The GAFE received special training in tactics and weapons. The US military provided some of this instruction at Fort Benning, Georgia. These elite counter-drug troops learned to use sophisticated intelligence-gathering equipment, advanced weaponry, and specialized tactics to combat drug traffickers. They fought to limit the escalating warfare among traffickers in Tamaulipas after the 1996 arrest of Juan Garcia Abrego, the Gulf Cartel’s leader at the time. An unknown number of GAFE soldiers under

the command of Arturo Guzman Decena deserted and joined the Gulf Cartel in early 2002. Reports differ on exact figures but range from 31 to 67 deserters. They dubbed themselves Los Zetas after Decena's GAFE radio call signal, "Zeta 1." Subsequently in a March 2002 shootout, group members helped a [excised] elude capture by Mexican authorities. In May 2002, Los Zetas delivered control of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico to [deleted] by murdering his primary rivals Dionicio Roman Garcia Sanchez and Juvenal Torres Sanchez.

DOCUMENT 03

November 7, 2005

Los Zetas Using Kaibiles to Train New Members

Extract from DIA [redacted] Intelligence Summary-EH for 04 November

U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Summary, Top Secret, 5 pp.

A U.S. military intelligence report says evidence the Zetas criminal organization is using former member of the Guatemalan special forces (*Kaibiles*) to train recruits "suggests the Zeta leadership no longer has the internal capability to train its new recruits or is trying to expand its operational capability."

As of June 2005, the Zetas were continuing efforts to recruit new members with military or law enforcement experience and especially sought to attract former or current Mexican special forces troops. The Mexican military's anticorruption efforts apparently have stymied these efforts. However, Guatemalan military downsizing from 1996 through 2004 created a pool of special forces-trained candidates for the Zetas to draw on to train new Zeta members or offset personnel shortfalls.

DOCUMENT 04

January 15, 2009

Arrest of [Deleted] a Former Member of the Mexican Military Special Forces (GAFE) and Original Zeta Operative, in Mexico City, Mexico, on January 9, 2009.

U.S. Embassy Mexico City, cable, Unclassified EFTO Sensitive, 3 pp.

An Embassy message apparently based on Drug Enforcement Administration sources reports that a "former member of the Mexican military special forces (GAFE) and original Zeta operative" whose name was redacted from the document had been arrested by the *Subprocuraduría Especializada en Investigación de Delincuencia Organizada* (SIEDO or SEIDO) in Mexico City on January 7.

DOCUMENT 05

March 12, 2009

Arrest of Zeta Operative [Deleted] a former member of the Mexican Military Special Forces (GAFE), in Queretaro, Queretaro, Mexico, on March 4, 2009

U.S. Embassy Mexico City, cable, Unclassified EFTO Sensitive, 3 pp.

Another Embassy message based on DEA information reports the arrest of another former GAFE member said to be “in control of” Zetas drug trafficking operations in Cancún. The unnamed individual was taken down in a “joint operation by the Mexican military and the Federal Agency of Investigation (AFI).

DOCUMENT 06

April 15, 2009

Human Rights in Nuevo Leon: Police Impunity but Few Complaints Regarding the Military

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Unclassified/Sensitive, 5 pp.

The U.S. Consulate reports that, “The militarization of the drug war in northern Mexico has not resulted in a significant increase in alleged human rights violations against the Mexican military in Nuevo Leon.” “Numerous human rights violations do occur,” according to the Consulate, “but the alleged culprits usually are state and local police forces.”

The low number of complaints reported by the CEDH of Mexican military abuses is consistent with conversations that [U.S. Embassy political officers] have had with public official [sic] and various NGO's. In the two years the Mexican military has had a presence its favorable ratings have remained consistently high. Even though state and local officials often talk of cleaning up their police forces, corruption and police abuses remain and the military is still the most effective means of combating crime.

DOCUMENT 07

June 26, 2009

Narco-violence Spikes Again

U.S. Embassy Mexico, cable, Confidential/Sensitive

Source: WikiLeaks

The “organized crime related death toll” in Mexico is climbing at alarming rates, according to this cable from the U.S. Embassy. “Despite the on-going strong military presence in Ciudad Juarez (CJ), Chihuahua continued to register the largest number of homicides (1093 [so far in 2009]).

[U.S. Embassy] law enforcement agencies believe the spike in violence may be partially explained by a series of blows the military and police delivered to the cartels, capturing a considerable number of local bosses in key positions, as well as identifying and arresting officials who had been colluding with drug traffickers.

“Law enforcement contacts” say the rise in violence may be the result of “score-settling” among rival gangs. Another theory says that, “as cartel members go ‘down-market’ and engage in relatively more petty criminal activities, they are increasingly butting up against rival drug trafficking organizations, as well as other criminal groups.”

The cable lists a number of government officials recently connected to criminal groups, including military and police officers in Jalisco, top officials in Quintana Roo, “two former top security officials in the state of Morelos,” and several current and former top police officials in Tapachula.

Separately, the cable highlights the recent arrests of three officers from the Attorney General’s Organized Crime Investigations Unit (SIEDO) and ten members of the Mexican military for links to organized crime. The Embassy says the arrests “suggest that there [*sic*] cartel infiltration of federal security forces remains an ongoing problem.”

DOCUMENT 08

c. July 2009

Assessment of "Los Zetas" Evolution and Expansion (2001-2009)

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), cable, sensitive, 9 pp.

The DEA distributes an assessment of the evolution and expansion of Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel from their inception around the year 2000 to the time of the report, in 2009. In addition to the DEA stations in the U.S. and Mexico, the assessment was also sent to the U.S. embassies in Mexico City, Guatemala City, as well as to officials at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), and the National Security Agency (NSA).

Based on internal discussions and intelligence briefings, the assessment highlights important details about the composition of, and growing threat posed by, the Zetas, and provides details on the group’s links to the Guatemalan Kaibiles, elite special operations forces tied to massacres carried out during Guatemala's civil war. According to the assessment, in 2005 an arrested Zeta member said his organization had recruited "former Guatemalan Kaibiles to work with the Zetas, and that the Kaibiles were procuring firearms and grenades from Guatemala on behalf of the Gulf Cartel."

The document warns, "The Zetas are no longer solely operating as the enforcement arm of the Gulf Cartel. The strength of the Zeta force is their ability to corrupt, kill, and intimidate and these factors have given the Zetas the power to conduct activities throughout Mexico, and they have established a methodology to move into new territory and assert control over that geography. Zeta activities have evolved from drug trafficking to traditional organized crime as well... While still closely allied with the Gulf Cartel, the Zetas have evolved into a separate drug trafficking organization that is independently transporting cocaine from Colombia to Mexico."

DOCUMENT 09

November 24, 2009

Arrest of Former Police Chiefs of Monterrey, Guadalupe and Monrelos [*sic*], Nuevo Leon and Ten Other Officers on 11-19-2009

U.S. Embassy Mexico City, cable, Unclassified EFTO//Nofoin Sensitive, 5 pp.

In a message transmitted through the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, in-country DEA officer reports the arrests of 13 current and former law enforcement officials in the state of

Nuevo León, then considered a Zetas safe-haven. Among those arrested on allegations of “providing protection and assistance to the [deleted] drug trafficking organization” are the former police chiefs of Monterrey, Guadalupe and Montemorelos.

DOCUMENT 10

January 29, 2010

Scenesetter for the Opening of the Defense Bilateral Working Group, Washington, D.C., February 1

U.S. Embassy Mexico, cable, Secret

Source: WikiLeaks

Calderon has aggressively attacked Mexico's drug trafficking organizations but has struggled with an unwieldy and uncoordinated interagency and spiraling rates of violence that have made him vulnerable to criticism that his anti-crime strategy has failed. Indeed, the GOM's inability to halt the escalating numbers of narco-related homicides in places like Ciudad Juarez and elsewhere - the nationwide total topped 7,700 in 2009 - has become one of Calderon's principal political liabilities as the general public has grown more concerned about citizen security.

Mexican security institutions are often locked in a zero-sum competition in which one agency's success is viewed as another's failure, information is closely guarded, and joint operations are all but unheard of. Official corruption is widespread, leading to a compartmentalized siege mentality among “clean” law enforcement leaders and their lieutenants. Prosecution rates for organized crime-related offenses are dismal; two percent of those detained are brought to trial [sic]. Only 2 percent of those arrested in Ciudad Juarez have even been charged with a crime. The failure to reduce violence has focused attention on the military's perceived failures and led to a major course change in January to switch the overall command in Ciudad Juarez from the military to the federal police. The military was not trained to patrol the streets or carry out law enforcement operations. It does not have the authority to collect and introduce evidence into the judicial system. The result: arrests skyrocketed, prosecutions remained flat, and both the military and public have become increasingly frustrated. The command change in Juarez has been seen by political classes and the public as a Presidential repudiation of SEDENA. When SEDENA joins you at the DBWG, it will be an agency smarting from the very public statement of a lack of confidence in its performance record in Juarez. ... Currently, the military is the lightning [sic] rod for criticism of the Calderon Administration's security policies. We are having some success in influencing the GOM to transition the military to secondary support functions in Juarez. Still, the GOM's capacity to replicate the Juarez model is limited. They simply lack the necessary numbers of trained federal police to deploy them in such numbers in more than a few cities. There are changes in the way that the military can interact with vetted municipal police, as we have seen in Tijuana, that produce better results. But in the near term, there is no escaping that the military will play a role in public security.

DOCUMENT 11

c. February 2010

Los Zetas Fact Sheet

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Huston Field Division, report, classification unknown, 2 pp.

The DEA's Houston Field Division provides a fact sheet on the Zetas, again highlighting their growth and independence as a "highly sophisticated organized crime syndicate." The fact sheet notes that "They include Mexican military deserters, former police officers and family members of Zetas as well as *Kaibiles* (former Guatemalan Army Special Forces Soldiers)." Once the Zetas become entrenched in an area, they engage in organized crime that includes "...extortion, kidnapping, murder-for-hire, money laundering, human-smuggling" among other criminal activities.

DOCUMENT 12

February 26, 2010

Border Violence Spreads to Nuevo Leon

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Confidential

Source: Wikileaks

Zeta influence here is longstanding and widespread throughout local and state government. Gang members hung the recently discovered narcobanners in a least one area, near the Palacio del Gobierno, under state police observation. RSO [U.S. State Department Regional Security Officer] sources indicated that state police officers' calls for backup went unheeded. Post has long connected former Nuevo Leon Director General of State Investigation Hector Santos (now serving in the same post in Coahuila) with the Zetas, and many other local and state police and government officials have ties to organized crime.

DOCUMENT 13

February 28, 2010

Grenade Attacks Against Monterrey Police; Feb. 26 and 28th EACs

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Unclassified/Sensitive

Source: Wikileaks

A series of grenade attacks by the Gulf Cartel against municipal police forces in Monterrey are interpreted by U.S. Consulate personnel as a message to police to cease supporting the rival Zetas criminal organization and "switch sides."

Given the thorough penetration by the Zetas of the police forces in those municipalities that were hit, a much more likely explanation is that the attacks were a signal from the Gulf Cartel to the police to cease/desist their support of the Zetas and switch sides.

The Consulate's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) also "discussed the probabilities of further Gulf Cartel retributions against Zeta controlled police departments in the Monterrey area."

The attacks and the recent uptick in violence generally has the local population worried, with many canceling trips to the border. The Consulate notes that "several bus companies are cancelling runs to outlying cities in the state."

Indeed, if high-value targets fleeing Tamaulipas take up residence in Monterrey and nearby Saltillo, Coahuila, violence here between the cartels and between the cartels and the military (both army and navy) will increase. During the previous week reliable witness reported carloads of gunmen, with automatic weapons hanging out the window, retreating to Monterrey along the highways linking the city to Reynosa. Indeed, DEA confirms a rolling confrontation between the military and retreating Zetas on February 27 in the Nuevo Leon municipalities of Zuazua and Pesqueria, both to the north and east of Monterrey.

...

RSO relayed Unclass reporting that the Los Zetas leader, Miguel Heriberto Lazcano-Lazcano is believed to be hiding in Monterrey and was planning for counter-offensive strikes against the Gulf Cartel in Tamaulipas. This information dovetailed with reporting from other sources and the members of post's Law Enforcement Working Group elaborated that Saltillo, Coahuila would likely be considered a safehaven by the Zetas.

...

It is now clear that the ongoing war between the Gulf and Zeta drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) has reached Monterrey.

DOCUMENT 14

March 23, 2010

Nuevo Leon: Citizens Wonder Who's Winning in the Fight Against Organized Crime
U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Confidential, 5 pp.

With violence spinning out of control, the U.S. Consulate paints a grim picture of the security situation in and around Monterrey, describing a number of violent crimes committed in the recent days by cartels and state officials. In Santa Catarina, a routine arrest resulted in a mob attack on the police chief. One suspect in the attack who was detained and delivered to the military "was found dead (and bearing signs of torture) shortly thereafter" according to the consulate.

State officials also "admitted misidentifying as gangsters two students who were killed" during the gunfight at Monterrey Tec. The governor of Nuevo Leon suspended 81 police officials after admitting "that the Zeta drug trafficking organization (DTO) had co-opted some state and police officials" in setting up roadblocks around the city. The Mexican marines have been "aggressively targeting cartel figures, leading to shootouts during military attempts to arrest high-ranking cartel members and during chance encounters with cartel motorcades." Violence has now reached "beyond Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon" to include Ciudad Valles in the state of San Luis Potosi. The consulate adds that, "The

struggle between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas has clearly shifted from the border to the outlying towns in Nuevo Leon state."

DOCUMENT 15

March 25, 2010

Continuing Violence in Northern Mexico Between Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, Possible Gang Threat Against U.S. Law Enforcement in El Paso, Texas

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, cable, unclassified, 6 pp.

Based on information provided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), this U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) document reports on the worsening security situation in Mexico's northern states, where fighting between the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas has led to escalating violence in the region. The document cites "corroborated and reliable information" on the widespread use of roadblocks along highways in the region.

The document goes on to describe fierce gun battles between the rival gangs, which in one case left the bodies of "approximately 20 to 25 Gulf Cartel members...scattered in Jiménez [Tamaulipas]." "The Gulf Cartel has been attacking small plazas in Tamaulipas," according to the CBP report, adding that "[t]he attacks occur simply because the area belongs to the Zetas." The DHS ominously predicts that "a retaliatory strike by Los Zetas is likely inevitable."

One section of the document emphasizes the intensity of the violence, relating a gripping tale of a 21-year-old U.S. citizen who arrived at the Paso Del Norte border crossing "shot twice in the chest" with "his left leg amputated as a result of a grenade explosion." CBP officials on the case received conflicting reports about the cause of his injuries, with one version indicating the grenade was tossed into his vehicle, while another claimed it had accidentally exploded as he "was attempting to toss a grenade into another vehicle."

This report comes amid Operation Knock Down, in which U.S. authorities at the federal, state and local levels targeted Barrio Azteca gang members in El Paso, Texas.

DOCUMENT 16

April 16, 2010

Narcotics Affairs Section Mexico Monthly Report for March 2010

U.S. Embassy in Mexico, cable, unclassified, 11 pp.

The U.S. Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section provides a monthly summary of internal developments in Mexico, reporting that "March ended as one of the bloodiest months on record, with an estimated 900 killings nationwide." The cable highlights that Mexican government officials did not anticipate the sharp increase in violence in the northeast that occurred as the Zetas took control the lucrative plazas in the region. U.S. officials report the violence has "cut a swath across north-east Mexico, including key towns in Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon, and even in neighboring Durango." The document highlights the failure of the Mexican authorities to manage the growing threat, highlighting how "DTO's [Drug Trafficking Organizations] have operated fairly openly and with freedom of

movement and operations...In many cases they operated with near total impunity in the face of compromised local security forces."

The focus on violence in Ciudad Juárez, especially in the wake of the killing of a U.S. Consulate employee and her husband, has also produced changes in U.S. deportation policies. While ICE reports that some 6,000 convicts were deported to Juárez in 2009, in the future such deportations will take place at point further east, including Del Río, Laredo and Eagle Pass.

As part of U.S. support provided through the Mérida Initiative, the document also reports on U.S. efforts to implement an initiative to train regional police under the Culture of Lawfulness education initiative, involving officials from the now-defunct Secretariat of Public Security (SSP) in Baja California, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas.

DOCUMENT 17

April 28, 2010

Alarming Increase in Drug Cartel Violence in Monterrey Metro Area

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Unclassified/Sensitive, 6 pp.

This cable notes an alarming increase of narcotics-related killings in Nuevo León, reporting that drug trafficking groups "have targeted military, state, and municipal police by killing corrupt officers affiliated with the opposing cartel, or as retaliation for military operations against them." The Consulate describes "[f]ierce gun battles...on the highway to Reynosa" as well as "roadblocks in the city" set up by the drug cartels, who travel "relatively unimpeded" in and around Monterrey. "Beset by corruption and a paucity of resources, the state government is unable to deal with the situation and is relying on the military to stabilize the situation," according to the cable.

DOCUMENT 18

May 21, 2010

Civilian Law Enforcement Outmatched by the Cartels; the Public Frustrated in the Search for Solutions

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Confidential, 7 pp.

Listed among a long inventory of recent violence in Monterrey —attributed mainly to conflict between the warring Gulf Cartel and the Zetas criminal group—is the following warning about c

Roads North Continue to Be Dangerous

Intense fighting between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas has made travel chancy on roads north from Monterrey to the U.S. border. On April 30, gunmen killed an employee of the Nuevo Leon state Committee for Livestock Protection as he drove his mobile office towards the Colombia border crossing. (Comment: Over the past month, Post has received reports

of numerous Cartel hijackings and hijack attempts, including the recent carjacking and robber of [deleted] on the road to Reynosa. End comment.)

Of particular concern is the high levels of official corruption being reported in Monterrey, where “165 out of approximately 1,000 state police have been dismissed in recent months due to ties to [drug trafficking organizations].” The problems facing Monterrey are “typical of those faced by...neighboring municipalities,” according to the Consulate, which cites other instances where police officials from Monterrey and other towns participated or assisted in kidnappings and killings perpetrated by organized crime. “Both industry and the public, aware that the public security apparatus has been compromised, are reaching for...solutions,” according to the Consulate report.

DOCUMENT 19

May 28, 2010

FW: SEARS NBR 6152 for North & Central America case [redacted]

Drug Enforcement Administration, cable, classification unknown, 4 pp.

This heavily-redacted DEA cable reports on significant criminal activities taking place in Mexico, including arrests, seized vehicles, and seized weapons. It includes details on an incident that took place just three months before the 2010 San Fernando massacre involving the arrest of four members of the Zetas in Tamaulipas and the subsequent seizure of eight assault rifles and two vehicles on May 19, 2010. A shootout between security forces led to the deaths of four Zetas and capture of four others. While the names of the Zetas are withheld from the document, it notes that “it was determined that some of them were members of the Zetas and the subjects from Guatemala were members of the Fuerzas Especiales de Guatemala (Kaibiles).”

DOCUMENT 20

c. July 2010

GFM7-10-9448; Southwest Border Intelligence Collection Plan

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, cable, classification unknown, 8 pp.

This report catalogs “significant events of violence” in and around Ciudad Juárez from November 2009 through July 2010.

Cartel operations against Mexican law enforcement officials have been a major component of the CDJ Plaza battle since its beginning. The primary reason is the heavy reliance Mexican cartels have in the use of corrupt officials.

...

Calderon’s anti-crime strategy had “unintended consequences”: “For example, the removal of DTO leadership has allowed less experienced and undisciplined personnel to fill the leadership vacuum, contributing to the spike of drug-related murders.”

DOCUMENT 21

c. August 2010

State of Cartels

U.S. State Department, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, memorandum, Secret/NOFORN/ORCON, 3 pp.

The State Department's intelligence arm considers President Calderón's anti-crime strategy, noting his decision to deploy military and federal police forces "to states where weak and often corrupt state and local police units were unable or unwilling to combat powerful cartels." Calderón's "crackdown" has put pressure on the cartels but has also "resulted in some unintended consequences... For example, the removal of DTO leadership has allowed less experienced and undisciplined personnel to fill the leadership vacuum, contributing to the spike of drug-related murders."

DOCUMENT 22

August 26, 2010

Zetas massacre 72 migrants in Tamaulipas

U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, unclassified, 3 pp.

The U.S. Consulate in Matamoros sent this report four days after the San Fernando massacre of August 22, 2010, providing the first in the series of declassified cables on the incident. The Embassy describes how on August 22 approximately 75 migrants "were stopped by an unknown number of organized crime figures and transported under guard to San Fernando." According to a U.S. consulate source, the hijack point was north of a fixed military highway checkpoint, which the migrants avoided by using small rural roads.

An Ecuadorian male who survived the massacre described how before the killings some of the victims were offered an opportunity to work for the Zetas as assassins ("sicarios"). After all but one member of the group turned down the offer to work for the Zetas, the survivor stated that 54 men and 15 women were subsequently executed. Mexican Navy officials found the bodies two days after the massacre in an abandoned barn/warehouse. Two days later, on August 26, Mexican authorities reported that the director of the municipal police in San Fernando was found dead with other unidentified bodies, one of which was believed to be the state prosecutor.

The document concludes with the assessment of the consular official, noting that, "If the survivor's account of the murders is accurate, then this represents a new level of violence from the Zetas. It remains unclear how these deaths benefit the Zetas...One theory proposed by [name redacted] is that as the profits from the migrants proposed illegal entry in to the U.S. were destined for the Gulf Cartel, their murders were a way for the Zetas to financially hurt the Gulf Cartel's interests."

DOCUMENT 23

August 27, 2010

Timeline of violent events occurring in Matamoros consular district August 22-27, 2010

U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, unclassified, 2 pp.

The U.S. Consulate in Matamoros provides further details of the timeline of events beginning with the San Fernando killings through to August 27. The events include a shootout between Mexican military officials and cartel members on August 24, grenade

attacks the same day, car bombs on August 27, and discovery of decapitated bodies believed to be the state prosecutor and director of municipal police in San Fernando, both of whom disappeared on August 25.

DOCUMENT 24

September 3, 2010

Timeline of major violent events occurring in Matamoros consular district August 29 through September 3, 2010

U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 2 pp.

U.S. Consulate officials provide a roundup on continuing violence in Matamoros in the wake of the San Fernando massacre. The incidents include a grenade attack against a Mexican Naval hospital where one of the survivors of San Fernando was recovering. Additionally, on September 2, a second survivor of the massacre located federal authorities in Matamoros, was taken in, and reportedly moved to Mexico City for debriefing. The same day officials from Mexico's Attorney General's Office (PGR) and open sources reported on military clashes with Zetas in Tamaulipas, near Nuevo Leon. Thirty-two cartel members were reported killed along with two military officials.

DOCUMENT 25

September 10, 2010

Timeline of major violent events occurring in Matamoros consular district September 4 through 10, 2010

U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 2 pp.

Open sources report that the head of public safety in Tamaulipas resigned because of escalating violence in the state and after confirmation that bodies recently discovered were that of San Fernando's director of the municipal police and state prosecutor. U.S. contacts in the Attorney General's office also tell consulate officials that nine cartel members in the San Fernando area were arrested but would not confirm if the individuals were connected with the August 22 killing of 72 migrants.

DOCUMENT 26

November 19, 2010

Administrative Revision - Provision of Support to Los Zetas by Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, Municipal Police Officers and Polic [sic]

U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Intelligence Information Report, Secret/NoFORN, 3 pp.

FBI authorities in Mexico report information connecting police officials in Saltillo, Coahuila, to the Zetas and to "drug trafficking and homicides." A list of officers who "provided support and information to Los Zetas" is redacted from the document.

DOCUMENT 27

December 16, 2010

Mass Murder, Extortion, and Abuse Conducted by Los Zetas Against Migrant who Traveled via Los Zeta and MS-13 Controlled Train Smuggling Routes from Central

America to Mexico, as of October 2010**U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Intelligence Information Report, Secret, 7 pp.**

Nearly every word has been redacted from this seven-page report on abuses perpetrated by Los Zetas against migrants along train routes in Mexico.

DOCUMENT 28**January 31, 2011*****A Perilous Road through Mexico for Migrants*****U.S. Embassy in Mexico, cable, sensitive, 6 pp.**

The cable highlights the ineffectiveness of Mexico's National Migration Agency (INM) in allowing migrants to bypass checkpoints, due to "a combination of understaffing, inability, and corruption." It also brings attention to how the situation for migrants has worsened "due to pervasive TCO [transnational criminal organizations] control of routes and crossings," where "TCO's act alternatively as paid facilitators, extortionists, kidnappers and traffickers." Moreover, according to the cable, "anecdotal evidence suggests that migrant authorities and local police often turn a blind eye or collude in these activities."

The Embassy comment stresses that a permanent solution to addressing the treatment of migrants transiting through Mexico will require strengthening in the rule of law and increased professionalization of law enforcement agencies. The document notes that these types of programs are underway and are partially financed by the U.S. under the Mérida Initiative.

DOCUMENT 29**February 15, 2011*****February 14: A Day of Violence in Tamaulipas*****U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 2 pp.**

The U.S. Consulate in Matamoros reports on the most violent day in the district since the San Fernando massacre of August 2010. Twenty-six people were killed in the cities of Nuevo Padilla, San Fernando, and Ciudad Victoria in attacks linked to translational criminal organizations (TCO). Bodies were discovered in San Fernando, and assailants killed a police officer in Ciudad Victoria. U.S. officials comment that Mexican military forces are heavily involved in fighting the Zetas in the town of San Fernando.

DOCUMENT 30**April 6, 2011*****Two Mass Graves Containing 48 Bodies Discovered in the San Fernando Area*****U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 2 pp.**

The U.S. Consulate in Matamoros continues to report on the discovery of bodies in the area. On April 2 and again on April 6, mass graves containing 48 bodies, two reportedly wearing police uniforms, were discovered in the community of La Joya near San Fernando. SEDENA, the Mexican defense ministry, is in charge of recovering the bodies, and the Attorney General's office is investigating the matter. The U.S. Consulate comments that the

bodies were likely either members of transnational criminal organizations, victims of kidnappings by criminal organizations, or victims of highway violence.

DOCUMENT 31

April 6, 2011

Juarez Police Accused of Involvement in Disappearance of Four Men

U.S. Consulate Ciudad Juárez, cable, Unclassified/Sensitive, 2 pp.

The Consulate reports that the Secretary of Public Security for Ciudad Juárez, retired Lt. Col. Julian Leyzaola Pérez, is "facing a controversy involving human rights" in the disappearance of four men, who were allegedly abducted by Leyzaola's police body guards. Leyzaola, the Consulate says, has "a reputation for condoning torture while he was police chief in Tijuana." While there is "little evidence of his direct involvement," the situation is "complicated by the commonly acknowledged corruption within the municipal police forces and the many interests that may not wish to see Leyzaola succeed in either cleaning up the police department or in taking on organized crime."

DOCUMENT 32

April 8, 2011

More Mass Graves Found in Tamaulipas: Body total Now 81

U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 3 pp.

Kidnappings continue in the state of Tamaulipas on a large-scale, with clashes occurring between Mexican military officials and criminal organizations, and new discoveries of mass graves of victims. More mass graves have been discovered in San Fernando, bringing the body count to 81, across 17 different burial sites. "Federal officials believe that the majority of the bodies belong to people kidnapped from public buses in the San Fernando area by Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO) members in recent weeks." The victims were kidnapped on buses heading north to the border from San Luis Potosi, destined for Reynosa, as well as buses coming from Michoacán, and Guanajuato. SEDENA has deployed its Special Operations Investigation unit in San Fernando to investigate.

SEDENA has also reportedly deployed forces, rescued kidnapped victims, discovered grave sites in the region, and detained presumed TCO members. The document notes that "According to federal officials, the vast majority of the remains appear to have been beaten to death. A small number had bullet wounds. Officials sources say they believe that many individuals taken from buses have not been reported and authorities are continuing to search the area for their remains." As for the 14 presumed TCO members, they were reportedly brought to Mexico City, and placed in custody of the Office of Special Investigations of Organized Crime (SIEDO) of the Attorney General.

The U.S. Consulate official comments that federal officials believe the Zetas are responsible for the killings, and that the majority of the kidnapping victims discovered were migrants heading to the U.S. "who were intercepted en route and unable to pay what was demanded of them."

DOCUMENT 33**April 15, 2011*****Tamaulipas' Mass Graves: Body Count Reaches 145*****U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, unclassified, 4 pp.**

Summing up information taken from official sources, the U.S. Consulate reports that a total of 36 grave site containing 145 bodies were discovered in the San Fernando area during a SEDENA operation that took place April 1-14, 2011. Seventeen Zetas and 16 members of the San Fernando police have been arrested in connection with the deaths. The police officials are being charged with "protecting the Los Zetas TCO members responsible for the kidnapping and murder of bus passengers in the San Fernando area."

Off the record, Mexican officials tell Consulate officials that "the bodies are being split up to make the total number less obvious and thus less alarming." Consulate officers also comment that, "Tamaulipas officials appear to be trying to downplay both the San Fernando discoveries and the state responsibility for them, even though a recent trip to Ciudad Victoria revealed state officials fully cognizant of the hazards of highway travel in this area."

DOCUMENT 34**April 29, 2011*****Holy Week Vacations Marred by Violence; San Fernando Body Count Reaches 196*****U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, sensitive, 4 pp.**

The U.S. Consulate reports that Mexican government authorities are covering up information to hide the total number of bodies that have been discovered in mass graves Tamaulipas. "Though not publicized by authorities," the cable reads, "the number of bodies found in mass graves in the San Fernando area since April 1 has reached 196 and is expected to rise as Mexican Army (SEDENA) and Marine (SEMAR) forces continue to search the area." Official sources indicate that SEDENA and SEMAR continue to search for new bodies, and the military continues to respond to ongoing gun battles between rival cartels.

Despite providing private statements about the insecurity of the region, Mexican government officials have been downplaying the violence, particularly in the lead up to Holy Week, so as to not deter tourism in the area. The cable reads, "Despite stating privately in January that security in general, and highway violence in particular, is their top concern...government officials have avoided publicly drawing attention to the level of violence in Tamaulipas."

There is now a heavy military presence on the highways around San Fernando which has temporarily deterred TCO [transnational criminal organization] activity in that area. [The Embassy] sees no evidence, however, that the military presence has substantially limited TCO ability to operate in Tamaulipas[. W]hen the federal troops leave there is little doubt that the TCOs will return to fill the power void.

DOCUMENT 35**May 13, 2011*****Mexican Army Seizes Weapons of Local Police in Tamaulipas*****U.S. Consulate Matamoros, cable, unclassified, 3 pp.**

U.S. Consulate officials report that SEDENA has disarmed municipal and transit police in all but one of the 43 Tamaulipas municipalities. The government has not made public comments on the seizure, but initial reports indicate the measure was carried out to determine if the weapons were used in crimes. The seizure comes in the wake of the arrest of 17 San Fernando police officers in connection with the discovery of 196 bodies in mass graves in that city. Sources tell the Consulate officials that the SEDENA forces seized a total of 460 weapons in Matamoros, leaving Matamoros' 700 police officers without weapons.

DOCUMENT 36**May 16, 2011*****Narcotics Affairs Section Mexico Monthly Report for April 2011*****U.S. Embassy in Mexico, cable, unclassified, 11 pp.**

The Embassy reports on internal developments in Mexico, including the discovery of 183 bodies in mass graves in the area of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, and the arrest of 17 of the 25 municipality police officers, including the municipality police chief, in connection with the discovery of the mass grave.

DOCUMENT 37**June 13, 2011*****Narcotics Affairs Section Mexico Monthly Report for May 2011*****U.S. Embassy in Mexico, cable, sensitive, 9 pp.**

Among other things reported in this document is the firing of seven top INM officials "amid allegations that some agents had been involved in the kidnapping of migrants." It adds that "Immigrants from Central America (namely from El Salvador and Guatemala) accused the immigration agents of pulling them off buses and handing them over to drug gangs in the state of Tamaulipas."

DOCUMENT 38**October 7, 2011*****Alien and Narcotics Smuggling Along the Southwest Border*****U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Information Report, confidential, 4 pp.**

This DIA intelligence report includes information based on a human source with "both direct and indirect access" to the information "during the course of official duties." It reports that, "At least four Mexican police officers may have been accepting payment from drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). Although law enforcement officers being involved with DTOs [drug trafficking organizations] and alien smuggling organizations (ASOs) was not new information it was important to note so that it continued to be passed as current practice (sic)."

The document goes on to discuss the harsh treatment of migrants and widespread abuses carried out by human smugglers on migrant populations.

DOCUMENT 39

October 21, 2011

Operation All Inclusive 2011 (Ref [Deleted]) After Action Report – Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico

U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Confidential//NoFORN, 5 pp.

In a message transmitted through the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, the DEA reports the arrest of a “Zeta plaza boss” who was formerly a police officer in two different municipalities of Nuevo León.

DOCUMENT 40

February 3, 2012

Mexican Political Highlights January 28-February 3, 2012

U.S. Embassy Mexico City, cable, Unclassified, 5 pp.

The U.S. Embassy highlights the problem of corruption at the highest levels of the Tamaulipas state government, reporting that the Attorney General's office (PGR) has been investigating three former Tamaulipas governors since early 2009 in connection to the arrest of Zeta founding member Miguel Angel Soto Parra. The governors include Manuel Cavazos Lerma (1993-1999), Tomás Yarrington (1999-2004) and Eugenio Hernández Flores (2005-2010). All three were pursuing Senate seats at the time of the investigations and, according to the assessment, "pundits speculate that PRI presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto will only give the nod to Cavazos." It also comments that "PRI leaders say the investigation reflects a 'dirty war' against them, and that GOM [government of Mexico] is exploiting PGR for political purpose," and notes how "Peña Nieto visited Tamaulipas on February 2 to launch his campaign in the state."

The cable also reports on the trial of General Jesús Moreno Aviña, charged with human rights violation and corruption stemming from his actions as former head of the 1st Airborne Infantry Battalion in Ojinaga, Chihuahua. The charges include accepting bribes from narcotics traffickers, and authorizing extrajudicial killings, among others.

DOCUMENT 41

May 4, 2012

Fourteen Decapitated Bodies Discovered in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), report, Official Use Only/Law Enforcement Sensitive, 5 pp.

Shortly before the May 13 discovery of 49 dismembered torsos along the Monterrey-Reynosa highway in Nuevo León, the CBP report chronicles two months of horrific massacres in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, as rival drug cartels engage in an increasingly brutal series of killings—including beheadings, dismemberments, and other unspeakable acts of violence.

DOCUMENT 42**May 14, 2012*****49 Mutilated Bodies Discovered in Nuevo Leon*****U.S. Consulate Monterrey, cable, Unclassified/Sensitive, 2 pp.**

Following the discovery on May 13, of 49 dismembered torsos along a highway in Nuevo León, the Consulate's "law enforcement contacts" report that "the Zetas attacked a bus traveling from Reynosa to Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, on May 12 and killed all aboard" and that "the 49 victims may be the murdered passengers."

Nuevo Leon authorities confirmed that the Zetas perpetrated the crime and asserted that the victims were Gulf Cartel members and may include immigrants. Most bodies, state officials claim, carry Santa Muerte cult tattoos, a possible indication of criminal involvement. Investigators are working to identify the bodies.

DOCUMENT 43**May 22, 2012*****Sinaloa Cartel Offensive Posture Against Los Zetas and its Implications to Nuevo Laredo Plaza 21 May 2012*****U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), report, secret, 11 pp.**

The document discusses the continued clashes between the Zetas and the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels over Tamaulipas Plaza in Nuevo Laredo, "a highly contentious and lucrative corridor known for narcotic and alien trafficking." It goes on to discuss a number of incidents involving the Zetas, and reports on the discovery in May 2012 of 49 mutilated bodies highlighting the "abhorrent brutality transpiring over the control of the coveted Tamaulipas Plaza."

<https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2014/03/28/mexicos-san-fernando-massacre-the-families-have-the-right-to-know-why/>

Mexico's San Fernando Massacre: The Families Have the Right to Know Why

MARCH 28, 2014

tags: access to information, CNDH, IFAI, Mexico, PGR, san fernando massacre

by Jesse Franzblau

Information commissioners must determine whether migrant killings violated human rights

Judge says right to information is a “human right” that supersedes “disproportional” application of exemption pertaining to legal investigations

This post was co-authored by [Michael Evans](#) and [Jesse Franzblau](#) from [Migration Declassified](#) and was also published in Spanish by [Animal Politico](#) in Mexico.

In a case that with important ramifications both for access to information and for human rights investigations in Mexico, a federal judge declared last week that the country’s information commissioners can and should determine whether an infamous 2010 massacre of 72 migrants in Tamaulipas state by alleged agents of the Zetas drug cartel might constitute a grave violation of human rights under established international legal norms. If so, plaintiffs argue, the Attorney General of Mexico (PGR) must release an unclassified version of its investigative file on the massacre in accordance with Mexico’s access law, which prohibits the withholding of records relating to grave violations of human rights or humanitarian law.

The commissioners from Mexico’s Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI) have until now resisted efforts by civil society groups, led by Article 19 in Mexico, to force the oversight body to make such a determination. In September 2013, IFAI ruled that it “did not have the faculty, capacity, expertise, knowledge, or the personnel to investigate and determine the existences of grave human rights violations or crimes against humanity” with respect to the San Fernando killings (see [Article 19 press release](#)). Absent an official determination that the massacre constituted a violation of human rights, IFAI claimed it could not invoke the clause in Article 14 of Mexico’s transparency law that mandates disclosure of otherwise protected documents when they relate to such violations. The commissioners thus rejected the appeal from Article 19, and refused to order PGR to release its investigative files on the San Fernando case (see [previous posts on IFAI September 2013 ruling](#)).

Article 19 appealed that decision, and the recent ruling found that IFAI is in fact capable of interpreting the law to determine if the massacre *could* constitute a grave violation of human rights based on the criteria set by Mexico’s Supreme Court and the Inter-American Human Rights Court (see [Article 19 press release](#)). The judge also found that IFAI’s September 2013 decision—that the human rights nature of the case must be determined by another authority before IFAI can rule on the opening of related documents—was itself a violation of citizens’ right to information.

In a remarkable passage from the court’s ruling, the judge found that the PGR’s decision to withhold information pertaining to its “preliminary investigation” of the massacre – a determination that was approved by IFAI – is “disproportional” and “violates the human right of access to information.”

The ruling orders IFAI to take another look at the San Fernando case, to determine if the killings might reasonably constitute grave human rights violations under guidelines clearly defined by the court, and if so, to order the Attorney General to release the public version of its investigative file.

A strategic right to truth campaign

If upheld, the court's ruling would be an enormous victory for human rights defenders and transparency advocates in Mexico and could have a transformative impact on the efficacy of using the Mexican access law to investigate violations of international human rights norms.

Through Migration Declassified, the National Security Archive continues to support the [campaign launched last year by Article 19](#) and the rest of our partner organizations to promote the right to the truth with respect to the San Fernando case. The case is part of a coordinated campaign, involving transparency activists and migrant rights defenders in the U.S. and Mexico, all working to push back the veil of secrecy surrounding violence against migrants.

Nearly four years later, the federal and state agencies responsible for investigating the case appear unwilling, or incapable, of fully investigating the massacre. Surviving family members of massacre victims were incensed when Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), in its formal report on the case, declined to say whether the acts constituted grave violations of human rights. Family members of the victims, along with the Fundación para la Justicia (FJEDD) have now taken legal action against the CNDH and are challenging the unassailability of the commission's rulings (see [previous post](#) on legal challenge against CNDH). The complaint argues that CNDH, the agency charged with the protection and defense of human rights in Mexico, did not fully investigate the case, did not solicit the views of victims and family members or respect their right to justice, and ultimately failed to determine whether the state was involved in the killings either through omission or direct action.

In consultation with these organizations, Migration Declassified has been engaged in a strategic effort to gain access to official government files with important information on abuses against migrants, and information on the San Fernando massacre is central to this effort. Using access to information laws in both countries, the strategy seeks to push U.S. and Mexican government agencies to disclose classified information essential to the defense of migrant rights on both sides of the border. The scale and the circumstances surrounding the San Fernando massacre, which was followed, the next year, by the discovery of hundreds more bodies in mass graves, makes the case emblematic of the horrors and abuses faced by migrants traveling through Mexico.

The strategy has resulted in the declassification of U.S. diplomatic cables and intelligence reports in support of both of these legal challenges. First published in August 2013, these records reflect U.S. concern that, despite prior knowledge, Mexican authorities did little to prevent cartel-related violence against migrants and deliberately downplayed the state's responsibility for the massacres in San Fernando (see [previous post on U.S. files](#)). One U.S. Embassy Mexico cable sent to Washington just a few months before the massacre observed a state of "[near total impunity](#)" for Mexican cartels in the face of compromised security forces. Four years later, a culture of impunity remains.

The declassified U.S. files also provide details on the [arrest of San Fernando police officials](#) and suspected Zeta members in the wake of the massacre, including [U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency \(DEA\) files](#) on the arrest of Zeta leaders in April 2011. The DEA documents indicate that U.S. agencies are willing to release information that could be considered sensitive to law enforcement and investigative proceedings, paving the way for Mexico's Attorney General's office to release its investigative files on the case.

On the Mexican side, the strategy has produced a set of internal records from Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) relating to migrant protection programs implemented in the wake of the San Fernando massacre, including the creation of Migrant Protection Groups in July 2011 for deployment to dangerous migration routes (see [INM documents](#) released in FOI case 0411100064213). In one of our more recent cases, IFAI ordered INM to locate records in response to our requests for documents relating to the May 2011 firing of INM officials under allegations of involvement in abuses against migrants (see [IFAI Resolution 5361/13](#), request # 0411100075613).

IFAI now holds the key to unlocking the case files behind a criminal investigation that has failed to produce a single conviction for the most shocking mass murder that Mexico has seen in a generation. Soon after the April 2011 discovery of bodies of the victims in mass graves in San Fernando, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IACHR) urged the "State of Mexico to maximize its efforts to ensure that such crimes do not happen again, to determine the victims' identities, and to investigate, prosecute, and punish the perpetrators and masterminds, whether this is a case involving organized crime or State agents in collusion with organized crime" (see [IACHR press release](#), April 2011). After nearly four years Mexico has failed every one of these tests. It will now be up to IFAI to determine whether the families of the San Fernando victims have the right to know why.

<https://migrationdeclassified.wordpress.com/2014/08/22/mexican-prosecutors-office-ordered-to-release-investigative-files-on-san-fernando-massacre/>

Mexican Prosecutor's Office Ordered to Release Records on San Fernando Massacre

Posted on [August 22, 2014](#) *by* [MICHAEL EVANS](#)

This week, Mexico's new information commissioners for the first time [ordered the federal prosecutor's office](#) to open certain investigative files relating to the discovery of some 200 bodies in mass graves in the state of Tamaulipas in April 2011. The victims, many of them migrants headed toward the U.S.-Mexico border, were pulled

from intercity buses and executed by the Zetas criminal organization with the alleged complicity of local police and government officials.



Mexico's information commissioners have ordered the federal prosecutor's office to release files on police officials detained in connection to the discovery of hundreds of bodies in mass graves in April 2011.

The decision by the Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI) comes in response to an access to information request and appeal filed by the National Security Archive's Jesse Franzblau for information on 16 Mexican police officials detained in the wake of the discovery, usually referred to as the 2011 San Fernando massacre. (See related posting, "[Mexico's San Fernando Massacre: A Declassified History](#)," at the National Security Archive.)

The announcement came during the four-year anniversary of the related 2010 San Fernando massacre and on the same day that [MVS Noticias reported](#) on our [efforts to force](#) another Mexican agency, the National Migration Institute (INM), to declassify and release documents on that case.

In making the new decision, the IFAI commissioners—a seven-member body approved by the Mexican Senate—declared themselves competent to determine the applicability of human rights criteria in access to information cases, even the absence of such a finding by another legal authority. The finding is critically important for transparency in such cases. Article 14 of Mexico's access law prohibits the state from withholding information relating to grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

IFAI's decision this week also ratifies legal concepts set forth in related access to information cases now being challenged in Mexican courts by Article 19 and the Fundacion para la Justicia (FJEDD). Those groups are seeking the declassification of preliminary investigative files (*averiguación previa*) in three separate migrant killings, including the 2010 and 2011 San Fernando cases.

In those cases, two separate federal judges have ruled that IFAI is competent and legally obligated to make determinations with respect to the applicability of human rights criteria in access to information cases. One judge took it a step further, ruling that the 2010 and 2011 San Fernando killings, as well as the murder and dismemberment of 49 others in 2012, were human rights violations *prima facie* and that IFAI should require the federal prosecutor's office (Procuraduría General de la República – PGR) to release files on the cases. After appeals from IFAI and the PGR, those cases are now up for consideration by Mexico's Supreme Court. Here's a link to the official transcript of IFAI's public session earlier this week. Commissioner Areli Cano Guadiana begins the discussion of the San Fernando case on page 65.

Declassified documents previously published by the National Security Archive underscore allegations linking federal and state officials to the San Fernando massacre. One U.S. Embassy cable highlights the arrest of 16 police officials in connection to the 2011 San Fernando massacre and the fact that state officials were “trying to downplay both the San Fernando discoveries [of mass graves] and the states [sic] responsibility for them.” Embassy officials said they did so despite being “fully cognizant of the hazards of highway travel in this area.” Another U.S. report described a state of “near total impunity” for criminal organizations operating in that region “in the face of compromised local security forces.” (See previous post on U.S. documents on San Fernando massacre). While a number of people have been arrested in relation to the San Fernando cases, there has been little information available on the cases against them. The presumed authors of the violence, Édgar Huerta Montiel (“El Wache”) and Martín Omar Estrada Luna (“El Kilo”) remain in detention. Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales, the top leader of the Zetas, was arrested by Mexican authorities in July 2013. More recently, Mexican authorities reported the arrest of an alleged human smuggler (*pollero*) said to be linked to the case.

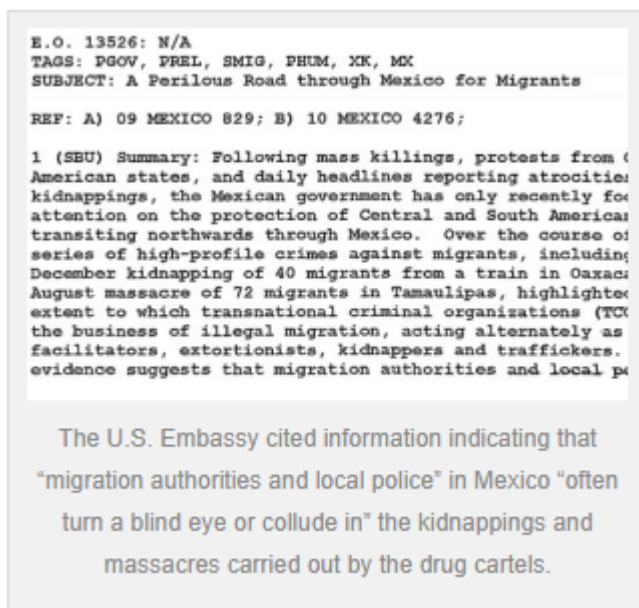
<https://migrationdeclassified.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/three-years-later-still-no-justice-for-2011-san-fernando-killings/>

Three Years Later, Still No Justice for 2011 San Fernando Killings

Posted on April 1, 2014 *by* MICHAEL EVANS

On April 1, 2011, Mexican authorities discovered the first of several mass graves in Tamaulipas state that all told would contain the bodies of nearly 200 people. The

victims, many of them migrants headed toward the U.S.-Mexico border, were pulled from intercity buses and executed by the Zetas criminal organization with the alleged complicity of local police and government officials.



Now three years later, not a single individual has been sentenced in the case.

The results of numerous Freedom of Information Act requests filed on the case are detailed in [previous postings](#) on this blog as well as in a comprehensive [Electronic Briefing Book](#) published on the main website of the National Security Archive. Many of these records were also [highlighted in *Proceso* magazine](#) by award-winning journalist Marcela Turati.

To mark the third anniversary of this gruesome discovery, we're here highlighting some of the most important declassified documents from those collections. Some of these are among the evidence being presented in [a pair of legal actions](#) aimed at forcing the Mexican government to provide more information about the case and to explain why the perpetrators and facilitators have not been brought to justice.

- Four months before the feared Zetas drug cartel kidnapped and murdered 72 migrants under similar circumstances in August 2010, the [U.S. Embassy in Mexico City](#) said that narcotrafficking organizations in that region operated with "near total impunity in the face of compromised local security forces."
- As the date of the 2010 massacre drew nearer, another U.S. agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), [reported new evidence](#) linking the Zetas to soldiers from the Kaibiles, an elite Guatemalan special forces known for spectacular acts of cruelty and brutality during that country's civil war.

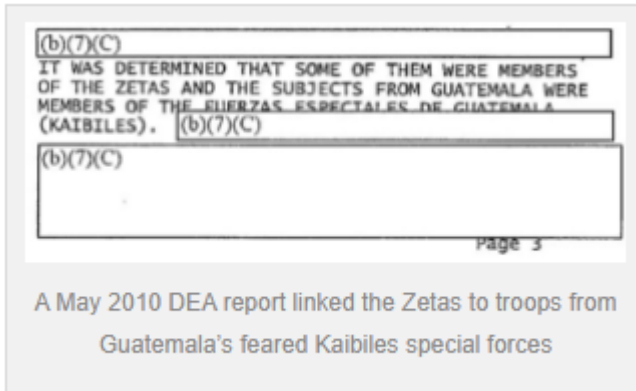
- Regional highways had become killing zones for the rival gangs that controlled both the drug trade and “the business of illegal migration,” according to a U.S. Embassy report written during the height of the violence in 2011. The Embassy cited information indicating that “migration authorities and local police” in Mexico “often turn a blind eye or collude in” the kidnappings and massacres carried out by the drug cartels.
- One U.S. intelligence report from the period just before the 2010 massacre cites “corroborated and reliable information” on the widespread use of roadblocks along highways in the region.
- Mexican authorities also deliberately tried to minimize the extent of the carnage following the April 2011 discoveries. “Tamaulipas officials appear to be trying to downplay both the San Fernando discoveries and the state’s responsibility for them,” according to a report from the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros. Mexican officials, “speaking off the record,” told the Consulate that the bodies of victims were “being split up to make the total number less obvious and thus less alarming.” Mexican officials “avoided publicly drawing attention to the level of violence in Tamaulipas,” according to the Embassy, despite having identified “highway violence” as “their top concern.”

<https://migrationdeclassified.wordpress.com/2013/11/06/near-total-impunity-for-mexican-cartels-in-the-face-of-compromised-local-security-forces-u-s-cable/>

“Near total impunity” for Mexican Cartels “in the face of compromised local security forces,” U.S. Cable

Posted on November 6, 2013 *by* MICHAEL EVANS

Four months before the feared Zetas drug cartel kidnapped and murdered 72 migrants in northeastern Mexico, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City said that narcotrafficking organizations in that region operated with “near total impunity in the face of compromised local security forces.” As the date of the massacre drew nearer, another U.S. agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), reported new evidence linking the Zetas to soldiers from the Kaibiles, an elite Guatemalan special forces known for spectacular acts of cruelty and brutality during that country’s civil war.



These records are among a set of U.S. documents declassified under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and published today by the National Security Archive, providing a glimpse of what U.S. diplomats and intelligence analysts were saying about the extreme violence that has engulfed Mexico's northern border state of Tamaulipas in recent years and the apparent complicity of Mexican officials. Just this week, a new round of violence in Tamaulipas took the lives of 13 more people, as drug-related violence flared yet again.

Some of these documents are featured in this week's edition of *Proceso* magazine, in an article by award-winning investigative journalist Marcela Turati. Her report highlights the unchecked power of the Zetas in the region and the inability or unwillingness of federal, state and local officials in Mexico to provide security for citizens and migrants traveling in the region.

The turf war between the Zetas, the Gulf Cartel and other criminal organizations for control of drug trafficking, human smuggling and other illicit enterprises in northern Mexico produced unimaginable scenes of carnage, including the August 2010 massacre of 72 migrants travelers in San Fernando and the discovery, the following year, of graves containing the remains of hundreds more.

In August, we published the first set of cables on the San Fernando massacres, including one in which U.S. diplomats say that Mexican authorities wanted to minimize "the state's responsibility" for the massacres in the region. Government authorities sought to cover up information on the violence, according to U.S. officials, and jeopardized investigations into the killings by splitting up corpses of the victims "to make the total number less obvious and thus less alarming."

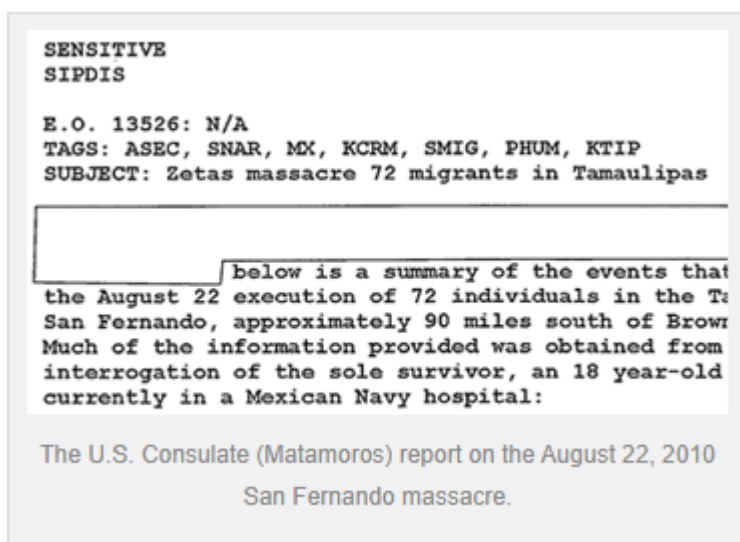
Check out the full report over at the National Security Archive.

<https://migrationdeclassified.wordpress.com/2013/08/29/mexican-officials-downplayed-states-responsibility-for-migrant-massacres/>

Mexican Officials Downplayed “State’s Responsibility” for Migrant Massacres

Posted on August 29, 2013 by MICHAEL EVANS

Mexican officials sought to minimize “the state’s responsibility” for the slayings of scores of migrants and other travelers kidnapped from intercity buses as part of a drug cartel turf war in the northern state of Tamaulipas, according to a declassified report from U.S. officials in Mexico. This and related records were obtained by the National Security Archive under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act and are being published here for the first time.



The documents bear directly on a parallel access to information case in Mexico, now in the hands of the state’s information commissioners (IFAI). At issue is the government’s investigative file on killings in and around the town of San Fernando (Tamaulipas).

The newly-declassified reports detail horrifying acts of violence perpetrated by rival Mexican drug cartels in the last several years, including the San Fernando massacres of 2010 and 2011, which took the lives of more than 250 people, many of them migrants. Early reports on the massacres describe how the gunmen pulled groups of victims from commercial bus lines, killing those who refused to work for the cartels and dumping many of the bodies in mass graves. Mexican officials told the U.S. they believed “that the majority of the victims discovered were migrants heading to the US who were intercepted en route and unable to pay what was demanded of them.”

Regional highways had become killing zones for the rival gangs that controlled both the drug trade and “the business of illegal migration,” according to [a U.S. Embassy report](#) written during the height of the violence in 2011. The Embassy cited information indicating that “migration authorities and local police” in Mexico “often turn a blind eye or collude in” the kidnappings and massacres carried out by the drug cartels.

“Tamaulipas officials appear to be trying to downplay both the San Fernando discoveries and the state’s responsibility for them, even though a recent trip to Ciudad Victoria revealed state officials fully cognizant of the hazards of highway travel in this area.” – [U.S. Consulate, Matamoros](#).

The new information comes shortly after a Mexican federal court ordered the information commissioners at IFAI to decide if the August 2010 massacre of 72 Central American migrants by the feared Zetas drug cartel could be considered a grave violation of human rights according to the guidelines established by Mexico’s Supreme Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Two years ago, Article 19, a group dedicated to the right to information and freedom of expression, asked Mexico’s Attorney General (PGR) to publish a public version of its preliminary investigation into the 2010 massacre. The Attorney General’s office denied the request, citing a provision in Mexico’s access law which exempts such files from release. Article 19 then appealed the case to IFAI, citing another part of the law that prohibits the withholding of any information related to “the investigation of grave violations of human rights or crimes against humanity.” IFAI denied the appeal, confirming PGR’s decision to deny the records on the basis that all records relating to preliminary judicial investigations are exempt from release.

Article 19 then took its case to court, arguing that the human rights provision applies because the state participated in these crimes through omission. The court’s recent decision sent the case back to the IFAI commissioners, who will now determine whether the San Fernando killings could be considered human rights violations. If so, IFAI has signaled that it will apply the principle of maximum publicity and order the PGR to produce a public copy of its investigative file.

The declassified collection published today shows that state and local officials in Mexico were well aware of, but did little to prevent, cartel-related violence in the northeast. One [U.S. intelligence report](#) from the period just before the San Fernando passenger bus massacres, cites “corroborated and reliable information” on the widespread use of roadblocks along highways in the region. “The Gulf Cartel has been attacking small plazas in Tamaulipas,” reads the report from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). “The attacks occur simply because the area belongs to the Zetas.”

Mexican authorities also deliberately tried to minimize the extent of the carnage. When nearly 200 more people were slaughtered under similar circumstances in 2011, Mexican officials “avoided publicly drawing attention to the level of violence

in Tamaulipas,” according to the Embassy, despite having identified “highway violence” as “their top concern.” Other Mexican officials, “speaking off the record,” told the U.S. that the bodies of victims were “being split up to make the total number less obvious and thus less alarming.”

IFAI must now determine whether or not the Mexican government’s failure to prevent the killings and prosecute those responsible qualifies as a human rights violation through omission. The decision—whichever way it goes—will have serious repercussions for human rights and the right to truth in Mexico. Three years after the 2010 San Fernando massacre, the two cases remain mired in secrecy and impunity. Despite dozens of arrests, including at least 16 members of the San Fernando police force, none of the intellectual authors or facilitators of the crime have been convicted. Article 19 and its allies simply want to know why.

Watch and share the videos made by Article 19 to raise awareness about the importance that IFAI should give to the case (In Spanish):

<https://migrationdeclassified.wordpress.com/2014/08/20/four-years-later-mexican-migration-agency-makes-first-Four Years Later, Mexican Migration Agency Makes First Disclosure on 2010 San Fernando Massacre>

Posted on August 20, 2014 *by* JESSE FRANZBLAU

[-on-2010-san-fernando-massacre/](#)

INM Invokes Human Rights Clause of Mexican Access Law; Says Right to Information is “a Fundamental Human Right”; Cites Presumption of Disclosure

Nearly four years later, Mexico’s federal migration agency has for the first time released declassified files on the August 2010 San Fernando massacre—in which 72 migrants were pulled from buses in Mexico’s northern border state of Tamaulipas and executed by suspected members of the *Los Zetas* criminal group.

In doing so, the National Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración* – INM) also becomes the first Mexican agency to acknowledge the possibility that the infamous massacre, which has garnered international attention, constituted a grave violation of human rights or humanitarian law, something other Mexican

agencies, including the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH), have refused to do.



Aerial view of the ranch in Tamaulipas, Mexico, where the bodies of 72 murdered migrants were discovered in August 2010.

The documents were released in response to an access to information request and appeal filed by the National Security Archive as part of a right to truth campaign aimed at unearthing classified files about migrant abuses in Mexico. This exciting new development is the subject of a story published today on *Aristegui Noticias* in Mexico and a radio interview on *Noticias MVS* with *Migration Declassified* editor Michael Evans.

INM's decision to disclose the records is an indication that it intends to respect recent judicial rulings finding that agencies are capable of evaluating for themselves whether the Mexican access law's human rights "override" applies to information that would otherwise be held in secret as part of a preliminary investigation (*averiguación previa*). In the most far-reaching of these decisions, the 8th Judge of the Federal District, Fernando Silva García, ruled that the exception guaranteeing access to human rights information does apply in the San Fernando case and ordered Mexico's Public Prosecutor's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República* – PGR) to release its preliminary investigative files.

In doing so, Judge Silva determined that the migrant killings were gross human rights violations, *prima facie*, and found that the country's information oversight body—the Federal Institute for Access to Information (*Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos* – IFAI)—had violated citizen's rights by upholding the PGR's decision to deny access to the records. Silva said transparency in such cases is key to "avoiding impunity and the repetition of such acts in the future." In the judge's view, the sensitive nature of the investigatory files is precisely why it is so important to make them public, since human rights violations, by definition, "affect society as a whole."

The *Fundación para la Justicia* (FJEDD), a pro-transparency group in Mexico, filed the information request for the records, and later took the case to court. A similar ruling was handed down in a case brought by [Article 19](#) earlier this year (*see Article 19 press release*). Both cases are now under appeal.

The documents recently released by INM in this latest case were cited in a [ruling on the San Fernando case issued by CNDH in December 2013](#) and requested by the National Security Archive in April 2014. INM initially denied the request, arguing that the documents were properly classified (*reservado*) because they contained sensitive information that could put individuals at risk. We appealed the decision, citing Judge Silva's ruling in the FJEDD case, and arguing that such records should be made available in accordance with the human rights exception articulated in the final paragraph of Article 14 of Mexico's transparency law. In response to our appeal, INM released public versions of the requested documents, citing the human rights clause and implicitly acknowledging the possibility that those files may contain evidence about grave violations of human rights.

The newly-released files include [internal reports](#) produced by the migration agency in the wake of the 2010 massacre, including [one of the first reports](#) produced by INM officials following the discovery of the 72 bodies. The August 27 redacted document includes information on the events that occurred in the previous days and discusses how the man then thought to be the lone survivor of the massacre was placed in the custody of Mexican naval authorities. [U.S. declassified documents](#), obtained through freedom of information requests filed by Migration Declassified, also reveal details on the San Fernando massacre, and the individual mentioned in the INM files. One [cable](#), sent from the U.S. Consulate in Tamaulipas, provides details of the massacre as related by the survivor, who told Mexican authorities that before the killings some of the victims were offered an opportunity to work for the Zetas as assassins (*sicarios*). After all but one member of the group turned down the offer to work for the Zetas, the survivor stated that 54 men and 15 women were subsequently executed.

Even more than the content of the documents themselves, INM's decision to declassify the files at all is a huge step forward in terms of how the federal government handles the declassification of information related to violations of human rights and the rights of migrants. David Mora from FJEDD praised INM's decision to produce documents on the San Fernando case, adding that he thought it paradoxical that CNDH, the government's human rights ombudsman, had refused to divulge those same records in response to similar requests.

Ana Cristina Ruelas of Article 19 told us that INM's decision to apply the human rights exception and rule in favor of disclosure should serve as a model for other agencies in processing requests for information related to human rights investigations. The legal reasoning behind the decision goes well beyond anything that the agency charged with protecting the right to information, IFAI, has done to advance access to human rights information. A newly-selected panel of IFAI commissioners with newly-granted constitutional authorities would do well to study both Judge Silva's decision and INM's apparent application of it as it moves forward.

<http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201403/cronicas/15101/>

CRÓNICAS Y REPORTAJES

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TRANSNACIONAL

Los coyotes domados

¿Por qué Los Zetas, en dos masacres, asesinaron a 268 personas, la mayoría migrantes centroamericanos, mexicanos y suramericanos? La historia de algunos de los salvadoreños que murieron en esas carnicerías en el norte mexicano, la voz de uno de los patriarcas coyotes de El Salvador y algunos documentos apuntan a que todo fue parte de un proceso para hacer entender a los coyotes que o pagan o no pasan. Ni ellos ni sus migrantes. Las reglas han cambiado. Los más rudos del camino ya no son los coyotes.

Óscar Martínez* / Fotos: AFP

El coyote volvió mucho antes de lo esperado. Normalmente se tardaba más de 20 días, pero en esta ocasión apenas habían pasado cinco o seis días desde que había cruzado la frontera entre Guatemala y México. Por eso se extrañó Fernando, el motorista del coyote en El Salvador, cuando recibió la llamada de su jefe. Era agosto de 2010, y el coyote pedía a su motorista que lo recogiera en la frontera San Cristóbal, del lado salvadoreño. Venía solo, sin ninguno de los seis migrantes que se había llevado. El coyote -recordó Fernando cuando contó la historia a la Fiscalía- regresó nervioso, sin explicar lo sucedido, dando excusas a medias: "Me mordió un perro", recuerda Fernando que le dijo el coyote. A los días, Fernando sabía que al coyote no lo mordió ningún perro en México. Lo mordió algo mucho más grande.

* * *

El miércoles 25 de agosto de 2010, los periódicos de El Salvador amanecieron con esta noticia en sus portadas: "Encuentran 72 cadáveres en un rancho en Tamaulipas". Un muchacho ecuatoriano de 18 años había llegado la madrugada del día 23, cansado y herido de bala en el cuello, hasta un retén de la Marina mexicana. Había dicho que era sobreviviente de una masacre perpetrada por los amos y señores del crimen en ese Estado nortero de México, Los Zetas. Los marinos ubicaron el lugar y llegaron hasta un municipio llamado San Fernando y se internaron hasta un ejido llamado La Joya, en la periferia del corazón de ese lugar. Ahí, afuera de un galpón de cemento con apenas techo, encontraron a un comando armado. En medio de la nada, a la orilla de una callecita de tierra, se enfrentaron a balazos. Murieron tres pistoleros y

un marino. Huyeron los demás pistoleros. Entraron los marinos y vieron lo que había dentro del galpón: recogidos contra la pared de cemento como un gusano de colores tristes, amontonados unos sobre otros, hinchados, deformados, amarrados, un montón de cuerpos. Masacrados.



Los cuerpos de 72 migrantes asesinados por sus captores en un rancho en San Fernando, Tamaulipas, en agosto de 2010. Foto AFP.

Gracias al testimonio del ecuatoriano sobreviviente, un muchacho de nombre Luis Freddy Lala Pomadilla, al día siguiente los periódicos hablaron de migrantes masacrados. Poco a poco, día a día, la noticia se confirmó: 58 hombres y 14 mujeres migrantes de Centroamérica, Ecuador, Brasil y la India habían sido masacrados por un comando de Los Zetas.

* * *

Fernando —el motorista— asegura que el día que la noticia salió publicada en los periódicos de medio mundo, recibió una llamada del coyote.

—Me voy. Si viene la Policía, vos no me conocés —dijo el coyote.

—¿Por qué?

—¡Ah! Vos no sabés nada de mí.

* * *

Fernando es el nombre clave que durante el juicio contra seis salvadoreños acusados de integrar una banda de coyotes le dieron al testigo clave. Fernando conocía desde la infancia al coyote. Eran vecinos cuando Fernando quedó desempleado y accedió a trabajar como el

motorista del coyote. Normalmente —relató en varias ocasiones Fernando ante un juez, ante las fiscales de la unidad de trata y tráfico de personas y ante agentes de la División Élite contra el Crimen Organizado (DECO)— sus funciones eran recoger al coyote, llevarlo a conversar con algunos de los potenciales migrantes, llevarlo a las reuniones con los demás miembros de la organización, llevarlo y traerlo a la frontera con Guatemala cuando iniciaba o regresaba de un viaje. Sus funciones, hasta aquel agosto de 2010, no incluían mantener la boca cerrada cuando la Policía apareciera.

En diciembre de 2010, la Policía apareció. Capturó a Fernando y también capturó a un hombre de 33 años llamado Erick Francisco Escobar. Según la Fiscalía, la Policía, Fernando y otros testigos, él es el coyote.

La detención se realizó cuatro meses después de la masacre en San Fernando porque fue hasta septiembre cuando Cancillería de El Salvador recibió el informe forense de México, donde se establecía que 13 de los asesinados en aquel galpón abandonado eran salvadoreños. Los investigadores policiales buscaron a los familiares de las víctimas y obtuvieron siete testimonios coincidentes. El coyote con el que habían negociado se llamaba Erick, y su número telefónico —que luego sería rastreado por la Policía— era el mismo. Uno de esos testigos, un hombre cuyo hijo fue masacrado a balazos por Los Zetas en aquella carnicería de Tamaulipas, fue el único de los siete que dijo poder reconocer a Erick. Y lo hizo. Durante el proceso señaló al que según él había sido el coyote que guio a su hijo a la muerte.

Fernando fue capturado en el mismo operativo en el que cayó Erick. Fernando era acusado de pertenecer a la red, pero tras unas semanas en el penal de San Vicente —donde era obligado a dormir sentado a la par de un inodoro—, el hombre decidió contar en una declaración jurada a las fiscales y a los investigadores de la DECO lo que sabía.

Tres meses después de las primeras capturas, la Policía detuvo a un hombre que había logrado mantenerse prófugo durante todo ese tiempo. La DECO detuvo en el municipio de Tecapán, Usulután, a un hombre corpulento, dirigente del equipo de fútbol de primera división Atlético Marte y dueño de buses de la ruta 46. Su nombre es Carlos Ernesto Teos Parada. Según las investigaciones fiscales y la declaración de Fernando, él era el jefe de la red de coyotes en la que Erick trabajaba.

Sabas López Sánchez, un muchacho de 20 años, y Karen Escobar Luna, de 28, eran también de Tecapán. Ambos terminaron formando parte de aquel gusano de colores tristes.

* * *

En su declaración ante las fiscales, Fernando dibujó un mapa con palabras. El mapa que Fernando dibujó permite imaginarse que los migrantes, al menos los seis que iban con Erick, pasaron sus últimos días colgados a un tren de carga como polizones.

Fernando describió dos rutas. Una de ellas empezaba en Chiapas, donde cientos de miles de migrantes ingresan cada año luego de mojarse las piernas cruzando el río Suchiate que hace de frontera con Guatemala. La ruta seguía por Veracruz, lo que hace pensar que los migrantes ya antes habían alternado entre caminatas por el monte y autobuses chiapanecos durante 280 kilómetros donde el tren no funciona, hasta llegar al municipio de Arriaga, montar la bestia de acero durante 11 horas bajo el inclemente sol agostino, hasta llegar al municipio de Ixtepec, ya en el Estado de Oaxaca, donde cambiaron de tren y se subieron a uno mucho más veloz, que

va a unos 70 kilómetros por hora, y que tarda entre seis y ocho horas para llegar al Estado de Veracruz, al municipio de Medias Aguas, donde los trenes que vienen de Oaxaca y de Tabasco se juntan para viajar en una sola línea hasta las proximidades de Ciudad de México. Desde ahí escalaban hasta llegar a Ciudad Victoria, viajar a Reynosa e ir a Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, para intentar ganarle al río Bravo, ganarle a la Patrulla Fronteriza de Estados Unidos y entrar al vasto Estado de Texas.

Fernando había explicado que conocía a Erick como un hombre de vicios. Un bebedor y cocainómano. Le gustaba, como dijo el testigo, andar "de zumba".

Tomar alcohol y consumir cocaína, en el mundo de los coyotes, es como tomar whisky en el de los jugadores de póquer. No tiene nada de particular. Y sería solo un rasgo identificativo, una curiosidad, de no ser porque en este caso pasó lo que pasó.

En una ocasión, contó Fernando a las fiscales, Carlos Teos y Erick se reunieron en Usulután junto con otros miembros del grupo. Eso ocurrió más o menos un mes antes de la masacre. Teos dio algunas instrucciones, habló de la ruta, habló de nuevos contactos y ordenó a uno de los presentes que sacara el dinero. Fernando observó armas de fuego. El hombre regresó con un rollo de billetes y le entregó a Erick 3,000 dólares, el dinero que cubría el viaje de algunos de los viajeros.

Los familiares de los seis salvadoreños que fueron acribillados por Los Zetas aseguran que el acuerdo con Erick era pagar entre 5,700 y 7,500 dólares por el viaje. Todos pagaron la mitad antes de la partida. La otra mitad se pagaría allá, en Estados Unidos, a la llegada que nunca ocurrió.

Fernando relató que tras aquella reunión, Erick le pidió dirigirse a San Salvador, y ahí al bulevar Constitución, y ahí a una callejuela que entra a una comunidad llamada La Granjita, dominada por una vieja pandilla llamada Mao Mao. Ese lugar es conocido comúnmente como La Pradera, porque a la entrada de la callejuela de tierra hay un motel con ese nombre. Erick quería comprar cocaína, y su motorista lo llevó. Ahí mismo en el carro, dijo Fernando, Erick se metió unos buenos "narizazos".

Los narizazos serían un rasgo identificativo de un coyote. Una curiosidad, de no ser porque el relato de Fernando termina como termina.

* * *

Una de las muchachas que iba en el viaje con el coyote llamó durante el camino a una de sus familiares que luego se convirtió en denunciante del coyote. La muchacha, dice la versión fiscal, era optimista:

—Estoy en México y voy con la persona que me fue a traer. Estoy bien, dale saludos a todos, les aviso cuando esté en Estados Unidos.

El hijo del señor que luego señaló a Erick también llamó. También era optimista.

—¿Con quién vas? ¿Vas con Erick? —preguntó el papá.

—Sí, papá, aquí está con nosotros todavía, no se ha separado.

Aún no había pasado lo que pasó. Los pequeños detalles aún no habían terminado en un gusano de colores tristes.

* * *

El 11 de agosto, según reportes de Migración de El Salvador, con uno o dos minutos de diferencia, abandonaron el país por la frontera San Cristóbal seis migrantes que 13 días después serían masacrados en un galpón abandonado en Tamaulipas.

Fernando —el motorista— asegura que una noche antes habían sido concentrados en dos hoteles que están a unas cuadras de la terminal de autobuses que van hacia el occidente de El Salvador. Algunos migrantes estaban hospedados en el hotel Ipanema y otros en el hotel Pasadena. Se trata de hoteles de paso, que cobran unos 17 dólares por una habitación doble, estancia de camioneros, buseros, migrantes y coyotes.

Una de las fiscales del caso cuenta que durante la investigación consiguieron una orden de registro del hotel Pasadena. Entre los huéspedes encontraron a un niño de 10 años y a un joven de 18 que estaban a la espera de iniciar el viaje con sus coyotes: estos eran un hombre que había sido deportado de Estados Unidos recientemente y un policía supernumerario. Ambos fueron detenidos. Encontraron también a un guatemalteco de nombre José María Negrero Sermeño. La policía solicitó sus antecedentes por radio, y pronto les respondieron que tenía una orden de captura por el delito de tráfico de personas girada por un juez de Cojutepeque. Le decomisaron sus teléfonos y ahí encontraron números de agentes policiales, de migración, de la frontera, agendas donde precisaba nombres de delegados de migración de Guatemala y El Salvador, así como tarjetas de presentación de varios funcionarios. Cuando hicieron el análisis telefónico de las llamadas de ese hombre, encontraron que se comunicaba con Erick y Carlos Teos.

Los migrantes que serían masacrados subieron a un autobús internacional que iba hacia la capital guatemalteca, contó Fernando. Erick le entregó al motorista 120 dólares. Según Fernando eso correspondía a 20 dólares por migrante, y eran para que el conductor del autobús sobornara a algún policía que se percatara de que los migrantes iban siendo guiados. Erick, él y otro hombre —Carlos Arnoldo Ventura, que luego sería condenado a cuatro años de prisión por tráfico ilegal de personas— se fueron en carro hasta la frontera. Fernando recuerda que durante el camino, Erick fue conversando por teléfono con Carlos Teos sobre rutas y fechas.

En el expediente fiscal se consigna que Carlos Teos —que tiene visa de turista para entrar a Estados Unidos— salió de El Salvador hacia Estados Unidos casi una semana después de que lo hicieran los migrantes. Fernando aseguró que Teos era quien se encargaba de recibir a los migrantes en Estados Unidos, entregarlos a sus familiares y cobrar la segunda mitad por el viaje. En algunas ocasiones hay registro de salida de Teos, pero no de entrada al país. La hipótesis fiscal es que Teos regresaba cargado de dinero, y evadía controles para ingresar al país y no declarar. El análisis de las cuentas bancarias de Teos demuestra que es un hombre que puede pasar de tener cero dólares a tener casi 10,000 en menos de un mes; de tener 85,000 un mes y 94,000 tres días después.

Lo último que Fernando supo de Erick es que cruzó la frontera sin pasar por el registro, con la idea de abordar el autobús del lado guatemalteco y emprender el viaje con sus migrantes.

* * *

Tiempo después, Fernando recibiría la llamada de Erick. Una llamada que llegó muy pronto.

—Me voy. Si viene la Policía, vos no me conocés —dijo el coyote al regresar.

El coyote desapareció unas semanas. Cuando reapareció, dijo Fernando en su declaración jurada, que Erick le contó que un pequeño detalle, ese sutil rasgo característico de estos hombres de vida dura, cambiaría por completo esta historia.

Érick dijo que se había gastado un dinero que es sagrado en estos viajes. Erick se gastó en vicios la cuota que tenía que pagar a Los Zetas en Tamaulipas. Erick se gastó la cuota que un coyote debe pagar a esa mafia mexicana para que cada migrante pueda seguir migrando. Erick —relató Fernando— sabía que había tocado un dinero obligatorio, un dinero que no se negocia, y por eso abandonó a los seis salvadoreños que querían entrar a Estados Unidos.

* * *

Cuando una de las fiscales del caso cuenta que Carlos Teos y Erick fueron absueltos por un juez suplente del juzgado especializado de sentencia de San Salvador, se le corta la voz. Se le insinúa el llanto.

A pesar del testimonio de Fernando, del análisis de llamadas, del reconocimiento del padre de uno de los muchachos masacrados, a pesar de que con las mismas pruebas y el mismo testimonio de Fernando otro juez condenaría luego a otros dos miembros del grupo, este juez absolvió a Erick y a Carlos Teos.

—Fue un asombro, estábamos celebrando... Bueno, qué tristeza. Todos nos volteábamos a ver, nadie lo creía.

La Fiscalía ha puesto un recurso y espera que la Sala de lo Penal revierta el fallo y obligue a que otro juez juzgue el caso.

Mientras, lo único que queda de los familiares de las víctimas, es el testimonio que ya rindieron. Todos los familiares de los migrantes masacrados que declararon recibieron amenazas telefónicas. A todos les dijeron que los iban a desaparecer, a asesinar, relataron a las fiscales antes de largarse de sus casas hacia otro lugar.

* * *

Lo que pasó en aquel rancho es ya historia contada. Historia contada por un muchacho.

Luis Freddy Lala Pomadilla, de 18 años, se sentó en la ciudad ecuatoriana de Riobamba al mediodía del 14 de septiembre de 2010. Se sentó para contestar las preguntas que, vía video, le hacía un fiscal desde la Ciudad de México. Pomadilla es uno de los dos sobrevivientes. Él asegura que también sobrevivió otro muchacho, que era de noche y lo vio huir de entre los muertos, pero que luego escuchó alboroto, persecución, disparos.

El fiscal mexicano estaba más centrado en preguntar a Pomadilla por nombres y apodos. Le preguntó por El Coyote, El Degollado, Chabelo, El Kilo, Cabezón, le preguntó por El Gruñón, un "kaibil guatemalteco", y por cinco salvadoreños, le preguntó si los reconocía como zetas. Pomadilla dijo que entre ellos no se hablaban, que por eso apenas recordaba a El Kilo —Martín Omar Estrada, que luego sería capturado y condenado como jefe de plaza de Los Zetas en San

Fernando—. Pomadilla —que al igual que los seis migrantes salvadoreños fue abandonado por su coyote— recuerda que eran unos ocho zetas, todos armados, que se conducían en un pick up doble cabina blanco y en una todoterreno Trooper, los que detuvieron los tres camiones donde viajaban decenas de indocumentados en su intento por acercarse a la frontera. Recuerda que los llevaron hasta San Fernando y ahí los formaron contra el muro del galpón. Recuerda que uno de los zetas preguntó si entre esos hombres y mujeres había alguien que quería entrenarse para pertenecer a Los Zetas. Recuerda que solo un muchacho migrante levantó la mano y dijo que sí. “Pero igual lo mataron”. Lo mataron a él y a 71 personas más. Pomadilla, que sobrevivió porque lo dieron por muerto, recuerda que después, durante unos tres minutos, tronó un arma. Fue un concierto de balas de una sola arma que duró hasta acabar con la vida de 72 migrantes.



Omar Estrada Luna, alias "El Kilo", fue capturado en abril de 2011 acusado de ordenar la masacre de 72 migrantes en agosto de 2010 y de otros 145 asesinatos de personas encontradas en fosas comunes en San Fernando, Tamaulipas. Foto AFP.

Los Zetas son una banda de cavernícolas. Tal como me dijo un coronel que formaba parte del contingente que mantenía un estado de sitio en Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, en 2011, para intentar echar a esa mafia, son tipos que primero disparan, torturan, asesinan y después preguntan si sus víctimas les harán caso.

Sin embargo, lo cavernícola no les quita lo mafiosos. En cada una de las actividades de esta banda a la que intento entender desde 2008 hay un solo interés: multiplicar el dinero. ¿Por qué secuestrar a 72 migrantes, llevarlos hasta una zona perdida de un municipio rural y masacrarlos? ¿Qué ganaron con eso?

La principal hipótesis divulgada por las autoridades mexicanas asegura que Los Zetas dispararon disgustados porque los migrantes no quisieron integrarse a la banda criminal. Una de las mujeres que eran guiadas por Erick y que murió en aquella masacre era una joven de 18 años del departamento de La Libertad. ¿Es ese el perfil de reclutas que Los Zetas buscan?

La historia de los seis migrantes salvadoreños que acabaron asesinados, que se supone pagaron por el pequeño detalle de que su coyote decidió consumir más cocaína y alcohol del que podía financiar, habla de otra lógica. El que no paga, no pasa. Migrar por México tiene tarifa, y la cobran Los Zetas.

Los coyotes o migrantes que quieran burlar ese peaje se enfrentarán a esos cavernícolas. ¿Qué manera más poderosa de demostrarlo que 72 cadáveres apiñados en un gusano de colores tristes?

Todo parece adquirir lógica cuando se piensa que Los Zetas pretendían consolidar un mensaje entre los coyotes y los migrantes. Pero para dar eso por seguro, para entender cómo esa mafia cambió los códigos de un mundo de rudos coyotes hay que buscar a algunos de esos guías clandestinos.

Hay pocos lugares mejores que el departamento de Chalatenango, en El Salvador, para encontrar a algunos de los mejores coyotes.

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<http://www.animalpolitico.com/2011/09/los-misterios-de-la-masacre-de-san-fernando/>

Los misterios de la masacre de San Fernando



Por Omar Granados 24 de septiembre, 2011

Hace trece meses el asesinato masivo de 72 migrantes en San Fernando, Tamaulipas, oscureció aún más el panorama de inseguridad en el noreste mexicano, inaugurando hallazgos de cuerpos mucho más numerosos que los conocidos hasta aquel momento. A este hallazgo le siguieron aún varias fosas comunes con cientos de víctimas.

A principios de este mes el periodista independiente dedicado a la investigación y especializado en incidentes humanitarios internacionales, [Gary Moore](#), llegó a San Fernando para acabar con sus dudas sobre el caso de San Fernando. Moore llegó al lugar hace unos días y [escribió un relato](#) de su percepción del ambiente en el municipio.

Para el reportero estadounidense, los archivos parecen confirmar que el suceso de agosto de 2010 en San Fernando es la mayor matanza -en un solo incidente- en la historia moderna de Norteamérica, desde la Revolución Mexicana. Sin embargo, recuerda también que en marzo y abril de este año, también en San Fernando, llegó una segunda ola de atrocidades al lugar: “las masacres de los camiones” y más fosas comunes masivas. Los asesinatos han sido una dolorosa serie de ataques. Sicarios en los alrededores de San Fernando sacaron a los pasajeros de camiones para asesinarlos en masa por razones que de nuevo son desconocidas y que han quedado en rumores.

Las versiones del gobierno sobre el caso fueron encriptadas y contradictorias y no lograron terminar ni solucionar los rumores que viralmente recorrieron la opinión pública. Todos estos sucesos tienen detalles de crueldad extrema, “casi increíbles” y que si fueran detallados volverían la historia casi imposible de leer.s

Sin lugar a dudas, los al menos 193 cuerpos encontrados sin vida en 47 fosas clandestinas desde abril -además de la encontrada en agosto de 2010- no incluyen las incontables víctimas conocidas sólo como personas desaparecidas. Los rumores de los lugareños de San Fernando afirman que si la verdad algún día se conociera, la cifra total de víctimas entre las orgías de terror de 2010 y 2011 tal vez llegarían a 600 y que las víctimas faltantes estarían bajo el suelo de esta región.



Moore reflexiona que los medios y sus representantes, en general, no se desplazaron a Tamaulipas, y que los que lo hicieron no visitaron el lugar de los hechos, por lo que no pudieron confirmar muchos de los detalles en la versión oficial, ni pudieron hablar con los lugareños, que hasta hoy empiezan a perder el miedo. Por lo anterior, la masacre fue en su mayoría cubierta a la distancia, lo cual provocó errores incluso en los nombres de los diferentes lugares.

San Fernando ya no es el lugar de la muerte ... por el momento

Situado a casi 150 kilómetros al sur de EU por la autopista federal 101, conocida como “la carretera de la muerte”, San Fernando ya no aparece en los medios de comunicación que según Moore “se cansaron del tema, de repetirlo sin haber conseguido siquiera todos los detalles.” San Fernando “yace abandonado en sus misterios”, los funcionarios mexicanos publicaron “sólo los detalles más escuetos”, profundizando las interrogantes, reflexionó Moore. “Es como si una muralla de humo emergiera, escondiendo lo sucedido.”

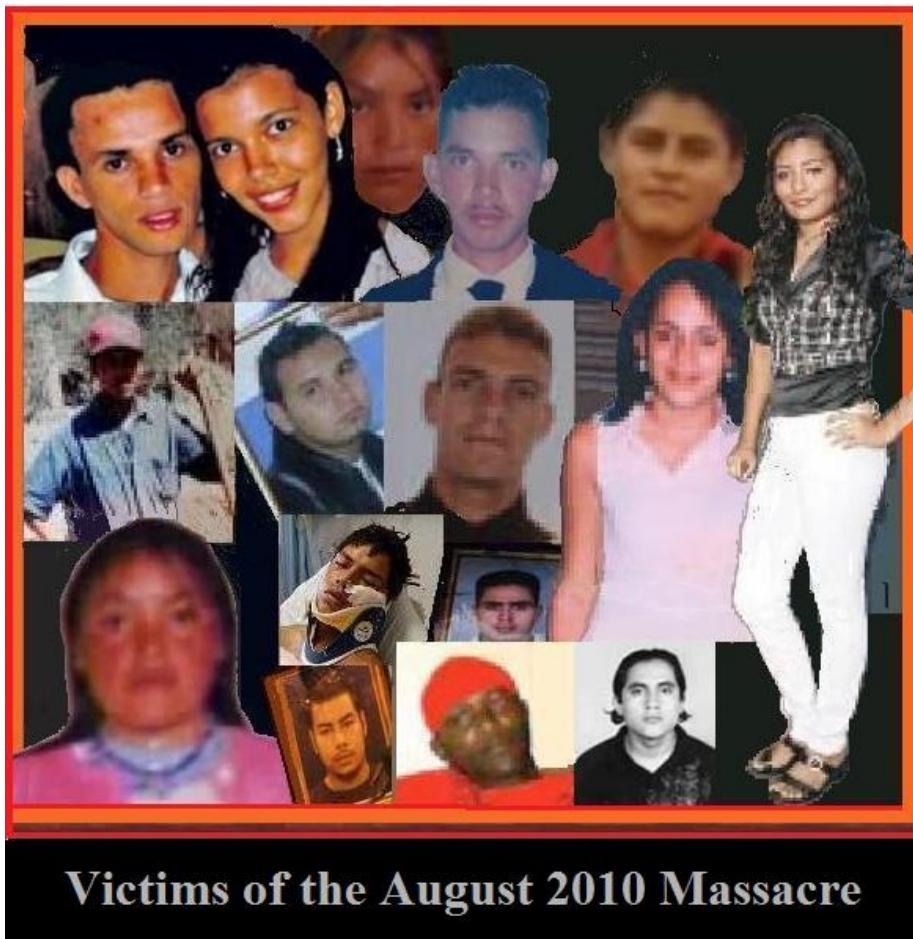
El municipio es muy extenso y en la cabecera municipal -el pueblo de San Fernando- hay calles dañadas llenas de tráfico, tiendas de conveniencia, viejos semáforos de pedestal y,

probablemente, menos de 70 mil habitantes. La violencia del año pasado y principios de este habría expulsado al 10% de los pobladores. El censo de 2010 encontró 3 mil 600 casas abandonadas a lo largo del municipio. Las cicatrices de la violencia son notorias, Moore detalla las ruinas de una vieja concesionaria de Ford con señas de haber sido quemada, luego de haber funcionado aún hasta el año pasado.



Para Moore, “lo realmente impresionante es la ausencia de shock, la aparente paz y la quietud tras el conflicto.” San Fernando no tiene los clichés de las películas del oeste, donde “miradas venenosas son lanzadas desde las sombras a los visitantes. No.” Al menos en el día muchos peatones comunes caminan las calles, dan instrucciones al reportero, y dan sus opiniones y no miran de lejos. .

La masacre de migrantes de San Fernando, acaecida en agosto de 2010, se ha convertido en un punto ciego de la historia de la lucha contra el crimen en México. Por una parte, es un lugar común solemne de los derechos humanos en nuestra época, mucho más grande que cualquier evento anterior en la caótica guerra contra las drogas. Y aún la forma en que se realizó la masacre, a decir de Moore, es “un acertijo enredado en un misterio dentro de un enigma.”



Por lo anterior, la importancia de que esta pieza del rompecabezas salga a la luz. [En su segunda publicación](#) desde San Fernando, Moore busca encontrar y tapar los huecos en la narración.

El martes 24 de agosto de 2010, el gobierno mexicano anunció que sus tropas de élite de la Marina habían descubierto un rancho donde había sido llevada a cabo una masacre. Los 72 cadáveres yacían en un rancho abandonado en medio de la nada. Los Zetas, un brutal cártel conocido por sus atrocidades fue acusado de perpetrar la matanza. En los siguientes meses, se acumularon pruebas que señalaban efectivamente a este cártel como los asesinos.

Mientras tanto, las víctimas no eran traficantes de drogas, sino sólo transeúntes convertidos en una muestra del horror. Los muertos no eran siquiera mexicanos, sino inmigrantes de Centro y Sudamérica tratando de atravesar clandestinamente el país para entrar en EU. Moore destaca que una de las muertes era al menos inusual, pues una persona era originaria de India y nunca fue nombrada públicamente.

Luego de viajes de miles de kilómetros (para lo cual habían pagado miles de dólares a tratantes de personas), los viajeros fueron encontrados tras una situación que repentinamente inexplicablemente se había vuelto fatal. ¿Buscaron Los Zetas forzar a los cautivos a ser

reclutados forzosamente como sicarios o mulas para transportar coca? ¿Los migrantes fueron asesinados para golpear a una banda rival o para enviar un mensaje al gobierno? “Escoja su teoría”, sugiere Moore.

Uno de los más grandes misterios es porqué el gobierno mexicano guardó en secreto la mayor parte de las evidencias. Moore especula: “¿Significó esto una complicidad con la matanza? ¿O tal vez es simple incompetencia? ¿Tal vez pánico en el gobierno?”

El vocero gubernamental fue breve y casi no dio detalles mientras relataba cómo los marinos, supuestamente, descubrieron esta abominación. El gobierno afirmó que el único sobreviviente de la masacre milagrosamente salió del lugar para contar la historia. El sobreviviente, según la versión gubernamental, era un pequeño y joven indígena de 18 años, proveniente de una aldea de los Andes ecuatorianos. Sin duda este individuo existió y fue herido en la matanza. Se dijo que recibió un disparo por parte de Los Zetas juntos con sus 72 compañeros, pero se dijo también que se hizo el muerto hasta que Los Zetas dejaron el lugar del crimen. Después, a pesar de las heridas, el incansable sobreviviente supuestamente corrió épicamente por más de 16 kilómetros, hasta llegar -casi como un milagro- hasta el retén operado por la Marina mexicana.

El joven ecuatoriano nunca fue presentado a la prensa (fue enviado pronto a Ecuador bajo protección incluso allá), pero relató una historia que difiere un poco de la historia contada por el gobierno, antes de desaparecer para siempre en un programa de protección para testigos. Insight Crime se pregunta si fue esta la forma en que el gobierno mexicano escondía algo, “¿Tal vez algo grande?”.

En la atmósfera de terror que rodea al evento de agosto de 2010, los reportes hechos sobre el tema fueron realizados desde la distancia. El territorio alrededor del atormentado pueblo de San Fernando era considerado demasiado peligroso para que entraran los reporteros. Los pocos que fueron encontraron a la población demasiado temerosa como para hablar. El gobierno dejó la historia del milagroso sobreviviente sospechosamente “esquelética”. Los detalles que apoyaran la versión estaban ausentes, un síntoma clave de una historia falsa.

El antídoto que se necesitaba urgentemente parecía ser imposible de conseguir. A la narración había que llenarle los huecos con los testigos o confirmar o rechazar esta milagrosa historia. Aquel testimonio, no publicado hasta hoy, forma la pieza faltante del rompecabezas.

Este mes, más de un año después de la masacre, *InSight Crime* encontró que la barrera de silencio en San Fernando se empieza a romper. Otra racha de masacres en el norte del país en este año trajo una gran respuesta gubernamental. Más de mil elementos persiguieron a Los Zetas a sus escondites y rompieron su dominación sobre San Fernando. En el verano los residentes pudieron respirar más tranquilamente y hubo oportunidad de investigar físicamente el lugar donde hace un año el sobreviviente ecuatoriano supuestamente habría llegado milagrosamente al retén de la Marina.



Lo que la prensa ha omitido sobre esta realidad es que esta zona del país es casi como un paisaje lunar, vacío, donde no hay testigos. Incluso en los desiertos más inhóspitos -y esta tierra de cultivo cercana a la costa no es ningún desierto- un impresionante número de personas pueden llevar sus vidas, hablar con sus vecinos, y formar una densa red de información. Un año después, algunas de estas personas aún no hablarían, pero muchos lo hacen, al menos lo suficiente para llegar a un consenso en la historia de la masacre desde una perspectiva independiente a la del gobierno.

La masacre había ocurrido, antes que nada, en un área de ranchos llamada “El Huizache”, no “El Huizachal”, como erróneamente reportó la prensa extranjera que no visitó el lugar. Índices geográficos concuerdan con los residentes en el nombre correcto. El cobertizo del rancho abandonado donde se llevó a cabo la masacre está en una calle empedrada y lodosa llamada La Noventa, la cual está a 16 kilómetros de la carretera federal 101. El retén de la Marina en la historia del sobreviviente estaba en esta avenida, alrededor de la marca con el kilómetro 114, en una desviación que lleva a la carretera principal.



Estos 16 kilómetros (10 millas) son lo mínimo que habría corrido el sobreviviente herido habría tenido que correr de forma “impresionante”. Sin embargo, los habitantes del lugar conceden esta posibilidad encogiendo los hombros, no tienen duda de que el ecuatoriano realmente lo haya hecho. Los habitantes dieron más contexto con el que coincidían con la historia oficial del sobreviviente, pero que dio mayor información que compagina cosas que parecían auténticos milagros.



A pesar de que mucha de esta carrera nocturna que habría realizado el sobreviviente fue realizada sobre la carretera 90, los vecinos afirman que el ecuatoriano corrió hacia el norte cuando vio una luz distante. También afirmaron que la luz estaba en un amplio almacén de granos y soya que estaba cerrado, donde sólo estaba el vigilante en servicio y todos los

entrevistados parecían conocerle según reporta el enviado de *Insight Crime*. Algunos, aún más específicamente, afirmaron que la luz estaba en un poste enfrente del almacén en una estación de inspección de ganado -la Estación 10- que esa noche estaba desierta.

Así que, ¿cómo pudo el sobreviviente alcanzar a los marinos? No había marinos en el almacén de soya ni en el puesto de inspección de ganado. De acuerdo con los habitantes -y esta versión es la que se conoce en la región- el vigilante en el almacén dijo a la fugitivo que no podía ayudarlo, pero que al sur por la autopista había un retén de la Marina mejor equipado para esta peligrosa ayuda. De acuerdo con esta historia, el joven ecuatoriano no encontró a los marinos por un accidente milagroso, sino que fue dirigido hacia ellos por el vigilante del almacén.



El contexto ayuda, al menos, a disipar algunas de las sospechas más espectaculares sobre la masacre. Las explicaciones de los habitantes no suenan como un rumor vacío o exageración emocional. Los vecinos tenían contacto con los marinos que hace trece meses fueron a pasar la noche al lugar del retén de la Marina y la discusión del extraño escape se generalizó aparentemente, no un secreto, excepto -tal vez- para los apurados o asustados reporteros que nunca fueron hasta el lugar.

El indicador crucial -un contexto amplio iluminado por muchas pistas- ahora sugiere que muchos puntos en la encriptada narración no eran mentiras o historias para encubrir algo, sino que reflejan eventos reales, aunque lleva al misterio aún más profundo planteado por Moore: “¿Por qué el gobierno no se hizo el favor de dar más detalles desde el primer momento y crear así un ambiente creíble de información?” Para el reportero “muy posiblemente, alguna complicidad en la masacre por parte de algunos de los funcionarios del gobierno de alguna forma fue escondida.”

En abril de este año, cuando las tropas federales mexicanas finalmente limpiaron los escondites *zetas* en San Fernando, 17 policías municipales fueron arrestados por ser aliados del cártel y el resto fueron despedidos. De otras varias formas, los cargamentos desaventurados de inmigrantes ilegales que estaban cruzando tierra mexicana pudieron haberse enroscado en enredaderas oficiales.

En ningún nivel, “si usted cree el consenso general entre los lugareños” -de un área demasiado peligrosa para estudios formales como nombrar a los testigos-, hubo una casi milagrosa carrera por la libertad emprendida por el ecuatoriano y duró más de sólo 16 Km.

Las más de 12 millas es mucho para caminar con dificultades, especialmente con una herida en la quijada, de acuerdo con algunos reportes y otra en la clavícula. De forma concebible, tal acto de voluntad pudo haberse explicado por un factor indescriptible que incluso se les escapó a los lugareños. Esto es que el joven sobreviviente, Luis Fredy Lala Pomavilla, era un joven campesino quechua de las altas montañas de los Andes ecuatorianos, por lo que sus pulmones habrían estado en muy buena condición y su carrera fue realizada en la región costera y casi a nivel del mar. La diferencia de altitud le significó al joven una riqueza de oxígeno un poco inusual. El caos criminal frecuentemente provoca vuelcos que pueden sonar inverosímiles, pero son reales. La adrenalina tiene su propia magia.

No obstante, muchos misterios en la masacre de agosto de 2010 “permanecen obstinadamente sin resolver”, para Moore. En la confusión, justo después, un anuncio hizo surgir la versión de que hubo realmente dos sobrevivientes, siendo el otro un anónimo joven hondureño cuya identidad nunca se hizo pública.

El segundo sobreviviente es conocido sólo por una historia hecha pública por el gobierno de Honduras, cuando supuestamente lo interrogaron. Lo relevante de esta segunda historia tiene un conflicto fundamentalmente la que se atribuye al ecuatoriano. La supuesta historia del hondureño situaría la masacre en la noche del sábado 21 de agosto, mientras que la del ecuatoriano la pone en la noche del domingo 22. Ambas no pueden ser ciertas y no pueden estar equivocadas en un detalle tan básico.

El conocido lugar, sombrío para la defensa de los derechos humanos en nuestro país permanece casi completamente como un enigma en muchas formas, con muchos actores escondiendo las piezas faltantes.