

ing months and years. Unfortunately for the people of Central America, it is unlikely this plan will do anything to address the structural factors causing migration. Rather, the Alliance for Prosperity is another formula that aggravates environmental conflicts and increases environmental risks, feeding the growing gap between rich and poor, and promoting the drug war model of public security, which, as we have seen is based on criminalizing the poorest—as well as the most organized—segments of society.

*Drug War Capitalism* is a proposal, a provocation. It requires us to come to terms with the fact that conflicts in Mexico and Central America are among the world's bloodiest, both ranking just after Syria and Iraq as the regions with the highest fatalities in 2014.<sup>31</sup> It is not a book about narco-trafficking; instead, the focus is on the war against drugs, a form of war that is expanding globally. In the first (English) edition, I noted that West Africa could be the next area where the US exports the war on drugs. This has since come true. In July 2015, Washington announced the West Africa Regional Security Initiative (WACSI), a plan similar to Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative, which will be carried out in Benin, Cabo Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo.<sup>32</sup>

Dawn Paley<sup>33</sup>

Puebla, Mexico

August 2015

# AYOTZINAPA

## PARADIGM OF THE WAR ON DRUGS IN MEXICO

New Afterword to *Drug War Capitalism*

**Dawn Paley**

31 IISS. "Armed Conflict Survey 2015 Press Statement". *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*. May 19, 2014. <https://www.iiss.org/en/about%20us/press%20room/press%20releases/press%20releases/archive/2015-4fe9/may-6219/armed-conflict-survey-2015-press-statement-a0be>

32 Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. "The West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative (WACSI)." July 16, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/2015/194687.htm>

33 Special thanks to Justin Karter for research assistance, Jorge Comensal and Megan H. Stewart for their important edits and comments on the text, and Charles Weigl at AK Press for layout and publishing. This essay will appear as the afterword to the forthcoming Spanish version of *Drug War Capitalism*, to be published by Sur Plus in Mexico City. Some of the reporting in the afterword has appeared in other publications, including *Warscapes*, *The New Republic*, and *Pueblos en Camino*.

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## Mexico one year after Ayotzinapa

“It is necessary that we take action now, because they are annihilating us. It is necessary that we do something.” —Nadia Vera, social anthropologist, tortured and assassinated alongside journalist Rubén Espinosa, Alejandra Negrete, Yesenia Quiróz and Mile Virginia Martín on July 31, 2015, in Mexico City.<sup>1</sup>

In the year since we put the final touches on the manuscript for the English edition of *Drug War Capitalism*, the campaign of terror directed against the people of Mexico in the name of fighting drugs has continued. This essay will serve as the afterword for the forthcoming Spanish edition of the book, and looks back over the 10 months since it was published.

As the first edition of *Drug War Capitalism* was in its last stages before printing, there were rumblings that the army had massacred 22 people in Tlatlaya, in Mexico State, in June, 2014. Initial media reports presented the killings as having taken place during a firefight, and the governor of Mexico State initially claimed the army had, in “legitimate self-defense, taken down the criminals.”<sup>2</sup> One witness, whose daughter was among the dead, later claimed that soldiers had in fact lined up 22 before executing them one by one. The eyewitness said she told the soldiers not to do it, not to kill those being interrogated. Their response, she said, was that “these dogs don’t deserve to live.”<sup>3</sup> The cover-up that ensued involved bureaucrats from various levels of government. It was only because of reporting by *Esquire* magazine and the work of local journalists in Mexico that the truth came out. Eight soldiers are believed to have been directly involved with the killings in Tlatlaya. Seven soldiers have been charged, three of them for murder.

1 Rompeviento TV. “Fragmentos de la entrevista a Nadia Vera, en reportaje Veracruz: la fosa olvidada”. Rompeviento TV. August 2, 2015. <http://rompeviento.tv/RompevientoTv/?p=2026>

2 Rompeviento TV. “Fragmentos de la entrevista a Nadia Vera, en reportaje Veracruz: la fosa olvidada”. Rompeviento TV. August 2, 2015. <http://rompeviento.tv/RompevientoTv/?p=2026>. Redacción AN. “Tlatlaya: Cronología básica, del 30 de junio al 21 de octubre”. Aristegui Noticias. June 30, 2014. <http://aristeguinoticias.com/2210/mexico/cronologia-del-caso-tlatlaya-desde-el-30-de-junio-al-21-de-octubre/>

3 Redacción. “Tlatlaya, primera gran masacre del gobierno de EPN, según HRW, se vuelve tema mundial.” Sin Embargo. September 19, 2014. <http://www.sinembargo.mx/19-09-2014/1121286>

overall goals of US foreign policy. Guided by the work of Professor William I. Robinson, I understand those goals as essentially connected to ensuring the expansion of transnational capitalism worldwide.

The centrepiece of the Alliance for Prosperity is the construction of a new gas pipeline from Salina Cruz, which is in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, to Esquintla, Guatemala. Salina Cruz is on the Pacific Ocean, it hosts the southernmost refinery in Mexico and is connected to Mexico’s main pipeline infrastructure. A pipeline to Esquintla will traverse more than 650 kilometres, a path that will cut through Chiapas and Guatemala’s coastal regions. The argument here is that the natural gas pipeline will lower energy costs in the region. That is of course speculation. What we can say with certainty is that this pipeline is about opening a new market for fracked gas from the US (and perhaps eventually from Mexico). It does nothing to reduce Central America’s dependency on purchasing fossil fuels. But it does promise that businesses will be able to use this fuel at reduced rates.

The Alliance for Prosperity proposes the expansion of Central America’s common electricity supply and interconnection with Mexico and Panama. This means more powerlines, more dams and more environmental conflict. A year and a half ago in Honduras, state forces attacked Indigenous Lenca communities resisting a hydroelectric project and one opponent was killed.<sup>29</sup> The interconnection with Mexico represents, in fact, an interconnection with the US market, and the interconnection with Panama means Andean and Central American power markets would be linked.<sup>30</sup>

The Alliance for Prosperity foresees nine new logistics corridors, which is to say highways, in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. It proposes a single window to for investors, streamlining the permitting process. It tailors education to corporate needs. It promotes new free trade zones, more maquiladoras and tax breaks for corporate investors. It proposes a new round of what I call toilets for tourists, basically insuring better infrastructure for visitors.

It proposes more police training and professionalization. It subsumes national security in these three countries to the logic of the war on drugs.

The Alliance for Prosperity ought to be on our radars over the com-

29 Knoll, Andalusia. “Honduras: La batalla de Río Blanco.” December 17, 2013. <http://www.otrosmundoschiapas.org/index.php/temas-analisis/31-31-resistencia/29-honduras-la-batalla-de-rio-blanco>

30 US Department of State. “Mesoamerican Investors Summit Deepens Commitment to Energy Integration.” October 31, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/10/233613.htm>

American leaders used their struggle to promote a renewed version of drug war capitalism, which they called the Alliance for Prosperity.

According to Biden, who asked Congress for US \$1 billion to fund the Alliance for Prosperity, the plan promotes security, good governance and economic growth in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. (The plan was authored this past fall by those countries' presidents.) Total funding for the Alliance for Prosperity over five years is projected at \$25 billion. US funding makes up 20 per cent of the total investment. The remaining 80 per cent would come from the Inter American Development Bank, other international financial institutions and host governments.

Biden, who was an "architect" of Plan Colombia, compared the transformation needed in Central America to that of Colombia. Beginning in 2000, the US spent \$9 billion on Plan Colombia, and the country "cleaned up its courts, vetted its police force and reformed its rules of commerce to open up its economy," according to Biden.<sup>27</sup>

But there are a few things Biden didn't mention about the current security situation in Central America. He didn't mention that the US has already been funding a Plan Colombia-style program in Central America, known as the Central America Regional Security Initiative. Nor did he mention that violence and, in particular, homicides in Central America have been on the rise as US security funding rolled in.

The first call for an "Alliance for Prosperity and Peace" between the US and Latin America came from Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in December 2013. Santos referred to reviving John F. Kennedy's controversial "Alliance for Progress." Following a meeting in Washington with representatives from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank, Santos said the following: "We agreed that we would see how we could materialize that initiative. I think it could be a very productive initiative for all of the Americas."<sup>28</sup>

It is no coincidence that the first mention of an Alliance for Prosperity came from Colombia. Its position as a vanguard for US interests in the hemisphere took shape over the course of Plan Colombia. As I outline in the book, the stated goal was cutting the flow of narcotics to the US, but Plan Colombia did little to reduce the amount of drugs reaching the United States. It did, however, succeed in advancing the

27 Biden, Joseph Jr. "Joe Biden: A Plan for Central America." *New York Times*. January 29, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/opinion/joe-biden-a-plan-for-central-america.html?smid=pl-share&r=2>

28 Santos, Juan Manuel. "USA: Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos calls for Alliance for Prosperity and Peace to forge better relations between U.S. and Latin America." *ITN Source*. December 4, 2013. <http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/RTV/2013/12/04/RTV041213004/>

After the emergence of the army's role in slaughtering civilians in Tlatlaya came the disappearance of 43 students and the murder of three others in Iguala, Guerrero. On the night of September 26, 2014, six people were killed, three of them students at a nearby teacher-training college. One young man who was killed had his face pulled off and yanked down around his neck. Others were wounded and denied medical treatment. By the next day, 43 more students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College of Ayotzinapa were missing. The students were last seen as they were arrested by municipal police, allegedly for participating in taking over buses to use for transportation to a march in Mexico City. The police handed off the students to a local paramilitary group that the media dubbed *Guerreros Unidos* (United Warriors).

The remains of one of the missing 43 have been discovered and confirmed, but the other 42 students remain disappeared. In the search for the missing 43, groups of community police and other non-state organizations initiated one of the country's first searches for clandestine graves. In the weeks and months following the massacre and the mass disappearance of the students, search parties made up of community police and families of the disappeared discovered mass graves containing dozens of recently buried bodies.

The impact of the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa normal school cannot be underestimated. It sparked the largest crisis of legitimacy the Mexican government has faced since the war on drugs began in December 2006.

Then Attorney General Murillo Karam suggested the reason they were disappeared was because the students were mistaken by one crime group as belonging to another crime group. But make no mistake: *it was the state*. Police officers led the killing of six people on September 26, including torturing Julio César Mondragón to death. Police detained the youth, and police in cooperation with a local paramilitary group disappeared the students. The Mexican government thought they could ride out the mass disappearance and the massacre in Iguala the same way they had done with previous killings. For weeks on end, Mexican authorities struggled to maintain their version of events. They tried to link the students to criminal activity. "They had already gone to the municipality, they weren't [religious] sisters of charity," said Murillo Karam of the Ayotzinapa students.<sup>4</sup>

Five months later, with 42 of the students still missing, the federal

4 Ortiz, Sergio. "Desaparecidos de Ayotzinapa No Eran Hermanas de La Caridad": Murillo Karam." *Revolución 3.0*. January 2015. <http://revoluciontrespunto-cero.com/desaparecidos-de-ayotzinapa-no-eran-hermanas-de-la-caridad-murillo-karam/>

government closed the investigation. More recently, a forensic team working under municipal authorities in Iguala announced it was *fauna nociva* that tore Mondragón's face off.<sup>5</sup> The parents and supporters of the 46 missing and dead young men from Ayotzinapa have continued to lead protests and reject the official versions of events.

What happened last September in Iguala is not a case of a few bad apples in the local police force. On the contrary, Ayotzinapa is akin to the straw that broke the camel's back, exposing how the army, the Federal Police and local police act in tandem with criminal groups to sow terror. Ayotzinapa is not an exceptional case: it is paradigmatic. Groups like Guerreros Unidos, which the state calls drug cartels or drug gangs, but which can be understood as something closer to paramilitary groups, do not threaten the state or control the state. On the contrary, they can actually strengthen the state repressive apparatus. This structural collusion is why no one person or group can absorb responsibility for the disappearance of 43 young men from the Ayotzinapa school and the massacre of six people. Rather, these acts were facilitated by overlapping forms of domination, capitalism, impunity, racism, militarization and paramilitarization. These forms are created and upheld not only by the government of Mexico but also by the U.S. and other governments, and I argue in *Drug War Capitalism* that they can benefit transnational capital.

After Ayotzinapa, Mexicans around the country protested in numbers few could remember seeing since the Zapatista uprising 20 years prior. Government buildings were lit aflame. Nationwide, Normal Schools went on indefinite strike. The country's largest universities observed multiple days of strike action. Students shut down high schools and colleges, held assemblies, blocked roads, and organized cultural events. Demonstrations took place around the world, with a huge upsurge in Chicx, Latinx and Mexican-led organizing in Europe and especially in the USA.

There is a Mexico before Ayotzinapa, and another Mexico afterwards. A Mexico in which an increasingly large portion of the population understands it is the state that is responsible for much of the violence justified under the rubric of the war on drugs and organized crime.

It is important to be clear that Mexico is not a failed state. Without a doubt, it is a state that has failed the people, as states do. But it has absolutely not failed at fulfilling the duties of a state in the system of

5 Petrich, Blanche. "'Fauna nociva' mutiló el rostro del normalista César Mondragón: peritos". *La Jornada*. June 26, 2015. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/06/26/politica/004n1pol>

As massacres, disappearances and mass displacements remained the norm in various parts of Mexico, attacks on migrants transiting the country carried on. Between October 2013 and October 2014, 60,000 unaccompanied minors crossed the US-Mexico border.<sup>24</sup> Most of them were from Honduras, followed by Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. These arrivals marked a spike in Central American minors trying to cross the border. (The number of Mexican minors has remained relatively stable; Mexican children are deported without a court hearing and thus not detained for significant lengths of time.)

Many of the youth held in custody by US Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) were subjected to measures that would be considered objectionable against anyone, convicted adults or otherwise. Accusations against the CPB, in a complaint filed in June on behalf of 100 children by the American Civil Liberties Union and other rights groups, are truly grotesque.<sup>25</sup> They include "denying necessary medical care to children as young as five-months-old, refusing to provide diapers for infants, confiscating and not returning legal documents and personal belongings, making racially charged insults and death threats, and strip-searching and shackling children in three-point restraints during transport." On a visit to McAllen, Texas, in March, I learned from nurses and support workers that children were kept in dog kennels, and that social workers at the border were not allowed to stay in contact with the youth when they were shipped to other parts of the US (including to a military base) to be held.

After reaching a peak in June 2014, the number of unaccompanied minors arriving to the United States has fallen off from more than 10,000 to a few thousand a month.<sup>26</sup> This owes in large part to Mexico deporting more Central American minors. As fewer Central American kids arrived at the US border, the issue and the plight of these children slid out of view but not before US Vice President Joe Biden and Central

24 American Civil Liberties Union. "Unaccompanied Immigrant Children Report Serious Abuse by U.S. Officials During Detention." June 11, 2014. <https://www.aclu.org/news/unaccompanied-immigrant-children-report-serious-abuse-us-officials-during-detention?redirect=immigrants-rights/unaccompanied-immigrant-children-report-serious-abuse-us-officials-during>

25 Perez, Evan. "Number of unaccompanied minors crossing into U.S. tops 60,000." CNN. August 2, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/02/us/border-crisis-milestone/>

26 Chishti, Muzaffar, Hipsman, Faye. "Unaccompanied Minors Crisis Has Receded from Headlines But Major Issues Remain." *Migration Policy Institute*. September 25, 2014. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/unaccompanied-minors-crisis-has-receded-headlines-major-issues-remain>

mainstream media's take on the war on drugs includes a focus on the telling of certain stories, like the escape of El Chapo or conflict between inter-cartel rivalries while ignoring killings, displacements and disappearances as well as economic events that are transforming Mexican society.

As the hunt for El Chapo carried on, the Mexican government announced the bidding results for the first round of oil exploration contracts. Two offshore concessions were granted to a consortium of companies from Mexico, the US and the UK. This marked the first time in more than 75 years that oil exploration contracts were granted to private oil companies in Mexico. It was the first and smallest of five oil block auctions to take place in Mexico as part of the first round of concessions granted in Mexico's newly privatized oil sector.

The upcoming portion of Round 1 auctions of conventional and non-conventional oil fields, slated to take place in Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon along the Mexico-US border, as well as in the state of Veracruz, are some of the most conflictive regions of the country. Much of this oil-rich region is said to be under the control of the Zetas, a drug cartel which has been known to disappear on-duty oil workers employed by the state-owned oil company, Pemex. It remains to be seen how the Zetas will interact with the private oil companies that sign on to explore the blocks that will be auctioned off by Mexico's National Hydrocarbons Agency. Similarly, many of the regions within Michoacán and Guerrero that have been experiencing state-directed terror and other violence are rich in minerals or areas with profitable agricultural production.

Beyond high profile gun battles that sometimes make the news, little is known about the nature of violence and repression faced by residents in cities and rural areas in Tamaulipas, which has long been known as a no-go state for journalists. The killing of photojournalist Ruben Espinosa and four others, including Nadia Vera (quoted in the epigraph), in a central neighborhood of Mexico City on July 31, 2015, returned attacks on journalists to the spotlight. Espinosa had fled Veracruz for the relative safety of Mexico City after experiencing intimidation in the city of Xalapa in June. Since Javier Duarte became governor of Veracruz state in December 2010, 14 reporters there have been killed or disappeared.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hernandez, Daniel. "A Photojournalist Fled Veracruz Under Threat, But Murder Found Him in Mexico City". *Vice News*. 2 de agosto, 2015. <https://news.vice.com/article/a-photojournalist-fled-veracruz-under-threat-but-murder-found-him-in-mexico-city>

global capitalism.

Mexico is a darling of the International Monetary Fund, which noted in December 2014 "Mexico's macroeconomic policies and policy frameworks remain very strong."<sup>6</sup> After the disappearance of the 43, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto gave an address to the nation. Using the terror in Iguala as a pretext, Peña Nieto called for a deepening of structural violence and inequality in the south of the country.<sup>7</sup> He promised to send more Federal Police to Guerrero and Michoacán, though we know the arrival of Federal Police and soldiers is a key factor in increasing violence.

But there was another component to Peña Nieto's speech. It came near the end and it's directly related to the theme of this book: capitalist expansion permeates every state strategy of terror and social control. Quoting Peña Nieto:<sup>8</sup>

Regardless, the tragic events in Iguala also reveal a social and economic dimension behind the violence and the institutional weakness. The justice we want goes beyond the legal sphere. It also includes the reduction of poverty and the marginalization and inequality that exist in the states in the south of the country. Today there are two Mexicos: One, inserted in the global economy with increasing income levels, development and well-being. And on the other hand, there is a poorer Mexico, with age-old backwardness that has not been resolved for generations.

Peña Nieto here suggests the areas of Mexico that are furthest integrated into global capitalism are also those where there is more peace and security. We have seen this is not true, proven simply by examining the levels of violence in Ciudad Juarez and other areas along the

<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund. "Mexico: Arrangement Under the Flexible Credit Line and Cancellation of the Current Arrangement-Staff Report and Press Release". December 1, 2014. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=42466.0>

<sup>7</sup> Peña Nieto, Enrique. "Mensaje a la Nación del Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, licenciado Enrique Peña Nieto: Por un México en paz con justicia y desarrollo". November 27, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/articulos-prensa/mensaje-a-la-nacion-del-presidente-de-los-estados-unidos-mexicanos-licenciado-enrique-pena-nieto-por-un-mexico-en-paz-con-justicia-y-desarrollo/>

<sup>8</sup> Peña Nieto, Enrique. "Mensaje a la Nación del Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, licenciado Enrique Peña Nieto: Por un México en paz con justicia y desarrollo". November 27, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/articulos-prensa/mensaje-a-la-nacion-del-presidente-de-los-estados-unidos-mexicanos-licenciado-enrique-pena-nieto-por-un-mexico-en-paz-con-justicia-y-desarrollo/>

US-Mexico border. He also suggests poverty does not exist in the parts of the country that are most integrated into the global economy, a statement that is also untrue, considering *maquila* workers in border regions earn around \$5 per day. Finally, he suggests material poverty exists in some parts of the south because of “age-old backwardness” instead of colonization, displacement and the imposition of capitalism. Without evidence, Peña Nieto concludes, “Most of the social and political conflicts in the country have their origin precisely in the lack of development in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca.” It is worth clarifying that, in fact, social organization in those three states has made them areas where capital investment is more likely to be challenged by social organizations, and also, to acknowledge that so-called narco violence in states like Michoacán, Veracruz, Tamaulipas and Chihuahua is a form of social and political conflict.

In this context, handing over more territory to transnational corporations appears as a solution to the economic inequality mentioned by Peña Nieto. In his address to the nation, he promised new investments for highways, hospitals, and oil pipelines. Then he said, “... For the first time in our history, I propose the establishment of three special economic zones in the most backwards region of the country. These are: The Inter-Ocean Industrial Corridor in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which will connect the Pacific with the Gulf of Mexico; the second, in Puerto Chiapas, and the third, in the municipalities that are connected to the Port of Lazaro Cardenas in Michoacán and Guerrero. A special economic zone is an area where we will offer a regulatory framework and special incentives to attract corporations and generate quality employment.”

Economic development designed to benefit global capital is proven to contribute to structural violence. Now, what Mexican elites and transnational capitalists are proposing through their spokesperson in the Presidential Mansion affirms they are ready to take advantage of a national crisis such as that taking place in Guerrero in order to make structural changes that benefit capital. After all of that, Peña Nieto had the gall to say, “We are all Ayotzinapa,” a popular slogan in support of the 43 and their families. And with that, he promised to increase social conflict and inequality as a solution to violence.

While the tragedy of the missing students dominated headlines and discussions in Mexico, the federal government also passed the last of the regulations to privatize Mexico’s state owned oil company and open up private participation in oil and gas projects in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> More proof

9 Barboza, César. “Inician licitaciones de la Ronda Uno”. *Vanguardia*. Nov 4, 2014. <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/inicianlicitacionesdelarondauno-2200213.html>

violence and abuses. Families United in Coahuila has developed a rapid response strategy wherein members head straight to GATE headquarters when a disappearance is reported, and sometimes that effort meets success when a disappeared person is found alive (often in prisons in other states). Longstanding community resistance to state violence has also created organizations like the Community Police in Guerrero State (CRAC-PC). And this resistance also led to the recent explosion of *autodefensa* groups in Michoacán last year. Among the first actions of many of these groups was to disarm local police, which are considered the prime predators on community members. Mexico’s latest police scandal—the massacre of members of the factions of the *autodefensa* movement who cooperated with state efforts to legalize—is a message to self-defense groups of all stripes that even co-operation does not guarantee survival.

Tlatlaya, Ayotzinapa, and Apatzingán are four places whose names today conjure the most recent examples of naked state violence in Mexico. As we’ve seen, however, there are many more areas of the country where tragedy is an everyday affair. We don’t know how many more events like these have taken place in past years. The number of mass graves being discovered (again, we only know about a fraction of those that are found) and the amount of people who have been disappeared in Mexico since 2006 (more than 27,000) indicate these three events could represent but the tip of the iceberg of state violence in a drawn out war on the people.

Then there’s the story of the villain. When Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman was captured in February 2014, I was well into writing the manuscript for *Drug War Capitalism*. A friend of mine got in touch and asked if I was going to include his capture in my book. I didn’t and explained this was because the true impacts of the activities of El Chapo are mercurial, based in speculation and unknowable in fact. Building an analysis about what is taking place in Mexico around one man is a too-limited lens through which to understand the form that war takes. Good thing too: El Chapo tunneled out of prison in July 2015. For weeks, the ensuing search for El Chapo dominated media coverage of Mexico. Pundits and journalists claimed his escape had set back US-Mexico relations by a decade. They said it was the most embarrassing thing Peña Nieto’s government had ever dealt with (as if Ayotzinapa never happened, as if 42 of the students were not still disappeared).-

Coverage of El Chapo’s escape eclipsed attacks against people in Michoacán and Guerrero as well as the first oil block auctions in 75 years, providing one example of how dominant narratives on the drug war serve to obscure important events taking place simultaneously. The

ed States have been the focus of outspoken resistance and mass protests in the wake of repeated cop killings of young (mostly) African-American men and women. The problem of police violence in the United States has led to increased calls to disarm and disband police and abolish prisons.

The example of the US SWAT team has been taken up locally in states like Coahuila with disastrous results. Take the case of Hotensia Rivas Rodriguez, whose son Víctor was taken from his house by members of Coahuila's elite SWAT team (Special Weapons and Tactics Group-GATE), which formed in 2009. When Rivas Rodriguez went to the GATE's headquarters in Piedras Negras, she was received by one of the men who participated in the disappearance of her son. She managed to catch a glimpse of Víctor in one of their vehicles but has not heard anything since.

"I know, we all know. It's an open secret what is happening in Coahuila," said Rivas in an interview in Mexico City, adding her belief that her son's disappearance has to do with the SWAT team operating in the state. The GATEs, she said, "Are a group that the governor allowed to operate in Coahuila to increase security. But in reality, what they're doing is disappearing people. They are the criminals because it is them who took my son, all of our disappeared, the majority, were taken by [GATEs]. It is the authorities, that's what is happening in Coahuila."

Familias Unidas say the GATEs have been involved in at least 60 cases of forced disappearance in the region. The group has also been accused of carrying out threats, arbitrary detentions, intimidations, robbery and beatings, and even of planting explosive devices at a police station and a city hall in the border city of Nuevo Laredo.<sup>21</sup> According to Ariana García Bosque, a lawyer who works with Familias Unidas, GATEs routinely detain people and torture them for two or three days before handing them over to authorities, justifying their actions by claiming the detained were involved in organized crime. Meanwhile, the governor of Coahuila has dismissed claims that GATEs are involved in criminal activity.<sup>22</sup>

Family members and communities are increasingly resisting police

21 Jiménez, Eugenia. "Denunciarán ante la OEA a grupo de élite de Coahuila". *Milenio*. January 4, 2014. [http://www.milenio.com/policia/Denunciaran-OEA-grupo-elite-Coahuila\\_0\\_272972747.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/Denunciaran-OEA-grupo-elite-Coahuila_0_272972747.html) Redacción. ¿Qué son los GATEs? *Estado Mayor*. 20 de agosto 2013. <http://www.estadomayor.mx/31846>

22 Milenio Digital. "Desfasada quejas contra GATE: Rubén Moreira". *Milenio*. February 4, 2014. [http://www.milenio.com/policia/GATE-PGR-desapariciones\\_forzadas-tortura-Ruben\\_Moreira-Coahuila\\_0\\_272973355.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/GATE-PGR-desapariciones_forzadas-tortura-Ruben_Moreira-Coahuila_0_272973355.html)

that the state of Mexico works very effectively, when it so wants. "The constitution was passed quickly, and the secondary laws were passed with blinding speed, and the regulations are being implemented," said a Calgary-based consultant for Pemex. "Everybody I know in the Mexican government is working eighteen-hour days to get this done."<sup>10</sup>

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The state-directed terror did not stop in Iguala. On January 6, 2015, Federal Police opened fire on members of the Fuerzas Rurales, which were protesting in the central square of Apatzingán in Michoacán. The Fuerzas Rurales were born out of the *autodefensa* movement, the armed uprising in rural Michoacán that caught the world's attention last January.<sup>11</sup> Those men were protesting the fact they hadn't been paid. Between two attacks that day, Federal Police murdered at least 16 people in Apatzingán. Dozens more were injured. The official version of events claimed there were nine deaths in total and the killings resulted from "friendly fire" or "crossfire" between Fuerzas Rurales and police. That version held nationally for more than three months until April when journalist Laura Castellanos released her investigative piece that blew apart the government's line.<sup>12</sup>

News of other massacres and mass disappearances has also seeped through what amounts to a mass media blackout on coverage of the drug war. In July, the army attacked the Nahua community of Santa María Ostula in Michoacán. "They will not forgive the community for having dared to organize and to begin to walk their own path, far from political parties and the tricks of electoralism," wrote journalists Alejandro Amado and Heriberto Paredes following the army attack.<sup>13</sup> In the Guerrero municipality of Chilapa, fifty people have been registered as disappeared since March, and at least another 44 people have been disappeared from the same region but not yet registered as such. In Chilapa in the midst of ongoing conflicts, including open conflict between organized crime groups, civilians who self-identify as community police have co-operated with Federal Police to take over local security operations.

10 Hussain, Yadhullah. "Mexico: North America's last energy frontier is ready to dance." *Financial Post*. November 1, 2014. <http://business.financialpost.com/news/energy/mexico-north-americas-last-energy-frontier-is-ready-to-dance?lsa=5696-bdcd>

11 Redacción AN. "El gobierno cooptó autodefensas y desacredita a Mireles: Mesa MVS". *Aristegui Noticias*. May 12, 2014. <http://aristeguinoticias.com/1205/mexico/el-gobierno-coopto-autodefensas-y-desacredita-a-mireles-mesa-mvs/>

12 Castellanos, Laura. "Las ejecuciones de Apatzingán: policías federales, los autores". *Proceso*. April 18, 2015. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=401646>

13 Amado, Alejandro y Paredes, Heriberto. "Embestida del ejército contra la comunidad nahua de Santa María Ostula". *SubVersiones*. July 20, 2015. <http://subversiones.org/archivos/117214>

Events in Chilapa have become emblematic of the increasing co-optation of the “community” label by armed groups. “In two years—starting with the first rupture in the CRAC-PC—the term ‘community’ has been deformed in various ways, losing its original meaning that was synonymous with justice. Conflicts between these fractions and their fateful results have corrupted the term ‘community,’” according to a report published online at the independent news site Subversiones.<sup>14</sup>

After Ayotzinapa, the deluge. In the spring, violence also displaced hundreds of people from San Miguel Totolapan and also in Guerrero, part of a mining district rich in gold, silver, lead and zinc where multiple exploration concessions have been granted. Attacks by police on behalf of feudal-style bosses wounded 70 people in San Quintín, Baja California, and were met with protests around the country. But Mexico was silent as more than 2,000 people were pushed from their communal lands in the town of Sonoyta, which lies on the border with Arizona. According to locals who were displaced, 40 bodies were hung at the kiosk in the central park of the village on April 30 though the official count was three dead.<sup>15</sup> Around the same time, reports surfaced of another massacre perpetrated by Federal Police, this time at a ranch between Ecuandureo and Tanhuato in Michoacan. The outcome: 42 civilians, some of them armed, all dead along with one Federal Police officer.<sup>16</sup>

Mexico’s national statistics agency reported more than 121,000 homicides during the six years Calderón was president, which is just over twice as many as during the presidency of Vicente Fox (2001-2006). According to a new report from the Justice in Mexico Project at the University of San Diego, “No other country in the hemisphere has seen such a large increase in the number or rate of homicides over the last decade.”<sup>17</sup> As I prepared this introduction, INEGI released its yearly homicide numbers: There were 19,669 homicides in Mexico in 2014. This number is down from a peak of more than 27,000 homicides in 2011, but at 16 homicides per 100,000, this remains well above the rates before the drug war.

14 Santillán, José Luis y Paredes, Heriberto. “Chilapa, entre la violencia y el poder del narco”. *Subversiones*. May 19, 2015. <http://subversiones.org/archivos/116018>

15 Escobar, Amalia. “Le clamamos a Dios para que la violencia termine”. *El Universal*. July 5, 2015. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/2015/07/5/le-clamamos-dios-para-que-la-violencia-termine>

16 Hernández, Daniel and Serafin Estrada, Juan José. <https://news.vice.com/article/42-dead-suspects-1-dead-agent-lopsided-shootout-in-mexico-is-under-suspicion> *Vice News*. May 23, 2015.

17 Shirk, David, Molzahn, Cory, and Heinle, Kimberly. “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2014.” University of San Diego: Justice in Mexico Project, April 2015. <https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015-Drug-Violence-in-Mexico-Report.pdf>.

Empirical research is beginning to affirm state responsibility in rising murder rates in Mexico. A recent report published in *American Statistician* found that where there were military interventions during the drug war during Calderon’s term, there were more murders. According to the article, “The military interventions resulted in an increase in the average homicide rate” in 18 regions of Mexico. One of the telling tidbits in the report is that there is not “a comprehensive list of interventions,” which is to say we don’t even know about all of the military interventions that have taken place in Mexico since December 2006.

Internal displacement is also on the rise. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2014 there were at least 281,000 people displaced by violence in Mexico. Numbers are similarly staggering in Central America. Colombia, which launched a peace process with the FARC in December 2012, chalked in with 137,200 people displaced that year, bringing the total there to 6,044,200.<sup>18</sup> As with the homicide rate, the number of people displaced in Mexico could be much higher than reported. According to the IDMC, in Mexico, “Aside from the 23 mass events [leading to internal displacement] recorded in 2014, many people are thought to flee in small numbers and find their own solutions, effectively making them invisible and the true scale of displacement hard to gauge.”<sup>19</sup>

State-perpetrated killings and terror are taking place in Mexico at a time of unprecedented co-operation in military and police training between Mexico and the United States. As I explore in *Drug War Capitalism*, the US backed Merida Initiative is a key factor in escalating the violence in Mexico. Between 2008 and 2014, the United States trained more than 22,000 federal and state police in Mexico. *The Intercept* reported that five members of the battalion involved in the massacre in Tlatlaya were trained by the US Northern Command.<sup>20</sup>

We are told this training will lead to better policing, an idea with surprising credibility under the circumstances. As evidence of more state-sponsored massacres continues to surface, police across the Unit-

18 IDMC. “Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence”. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. May 2015. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201505-Global-Overview-2015/20150506-global-overview-2015-en.pdf> p. 16

19 IDMC. “Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence”. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. May 2015. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201505-Global-Overview-2015/20150506-global-overview-2015-en.pdf> p. 18

20 Currier, Cora and Franzblau, Jesse. “Mexican Authorities Implicated in Violence, But U.S. Security Aid Still Flows”. *The Intercept*. May 8, 2015. <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2015/05/08/ayotzinapa-mexico-u-s-security-aid-keeps-flowing/>