

Police shootings raise questions over CIA role in Mexico

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On August 24, Mexican police shot two US intelligence officers under mysterious circumstances. Initially reported to be Drug Enforcement Administration agents (DEA) officials, they turned out to be CIA agents working with the Mexican Navy.

US and Mexican authorities subsequently gave several failed explanations that only raised more questions.

The shooting took place near Tres Marías on the Mexico City-Cuernavaca highway. The two CIA men were in an armored US embassy sports utility vehicle, with a Mexican naval officer in the back, who was not hurt. The embassy car was reportedly nearly driven off the road and then chased by four vehicles.

Twelve Federal Police officers were arrested for their role in the shooting. According to the Public Security Ministry (PSS), they “are testifying to authorities to determine what happened and who is responsible.”

Five days later, Mexican newspapers cited Mexican officials claiming that the wounded men were CIA operatives participating in an anti-drug task force. The daily *El Universal* followed up with the news that, according to a confidential official report, the CIA men were involved with instruction at a firing range at a secret naval facility.

Mexican officials’ initial story suggested that the shooting arose from “confusion” between federal police and the embassy vehicle. US authorities gave a different version, however, calling the shooting an ambush.

On Sunday, September 2, Miami’s *Nuevo Herald* released a third version, that the federal police were in the area investigating a kidnapping and presumably thought that they were chasing the kidnappers.

These shifting stories are aimed at obscuring the growing role of the US military, intelligence and police

agencies in Mexico under the cover of an endless “war on drugs” in which the Mexican ruling class acts as a full accomplice.

The US State Department refused to disclose the real names of the wounded men and would only confirm that they were government employees carrying out “law enforcement cooperation.” The men were whisked away two days later without speaking to anyone.

It is now known that both had arrived from Afghanistan ten days earlier with tourist visas using the false names of Stan Dove Boss and Philip P. Quincannon. These CIA men had entered Mexico in at least one other occasion, also with tourist visas.

What is more, it now appears that the federal police was not permitted to question the 12 arrested police officers while US embassy officials were allowed to participate in their interrogation, in violation of Mexican law.

Yet another mystery that has yet to be explained is what the Mexican naval officer was doing riding with the Americans.

This is not the first time that US intelligence agents surface in Mexico; in fact, the entire Mexican political establishment is well aware of the CIA’s presence and semi-official role in the country.

President Calderón’s assurances that an investigation would be launched have little value. Congressional leaders and Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) members also called for an investigation. “We will ask for a hearing with the public security minister, the foreign minister and the navy to find out what CIA agents are doing in Mexico and why they are fighting each other,” PRD senator Mario Delgo told MVS radio.

Also weighing in on the affair was PRD leader and Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard and 2012 PRD

presidential candidate Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador. The PRD's position on this is self-serving, consistent with its role as a "left" critic of the government and a safety valve for popular anger. According to Lopez Obrador, the Mexican military, commanders and soldiers alike, are unified in their hostility to the "war on drugs."

This is part of the myth that the armed forces are the "people in uniform," used by the PRD and Mexican pseudo-left groups like the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) to create false confidence in the armed forces. Lopez Obrador has even raised the possibility that a coup could set right the fraudulent results of the 2012 presidential ballot.

La Jornada, a daily that supports Lopez Obrador, criticizes Calderón for discrediting the military. In a September 2 editorial, it condemns Calderón for insisting on involving the national military in his "crusade"—i.e., the drug war. "This ruined the armed forces' image among the people," it wrote.

The CIA-military relationship does not preclude difficulties and tensions. Diplomatic cables, released by Wikileaks from the former US ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual, reveal contempt towards the Mexican security apparatus and for the military, which Pascual described as 'slow,' 'poorly trained,' and 'risk averse.' Pascual himself was forced to resign his post because of these dispatches.

For that reason, some in the Mexican press speculate that navy officers intended the shooting as "payback," to embarrass the Calderón administration and its American handlers.

The shooting took place amid a transfer of power from Felipe Calderón (National Action Party, PAN) to Enrique Peña Nieto (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) and a continuing "war on drugs" that has claimed tens of thousands of Mexican victims.

Under the Mérida Initiative, the Calderón government has given free rein to US agencies—the CIA, DEA, FBI, and ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms). In Mexico they carry out activities that are banned inside the US itself, including money laundering and giving US weapons to drug cartels like the Sinaloa syndicate. Mexico's skies are wide-open to US drone flights.

Between 2007 and 2010, the Mérida Initiative channeled \$1.6 billion into Mexico, for military

equipment and training of security forces. Since then, hundreds of millions of dollars have been added for Mexico and Central America.

Neither the White House, nor the Calderón government wish to disclose the number of US agents in México, but it has reportedly soared since 2006, when Calderón took office. In 2011, the Associated Press identified hundreds of operatives from various security agencies.

According to the AP, there were so many State Department narcotics personnel that they exceeded their office space in two floors of the US Embassy in Mexico City and now share offices with their Mexican counterparts in a new building.

An unknown number, including the wounded men, are not registered with the government and enter and leave the country as their bosses see fit.

Mexican Laws that regulate the activities of foreign agents are often ignored. Egardo Buscaglia, a security expert and senior research scholar at Columbia University recently told the *Agence France-Presse*: "of course many of these operations are taking place, and of course they are bypassing the legal framework in doing so."

He added: "the expansion of the US presence within Mexican soil is unprecedented... We are reaching levels—not in terms of soldiers but in terms of American intelligence—that are close to Afghanistan."



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