

Gang warfare continues to infest Mexican politics

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On January 2, Gisela Mota Ocampo, the 33-year-old mayor of the city of Temixco in the central Mexican state of Morelos, was gunned down in her home, one day after being sworn into office. On January 3, police killed two suspects in the assassination and arrested three others.

Temixco, with about 100,000 people, is a suburb of Morelos's capital city Cuernavaca, where many wealthy Mexico City residents and foreigners buy homes. The expressway between Mexico City and the Pacific Coast city of Acapulco in Guerrero state, a major drug trafficking route, cuts through Cuernavaca and Temixco.

Morelos governor Graco Ramirez and its public security commission told the media that Mota Ocampo, formerly a federal congresswoman, was killed by members of the Los Rojos (The Reds) drug gang, for refusing to ally with them.

Los Rojos is also known for kidnappings and extortion of local businesses. Los Rojos has battled the Guerreros Unidos (United Warriors) cartel for some time for control of the Morelos and parts of neighboring Guerrero state. Both groups arose out of the demise of the Beltrán-Leyva cartel, which itself arose out of a split with Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera's cartel, based in the northwest state of Sinaloa.

The Mexican government officially blames Guerreros Unidos for the likely killing in September 2014 near the Guerrero town of Iguala of 43 missing teaching students (normalistas) from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.

Mayor Mota was a member of the center-"left" Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Upwards of 100 mayors from the PRD and other political parties have been killed across Mexico over the past decade at the hands of organized crime.

Another PRD candidate for mayor of Temixco was

kidnapped in December 2014, allegedly by Guerreros Unidos.

Temixco was also the site of another highly publicized March, 2011 killing of the 24-year-old son of poet Javier Sicilia and six other people by members of the Pacifico Sur (Pacific South) cartel, yet another remnant of the defunct Beltrán-Leyva cartel.

As in the case of Iguala after the Ayotzinapa normalista killings, efforts to clean out corrupt local police who protected gangs led Morelos to put Temixco officers under a unified Morelos state command. That did nothing to protect Mayor Mota.

The mayor of Iguala, where the Ayotzinapa normalistas were kidnapped, José Luis Abarca Hernández, was a PRD member as well, who was in the process of decamping to Andrés Manuel López Obrador's pseudo-left Moreno party, as part of a plan to run for governor of Guerrero. Abarca and local police under his command worked in league with Guerreros Unidos. His wife, mother-in-law and brother in-law had come out of the Beltrán-Leyva cartel.

As to the 43 missing students, the official version of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and his ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) remains that local Iguala police delivered the students to members of Guerreros Unidos, who then killed them, burned their corpses and tossed them into a dump in the neighboring town of Cocula.

However, during the last week of December a group of distinguished experts from the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights that studied the case reported that new evidence showed that the students were not incinerated in that location, something the parents of the students have asserted for over a year.

The Mexican government ignored that report. Peña Nieto's strategy has been to simply attempt to wait out

Mexico's profound outrage over the killing of the normalistas and his abysmal poll ratings.

Various sectors of the PRI, and other major Mexican political parties, have been associated with drug cartels for the years. Chapo Guzmán's Sinaloa cartel infiltrated the ranks of various Mexican government agencies, including Mexico's Interpol. Reputable Mexican investigative journalists have also accused the PRI of favoring the Sinaloa cartel to the extent of helping it wage war against its rivals.

On Friday Guzmán was recaptured by a unit of the Mexican navy in the coastal Sinaloa city Los Mochis, a little over ten months after he escaped from the Altiplano federal prison. That was the second time Guzmán escaped from a federal high-security prison. *Rolling Stone* magazine published Saturday an interview with Guzmán by American actor Sean Penn, which was conducted in October. Guzmán was interested in having a film made of his life, much as was done as with the late Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar, who recently became the subject of a Netflix and Spanish television dramatic series. Mexican actress Kate del Castillo, known for her portrayal of a narco queen in the popular Mexican soap opera *Reina del Sur* (Queen of the South), introduced Penn to Guzmán.

According to the Mexican Secretary of the Interior, Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, the government located Chapo Guzmán by monitoring his contacts with his lawyers, Castillo and Penn.

This is indeed the stuff of soap operas. Belief is widespread among Mexicans that the government had a deal with Guzmán, whose net worth is reputedly upwards of \$3 billion, to let him escape last year, and could have picked him up again any time.

This is not farfetched. Guzmán has been taken back to the same "high security" prison from which he escaped in February.

American business interests have increasingly warned the Mexican government that the instability and violence associated with the "drug war" in Mexico is an impediment to investment. Guzmán's escape in 2014 did little to assuage investors.

Peña Nieto, himself proven to be immersed up to his eyeballs in corruption, may have decided it was time to pull in Guzmán once again, as efforts are accelerated in the new year to bring foreign capital into the oil and telecommunications industries.

It is true that the population of Mexico has suffered immensely from the drug violence and government corruption. At the same time, the narco drama also serves as a diversion from a class war raging in Mexico, as the Peña Nieto government imposes ever increasing attacks on the working class.



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