

Two years since the kidnapping of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in Mexico

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September 26 marks the second anniversary of the disappearance of 43 students (*normalistas*) from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College. The students were kidnapped in the city of Iguala, Guerrero State, in the course of an armed police assault on busloads of students on the way to a Mexico City protest. Six other students were killed and 25 injured.

To this day, the Mexican government's official version is that the municipal police delivered the students to the *Guerreros Unidos* drug gang that then killed them and burned their bodies in a refuse dump in the neighboring town of Cocula. The ashes were then supposedly bagged and thrown into the San Juan River.

That story has been shown to be false, and is universally repudiated by the public, by the parents of the missing youth and by The Independent Group of Interdisciplinary Experts (GIEI). The GIEI, appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH), an arm of the Organization of American States, presented evidence in April of complicity by the Mexican Federal Police and the Armed Forces in the disappearance of the 43 students.

Throughout these two years, the Mexican government interfered with the work of the GIEI and blocked all serious leads, particularly on the role of Mexican military and Federal Police.

It has become an open secret that on the night of the attack, the 27th Infantry Battalion, stationed in Iguala, was at the scene; and that it shielded the Federal Police and other attackers and refused to help the survivors, following the kidnapping of their comrades.

The indifference of the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto to the Iguala kidnappings and its contempt toward the demands of the parents of the missing *normalistas* was made very clear two weeks ago when Tomás Zerón de Lucio, author of the discredited "definitive" report on the fate of the 43 students (it was presented as the "historical truth") was fired from the Criminal Investigation Agency (AIC).

While the parents' group had long demanded the firing,

accusing Zerón of obstructing justice, within hours of his removal he was named Technical Secretary of the National Security Council, a cabinet level appointment. Relatives of the victims and their supporters denounced the government's action as a cruel "mockery" and a guarantee of impunity for the government gangsters.

Zerón had been fired from the AIC only a day after the publication in *Science* magazine of a report on an experiment from the University of Queensland, Australia, simulating the incineration of the disappeared students, that proves beyond a doubt that the government story is impossible, confirming strong suspicions raised by the GIEI in 2015.

Mario Gonzales, whose son Mario César Gonzalez is one of the disappeared, stated that, while the parents have no personal vendetta against Zerón, they always saw him as an example of the "corrupt" officials who invented the "historical lie" and hid and falsified evidence. His new appointment "makes a mockery, not just of the parents of the 43, but of the entire Mexican people," declared Gonzales. The parents are sad and angry. "Clearly we face a corrupt, fascist and incompetent State ... [the parents] demand to know whom the government are protecting by hiding the truth," and demand "that, for the first time ever, the government provide justice."

Other parents accused Peña Nieto of creating a wall of impunity around Zerón by keeping him in the cabinet. Among the evidence uncovered by the GIEI, are videos and photos of Zerón planting and hiding evidence and carrying out fraudulent interrogations as far back as October 28, 2014, thirty-two days after the Iguala kidnappings. Zerón constructed the official story mentioned above, that the cadavers of the 43 *normalistas* had been incinerated in a Cocula garbage dump, that the ashes had been deposited in garbage bags, and that the garbage bags had been dumped in the San Juan River.

Not only have those allegations been proven to be absolutely false, but also Zerón's hands are stained with blood. In addition to his manipulation of evidence, there is

evidence that he met near the San Juan River with Agustín García Reyes, a known member of the Guerreros Unidos criminal gang allegedly involved in the September 26 kidnappings. Also, Chilean musician and academic Maxwell Ilabarca accused Zerón of torturing him in November 2014 to extract a false confession from him of terrorism and anarchism.

The Department of Government (*Segob*) cynically justified Zerón's new appointment: "Zerón Lucio's appointment is a recognition of his past activity, of his experience and capacity."

A brief opinion article by journalist José Gil Olmos appearing in last week's edition of Mexico City's left-leaning *Proceso* magazine comments that, while the Ayotzinapa missing are the most iconic among thousands of other victims produced by a decades-long war (Gil Olmos coins the phrase "*guerra negra*," black war, to distinguish it from the "*guerra sucia*," or dirty war of the 1970s against left wing students and peasant guerrillas), there have been "thousands of bodies, executed, mutilated, tortured, incinerated, dissolved in acid, or hung along the roads." The targets of this on-going war, according to Gil, are the leaders of social movements, and its purpose to create a state of permanent terror against peasants and workers.

A decade since it began, during the administration of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), this "black" war has yielded 80,000 dead and 30,000 disappeared, while entire communities have been internally displaced. México now takes on the character of a police state ruled by an unholy alliance of government officials, security agencies, the armed forces and criminal gangs, in the interest of big business, the Mexican landed and financial aristocracies, and Washington.

Along with the increasing militarization of the Mexican State, since 2012, there has been an acceleration of cross border ties between the US and Mexican militaries, training of Mexican troops, and arms sales. The Mexican government's close military ties with the Obama administration and US armed forces are reflected in the increasing expenditures by the Peña Nieto administration on weapons purchasing and manufacturing. Since the turn of the century, and despite ups and downs, US military sales to Mexico have shot up from less than \$50 million to \$1.2 billion in 2015. These purchases include helicopters, airplanes, military vehicles and high technology rapid-fire machine guns.

The group of parents of the 43 has repeatedly denounced the enormous militarization reflected in the purchase of billions of dollars in arms and equipment by Mexico and the criminal willingness of the Obama administration to brush off Mexican human rights violations.

Since the September 26 kidnapping of the 43 students, Obama and Peña Nieto have met several times, avoiding any mention of the disappeared *normalistas*.

Mirroring the increasing military expenditures are draconian cuts in government social spending, most notably in education. On Sunday September 18, the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* reported that the 2017 budget currently being discussed by the Mexican Congress includes a 71.8 percent cut in resources, equipment and improvements for public schools, as well as for teacher training.

The cuts will impact 19 out of 23 education programs for children and teenagers, some of them associated with the controversial education reform that the government has been fighting to implement against the resistance of dissident teachers in southern and central Mexico.

The part of the education budget having to do with improvements in buildings and in quality education projects will be reduced from 7.7 billion pesos this year to 2.4 billion pesos. Teacher training will be slashed from 2.65 to 1.65 billion. So-called education equity programs, school quality and book subsidies are to be slashed 50 percent, 41 percent, and 35 percent respectively, from 2016 levels.

While the Peña Nieto administration has touted the education reform law as its most important structural reform in his six-year term, the cuts in education demonstrate that it is in reality an attack on Mexican teachers, on the system of rural schools that came out of the Mexican Revolution, and its replacement by a class-based education system at the service of big business.

The group representing the parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa students has called for protest demonstrations across Mexico and around the world to mark the anniversary of their disappearance.



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