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## US Arms Mexican State for Dirty War Against Its People

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available on the internet at: www.nonviolence.org or from the Mexico Committee, Bill Motto VFW Post 5888, P.O. Box 664, Santa Cruz, CA 95061 Tel.: (408) 429–8345

military aid to Mexico activists in the US have a unique opportunity to offer concrete assistance to the struggling people of Mexico. Consider this scenario: a successful revolutionary movement in Mexico would open up huge possibilities for renewed social struggles in the US. Attempts by the US to stop the movement of immigrants across the US-Mexican border will very likely inflame social struggles on the border. A successful revolution in Mexico would also be a signal to the rest of Latin America and indeed the whole world that US imperialism can be beat. Attempts by the US to intervene militarily in Mexico would very likely raise contradictions within the US Armed Forces and within the poor and people of color communities whose sons and daughters fill their ranks. Opposition now to military aid to Mexico would lay the foundation for future struggles against direct US military intervention in Mexico.

Such a campaign should begin with education. We need to go to schools and churches and educate our communities about the uses of US military aid to Mexico. But one of the most effective tools for educating people is action. We need to get into the streets, demonstrating at Federal Buildings, Mexican Consulates, the offices of Senators and Congressional representatives and the corporate offices of weapons contractors even if at first our numbers are small. We need to make US military aid to Mexico an issue in the minds of the people by using our own media but also by capturing the attention of the capitalist media through demonstrations, direct actions, and acts of civil disobedience aimed at the responsible parties. There exists both the potential and a crying need to build a mass movement against US military aid to Mexico. It is our responsibility to make it happen.

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This article relies heavily on information from "The Slippery Slope, US Military Moves Into Mexico," an excellently-researched, four-part series of articles by S. Brian Wilson. These articles are



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ado Ramirez, another SOA graduate, who was eventually removed from the post as a result of public outrage at the massacre.

## Stop Us Military Aid to Mexico

Mexico's dirty war against the popular movements of poor and indigenous peoples thus depends heavily on US military aid. The stakes in Mexico are very high. The US ruling class has considerably more to lose in Mexico than it had in Viet Nam or in any other conflict since World War II. Colonel Rex Applegate, who represents US military and police equipment companies in Mexico has said that US interests in Haiti and Cuba, for example, "pale by comparison" to the threat of a revolution in Mexico. A January 13, 1995 Chase Manhattan Bank memo on investments in Mexico stated bluntly that "The government will need to eliminate the Zapatista insurgency in Mexico to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and security policy." Less than a month later the Mexican Federal Army launched their brutal offensive against the Zapatista communities.

The powers that be understand that a revolutionary situation in Mexico could have profound implication within the US. The Next War by Peter Schweitzer and former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger poses the scenario of a US war with Mexico as a result of massive immigration to the US and social breakdown in Mexico. They argue for the need for a US invasion of Mexico under such circumstances. A 1994 Pentagon briefing paper disclosed in La Jornada of August 31, 1996, argued similarly that it was "conceivable that deployment of US troops to Mexico could be received favorably if the Mexican government were to confront the threat of being overthrown as a result of widespread economic and social chaos."

If our rulers take the possibility of revolution in Mexico seriously, shouldn't we? By launching a movement for an end to US

## The School of the Americas

Another major form of US aid to the Mexican military takes the form of training at the School of the Americas (SOA), otherwise known as the School of the Assassins because of the atrocious human rights records of so many of its graduates. (See article on this page.) The SOA has trained its students in practices such as torture, executions, and false imprisonment. Mexico now sends more students to the SOA than any other country. In 1995–96 a record 500 students from the Mexican military and police forces are believed to have attended a special "anti-drug" course at the SOA. SOA graduates are well represented among the generals in charge of counter-insurgency operations in Chiapas and other southern states. This includes the majority of commanders under General Armando Soto Correa, in charge of Rainbow Task Force counter-insurgency operations at the Mexican Army's General Headquarters in San Quintin, 15 kilometers from the Zapatista command in La Realidad. When the Zapatista uprising took place in 1994 three of the generals in the 31st Military Zone based in San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas were SOA graduates: Gaston Menchaca Arias, Miguel Leyva Garcia, and Enrique Alonso Garrido.

Another SOA graduate, General Juan Lopez Ortiz, commanded the troops that took the town of Ocosingo back from the Zapatistas in early January—an attack that included some of the worst atrocities of the military response to the Zapatista uprising. Troops under Lopez Ortiz tied the hands of Zapatista prisoners behind their backs before shooting them in the back of the head in the town's market. Lopez Ortiz had distinguished himself earlier in the 1970s waging a dirty war against the Party of the Poor in the state of Guerrero. Hundreds of campesinos were "disappeared" in the course of his campaign to stamp out that insurgency. SOA graduates have not confined their activities to Chiapas. In June 1995 a massacre of campesino activists took place near Aguas Blancas in Guerrero. The commander of the military region was General Adrian Maldon-



Twice a day, every day, about 25 US-made Humvees carry about 175 nervous Mexican soldiers toting US-made M-16 automatic rifles and heavier weapons through the Zapatista village of La Realidad. La Realidad is the headquarters of the military leadership of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). The troop convoys have become a fact of life for the residents of La Realidad, including the many refugees from the village of Guadalupe Tepayac who were driven from their homes by the Mexican Federal Army in February 1995. In early October the Federal Army soldiers built a new military encampment on the banks of the Rio Euseba on the other side of La Realidad. This new encampment is the latest stage in the military encirclement of the Zapatistas and in the increasing militarization of Mexico. The rapid growth in the Mexican police state has depended on large quantities of US military aid.

Historically the Mexican military differs from those of the rest of Latin America in two respects: It does not wield much political power. And the Mexican military has maintained a degree of relative independence from US domination. Mexico has been invaded repeatedly by the US and the Mexican military has long considered the US its most likely external enemy. Until recently Mexico has relied less on the US for military training than any other Latin American country. Mexicans at large harbor considerable opposition to close military ties with the US.

## The Militarization of Mexico

While the most intense militarization of Mexico followed the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the process of militarization dates to the early '80s. In 1982 when the Mexican Peso collapsed Mexico found itself unable to pay its foreign debt. In exchange for international loans the Mexican ruling party, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), implemented a series of austerity measures; they slashed state programs and sold off public industry. Having faced

a number of guerrilla movements in the 1970s, the ruling elite no doubt knew that the austerity measures it imposed risked renewed popular revolt. While the PRI slashed public services they beefed up the Mexican military—with quiet but unparalleled assistance from the US. In all categories of military assistance, including military training, Mexico received more aid from the US between 1982 and 1990 than it had in the previous three decades.

Immediately after the 1994 Zapatista uprising Mexico embarked on a dramatic expansion of the military in terms of size, equipment and training and in terms of political power. In 1995 alone the military budget grew by 44% to about $4.5 billion a year and the armed forces appear to have been expanded to a current estimate of over 200,000 troops. Many parts of rural Mexico have been placed under military control since the Zapatista uprising and the appearance of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) in 1996. 25,000 soldiers are based in 40 military encampments in the conflict zone in Chiapas, with another 40,000 troops in the immediate area.

The establishment of military rule in many areas is complemented by the increasing domination of the police forces by the military across the country. Active or former military officers now direct state police forces in 21 out of Mexico's 31 states. The whole command structure of the Mexico City police force was replaced with military officers and the entire Federal police force of Baja California is being replaced with soldiers.

No surprise that along with this militarization comes a dramatic disintegration of human rights. In Mexico City elite units of the police recruited from the military have made mass arrests in working-class neighborhoods and summarily executed suspects. Mexico leads the world in political murders of journalists. Members of the opposition parties and other political organizations are routinely arrested and frequently "disappeared." A report by the Latin American Federation of Associations of Families of the Detained and Disappeared documented 1,300 such disappearances, 80% of them from the indigenous communities of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero



remain so in part due to the loose and inconsistent US oversight process. Until recently, mandated inspections of the use of US-supplied equipment occurred once a year and always with advance notice. This policy was officially modified in September 1996 under pressure from Congress to allow unannounced inspections but there is no evidence of any change in the actual practice and little reason to expect such a change since the use of Drug War equipment for counter-insurgency purposes clearly and conveniently secures both states' interests in crushing oppositional movements in Mexico.

In addition to equipment and training, the US provides Mexico with considerable assistance in the area of intelligence in the name of the War On Drugs. Over the past five years the portion of the US anti-drug budget allocated for military surveillance has increased 400%. Much of this money is going to operations in Mexico. According to La Jornada US Condor spy planes with silent flight capacity and infrared sensors have been used to gather information on the location and movements of the EZLN since May 1994. US intelligence information was used to determine the supposed real identity of SubComandante Marcos prior to the February 1995 military offensive against the Zaptistas. Given the Mexican military's heavy involvement in the international drug trade US intelligence on drug activities given to the Mexican military might just as well be handed to the drug traffickers themselves.

The use of Drug War assistance against the Zapatistas is particularly perverse since they strictly enforce their own laws against all drug and alcohol use in the territories within their control. Zapatista territory is probably the most drug-free area in the Americas. In Zapatista territory the military has been trying to pressure campesinos into growing marijuana, providing them with seeds and offering to buy their crop when they harvest it. This is clearly meant to both divide the Zapatista communities by encouraging the violation of Zapatista laws and to create a pretext for intervention in Zapatista territory.

machine guns; 3,300 flame throwers; 360,000 grenades; 266 electric prods; 1,000 parachutes plus hundreds of thousands of other items including: combat rations, helmets, flack vests, canteens, night vision equipment, electronic command and control equipment, radar units, semi-automatic rifles, ammunition, gas masks and other equipment.

## The War On Drugs

The "War On Drugs" has provided some of the best cover for US military aid to Mexico. General Barry McCaffrey, Clinton's Drug Czar, only two years ago headed the US Armed Forces Southern Command, responsible for all US military activity in Latin America. Almost all of the military helicopters as well as C-130 troop transport planes were provided to Mexico under the auspices of drug interdiction efforts. Their use in the initial military response to the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 in blatant violation of the requirement that they only be used for anti-drug activity is well documented and widely reported in the National Catholic Reporter and La Jornada. In spite of this violation there has been a steady increase in Drug War assistance to Mexico. Much of the equipment provided in the name of the War On Drugs is being used in Chiapas and other southern states even though the heaviest drug traffic takes place in the northern states of Mexico that border the US.

US officials acknowledge the 'versatility' of military assistance by the US in pursuit of the drug war. In an internal Southern Command memo exposed in Covert Action Quarterly (Winter 96–97), Staff Judge Advocate to Gen. McCaffrey, Col. Warren D. Hall, said "It is unrealistic to expect the military to limit use of the equipment to operations against narcotraffickers. The light infantry skills US Special Operations forces teach during counter-drug deployments can be used by armed forces in their counter-insurgency as well." Such 'unrealistic' expectations that the US abide by its own laws



and Puebla. These numbers don't include the political murders of over 400 members of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (the PRD, a center-left opposition party). In the militarized zones of Mexico government-sponsored paramilitary organizations have taken the government's war of counter-insurgency into poor and indigenous communities to sow division. A special counter-insurgency unit of the military called the Rainbow Task Force coordinates these efforts to disrupt the indigenous resistance movement. Right-wing paramilitary organizations in Chiapas have terrorized many indigenous communities, particularly in the North of the state and more recently in Los Altos. A state of virtual civil war exists in many communities like San Pedro, Chenalhó where paramilitaries killed at least eight campesinos in November and two more are missing and presumed dead. Hundreds of people have been burned out of their homes in Chenalhó.

## Hiding Military Aid

The militarization of Mexico and the dirty war being waged against the Mexican people has been made possible by a dramatic escalation in US military aid to Mexico. The US and Mexican states badly want to hide their new relationship in for a couple of reasons. US military involvement in Mexico is very unpopular among Mexicans and its exposure would only further undermine an already unpopular government. The US government hopes to avoid the development of a mass movement in the US like those of the 1980s that demanded an end to US military aid to the right-wing dictatorship in El Salvador and the Nicaraguan Contras. Extensive US investments in Mexico and the threat of social unrest spilling over the US/Mexican border mean that popular insurgencies in Mexico pose a much more dire threat to the interests of the US corporate and financial elite than all of the revolutionary movements in the rest of Latin America combined. And so the US and Mexican rul-

ing classes have great stake in keping their policies free from public scrutiny and dissent.

While the public record reveals a dramatic increase in US military aid to Mexico since the Zapatista uprising, a great deal of military aid arrives in Mexico under the cover of anti-drug trafficking assistance and is therefore not reported to the US public. A June 1996 US Government Accounting Office report documents the use against the Zapatistas of equipment training and intelligence assistance intended for anti-drug purposes. The shipment and distribution of large quantities of military equipment of US origin reported in the Mexican press cannot be accounted for in publicly-reported US military assistance. The US can hide such aid in two ways. The Arms Control Export Act requires that the administration only notify Congress of international military sales in excess of $14 million. By parceling such sales into smaller units the Clinton administration avoids the reporting requirement. On top of this, reduced price or free Excess Defense Article transfers are not covered by the Arms Control Export Act. By defining various items as military surplus and offering them to Mexico for free or at a discount the administration can avoid reporting such aid to Congress. The second route for covert aid is through intelligence agency budgets. The CIA houses its largest Latin American office in Mexico City. Even the FBI maintains an office in Mexico City. Intelligence agency budgets are kept secret; they provide a perfect cover for such military assistance.

Despite huge US expenditures on curbing drug trafficking from Mexico there has been no reduction in the flow of narcotics. The Mexican military (which receives much of the anti-drug assistance) is actually heavily involved in the drug trade. Mexican newspaper La Jornada reports that an estimated 40% of the profits of that trade go to the Mexican police and military. In so far as the US engages in ineffective attempts at interdiction or even provides assistance to the trade it claims to be fighting, it supports the Mexican military at



the price of further misery and violence in the impoverished urban centers of the US.

Finally a certain amount of military aid is directed to Mexico by proxy. Israel and Argentina (both prime recipients of US military aid) train Mexican police forces in counter-insurgency tactics much in the same way that Israel aided the military dictatorship in Guatemala and the apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1980s when US public opinion made it impossible for the US to offer such aid directly.

## Military Sales and Donations

The US is the Mexican military's main foreign source of arms and other military equipment. US military transfers to Mexico are 16 times those from France, Mexico's second largest source of arms and equipment. Publicly reported US arms sales to Mexico from 1987 to 1996 totaled over $358 million. The biggest single annual increase took place in 1994 when sales jumped from $16 million to almost $54 million. Other sources reveal $78 million in authorized sales that year. An additional $37 million in military "draw downs" of excess equipment has also been reported as well as a $1 million grant for special training for 200 Mexican soldiers. As documented in La Jornada and by the Federation of American Scientists, US military equipment delivered to Mexico in this period includes:

Bell 212 helicopters; 20 Bell UH-1H Huey helicopters (plus 12 more inoperable Hueys for spare parts); 6 Sikorsky helicopters; 4 satellite guided UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters; 6 Blackhawk transport helicopters; 22 McDonell-Douglas helicopters; F-5 aircraft; 13 Cessna observation planes; 78 fixed wing planes; 20 C-130 transport planes; 4 C-26 reconnaissance planes; 23 Tanks; 7,500 bulletproof Humvee armored troop carriers; Anti-Riot vehicles and Water Cannons; 1,500 other military vehicles; 1 survey ship, 2 auxiliary ships, 1 salvage ship, and 2 Knox-class frigates; 1,615