WHERE THE GUNS GO

U.S. ARMS AND THE CRISIS OF VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

American Friends
Service Committee

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Introduction

U.S. legal arms sales to the Mexican police and military have grown enormously, to $3.5 billion between late 2012 and April 2015—nearly 10 times as much as the three-year period of 2000-2002, despite a climate of increasing fear and concern among Mexicans about state violence and impunity. These concerns have heightened in the wake of the September 2014 forced disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teachers school in the southern state of Guerrero, bringing global attention to the more than 27,000 people reported as forcibly disappeared in Mexico and 150,000 homicides since 2007, when then-President Felipe Calderón deployed the military to cities.[1] A large volume of military-grade assault weapons are also purchased on the open retail market in the United States and trafficked to Mexico for use by criminal organizations.

María Herrera has experienced the forced disappearance of four sons. "They put up huge walls to stop migrants, people seeking work, but how strange that weapons pass from there to here, with no control." *Photo: AFSC*

Recognizing the role the United States plays in arming Mexican police and military amid a growing human rights crisis experienced by Mexicans and Central American migrants in Mexico, the Quaker organization American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) (afsc.org) organized a two-week fact-finding mission to Mexico in June 2016. The U.S.-based delegation of 17 peace, social justice, and human rights advocates sought to gauge the impact of U.S. military programs and arms sales to Mexico, and to obtain firsthand accounts of the increased collaboration between the U.S. and Mexico in their effort to curb immigration flows on Mexico's southern border. (A second report will focus on the impacts of U.S. policy on Central American migrants in Mexico.) The delegation visited Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero, and met with human rights defenders, migrants, journalists, Mexican refugee agency and military officials, U.S. Embassy officials, and families of disappeared persons. In Guerrero, we visited the Ayotzinapa school and spoke with students and family members of some of the 43 disappeared students, as well as with families affected by forced disappearances and displacement throughout the state of Guerrero.

AFSC has a 100-year history of and commitment to support victims of war and violence, beginning with its founding during World War I. AFSC has also long engaged in efforts to investigate and address militarization and its effects on state violence. Our mission to Mexico built upon these efforts.

Corruption in the Mexican State

Corruption of government authorities does damage under any conditions. Public funds are pocketed, favoritism hurts the quality of public services, and decreased trust in authorities and institutions often means community members have nowhere to go for justice and other basic government functions.

The problem is compounded when state agencies collaborate with violent organized criminal groups—the same state agencies that are the designated institutions for fighting such organized crime, and are the chosen U.S. partners to do so. In Mexico, we heard testimony pointing to these problems and their grave consequences again and again.

> "We have found, for example, that sometimes you file a police report and get home, and you find the report you've just filed glued to your door. In other cases, people have filed a police report and on the way home they're ambushed and killed. It shows there is collusion between authorities and groups of organized crime."
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> —ISABEL ROSALES JUÁREZ, human rights defender with Guerrero Families and Friends of Kidnapped, Disappeared and Killed

Although 43 percent of Mexicans believe that neither they nor their family members are corrupt,[2] Mexico is considered the most corrupt of all 34 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, according to the Corruption Perception Index.[3] Critical government agencies— including the armed forces, police in general, judicial investigators, the prison system, and immigration authorities—are considered to be highly corrupt and corruptible organizations, as well as sources of violence instead of order.[4]

The corruption of Mexican state forces has been widely known and in the spotlight since at least the 1980s. This has coincided with progressively greater involvement of the military in anti-drug programs, opening the door to further corruption. The De la Madrid presidency (1982-1988) attempted to purge the Federal Security Directorate, whose members were linked to drug trafficking. The Salinas administration (1988-1994) tried to clean up Mexico's justice ministry by establishing the Drug Control Planning Center and then the National Institute to Combat Drugs, which included the armed forces for the first time in counter-drug agencies. Both administrations considered drug trafficking to be a national security issue.[5]

The trends continued. The Zedillo administration (1994-2000) intensified the use of the military in counter-drug operations, and began to substitute soldiers for Federal Judicial Police. The Federal Preventive Police, created in 1999, were largely military personnel, thus initiating joint police-military operations. The military presence in the drug war was further strengthened during the Fox administration (2000–2006). The notoriously corrupt Federal Judicial Police were dissolved in 2001 and incorporated into the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI). In 2003, all agencies involved in the drug war were united in a single bureau to fight organized crime, which then prosecuted hundreds of AFI agents. Justice agencies remained filled with military personnel, and the armed forces broadened its policing role. The Fox government reached a new level of cooperation with the United States in counter-drug matters, but violence related to drug trafficking continued to grow, and spiked during the last year of Fox's term.[6]

During the last two presidencies—that of Felipe Calderón and his declared policy of a "war on drugs" to be fought by the army, and that of the current Enrique Peña Nieto administration—the violence spiked dramatically. The state's actions have become increasingly opaque, and the period has been marked by one high-level corruption scandal after another.[7] Taken together, the violence unleashed by criminal groups, the corruption of police, and the government's lack of transparency led Stanford University researcher Beatriz Magaloni to speak of "the collapse of the Mexican State."[8] The long list of corruption scandals includes charges against several state governors for close ties to organized criminal groups. Current or former governors of at least five different Mexican states have been charged with crimes ranging from illicit enrichment and the diversion of millions of dollars (Tabasco Governor Andrés Rafael Granier Melo) to the death of 17 people (Veracruz Governor Javier Duarte) to participation in the Juarez Cartel criminal organization (former Quintana Roo governor Mario Villanueva Madrid).[9] Since civilian government leaders have both formal command and informal relationships with police forces, their involvement in corruption impacts state forces' relationships with organized crime, as well.

The disappearance of the 43 students in Guerrero, who were handed over by the police to a local criminal gang, reflects the level of cooperation between the Mexican State and criminal organizations. "Ayotzinapa was the event that uncovered all that was happening in Guerrero, which many of us knew, because we heard but we didn't know the depth of the reality people were experiencing," Alejandro Ramos of the Morelos y Pavón Human Rights Center in Guerrero (centromorelos.org) told us. "And the reality is that the Guerrero authorities, the whole state government, and the federal and municipal governments are in collusion with organized crime."

Impunity

Widespread impunity in Mexico—the failure of the Mexican state to pursue, capture, and punish criminal acts—is another key reason why weapons sales, military aid, and personnel training to Mexico are deeply problematic. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights describes impunity as "a failure by States to meet their obligations to investigate violations; to take appropriate measures in respect of the perpetrators, particularly in the area of justice, by ensuring that those suspected of criminal responsibility are prosecuted, tried, and duly punished."[10] The U.S. State Department Country Report for Mexico in 2015 states that impunity for human rights abuses continues to be "a serious problem ... throughout the country."[11]

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in its 2015 report The Human Rights Situation in Mexico, concludes that the climate of generalized violence in the country carries with it grave consequences for rule of law.[12] When crimes of violence—those committed by individuals and organized crime as well as by agents of the State—remain unpunished, a spiral of impunity results. The perpetrators do not face consequences for their acts, inviting them and others to repeat these acts. The widely recognized impunity in the vast majority of violent crimes in Mexico is part of the growth and repetition of lawlessness and injustice, including on the part of the State.

U.S. policy recognizes the importance of overcoming impunity, which the State Department names as

having "a corrosive effect ... on respect for human rights and the rule of law." United States law prohibits assistance to foreign military and police units that have not been prosecuted for serious human rights violations their members commit.

Mexico's impunity rates are incredibly high. The Open Society Foundations estimates this rate at close to 98 percent—meaning that about 2 percent of crimes are prosecuted.[13] When we met with officials at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City connected to implementation of the Merida Initiative—the multibillion U.S. assistance program focused on counter-drug operations—they confirmed these figures. Others, such as Ricardo Neves of Peace Brigades International in Mexico, stated that when you include prosecutions that are started but never completed, the impunity rate is closer to 99 percent.

Sister Leticia Gutiérrez, Scalabrinian Mission with Migrants and Refugees. *Photo: AFSC*

THE FACES OF IMPUNITY'S VICTIMS

Federal prosecutors avoid prosecuting both state and non-state actors for crimes by miring investigations in bureaucratic confusion, reclassifying serious crimes as lesser offenses, and tampering with evidence. We spoke with activist Margarita Lopez, the mother of a young woman who was disappeared and murdered. She related to our delegation how, while she was helping another family look for four missing teenage girls in the state of Guerrero, they found the bodies and were able to identify them by their clothes and shoes. State officials mixed up the corpses, giving the wrong bodies back to the families. When family members asked for DNA testing, they were told the government did not have resources to do so. "If you're looking for a car, you can find the vehicle ID number if it was stolen," said Mrs. Lopez. "But for people who are disappeared, there is no database."

Torture by the military and the police is still a common method of investigation in Mexico. We met with the brothers Francisco and Antonio Cerezo of the Comité Cerezo, a human rights group (comitecerezo.org), who were imprisoned and tortured for seven years. According to the Open Society Foundations report, as of April 2015, there had been only six convictions for torture since 2007 and no convictions of military officials, despite thousands of complaints of torture during the period.

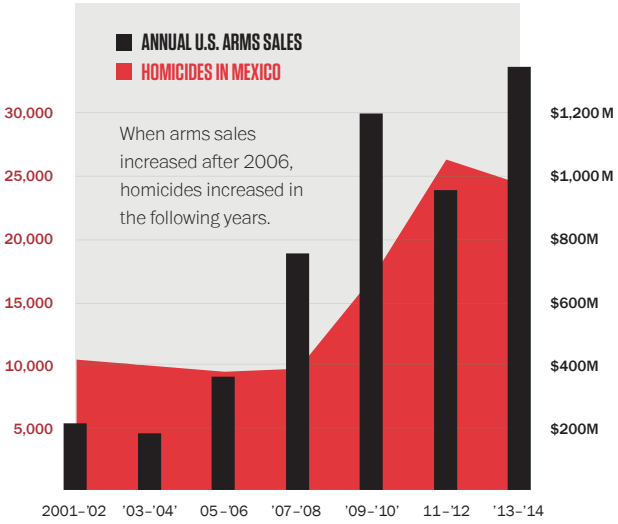
The militarization of Mexican police has been accompanied by a dramatic rise in reports of human rights violations by federal and state security forces, and the vast majority of these have not been judicially investigated.[14] The State Department Report cites unlawful killings, torture, and forced disappearances as among the most significant human rights abuses involving the military and law enforcement.

Forced disappearances are among the most shocking examples of this impunity (see section, "An Open Wound"). Mrs. Lopez also described a recent case to us in which state investigative authorities apparently collaborated with organized crime to eliminate the remains of disappeared persons. A man in Guerrero searching for disappeared relatives, together with other families, found the body of his brother in a mass clandestine grave at the bottom of a steep canyon. They immediately went to the authorities to get help and for permission to exhume the area, but authorities stalled, despite having a forensic team on site. Returning the next morning to recover the bodies, they found that the area had been burned overnight. The local head of public safety was fired for helping the families, and the searchers were prohibited from going back to the site.

U.S. interests in arms sales to Mexico

Under the framework of the Merida Initiative, the U.S. government has funneled billions of dollars into Mexico with the stated intent "to fight organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law." Launched in 2007, the initiative is formally focused on (1) disrupting organized criminal groups, (2) institutionalizing the rule of law, (3) creating a 21st-century border, and (4) building strong and resilient communities in Mexico. According to a January 2016 report by the Congressional Research Service, "Newer areas of focus have involved bolstering security along Mexico's southern border and addressing the production and trafficking of heroin in Mexico."[15] Most of the $2.1 billion of military and police assistance to Mexico since 2008 has been counter-drug equipment and training for Mexican police agencies, including $590 million worth of aircraft.

In addition to U.S. grant assistance to Mexico, most of which is channeled to U.S. companies, the United States has also approved the transfer through sales of billions of dollars' worth of other arms to the Mexican government. According to The Washington Post, the value of weapons and military equipment sold was $3.5 billion from 2012 to 2015 and included firearms, armored vehicles, helicopters, and other military aircraft.[16] "We didn't sell them just the helicopters," a former Pentagon official on Mexico policy told The New York Times. "We sold them 15 years of working intimately together that we would not otherwise have."[17]



> "I think people would be grateful to know where these weapons are ending up, because to see a death with one of those, what do they call it, an M-15, an M-13 used by a soldier, and to see someone killed with that kind of weapon outside of [the military], it's like, where did that weapon come from? If there could at least be transparency from government to government about where these weapons are going, where they come from, and where they're going to end up, that would be great."
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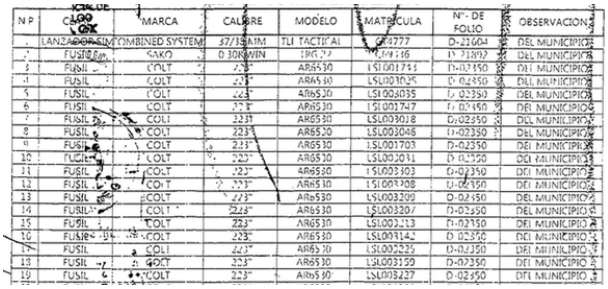
> —JOSÉ DASAEB TÉLLEZ ADAME, photojournalist

Whatever the pretext or mode of delivery, the evidence is strong that such U.S. military transfers contribute significantly to violence, instability, and the denial of human rights. Because of the depth of corruption in the Mexican government, police and armed forces blur the lines between official groups and criminals, and legal arms sales frequently end up arming criminal gangs and criminal conduct directly. Moreover, the Mexican police and military have a long history of repression against mostly peaceful social movements.

In 2013 alone, the United States exported to Mexico 5,810 revolvers and pistols, 7,223 rifles, 30 assault



N P	CL	MARCA	CALIBRE	MODELO	MATRICULA	N°. DE FOLIO	OBSERVACION
	LANZAGRANADAS	COMBINED SYSTEM	37/38MM	TLI TACTICAL	[illegible]4777	D-21604	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	KAKO	D 30R9WIN	[illegible]	[illegible]9116	D-21892	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL001745	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003025	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003035	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL001747	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003018	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003046	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL001703	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003011	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003303	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL001708	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003209	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003207	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003113	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003114	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003235	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003159	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO
	FUSIL	COLT	[illegible]	AR6530	LSL003227	D-02350	DEL MUNICIPIO

Police who disappeared 43 Ayotzinapa students had Colt AR-15 assault rifles sold to armed forces.

rifles, 1,311 machine guns, 7,145 shotguns, 34 grenade launchers, and 20 anti-tank missile launchers, according to data reported to the United Nations.

Among these weapons were U.S.-produced and exported rifles used by the police who attacked and handed over 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa to a local criminal gang in September 2014. Documents from the Mexican defense ministry's arms registry include the weapons possessed by municipal police in Iguala, who carried out the crime. Among the arms listed: 20 assault rifles produced by Colt's Manufacturing, headquartered in Hartford, Connecticut. Colt sold the Mexican government those rifles, which arrived in Guerrero in 2013.[18]

U.S. Embassy staff assured us that police who are shown to have committed grave human rights abuses are barred from receiving U.S. training. But the restriction apparently does not apply to police receiving U.S.-exported weapons. An increasing amount of arms sales to Mexico are made directly by the United States government, through its Foreign Military Sales program, rather than in commercial transactions with the producers, known as Direct Commercial Sales, even though those producers still profit from the sales.

These governmental sales do not count the assault rifles and other firearms sold at retail stores and gun shows in the United States and smuggled into Mexico. Paulina Arriaga, executive director of Desarma Mexico (desarmamexico.org), told us that one can't talk about arms in Mexico without talking about the United States. For example, the end of the assault weapons ban in 2004 provoked a spike in the presence of such weapons in Mexico.[19] Seventy percent of firearms seized in criminal investigations in Mexico come from the U.S., according to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. In fact, Arriaga says the U.S. is "without a doubt the primary provider of legal and illegal arms in Mexico." Those weapons contributed to some 65 percent of the nearly 15 million "common crimes" committed in Mexico from 2011 to 2013, and roughly 56 percent of the 57,000 homicides committed since 2013. Of the U.S.-sourced guns seized by authorities at crime scenes in Mexico, up to a half of them were imported into the United States from other nations, according to a Violence Policy Center report. If the United States restricted imports of assault weapons, it could reduce the flow of such weapons to Mexico, even without a full U.S. legislative ban on the sale of assault weapons.[20]

While the United States has the biggest external role in Mexico's militarization, other countries also contribute to and benefit from it, including Spain, the Netherlands, France, Canada, and Germany. In the display showcases that we saw at the Mexican Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA), guns manufactured by companies from the United States,[21] Israel,[22] Italy, Slovakia, China, and the Czech Republic are offered to private security companies and federal, state, and local police forces shopping for weapons.

German arms sales to Mexico demonstrate both how exported arms are used in atrocities and how exporting states can seek to exercise controls. The German firm Heckler and Koch sold nearly ten-thousand G-36 assault rifles to Mexico between 2006 and 2009, on the condition that they not send them to the conflictive states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Jalisco, and Chiapas. Yet dozens of the rifles were recovered from the Iguala municipal police who participated in the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in September 2014. In response, German prosecutors charged six Heckler and Koch employees with criminal violations, and German officials visited Mexico to request forgiveness of family members of the Ayotzinapa students.[23]

Exporting surveillance

Surveillance technology sales have been increasingly lucrative. These sophisticated intelligence systems are used not only by Mexican border control agents, but also by military and police, most notably in the Control, Command, Communication Computer and Intelligence public security system (called the C4I or C4). This system, funded by the United States through Merida Initiative programs beginning in 2010, allows all security agencies in Mexico, including municipal, state, and federal police as well as the military, to access surveillance information in real time. For example, the C4 system allowed both local police and the Mexican military in Iguala, Guerrero to follow the buses of the students from Ayotzinapa on the night that 43 were disappeared.[24]

Given the collusion between Mexican law enforcement agencies and criminal organizations and direct violations by Mexican state forces, these surveillance technologies may be used in human rights violations by either criminal actors or state agents.

Security Tracking Devices sold $355 million worth of surveillance equipment to the Mexican military in 2011. Though the company has headquarters in Mexico, it was also active in California, until the FBI arrested its CEO, Jose Susumo Azano, in 2014. Mexico has also purchased long-range AN/TPQ-78 radars produced by Northrop Grumman, a $221 million project.[25]

Israel's US$4 million annual military export sales to Mexico include small arms, but the exports are mostly surveillance equipment, especially drones. In 2004, the drone model Hermes 450, made by Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems, were the first unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to patrol the skies above Mexico's southern border. Another sale of these drones followed in 2011, and today three of the five types of drones used for border control by the Mexican military are made in Israel.[26] In 2015, Mexico ordered two Dominator 2 XP UAVs[27] from Israeli company Aeronautics Limited. This drone, with the capability to carry over 650 pounds and which can be converted into a bomber, made its first successful test run in Mexico at the end of 2015. The XP is now an operational component of the Mexican military for intelligence missions.

Israel is involved in other Mexican efforts to increase surveillance and control of the civilian population. Today, the Israeli defense ministry is working with the southeastern state of Chiapas to improve their C4 systems.[28] In 2006, an Israeli technology firm, Verint Systems, won a U.S. State Department contract for the wiretapping of Mexican telecommunications in the service of the Mexican government.[29] By 2012, this system was able to collect all telephone communications in the country and allow the Mexican government to access them—all entirely funded by the United States.[30]

Mexican interests in U.S. weapons

The Mexican military increasingly uses U.S. weaponry.
Photo: D. Myles Cullen

When Mexico's federal electoral tribunal declared Felipe Calderón the winner of the presidential elections in 2006, millions of Mexicans contested the election's validity in the streets of Mexico City and elsewhere. After he took office, Calderón immediately sought to legitimize his presidency by declaring a war on drug cartels and leaning heavily on the Mexican military, whose forces he deployed into cities. For Calderón, the militarization of law enforcement and army operations within the country did more than ally his administration with the military. It also was a means to get the United States on board economically as part of the drug war, through the $3 billion Mérida Initiative, focused on building Mexico's police and military.

The presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto, despite early announcements of a change of course, has continued the same policies of military operations, especially focused on "high value targets"—killing or arresting criminal leaders, leading to fragmentation, competition, and further conflict between smaller organizations.

Mexican political leaders have other interests in militarization, as well. The Calderón and Peña Nieto governments have responded with force to nonviolent grassroots mobilizations for democracy and labor rights and against forced disappearances and other state violence. While our delegation was in Mexico, federal police agents attacked unarmed participants in a teachers' protest in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca on June 19, killing at least nine people. Police snipers deployed to put down the protest used Belgian and Czech assault weapons.[31]

Mexico also uses imported weapons to enforce the Southern Border Plan that deports thousands of Central American migrants, many of whom are fleeing violence. Although agents of the Mexican immigration enforcement agency INAMI are not armed, immigrant rights defenders in Chiapas have documented frequent INAMI operations with federal and state police and military agencies. Those agencies are armed with U.S.-supplied weapons.

SEDENA controls all legal weapons imports into Mexico and markets them to police, private security companies, and the military itself. Gun possession by private citizens is highly restricted. During a visit by members of our delegation to SEDENA's arms showroom, Col. Eduardo Tellez Moreno, director of the Office of Weapons and Munitions Marketing, told us that there is no uniform weapons purchasing plan for federal, state, or local police. "It's like selling cars," he said. "People buy what is popular." The absence of standardized purchasing means that state police have arsenals that vary widely in country of origin, manufacturer, age, and characteristics.

Mexican communities, of course, have an interest in stopping the inflow of weaponry that is doing so much damage in the absence of the rule of law or a government that protects its citizens and others within its borders. "I would call on U.S. citizens to really question weapons policy, the production and freedom and sale of weapons from the United States to Mexico, to the Mexican government," said Manuel

Olivares of the Morelos y Pavón Human Rights Center in Guerrero. "The sale of these weapons is serving to massacre people."

"All of us in Mexico know that this is not a war against drug trafficking, but a war against the society, against our families, and above all against our children," María Herrera told us. Four of her sons were forcibly disappeared. Those responsible for selling weapons to Mexico, she said, "should think about the damage and destruction brought by these weapons, and that eventually it will harm them as well, which in fact we are seeing."

An open wound: forced disappearances

A person is taken, arrested, or abducted against her or his will, and then not seen again. Nor do authorities recognize knowing of the person's whereabouts or confirm that she or he is in custody, though state agencies may be responsible. This is a forced disappearance.

The Mexican government has registered nearly 27,000 disappearances since 2007, but evidence points to several times that many, largely because these figures exclude "kidnappings," and because only a small portion of kidnappings are reported. Many kidnappings involved state responsibility through support or acquiescence; Open Society estimates that kidnappings—which also include temporary abductions—exceeded 580,000 from 2007 through 2014. By any count, it is a human catastrophe.

Why are people forcibly disappeared? Historically, state forces targeted dissidents and activists for political reasons, in order to terrorize opposition. The most well-known example is the forced disappearance in September 2014 by police—while the Army watched from a surveillance center—of 43 student teachers of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. The Ayotzinapa school, which we visited, has a long tradition of training teachers from poor communities, including bilingual education for indigenous communities, and of militant protest. The students' family members and human rights organizations have persisted in their struggle to find the young men, clarify what happened, and bring those responsible to justice. The Mexican government has denied its responsibility and shut down an effective investigation by experts assigned by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

There are other motives and actors in forced disappearances: criminal organizations, often in collusion with government officials, also abduct people for ransom, forced labor, and human trafficking for the sex trade. Family members of disappeared persons we spoke with represented broad classes of people: middle-class devout Christian

Tranquilina Hernández, whose daughter was disappeared and buried in a clandestine, state-run grave in Morelos, Mexico. *Photo: AFSC*

women, people from poor indigenous communities, urban doctors and other professionals, and people who had recently moved to a new state. Some had no idea why their loved ones had been targeted.

But a universal aspect of the stories of those we met was the absolute refusal of state officials to help them find their children, husbands, wives, or siblings, reflecting not only a lack of resources, but a lack of will. "Police are in cahoots with organized crime and won't do anything," said Margarita Lopez. "In terms of its purpose to care for, to guard, to protect people's human rights," Scalabrinian Sister Leticia Gutiérrez told us, "the state's policy is to do nothing, to not recognize anything happening. That is its policy."

It is probable that most disappeared persons have been murdered, which means there are many unmarked graves. At least 118 mass graves had been discovered as of November 2015,[32] but more continued to be found.

Because state agencies have refused to investigate where the remains of people disappeared and killed are located--much less bring to justice those responsible—families and communities increasingly have begun their own investigations and uncovered a growing number of clandestine graves, moving "from indignation to action," in the words of one family member. In Guerrero alone, at least 60 such mass graves have been identified.[33]

In some cases, the state itself has created mass graves of disappeared persons. In Cuernavaca, we met with Tranquilina Hernández Lagunas, whose daughter was disappeared. She sought to recover her remains in a mass grave created by the state prosecutor's office, but her daughter's body was not among those recovered at the site.

In Guerrero, José Navarro's brothers were seized and GPS data located them in real time, but authorities refused to intervene. *Photo: AFSC*

Juan Carlos Trujillo, four of whose brothers have been disappeared, told our delegation how his group had gone to churches to tell their story and seek support. After passing a collection jar, they would find a slip of paper someone had deposited that described in detail where a grave could be found. Using such outreach, the group located more mass graves than the government itself, in a shorter period. Yet identification of remains has been paralyzed by the state's failure to establish a DNA database.

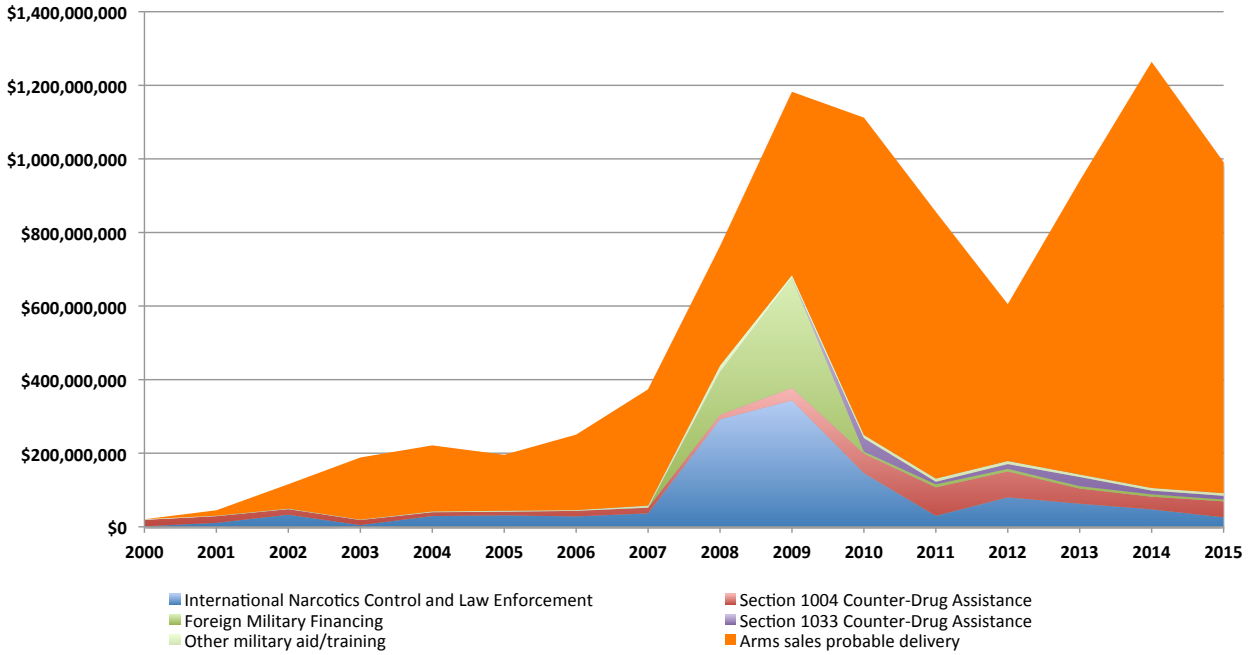
Conclusion

Arms sales are a pivotal element of U.S. policy with regard to Mexico, motivated largely by the "war on drugs." This military approach to combating drug trafficking has led to a dramatic escalation of homicides in Mexico since 2007, making it the second-most deadly armed conflict in the world in 2015.[34] And the Mexican government is responsible for flagrant abuses of human rights, including forced disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings, as documented by the U.S. Department of State, Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and Mexico's National Human Rights Commission. Victims are disproportionately indigenous people and migrants. Collaboration between organized criminal groups and the Mexican state is also extensively documented at the local, state, and federal levels, leading observers such as journalist

"I think they should establish a policy—and they can do it—banning weapons of extermination, and a stronger policy on the sale of weapons to the Mexican military, which is the sale of weapons to organized crime, because unfortunately, they have become the same thing. Those who suffer from this are the public, the citizens ourselves."

—JAVIER SICILIA, whose son was murdered in 2011

U.S. Arms Sales Deliveries and U.S. Military/Police Aid to Mexico, 2000-2014



AFSC chart. Source: securityassistance.org. Arms sales deliveries shown as 1-2 years after agreements signed.

Anabel Hernández to call Mexico a "criminal state" that lacks legitimacy. [35]

Arms sales to Mexican government forces escalate violence between the state and criminal organizations. At the same time, tens of thousands of weapons have gone missing from Mexican police inventories.

In a 2014 directive on conventional arms transfers, the Obama administration states that the U.S. should maintain "the appropriate balance between legitimate arms transfers to support U.S. national security and that of our allies and partners, and the need for restraint against the transfer of arms that would enhance the military capabilities of hostile states, serve to facilitate human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law, or otherwise undermine international security." Clearly, the balance has tipped far from the need to restrain violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

Recommendations to the U.S. government

1. End training and other assistance to Mexican military and police, until Mexico demonstrates full accountability for past abuses, brings those responsible to justice, establishes effective investigative and justice mechanisms for state abuses and corruption, and institutes reparations to those who have been harmed by violence committed by Mexican forces.
2. End U.S. arms sales to the Mexican military and police.
3. Fully and publicly disclose all past and pending military and police sales of military and police weapons, equipment, and training to Mexico, both through the Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales mechanisms, as well as of U.S. assistance used by Mexico to support such sales, including "end use monitoring" reports that show where and how U.S.-supplied arms are being used by Mexican government agencies.
4. Fully and proactively implement the Leahy Law that prohibits U.S. assistance to foreign police and military units for which there is credible information that members have committed gross human rights abuses. In Mexico as elsewhere, this requires dedicating resources to track information on assisted units and on which units have allegedly committed abuses.
5. Reorient U.S. counter-drug policy to address narcotic addiction as a public health issue in order to focus more resources on drug demand and away from militarized and ineffective operations against narcotics production and transit.
6. Re-establish a federal ban on the sale of assault weapons, following the model of California law.
7. Until such an assault weapon ban is instituted, the executive branch should use its authority under the Gun Control Act of 1968 to ban the importation of foreign-produced assault weapons.

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WHO WE ARE

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. The AFSC delegation traveled in Mexico from June 12 to 26, 2016. It was made up of 17 participants, primarily from the United States, as well as from Mexico, Guatemala, and Israel. The group included AFSC staff with long experience in issues of arms transfers and immigration policy, as well as journalists, a videographer, and other activists. We were supported in country by Casa de los Amigos (Mexico City, casadelosamigos.org), Fray Matías Human Rights Center (Chiapas, cdhfraymatias.org), and the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center (Guerrero, tlachinollan.org). This report was written by delegation participants, with editorial assistance from Willie Colón.

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