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Report on 'Dirty War' Released Online After Government Procrastinated

by LADB Staff

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A draft of a new report on atrocities committed during Mexico's "dirty war" against leftists made its way onto the Internet after the government procrastinated in releasing the final version of the document. The report was compiled by a team of 27 researchers, hired by the Fiscalía Especial para los Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP) to research data found in recently opened government archives.

The research team comprising academics, former student demonstrators, and advocates for the victims used declassified documents from the Mexican military to document the involvement of government authorities and the armed forces in the dirty war against leftists during the late 1960s, the 1970s, and the early 1980s. The documents became available to the public after Congress approved freedom-of-information legislation in 2002 (see SourceMex, 2002-05-08).

Three presidents suppressed dissent

In the report, completed in late 2005, the authors asserted that former Presidents Adolfo Lopez Mateos (1958-1964), Gustavo Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970), Luis Echeverria Alvarez (1970-1976), and Jose Lopez Portillo (1976-1982) developed a policy to intentionally suppress dissent from the left. "The authoritarian attitude with which the Mexican state wished to control social dissent created a spiral of violence that...led it to commit crimes against humanity, including genocide," said the draft report, known as the Libro Blanco (White Book). Special prosecutor says report needed changes

The authors presented the final report to FEMOSPP director Ignacio Carrillo, who then passed the document on to President Vicente Fox. Carrillo declined, however, to release the final report to the public without modifications. He acknowledged that much of the report's content was true, but questioned the tone and the bias of the document and noted the lack of references to some atrocities by guerrilla groups.

"There are assertions in the draft that the Army conducted the operations alone," said Carrillo, who was appointed in 2002 to investigate and prosecute crimes related to the dirty war. "But they did not conduct them alone. They conducted them in response to orders from civilians above."

The Fox administration's refusal to release the final version of the report prompted the authors to leak a draft to the National Security Archive (NSA), a private research institute based at George Washington University in Washington, DC. The NSA then posted the document on its Web site, also providing a copy to The New York Times. "The fact that a version of the final report is circulating among a handful of prominent people yet is still closed and inaccessible to those most affected by the violence is a state of affairs reminiscent of Mexico's past," said a note on the Web site, "when citizens were routinely shut out of civic participation by a government determined to keep them in the dark."

Carrillo offered to step down following the leak of the draft, but Attorney General Daniel Cabeza de Vaca refused to accept the resignation. The Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) attempted to discredit the version released by the NSA, which it said had not been validated by the FEMOSPP. "The report is not valid because it has not been presented formally by the special prosecutor," Cabeza de Vaca told reporters. "There is no definitive document....What we have here are drafts and working documents," said Carrillo.

Some human rights advocates, however, said the report was a necessary tool to prosecute those responsible for the dirty war. Edgar Cortez, director of the Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles Todos los Derechos para Todos, raised concerns that the Fox government had not intended to release the report at all, even though it went through the effort of helping put together the facts. "If the government does not punish those responsible for these acts, it would be promoting a de facto amnesty," said Cortez.

Report documents military repression in Guerrero state

In the report, the authors presented clear evidence that former President Echeverria gave orders to the secret police and the military to carry out a plan of genocide. Echeverria's defense secretary Hermenegildo Cuenca Diaz was identified as the intellectual author of the plan. The report confirmed that Echeverria had a hand in the two most brutal crackdowns in the dirty war. The first occurred in October 1968, when Army soldiers, under instructions of then interior minister Echeverria, indiscriminately opened fire on student demonstrators during the infamous massacre at Tlatelolco (see SourceMex, 1998-10-07).

The second involved the violent repression of protestors in June 1971, in what has become known as the Jueves de Corpus massacre (see SourceMex, 2003-10-08 and 2004-07-21). That incident occurred near the beginning of the Echeverria presidency. Beyond the Tlatelolco and Jueves de Corpus incidents, the report said other systemic repression was prevalent during Echeverria's tenure, including the use of military bases as "concentration camps" to punish dissenters. The most horrific human rights violations during Echeverria's presidency occurred in Guerrero state, where hundreds of suspected subversives were killed or simply disappeared.

Before the opening of the military archives a few years ago, the only documentation of the Guerrero atrocities came from eyewitness accounts. Among other things, the Libro Blanco reveals the names of military officers and units involved in destroying entire villages that authorities suspected of serving as base camps for rebel leader Lucio Cabanas.

"With this operation, a state policy was established in which all the authorities connected to the Army the president, ministers of state, and the presidential guard, commanders of the military regions in Guerrero, and officers and troops in their command participated in the violations of human rights with the justification of pursuing a bad fugitive," the report says. "Such an open counter guerrilla strategy could not have been possible without the explicit consent and approval of the president."

The FEMOSPP has on several occasions attempted to try Echeverria for the atrocities committed during the dirty war, but those efforts were thwarted by the Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de

Justicia de la Nacion, SCJN). In one ruling, the high court said the 30-year statute of limitations to prosecute Echeverria had expired (see SourceMex, 2005-03-02). In another, the SCJN ruled that the Jueves de Corpus crackdown was not genocide, so Echeverria could not be charged with that crime (see SourceMex, 2005-06-22, and 2005-08-03).

Some members of Congress have proposed creating a truth commission to delve deeper into the circumstances surrounding the 1968 and 1971 incidents. "After more than three decades, we have still not arrived at the truth," said Deputy Fidel Rene Meza Cabrera, a member of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). Meza said his proposal would have the commission include members of all parties in Congress. (Sources: National Security Archive (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/); Spanish news service EFE, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, 02/27/06; Associated Press, 02/27/06, 02/28/06; The Dallas Morning News, The Chicago Tribune, 02/28/06; The Herald-Mexico City, 02/27/06, 02/28/06, 03/01/06, 03/02/06; La Cronica de Hoy, El Universal, 02/28/06, 03/01/06, 03/02/06; La Crisis, 03/01/06, 03/02/06; Reforma, El Economista, 03/02/06; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 02/27/06, 02/28/06, 03/01/06, 03/02/06, 03/06/06; La Jornada, 02/28/06, 03/01-03/06, 03/06/06)

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