

## **German-Manufactured Assault Rifles Recovered from Local Police in Guerrero in Aftermath of Student Massacre**

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While the US remains the source of most of the weapons used by criminal organizations in Mexico in recent years ([SourceMex, April 1, 2009](#), [March 23, 2011](#), and [March 20, 2013](#)), the drug cartels have also found German companies an easy source of high-caliber weapons. Recent reports show that police officers in the city of Iguala might have used German weapons imported illegally into Guerrero state to abduct 43 students from a teachers college (Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa Raúl Isidro Burgos) in September 2014. The students were turned over to enforcers from the Guerreros Unidos cartel, which executed the students ([SourceMex, Oct. 15, 2014](#)).

As the information emerged about the German weapons and the possible involvement of the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA) in allowing those firearms to enter Guerrero, the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) issued a report confirming for the first time that the students were dead. In a press conference, Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam said information obtained from a recently arrested leader of the drug cartel Guerreros Unidos indicated that the students were killed and burned at the garbage dump in the town of Cocula, adjacent to Iguala.

### *German assault rifles recovered in Iguala*

According to a report in the German newspaper Die Tageszeitung (Taz) and the Mexican news site SinEmbargo.com, the Iguala police used high-caliber weapons, including G36 assault rifles, produced by Germany's arms manufacturer Heckler & Koch, to detain the students. The presence of weapons from Heckler & Koch in Iguala is problematic, since the German government has prohibited the sale of weapons to four Mexican states with a record of human-rights violations, including Guerrero, Chiapas, Chihuahua, and Jalisco states.

Taz said 36 German guns were among the 228 firearms that that Mexican federal law-enforcement authorities confiscated from the municipal police in Iguala. Three dozen of those weapons were Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifles, in addition to firearms manufactured in the US and Italy. In Mexico, federal authorities are in charge of issuing weapons to police at all levels of government—and weapons manufactured in Germany are not on the list. This led to the presumption that Guerreros Unidos acquired the Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifles and then transferred them to the Iguala police department.

The German government's export-control agency (BAFA) and the Federal Security Council initially approved the export of G36 weapons to Mexico in 2006, but the decision was later amended to include a condition—that exports not be sold to any parties in the conflict-ridden states of Guerrero, Jalisco, Chiapas, and Chihuahua.

### *Mexico's Defense Ministry Complicit in illegal imports*

The Taz report and a subsequent investigation by SinEmbargo.com said the arms in question were not smuggled into Guerrero but made their way into the state because of illegal permits requested

in Mexico by a local representative of Heckler & Koch and granted by SEDENA. The Taz report cited a letter from Germany's Ministry of Economic Affairs to German Green Party parliamentarian Hans-Christian Ströbele alleging that SEDENA officials provided false information about the final destination of arms shipments in export documents.

"Mexico has violated the political principles of the federal German government with regard to the exportation of military weaponry and equipment," said Ströbele.

The reports said the paperwork filed by Heckler & Koch with the German government indicated that the weapons would be shipped to another state in Mexico not named in the ban. "In reality, the G36 weapons ended up in Guerrero," said SinEmbargo.com.

Taz said Heckler & Koch has had a history of circumventing its own country's laws, at least since 2010, when the company was initially banned from exporting its firearms to Mexico and later allowed to ship the weapons to destinations outside the four banned states.

In an interview with the German magazine *Wirtschafts Woch* in August 2010, Andreas Heeschen, a leading investor in Heckler & Koch, denied that the company had engaged in any "direct" sales to any of the four banned states. He said the weapons were shipped to a "centralized location" under the control of SEDENA, which is evidence that Heckler & Koch was in compliance with German law. However, during an inquiry by German authorities in 2013, the company admitted that it had illegally sold thousands of weapons in Mexico.

A number of reports have circulated on how Heckler and Koch has violated German law. "In September 2010, a team from the Report Mainz program, which is broadcast on Germany's major public television chain ARD, captured images of a police operation in Ciudad Juárez, in which four federal agents with masks on their faces traveled in a pickup truck carrying G36 weapons," said the weekly news magazine *Proceso*. "ARD broadcast those images on Dec. 13, 2010. A few days later, German authorities announced that exports of any defense-related weapon [by Heckler & Koch] would be suspended."

A Radio Nederland journalist cited in the SinEmbargo.com report indicated that G36 rifles were used in a previous state police attack on student protesters in Guerrero in 2011 and that these weapons have showed up in the hands of police in Chihuahua.

"According to German peace activist Jürgen Grässlin, holes in Germany's monitoring system have helped facilitate the black market trade in weapons from [that] country, which is the world's third-largest arms exporter. German arms manufacturer SIG Sauer has also come under fire for illicit arms exports," said the security news site *Insight.com*.

Even though the German government instructed Heckler & Koch in 2010 to cease all arms deliveries to Mexico because of concerns that the guns were ending up in the four banned states, reports suggest the company has continued to export the weapons to Mexico. These reports have caused some German legislators, primarily members of the Green Party, to seek a full ban on all sales of firearms to Mexico.

The reports that German arms were seized in Iguala circulated as early as December 2014, prompting a group of about 100 protestors to gather outside the German Embassy in Mexico City on Christmas Day to denounce the use of G36 weapons in Guerrero state. Protest leader Felipe de la Cruz urged the German government to do more to prevent such sales.

There were no comments from SEDENA, the PGR, or the Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB) about the reports. The only official statement came from Foreign Relations Secretary José Antonio Meade, who said he was not aware that authorities had seized German-manufactured weapons from the police in Iguala. "I don't have any information to confirm [these reports]," Meade said in mid-January, shortly after the allegations surfaced that SEDENA had played a role in facilitating the export of the weapons into Mexico.

Meade said the PGR has not divulged any details about the arms seized in Iguala, "and there is no information" to confirm that German weapons were involved.

Meade also defended the ongoing dialogue between Mexico and Germany on security cooperation. The reports that German weapons were used in the Iguala massacre have given leverage to the leftist parties and the Greens to oppose such a bilateral security agreement. "This negotiation is in its early stages, and we want to see how we can enhance the agreement to benefit both Mexico and Germany," said the secretary, who was scheduled to travel to Berlin during the last week of January to meet with counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier and a group of legislators, academics, and business representatives.

Just before Meade arrived in Berlin, Steinmeier said Germany has offered to help President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration with the efforts to identify the remains of 42 of the students murdered in Iguala. Only the remains of one of the students, Alexander Mora Venancio, have been identified. "[If help] is requested, Germany could assist in the identification efforts," said Steinmeier.

### *Student deaths officially confirmed*

On Jan. 28, a week after the German chancellor made the offer, Murillo Karam officially declared the students dead, citing evidence provided by members of Guerreros Unidos who were recently arrested. The cartel's leader Felipe Rodríguez Salgado, also known as "El Cepillo," was arrested during a raid on his hideout in the community of Jiutepec in Morelos state. Authorities also relied on confessions from two leaders of the cartel, Rodríguez Salgado and Patricio Reyes Landa. Videotaped confessions of the two men were shown during a press conference held by Murillo and Tomás Zerón de Lucio, head of the government's criminal investigation agency (Agencia de Investigación Criminal, AIC).

Murillo Karam presented a detailed account of the case, providing little new information beyond what had already been announced to the public. The attorney general, however, offered the first official confirmation that the government was now certain that the students had been killed. Citing an "exhaustive" and "serious" investigation, Murillo said, "The evidence allows us to determine that the students were kidnapped, killed, burned, and thrown into the river."

The attorney general said authorities arrived at the conclusion following the interrogation of Rodríguez Salgado and other members of Guerreros Unidos, which confirmed that the students were killed and burned in the Cocula garbage dump. Murillo said the bodies of students were incinerated in a fire produced from tires, diesel, and wood, making it intense enough to burn the bodies beyond recognition. The perpetrators then collected the ashes in bags and disposed of them in a nearby river.

Murillo Karam said Rodríguez Salgado's confession confirmed some of the details that investigators had uncovered, allowing the government to present a sequence of events.

Authorities recovered thousands of pieces of remains and sent them to a special laboratory at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. However, the remains were too badly damaged to provide positive identification for any of the students other than Alejandro Mora, said Murillo.

Rodríguez Salgado told investigators that he had been ordered to eliminate the students because at least a couple of the victims, Bernardo Flores Alcaraz and Miguel Ángel Hernández Martínez, were thought to be members of the rival gang Los Rojos. Murillo Karam said, however, that the government's investigations uncovered no evidence that any of the 43 students were members of Los Rojos.

The gang-war explanation from the captured Guerreros Unidos members would seem to contradict an earlier theory that the Iguala police shot at the students to prevent them disrupting a rally for María de los Angeles Pineda, the wife of Iguala Mayor José Luis Abarca, who was celebrating her achievements as the director of the Iguala office of the federal social-assistance program Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) at the Plaza de las Tres Garantías in Iguala ([SourceMex, Oct. 29, 2014](#)). Abarca and Pineda, both of whom remain in federal custody, allegedly have ties to Guerreros Unidos, which carried out the killings.

Despite the new revelations, Murillo said the investigation remains wide open. "There is no rush to close this case," said the attorney general. "I have several investigations to conclude. What we have here is a serious accusation in the homicide of 43 students."

The government's most recent statements failed to convince the parents of the students, who contend that the government is covering up its role in the incident and hiding critical information from the public. The parents are planning to bring the case to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which meets in Geneva twice a year and is scheduled to convene on Feb. 2-3. Mexican attorney Santiago Corcuera Cabezut, an expert on human rights, is one of 10 members on the committee.

"We are going to file a formal complaint against the Mexican government before the Committee on Enforced Disappearances," said Vidulfo Rosales, the father of one of the murdered students.

The parents are also planning to bring the case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington, DC. Rosales expressed hope that an IACHR investigation finds "multiple irregularities" in the manner in which the PGR conducted its investigation.

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