

Will the Zapatistas go Mexico-wide?

by Carlos Cota Meza

Allegations in the Mexican press about large-scale arms smuggling point to an international plot to create a bloody civil war that will carve up Mexico.

The allegations appeared in the June 1 issue of the daily newspaper *El Financiero*. Citing government sources, the paper reported that Memorandum No. 6454, dated Feb. 8, 1994, from the Mexican Department of Defense to the Department of Interior, indicated that “a reliable source” had alerted the Mexican military attaché in Washington to an “imminent arrival of 2,000 AK-47 assault rifles, which would be sent from that country into national territory.” The shipment, according to the memorandum, was presumably part of “a larger shipment of nearly 20,000 of this kind of weapon, destined for the state of Guerrero.” The report notes cryptically that in Guerrero, “some events have occurred which allow us to presume the possibility that drug trafficking and other criminal activities are associated with the nascent subversion.”

The news provoked an uproar. On June 2, the Department of Defense issued a bulletin stating that ever since the early January uprising in the southern state of Chiapas, investigations into the illegal introduction of weapons into the country had increased. All such information on arms trafficking is thoroughly investigated, the Defense Department explained, adding that “on various occasions the investigation, as in this case, has turned up nothing.”

Despite the official denial on this specific case, an operation is indeed afoot to spark armed insurrections over a large part of the Mexican territory. Although the armed actions of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) were suspended in mid-January, when the government of Mexico buckled under to international pressure and agreed to negotiate with the hooded rebels, the Zapatistas and their narco-terrorist allies have exploited the lull to extend and organize their influence nationally, to arm themselves, and to prepare actions for the upcoming election period in Mexico. Their leader, Sub-commander Marcos, threatened in a recent interview that if there is “fraud” in the presidential elections this August, “the armed struggle” will expand “to other states of the country.”

The state of Guerrero (see map) is particularly worrisome. Historically it has been plagued by drug trafficking, and also by guerrilla activities, such as the cases of Lucio Cabanás and Genaro Vásquez in the 1960s and 1970s. More recently, well-organized narco-terrorist activities similar to

those of the Zapatistas have been observed there. According to an Agence France Presse news wire, “in the first days of February, an entire guerrilla training camp was detected in Guerrero, where there were more than 20,000 automatic weapons, probably AK-47 rifles.”

To evaluate the potential for an outbreak of “Zapatismo” on a national scale in the coming months, it must be asked how the Zapatistas managed to get arms for the first round of their uprising. An article by Manuel Mejido, published in the Mexican daily *El Sol de México* in early February, provides some useful information on this. Using a simple arithmetic calculation, Mejido estimated that the EZLN struggle has cost around \$12 million so far. For starters, there are an estimated 2,000 guerrillas who are heavily armed, each outfitted with an AK-47 (which on the black market sells for about \$2,500), and an average of four grenades (each worth about \$300). Thus, one combatant is equipped at a cost of \$3,700, meaning that the 2,000 heavily armed men need about \$7.4 million to equip them. Mejido makes a rough calculation that an additional \$6 million was spent on munitions for the EZLN, which adds up to a total of over \$12 million.

Add to this the cost of feeding a total EZLN army of 12,000 or so, and you are talking about another \$1 million per month.

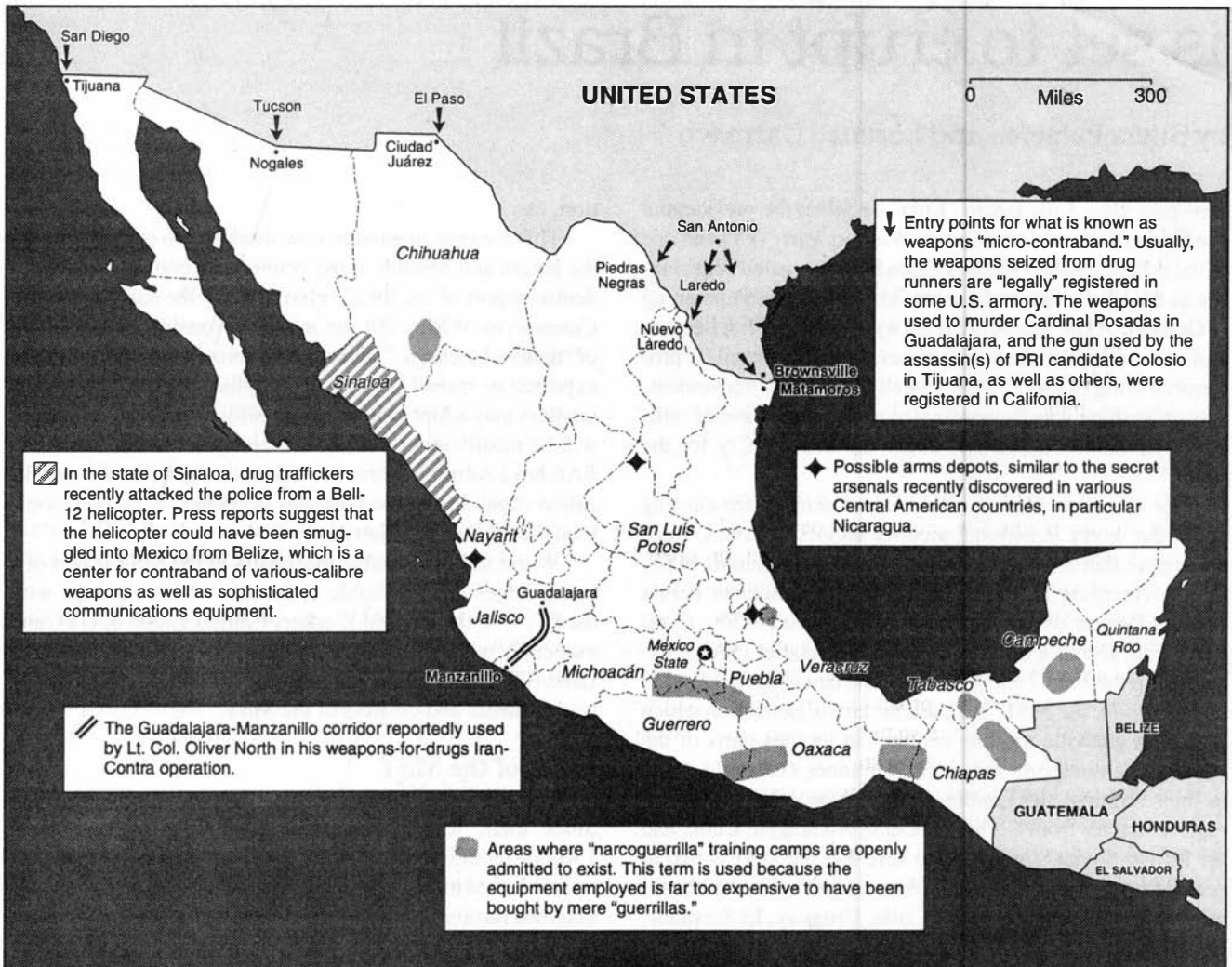
Which raises the obvious question: Where are the Zapatistas getting all this money from? Could it be from drug trafficking? Even the U.S. State Department is looking into that possibility, according to Crescencio Arcos, Assistant Secretary for Narcotics, Terrorism and International Crime.

A Zapatista ‘Contra’

If that’s how things were in Chiapas in February, today they are worse. The bishop of Tuxtla Gutiérrez in Chiapas, Felipe Aguirre Franco, said in an interview with the newspaper *El Heraldo* on May 29 that official Army spokesmen reckon there are more than 10,000 insurgents in the Lacandona jungle of Chiapas: “3,000 without arms or in the training stage, 7,000 equipped with conventional arms, and 2,000 with sophisticated, high-powered weapons.” The prelate also charged that the creators of Zapatismo in Chiapas “hide behind the various human rights commissions—some of them, not all—and the non-governmental organizations, the NGOs, which were there in Los Altos de Chiapas mountains before Dec. 31.”

The alleged shipment of another 2,000 AK-47s, and of a possible lot of 20,000, would indicate that the problem has worsened by an order of magnitude—with hair-raising consequences for Mexico. Such an arms-smuggling operation involves millions of dollars and the shipment of several tons of cargo, which would have to originate from one of the new European republics, or from China, Vietnam, Korea, Iran, Cuba, Egypt, or Israel, among others, and then shipped from some European port to the United States, and from there to Mexico.

The narcoterrorist weapons supply network in Mexico



Eduardo Valle, an expert and formerly anti-drug adviser to ex-attorney general Jorge Carpizo, noted that smuggling on that scale would have to involve "the large international arms-trafficking networks directly linked to intelligence agencies and, of course, in turn to the major drug-trafficking crime multinationals."

Valle wondered if this quantity of weapons would be distributed immediately in Veracruz, Michoacán, Mexico State, Oaxaca, and Nayarit, or if they would instead be warehoused for a while in the mountains of Puebla or in the ranches of the northern desert around San Luis Potosí. In all of these regions, it is known that drug-trafficking bands, kidnapping rings, Zapatista-style movements, and NGOs co-exist—all seeking the destruction of the Mexican state.

An operation of such magnitude has not been unleashed in Mexico since the end of 1988, when the Armed Forces

detected and seized a cargo of R-15 rifles and ammunition, plus various types of grenades and mortars, coming from Czechoslovakia. It was said at the time that the probable itinerary was from Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico to Manzanillo on the Pacific coast. From there, they would be re-shipped to some port in Nicaragua as a part of the "equipment" being given to the Contra forces there.

None of this has ever been clarified. As CIA contract agent Terry Reed exposes in his book *Compromised*, Lt. Col. Oliver North's gang operated for at least two years (1986-87) in Mexico, using the Guadalajara-to-Manzanillo corridor as the base for transferring weapons and drugs in his famous Iran-Contra operations.

Events clearly show that we are not looking at so-called "micro-smuggling" of arms, but rather at the operations of one or more new Oliver Norths.