

## Dateline Mexico by Jacobo Frontoni

### Huge narco-police network purged

*More than 700 officers have been fired to prevent a complete takeover by the drug cartels.*

On Aug. 16, more than 700 officers from the Federal Judicial Police (PJF), suspected of involvement in drug-trafficking, were fired from their posts. The surprise action was prepared by a special team of 20 people working out of the Attorney General's office, with the full backing of President Ernesto Zedillo, and coordinated with the military.

Three days before the purge, the national director of the PJF, Américo Flores Nava, had been dismissed. Sources who participated in planning the operation told *Reforma* newspaper correspondent Ignacio Rodríguez Reyna, that because the PJF, the country's primary police force, was at the point of falling under total control of the drug cartels, the government's only two alternatives were to purge the PJF in one fell swoop, as they did, or to place it under military control, the latter reportedly the option toward which Zedillo had initially been leaning.

Rodríguez Reyna also reported, in his Aug. 20 article, that his sources in the Attorney General's office, which is in charge of the PJF, say the majority (some 70%) of the purged state commanders had been appointed under the reign of former PJF director Adrian Carrera, along with "all Raúl Salinas's people who had been named on the recommendation of Justo Ceja, the personal secretary of Carlos Salinas de Gortari."

This latter is extremely significant, providing yet more evidence that responsibility for the explosion of the drug trade in Mexico lies at the door of Carlos Salinas, George Bush's friend

and ally, with whom he signed the infamous North American Free Trade Agreement.

The Attorney General's office is expecting a violent reaction from the cartels, "foreseeable above all in Chiapas, Sonora, and Baja California," a source in that office warned. Sources in the Government Ministry told *Reforma* that "it is estimated that there are right now in Mexico 100 tons of cocaine ready to be shipped to the United States, and its owners are seeking to get it out as fast as possible, before it is confiscated after the purge."

The decision was taken at a time in which the country, sinking under a terrible, worsening economic crisis, is also being assaulted by narco-terrorist violence and an organized-kidnapping industry. As José Alfredo Santos Asseo, the leader of the National Chamber of Commerce, warned on Aug. 20, during anniversary celebrations in Mexico City attended by President Zedillo: "Two Mexicos are dangerously being generated in the country. One lives within the law, and another outside it; the illegal is taking on greater force than the legal."

In reporting the purge, Attorney General Antonio Lozano Gracia pointed out, that since he assumed office, he had tried to clean out the PJF, as well as the Attorney General's office itself, but until now, he had failed. We have not given up, however, he said.

Others report that since Zedillo took office, almost 6,000 policemen have been fired: 1,250 from the PJF (including this latest purge), 1,037 from the Mexico City force, and 3,500

from the Public Security Secretariat.

The PJF purge was carried out in the following way: All the officers to be fired were ordered to report to Military Base No. One, the main military base in Mexico City, where their weapons and credentials were taken from them, and drug tests were given to all, regardless of rank. The same operation was carried out in the states of Tamaulipas, Sonora, and Zacatecas. Twenty-two of the 31 state commanders were detained at Military Base No. One, some of them believed to be key drug cartel figures.

The Mexican Army is now deployed in various parts of the country. Operation "Azteca 7" is under way in Chiapas and Tabasco, in which all military posts in the Lacandon jungle (where the Zapatistas base their operations in Chiapas), and along the border with Guatemala and Belize, have been placed on alert, and military units along the Pacific Coast reinforced. The commander of the VII Military Region, headquartered in Chiapas, Gen. Mario Renan, explained that this was a temporary dissuasive action, in response to indications that there were imminent plans to send in a large shipment of drugs.

The Army is also deployed in other zones where armed movements have been detected, including Chihuahua, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Veracruz.

In Guerrero, one of the principal drug-producing states and where the self-named Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) recently appeared, some 19,000 soldiers have been deployed. Military intelligence reports estimate that the EPR was launched by drug-traffickers. Interviewed by Televisa on Aug. 25, President Zedillo reiterated that those in the EPR "are wrong, and they are being, and will continue to be, pursued for the crimes which they are committing."