



THE GLOBAL
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Federal Authorities Arrest Military Officials for Past Violence

Opinion

Steven Cortez

In two separate cases, military personnel have been arrested for their alleged involvement in past abductions and murders. On April 9, the Mexican Navy reported that they had turned over 30 marines to federal prosecutors for their alleged involvement in the 2018 string of forced disappearances in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. In [another investigation](#), seven soldiers of the Mexican Army (*Secretaría de Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA) were arrested on April 1 for their involvement in the 2014 Tlatlaya massacre.



In the 2018 case, it is alleged that the marines are responsible for the forced disappearances of 36 individuals, including at least five minors. The marines were part of an anti-crime operation in which they rounded up individuals suspected of being involved in organized crime. Ericka Janeth Castro, [a witness](#) to the case, recounted that the marines raided a party with gunfire and forcefully abducted several men, including her husband who was never seen again. This is just one of the 47 disappearances that had been carried out in 2018 by this group of marines. At the time, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, denounced the crimes as “horrific” and urged the federal government to investigate. It has been difficult for witnesses and family members to come forward because of their fear of retaliation from the military.

According to [Amnesty International](#), witnesses and family members of the disappeared have received threats, harassment, assaults, and abductions after filing complaints with the authorities.

Not often seen, the Attorney General of Mexico (*Fiscalía General de la República*, FGR) and Secretary of the Navy (*Secretaría de Marina*, SEMAR) [collaborated](#) to execute the arrest and detention of the 30 soldiers involved. The soldiers of the elite armed forces group known as the Center for Analysis, Intelligence, and Studies of Tamaulipas (*Centro de Análisis, Inteligencia y Estudios de Tamaulipas*, CAIET) were arrested on charges of carrying out acts that were contrary to their duties. This event is not an isolated incident in the group's history. Since then, other marines of the same elite armed forces group have been arrested for violent crimes. In January 2021, 12 marines were arrested for the massacre of 19 migrants in Camargo, Tamaulipas. The CAIET marines have had a frequent capacity to act above the law in the state of Tamaulipas.

Rearresting the Suspects behind the 2014 Tlatlaya Massacre

Just over a week before the 30 soldiers were detained in Nuevo Laredo, seven soldiers of the army were arrested on April 1 for their involvement in the 2014 massacre of 22 suspected kidnappers in Tlatlaya, State of Mexico (Estado de México, Edomex). The altercation began as a shootout between the suspects and soldiers that ended with the killing of the 22 suspects. Despite the fact that the suspects had already surrendered, the military executed the remaining eight individuals. In addition to the extrajudicial killings, the soldiers also tampered with the scene to conceal their involvement.

Initially, the Mexican Army [publicly denied](#) the allegations that the soldiers executed the suspects and insisted that the victims were killed in the shoot out. After receiving public outcry, however, the army [implemented](#) the recommendations made by the National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH*) in response to the human rights violations that had occurred. For example, in 2015, the involved officers were arrested, but were then quickly released after a federal judge ruled that there was not sufficient evidence to connect them to the crime. Rarely are armed forces held accountable in Mexico, a country with a notoriously high rate of impunity. Like prior presidents, the Peña Nieto Administration (2012-2018) was not known for holding the military responsible for crimes committed against civilians, as was the case with the Tlatlaya massacre.

Nevertheless, in 2019, a [court ordered](#) that the soldiers be arrested again. It has taken the Mexican Army 16 months to turn them over to federal authorities. The Center for Human Rights Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (*Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez*), which represents a woman whose daughter was killed in the massacre, confirmed that the soldiers had been arrested and the case against them remains open. In 2019, the human rights group said, “This ruling confirms what survivors and rights organizations have been saying for five years, that there were illegal executions...” The re-arrests are a step in the right direction towards imparting justice in the Tlatlaya massacre.

Learning from his Predecessors, AMLO Seeks Accountability

These arrests are part of continued efforts by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, to hold military personnel accountable for past crimes. These arrests are the most high-profile since January 2021 when members of the Mexican Army were [arrested](#) for their involvement in the 2014 Ayotzinapa disappearances.

Since President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) launched the crackdown on the drug cartels in 2006, the army and the navy have played instrumental roles in carrying out the government's security strategy. Yet this has not been without significant consequence to the protection of civilians' human rights, as exemplified in the Nuevo Laredo and Tlatlaya cases. What more, the public security strategy across the presidential sexenios has failed to control the country's notoriously high levels of crime and violence. Between 2006 and April 2021, [85,000 people disappeared](#) in Mexico and in 2020 alone, there were over 34,000 victims of intentional homicide.

In an effort to break with his predecessors, AMLO has been working to slowly phase out the Mexican Army's and Navy's involvement in public security since taking office in December 2018. Under his leadership, the newly-formed National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) is now charged with countering the cartels. The creation of the [National Guard](#), however, was arguably just a rebranding strategy that put the military and police under a different name. It has been over three years since the 2018 Nuevo Laredo disappearances, and over seven years since the Tlatlaya massacre occurred. The AMLO administration's arrests and re-arrests of suspected military officials in the two cases are an important step forward.

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<https://justiceinmexico.org/arrest-military-officials-tlatlaya/>

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