

## Online appendix: Sources for Laguna federal deployments

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## Introduction

Chapter 4 of my dissertation consisted of case studies of the onset and decline of criminal group conflict in Monterrey and La Laguna. In both, I considered the role of the state security apparatus, including deployed

federal police and military personnel, in those trajectories. That required numbers on the composition and size of these deployments across time. As I wrote in the appendix to that chapter, however, systematic and detailed data was not easily available:

"Tracking the number of federal forces deployed in a particular place proved difficult. The agencies in charge, such as the federal police or the defense department (Sedena), often announced the amount of personnel initially deployed, but not when they left or how long they stayed. The most detailed information from Sedena, obtained through freedom of information requests, is often broken down at the regional level only and provides annual "average" personnel deployed. Announcements (and newspaper headlines) of "new" arrivals are as likely to be part of a rotation of personnel as to be additional forces, while withdrawals are not announced and often only mentioned off-handedly months later. Obtaining detailed data thus required systematic combing of newspaper archives, freedom of information requests, and other open sources." (pages 348-349)

Both datasets are provided on the Research page of my website ([www.patricksignoret.com/research](http://www.patricksignoret.com/research)). This document provides the lists and locations of newspaper articles and other open sources that I used to produce data for La Laguna. Readers will notice that this document is more detailed than the one for Monterrey. That is because I chose to carry out a particularly in-depth analysis on the role of federal deployments in La Laguna, with data down to the monthly level, to determine whether deployments were violence-inducing or violence-reducing and what their role was relative to police reforms in turf war termination and recovery duration.

### **Structure of this document**

I organized the federal government's actions in La Laguna (and my documentation) in seven parts. For each of those, I summarize the information gathered, along with the source(s) for each data point. Full information on those sources are provided at the end of the document: publication, date, author, title, and hyperlink (if available).

The following are descriptions of each of the stages of federal government deployments in La Laguna:

- June 2007 - March 2009: Operativo Conjunto Laguna. Hundreds of federal police and investigators were sent to La Laguna for the first time in June 2007, the first part of what the government would later call "Joint Operation Laguna" (*Operativo Conjunto Laguna*). One year later, in July 2008, they military entered the fray, activating the army battalion stationed in Torreón (the 33rd Infantry Battalion) and bringing in hundreds of outside troops to help patrol streets and

launch operations against OCGs. The 33rd Battalion would remain permanently engaged in public security operations throughout our period of interest, and outside military units would occasionally be brought in for major pacifying campaigns. Command of all joint operations was placed on the 11th Military Region, which oversaw Coahuila and Chihuahua and was headquartered in Torreón, a responsibility it would hold through 2012. At this point and throughout the rest of our period of interest, the Federal Police's role would be modest compared with the Army's, with deployments ranging from zero to the low hundreds.

- June-December 2009: Conjunto Laguna Reactivated. After fading away and ultimately being suspended by the first quarter of 2009, Joint Operation Laguna was reactivated in mid 2009, with thousands of outside troops deployed to the Laguna region for the remainder of the year.
- January-December 2010: Volatility. Over the first quarter of 2010, the federal police still present in the city were redeployed to Ciudad Juárez. The army may have already been redirected there as well, but they returned to La Laguna in a quiet surge over the first half of 2010. After that, the soldiers gradually left while the federal police returned for a few months. By the end of the year, however, few outside federal forces were still present in the region.
- January-September 2011: Sellamiento Nazas and Laguna 2011. Starting in January 2011, the local army battalion along with municipal, state, and federal police reorganized their operations and objectives and focused intensely on controlling and patrolling the border crossings between Coahuila and Durango, which had been identified as key to the turf war and related or incidental criminal activity, especially vehicle thefts. However, this did not seem to come with extra outside federal deployments; just the local battalion and the handful of federal police still left. It was not until a brief surge in mid 2011, called "Operativo Laguna I-2011", that there was a two-month deployment of additional federal police and army personnel.
- October 2011 - January 2013: Operativo Laguna Segura. After "Conjunto Laguna", "Laguna Segura" was the second of three major named campaigns. Appearing uniquely coordinated and formalized through a signed agreement between various levels of government, this campaign again brought in over 1,000 federal forces—mainly army units—from other parts of the country. This surge would fade away in the first half of 2012, then ramp up again starting in July of that year.
- February 2013 - April 2014: Operación Laguna. Under the new federal administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto, authorities renamed the Laguna campaign "Operativo Laguna" or "Operación Laguna", and made a significant change in its leadership: command of joint operations was now assigned to Durango's 10th Zone, based in Durango City, rather than the 11th Region, based in Torreón. This third and last major named campaign brought yet another surge of

federal forces, with well over 1,000 and at points over 2,000 deployed soldiers and federal agents involved in addition to the Torreón-based 33rd Battalion. This time, part of the surge was long-lasting: the army moved one of its battalions from the capital city of Durango to a new base in Gómez Palacio, bringing a second permanently deployed battalion to the metro area (and the first on the Durango side of the region). It also sent 300 military police to Gómez Palacio and Lerdo to help patrol the streets after their municipal police forces were dismantled, a deployment that would last through 2018.

- May 2014 - December 2018: Mando Especial. On May 1, 2014, the federal government installed a "Special Command" (*Mando Especial*) in La Laguna—an army general specifically designated to oversee security operations for the Laguna region. Though initially based in the 72nd Battalion's headquarters in Gómez Palacio, the Special Command would eventually have its own base in Torreón, on the border with Durango, housing an army staff of 65 and two vetted state police groups, one from each state, of 51 officers each. The general in charge of the Special Command (sometimes himself called *Mando Especial*) took over joint policing operations involving Laguna, with direct command of the state police based at the Special Command and broad oversight and coordination powers over the city's municipal police forces (including the military police still boosting local policing on the Durango side). During this period, there were no extraordinary deployments in La Laguna.

### **Preliminary notes and assumptions**

In addition to a systematic search of online newspaper archives, I also collected official information on deployments on Mexico's national transparency platform (*Plataforma Nacional de Transparencia*), where the public can make the equivalent of U.S. Freedom of Information Act requests.

My decisions on federal force presence always included a baseline of the 650 soldiers of the 33rd Infantry Battalion permanently based in Torreón, whether or not they were activated to patrol the streets. I confirmed in an interview with a former army official stationed in that city that joint operations in La Laguna always involved the 33rd Battalion. This means that my decisions on additional deployments always distinguished between soldiers arriving from elsewhere and those that were permanently in Torreón (and, later, Gómez Palacio with the 72nd Battalion). I use the 650 number for two reasons. First, the interviewee said that the 33rd Battalion had roughly 600 soldiers, but the military's operations also included the command staff of the 11th Region also based in the same Torreón military base. Second, when the 72nd Battalion was permanently installed in Gómez Palacio, its size was said to be 650.

Putting these two things together, using 650 as permanently based in Torreón provided a nice symmetric number.

Despite calls at one point for a permanent federal police (Policía Federal, PF) unit ("destacamento") for Laguna, I found no signs that there was ever permanent presence except for highway patrol bases. A new base for PF may have been constructed some time before January 2013 at Puerta Amarilla—or that one might have been there the whole time—but PF deployments weren't sent there (rather to hotels), and there was never any news regarding an inauguration of a new PF base or permanent delegation. Thus, I did not code any permanent PF presence (additional to highway patrol officers).

Finally, I assumed that new deployments with no known end date lasted for at least two months. It's the minimal deployment length that I've heard of (I also read or heard three months, or sometimes six) before being replaced, if they were replaced.

When making monthly coding decisions, I went by end-of-month numbers.

### **Abbreviations**

Folio. Unique number of information requests made on the PNT (see "PNT" below).

GP. Gómez Palacio (one of the metropolitan area's four municipalities).

PF. Policía Federal (Federal Police).

PNT. Plataforma Nacional de Transparencia (National Transparency Portal)

SDD. El Siglo de Durango (local newspaper).

SDT. El Siglo de Torreón (local newspaper).

Sedena. Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Defense Department, army).

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## **June 2007 - March 2009: First deployments and Operativo Conjunto Laguna**

### **June 2007 - June 2008: Federal police deployed**

600 federal agents deployed to entire metro area. Future reports would mention both PFP and AFI agents; not one single agency. *Arrival* announced on June 12.

In Tercer Informe SSP 2009, that operation was said to have extended to other municipalities in the region (this is consistent with more police having been sent but also with the Laguna presence being diluted). The government would refer to the operation as having had 150 additional elements (at least initially) and having included Saltillo, which isn't really in the region.

*SDT* Jan 2008 suggests that the federal agents had remained for the previous eight months and were just then being replaced (rotation). By now, this was already being called "Operativo Conjunto Laguna".

### **July 2008: Military joins "Conjunto Laguna"**

For the first time, the army became significantly involved in and took charge of Operativo Conjunto Laguna.

- Folio 37216 suggests that Sedena operations in Laguna began in May 2008. No report corroborates that they started that early, but at least it confirms that the military's role didn't begin before that.
- Two more notes: First, when the origin of the soldiers is mentioned, they are either very local (33rd Battalion) or semi-local (3rd and 11th regions). Second, the soldiers arriving to each side of La Laguna were from different military regions.

In July, the soldiers participating—patrolling the streets along with federal police agents—were the local ones from the 33rd Battalion (*SDT* Jul 2008). In August, we have the following reports:

- GP/Lerdo. There are two conflicting accounts in the first week of August, within a day of each other. One is that 1,000 soldiers arrived to Laguna Durango (*El Norte* Aug 2008). Another is that "over 500" soldiers from the 3rd Region arrived "indefinitely", joining 200 PFP and 300 AFI agents (*Grupo Sedena Informativo* Aug 2008).
- Torreón: By Aug 13, there were at least 250 soldiers from the 14th Regiment based in Múzquiz supporting 33rd Battalion patrols (*SDT* Aug 2008). The same source said that the day's patrols included 260 military and 90 AFI and PFP agents for a total of 350.

Sedena *Memoria 2006-2012* doesn't have any "Laguna" operations beginning before June 2009, but it does have a regional "Durango I-09" operation from August 8 to June 2009. Through answers to PNT requests, Sedena reported only one anti-narco operation starting before 2011: "Laguna", running from May 2008 to September 2014 with an average of 1,200 soldiers deployed.

At this point, then, we have 500-1,000 soldiers from the 3rd Region in Laguna Durango, plus the 33rd Battalion activated and at least 250 from the 14th Regiment coming from Múzquiz. Excluding the 33rd Battalion, this is a total of 750-1,250 new soldiers in Laguna; including the 33rd, it's a total of new or newly activated 1,350-1,850 soldiers in Laguna.

The mid 2008 deployment coincided with the arrival of a new 11th Region general, Mario Marco Antonio González Barreda, whose command lasted from June 2008 to January 2012 and who would be in command of

"Sellamiento Nazas" (Jan-Jun 2011), "Laguna 1 2011", and "Operativo Laguna Segura" (starting Oct 2011). [*Vanguardia* Jan 2012]

Regarding the federal police, from a couple of the reports cited above in this subsection, I gather that in July-August 2008 there were still about 500 agents in Durango and at least 90 in Torreón, for a continued total of almost 600, same as the original deployment size from mid 2007. Articles from October 2008 provided the following information:

- Over the 16.5 months from their original deployment and through October 2008, there were four major rotations of PF personnel, at least in Torreón. 200 agents arrived in July and lasted two months, notoriously clashing twice with local Torreón police. They were replaced by 200 agents in late September, but those only lasted 20 days before being called to Mexico City for "new instructions". (*SDT* Oct 14, 2008).
- The Torreón mayor said that he was told federal agents would return in a few days (*El Norte* Oct 15, 2008), but they weren't back by Oct 22 (*SDT* Oct 22, 2008), and I found no reports of their return.
- The articles make it seem that there were only 200 agents in Torreón, at least, and that there none left to patrol the streets, but none said it explicitly. It's unclear what was going on with the feds on the Durango side.

Federal deployments seemed to wind down after the mid 2008 boost. By Feb 2009, it seems that there were only at most 500 extra soldiers boosting public security in Laguna (*El Norte* Feb 2008). And Conjunto Laguna was apparently suspended entirely after March 2009 (*SDT* Aug 2009).

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## **June-December 2009: Conjunto Laguna reactivated**

In Torreón, Army soldiers arrived in force in June 2009. It was initially reported that at least 2,600 military were in Torreón boosting security operations against organized crime, with the majority had arrived in recent days from various parts of the country (*SDT* Jun 2009). Based "in various strategic points of the urban area". Characterized as "la mayor movilización militar en la historia reciente de la Comarca Lagunera." From their total-deployed characterization I assume that they counted the 600 from the 33rd Battalion and that the new arrivals supposedly added up to 2,000. This 2,000 number was confirmed in *SDT* Aug 2009, though this article was less clear whether the 2,000 were only in Torreón or for a broader surrounding region.

Also in *SDT* Jun 2009 were reports of an additional *unknown* number of soldiers also sent to the Durango side of Laguna.

In *SDT* Aug 20, 2009, the total number of *newly deployed* soldiers in Laguna is reported as "over 2,000" and this "reactivation" of Conjunto Laguna is reported as ongoing. Later, the number in Laguna to boost security was given as 2,300 (*SDT* Nov 6, 2009). I'm going to take 2,300 as my best estimate for newly deployed soldiers (including Durango and excluding the 33rd in Torreón) because this number is consistent with everything else above: 2,000 in Torreón plus 300 in Durango, over 2,000 in all Laguna, and 2,300 in all Laguna.

Sedena's *Memoria 2006-2012* has separate operations for Durango and Laguna that mostly coincide in dates. In the case of Laguna, it ends at the end of 2009; in the case of Durango, a demoted "regional"-type operation continues throughout 2010.

- "Laguna"/"Durango" (June 22 - Aug 23) and "Laguna II-09"/"Durango II 09" (Sep 3 - Oct 31); all of these characterized as "high impact"
- "Laguna III-09" (Nov 17 - 27 Dec, high impact) and "Durango III-09" (Nov 2 - Dec 31, regional)
- Notice the gap in the first half of November in "Laguna"
- After this there is nothing for "Laguna" until one month in the second half of 2010, while "Durango" regional operations (in Laguna or elsewhere, we don't know) continue throughout 2010.

From the gap in *Memoria* and the *SDT* articles on Nov 6, 19, and 20, I conclude that there was a break in army's involvement in Conjunto Laguna in November 2009, with about 700 soldiers leaving and not being replaced for over two weeks until the second half of November.

SSP 2009 Informe de labores suggests that PF presence remained significant through mid 2009, though the operation begun June 2007 had since "expanded to other municipalities in the region" and it's unclear whether that implied a dilution of presence in Laguna. They did mention hundreds of arrests and large quantities of drug confiscations, but only mentioned two specific actions, one in Durango City and the other in Torreón. But we do have a hard number from *El Norte* Aug 2009: 360 agents. According to that article, as of late Aug 2009, there were 360 agents, with 50 sent back to Mexico City after protesting poor labor conditions (*El Norte* Aug 2009). In Nov 2009 we know that 300 arrived to boost Conjunto Laguna, but there was no explicit sign that they were adding to the 310-360 there previously (*SDT* Nov 23, 2009); I assume that this was another rotation.

We would later learn that, in January 2010, Humberto Moreira complained that Calderón had sent only 300 PF to Laguna (*La Jornada* May 2010). It's unclear when, but it supports my "best estimate" that the size of the PF force was down to close to 300 in late 2009.



I should note that *SDT* Nov 6, 2009 suggested that over 1,000 PF had left the Laguna region in recent months. But there were never that many agents in the region (for example, in Nov 2009 there seemed to be a total of 500 in all of Durango, according to *SDT* Nov 14, 2009). Also an article two weeks later (Nov 23) makes an even more outlandish claim that there were 2,000 agents who were leaving the region. It makes me distrust all of their PF numbers.

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## **Jan-Dec 2010: Volatility**

### **Jan-Dec 2010: Federal Police**

Statements by Coahuila state authorities suggest that they had been asking for a boost in federal forces since at least October 2009 but that, as of Laguna, the federal government had sent only 300 (*Jornada* May 2010). I assume that they're talking about federal police, and the 300 matches what I understood to be the size of the force at the end of 2009. A report of attacks and shootouts involving PF in Laguna suggests that there was some sort of PF presence. The statements were unclear about whether the 300 in January were only in Torreón or all over Laguna. Then, most of PF there was in Laguna was actually removed in March 2010 and had not returned as of May (*Info7* May 2010) or July (*El Universal* Jul 2010, *Reforma* Jul 2010). *Reforma* Jul 2010 said the majority of the PF (at least in Torreón) was removed in late March, while *Proceso* May 2010 says that the PF started to leave the region after January 31.

*Proceso* May 2010 confirms and completes the details. It suggests that PF presence was stable until January 2010, after which most were diverted to Ciudad Juárez, which Segob Gómez Mont openly admitted to business owners in a meeting. As of May 2010, the PF on Coahuila side had only 5 agents per shift. I'll assume that this was just highway patrol officers, a minimal number that is not in any way an extraordinary deployment. Complaints about lack of PF were not only from Coahuila authorities, but also business representatives.

*Vanguardia* Jul 22, 2010 reports that 200 PFP arrived to Torreón around Jul 20-21, and this article, too, implied that there had been none before that (actually, the article just repeated what Humberto Moreira said, so it was he who implied it). The motivation for the deployment seems to have been the massacre of 17 people (and injuries of 18 more) in La Quinta Inn, late on the night of July 18 (*Reforma* via *El Vigía* Jul 2010).

*SDT* Aug 14, 2010 reports that 300 PF arrived to Durango Laguna but refused to provide any information about how long they were staying (one cop said "we're just passing through"). The implication in this article is also that there wasn't PF previously. Durango municipal authorities were not notified, there was no coordination. This could have

been like in the *Proceso* May 2010 anecdote about 100 PF arriving to Torreón but only on their way to Ciudad Juárez.

SSP 2010 Informe de Labores referred to its "Operativo coordinado La Laguna" and reported various activities from August 2009 to July 2010 (the period covered by the Informe), including: 608 arrests, 146 weapons confiscated (plus ammo), tons of marihuana and hundreds of kilos of cocaine and meth, and hundreds of stolen cars recovered or cars confiscated. This suggests that they did still have a significant presence as of mid 2009 and probably through end 2009. They mention specific actions through February 2010 (and another one in March 2010 elsewhere in Durango far from Laguna), then nothing until July 2010, supporting my conclusion that most of them were absent from March to mid July 2010.

### **Jan-Dec 2010: Military**

Sedena's *Memoria* shows no "Laguna" operations in 2010 until a *regional* "Laguna I-10" (23 Aug to 22 Sep 2010), and it shows a regional "Durango I-10" for all of 2010. However, I have found reports of deployments in the first half of 2010 and nothing specifically for Aug-Sep 2010.

In late February, about 1,000 soldiers arrived to Torreón to boost security in La Laguna, and another convoy arrived less than one week later, in early March (*SDT* Mar 2010). They were from the "north of the country", possibly from other parts of the 11th Region. *SDT* didn't say how many arrived in the second convoy, but suggested it could have been as many as the previous one. The article didn't say whether they were adding to or replacing previous military presence (or from what starting point). In July 2010, Humberto Moreira would praise the military them for having "quietly tripled their presence", though he did not say since when (*Vanguardia* Jul 2010). This coincides with the weeks in which most of the PF deployment was said to have departed.

I have total Sedena presence in Laguna at 2,300 as of Dec 2009. In July 2010, Moreira said that they had tripled their presence in Laguna. I assume that he did *not* mean that they tripled their presence from 2,300 to 6,900, an implausible number that would have been a huge deal. In fact, I doubt that they increased their presence to more than 2,300, since it seems that it would have been a big enough deal to report and would have prevented authorities from complaining about a few hundred PF agents. Moreira was either referring to the June 2009 boost (which then presumably remained constant), or to a recent tripling of presence after an unannounced removal of Sedena forces some point after end 2009. There are a few additional pieces of evidence to fit:

- We know that most PF was diverted to Chihuahua in Feb-Mar 2010; nothing was said about Sedena, but they could have been diverted as well.

- There were at least 1,000 soldiers in March 2010, when the arrival of a deployment of that size was announced. They could have added to or been part of a rotation of an existing force of unknown size.
- When the big joint operation Laguna Segura was announced in Oct 2011, it was suggested that about 1,000 Sedena personnel would participate, implying that that's about how many soldiers were deployed in Laguna (there was no strong indication that they had been *newly* deployed).
- In Sedena's detailed *Memoria*, they have no "Laguna" operations in 2010 except for a one-month regional operation starting August 23; and they have a Durango regional operation for all of 2010 (though this could have been anywhere in the state of Durango).
- In folio 37216, Sedena said that it had an average of 1,200 soldiers deployed in Laguna from May 2008 to Sep 2014; in folio 14717, Sedena said it had an average of 1,400 deployed in GP/Lerdo from May 2011 to Jul 2017.
- Coahuila authorities had been purportedly demanding a boost in federal forces since October 2009, then there was the anecdote about Moreira's diatribe against Calderón in Jan 2010 about the feds having abandoned them; but again, I think they were referring only to PF (lack of) presence, ignoring Sedena.

The only other news we have about Sedena in the second half of 2010 is (a) the month-long "regional operation" from 23 Aug to 22 Sep 2010 ("Laguna I-10"), and (b) expressions of concern from Coahuila authorities that Coahuila wasn't included in "Operativo Noreste" and that some of its troops were moved to Chihuahua, leaving Coahuila vulnerable (*El Norte* Nov 2010). The state's attorney general said that Coahuila had "very scarce presence of federal forces", that the state had worked closely with the army, but that Coahuila units had occasionally been redeployed to Chihuahua.

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## **Jan-Sep 2011: Sellamiento Nazas and Laguna I-2011**

### **Jan-Jun 2011: Operativo Sellamiento Nazas**

Sellamiento Nazas was an operation to "seal" the two sides of the Nazas River, which was the border between Coahuila and Durango. Not actually close it, but rather set up checkpoints on all bridges between the states to try to stop criminales from easily jumping across the border, looking for weapons, drugs, and stolen vehicles. "Plan para reforzar la vigilancia en ambos lados del río Nazas (Coahuila y Durango) y evitar así el paso de la delincuencia organizada" (Aguayo and Dayan 2020 pg 124). Involvement of Sedena, PF, state and municipal police on both sides of border (Milenio via Vanguardia Jan 2011). *Jornada* Mar 2011: "El operativo pasa por el vado del río Nazas que separa a ambos estados, lugar donde los delincuentes tiran cadáveres mutilados o degollados. El río tiene cuatro

puentes: amarillo, negro, plateado y de la Unión, pero a lo largo de 50 kilómetros existen más de 15 pasos clandestinos que son utilizadas por Los Chapos, llamados así porque varios cárteles de la droga se unieron al de Sinaloa para recuperar Torreón."

Reports over the next few months suggested that PF was still active throughout the period, that state and local police forces also saw themselves as part of the operation, and that the operation lasted through June 2011. *SDT* Feb 2011 reported on ongoing operations under Operativo Sellamiento Nazas in February 2011 with participation of Sedena and PF. *SDD* Mar 2011 had it continuing in March and suggested an important role for Coahuila state police (led by a general). Same from *Zocalo* Mar 2011, with important role and commitment claimed by Torreón police. Same in *Notimex* via *El Economista* Jun 2011 with role of GP police. That *Economista* article was the last one to mention Sellamiento Nazas, so I assume that it died out by then (though it may have continued until the Oct 2011 announcement of Laguna Segura).

Neither the announcement of Sellamiento Nazas nor subsequent news reports that we could find in 2019–2021 mentioned an *increase* in the number of federal personnel deployed for Operativo Sellamiento Nazas. Rather, it appeared to be change of strategy from the security apparatus already in place in Laguna at the time; perhaps the activation of existing troops from the 33rd. Sedena *Memoria* referred to "Sellamiento Nazas I-11" as a "regional" operation from 25 Jan to 20 Jul 2011 (the first named Laguna operation since Sep 2010). I think it's perfectly plausible that at this point there were no additional troops in the Laguna area. This view is boosted by the fact that, when Laguna I-2011 was launched in May 2011, it was reported that additional troops arrived to boost that operation in a way that suggested that there hadn't been additional troops before then.

### **May–Jul 2011: Operativo Laguna I-2011**

This campaign did include a boost in federal forces, including military, officially starting May 5 (*El Norte* May 6, 2011, *Vanguardia* Nov 2011), but the temporary boost seems to have ended in July (*Congreso de Coahuila* Aug 2011). Its objectives seemed similar to those of Sellamiento Nazas, which was still in theory ongoing or may have been folded into Laguna I-2011, and it was still under command of the Region XI general, as previous operations had been (*Demócrata Norte de México* Jun 2011). Its actions took place on both sides of Laguna.

We know some details about Operativo Laguna I-2011, though not under that name, from *Congreso de Coahuila* Aug 2011. Interior Minister Blake Mora visited Torreón in March and May (where locals presumably requested more federal help), and after the May meeting he announced an immediate deployment of additional federal forces. (*Congreso de Coahuila* Aug 2011) The forces consisted of 252 Sedena and 280 PF, they arrived May 6, and either the PF or both left a little over two months later

(about mid July) (the document actually said "dichas fuerzas policiacas se han retirado", so it could have been just PF that left, but the context makes it seem that it was the combined forces who left.) The point of accord was written in a way suggesting that the presence left after mid July was minimal, at least in Torreón, since in August, when it was written, they were asking for the *return* of PF presence in Torreón. And the document revealed that PF did not at the time have a permanent base in Torreón.

Other articles corroborated the 280 PF number with estimates of "about" or "close to" 300 agents sent to Torreón (*El Norte* May 7, 2011). After their removal two months later, there are signs that the PF presence in Torreón was still minimal in Sep 2011 (*La Silla Rota* Sep 2011).

News reports about federal operations mentioned "Operación Laguna I-2011" or "Operación Laguna 1-2011" in May–Jul 2011 (*Seguridad Ciudadana* May 2011, *Vanguardia* May 2011, *SDT* Jun 2011, *SDT* Jul 2011, *Proceso* Jul 2011); the last one from SDT mentioned that Sedena had announced a "change of strategy" with zero details and no reports until the Oct 2011 announcement of Laguna Segura.

In Sedena *Memoria*'s main text, Sedena says that "Operación Laguna Segura" began in May 2011, apparently framing Laguna I-2011 as the beginning of their campaign (or just making a mistake). But the actual tables with operation names don't have Laguna Segura starting until Oct 2011. Rather, they have an operation named just "Laguna" from May 5 to Jul 14, 2011.

Regarding the size of military deployments, we have this information:

- Over 1,000 troops arriving to Laguna (*El Norte* May 7, 2011 (a))
- 1,600 troops sent to strengthen security in the Laguna region, coming from Veracruz, Hidalgo, and CDMX (*El Norte* May 7, 2011 (b))
- About 1,000 military and PF personnel deployed ("desplazados") (*El Norte* Jun 2011)
- The army involved in the operation was all based in the 11th Region headquarters (*Demócrata del Norte de México* Jun 2011).
- The Laguna Segura campaign, which appeared to be a bigger deal, involved 1,000 outside soldiers (see section below).

I think for sure there were not 1,600 brought from outside—that's more than were later deployed in Laguna Segura. The number could have come from adding the roughly 1,000 newly deployed to the 600 from the 33rd Battalion. The June sources, on the other hand, suggest that the newly deployed were actually less than 1,000 (one says that the 1,000 included PF, the other says they were all based in Campo Militar 6-B even though other big deployments have required them to be housed in other parts of

the city). I think the new troop estimates should range from 252 (from *Congreso de Coahuila*, assuming no one else was deployed) to 1,000.

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## **Oct 2011 - Jan 2013: Operativo Laguna Segura**

Major operation announced 19 Oct 2011 in which authorities *appeared* coordinated and which was seemed uniquely formalized through a signed agreement (*Presidencia* Oct 2011). Single command was placed on the general in charge of Region XI, as it had been previously (*Vanguardia* Jan 2012). We would later learn that most soldiers involved actually left in early 2012, then started returning in the second half of the year (*SDT* Jul 2012). The intended duration of this operation, five to nine months, was announced beforehand (*Excélsior* Oct 22, 2011).

The commander of this operation (*mando único*) was the general in command of Region XI, Mario Marco Antonio González Barreda, who had been in that position since June 2008 and had also been the head of previous operations in the region; he would head Laguna Segura for only a few months, leaving in January 2012 following a promotion, replaced by General Roberto de la Vega (*Vanguardia* Jan 2012). Unclear whether this was related to the removal of soldiers and suspension of Sedena participation in early 2012 (see below).

The first actual deployment was 21 Oct 2011, when either 200 PF and Sedena or 200 Sedena plus an unknown number of PF arrived (*Excélsior* Oct 21, 2011 or *El Universal* Oct 23, 2011). Shortly thereafter it was reported explicitly that about 1,000 new troops arrived from various regions in the country *in addition* to those already based there (*El Norte* Oct 22, 2011, roughly consistent with the somewhat uniformed *Excélsior* Oct 23, 2011). I assume from here that there were 100–200 new PF agents deployed, with the best estimate right in the middle.

Authorities said they expected the operation to last 5–9 months. The operation was interrupted some time in early 2012 ("principios de 2012"), when, owing to "logistical problems" or to the federal elections, the army's participation was explicitly said to have been "suspended" (*El Norte* Jul 13, 2012, *SDT* Jul 2012). Only in July 2012 did they start to come back, though it's unclear how many: Sedena via *SDD* Jul 2012 and *El Norte* Jul 16, 2012 said in mid July that 746 new soldiers had arrived.

In July and August 2012, plans were made to boost the "Metropolitan Police" with federal police, and this was presented as a "reinforcement" of Laguna Segura. My conclusion from the reports about this meeting is that it implied a *plan* to add 250 federal police, but it was never confirmed that they were sent at all. In late July 2012, authorities announced that they planned to start the operations of a permanent delegation of PF in Laguna which would oversee the state police (*SDT* Jul 2012). Then two weeks later there was another meeting (organized by

Tello) in which they appeared to repackage the plan, now with some specifics on numbers but still implying that the federal police were not yet there. One article on that Aug 9 meeting said that the plan was to have 450 total police including PF, of which 200 would be Coahuila/Durango state police, and 40 (presumably also state) special anti-kidnapping police. Another article said that Laguna Segura was to be reinforced with 500 personnel, and the implication was that it would be via the boosting of the Metropolitan Police (*Sin Embargo* Aug 2012). Combining those Aug 9 reports, I assume that what was planned was to have a total force of 450 police (plus 40 state anti-kidnapping agents); and I'll conclude that the plan was to boost PF presence by 450 total - 200 state = 250 federal.

In Sep 2012, it was announced that special Marine forces would be included in Laguna Segura and that one group had already arrived to Torreón (*SDT* Sep 2012). No additional information given; I assume that these were small special forces groups and don't even attempt to count them.

Articles in Sep and Oct 2012 suggested that the Laguna Segura deployments remained constant (no new or leaving PF or military) and that the operation was expected to last that way at least through Nov 2012, end of Calderón administration (*El Norte* Sep 25, Oct 5 and Oct 26, 2012). A report in Dec 2012 appeared to confirm that the PF force in Laguna remained there (*SDT* Dec 2012).

December 2012 and January 2013 were in limbo because the Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) administration was just beginning and there were rotation of commands. There were no reports of changes in federal deployments, and some evidence that PF presence was ongoing.

A January report suggested that PF presence remained stable at whatever its level was (*Estado Mayor* Jan 13, 2013). Also in January, Lerdo and GP police were removed and replaced in the streets by 800 Torreón municipal, state, and federal police and soldiers, though we don't know how many of each (*Estado Mayor* Jan 14, 2013).

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## **Feb 2013 – Apr 2014: Operativo/Operación Laguna**

In early February 2013, joint authorities renamed the Laguna campaign "Operativo Laguna" or "Operación Laguna", and made a major change in its leadership: instead of being led by the 11th Region, command of the campaign was assigned to Durango's 10th Zone, based in Durango City, with the spokespersons based in the military zone in Saltillo (*Vanguardia* and *SDT* Feb 2013).

The announcement explicitly withheld details about the size or composition of the federal forces that would be involved. We know the

following:

- In late January and early February, there were 400 federal police in Coahuila, though we don't know how many specifically in Laguna (*SDT* Jan 2013, *Estado Mayor* Feb 2013). *SDT* quoted state authorities as saying that 300 more PF would arrive to Coahuila, though we don't know how many to Torreón. *Estado Mayor* reported that 80 arrived to Torreón by plane in early February; unclear whether they were all additional to or in substitution for agents as part of a rotation (*Estado Mayor* Feb 2013). *Vanguardia* Feb 2013 also reported on the arrival of 80 PF, and here it seems clear that they were reinforcements (not substitutes). They also mentioned that there were already 400 PF in the region for Operativo Laguna. Possibilities: (a) *Vanguardia* is wrong: they confused the 400 number with the number for all Coahuila (and authorities perhaps allowed these numbers to be fudged to make it appear that PF had a greater presence in Laguna than it actually did). (b) *Vanguardia* is right: either the 400 in Coahuila were all in Torreón, or only part of them were in Torreón but there were more on the Durango side that added up, coincidentally, to 400. Either way, the number should increase in February by 80 (I'll let it slide that it appears, from the *Estado Mayor* article, that the 80 were replacing at least some officers at least temporarily).
- In late February reports indicated that three army battalions arrived to Laguna for Operativo Laguna. The source (Durango attorney general) said that Laguna had a little over 1,500 soldiers before the end-February arrival of 500 more (*El Norte* Mar 1, 2013). This fits with three earlier reports (*El Norte* Feb 19 and 28, 2013, *SDT* Feb 28, 2013), the last of which also said that 200 more were expected. If there were a little over 1,500, then another 500, then 200 more expected, that's close to the 2,400 we would expect from four 600-soldier battalions. Assuming one is the permanent 33rd, that means that this operation began with three new battalions, 1,800 soldiers.

In June 2013, 300 military police arrived to Gomez Palacio and Lerdo, but this was not directly part of Operativo Laguna but rather to take over policing in those municipalities after their police was removed in January 2013 (*Proceso* Jul 2013). The same *Proceso* article suggests that the federal police were clearly still active (at least on the Durango side), albeit in collusion with Los Cabrera.

In late 2013, the federal police in La Laguna were redeployed elsewhere in the country, and at least some returned in March or April, according to two somewhat inconsistent reports (*Milenio* Mar 2014 and Apr 2014). The March 19 article says that 400 PF were redeployed from Laguna to other parts of the country maybe in November 2013 (but maybe in December) and that they were expected to return shortly and indefinitely (unclear if the 400 were for all of Laguna or just Torreón). The implication was that



not many stayed in the meantime. The April 10 article said that 100 were set to return imminently to help patrol the streets of Torreón, and that they had been gone since December 2013 or January 2014. I'll take the overlapping departing date of December 2013. Given that I did not find any evidence of large PF units in Laguna after March/April 2014—or the second half of 2013, for that matter—I'm going to assume that the maximum police force before their redeployment was 400 for the entire Laguna region. Regarding the return, I will have a range of 100 to 400 returning, with a preference for an estimate of 100 in Torreón and 100 more in Durango because the "100" report was more recent than the plans and expectations from March.

In March 2014, the new military base in GP began operating with the 72nd Infantry Battalion (*SDT* Mar 2014), so as of this date Laguna had two permanently based battalions (still, for my purposes, this is an "extra deployment"). The base was officially inaugurated at the end of April, at which point the relevant communiqué mentioned 650 soldiers taking part "in the operation against organized crime" (*El Universal* Apr 2014). It's clear that at this point there was only that one battalion on the Durango side. It's not clear whether there were additional deployed soldiers on the Coahuila side, but my best (and maybe only) guess is that there were not—deployments of "foráneo" units were only 2-3 months long, there was no news of new convoys arriving, and there was no reason to send them since violence was plunging.

There seemed to be some rotation in the military command in the first part of the operation. In March 2013, one month after Operativo Laguna was launched, Hernández Rivera was replaced as head of the 10th Zone (and Operativo Laguna) by General Andre Georges Foullon Van Lissum, but he was replaced six months later by another general, Martínez Castuera. Martínez Castuera lasted longer: from Sep 2013 to April 2014, at which point he was named Mando Especial de La Laguna and *continued* to be the head of Operación Laguna.

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## **May 2014 – Dec 2018: Mando Especial**

On May 1, 2014, the federal government installed a "Special Command" (*Mando Especial*) in La Laguna—an army general specifically designated to oversee security operations for the Laguna region (*SDD* May 2014). This was a little over a month after the 72nd Infantry Battalion settled into their new base in Gómez Palacio and a few days after that base was formally inaugurated. The general appointed to head the Special Command was a familiar figure: General de Brigada DEM Sergio Alberto Martínez Castuera, who was already in charge of Operación Laguna as head of the 10th Zone (a position he left when he was appointed to Mando Especial; see *TCyT* Apr 26 and May 1). Thus there was continuity in the operation. He would remain in that position until January 2016, having

thus headed Operación Laguna for over two years (eight months as head of 10th Zone and 21 months as Mando Especial).

In June 2014, *El Norte* (Jun 23, 2014) published an article saying that the army had 1,400 soldiers in Gómez Palacio / Lerdo. However, I'm skeptical that the information was up to date. The article looks a lot as if it used some of the FOI requests that I have saved and documented—which are unclear about how deployments are defined and sometimes internally inconsistent. Moreover, this 1,400 number looks a lot like the 1,408 number found in folio 14717 in 2017, which also referred only to GP/Lerdo. In both cases, it's weird that they don't mention Torreón as part of the operation (especially since folio 14717 claims this is an operation beginning in May 2011, when it was still under 11th Region command). And the fact that the same number was published in 2017 is strong evidence that the numbers are outdated yet continually presented as new—much like what we have seen government agencies do elsewhere, as we learned in the Mapping Criminal Organizations project—so it makes me think the 2014 numbers were also outdated. What I do believe is that an average of at least 1,400 soldiers were present in La Laguna at some point after May 2011, but this is still not very useful overall because I don't know whether they include the activation of the permanently-based soldiers (33rd Battalion always, 72nd after April 2014).

I found no relevant articles on Operación Laguna or big movements of federal forces reports throughout the rest of 2014 and most of 2015. Military involvement besides permanent bases seemed limited to Mando Especial and the military police in GP/Lerdo.

The 300 military police who replaced the municipal police in GP/Lerdo remained there through December 2018 (*SDD Dec 2015*, *Sol de La Laguna Dec 2018*). The second article suggests that they also fell under the Mando Especial's command. This is corroborated by FOI responses (folios 191418 and 227718, for example).

Regarding the size of the Mando Especial, we have a range with an upper limit of 200 soldiers for some time. Sedena FOI responses from 2018 and 2019 say that, from both May 2014 and May 2016 through past December 2018, an average of 200 soldiers were deployed monthly as part of the Mando Especial Laguna. That's an upper limit for permanently based personnel. However, when Mando Especial was launched, it was done so in the 72nd Battalion's base, since Mando Especial presumably wasn't yet established in the Puerta Amarilla base. There were no mentions of the Mando Especial having his own force. I therefore assume that the soldiers at his disposal were those from the 72nd Battalion (or perhaps the 33rd), which we're already counting. In March 2016, when the "Fuerza Metropolitana de La Laguna" was launched, the focus was on the 102 elite state police officers, with "support from Sedena personnel" (*El Universal Mar 2016*). The exact number of support Sedena personnel is provided in the January 2017 MOU: the Mando Especial had 65 personnel, out of

which 30 soldiers would always be available to back up the state police in their operations (Coahuila Government Jan 2017).

Regarding the federal police, in June 2016, we learned that there were only 15 PF on the Coahuila side of Laguna. I carried out a particularly intense search in Google and *El Norte's* archives with several combinations to try to glean information on the size of the PF's force in the city from 2014 to 2016, but found nothing. There was PF activity and the PF did have stations on both sides (GP and Torreón), but my sense is that it was mostly related to highway patrols and not active police patrolling the streets. I conclude that the size of the PF force on both sides of Laguna stabilized at some low level, perhaps 100.

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The following references provide URLs that were verified no earlier than November 2021. Hyperlinks are provided for all articles available online, which notably excludes *El Norte* articles, which I accessed through a subscription to news archives.

### **Plataforma Nacional de Transparencia (freedom of information portal)**

Research assistants Marisol Torres and Diego Mendoza and I combed through PNT archives for any responses related to deployments, joint operations, and similar terms ("despliegues", "operativos", etc.) for both the defense department (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional) and the federal police (Policía Federal). The federal police provided no information. Sedena provided several answers with varying degrees of detail and overlap. The following are the four I referred to for the Laguna deployments database. Other responses may have contained the same information and thus were not referenced.

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Folio 14717. Full folio 0000700114717. Response on 7 July 2017 regarding location and personnel deployed in operations from 2006 to 2017.

Folio 191418. Full folio 0000700191418. Response on 14 November 2018 regarding personnel deployed in operations against drug traffickers in the state of Durango.

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