

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024039440555 Ayotzinapa: Debunking the “Historic Truth” On July 7, the attorney general’s office announced that the University of Innsbruck — a collaborating institute in the investigation into the 2014 kidnapping and disappearance of forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teaching College — had identified the remains of one of the bodies. Crucially, the remains were not found where the Peña Nieto government had insisted the killings occurred but nearly a kilometer away, in a ravine known as the Barranca de la Carnicería. Ayotzinapa marked the beginning of the end for Peña Nieto, not least because his government insisted on pushing a version of events, famously referred to as the “historic truth,” that was clearly self-serving. In its version, the students were apprehended by local police in the town of Iguala, turned over to the criminal organization Guerreros Unidos, and killed and burned in a garbage dump in the nearby town of Cocula. But this so-called “historic truth” had always been hotly contested, not least by the families of the victims, and when an international team of experts known as the GIEI got too hot under the collar for the government with its own investigation, it was bounced out of the country in 2016. On July 10, extradition proceedings were initiated for Tomás Zerón, the former head of the Criminal Investigation Agency (AIC) who had been instrumental in formulating the “historic truth,” on charges of torture, forced disappearance, altering a crime scene, and the loss and concealment of proof in the case. Zerón had fled to Canada in March. Meanwhile, new evidence based on fresh witness testimony alleges what the Peña administration always strenuously denied: that the army — specifically the 27th and 41st Battalions — was intimately involved in the detention of the students on the fateful night of September 26. Not only that, but a number of the members of these battalions were to have been directly on the payroll of the Guerreros Unidos in order to allow the transport of drugs, arms, and money throughout the region, as well as participating in the disappearance of the forty-three students. In fact, it is suspected that one of the main reasons the army got involved in the first place was that the students had inadvertently seized a pair of buses that contained a shipment of heroin worth two million dollars. These accusations put President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in a delicate spot. From the outset of his administration, he has leaned on the armed forces for everything from the construction of the new Mexico City airport to the transport of gasoline to, recently, sending the navy to seize control of the nation’s ports in a bid to fight corruption there. Historically answerable only to a series of complicit presidents, the Mexican army is among the most hermetic of institutions, with its own court system and a secretary of defense who has always been an active-duty soldier. Whether AMLO will be able to pry it open to allow the corruption in its own ranks to be investigated will be a stiff test for his resolve. Most urgently, it is Enrique Peña Nieto who is feeling the heat. On July 20, he celebrated his 54th birthday in seclusion, without the fanfare and hoopla of previous years. It’s not without irony that one hopes he enjoyed it. His coming year stands to be significantly less pleasant than the last.