

# THE DIPLOMACY OF AMBUSHES

The reporting on the ambush of 2 American trainers in Mexico on Friday reminds me of the reporting on Ray Davis' antics in Pakistan last year. Then, there was a squeamishness about mentioning that he was a CIA contractor, even after that had been widely reported in Pakistan, even in English. Here, too, there's a hesitation to describe what the trainers were doing in Mexico or publish the names that have been reported in Mexico (which I suspect are covers). Much of the American reporting neglects any mention of possible attempted murder charges for the attack.

More striking, too, is that only the AP has reported the US Embassy in Mexico's accusation that this was an ambush. The Embassy in Mexico started calling this an ambush at least by Saturday (according to this account, they started calling it that on Friday after hearing the story of the two trainers). Here's what the AP says the Embassy said yesterday.

The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City said Monday that two U.S. government employees and a Mexican Navy captain were heading to a training facility outside the city of Cuernavaca when they were ambushed by a group of gunmen that included federal police. The Mexican government said federal police were conducting unspecified law-enforcement activities in the rural, mountainous area known for criminal activity when they came upon the car, which attempted to flee and came under fire from gunmen in four vehicles including federal police.

(Lawyers for the 12 Federales being detained—and some of the early reporting on this—say they were investigating a kidnapping, but I guess

that's not official.)

CNN appears to have asked State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland whether this was an ambush—and with her equivocation, they chose not to publish that the Embassy in Mexico said it was.

The U.S. Embassy in Mexico is cooperating with the investigation into the shooting incident, Victoria Nuland, the State Department spokeswoman, said Monday.

"I'm not going to get ahead of the investigation. I think we're going to wait and see what that concludes," she said when asked whether the incident was an attack or an ambush.

The WaPo doesn't get into questions of ambushes or not—but it does give more information on the trainers (whom it does refer to as such).

Over the weekend, the two men, both in stable medical condition, were evacuated to the United States, according to a U.S. State Department official.

One of the wounded men was attached to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, the other appeared to be in Mexico on temporary assignment, according to U.S. law enforcement officials who spoke the condition of anonymity because the case is still under investigation.

[snip]

The two U.S. employees were headed to a Mexican Navy training facility, accompanied by a Mexican Navy captain, meaning that U.S. trainers were attacked by the federal police forces they have spent the past five years helping to train.

Here's a thought.

For the moment, I suspect this is what the US Embassy in Mexico (though not what Nuland) says it is: an ambush of two “trainers” to prevent them from getting to the Naval base where they were cooperating on counter-narcotics operations.

But what if the Federales mention of a kidnapping is accurate? That is, what if they were pursuing “kidnappers” they knew to be the American trainers? Is it possible we helped the Mexican military take someone into custody—perhaps on the Navy base—they wanted to free or retaliate for? Is it possible we got ambushed for helping the military capture someone? Did the names of the Americans—Jess Hoods Garner and Stan Dove Boss—come from the Federales, in an effort to expose their covers?

The Mexicans have shut down coverage of this pretty hard, both by locking down the site for most of the day on Friday and limiting access to the 12 Federales in custody.

It clearly seems like the trainers were ambushed (and as I’ve said, the shots seem to have concentrated on whoever was in the passenger seat). But it’s also possible that there’s a back story that is more explosive than the ambush itself.