

Al Letson: From the Center for Investigative Reporting and PRX. This is Reveal I'm Al Letson. This week, we have part two of our series about the attack on a group of students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College. And we should remind you that this story contains scenes of violence. At the end of September 2014, the students were riding in buses at night when police surrounded them.

Speaker 3: [Spanish 00:01:22].

Al Letson: And open fire.

Speaker 3: [Spanish 00:00:01:27].

Al Letson: Three of the boys were killed. 43 students were never heard from again. A month and a half later, the Mexican government announced it had solved the case.

Speaker 4: [Spanish 00:01:42]

Al Letson: The government said corrupt police had taken the students and handed them to members of a local gang. And that the gang had taken them to a garbage dump, shot them and incinerated their bodies. But parents of the students had their doubts.

Speaker 5: Whatever it is, I need to know. I need the truth. I want my son to return to achieve his dreams of being someone in this life.

Al Letson: For them, the government story didn't make sense. For starters, it didn't answer the most important question of all. Why? Why were the students shot? This is our serial investigation. After Ayotzinapa. Chapter two, The Cover. The parents of the missing students have been searching for answers for years. In 2017, they reached out to human rights investigator Kate Doyle. Kate has exposed atrocities throughout Latin America and testified as an expert witness in trials involving officials in Peru, Guatemala and El Salvador. She's with the National Security Archive, a nonprofit research organization that uncovers government records tied to state violence. Kate has been working with Reveal's Anayansi Diaz-Cortes for the past two years on our series. What they found is that understanding why the students were attacked in Mexico has a lot to do with a small town in Illinois, more than 2000 miles to the north. Kate tells us how she got involved in this story.

Kate Doyle: I got pulled in when the lawyers for the families contacted me. There was a really intriguing lead in the case that the Mexican government had just ignored. And it came from a drug investigation in Chicago of all places. Here's what happened. At the end of 2014, not long after the attack on the students, the Us Justice Department posted a press release announcing a drug bust. It

said eight men had been charged as a part of a heroin trafficking ring operating out of Aurora, a Chicago suburb. According to the DEA, the men were working for a Mexican drug cartel called Guerreros Unidos. That's the same gang Mexican officials were saying was involved in the disappearance of the 43 students in Iguala, Mexico. When the lawyers called my first move was to track down this man.

Mark Giuffre: My name's Mark Giuffre. It's G-I-U-F-F-R-E for the record. I'm a retired special agent with the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

Kate Doyle: Mark was the supervisor in charge of the DEA's Chicago investigation and he remembers when he read about the missing students a couple months after the attack.

Mark Giuffre: I was reading the Time Magazine expose on the 43 students and there was a part in the article that said...

Kate Doyle: It caught his eye that Mexican authorities were saying Guerreros Unidos was behind the attack. The Mexican attorney general had described them as a bunch of local criminals who turned on the kids. In fact, they were a much bigger deal. And no one knew that better than Mark. He'd been tracking them closely for more than a year since 2013, when one morning...

Mark Giuffre: At 7:00 AM, I stopped at Dunkin Donuts and grabbed a cup of coffee and went up to the north side of Chicago and parked my car a block away.

Kate Doyle: Mark was staking out a guy he thought was laundering money. After the man got into his Jeep with a duffle bag...

Mark Giuffre: I got in the car, walked up to the bag, it was overflowing with cash.

Kate Doyle: Mark arrested the man, but he had stumbled onto more than a money laundering operation.

Mark Giuffre: We executed a search and discovered multiple kilograms of both heroin and cocaine and hundreds of thousands dollars worth of cash and money counting machines, et cetera, et cetera.

Kate Doyle: Mark had uncovered a massive drug trafficking ring.

Mark Giuffre: But that cell was run by a man named Transformer who they all feared. Transformer was Vega, Pablo Vega. He ran a Chicago cell of this cartel. Guerreros Unidos Cartel.

Kate Doyle: Pablo Vega was from Iguala, but he grew up in Aurora and he was the one making sure that Guerreros Unidos in Iguala could get heroin across the US border to sell in the American Midwest. Mark got a court order to wire tap the

gang's cellphones and started reading their text messages. That's when the DEA figured out how the smuggling worked.

Mark Giuffre: We knew from the codes they were using that they were using buses. Mexican passenger bus company, when they arrived after they did their various drop offs in the neighborhoods in the little village in Pilsen or wherever, they would go to this location warehouse in Aurora and they would be serviced at the warehouse.

Kate Doyle: The warehouse was the heart of the heroin operation. From a van nearby, Mark and his team watched this place on and off for months through binoculars. A year ago, Anayansi and I went to Aurora and found the warehouse.

Mark Giuffre: Hello?

Kate Doyle: Hi Mark. How's it going?

Mark Giuffre: Good. How are you?

Anayansi

We called Mark on the phone so he could describe the drug smuggler's setup.

Diaz-Cortes:

Kate Doyle: Give us a tour of what we should be looking for and what you we're seeing here from your perspective and what you-

Mark Giuffre: Okay.

Kate Doyle: Yeah.

Mark Giuffre: Around back is where the buses would pull in right along the side, next to the park there.

Kate Doyle: And where were you watching?

Mark Giuffre: So there's a park to the left of this warehouse and there's a parking lot, and I was parked in that parking lot with binoculars. We had people in the park.

Anayansi

It was mind blowing to see how an ordinary building in the heart of suburbia can be the front for a bustling drug operation

Diaz-Cortes:

Kate Doyle: Mark had previously told me that over the course of the investigation, the DEA had intercepted thousands of text messages sent between the drug dealers in Aurora and their suppliers in Iguala.

Mark Giuffre: We were intercepting conversations. "Is it being unloaded?" "Yeah, we're unloading it right now." When they were talking about the code name they used for heroin.

Kate Doyle: Wait, what was the code word for heroin?

Mark Giuffre: I can't remember what they used in this-

Kate Doyle: Okay. In the court document, they say... "Is your aunt arriving tonight?"

Mark Giuffre: Yeah, I think the aunts were the buses. So we knew from the codes they were using that heroin loads were coming up in buses and that bulk cash, millions and millions of dollars was going back out via the same method.

Kate Doyle: Mark was a foot soldier in the war on drugs. The American campaign to stamp out narcotics trafficking around the world. His job was to take apart the groups operating inside the United States. But the US also played a huge role in Mexico's drug war. In 2006, then president Felipe Calderon decided to enlist the armed forces in the fight and the US dedicated billions of dollars to send helicopters, weapons, intelligence and training for Mexican security forces.

Speaker 9: Giving the Mexican military and police US training, armament and resources.

Kate Doyle: Militarizing the fight in Mexico and criminalizing it in the United States was supposed to win the war on drugs, but the strategy has backfired. At home, it's led to mass incarceration and the deaths of more than 800,000 Americans by overdose in the past 20 years. More casualties than in any other war in our country's history. And in Mexico, the war produced a whirlwind of violence unlike anything the country had seen before. Karla Quintana heads the national commission on the search for the disappeared in Mexico.

Karla Quintana: There had been drug cartels in Mexico way before 2006. So something happened in 2006 that a deal was broken among drug cartels, federal government, local governments. Something was broken there. After that, the violence has just been...

Kate Doyle: Skyrocketing.

Karla Quintana: Yeah, skyrocketing.

Kate Doyle: Exactly. Karla says that unleashing the Mexican military against the cartels had a destabilizing effect. When the bosses were taken down, their operations splintered and new people tried to take over. She says they intimidated or paid off police and government officials to look the other way. A.

Karla Quintana: After that, the mix of cartels and of state agents in perpetrating these crimes is very common. So we, as Mexican people, we don't know who's who.

Kate Doyle: Corruption wasn't a new problem in Mexico, but the war on drugs made it much worse. People were getting caught in the crossfire of rivalries and turf wars across the country. By the time the Ayotzinapa students were ambushed and taken off the buses, some 30,000 people had gone missing. Collateral

damage in the war on drugs. Almost no one was prosecuted. Mexican institutions were becoming a part of the Narco system.

The DEA's Mark Giuffre could see that, even from Chicago. As he and his team read the text messages they got off the wire taps, he says it was obvious that local officials in Iguala were working with the cartel.

Mark Giuffre: There were people that you could tell from the context that were political figures at the highest level from Iguala and in Guerrero state that were communicating with various people that we were being ordered to intercept.

Kate Doyle: Mexican investigators had evidence that Guerreros Unidos was bribing officials to look the other way. And their drug business was booming.

Mark Giuffre: We looked at our data, our intelligence, the intercepts. More than 2,000 kilograms of heroin came to Chicago in a one year period of time, which is a unprecedented, mind boggling amount.

Kate Doyle: The heroin was hidden behind the bumpers of the buses. Through the wire taps, Mark realized the buses were carrying these secret drug stashes. The smugglers had built ingenious, airtight containers that dogs couldn't sniff out and X-ray machines couldn't see through. Mark connected the dots between Guerreros Unidos buses and the Ayotzinapa students.

Mark Giuffre: These students hijacked the wrong bus. They hijacked the wrong bus. To me, it was just so crystal clear that if not for that being the bus they hijacked, my hypothesis is they might all very well be alive today.

Kate Doyle: It would take a very long time before Mark's epiphany would become a serious focus of the investigation into Ayotzinapa. The Mexican government never even posed the question, did the students commandeer a bus loaded with heroin? And could that explain the intensity of the attacks on them?

Al Letson: In a moment, we go back to Mexico where parents of the students are convinced they're not getting the truth and the government soon has a crisis on its hands.

Mark Giuffre: The Mexican government, it's hoping this case will go away and the case doesn't go away.

Al Letson: That's next on Reveal. [Commercial break]

Al Letson: From the Center for Investigative Reporting and PRX, this is Reveal I'm Al Letson. More than 2000 miles away from Chicago and DEA agent Mark Giuffre, the Mexican government's investigation continues. It's the fall of 2014 and Mexican officials are saying nothing about heroin hidden on buses or drug smuggling to the US. The parents of the missing students suspect the

government is hiding the truth. Then in December, three months after the attack, the government makes a surprise announcement.

Speaker 4: [Spanish 00:15:16]

Al Letson: The attorney general says they have results from a DNA lab in Innsbruck, Austria. They sent the lab a bone found near a river, not far from where the students were attacked and the lab was able to match it to one of the missing students. Alexander Mora Venancio.

Speaker 4: Alexander Mora Venancio [Spanish 00:15:37]

Al Letson: This news is a gut punch to the parents of the missing boys. "The blow that hits one parent hits all of us," says Cristi Bautista whose son Benjamin also disappeared that night. Alexander was a 19 year old student at the Teachers College. His dad, Ezequiel is a taxi driver but he never taught Alexander how to drive. "If I teach you, you'll want to be a taxi driver like me and I can't allow that," he would tell him. Now, Ezequiel was preparing to bury his son or the only remains he had, just a single bone, no bigger than the palm of his hand, Doña Cristi and the other parents decided they had to be there to support him.

Cristi Bautista: [Spanish 00:16:31]

Al Letson: The families went to Alexander's hometown in Costa Chica to cry and pray together with his father. As painful as it was for the parents and the Mexican people to accept Alexander's death. It seemed to confirm what the government was saying happened to the students. Still, as Kate Doyle's and Reveal's Anayansi Diaz-Cortez discovered, the government's announcement just raised more questions for the families of the students who were losing faith in the government investigation. Anayansi explains why.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortez: The bone that belonged to Alexander was identified through the work of Mimi Doretti, a forensic anthropologist from Argentina who'd been asked by the families of the missing to work with the Mexican government. Getting confirmation from the DNA lab in Austria, that this bone was from one of the students is a major development. The government holds a press conference and Mimi issues a statement of her own, a press release. In it, she decides to clarify a small detail on the government's announcement that just doesn't sit well with her.

Mimi Doretti: Let's just put that we were not there when the bag was allegedly found on the river and that we were not there when this particular fragment was found.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortez: Because the government was declaring publicly that Mimi and her team were there.

Speaker 4: [Spanish 00:17:57]

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: When the bag was pulled out of the river, when it was opened and laid out. What happens next, completely blindsides Mimi.

Mimi Doretti: That produced a major controversy with people that were on the federal government conducting the investigation. They felt that we put in doubt the whole thing, the bag, the location of where the bag was found and the origin of that fragment.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: And there were other things the government was claiming that didn't make sense. Like the theory that the boys were shot at the top of the dump and thrown over a cliff of garbage. If that were the case, Mimi expected there would be dozens of bullet shells at that spot.

Mimi Doretti: And we found a few cartridges here and there, four or five, but really not much. So we're like, "Wait, this is not telling the same story."

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Then out of the blue, new evidence appears almost as if in response to their doubts.

Mimi Doretti: Like 10 days after, we all have left the site... the prosecutor's office went back to the site, to the garbage dump. They didn't tell us to go with them and they found more than 40 [inaudible] cases under a rock where... that was the rock where we always sit down to change shoes or something like that before going down. So we're like, "Wait a minute, they have been placed there."

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Mimi believes the government planted the evidence. For the families, this confirms their suspicions about the official story and in early 2015, the families take to the streets. This time demanding a brand new independent investigation.

Cristi Bautista: [Spanish 00:19:43]

Speaker 5: The March on January 26th, it was huge. We marched to the center of Mexico City from four different places.

Speaker 3: [Spanish 00:00:19:54]

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Doña Cristi and the other parents hold up huge body size portraits of their sons. Thousands of people join them.

Speaker 3: [Spanish 00:20:06]

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The government's answer to the protestors comes quickly... with another press conference. The government's response is to double down. They restate their original theory. Boys, dump, fire, river, DNA match, case closed. And they call their theory la verdad historica, the historical truth. Which is like saying the absolute truth. The message to the families of the missing is clear. This is finished. You need to turn the page.

Cristi Bautista: [Spanish 00:20:56]

Speaker 5: We were having dinner and we just stared at each other, we didn't believe it. We couldn't accept it. All we could was, "This is a historic lie that they're making up."

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Instead of calming things down the government's response leads to more outrage.

Jim Cavallaro: The Mexican government, it's hoping this case will go away and the case doesn't go away.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: That's Jim Cavallaro. He was with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights at the time. It's part of the United Nations in Latin America. In a very smart move, the parents had reached out to Jim when they were pushing for a new investigation.

Jim Cavallaro: There's a sense that this is going to be extremely politically detrimental, if not devastating for the Mexican government, possibly to the level of seeing a Mexican government fall.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The outcry is so big. The government has no choice but to support an independent investigation.

Jim Cavallaro: So I think the Mexican government engages in a bit of a gamble, but a gamble they think they're going to win and that they need some kind of cover. Which is we invite in the commission, see families, see media, see opposition. We have a commitment to human rights and we will do this the right way.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: So immediately Jim gets to work, putting together a group of experts.

Jim Cavallaro: I'm picking up the phone and I'm calling up people and I'm twisting their arms.

Francisco Cox: I'm in my house sleeping and I get a call from Jim Cavallaro, who didn't respect the time difference because he was in California and I was in Santiago. So it was like 3:00 in the morning or something like that.

Al Letson: Francisco Cox, who's a Chilean criminal law expert and human rights expert.

Francisco Cox: He said like, it's a group of experts that will oversee the investigation. And I said, "Yeah. I'm in. I'm all for it."

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Jim pulls together a who's who of Latin American experts.

Francisco Cox: Carlos Beristain.

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:
Jim Cavallaro: A psychologist who works with families of the disappeared.
Claudia Paz y Paz, who stood up to some of the most ruthless, organized criminal groups and corrupt authorities in Guatemala. Angela Buitrago and Alejandro Valencia.

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes: Both from Colombia where they investigated massacres and paramilitary groups and she prosecuted them.

Jim Cavallaro: So we had folks who were not gun shy.

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes: This newly minted group of five international experts calls itself El Grupo Interdisciplinario Expertos Independientes or GIEI for short, which is how we'll refer to them. On March 2nd, 2015, the GIEI arrive in Mexico city and they get to work.

Francisco Cox: We went to the foreign affairs office. The woman that was in charge of receiving us was this very well dressed woman. Her secretary came in with a huge mug, like transparent mug with something green in it. And she had all her jewelry and her rings and she was very elegant.

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:
Francisco Cox: From the fancy offices, they asked to be taken to the school in Ayotzinapa.
We went out and we had this huge... How you say [inaudible].

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:
Francisco Cox: Body guards?
Yeah. But I mean, they were like police officers with huge, huge machine guns. And they all had their face covered and this is something that Mexico does a lot, which is the state shows you its power. And then you go into these people's school and you see the contrast. Once you shake the hand of one of the 43 fathers, I mean, you feel like you have... Your hands are like tiny and very, very weak. I mean, it's a strong person's hand. So the contrast of Mexico to me was right there.

Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes: Even though the experts were from Latin America, they're outsiders in Mexico, trying to crack a super sensitive case. Each of them told us over and over again, [Spanish 00:25:17] We didn't understand Mexico. Not really. They needed an insider to help them. This is where Omar Gomez Trejo comes into the picture again. You met him in our last episode, he works for the UN and was observing the government's ongoing investigation. When he reads about the experts coming in, the GIEI, he realizes he knows one of them, Alejandro Valencia.

Omar Gómez Trejo: [Spanish 00:00:25:46]

Omar Gómez Trejo: And then we went to go grab a beer and then we started to talk and then he tells me, "Omar, we're thinking about finding someone to be our anchor in Mexico." And I told him, "Don't look anymore. I'm here." He tells me, "Are you

for real?" "Yes." We can offer you a three month contract. I had a lifetime contract at the United Nations.

Anayansi And Omar walks away from his comfortable UN job.

Diaz-Cortes:

Omar Gómez Trejo: [Spanish 00:26:17]

Omar Gómez Trejo: I was there [inaudible] in Mexico. So I knew that as soon as I arrived, my time was... work, work, work with them and travel.

Anayansi At first, the GIEI worked out of these slick offices in a fancy part of Mexico City.
Diaz-Cortes: They felt uncomfortable there, like they were being watched and it was getting in the way of their work.

Francisco Cox: It was so bad. We ended up making Omar's apartment our office. So that's how committed he was.

Omar Gómez Trejo: So yes, my apartment became sort of the headquarters where we worked. We would get coffee and buy some snacks, cold cuts... A little bit of fruit.

Anayansi And sometimes Omar would pull out his guitar.

Diaz-Cortes:

Omar Gómez Trejo: So we would work around the clock leaving only for lunch or dinner and then we would work some more, and then eventually everybody would leave. And I would go into my room and play video games, you know?

Anayansi And the next day, they'd start again. The Chilean law expert, Francisco Cox,
Diaz-Cortes: who goes by Pancho says the first thing the GIEI decides to focus on is the dump. Where Mexican officials said the students were executed and burned.

Francisco Cox: So the fire is critical in terms of if this story stands or doesn't stand. And we need to know the amount of material you need to burn somebody. What happens to the body? I mean, let's go through it.

Anayansi From the beginning, parents of the boys didn't believe the government story
Diaz-Cortes: about the fire.

Cristi Bautista: [Spanish 00:27:59].

Speaker 5: We worked the land, how were we to believe that 43 students were going to turn to Ash over the span of one night? We can't accept that, that can't be true.

Anayansi So Pancho brings in one of the world's top experts on fire, a Peruvian.

Diaz-Cortes:

Jose Torero: My name is Jose Torero. I've been a fire engineer for about 30 years now. So I've been involved in a number of very complicated cases like the World Trade

Center. I did part of the analysis on the collapses of World Trade Center one, two, and seven.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:** And when Jose arrives in Mexico, the government gives him and Pancho a military escort to the dump. Then the two men start climbing down on the pit.

Jose Torero: There's a path of garbage, plastic bottle, bags, you name it, insects all over the place. I mean, your legs are being eaten alive.

Francisco Cox: We get there. He starts to look around and there were some trees, bushes that were still there. Why is he stopping kind on the bushes? I mean, he said like, "Look." The minute I saw that there weren't any burns around it, I had what I needed. And yeah, we were there like 15, 20 minutes, not more.

Anayansi Already what Jose is seeing casts doubts on the government story.

Diaz-Cortes:

Jose Torero:

Basically the historical truth existed on the premise that 43 bodies were incinerated to a level that there was no organic matter left in that dump, you know? To be able to incinerate 43 bodies, you needed a fire that was basically enormous, hundreds of feet in length and many feet in width. And the fire would've been so large in nature that you would have seen it miles away. And it would have completely incinerated all the garbage in the slope. There was no way you could have had that fire in that place. Impossible.

Anayansi Jose's findings punch a big hole on the government's so-called historical truth.
Diaz-Cortes: Because if there was no fire at the dump, why were people confessing to burning the bodies? You see, since the early days of the investigation, Mexican officials released videotaped declarations of suspects admitting to every detail of the crime. Without the fire, those confessions had to be staged or coerced,

And the most devastating evidence of all, the experts unearthed security camera footage from the Iguala Bus Station, where the boys took the buses. The video shows the students had five buses. All along, the government said that there were just four. The experts realized that the government is likely hiding that fifth bus. The bus is key evidence and could explain why the students were attacked. Just as DEA agent Mark Giuffre insisted, the students may have unknowingly commandeered a bus loaded with heroin or cash.

All of this gets written up by Omar and the members of the GIEI. And they go public with it a year after the attack in September 2015. The GIEI's report is a huge embarrassment for the Mexican government. Soon officials start distancing themselves, no longer cooperating with the GIEI like they were before.

Francisco Cox: They never say no, but they can delay the response forever. So we start to feel that.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The government also pulls resources from the independent investigation and at the same time, a smear campaign begins targeting each one of the experts.

Speaker 19: [Spanish 00:31:53].

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Suddenly Jim Cavallaro from the Inter-American Commission is in scramble mode, rallying every connection he has to keep the GIEI in Mexico for another six months. And he succeeds, but there's immediate fallout.

Jim Cavallaro: I'm invited with another commission member to a dinner at the home of a very high placed authority in Mexico. Super formal with linen and there are a number of spoons and forks. I just remember something like, "Oh man, what fork am I going to use?"

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: After some small talk, they look at Jim intently. Why did you renew the mandate of the experts without Mexico's express consent? And suddenly this diplomat starts screaming.

Jim Cavallaro: Mexico is an important country and you meant to treat us with respect and you don't do this without consulting with us. His voice is raising. And with each syllable, there's a fist pound. How dare you do this without Mexico's express consent. And I'm looking at the table with each punch. The plates all dance upward in unison and just watch the plates go up and down and up and down. The whole experience was surreal. But for me, it was telling about how Mexican authorities thought they could and should engage with the Inter-American Commission. I think they thought that they could control a situation. I think they thought that I would say, "I'm so sorry for not asking for your consent."

Al Letson: The GIEI is being sabotaged by extremely powerful people in Mexico. Their investigation is hanging by a thread. When we come back, the experts have to figure out how to keep that thread from breaking. You're listening to Reveal. From the Center for Investigative Reporting and PRX, this is Reveal, I'm Al Letson. After the international experts released their report about the attack on the students, the Mexican government is in a bind. The report raises troubling questions about the Mexican investigation and the government wants nothing more than the experts to stop scrutinizing them and go away. But the optics would be terrible if the government shuts down the experts work. Reluctantly Mexico's president agrees to renew the experts mandate, but as Anayansi Diaz-Cortez reports, they'll have a limited time to get the job done.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The international experts known as the GIEI have been doing their work under diplomatic immunity. The Mexican government is now saying that immunity will end in seven months in April 2016. So the experts need to wrap up their investigation by then. The government also pulls the plug on logistical support for the GIEI, no more helicopters, bulletproof cars and armed bodyguards. Now

to get around, they're squeezing into an old Jetta owned by their Mexican liaison, Omar Gomez Trejo. One time, they're following up on a tip.

Omar Gómez Trejo: We have a lead and we have a person that has important information about what happened to the students.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: They head to Iguala, but the road gets too rough for the Jetta. So they borrow a pickup truck.

Omar Gómez Trejo: So his truck was a very beat up old, very tiny truck.

Omar Gómez Trejo: [Spanish 00:35:44]

Omar Gómez Trejo: The door would only open on one side, so there I am driving Alejandro and Pancho are on the back part of the truck.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: It's hot, they're sweating and when they see a hat stand up ahead... they make Omar pull over. They buy big sombreros, put them on and keep going.

Omar Gómez Trejo: And so we were getting really close, Alejandro and Pancho are talking in the back and Alejandro says... "Hey, didn't we just see that motorcycle with those two guys pass us already?" Yeah. Yeah, they passed us twice.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: They suspected these were lookouts known as halcones or hawks spying on them.

Omar Gómez Trejo: So we finally get there and we talk to this person that has intel for us, and he didn't want to talk to us at all. He goes... "Get out of here, because you're being followed. Go back to where you came from."

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: And then there's this other lead that turns out to be explosive. A lead that points straight to the top of the Mexican government. The experts hear about a video. It was shot by a photo journalist named Pepe Jimenez at the river where the bone of the student was found. As it turns out, I shared a car ride with Pepe this past summer. We were both headed toward the Cocula dump. Crammed in the back of an SUV, he tells me the story of the footage. He's in the area reporting on the case. It's October 28th, 2014, one day before a garbage bag was pulled out of a river and a bone fragment was found inside

Pepe Hears government helicopters flying overhead and decides to follow them and see where they land. He starts recording.

Omar Gómez Trejo: And about 80 yards away from the camera. What caught my attention was a group of armed men like bodyguards. And then a man in a suit and tie, it's over a hundred degrees just extreme heat and this guy is dressed in a black suit with a pistol in his hand, and he is holding onto another guy in handcuffs.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:
Pepe Jimenez:** Pepe is with two other reporters staking out the situation.
Yes [Spanish 00:38:20] Wall Street Journal [Spanish 00:38:22]

Omar Gómez Trejo: And then the reporter from the Wall Street Journal tells me, "Oh, if it isn't the famous Tomas Zeron, the chief of police and the lead investigator on this case.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:** Tomas Zeron, the government's lead investigator notices Pepe and the others and there's this moment of tension.

Omar Gómez Trejo: I just kept filming the whole time and that's how we got them. It was all by luck really.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:** You can see Zeron and his entourage, talking and making calls, all while the armed guard holds tight to the young man in handcuffs. In many ways, the video shows what you'd expect, given the government story of what happened to the students. You see an SUV blocking the road to the site. Zeron's men by the river with two garbage bags in the frame. When the GIEI get word about this video, they ask Pepe if they can come over and take a look. And when they see it, they all sit there frozen. The timestamp on the video says October 28th, but the government told the world the remains were discovered the next day, the 29th. And when the experts follow up, they find nothing in the case file about a trip to the river on October 28th. Pepe's video introduces a whole new element of doubt about the government's story. In April 2016 with just days left before their official mandate ends, the GIEI wraps up its second report about the investigation. But before releasing it to the public Pancho Cox, the lawyer from Chile says they first need to take their findings to the parents.

Francisco Cox: We went to present the report. We did it in the school at Ayotzinapa.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:
Speaker 5:** Doña Christi, whose son Benjamin disappeared was there.
They were just so sad. We cried. They cried with us. It was soul crushing.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:** The experts tell the parents what they've learned, the drug cartels and the connection to Chicago. The proof that there was a fifth bus, not four as the government claimed. The impossibility of the fire. It was intense.

Francisco Cox: And that day it was... Oh man, we gave the report to them and tell them that we needed to leave because they hadn't renewed the mandate. So we needed to leave. And I remember, I asked for their forgiveness because we hadn't accomplished the main objective, which was determine what had happened to each one of them, of their sons. It's... every time I remember that... sorry. It's one of the most emotional times of the whole process.

**Anayansi
Diaz-Cortes:** Even after learning all this about their government, the obstruction, the cover up, the repression, many of the parents are still proud of their country, of being Mexican. And they have something for are their experts.

Francisco Cox: As a gift, they gave us this very big Mexican flag.

Speaker 5: We bought a flag and we wrote our names and the names of our sons. And we asked them to always remember our sons, to remember everything.

Francisco Cox: They wrote on the flag [Spanish 00:42:12] always thankful for our experts. [Spanish 00:42:19] Thank you for not selling out. It was moving. It was sad. It was frustrating. At least... They valued what we had done or tried to do. To me, it's my badge of honor.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The very next day, the GIEI presents their findings publicly, exposing to Mexican society and the world that the government's case is built on lies.

Francisco Cox: I remember we were all very nervous. I mean, we were very, very nervous. And we walk into this room, Omar started to give the press conference.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Omar walks up to the stage and takes his place at the table. Even though he's not one of the expert investigators, they decide that he should lead the press conference.

Francisco Cox: Omar won every bit of space that we ended up giving him, because at the end, he was one more of us. I think it was important for him being Mexican and for the Mexicans to see a Mexican. I think we borrowed a little bit of legitimacy from Omar.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: The room is filled with press. The parents are there. Hundreds of others, too. The government was invited, but no one shows up, just a few empty chairs in front of the podium. You took them alive. We want them back alive. The room quiets down and Omar begins.

Omar Gómez Trejo: The moment I take the mic, everybody gets up and starts shouting.

Speaker 19: [Spanish 00:44:17]

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: Don't leave, don't leave. The entire room is a chorus of these words.

Omar Gómez Trejo: To listen to them shouting really wanted to cry. Finish the story you're making. Tell us who did it. Because if you leave the people responsible, remain free and can do whatever they want.

Anayansi Diaz-Cortes: When things quiet down, Omar begins the press conference, which goes on for two hours. They talk about their findings just as they told the parents. Then toward the end, they show parts of the video shot by Pepe Jimenez, the one at the river. One of the experts Carlos Beristain describes what's happening.

Flash of two plastic garbage bags, one where the bone was supposedly found. Then he describes the scene with Tomas Zeron, the government's lead

investigator for the case, and the detainee, a man named Agustin Garcia Reyes. And he ends by explaining how there's no record of these events on October 28th in the case file. In the eyes of the experts, the video appears to show that Alexander Mora's bone was planted on October 28th. So it could be discovered the next day. The experts have also learned by examining medical reports that the man being held at gunpoint on the side of the river was tortured to confess to the crime. And it was the lead investigator, the president's trusted aid, Tomas Zeron at the center of all of it.

Now that the findings are public. It's time for the experts to leave Mexico. Without immunity, they fear indictment by the Mexican government or worst, prison time. Here's Doña Cristi.

- Speaker 5:** I can't even talk about it because it's so sad. We all felt hopeless. What are we going to do now? What is going to happen now that we've lost our experts?
- Anayansi Diaz-Cortes:** Pancho Cox and the other four Latin American experts had packed their things and booked flights home. But they're worried about Omar.
- Francisco Cox:** Our concern, yeah was Omar. Omar was the weakest link. He was a Mexican, he had family, brothers, his mother.
- Anayansi Diaz-Cortes:** And he was in the cross hairs of the Tomas Zeron. Omar remembers clicking on his phone, his name is making headlines.
- Omar Gómez Trejo:** I wasn't really thinking about leaving until I realized I was being targeted. I was all over the news being set up.
- Francisco Cox:** We weren't comfortable with that situation. I remember the five of us saying, "We need to see a way to get Omar out of here."
- Anayansi Diaz-Cortes:** So they huddled together and then Pancho tells Omar.
- Omar Gómez Trejo:** So he tells me in his Chilean way... "You have to leave your country."
- Francisco Cox:** And then he said like, "Do you think I should leave like for a couple of months?" And I said like, "No. Omar, I think you need to leave, leave. Like for a long time."
- Anayansi Diaz-Cortes:** The message sinks in. Omar rushes to his apartment and packs what he can into two suitcases. He pays what's left on his lease. His brother drives him to the airport. And the next thing Omar knows, he's on a plane headed out of the country.
- Al Letson:** It's been a year and a half since the students from the Teachers College came under attack and parents have pretty much lost hope of ever finding out what happened to their sons. International experts had shown instead of exposing the truth, the Mexican government covered it up. Now those international

experts, along with executive secretary Omar have left the country in fear. Next week, the final episode in our series. We track down a man in witness protection who says he was tortured into signing a false confession.

Speaker 21: It's something I can't describe what it feels like to have a bag over your head and to be deprived of air. I could not move, my heart racing at 1000 miles per hour from the need to breathe air.

Al Letson: And the Mexican government's lead investigator becomes a fugitive.

Kate Doyle: He had been charged with very serious crimes including torture, forced disappearance and obstruction of justice.

Al Letson: That's next week on After Ayotzinapa. To see cell phone video of the attack and documents related to the investigation. Visit revealnews.org/disappeared. Our partners at Adonde Media are developing a Spanish language version of the series. Stay tuned for more details. Our lead producer is Anayansi Diaz-Cortez. Kate Doyle with the National Security Archive is our partner and co-producer for this series. Taki Telonidis edited the show. We have production help from Reveal's David Rodriguez and Bruce Gil. Thanks to Tom Blanton, Megan DeTura, and Claire Dorfman from the National Security Archive and to Laura Starecheski, Lisa Pollak, John Gibler and Ariana Rosas. Special thanks to Santiago Aguire, Maria Luisa Aguilar from Central Pro and Maureen Meyer from the Washington Office on Latin America.

Victoria Baranetsky is our general counsel. Our production manager is Amy Mostafa. Original score and sound design by the dynamic duo Jay Breezy, Mr. Jim Briggs and Fernando, my man yo, Arruda. They had help from Claire "C Note" Mullen, Kathryn Styer Martinez, Steven Rascon and Jess Alvarenga. Our digital producer is Sarah Merck. Our CEO is Kaizar Campwala. Sumi Aggarwal is our editor in chief and our executive producer is Kevin Sullivan. Our theme music is by Camerado Lightning. Support for Reveal is provided by the Reva and David Logan Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. McArthur Foundation, the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Hellman Foundation, the Democracy Fund and the Inasmuch Foundation. Reveal as a co-production of the Center for Investigative Reporting and PRX. I'm Al Letson and remember, there is always more to the story.

Cristi Bautista: [Spanish 00:51:29].

Speaker 22: From PRX.