

Hopes of Finding Missing Sub Fade Haunted by Loss, and Chasing Ghosts

MAR DEL PLATA, Argentina — As search teams raced against time, and stormy seas, to find a missing Argentine submarine, officials said on Sunday that earlier reports that the crew might have tried to make satellite calls in recent days appeared to be wrong.

The Defense Ministry on Saturday had based optimistic statements on reports that there were seven attempts to communicate by satellite phone from the search area off the Patagonia coast.

But on Sunday, the Argentine Navy said that it was still analyzing the calls and that there was no “clear evidence” that the calls had come from the submarine.

The reports came as an increasingly robust international effort was hampered by weather in the 186-square-mile search area.

The mystery surrounding the fate of the crew aboard the ARA San Juan has transfixed the nation since news of its disappearance broke early Friday. The submarine last made radio contact on Wednesday.

Roughly 200 family members of the service members onboard were invited to await news at the Mar del Plata Naval Base in this seaside city, where two psychologists and one psychiatrist were on hand.

“This has turned into one big family, and we are all helping each other get through this difficult time,” María Morales, 51, the mother of crew member Luis García, said in an interview. “Sadly we don’t have any news, but at least there is no bad news.” (NYT)

XALAPA, Mexico — At 5 a.m., the couple stirred to the buzz of a cellphone alarm. They had hardly slept — Carlos Saldaña had been in the hospital the night before, betrayed by his fragile stomach.

Today was the raid, the culmination of years of tracking the cartels, of lonely reconnaissance missions to find where they had discarded his daughter. He had spent the last six years searching for his daughter Karla, charging through every obstacle with an obsession that bordered on lunacy — cartel threats, government indifference, declining health, even his other children, who feared that his reckless hunt had put them in danger.

Vicky Delgadillo watched as he eased out of bed and grabbed a cane. She had a missing girl as well, Yunery, whom Saldaña now thought of as his own. For the last two years, the couple had shared a home, a life and a love born of loss.

Officially, the Mexican government acknowledges the disappearances of more than 30,000 people — men, women and children trapped in a liminal abyss — neither dead nor alive, silent victims of the drug war. But the truth is no one knows how many people are missing in Mexico.

In the last year alone, the remains of nearly 300 bodies have been unearthed from clandestine graves in Veracruz, unidentified fragments that only begin to tell the story of what has transpired over the last decade.

“There are an infinite number of people who are too scared to even say anything, whose cases we know nothing about,” said the

state’s attorney general, Jorge Winckler.

“The entire state is a mass grave,” he said.

For more than a decade, cartels across Mexico have taken out their rivals with utter impunity, tossing their remains into unmarked graves across the country. Soldiers and law enforcement officers often adopt the same approach, leaving many families too terrified to ask for help from a government they see as complicit.

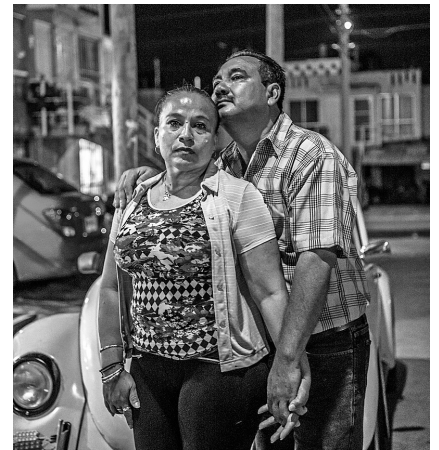
After countless phone calls beseeching the government for help, hundreds of hours chasing down leads, years of rallying other families and stalking officials with a megaphone of grief, Saldaña and Delgadillo were getting a shot. Maybe their only shot.

They drove for nearly an hour, slowing in the town of Cosautlán de Carvajal, the last population center before the ranch Saldaña had heard about. Like many places taken over by organized crime in rural Mexico, the property was scarcely discussed in town.

The couple wandered the grounds in a dream state, led more by instinct than clues. They stumbled on a large metal bin filled with dirt and random pieces of clothing, perhaps, they thought, the belongings of captives.

Having been the engine behind the entire raid, Saldaña tried to take control, barking orders.

He carried a metal stick with a hook fixed on its end, to pry loose



DANIEL BEREHULAK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Vicky Delgadillo and Carlos Saldaña at home. “We decided to spend our lives together and live this struggle united,” he said.

items from the soft earth. His hook snagged a piece of clothing, and then another, and another. He laid them in a pile at his feet and called for help.

The forensic specialists took over, drawing a circle around the spot. They dug. An hour later, a pile of 500 items sat before them: baby outfits, women’s blouses, worn-out jeans and shoes.

A profound sadness settled over Saldaña. He took no comfort in finding the clothes that he had chastised officials to look for, no comfort in being right.

“I wonder if this clothing might be as close as we ever get to our children,” he said to Delgadillo. “That its very existence means we may never reach them.”

AZAMAHMED

In Brief

Chile Votes for New President

Former President Sebastián Piñera of Chile, a conservative billionaire, on Sunday won the first round of an election to choose a successor to President Michelle Bachelet. Piñera, 67, who won 36 percent of the vote, will compete in a runoff election on Dec. 17 against a center-left journalist and former news anchor, Alejandro Guillier, 64, who received 22 percent of the ballots cast. The biggest surprise of the day was the surge of the left, marking a shift in Chile’s political map. As of next year political power will not be wielded solely by the two major coalitions that have governed Chile since the end of military rule in 1990. Preliminary results on Sunday showed significant gains by the Frente

Amplio in Congress, as well as a generational shift and a greater number of women elected as lawmakers. (NYT)

U.S. Steps Up Attacks

The United States has sharply increased attacks against Qaeda-backed Shabab militants in Somalia in recent days, conducting a flurry of airstrikes in the wake of the country’s deadliest terrorist assault last month and President Trump’s approval of new military authorities to hunt down insurgents around the world. In a five-day stretch beginning Nov. 9, American drones and warplanes carried out six strikes against Shabab fighters and one strike against Islamic State combatants. Officials said the drone strikes killed more

than 40 fighters, a month after a double truck bombing in Mogadishu left more than 380 people dead. (NYT)

Apartment Fire In China Kills 19

A blaze roared through an apartment building in Beijing, killing at least 19 people, many of whom were apparently migrant workers from the Chinese countryside, officials and local residents said on Sunday. The fire started Saturday evening in a two-story structure about 11 miles south of the Chinese capital’s prosperous downtown. Firefighters spent three hours battling the fire, officials said in a statement. Eight people were injured, and a suspect was being detained, the statement said. (NYT)