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Retired General Linked to Dirty War, Drug Traffickers Gunned Down in Mexico City

by Carlos Navarro

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Retired Brig. Gen. Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro—who played a key role in the government's dirty war against leftists in the 1970s and 1980s as well as in the drug-trafficking operations of the Juárez cartel—was gunned down in Mexico City as he exited his automobile. Acosta Chaparro, who worked as a special investigator for the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA) at the time of his death, survived an earlier attempt on his life in 2010. Part of his role at SEDENA was to investigate drug-trafficking operations and "subversive groups," activities that might have played a role in his murder.

But at least one observer points out that the murder was not conducted in the manner commonly employed by drug cartels to execute their enemies. "Acosta Chaparro was hunted down and executed in a manner much different from that employed by drug-trafficking groups," columnist Jorge Fernández Menéndez wrote in the Mexico City daily newspaper *Excelsior*. "There were no trucks, no high-caliber weapons, not even a machine gun. A young man approached the general at an auto-repair shop, shot him in the thorax and the head, and fled on his motorcycle."

Acosta Chaparro had long been a controversial and infamous figure who had led the White Brigade, a paramilitary group whose mission was to eradicate guerrilla groups in Mexico. In 2002, a military court took the unprecedented action of ordering Acosta Chaparro, who was still on active duty at the time, to stand trial along with Gen. Francisco Quirós Hermosillo and retired Major Francisco Javier Barquín Alonso in connection with the disappearance of 143 suspected government opponents during the 1970s and 1980s ([SourceMex, Oct. 16, 2002](#)). Acosta Chaparro and the two other Army officers were eventually released after a court found insufficient evidence to charge them.

Another infamous collaborator with Acosta Chaparro in the White Brigade was Miguel Nazar Haro, who led the now-defunct Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS). The DFS coordinated the crackdowns in the 1960s and 1970s, including the infamous Tlatelolco massacre and the Jueves de Corpus killings ([SourceMex, Oct. 8, 2003](#)). Nazar Haro died earlier this year.

Mario Acosta Chaparro protected Juárez cartel

Acosta Chaparro was also linked the drug trade, and specifically the Juárez cartel, led by the late Amado Carrillo Flores. Acosta Chaparro and other military officials, including Gen. Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo and Gen. Adrián Carrera Fuentes, provided protection for Carrillo Flores, also known as the Señor de los Cielos because of his extensive use of Boeing 727 aircraft to transport large shipments of cocaine from Colombia to distribution points in northern Mexico. Gutiérrez Rebollo, who was in charge of the government's drug-enforcement agency, was arrested on charges of accepting bribes to protect Carrillo Flores ([SourceMex, Feb. 26, 1997](#)).

In 2000, a federal court also charged Acosta Chaparro with links to the Juárez cartel and sentenced him to 16 years in prison. In 2007, a federal tribunal threw out the charges and ordered his release.

For all the protection that Acosta Chaparro and Gutiérrez Rebollo gave to Carrillo Flores, the Juárez cartel capo was unable to avoid assassination. Carrillo Flores was murdered while undergoing plastic surgery ([SourceMex, July 16, 1997](#)).

Upon his release from prison in 2007, Acosta Chaparro was enlisted into the government's drug-interdiction efforts. Part of his mission involved "clandestine efforts" on behalf of President Felipe Calderón and Defense Secretary Gen. Guillermo Galván. "Acosta Chaparro performed some secret tasks, such as approaching certain criminal organizations," Ricardo Ravelo, a reporter for the weekly news magazine *Proceso*, said in a radio interview. One drug trafficker who Acosta Chaparro is said to have approached was Sinaloa cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán.

In May 2010, the retired general was shot in the abdomen at a supermarket, just days after he had begun an investigation into the kidnapping of former legislator and presidential candidate Diego Fernández de Cevallos ([SourceMex, May 26, 2010](#), and [Jan. 5, 2011](#)). Acosta Chaparro, who survived the attack, dismissed the attempt on his life as the work of mugger.

The second attempt on Acosta Chaparro's life succeeded, and authorities have been unable to identify a perpetrator or group to which he might have been associated. "Practically all his life, Acosta Chaparro was at the service of a system, whether led by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) or the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), that required his sordid skills," Jorge Carrasco Araizaga wrote in *Agencia de Noticias Proceso* (*apro*). "He owed many people, and perhaps one of his debts was collected."

Carrasco noted that Acosta Chaparro's death was a major loss for the administration. "The government of Felipe Calderón has lost its favorite intermediary with the drug cartels," said the *apro* reporter.

Others pointed to the political implications of Acosta Chaparro's murder. "Even though we're talking about a retired general, the assassination of Acosta Chaparro was clearly a signal to the Mexican military and to the inner circle at SEDENA," columnist Ricardo Alemán wrote in *Excelsior*. "This is the institution that has carried the greatest load in the fight against organized crime and the drug trade."

Alemán said political candidates should also take note of the murder. "This is a message that should worry the entire political spectrum, from the parties and the candidates to the three levels of government," said the columnist. "This message is magnified by the campaigns and the upcoming elections."

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