4-10-2013

Authorities Thwart Assassination Attempt against Federal Senator, Deputy from Zacatecas

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Political espionage has been a sensitive and controversial topic in Mexico, particularly in cases where a government agency or elected official has secretly recorded private telephone conversations. The espionage becomes a political problem if conducted for personal political gain, as was the case with Quintana Roo gubernatorial candidate Greg Sánchez, who was forced to drop out of the race after his transgression was discovered (SourceMex, June 2, 2010).

Other cases have raised tensions because of allegations of political espionage, including charges that outgoing President Ernesto Zedillo's administration, via the Centro de Investigación en Seguridad Nacional (CISEN), secretly recorded a conversation between newly elected President Vicente Fox and his wife Martha Sahagún in 2000 (SourceMex, Oct. 25, 2000).

But CISEN's intervention has, in some instances, helped bring political transgressions to light, as was the case with the wiretaps on the telephone conversations between former Puebla Gov. Mario Marín and entrepreneur Kamel Nacif, as they plotted to illegally kidnap and imprison journalist Lydia Cacho (SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2006).

Intelligence agency discovers plot
CISEN's intervention again proved useful in March 2013, after the agency obtained information about an assassination plot against two prominent center-left politicians from Zacatecas, Deputy Ricardo Monreal Ávila of the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) and his brother Sen. David Monreal Ávila of the Partido del Trabajo (PT).

Acting on the information from CISEN, authorities arrested four individuals at a Mexico City hotel and charged them with the plot to kill the Monreal brothers. The arrest was carried out by members of a police force under the command of the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR).

Assistant attorney general Mariana Benítez Tiburcio said the detainees admitted their plans to police during interrogation. "They said they were in Mexico City to kill the legislators," Benítez told reporters.

Benítez did not offer many specifics during the press statement but pointed out that the arrest was carried out peacefully. "Early today the raid was successfully carried out without violence, and apart from the individuals arrested ... guns and communication equipment with which they planned to carry out the assassinations were seized," the PGR official said.

Benítez said authorities immediately informed the Monreal brothers of the plot, with Interior Secretary Sergio Osorio Chong personally contacting Ricardo, who is the MC coordinator in the lower house and a close ally of center-left leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

"As soon as we obtained the information, we decided to immediately alert the legislators about the plot," said Benítez. "At that time, we offered them the full protection of the federal government."
Some political observers said the assassination might have been successful had it not been for the intelligence gathered by CISEN. "Without this information, we would have had a bloody week marked by the murders of two brothers, one a federal senator and another a federal deputy," columnist Eduardo Caccia wrote in the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma.

"The plot was uncovered during CISEN’s rigorous daily operations, which involve spying on many powerful entities in Mexico. In this case it was in the Senate," said syndicated columnist Ricardo Alemán.

More details surfaced in subsequent days, including information that the plotters were allegedly members of the Zetas drug cartel, but the assassination was not deemed to be an operation organized by cartel leaders.

Organized crime has occasionally targeted high-profile politicians for murder, but, more often than not, the drug cartels leave prominent elected officials alone. One notable exception was Rodolfo Torre Cantú, a candidate for governor in Tamaulipas, who was ambushed and murdered in 2010 by the Zetas drug organization (SourceMex, June 30, 2010).

**Revenge possible motive**

Investigators said the would-be killers might have been hired by Zacatecas businessman Arturo Guardado Méndez, who appeared to have a personal vendetta against the Monreal brothers.

Guardado, whose business involves the wholesale production and marketing of dried chile peppers, was arrested at a hotel near the wholesale market (Central de Abastos) in Mexico City. Evidence shows that Guardado was in constant communication with the four men who were arrested.

Sources say Guardado’s motive for wanting Ricardo and David Monreal dead appears to be revenge for their failure to use their resources and connections to try to find his brother, Juan Carlos Guardado, who disappeared in February 2011. Juan Carlos Guardado was a close ally of David Monreal and even replaced him as mayor of the city of Fresnillo when David left the post to run for governor in 2010.

The last time anyone heard from Juan Carlos Guardado was a text message that said he was somewhere in Durango state, probably in a territory under dispute between the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas.

"The Monreal brothers interceded to try to push authorities to expedite the investigation into the disappearance but were not successful in finding him," said Reforma.

Sometime in 2012, the Monreal brothers dropped their efforts to find Juan Carlos Guardado, which apparently angered the family. "That really bothered them and presumably would be one of the reasons why Arturo Guardado was seeking revenge," added Reforma.

Ricardo Monreal shot down another theory that surfaced in the immediate aftermath of the attempt—that some elements of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) had plotted the murders because he led the campaign to prove that candidate Enrique Peña Nieto engaged in a massive campaign to bribe would-be voters by giving them bank and store cards (SourceMex, Sept. 5, 2012). Monreal, a former senator, has been a thorn on the side of the past three administrations, including the governments of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN).
"You become vulnerable when you are an opposition leader in Mexico," Monreal, who came from the ranks of the PRI, said in an interview with Agencia de Noticias Proceso (apro). But he said his campaign against the PRI was not enough reason for anyone to want to kill him and his brother David. Rather, he credited the Peña Nieto government for uncovering and acting immediately to thwart the plot.

Still, Monreal raised concerns that the assassination attempt might be a sign that political leaders are now fair game and that the situation in Mexico could mirror that of Colombia in the 1980s. Social unrest, he said, could be the catalyst for killing elected officials. "Something serious is about to happen," the MC leader told apro.

-- End --