

10-5-2016

Ambush of Military Convoy in Sinaloa Could Signal New Strategy for Drug Cartels

Carlos Navarro

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

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Ambush of Military Convoy in Sinaloa Could Signal New Strategy for Drug Cartels." (2016).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6296>

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.

Ambush of Military Convoy in Sinaloa Could Signal New Strategy for Drug Cartels

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2016-10-05

In the early hours of Sept. 30, members of a criminal organization launched a direct attack on a group of soldiers in the coastal city of Culiacán, in Sinaloa state, who were transporting a suspect to the hospital for treatment. The ambush killed five soldiers and injured nearly a dozen others.

According to the defense ministry (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, SEDENA), the confrontation with the military actually started in the nearby community of Badiraguato, where a suspect was wounded in an exchange of gunfire with the military. Unable to treat him at the site, the soldiers called upon a civilian ambulance to transport him to a hospital in Culiacán. The soldiers traveled with the ambulance as escorts.

"As the convoy was entering the city limits, a group of delinquents was awaiting to ambush the convoy, launching an attack with high-caliber weapons," SEDENA said.

Some analysts said the confrontation might represent a change of tactics on the part of drug-trafficking organizations, which have generally tended to avoid direct attacks on the Army or the Marines. One exception was the 2015 rocket attack on an Army helicopter in Jalisco state that killed 10 people.

"The surprise and the intensity of the attack and the numerical disadvantage [on the part of the soldiers] were a determining factor," columnist Joaquín López-Dóriga wrote in the daily newspaper Milenio. "In less than 40 minutes, five soldiers were killed and 10 others were wounded. Only two others escaped injury. A civilian paramedic was also hurt."

'A declaration of war'

"The ambush was a declaration of war against the Mexican state," columnist Raymundo Riva Palacio wrote in the daily business newspaper El Financiero. "What this group of criminals accomplished is to breach the last frontier of national security, the armed forces."

He added: "Why do I call this a declaration of war? The armed forces, which represent the military power of a country, have the obligation under the Constitution to defend the integrity, independence and sovereignty of the nation as well as to guarantee internal security."

SEDENA and the Secretaría de Marina (SEMAR) immediately placed the blame for

the attacks on Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar and Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar, sons of drug kingpin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, who was rearrested in January ([SourceMex, Jan. 20, 2016](#)) after a daring escape from a maximum-security facility in July 2015 ([SourceMex, July 15, 2015](#)). Guzmán Loera is fighting extradition to the US ([SourceMex, June 22, 2016](#)).

"The statement was based on the presumption that the injured cartel member was a relative of El Chapo Guzmán," columnist Jorge Fernández Menéndez wrote in the daily newspaper Excélsior.

"And of course, the sons of Guzmán Loera are capable, because of their training and temperament, of engaging in all sorts of criminal activities."

Still, analysts said something in the theory does not add up, pointing to the fact that the Guzmán Salazar brothers have not been known for carrying out these types of brutal attacks.

"My first question is whether the sons of El Chapo are capable of taking an action of this magnitude," said Fernández Menéndez. He pointed to an incident in August where a group of armed men kidnapped patrons at an exclusive restaurant in Puerto Vallarta. The kidnapping victims included the Guzmán Salazar brothers. "It would be inconceivable that El Chapo or his lieutenants, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada or Dámaso López, would allow themselves to be kidnapped in this manner and without a large contingent to protect them."

After several days, the Guzmán Salazar brothers were released unharmed. The rival *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG), which is fighting with the Sinaloa cartel for control of drug routes in western Mexico, is thought to have carried out the abduction.

A week after the Culiacán attack, the Guzmán Salazar brothers, speaking through their attorney, José Refugio Rodríguez, denied responsibility. "They would like to see an objective and impartial investigation to clarify the facts of the event, and they lament the death of the soldiers in carrying out their duties," Rodríguez said in a radio interview on Noticias MVS.

In a subsequent interview with the weekly newsmagazine *Proceso*, Rodríguez said the Guzmán Salazar brothers had spoken out because, like anyone else, they do not like to be persecuted by the government for crimes they did not commit. "Hopefully, there won't be a witch hunt in which the military abuses its power, extracting vengeance for their fallen companions," said Rodríguez, who noted that he is not in direct communication with the brothers, and that the information was relayed to him via third parties.

"I believe the sons because they are not known for these types of actions," Rodríguez said.

Power struggle

If the Sinaloa cartel, under the leadership of El Chapo's sons, did not order the ambush, then who did? One theory is that another faction of the Sinaloa cartel, led by Alfredo Beltrán Guzmán, known as "El Mochomito," ordered the attack. Beltrán Guzmán is a nephew of El Chapo and the son of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, another important leader of the cartel.

In June of this year, Beltrán Guzmán openly declared war on his uncle, choosing El Chapo's hometown of La Tuna to make the announcement. In a show of strength, he ordered El Chapo's mother to leave the community. The attack on the military might have been an attempt by El Mochomito to show he is winning the power struggle for control of the Sinaloa cartel, some analysts have speculated.

"Perhaps we are now witnessing the true fall of El Chapo Guzmán, not caused by [his arrest] by the government, but by actions by members of his own family," said Anabel Hernández, a journalist and author who has written extensively about the drug trade in Mexico.

Other analysts believe the CJNG might have been behind the attack. The ruthless organization, which has gained control of Jalisco and other western states, is said to be engaged in a power struggle with the Sinaloa cartel to gain control over Sinaloa.

Fernández Menéndez said the attack, involving a large number of individuals armed with high-caliber weapons and a spirit of reckless abandon, was reminiscent of the CJNG's previous operations. "For the CJNG, politics is conducted through violence and intimidation," he said.

-- End --