

Source:

Oct 2010
STRATFOR
report

THE FALCON LAKE MURDER AND MEXICO'S DRUG WARS

By (b)(7)(C)

STRATFOR published an analysis last Wednesday noting that a reliable source in Mexico informed us that the Sept. 30 shooting death of U.S. citizen David Hartley on Falcon Lake -- which straddles the U.S.-Mexico border -- was a mistake committed by a low-level member of the Los Zetas drug trafficking organization. The source also informed us that those responsible for Hartley's death are believed to have disposed of his body and that the Zeta hierarchy was conducting a damage-control operation to punish those responsible for the death and to distance the cartel from the murder. The source further reported that the murder of the lead Tamaulipas state investigator on the case, (b)(7)(C) -- whose head was delivered in a suitcase to the Mexican military's Eight Zone headquarters in Reynosa on Oct. 12 -- was a specific message from Los Zetas to Mexican authorities to back off from the investigation.

Since publishing the report, we have been deluged by interview requests regarding the case. Numerous media outlets have interviewed (b)(7)(C) and myself regarding the Falcon Lake case. During the course of talking with reporters and customers, it became obvious to us that a solid understanding of the context within which Hartley's killing occurred was lacking in media discussions of the case. Viewing the murder as part of the bigger picture of what is occurring in Mexico makes it far easier to understand not only why David Hartley was killed, but why his body will likely never be found -- and why his killers probably will not be held accountable for their actions, at least in the context of the judicial system.

The Changing Mexican Cartel Landscape

In STRATFOR's annual Mexican cartel report published in December 2009, we noted the growing fracture between the Gulf cartel and its former enforcement arm, Los Zetas, which had become an independent drug trafficking organization. We noted that Los Zetas were becoming increasingly aggressive and that the Gulf cartel was struggling to fend off these advances. In fact, it looked as if Los Zetas were about to swallow up the Gulf cartel.

(click here to enlarge image)

What had been a tense standoff between the two cartels erupted into open warfare in January when Zeta leader (b)(7)(C) died in an altercation between (b)(7)(C) and a group of men reporting to Gulf cartel No. 2 leader (b)(7)(C). After learning of (b)(7)(C) death, Los Zetas No. 2 Miguel (b)(7)(C) gave (b)(7)(C) an ultimatum to hand over those responsible for (b)(7)(C) death by Jan. 25. When the deadline passed without his demand being met, (b)(7)(C) ordered the kidnapping of 16 known Gulf cartel members in the Ciudad Miguel Aleman area as retaliation. The war was on.

Fearing the might of Los Zetas, the Gulf cartel reached out to their longtime enemies, the Sinaloa federation, and asked for their assistance in dealing with Los Zetas. The leader of the Sinaloa federation, (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) has no love for Los Zetas, who as the former military arm of the Gulf cartel engaged in many brutal battles with (b)(7)(C) forces. Together with another enemy of Los Zetas, La Familia (b)(7)(C) (LFM), (b)(7)(C) joined forces with the Gulf cartel to form an organization known as the New Federation. The stated goals of the New Federation were to destroy Los Zetas, along with the remnants of the (b)(7)(C) (VCF) organization, aka the Juarez cartel. A move by the New Federation to destroy the remnants of the (b)(7)(C) Organization (aka the Tijuana cartel), now very weak, would allow the organization to dominate Mexican drug smuggling routes into the United States. If this New Federation consolidation were to occur (it has not happened yet), it would also likely result in a dramatic decrease in violence in the long term. But the VCF and Los Zetas have not yet been vanquished. This means that while the New Federation clearly has been able to gain the upper hand over the past several months, both Los Zetas and the VCF continue a desperate fight for survival and turf that in the short term means the level of violence will remain high.

The emergence of the New Federation was accompanied by the collapse of the (b)(7)(C) Organization, a group formerly allied with the Sinaloa federation that broke away from Sinaloa and allied with Los Zetas and the VCF to fight against (b)(7)(C) and his allies. As these two developments played out over the first quarter of 2010, we found them to be so significant that we felt compelled to publish an update to STRATFOR's annual cartel report in May to document the changes.

Los Zetas: Wounded, but Still Dangerous

(click here to enlarge image)

Since January, the Zetas have suffered significant organizational and territorial losses. By May 2010, Los Zetas reportedly had lost control of the strategic (and very lucrative) border crossing of Reynosa, Tamaulipas state, to the New Federation and had been forced to retreat north toward Nuevo Laredo and west toward the transportation hub of Monterrey, the capital of Nuevo Leon state and Mexico's third-largest city.

Significant incidents involving the Los Zetas organization since January 2010 include the following:

- Jan. 18: (b)(7)(C) killed by Gulf cartel, leading to rupture in Gulf/Zeta relationship.
- March 16: (b)(7)(C) Zeta leader of the Tabasco plaza, or port of entry for contraband, arrested.
- March 29: (b)(7)(C) Zeta leader in Quintana Roo state, arrested.
- March 30: (b)(7)(C) nephew of Zeta leader (b)(7)(C) and reportedly in line to be the new Tabasco plaza leader, arrested in Tabasco.
- April: Twenty-five law enforcement officials in Nuevo Leon killed by the New Federation for allegedly cooperating with Los Zetas.
- May 12: Los Zetas ranch/training facility near Higuera, Nuevo Leon state, seized along with huge weapons cache.
- May 30: (b)(7)(C) accountant, arrested in Monterrey.
- June 9: (b)(7)(C) Monterrey Zeta leader, arrested.
- June 24: (b)(7)(C) Puebla state Zeta leader, arrested.
- July 7: (b)(7)(C) Monterrey Zeta leader, arrested.
- Aug. 14: (b)(7)(C) Monterrey Zeta leader, killed by military.
- Aug. 24: Discovery of 72 dead migrants killed by Los Zetas near San Fernando, Tamaulipas.
- Aug. 29: (b)(7)(C) Zeta leader in Monterrey, arrested.
- Sept. 3: Twenty-seven Los Zetas die in firefight with military in Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas.
- Sept. 26: (b)(7)(C) Zeta leader in Quintana Roo state hand-picked by (b)(7)(C) in June, arrested.
- Sept. 30: Gunmen linked to Los Zetas shoot and kill American David Hartley.
- Oct. 6: (b)(7)(C) local Zeta leader in San Nicolas de las Garza, Nuevo Leon (Monterrey metro area), arrested.

Oct. 9: (b)(7)(C) Zeta leader in Tabasco, arrested.

Not Your Father's Zetas

All of these recent losses by Los Zetas must be considered part of a longer timeline. As early as 2007, STRATFOR began to discuss the toll that the cartel wars were taking on the enforcement arms of the various cartel groups, such as Los Zetas. The life of a cartel enforcer is often quite brutal and short: Enforcers constantly are in danger of being killed or arrested. In 2007, we noted how Los Zetas were looking to bring in fresh muscle to bolster their ranks, to include other former members of the Mexican military and police, former Guatemalan special operations forces (known as Kaibiles), and even members of street gangs like (b)(7)(C) aka MS-13. These young street gang recruits frequently are referred to as "Zetitas" or little Zetas.

Such replacements come with a price, however. The original Los Zetas were defectors from Mexico's Special Forces Airmobile Group (known by the Spanish acronym GAFE), and as such were very well-trained and well-disciplined. As evidenced from the paramilitary training camps uncovered in Mexico and Guatemala, and the fact that Los Zetas reportedly have hired military instructors from a variety of countries (including Americans, Israelis, and some Europeans), the organization has attempted to train their new recruits. But the new generations of Zetas and Zetitas are simply not as well-trained or well-disciplined as the original Zetas. This basic level of training for new recruits has also suffered in recent months as the group has been under tremendous pressure to replace members who have been killed while some of its training facilities have been seized by the authorities. This means the organization has been compelled to use enforcers with very little training who are far less tactically adept than their Zeta masters. They are little more than thugs with guns.

And this brings us back to the Hartley case. Intelligence reports we received indicate that a group of poorly trained Zeta enforcers working to keep the Falcon Lake smuggling corridor safe from encroachment by the Gulf cartel and their New Federation partners killed David Hartley. When viewed within the analytical framework of what has happened to the Zetas over the past year, the intelligence fit. It makes sense to us that the Zetas would be employing poorly trained individuals for such duties, that those performing those duties would be jumpy and that these gunmen likely did kill Hartley without orders from the Zeta hierarchy.

Although some media outlets have portrayed the murder of an American citizen by a Mexican cartel organization as an unusual event, it is really quite common. In fact, 79 American citizens officially were reported murdered in Mexico in 2009, according to U.S. State Department figures, and the State Department notes that there were probably other cases that went unreported. For 2010, the State Department reports 48 American citizens have been murdered in Mexico through June 10. Our research has uncovered at least another six reported deaths since June 10 (including David Hartley), so unofficially the number of American citizens reported murdered in Mexico is approximately 54 for the year to date. While many of the Americans murdered in Mexico are undoubtedly involved in some way with the drug trade, others have no apparent link.

Two of the American citizens murdered in Mexico in 2010 were (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) an employee of the U.S. consulate in Juarez, and her husband, (b)(7)(C) a detention officer at the El Paso County Jail. Still, with more than 9,100 murders from cartel violence to date this year in Mexico, the 54 American murder victims comprise only a small percentage of the overall body count. Because of this, some of our contacts in the Mexican government are having a hard time understanding why the Hartley murder has elicited such an intense media reaction in the United States, which in turn resulted in diplomatic pressure on Mexican authorities from the U.S. government. At the same time Mexico is being pressured by the U.S. government about the death of one American citizen, it is also are trying to come to grips with the fact that the lead Mexican investigator in the case was kidnapped and beheaded. This turn of events provides a fairly good illustration of the security environment in Mexico today.

It must also be recognized that any attempt to quantify the death toll in the Mexican cartel wars is quickly complicated by the fact that the cartels have gotten very good at disposing of bodies. Many victims simply disappear, and their murders are never confirmed. For example, in December 2008, American anti-kidnapping consultant (b)(7)(C) disappeared from a meeting at a restaurant in Saltillo, Coahuila state. (b)(7)(C) reportedly was murdered, but no trace of his body was ever found. In addition to dumping bodies in mass graves, using wood chippers or feeding them to vultures, Mexican cartels also have developed innovative ways to dispose of their victims' corpses (b)(7)(C) a Tijuana cartel enforcer arrested in January 2009, admitted to Mexican authorities that he was responsible for dissolving at least 300 bodies in sodium hydroxide, a process known as making "guiso," Spanish for "stew." The cartels can either

dispose of a body or mutilate it and leave it to be found, depending on the specific message they wish to send.

Given the well-honed ability of the cartels to dispose of bodies and the fact that Los Zetas reportedly went into damage-control mode following David Hartley's shooting, it was not at all surprising to receive a report indicating that the gunmen who killed Hartley reportedly disposed of the body to destroy any potential evidence. We also received reports that Los Zetas No. 2 man, (b)(7)(C) was angry about the murder of Hartley by poorly disciplined Zeta gunmen acting without permission, and is very unhappy with the attention the case has focused on his organization and their smuggling route through Falcon Lake.

While under heavy pressure from the New Federation and the Mexican government, which Los Zetas claim is helping the New Federation against them, the last thing Los Zetas needed was heavy pressure from the U.S. government. This might result in police operations to capture Zeta members and interference with the group's smuggling activities.

In addition to the loss of personnel on the battlefield, Los Zetas also have lost control of valuable smuggling corridors like Reynosa. This means that any remaining corridors they control are even more important to the group and its ability to make money, which is needed to buy guns and hire and train new gunmen to protect the group against outside pressure by the New Federation and the Mexican government. Intensive law enforcement operations looking for Hartley's body effectively shut down the Falcon Lake corridor. Due to the losses suffered by the organization from this chain of events, it is not surprising that we have received reports that (b)(7)(C) wants to execute the gunmen who killed Hartley. This means that the shooters in all likelihood never will be found by authorities, much less arrested or brought before a court of law.

As organizations such as the VCF and Los Zetas become increasingly desperate in the face of attacks against them by their New Federation enemies and the Mexican government, they will likely become even more paranoid -- and more dangerous to those not directly involved in the Mexican cartel wars. As this occurs, there will almost certainly be more cases of innocents caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

FW Brownsville murders and shooting at Falcon Lake-two separate incidents of crossover violence.txt

(b)(7)(C)



W Brownsville murders and shooting at Falcon Lake-two separate incidents of crossover violence

(b)(7)(C)

In a separate incident:

At approximately 2:00 p.m., on 9/30/10, David Michael Hartley and his wife, (b)(7)(C) were sightseeing in their jet skis near Guerrero Viejo on Falcon Lake. They observed three boats at a distance with armed gunmen. As they departed the area, the gunmen started shooting at them. Michael was shot in the head. (b)(7)(C)

(b)(7)(C)

(b)(7)(C) Attempts are being made by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement to recover David's body. The Zapata County Sherriff's Department continues to investigate incident. SA (b)(7)(C),(b)(7)(F) RA/ (b)(7)(C),(b)(7)(F)

(b)(7)(C)

Feb 17: United Cartels Offer to Exterminate Zetas in Exchange for Withdrawal of Army

This is a message that was sent via email to various media outlets in Mexico. The United Cartels has made headlines before, by asking president Felipe Calderon to withdraw army troops in exchange for the termination of the Zeta organization. "The Gulf cártel (CDG) and Cáteles Unidos (C.U.) would like to distance themselves from the recent series of attacks against public institutions, the authorities, and the civilian population which have been occurring in the country. The federal government knows the perpetrators of all these crimes are the criminal group Los Zetas. They (the Z) try to manipulate public opinion in which they deny their direct participation. So there is no further confusion, here is a list of names of people who are responsible for some of these acts, which plague both societies in Mexico and the U.S. (b)(7)(C) detained in Poza Rica, Veracruz. He is responsible for the abduction of a private investigator

from the U.S. named (b)(7)(C). This occurred in Coahuila. -The attack on the U.S. Embassy in Monterrey, should be attributed to (b)(7)(C), who is also responsible for the execution of general (b)(7)(C). In San Fernando, Tamaulipas: The 72 undocumented migrants from Central and South America who were massacred on the orders of (b)(7)(C), murdered the tourist David Hartley on Falcon Lake. They also killed the lead investigator of the PME group in (b)(7)(C) who was decapitated and his head was sent in a briefcase to a military base in Mexico. Four of bodyguards and one secretary, along with the director of public security of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, General (b)(7)(C) were killed by a group of sicarios who were acting on the orders of (b)(7)(C). (b)(7)(C) was also the one who ordered the murder of the director of the Tactical Co-ordinations of Public Security in Nuevo León (C-5), (b)(7)(C). Los Zetas are responsible for the death of 18 innocent people in Padilla, Tamaulipas. This wave of violence they are implementing has caused one of their comandos to fire indiscriminately of the civilian population (the Z recently hung banners a few days ago claiming the CDG were responsible for this act). -The attack on the ICE agents in San Luis Potosí, was perpetrated by (b)(7)(C). It should be clear: the Federal Government should act on their conscience and sense of morals to take on these murderers who leave their bloodstained footprints on our country, and on our society." Source: Borderland Beat Blog.

Feb 22: Death of El Condor 2

A gunman who was killed in a confrontation with Federal Police officers in Ciudad Juarez last Tuesday turned out to be a former state investigative police (AEI) commander linked to at least 96 narco-executions. (b)(7)(C) joined the Chihuahua State Attorney General's office as an investigator in 2000 and resigned in March 2009, when he held a position of "comandante" with the AEI. (b)(7)(C) for whom the federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) had offered a 5 million peso reward, was alleged to have held a high position in the "Carrillo Fuentes" criminal organization (also known as the Juarez cartel) and its enforcement arm, "La Linea". The day of the shooting, the state prosecutor's office announced that the dead gunman's name was (b)(7)(C) however, relatives of the deceased the body as that of the former commander. Source: Borderland Beat Blog.