

## **A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE ZETAS**

Two organizations clearly define criminal activity in Coahuila: the Gulf Cartel, with its constant presence in the state, and the Zetas, who have recently managed to take over control. In the following overview of these organizations' general background, the close relationship between them is clearly evident.

### **Background: the Gulf Cartel**

The Gulf Cartel began its life as a whiskey-smuggling organization in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Led by Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, it took advantage of Prohibition in the United States, trafficking the product to Texas in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> By mid-1980s, Nepomuceno Guerra gradually started to hand over the reins of the organization to Juan García Ábrego, one of his nephews. The main change within the Gulf Cartel under García Ábrego's leadership was its transition towards the business of large-scale drug dealing, responding to the demand of the international drug market.<sup>6</sup> The geographical location of Tamaulipas gave García Ábrego a particular advantage:

It must be the most coveted state for Mexican drug dealers (given their main role as drug carriers to the United States): it has a long border with the United States; it has a long coastline and, compared to other states with borders and coastlines, such as Baja California and Sonora, its border cities (Nuevo Laredo, Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, Río Bravo, and Matamoros) are the nearest destinations.<sup>7</sup>

The Gulf Cartel's growth was so spectacular in the early-1990s that many believed García Ábrego had struck a special deal with the Mexican authorities. "Curiously, his leadership lasted only slightly longer than Carlos Salinas de Gortari's six-year presidency: he was arrested only 13 months after Salinas left office, on January 14, 1996."<sup>8</sup> The Mexican government then took advantage of García Ábrego's US nationality to order the drug lord's immediate extradition. This move prevented García Ábrego from using the corruption within the Mexican prison system to his advantage in order to continue ruling the Gulf Cartel from behind bars, the *modus operandi* of one of his successors some years later.

Juan García Ábrego's capture triggered an internal struggle for control over the Gulf Cartel, because there was no blood relative to take over. Juan's brother, Humberto García Ábrego, had been in prison since 1994.<sup>9</sup> As a result, two factions fought over the control of the Gulf Cartel: Salvador Gómez Herrera, alias "Chava Gómez," and Osiel Cárdenas Guillén were pitted against Óscar Malherbe de León and Hugo Baldomero Medina Garza, alias "El Rey de los Tráileres" (the Trucking King).<sup>10</sup>

The leadership role initially fell to Malherbe because, as the main contact between the Cali and Gulf Cartels, he managed to maintain a continued flow of drug supplies after García Ábrego's extradition. However, he was only in control for a few months, due to his arrest in May 1997. The rival faction took advantage of this situation and seized control of the organization. Salvador Gómez Herrera orchestrated an attack against Baldomero Medina almost immediately, in May.<sup>11</sup> Medina saved his own life, but decided to retire temporarily from criminal activities.<sup>12</sup> The Gulf Cartel was left under the control of Salvador Gómez Herrera and Osiel Cárdenas Guillén.

According to Guillermo Valdés Castellanos, Gómez Herrera focused on eliminating rivals and spending time pursuing recreational activities,

delegating operational and commercial matters to Cárdenas Guillén. In this sense, Gómez Herrera appeared to consider Cárdenas Guillén more as a subordinate than a partner.<sup>13</sup> This dual, albeit asymmetrical configuration would also prove short-lived. The internal power struggle following García Ábrego's arrest had already lasted more than two years, with two transitory leaderships and several attempts to resolve the succession issue.

Within a few months, Cárdenas Guillén delivered the final blow and eliminated Salvador Gómez in 1998. With the support of Arturo Guzmán Decena—his bodyguard, an elite ex-soldier whom he had met through Gilberto García Nena, at that time a regional boss (“jefe de plaza”) for the Gulf Cartel in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas—<sup>14</sup> Osiel Cárdenas Guillén finally put an end to the succession conflict within the organization. This episode is so important it even had symbolic effects: on the one hand Osiel Cárdenas' nickname changed from “El Chaparrito” (Shorty) to “El Mata Amigos” (Friend-Killer),<sup>15</sup> and on the other, it marked the arrival of the first Zeta onto the criminal scene.

### **Osiel Cárdenas Guillén and the formation of the Zetas**

Varying accounts exist to explain how the Zeta organization was established. It is widely understood, however, that Cárdenas Guillén requested Guzmán Decena to hire the most highly-trained bodyguards. Guzmán Decena then set out to convince his former companions from elite Army units to work for the new leader of the Gulf Cartel. Guzmán Decena focused on persuading his former companions from the Airborne Special Forces (Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales, GAFE) , an elite unit of the Mexican army, with very select members trained in counterinsurgency at the Escuela de las Américas, both in tactics and in the use of specialized weapons.<sup>16</sup> That select group was

part of the government response to the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) in 1994. GAFE members were trained as small, mobile, decentralized, quick-response units.<sup>17</sup> After the Mexican state managed to rapidly control the Zapatista's guerrilla movement,<sup>18</sup> the government took advantage of its specialized training for fighting against organized crime, thus moving them to Tamaulipas.

According to a declassified document of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA),<sup>19</sup> in the second half of 1998 Guzmán Decena held several meetings with GAFE members assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, assigned to Tancol, Tamaulipas. For instance, American authorities recorded meetings between Guzmán Decena and active soldiers in bars in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas, in December 1998. On the basis of this documentary evidence, we can date the Zetas' formation to December 1998.

After his arrest, Jesús Enrique Rejón Aguilar, alias "El Mamito" or Z-7, declared that there "were initially seven Zetas, and then seven more came along, adding up to fourteen, and we were the oldest."<sup>20</sup> It is very hard to determine the original number of deserters, but among them were Alejandro Lucio Morales Betancourt, Rogelio González Pizaña, Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, Mateo Díaz López, Jesús Enrique Rejón Aguilar, Óscar Guerrero Silva, Omar Lorméndez Pitalúa, and Efraín Teodoro Torres.<sup>21</sup> According to Logan,<sup>22</sup> in the first few years Guzmán Decena convinced 31 elite soldiers to abandon the army.

The group did not receive a specific name, but in time they became known as the Zetas, as they identified themselves with successive codes starting with the letter Z, where Guzmán Decena was Z-1, Lucio Morales Z-2,<sup>23</sup> Heriberto Lazcano Z-3, and so on. It is most widely believed that they used their radio frequencies to identify each other. Initially, the Zetas were

only in charge of eliminating Cárdenas Guillén's competitors, according to Morales Betancourt's statement given to the Federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) when he was a protected witness following his arrest.<sup>24</sup>

There were two transcendental moments in the Zetas' early years. Firstly, when Guzmán Decena was shot dead by Mexican soldiers at a Matamoros restaurant on November 22, 2002. The successor was not Z-2,<sup>25</sup> but Heriberto Lazcano, alias Z-3 or "El Verdugo" (the Executioner). It remains unclear whether the succession was a decision of the group of hitmen or imposed by Cárdenas Guillén, but some common traits are notable: Z-1 and Z-3 were not born or raised in northeastern part of the country but instead in central Mexican states (Puebla and Hidalgo, respectively); both were highly-trained soldiers, capable of large-scale violence carried out with great precision.<sup>26</sup>

The second moment relates to the leader of the Gulf Cartel and founder of the Zetas. The Army managed to capture Osiel Cárdenas Guillén in March 2003, in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. The National Defence Minister at the time, General Gerardo Clemente Ricardo Vega García, declared that Mexican soldiers managed to repel several attacks from Cárdenas Guillén's hitmen. He talked about three specific clashes during his capture and the rescue attempts by his subordinates.<sup>27</sup> As detailed below, this did not spell the end of Cárdenas Guillén's leadership of the Gulf Cartel, but it did loosen the chain of command and allowed the Zetas to expand.

### **The Zetas' growing independence from the Gulf Cartel**

Cárdenas Guillén's arrest by the Mexican authorities called for the division of labor to be reorganized within the organization. Therefore, although even

from prison he remained in control,<sup>28</sup> traditional members—under the command of Osiel’s brother, Ezequiel Cárdenas, alias “Tony Tormenta” (Storm Tony) and Eduardo Costilla, alias “El Coss”— kept the drug-dealing business for themselves, particularly exploiting the border regions around Matamoros and Reynosa, and keeping contact with Colombian cartels, ensuring that the Zetas continued making money from mining their territories for resources through extortion, kidnapping and drug dealing.

Lazcano leveraged his organization’s capacities and the partial absence of Cárdenas Guillén to expand the Zetas’ territorial presence. Here we should note the Zetas’ large comparative advantages within the Mexican crime scene: they skillfully spread out geographically, organizing themselves in cells and seizing positions as elite military commands. This territorial strategy also represented another innovation in the world of Mexican organized crime.

We should first note the fact that the Zetas took violence within Mexican organized crime to a new level. Their firepower, level of training, tactical knowledge, and the sheer brutality of their methods gave the Gulf Cartel a strong advantage. This clearly forced rival organizations to adapt or be crushed, thus *professionalizing* extreme violence and ruthlessness.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, they developed a model of criminal franchises. A Zeta cell would set up in a specific locale, eliminate possible competitors, co-opt local police corporations and then recruit local representatives who would remain in charge of the area (“la plaza”) and hand over a percentage of their income to the Zeta leadership and the Gulf Cartel.

As a third factor, the Zetas did not limit their activities to controlling drug-dealing. They also became involved local crime, racketeering in other criminal activities such as kidnapping and extortion; additionally, they took control of businesses in the formal sector, from horse racing, shopping malls

and possibly even government tenders.<sup>30</sup> In short, they had their fingers in every pie to extract resources.<sup>31</sup>

The Zetas therefore concentrated on the organization's territorial expansion and opening up new business opportunities—such as extorting stores, kidnapping, selling drugs on the street, stealing fuel, operating illegal activities in nightclubs, piracy, and clandestine alcohol sales—while commanders of the Gulf Cartel concentrated on strengthening their main source of income: crossborder drug-trafficking, particularly from Matamoros to Brownsville, and from Reynosa to McAllen.

This limited the interaction between both structures, and increased the Zetas' independence and operational capacity; they received direct incomes that did not depend on the commanders of the Gulf Cartel. Over time, this triggered a series of frictions between the Zetas and other units within the cartel.

They expanded down Mexico's Gulf coast, reaching Central America, but also operating in Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Hidalgo, and Chiapas.<sup>32</sup> The Zetas waged hard-fought battles against rival organizations in various territories, from Michoacán—for the control of Lázaro Cárdenas' port—to Guatemala, to access South American cocaine and migrant routes.<sup>33</sup> This process of expansion also involved the recruitment of new members, thus expanding the Zetas' main nucleus of operation.

The response by the authorities and other criminal groups reduced the number of Zeta leaders, either because they were murdered, captured, or even because they abandoned the organization.<sup>34</sup> For instance, by 2005 the DEA calculated a reduction of between 30 and 40 out of the 83 members estimated to form the organization's nucleus. It is worth clarifying that the recruitment process continued after 1998; the Zetas gradually brought into their ranks soldiers with less training, former policemen, and even criminals, whom they sent to training camps run by the organization. They also started

to recruit Kaibiles—elite soldiers from the Guatemalan army, trained in counterinsurgency activity and responsible for several human rights violations—to replenish their numbers. It is certain that the downsizing of the Guatemalan army by more than 50%, under the rule of the former president, Óscar Berger Perdomo (2004-2008),<sup>35</sup> facilitated their recruitment.

The Treviño Morales brothers rose to prominence in this context, particularly Miguel Ángel, alias Z-40, who from 2009 started to make many of the operative decisions within the organization, even though this group was still under the leadership of Heriberto Lazcano.<sup>36</sup> The role of the Treviño Morales siblings was important for two main reasons: firstly, because they rose up within the Zeta ranks despite having a different profile to the organization's founders—who had been elite soldiers. This reveals that arrests and murders started to weaken the original founders' nucleus. Secondly, it represents the organization's multinational dynamics, as the Treviño Morales were criminals operating around the US-Mexico border region, with businesses on both sides of the Río Bravo, as became abundantly clear after the José Treviño Morales's arrest and trial in the United States in 2013.<sup>37</sup>

The watershed in the Zetas' history happened when Osiel Cárdenas Guillén was extradited to the United States in early 2007, at the very start of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa's "Guerra contra el narcotráfico" (War on Drugs). According to Corchado and Krause, when he arrived in the United States:

Cárdenas Guillén considered rejecting the US charges of drug-dealing and conspiracy, according to two of this former partners; but his lawyers reminded him that the last Mexican drug lord to do so, his predecessor Juan García Ábrego, had lost the trial and was sentenced to 11 consecutive life



sentences and forced to hand over millions of dollars of illicit income. They advised him that cooperation was the best strategy.<sup>38</sup>

Osiel Cárdenas Guillén's extradition to the United States triggered two closely inter-related processes that, in the long-term, turned northeastern Mexico into a brutally violent region. Firstly, the extradition increased the Zetas' power and independence from their umbrella organization, the Gulf Cartel, which was no longer in the position to assign territories or missions. Instead, it now had to maintain a collaborative attitude towards its former subordinates, respecting their territories and being unable to prevent them from encroaching further into the lucrative drug-dealing business. The case of northern Coahuila is a case in point, and shall be discussed in more detail below. Secondly, Cárdenas Guillén's extradition to the United States implied the weakening of his organization, increasingly understood as an alliance between the old Gulf Cartel and the Zetas, no longer as a superior-subordinate relationship.

The effects of Osiel Cárdenas Guillén's extradition were gradual. Information gathered by Corchado and Krause showed how Cárdenas Guillén continued in control of the Gulf Cartel from 2007 to 2009, when he was already in the United States.<sup>39</sup> This was only made possible due to the collaboration of the US authorities. According to Corchado and Krause, the US government had turned one of Cárdenas Guillén's trusted henchmen into an informer back in 2001. Cárdenas Guillén managed to communicate with the leaders of the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas through Juan Jesús Guerrero Chapa, ensuring the organization remained stable and in control of northeastern Mexico. Considering there was no conflict between criminal organizations in the region, it therefore comes as no surprise that violence indicators in the region—particularly murder rates—did not increase

drastically at the end of the 2000s, especially when compared to other regions in the country and considering the “War on Drugs” had begun.<sup>40</sup>

### **The uprising: war breaks out between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas**

The Zetas and the Gulf Cartel separated in early 2010, leading to an extremely violent and bloody confrontation in their overlapping territories, particularly Tamaulipas. There are three main causes for the uprising, or “El Alzamiento” as the outbreak of the war between the former allies is known.<sup>41</sup> Far from contradicting themselves, they resemble pieces of a puzzle: the murder of “El Concord 3,” Cárdenas Guillén’s betrayal and, structurally, the Zetas’ expansion throughout the country.

Although he could operate in that city due to the inter-organizational alliance, Víctor Peña Mendoza, alias “El Concord 3,” represented the Zetas in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, a bastion of the Gulf Cartel. According to Mexico’s Federal Police officials, Peña Mendoza was inside Miguel Ángel Treviño’s circle of trust.<sup>42</sup> Federal agents captured Peña Mendoza in March 2009, although he was inexplicably free at the end of that year.<sup>43</sup> Everything points to Eduardo Costilla Sánchez, alias “el Coss,” having ordered Samuel Flores Borrego, alias “Metro 3” and leader of the band “Los Metros,” to murder Peña Mendoza.

Zeta leaders did not declare war immediately. Lazcano and Treviño Morales asked Ezequiel Cárdenas Guillén and Costilla Sánchez to hand over the hitmen, or else they would start to attack members of the Gulf Cartel.<sup>44</sup> The Gulf Cartel leaders refused, creating a definitive break between the two organizations. The Zetas began the offensive in Tamaulipas at the end of January.<sup>45</sup>

According to Corchado and Krause, the second reason for the break was that Osiel Cárdenas's betrayals were increasingly obvious, to the point that attempts to capture Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano intensified. Lazcano Lazcano noted he was being pursued in a different way, particularly after his survival skills barely enabled him to evade an arrest attempt from the authorities. He immediately began to investigate these incidents, which were unusual given his strong security measures.<sup>46</sup> One of his sources informed him that Osiel Cárdenas Guillén was plea-bargaining with American authorities, which had to mean he was supplying information about his subordinates, his operations, and his properties, to the US Department of Justice. In fact, the US Consulate in Monterrey itself has verified data provided by Corchado and Krause: "the information gathered by intelligence services reflects that this separation was the result of the extradition of [redacted] to the United States in 2007, and sentenced on February 25, 2010."<sup>47</sup>

This should not seem strange to anyone, because plea-bargaining in exchange for information is a systematic practice of the US Department of Justice, regardless of its potential consequences for the internal dynamics of organizations, countries, and lives of innocent people.<sup>48</sup> According to a Human Rights Watch report, the US Department of Justice uses its prosecutors to force detainees to cooperate by threatening them with the severest penalties possible, and offering lower sentences to those who plead guilty and collaborate with the DEA, informing on accomplices and rivals alike.<sup>49</sup>

The system works the same way whether the person in question is a small-scale trafficker or the leader of an organization. This issue is particularly important to explain the situation in northeastern Mexico, as the approach is not limited to the deal struck with Osiel Cárdenas Guillén but also the plea-bargain arrangements with lower-level criminals, such as

Alfonso Cuéllar or Héctor Moreno, key figures in the kidnappings and assassinations in Allende, Piedras Negras, and the Cinco Manantiales region in Coahuila, widely known as ‘Allende’s Massacre’, and which we will call the Zeta Revenge.<sup>50</sup>

These doubts were confirmed after Osiel Cárdenas Guillén’s sentence: for crimes including money laundering, assaulting and murdering federal agents, conspiring to distribute drugs in the United States, among others, he received only 25 years in prison. “This is unacceptable. Cárdenas deserves no such special treatment,” stated the editorial of the *Houston Chronicle* in the United States.<sup>51</sup> According to the statement made by Jesús Enrique Rejón Aguilar, alias “El Mamito,” “the Zetas were loyal to Cárdenas Guillén until February 2010, when the deal struck for his sentencing became known.”<sup>52</sup>

However, the main cause for the two organizations to split was structural. Simply put, the Zetas’ expansion and autonomy outstripped that of the Gulf Cartel, and the latter organization very soon became overshadowed by its former subordinate. In this sense, the strategy chosen by Ezequiel Cárdenas, alias “Tony Tormenta,” and Eduardo Costilla, alias “El Coss,” to maintain the regional status quo for drug-trafficking in the northeast, Matamoros, and Reynosa, proved counterproductive, for the Zeta’s expansion had not only enabled them to secure their control of the area from Nuevo Laredo to Laredo, but also opened the door to other territories, such as Piedras Negras to Eagle Pass, Texas. Furthermore, it gave them direct access to suppliers when they reached Central America, and the opportunity to extract resources by other means, as outlined above.<sup>53</sup>

Stratfor—a company that refers to itself as a geopolitical intelligence platform—included all Mexican entities bordering the Gulf of Mexico, from Tamaulipas to Yucatán, and some nearby areas such as San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Puebla, Chiapas, or Campeche, in a list of territories within the alliance between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel.<sup>54</sup> Alfonso Cuéllar presented

a similar list during José Treviño Morales's trial in 2013.<sup>55</sup> However, the split made it clear that the territories only belonged to the Zetas, because they were stronger in most states in their area, and had greater firepower. For instance, whereas the Gulf Cartel controlled Matamoros and Reynosa, the Zetas had a strong presence in the surroundings, both in Nuevo Laredo and in the region of San Fernando and Ciudad Victoria.

According to Osorno,<sup>56</sup> the Gulf Cartel's surprise attack on its former allies has several names, depending on the point of view of those involved: members of the Gulf Cartel called it "La Vuelta" (the Return) or "El Reto" (the Challenge); the Zetas spoke of "La Traición" (Betrayal); for everyone else it was simply 'El Alzamiento' (the Uprising). After the torture and murder of Víctor Peña Mendoza, alias "El Concord 3," the Zeta response was extremely violent. A couple of days before Osiel Cárdenas Guillén was sentenced on February 22, 2010, the Zetas launched a counterattack throughout the region known as La Frontera Chica in Tamaulipas. They literally laid siege to Ciudad Mier, Miguel Alemán, and Camargo.<sup>57</sup>

The war had multiple effects. Firstly, violence in the region spiked to alarming levels, almost as high as those seen in notoriously dangerous states such as Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Baja California. The murder and disappearance rates increased significantly at the start of this decade, with a lag of two or three years in relation to the national trend.<sup>58</sup>

An analysis of the events that took place during the war between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas would be extremely complicated. Suffice to say that the brutality of the confrontations was extreme. The well-known, paradigmatic cases speak for themselves; it is worth reading Osorno's work on the battle of Ciudad Mier,<sup>59</sup> the research on the migrant massacre in San Fernando,<sup>60</sup> and the appearance of torsos in Cadereyta,<sup>61</sup> among others. Of course, many other cases of extreme violence received scant attention. For

instance, a diplomatic note from the United States signaled the presence of car bombs in the center of Ciudad Victoria, capital of Tamaulipas.<sup>62</sup>

### **The pursuit of Zeta leaders and internal rifts**

In the medium term, the struggle over the various territories stabilized and the Zetas came out on top; between 2011 and 2015, they became one of the country's two largest criminal organizations, along with the Sinaloa Cartel. However, disputes broke out within its ranks among those seeking control of the group, and an increasingly dogged pursuit by Mexican and American authorities.

The first division in the organization opened up in 2012, when a regional cell headed by Iván Velázquez Caballero, alias “El Talibán,” decided to become independent.<sup>63</sup> The Talibans, as they called themselves, operated in various municipalities of Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, and Nuevo León. They entered an alliance with the Gulf Cartel to take over some Zeta “plazas” in Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, a struggle that continues, because the remaining Talibans now form part of the structure of the Gulf Cartel.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the authorities focused on the organization's lieutenants, such as Jesús Enrique Rejón Aguilar, alias “El Mamito”, and Jaime González Durán, alias “El Hummer.” However, the wave of brutality and, above all, the high-profile episodes of the war between the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas caused the Mexican authorities to target the leaders: Heriberto Lazcano, alias Z-3, was shot dead by the Mexican Marines in Progreso, Coahuila, on October 7, 2012.<sup>64</sup> His successor, Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales, alias Z-40, led the organization very briefly, although some reports state he had ousted Lazcano even before the latter's death. Marines

arrested Miguel Ángel Treviño Morales on July 15, 2013, in Anáhuac, Nuevo León, close to the border with Tamaulipas. A few months earlier, the US Department of Justice had sentenced his older brother, José Treviño Morales, for money laundering through pure-blood horse breeding and racing, in an episode directly related to disappearances and assassinations in the northern region of Coahuila.<sup>65</sup>

Omar Treviño Morales, the youngest brother known as Z-42, retained the Treviño's control over the Zetas, but from an increasingly weak position. According to Monte Alejandro Rubido, then National Security Commissioner, "his extremely violent personality did not earn him the respect his brother had enjoyed within the organization, which forced him to face the opposition of some local operators who sought their independence, a situation that derived in further confrontations within the criminal group."<sup>66</sup>

The arrest of Omar Treviño Z-42 triggered an internal dispute within the organization, which was impossible to resolve in the short term. This led to the split of the Zetas into two independent groups, which still exist today. The first organization, known as "Los Zetas Vieja Escuela" (Old-School Zetas), and was controlled by Ricardo Carreón Olvera, killed in September 2017.<sup>67</sup> This organization still has an alliance with the Gulf Cartel.<sup>68</sup> Its operations are centered on Tamaulipas and northern Veracruz.

The other group, the "Cartel del Noreste," is the larger of the two organizations, and could be considered as the true heir of the Zetas, regardless of the name of its rival organization. It is headed by Z-40 and Z-42's nephew, Juan Gerardo Treviño Sánchez, who seems that he kept the lion's share of the Zetas' structure, and keeps its presence in significant areas of the territories where the original Zetas operated. Therefore, it is possible that the old Zetas still operate in northern Coahuila, although perhaps with less intensity than before and under a different name. This can be confirmed with a single fact: after his arrest in Ciudad Cardel, Veracruz, Rogelio López

Alemán, alias “El Kelo,” declared that he was the Cartel del Noreste’s “jefe de plaza” in Coahuila. Subsequently, he was arraigned by a judge (Juez Primero de Primera Instancia del Distrito Judicial), based in Sabinas, Coahuila.<sup>69</sup>