



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 28, 2011

Houston Officer Shot As U.S. Authorities Respond to ICE Agent's Death

On Thursday, less than two days after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent Jaime Zapata was buried in Brownsville, Texas, a Houston police officer was shot twice during a massive crackdown on drug cartels in the U.S. in response to Zapata's death. A suspect was also shot in the raid on a Houston home. Both men survived, and reports are that veteran officer Nainash Patel's wounds are not life-threatening. According to *Chron.com* on February 25, authorities made 33 arrests, seizing drugs, cash, and guns.



Special agent in charge of Houston's ICE/Homeland Security Investigations Robert Rutt indicated that in the national sweep coordinated by the DEA and ICE, dubbed "Operation Bombardier," U.S. authorities are targeting gangsters and cartels across the country. Arrests are also being made in Central America, Colombia, and Brazil, with hundreds more predicted. He explained,

While the murder is personal to ICE, we are arresting transnational gang members and drug traffickers who have links to Mexican cartels because of their criminal activity and not simply out of retaliation.

On February 15, ICE agent Jaime Zapata was killed and his fellow agent Victor Avila wounded when at least two vehicles of gunmen armed with AK-47s ran the agents' Suburban off the highway and opened fire. According to Avila, in the moments before the shooting, the two agents had shouted out that they were U.S. diplomats.

Zapata's murder has sparked intense emotion from authorities and residents alike. The Zetas cartel is being blamed for the attack. According to *Chron.com*, six arrests have resulted already in Mexico with one of the leaders of the Zetas admitting the killing, but [claiming the attack was a mistake](#). That allegation has yet to be confirmed.

Zapata's was the first murder of a U.S. agent since the death of DEA agent Enrique ("Kiki") Camarena in 1985. Mike Vigil, a retired international operations director for the DEA, recalled the reason for a similar sweep then:

You immediately have to come forth with a tremendous message that they are not going to get away with it. If they are going to engage in this type of violence, there is going to be hell to pay.

Vigil, now executive director of ManTech International, a global logistics and information technology firm, related the events following Camarena's death: " We were going full bore. The U.S.-Mexico border was largely shut down at one point, and Camarena's killers were hunted across Latin America and Europe."

His sentiments were echoed by Carl Pike, assistant special agent in charge of special operations for the



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DEA:

We are not just going after Zetas, we are going after all cartels. We want all the cartels to realize this. It is the schoolyard mentality — a bully situation. The cartels have pushed; if you don't push back, you become the victim. U.S. law enforcement is not going to become the victim.

Texas State Representative Michael McCaul, who represents District 10, observed that the sweep was long overdue, adding, "It is a massive undertaking, very dangerous. It is like walking into a snake pit, where these drug dealers and cartel members are."

Over 36,000 people have died in Mexico in the last four years in violent cartel murders, but few of those murders have been investigated. [Mexico's President Felipe Calderon has gone so far as to blame the U.S.](#) for non-cooperation in his country's massive drug cartel problem.

Mexican national security analyst Raul Benitez complained:

These operations are fine, but they should be happening all the time. What I don't like is that they only launch these types of actions when they attack an American agent.

On the American side, Zapata's death has rallied forces, and sentiments are running high for the lost ICE agent, with even members of the Obama administration speaking out. White House Drug Policy Director R. Gil Kerlikowske commended agents and officers involved in the sweep:

Today's forceful crackdown demonstrates that the United States will never back down from the threats posed by barbaric criminal organizations that smuggle poisons into our communities and have no regard for innocent human life.

The border, however, still remains no more protected than it was before Zapata's death.



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