



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 24, 2011

Mexican Drug Cartel Leader Suspected in Murder of U.S. ICE Agent

A leader of the violent Zeta drug cartel is topping the list of murder suspects in last week's shooting in northern Mexico of two U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents who were driving on the federal highway from Mexico City to Monterrey. Jaime Zapata was killed when gunmen opened fire on them, and his fellow agent Victor Avila was wounded, but survived. Zapata was buried in Brownsville, Texas, on Tuesday.



Jesús "El Mamito" Rejón, 34, is [believed to have been involved in Zapata's murder](#). The *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* for Feb. 23 reported the statement of a U.S. official:

El Mamito and all Zetas are being closely looked at by Mexican authorities, supported by the joint Department of Homeland Security[/]Department of Justice task force. He is very well-known to us. He is in the mix.

The *WSJ* reported on Feb. 18 that the two agents had yelled out they were American diplomats when the [attack](#) began. U.S. lawmakers recounted Avila's version of the event as told to American officials. According to Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar of Laredo, "The agents tried to identify themselves as Americans, but the other side maybe didn't give them much of a chance."

Texas District 10 Rep. Michael McCaul reported that the two ICE agents stopped at a Subway restaurant in the central Mexican city of San Luis Potosí for a quick lunch before setting out for Mexico City. After they got on the highway, the agents realized they were being followed.

McCaul continued:

One car drove in front of the agents and slammed [on] the brakes which caused the agents' car to hit it and veer off the road. He said that when the car came to a stop, the car's doors automatically unlocked and a window partially opened, making the agents vulnerable. As many as 10 to 15 gunmen armed with AK-47s surrounded the car. [The agents were] yelling, "we are American diplomats, we are American diplomats."

But the gunmen opened fire through the open window, killing Mr. Zapata and wounding Mr. Avila. The gunmen then drove off. 83 shell casings were found at the scene.

Rep. Ben Quayle, (R-Ariz.), also brief by ICE officials, stated, "This is a wake-up call for all of us in the U.S. ... this is a big issue which the U.S. needs to focus on."

Mexican intelligence services compiled a profile of Rejón revealing that he was trained in the use of explosives and is an expert sniper. Before deserting the military in 1999, he commanded the federal police in Ciudad Miguel Aleman, in the northern state of Tamaulipas, which borders Texas. Formerly a



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Gulf cartel leader, Rejón is believed to presently be running a training camp for Zeta recruits. The Zetas originally worked as enforcers for the Gulf cartel, but broke with them last year. A violent and brutal turf war has raged ever since.

The *Brownsville Herald* received a communiqué last week from cartels at war with the Zetas which identified Rejón as the man responsible for not only the attack on Zapata, but also for last [August's massacre](#) of 72 migrants, also in Tamaulipas.

Jaime Zapata was the first U.S. law enforcement agent to die in the line of duty since the 1985 killing of DEA agent Enrique ("Kiki") Camarena. According to the *WSJ*,

U.S. officials worry that last week's attack signals that cartel gunmen may no longer abide by the unwritten law in place since Mr. Camarena's death, which appeared to provide U.S. agents in Mexico a measure of protection. During last week's attack, the ICE agents were fired on after they identified themselves as U.S. diplomats.

"The Zetas are sending a message to U.S. law enforcement that if confronted, they will kill," declares Bruce Bagley, an expert on drug trafficking and Latin America at the University of Miami.

Rejón was one of the top Gulf cartel leaders indicted by the U.S. in 2009 for cocaine importation. The U.S. is offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to his capture, in addition to Mexico's \$2.3 million reward.

Because Tamaulipas is close to Texas and is a major drug route, it is the site of a large portion of border drug violence. And as the violence escalates, so will the number of American deaths, unless border security is given immediate attention.

Photo: Jesús "El Mamito" Rejón: [U.S. State Department Rewards Program webpage](#)



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