



Texas Department of Public Safety, Bureau of Information Analysis

## Situation Report

Report# 2008-01-0016 (January 28, 2008)

### Border Travel Advisory

#### Summary

Due to the rising level of violence in Mexico—which is attributed to drug cartels, violent criminal organizations, and increased presence of military personnel in some Mexican border communities—it is recommended that persons be discouraged from traveling to Mexican border towns, particularly those that have recently been scenes of gang-related violent activity. These communities include Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Reynosa, Rio Bravo, Miguel Aleman, and Ciudad Juárez. The increased levels of violence in recent weeks and potential for additional violence suggest that an advisory against traveling to these communities is warranted.

#### Details

On November 30, 2007, gunmen opened fire on the former mayor of Rio Bravo—who was a two-term representative and one-time senator—and his entourage as they left a restaurant in Rio Bravo. The former mayor was killed along with two other politicians and two federal agents. The Los Zetas, an organized cell of the Gulf Cartel, had previously threatened the former mayor's life and attempted a prior assassination, prompting the government to assign bodyguards. In response to the assassination, the Mexican government immediately mobilized approximately 500 soldiers, federal police, and support personnel in order to conduct counterdrug operations in the state of Tamaulipas. The focus of the operation was on the cities of Matamoros, Rio Bravo, and Miguel Aleman, just south of Roma, Texas, and Reynosa, Mexico.

On Monday, January 7, 2008, members of the Mexico Federal Preventive Police (PFP) were patrolling Colonia Cuauhtémoc in Rio Bravo when they observed a 2005 Chevrolet Suburban occupied by heavily armed men. The officers attempted a traffic stop that resulted in shots being fired at the officers from the Suburban. A gun battle ensued, and additional officers and a contingent of the Mexican army responded. Three gunmen were killed and ten others were arrested, including three US citizens, one of whom was from Texas.

On January 23, 2008, local police in the border cities of Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Reynosa, Mexico, were relieved of their duties as army troops disarmed the officers and searched for evidence that might show links to drug traffickers. Eleven men were arrested by federal police in Nuevo Laredo, including four police officers, who were said to be operatives for the Gulf Cartel.

President Calderon has sent approximately 6,000 military troops and federal police to areas that extend from Matamoros—which is across the border from Brownsville, Texas—westward to Miguel Aleman, which is across the border from Roma, Texas. Mexican military and federal police personnel have also been sent to the city of Juárez. A similar operation was conducted last year in Tijuana when violence erupted there, with more than 3,500 soldiers and federal officers sent to the city.

Over the past weekend, a total of five people were either shot or beaten to death in separate incidents in Juárez. This comes on the heels of approximately 30 persons in Juárez being murdered since the beginning of the year, including 17 law enforcement personnel, as well as the recent attempted assassination of a Chihuahua State Police Commander Fernando Lozano Sandoval. Commander Sandoval is currently hospitalized in El Paso's Thomason Hospital under tight security. An alleged "hit list" of Mexican law enforcement was also discovered near Chihuahua state offices over the weekend.

There currently exists a US Department of State travel alert for Mexico with a date to expire of April 15, 2008. Fort Bliss officials also announced Saturday that travel to Juárez has been declared off-limits for US military personnel.

In addition to the travel advisory, law enforcement officials should be aware of the possibility that violent criminals and cartel members may seek to enter Texas in an attempt to escape Mexican military and law enforcement operations. As some persons seek refuge in Texas, their enemies may plan to conduct raids or hits on them here. The most significant violent criminals in the region are members of the Gulf Cartel or their violent enforcers, Los Zetas.

### **Analyst's Comments**

With the increased military and police presence in Mexican border towns, and the recent violence associated with shootouts between Mexican military and drug cartels, it is advised that Texas residents avoid traveling to Mexican border communities, particularly those that have recently been scenes of violent gang-related activity. In addition, there exists a possibility that Los Zetas and Cartel members may cross the border into Texas. Tactical operations, such as increased police patrols, should be initiated in high-profile and high-visibility areas—such as points of entry and between points of entry—to discourage cross-border incursions. If any contact is made with suspected Los Zetas or cartel members, an INT-7 form should be completed and forwarded to the Texas Intelligence Center.

Law enforcement officials are encouraged to remain vigilant and report any suspicious incidents to the Texas Intelligence Center at 1-866-786-5982 or [www.texasalert.tx.gov](http://www.texasalert.tx.gov).

### **Sources**

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