

Soldiers guard Mexico police station after shooting

by Anna Cearley - CNS

A day after gunmen stormed the Rosarito Beach, Mexico, police station, killing one officer and wounding another, dozens of soldiers stood guard around the building and work crews started repairing the broken glass and bullet-nicked walls.

The attack's apparent target, Public Security Director Jorge Eduardo Montero Alvarez, was being shuttled around the city under heavy guard as funeral arrangements were made for his fallen bodyguard, Officer Guillermo Castro Corona, 35.

Montero's other bodyguard, Leonel Pizana Trip, was recovering from the attack. Information on the conditions of two other injured people, unidentified civilians, were unavailable Wednesday.

Tuesday's attack occurred at 12:40 p.m. It was the third attack in recent weeks against people who were named to high-level public security positions in new administrations in Rosarito Beach, Tijuana and Tecate.

Rosarito Beach Mayor Hugo Torres was in Mexico City attending a scheduled meeting with other Baja California mayors and federal authorities about improving the state's security.

His second-in-command, General Secretary Javier Hernandez Tovalin, denounced the attack Wednesday morning at City Hall.

"These acts are a result of the work that is being done in public security ... which will continue until we reach the goal of living in a safe city," he said.

Little additional information about the attack was available Wednesday. Bernardo Cisneros Medina, spokesman for the city's Police Department, said earlier reports that Montero wasn't in the building were incorrect. Montero was inside, he said, and escaped injury.

As many as four carloads of people may have been involved in the attack. Cisneros said police were able to repel the gunmen, who retreated.

The motive of the attack was unclear. The post of public security director is similar to that of a police chief in

the United States.

Some here see a connection between the recent violence and election-year changes in Baja California's government. A new governor was sworn in Nov. 1, and new mayoral administrations took power Dec. 1.

On Nov. 27, assailants attempted to force their way into the Tijuana home of Alberto Capella, who was then a candidate for Tijuana secretary of public security. Capella fired at the assailants, apparently catching them off guard, and escaped injury. His nomination was confirmed several days later.

On Dec. 4, a group of men gunned down an officer in Tecate, Juan Jose Soriano Pereira, inside his home. Soriano had been named second-in-command of the Tecate Police Department shortly before the attack.

"It appears the drug traffickers are reaffirming their power over the territory they dominate," said Victor Clark, director of the Binational Center of Human Rights in Tijuana. "They are showing that they continue controlling the zone and have power above the law."

The Arellano Felix cartel has controlled the region's drug trafficking for several decades. Many of the cartel's top leaders have been arrested in the past few years, though it remains a major force along this section of the border. Competing drug groups are posing a larger threat to them, however, and the additional players could create havoc in police agencies where traffickers typically form alliances with certain officers.

Hector Gomez, 29, who heard the shooting Tuesday from his home, said the boldness of such attacks is a reminder of the forces that corrode law and order in Mexico.

"For them to do this in the police station means they were very determined to die or to kill," he said. "It doesn't bother them to confront the government because they are more powerful than the government."

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