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Mexican Cartel Tactical Note No. 5: Indications & Warning (I&W): VBIED Anti-Vehicular/Anti-Personnel Ambush Capability for Los Zetas [Assumed]

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Mexican Cartel Tactical Note # 5

Indications & Warning (I&W): VBIED Anti-Vehicular/Anti-Personnel Ambush Capability for Los Zetas [Assumed]

By [Robert Bunker](#)

SWJ Blog Post Oct 24 2011 - 1:11pm

Key Information:

Via "Monterrey: Army attacked in car bomb ambush" [Borderland Beat](#)

Thursday, October 20, 2011 [1]:

A parked car loaded with explosives was detonated by remote control as a military convoy drove by in Monterrey's southside in an ambush reminiscent of attacks on U.S. forces in the Middle East.

The incident took place around 5:10 am this morning on Avenida Revolucion close to the intersection with Ricardo Covarrubias, in the Colonia Ladrillera, outside of a machine shop/auto garage.

A military source said that during a surveillance patrol in the Colonia Ladrillera soldiers detected suspicious vehicle, a black Jetta, which resulted in a pursuit thru Avenida Revolución.

As the pursuit continued north on Avenida Revolucion a Nissan Sentra or Tsuru with Tamaulipas license plates was detonated remotely moments before the Army vehicles passed the location, between Berel and Ricardo Covarrubias.

No soldiers or civilians were reported injured in the attack.

Debris from the blast was scattered over several meters. The door to the machine shop was heavily damaged and windows were broken in buildings for at least a block.

Avenida Revolucion remained closed as bomb experts and forensic examiners investigated the blast scene.

[Includes 8 photos of the incident scene and a 4 minute Mexican news video: view via <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/10/monterrey-army-attacked-in-car-bomb.htm>]

Via "Army seizes explosives in Veracruz" [Borderland Beat](#) Thursday, October 20, 2011 [2]:

In a security operation that occurred Wednesday in the southern Veracruz city of Coatzacoalcos, military personnel seized high explosives, detonators, weapons, cell phones, military type equipment and stolen vehicles from a safehouse located in the colonia Brisas del Golfo area of the city.

The El Universal news agency reported that Mexican Army sources in Coatzacoalcos identified explosives seized as 45 C-4 plastic explosive charges.

Five suspects were detained by the military during the operation.

[Includes 5 photos of the seized explosives, cell phones, vehicles and weapons: view via <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/10/army-seizes-explosives-in-veracruz.html>]

VBIED Anti-Vehicular/Anti-Personnel Ambush:

Who: Los Zetas [assumed]

What: I&W event involving a VBIED (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device)/car bomb deployed against a mounted Mexican Army patrol by means of an ambush.

When: Thursday, October 20, 2011 at 5:10am in the morning [3].

Where: On Avenida Revolucion close to the intersection with Ricardo Covarrubias, in the Colonia Ladrillera, outside of a machine shop/auto garage in Monterrey, Mexico.

Why: The Mexican military is attempting to help pacify Monterrey, Mexico, bring down the homicide rate, and limit local drug cartel and gang political influence. The ambush is a response to this Mexican military operation.

Tactical Analysis: Provides an Indications & Warning (I&W) event concerning Los Zetas [assumed] tactics and capabilities. A cell phone detonated improvised explosive device (IED) placed inside the trunk of a small sedan is the most plausible—making it a VBIED (vehicle borne IED)—method of attack. The explosive type utilized is unknown but C-4 is quite probable. These assumptions have not been confirmed forensically and therefore are only speculative. A cartel vehicle was used as bait to bring a mounted Mexican Army patrol into the prepared kill zone. The VBIED was detonated prematurely with no soldiers or civilians injured in the ambush. Scenario 1: The VBIED was meant to be utilized in an efficient anti-vehicular/anti-personnel role to produce maximum Mexican military casualties. The ambush was unsuccessful due to the premature VBIED detonation and/or the explosive yield/dynamics utilized (small yield/non-directional). Scenario 2: The VBIED was utilized symbolically (as a warning) to the Mexican military to cease/limit their operations in Monterrey [4]. No matter the accuracy of either scenario, this incident represents the first recorded use of a VBIED against a mounted Mexican Army patrol and a further escalation of VBIED tactical evolution taking place in the criminal insurgencies in Mexico. The VBIED in an ambush role component itself is not unique—it was utilized in the VBIED attack against dismounted Mexican law enforcement in July 2010 in Ciudad Juárez perpetrated by the Juárez cartel [5]. Explosives seized: the C-4 explosives (45 packages), detonators, and cell phones seized in Veracruz, Mexico, prior to the VBIED attack demonstrate that caches of bomb making materials belonging to Los Zetas [assumed] exist in other regions of Mexico and can be used to fabricate additional VBIEDs [2]. Further, if the recent Mexican Cartel Tactical Note No. 4 is referenced, it can be seen that C-4 explosives (3 packages) are once again identified related to a Los Zetas [assumed] weapons cache [6].

The assumption must be considered that Los Zetas possess a growing VBIED fabrication and deployment

capability.

Significance: Cartel Weaponry; I&W; Officer Safety Issues; TTPs

Source(s):

1. The original Mexican news sources are:

<http://www.elnorte.com/seguridad/articulo/654/1306879/>

<http://www.elnorte.com/seguridad/articulo/654/1306973/>

2. The original Mexican news source is <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/802722.html>

3. The alternative time of 4:00 AM for the incident has been provided in other news sources. Both times suggested would mean that the device was detonated under cover of darkness (sunrise is at 7:42 AM) while visibility levels are lower. For sunrise validation see

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/astronomy.html?n=162&month=10&year=2011&obj=sun&afl=-11&day=1>.

4. This perception is attributed to John P. Sullivan, an El Centro Senior Fellow, during discussions on 20 October 2011 concerning the use of symbolic and instrumental violence pertaining to this VBIED ambush.

5. Note—C-4 explosives were utilized via cell phone detonation. For more information pertaining to that incident see John P. Sullivan, “Explosive Escalation? Reflections on the Car Bombing in Ciudad Juarez.” *Small Wars Journal* 21 July 2010. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/explosive-escalation>.

6. David Kuhn and Robert Bunker, “Mexican Cartel Tactical Notes: No 4. Cartel Military Weapons Discovered Near Fronzon, Texas.” *Small Wars Journal* 15 October 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-4>

About the Author

Robert Bunker

Dr. Robert J. Bunker holds degrees in political science, government, behavioral science, social science, anthropology-geography, and history. Training taken includes that provided by DHS, FLETC, DIA, Cal DOJ, Cal POST, LA JRIC, NTOA, and private security entities in counter-terrorism, counter-surveillance, incident-response, force protection, and intelligence. Dr. Bunker has been involved in red teaming and counter-terrorism exercises and has provided operations support within Los Angeles County.

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-5>

Links:

{1} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/robert-bunker>

{2} <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/10/monterrey-army-attacked-in-car-bomb.html>

{3} <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/10/army-seizes-explosives-in-veracruz.html>

{4} <http://www.elnorte.com/seguridad/articulo/654/1306879/>

{5} <http://www.elnorte.com/seguridad/articulo/654/1306973/>

{6} <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/802722.html>

{7}

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/astronomy.html?n=162&month=10&year=2011&obj=sun&11&day=1>

{8} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/.../jrn/art/explosive-escalation>

{9} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/.../blog/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-4>

{10} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/comment/reply/11676#comment-form>

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