

Mexico's security chief Zorrilla ran protection for drug czars

by Héctor Apolinar

The arrest of **José Antonio Zorrilla Pérez**, former chief of Mexico's top security agency, the DFS, for masterminding the assassination of renowned columnist **Manuel Buendía**, has turned into Mexico's "case of the century," and has already dealt devastating blows to the intelligence networks inside and outside the Mexican government which are responsible for protecting Mexico's drug trade.

Zorrilla was arrested June 13 by agents of the Federal District's attorney general's office, headed by Attorney General **Ignacio Morales Lechuga**. Zorrilla resisted arrest, and even threatened to kill himself or force his captors to kill him. However, Morales Lechuga approached him unarmed, and urged Zorrilla to give himself up under the guarantee of a fair trial and security for his family. After a long negotiating session, in which **Manuel Camacho Solís**, an intimate of President **Carlos Salinas de Gortari**, intervened, Zorrilla agreed to surrender himself to the authorities.

On June 19, the attorney general's office formally charged Zorrilla with the assassination of Buendía, who had reportedly been planning to reveal the links of leading government authorities, including Zorrilla himself, to Mexico's drug-trafficking barons. At the same time, the authorities accused Zorrilla of using his government position to allow "the entrance of drugs into the country, providing protection for the drug traffickers, granting them credentials as active agents of the DFS, and receiving multi-million sums" in bribes from the traffickers.

The next day, the attorney general's office followed up with the arrest of **Juan Rafael Moro Avila Camacho**, a former member of the DFS's elite team, and charged him with "co-authorship" of the Buendía assassination. His arrest created an enormous scandal in Mexico's social elites, since he is a grandson of Maximinio Avila Camacho, a leading politician from the 1930s and 1940s who was central to government policy planning in that period. Moro Avila Camacho is also related to the influential O'Farrill-Avila Camacho family, which holds the Televisa radio and television monopoly through principal stockholder Romulo O'Farrill.

In his first statements, Moro Avila Camacho revealed that the actual author of the Buendía murder was **José Luis**

Ochoa, whose escape after the crime Moro had assisted. Less than two months after the June 30, 1984 crime, Ochoa—according to Moro—was murdered by a group of DFS agents to prevent him from talking. Moro also accused then-DFS commanders **Juventino Prado** and **Raúl Carmona Pérez** of having coordinated the assassination.

On June 26 of this year, the attorney general's office took testimony from **Juventino Prado**, the former head of the DFS's Special Brigade, who confessed to having coordinated "Operation News"—i.e., the Buendía murder—under Zorrilla's orders. He also claimed that Zorrilla had received vast sums of money from Mexico's drug czars, in payment for the protection he provided for their enormous marijuana and cocaine shipments into the United States.

Several days earlier, on June 15, spokesmen from the federal attorney general's office responsible for Mexico's anti-drug efforts publicly revealed that they possessed undeniable proof that DFS credentials had been provided to drug traffickers, and that those credentials bore Zorrilla's signature. Among the traffickers named who carried such credentials were **Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo**, who was arrested in April 1985 for his involvement in the murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent **Enrique Camarena**. Fonseca, in turn, was the boss of **Rafael Caro Quintero**, charged with the Camarena murder. Caro also carried DFS credentials signed by Zorrilla, which enabled him to flee to Costa Rica. Caro was arrested in that country in June of 1985.

For anyone watching from outside the country, or who has not followed the Zorrilla case since its inception, the arrest of the former DFS boss and his lackeys would appear to be "one more case" of the "endemic" corruption so rife in underdeveloped countries. Or perhaps Zorrilla might be a scapegoat. But the matter is much more complex than that. The DFS over which Zorrilla presided was in charge of obtaining and pursuing the most sensitive political intelligence in all areas of Mexican life. In fact, the DFS was founded in the 1940s with the assistance of none other than **J. Edgar Hoover**. The DFS was also in charge of maintaining both official and unofficial relations with foreign intelligence and

security bodies. It was this powerful institution, with all its vast resources, that Zorrilla transformed into a protection agency for the drug mob. In U.S. terms, it is as if CIA head William Webster had been caught red-handed protecting the drug mob.

Enter the Mossad

It was known in several official circles that Zorrilla led the DFS into an unwholesome dependence on the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, albeit not through official channels. Mexican political observers were known to comment sardonically that Mossad agents regularly treated the DFS as their own home. In 1984, two important Mossad agents were operating inside Mexico. One was **David Marcus Katz**. The other was **Amiram Nir**, of Irangate fame, who died last year in an airplane accident in Mexico before he could appear to testify at the Oliver North trial.

Katz was known in Mexico as "Mr. Uzi." One former leader of the Nicaraguan Contra forces was heard jesting that Katz never entertained requests for less than 10,000 Uzi submachine guns at his Mexico City office. Some of his weapons shipments to Central America—destined for both right- and left-wing insurgents—went through the Mexico City airport. Katz's method for closing the eyes of the authorities was simple: dollars and women. Because of his corrupt marketing techniques, Katz constantly clashed with other sectors of Mexico's Jewish community, including with members of his own family. Under the previous administration of President **Miguel de la Madrid**, Katz enjoyed excellent relations in government circles. He was denounced on several occasions in the press, and at least once by columnist Manuel Buendía.

Zorrilla sent several secret agents to Israel for training, including **Miguel Aldana**, who took various courses in Israel during his year-long stay there. In 1985, Moro Avila Camacho himself took specialized courses from the Mossad in anti-terrorism, protecting VIPs, handling a Browning pistol and Uzi submachine gun, etc. On June 17, 1989, the police reported that in a raid on one of Zorrilla's homes, they discovered evidence that he held bank accounts for his secret funds in the Israel Discount Bank of New York, the Deutsche Bank of Munich, the Bank of Montreal, the First National Bank of San Antonio, Bank One of Texas, and others.

Until Zorrilla's arrival at the DFS in 1982, it was a law well known by the Mexican government that the country not be permitted to become dependent on any foreign intelligence agency, especially one with such widespread interests as the Mossad. Previous DFS director **Miguel Nazzar**, of Lebanese descent, distrusted the methods and motivations of Israeli intelligence, and deliberately kept his distance.

The Bartlett connection

The national implications of the Zorrilla case have been explosive. The fact that Zorrilla was arrested five years after

the Buendía assassination was committed was a topic of speculation in all the Mexican media, and is viewed as an unmistakable indication that Zorrilla had been receiving protection from the highest levels of the Miguel de la Madrid administration. In Mexico, it is impossible for a high-level government official like Zorrilla to escape jail for the assassination of such a public figure as Buendía. The 1982 jailing on corruption charges of former PEMEX director Jorge **Díaz Serrano**, an intimate friend of then-Vice President **George Bush**, is clear proof of this.

As DFS director, Zorrilla answered to Government Secretary **Manuel Bartlett**. Bartlett at the time was a strong contender for the Mexican presidency, and sought to win that prize by using the political espionage apparatus at his disposal. Furthermore, it is well known in Mexican political circles that Zorrilla had struck a political alliance with Bartlett and had every hope of winning the presidency himself, after Bartlett's term. It is an open secret within police circles was that Zorrilla took orders directly and personally from Bartlett, bypassing his own chief **Jorge Carrillo Olea**, then deputy government secretary in charge of national security matters.

During Zorrilla's tenure it was already a scandal that leading members of the DFS, agents of the Federal Judicial Police, and others, were directly involved in providing protection for drug traffickers in various parts of the country—especially for the protection of the vast marijuana fields in the border state of Chihuahua known as El Búfalo. In November 1984, that drug camp was destroyed in a joint operation by anti-narcotics policy and the Mexican army, and nearly 12,000 tons of marijuana were seized. Dozens were arrested, including some DFS agents. The camp's owners, however, had been tipped off and escaped arrest. It is now clear where the tip-off came from.

After the murder of DEA agent Camarena in early 1985, the arrest of his assassins Rafael Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca revealed further details on the collaboration of the DFS and other federal and state police personnel. Despite this, Government Secretary Bartlett issued a document in August 1985 stating that Zorrilla knew nothing of the DFS credentials found in the possession of the drug czars, and that the worst he could therefore be accused of was "administrative negligence."

Bartlett's ruling was a bald faced coverup of Zorrilla's role in the mafia protection operations. In fact, witnesses in the Zorrilla case have testified before the attorney general's office to personal knowledge of Zorrilla's association with the drug traffickers, even to the point that Caro Quintero was allowed to have himself photographed for his credentials inside the offices of the DFS.

The frightening truth is that despite the Buendía assassination scandal, the El Búfalo raids, and the murder of Camarena, the De la Madrid government which left power last year, never punished a single public official of his government for involvement in these deeds, not even Zorrilla.