

Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

Fall of a 'godfather'

Drug kingpin Figueroa Soto may have been taken out of the picture, but his influence lingers on.

On May 25, the Mexican drug kingpin Jaime Javier Figueroa Soto, was surprisingly captured in Phoenix, Arizona, together with two of his thugs. The arrest was a blow to narco-political networks on both sides of the border, given Figueroa's links to the world of business and politics in Mexico and the United States alike.

The capture was directed by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, in close collaboration with state and municipal police forces in Arizona, concluding an investigation that had lasted four years and stretched across three U.S. states. On May 26, the DEA presented the news media with a 50-page document describing Figueroa's criminal career, drawing on information from informants' testimony, telephone taps, and investigations of mafia money flows over the past two decades. In the document, very serious accusations are made against a high-level official of the Miguel de la Madrid administration in Mexico.

Figueroa Soto was well known in the Mexican state of Sonora, where he was named as the "godfather" of the cocaine and marijuana trade that crossed through that state into the United States. His economic power and political relations enabled him to mix well in the business world. In Sonora, his investments ranged from hotels to real estate, car dealerships to meat processing plants, ranches to political careers. He also had extensive investments in Arizona.

On June 10, the DEA indicted Figueroa on 40 new counts, including charging him with responsibility for more than 80% of the marijuana ship-

ments that entered the United States from Mexico. In addition, he was charged with responsibility for at least 40 assassinations in Sonora.

It did not initially appear that the case would be a complicated one. However, on June 23, U.S. Army intelligence at Fort Wachucha, received information that an attempt to rescue Figueroa Soto had been made by a commando squad, during the mafioso's transfer from jail to the Pima County court. A huge number of police agents were mobilized in the center of Tucson, while the convoy transporting Figueroa returned to the jail. From then on, all public hearings were suspended; testimony would now be given in the jail.

These developments only hint at the importance that Figueroa has in the drug world, and thus the importance of his arrest.

Nonetheless, there are some who are none too happy. In particular, former Sonoran attorney general Carlos Robles Lostanau, who has rather questionable relations with the drug kingpin. Rumors on Robles's links to the drug trade have circulated in Sonora for years. On July 4, 1988, *El Universal* columnist Roberto Rock, reported from Mexico City that Figueroa and a group of associates were arrested in 1985 by the municipal police of Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, for shooting up public places. The drug traffickers were handed over to Mario Canizales, an official of the state attorney general's office, who later received a "strange call" from Attorney General Robles, ordering Figueroa's release.

Robles Lostanau's behavior was

not attributed to fear of reprisals, but rather to his close association with Figueroa and company.

At the end of the 1970s, Robles became a federal congressman from a Mexico City district, thanks to the backing of Arturo Durazo Moreno, then-Mexico City chief of police, who is believed to have been one of the country's most important drug traffickers during that period. Durazo backed Robles because of his relations with one Alicia Arellano de Pavlovich, then the mayor of Hermosillo, whose family was known to be the political protector of Robles Lostanau's career. Alicia Arellano's brother-in-law, Felipe Pavlovich Sugic, has been accused of cocaine trafficking by the DEA.

In 1982, then governor of Sonora Samuel Ocaña García tried to displace Alicia Arellano and her group from control over Hermosillo; in response, the Arellano group manipulated the elections to deliver power to the National Action Party (PAN), through which it continues to manage the city at its whim.

This brazen manipulation of the elections was publicly supported by the U.S. consul in Hermosillo, Terry Dale Hansen, who, in the midst of the voting, granted asylum to the PAN mayoral candidate, turning him into a state hero. It was no secret that the consul maintained friendly relations with Alicia Arellano and her group, which included former governor Carlos Armando Biebrich. It is strange that the DEA's investigation of Figueroa has yet to mention these curious links.

On July 6 of this year, Carlos Robles Lostanau was "elected" the new mayor of Hermosillo. Clearly, the Figueroa trial, if properly prosecuted, could bring down more than one bad apple from the tree.