

After threats, Juárez mayor in El Paso

By Diana Washington Valdez / El Paso Times

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Audio of press conference



Video

EL PASO -- Police are investigating threats against Juárez Mayor Jose Reyes Ferriz, who moved his family to El Paso for safety, El Paso police Detective Carlos Carrillo said Monday.

"We received information that the Juárez mayor lives in El Paso, and that possibly they were going to come to El Paso to get him," Carrillo said. "He has not asked us for our help, but it's our duty to protect any resident of our city who may be under threat."

Juárez police said written threats against Reyes Ferriz and his family were left in different parts of Juárez after the police chief, Roberto Orduña Cruz, resigned Friday. The threats were written on the kind of banners and posters that the Juárez drug cartel has used to send messages to police and others.

Meanwhile, Mexican authorities were unraveling a shooting Sunday in Chihuahua City that killed one of Chihuahua Gov. Jose Reyes Baeza Terraza's bodyguards.

Alejandro Chaparro Coronel died while

defending another state agent in a convoy. He was a commander who served on the Chihuahua state police force for 11 years.

The assailants wounded two other bodyguards, both also members of the state police.

Mexican officials said police returned fire and wounded one suspect, Eduardo Hernandez Valdez, 36. He served in the Mexican army from 2001 to 2003.

The Chihuahua governor, who drove his own vehicle with the bodyguards behind him, said earlier he did not know whether the attack targeted him or stemmed from an unrelated dispute between his bodyguards and the armed suspects.

"We cannot speculate and will comment only about what we know," the governor said.

Chihuahua state officials said they had indications that the shooting was an isolated case stemming from a disagreement between the governor's bodyguards and one of the suspects.

Officials said the bodyguards stopped one suspect's vehicle because they thought it was following the convoy. Then a second vehicle approached, from which two armed men exited and started firing at the bodyguards.

The suspects' vehicles, which were stolen, were found burned outside Chihuahua City.

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Both the Juárez mayor and Chihuahua governor belong to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Hector Garcia, the federal attorney general's regional director in Chihuahua state, said at a Monday news conference that the government will investigate any federal violations in connection with Sunday's shooting.

Garcia, who is serving his second tour in Juárez, gained notoriety in 2003 when he claimed publicly that the Juárez drug cartel had been dismantled and no longer existed.

Juárez city official Guillermo Dowell said the violence in Juárez and Chihuahua state is comparable to what occurred in Ireland and Iraq, "where people were killed not because of what they did or failed to do, but to plant terror in a city and its authorities."

He said Reyes Ferriz remained committed to fighting back with a clean and competent police force.

"The mayor's position is that the city police have to serve the public and not some organized criminal band, and he will continue to clean up the police force in a process he began since the first moments of his administration," Dowell said.

Violence against high-ranking politicians in Mexico is not new. In 2001, Patricio Martinez Garcia, then the Chihuahua state governor, survived an assassination attempt by the Juárez drug cartel and a corrupt policewoman.

FBI agents in El Paso had warned him about the cartel's plans. A Chihuahua state policewoman was charged and imprisoned in the plot.

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