

MEXICO: Lessons to be learned from the recent violent episode at Monterrey

Facts:

- In a statement issued in the evening of June 9, Mexico's Ministry of Defence announced that Hector Raul Luna Luna *alias "El Tory"* had been captured by the army at calle Fénix vivienda 223 (Fénix street apartment 223) in the north-western part of Monterrey, at about 16:00 hours (local time). This 28 year old head of the local branch of *Los Zetas* cartel is suspected to be responsible for the 12 October 2008 attack on the US consulate in the city¹.
- Barely 90 minutes after his arrest, gunmen took hold of several areas for more than two hours (the hostage lasted for 5 hours in certain places), by means of "*narcobloqueos*", roadblocks set by the armed wing of the cartels with the intention of disrupting police intervention and sending a wave of terror among the local population.
- The June 9 episode indeed proved to be all the more striking by the extent of the chaos it caused (28 places in the city were invaded) and its brutal and violent nature (vehicle tyres were shot, drivers and passengers were threatened at gunpoint and asked to leave their vehicles). Furthermore, in the course of these operations, a military convoy had to fend off a direct attack from the alleged members of the cartel.
- The traffic police station situated in Garcia on the periphery of Monterrey was attacked by a commando unit only a few hours later (18:20 h local time), causing the death of a police official, and severely injuring another. Establishing a direct cause-effect relation between the events however seems impossible at this moment.

Comments:

1/ The security forces of Monterrey were taken off-guard by the reaction of the gangs, which they had not anticipated in any way. After having succeeded in their demonstration of force, these gangs dispersed on their own without having to be chased away by the police and military. It should also be noted that Lincoln Avenue was blocked at several junctions, even in front of the traffic police headquarters of the provincial capital.

2/ The demonstration of force by the criminals is said to have caused only one minor casualty among the civilians, a woman was shot in the leg when she hesitated to come out of her vehicle. It is evident that if the criminals would have had other intentions, nothing could have prevented a much higher toll of victims.

3/ It is now feared that the *Los Zetas* may decide to maintain the pressure on the authorities "guilty" of taking away one of their leaders. Some even go as far as suspecting that this police attack is a direct help to their competitors of the Gulf cartel with whom they are at open war over the control of the Nuevo Leon province.

4/ Other observers believe that the Mexican authorities might have taken "*El Tory*" in for questioning at Washington's insistence, since the man in question was identified by the FBI, called in to investigate the attack on the US consulate. Such a scenario would be reminiscent of what happened recently at Kingston, the Jamaican capital.

¹ In October 2008, the American consulate of Monterrey was attacked with gunshots and a grenade, which did not explode. A suspect, described as a hit man of the Gulf cartel, to which the *Los Zetas* gang then used to provide professional assassins, had been arrested.