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Journalist's murder 'a display of power, intimidation, and fear' -- pure terrorism

by David Crowder

The daylight murder of Diario de Juarez reporter Armando Rodriguez today was nothing less than a terrorist act and represents an ominous escalation of the war going on in Ciudad Juarez, said Tony Payan, a UTEP assistant professor of political science, who specializes in Mexico.

"There was a psychological barrier they broke down to get an innocent journalist just because he was doing his job," Payan said. "Violence against innocent victims for the sake of intimidation – that is terrorism at its best, pure terrorism."

Last week, Rodriguez himself wrote a story about the murder of a 33-year-old man in Ciudad Juarez whose decapitated body was hung upside down in public and whose head was left on the statue of a newsboy in the Plaza del Periodista – the Plaza of the Journalist.

If that message was unclear, what happened to Rodriguez today is not, Payan said.

"There are many things you could read into it," Payan said. "This guy covered crime and drug trafficking. We had already seen a message placed in the plaza at the statue of the newsboy considered to be a monument to journalists.

"The message was that they had better be careful. They had better stop covering what is going on. The message was essentially one of silence, saying 'You had better not be covering this anymore.'"

Carlos Lauria, senior Americas program coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists, headquartered in New York, said 24 journalists have been killed in Mexico since 2000, seven in direct reprisal for their work. Seven others have simply disappeared. (See cpj.org)

Rodriguez was the fifth reporter to be murdered in Mexico, according to CPJ. One other has disappeared.

"This is what makes Mexico one of the most dangerous places in the world to work as a journalist," Lauria said. "Those responsible are scaring a lot of people into self-censorship.

"In some cities, the press is muzzled. They don't want to report on crime and have abandoned investigative reporting entirely

Payan, who has been watching the drug war in Juarez and Chihuahua closely for months, said it has now evolved into something far more sinister than a turf fight between the Juarez and Sinaloa cartels.

It is Baghdad at its worst, with street killings, beheadings, mutilated bodies and various armed militias warring on each other and on anyone who gets in their way.

"It is a display of power, intimidation and fear," Payan said. "It's clearly a message saying 'We're in control. We own the streets and we can get to anybody.'"

Payan said a message was delivered to ambulance attendants in Juarez a few months ago, urging them not to respond so quickly to reports of people wounded or bodies dropped off beside a road in Juarez.

Two things are served by that: wounded people die without prompt treatment and bodies lie on the street longer for people to see.

"They've also gone into hospitals and finished off several people," Payan said.

"This is a war"

The city of Chihuahua is now seeing executions, deliveries of bodies, beheadings, torture and bomb threats to the city's major university, which is also a message, he said.

Most of the violence, but not all of it, is part of a continuing and expanding turf war between the Juarez and Sinaloa cartels for control of not just Juarez and the corridor leading into the city but of the entire state of Chihuahua.

"What we've seen lately are bank and bus robberies, kidnappings and intimidations that may have nothing to do with drug crime anymore," Payan said. "There seems to be a lot more opportunistic crime because the situation is so chaotic.

"The state and the city are unable to fight crime or to protect people. In the last few weeks, we have seen violent and opportunistic gangs of people who come together to take advantage of the situation."

In short, the state of Chihuahua and the city of Juarez are, he said, "semi-failed states." In fact, an analyst said much the same thing in an piece published in May in NPT. [[The State Could Fail](#), by George Friedman]

"They have no understanding of the actors involved, much less what kinds of tools they need to employ to turn things around," Payan said. "This is a war and they need to employ those tactics.

"The military needs to come in and take, clear and hold areas in Juarez, house by house, block by block and colonia by colonia until they have flushed out the cartels, just like in Baghdad."

While it appears that the Mexican federal government has gotten serious about the war on drugs, its ally, the United States has not, Payan said.

Under the Merida Initiative, Congress appropriated and the president has authorized spending \$465 million to combat drug trafficking in Mexico and Central America but, Payan said, "not one cent has been delivered."

"There is no demand-side strategy in the United States; the issue of drug trafficking is barely on the radar screen," he said. "But there would be one way to get the U.S. serious about helping Mexico , and that is to bring the violence over here.

"But that's the last thing these organizations want to do. They can deal with Mexico, but they don't want to deal with the United States."

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