

# Mexican Drug Cartel was working alongside the US Government

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by Jason Howerton

A high-ranking Mexican drug cartel operative currently in U.S. custody is making startling allegations that the failed federal gun-walking operation known as “Fast and Furious” isn’t what you think it is.

It wasn’t about tracking guns, it was about supplying them — all part of an elaborate agreement between the U.S. government and Mexico’s powerful Sinaloa Cartel to take down rival cartels.

The explosive allegations are being made by Jesus Vicente Zambada-Niebla, known as the Sinaloa Cartel’s “logistics coordinator.” He was extradited to the Chicago last year to face federal drug charges.

Zambada-Niebla claims that under a “divide and conquer” strategy, the U.S. helped finance and arm the Sinaloa Cartel through Operation Fast and Furious in exchange for information that allowed the DEA, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal agencies to take down rival drug cartels. The Sinaloa Cartel was allegedly permitted to traffic massive amounts of drugs across the U.S. border from 2004 to 2009 — during both Fast and Furious and Bush-era gunrunning operations — as long as the intel kept coming.

This pending court case against Zambada-Niebla is being closely monitored by some members of Congress, who expect potential legal ramifications if any of his claims are substantiated. The trial was delayed but is now scheduled to begin on Oct. 9.

Zambada-Niebla is reportedly a close associate of Sinaloa Cartel kingpin Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman and the son of Ismael “Mayo” Zambada-Garcia, both of which remain fugitives, likely because of the deal made with the DEA, federal court documents allege.

Based on the alleged agreement “the Sinaloa Cartel under the leadership of defendant’s father, Ismael Zambada-Niebla and ‘Chapo’ Guzman, were given carte blanche to continue to smuggle tons of illicit drugs into Chicago and the rest of the United States and were also protected by the United States government from arrest and prosecution in return for providing information against rival cartels which helped Mexican and United States authorities capture or kill thousands of rival cartel members,” states a motion for discovery filed in U.S. District Court by Zambada-Niebla’s attorney in July 2011.

A source in Congress, who spoke to TheBlaze on the condition of anonymity, said that some

top congressional investigators have been keeping “one eye on the case.” Another two members of Congress, both lead Fast and Furious Congressional investigators, told TheBlaze they had never even heard of the case.

One of the Congressmen, who also spoke to TheBlaze on the condition of anonymity because criminal proceedings are still ongoing, called the allegations “disturbing.” He said Congress will likely get involved once Zambada-Niebla’s trial has concluded if any compelling information surfaces.

“Congress won’t get involved in really any criminal case until the trial is over and the smoke has cleared,” he added. “If the allegations prove to hold any truth, there will be some serious legal ramifications.”

Earlier this month, two men in Texas were sentenced to 70 and 80 months in prison after pleading guilty to attempting to export 147 assault rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition to Mexico’s Los Zetas cartel. Compare that to the roughly 2,000 firearms reportedly “walked” in Fast and Furious, which were used in the murders of hundreds of Mexican citizens and U.S. Border Agent Brian Terry, and some U.S. officials could potentially face jail time if they knowingly armed the Sinaloa Cartel and allowed guns to cross into Mexico.

If proven in court, such an agreement between U.S. law enforcement agencies and a Mexican cartel could potentially mar both the Bush and Obama administrations. The federal government is denying all of Zambada-Niebla’s allegations and contend that no official immunity deal was agreed upon.

To be sure, Zambada-Niebla is a member of one of the most ruthless drug gangs in all of Mexico, so there is a chance that he is saying whatever it takes to reduce his sentence, which will likely be hefty. However, Congress and the media have a duty to prove without a reasonable doubt that there is no truth in his allegations. So far, that has not been achieved.

Zambada-Niebla was reportedly responsible for coordinating all of the Sinaloa Cartel’s multi-ton drug shipments from Central and South American countries, through Mexico, and into the United States. To accomplish this, he used every tool at his disposal: Boeing 747 cargo planes, narco-submarines, container ships, speed boats, fishing vessels, buses, rail cars, tractor trailers and automobiles. But Guzman and Zambada-Niebla’s overwhelming success within the Sinaloa Cartel was largely due to the arrests and dismantling of many of their competitors and their booming businesses in the U.S. from 2004 to 2009 — around the same time ATF’s gun-walking operations were in full swing. Fast and Furious reportedly began in 2009 and continued into early 2011.

According Zambada-Niebla, that was a product of the collusion between the U.S. government and the Sinaloa Cartel.

The claims seem to fall in line with statements made last month by Guillermo Terrazas Villanueva, a spokesman for the Chihuahua state government in northern Mexico who said U.S. agencies “don’t fight drug traffickers,” instead “they try to manage the drug trade.”

Also, U.S. officials have previously acknowledged working with the Sinaloa Cartel through another informant, Humberto Loya-Castro. He is also allegedly a high-ranking member of the Sinaloa Cartel as well as a close confidant and lawyer of “El Chapo” Guzman.

Loya-Castro was indicted along with Chapo and Mayo in 1995 in the Southern District of California in a massive narcotics trafficking conspiracy (Case no. 95CR0973). The case was dismissed in 2008 at the request of prosecutors after Loya became an informant for the United States government and subsequently provided information for years.

In 2005, “the CS (informant Loya-Castro) signed a cooperation agreement with the United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of California,” states an affidavit filed in the Zambada-Niebla case by Loya-Castro’s handler, DEA agent Manuel Castanon.

“Thereafter, I began to work with the CS. Over the years, the CS’ cooperation resulted in the seizure of several significant loads of narcotics and precursor chemicals. The CS’ cooperation also resulted in other real-time intelligence that was very useful to the United States government.”

Under the alleged agreement with U.S. agencies, “the Sinaloa Cartel, through Loya-Castro, was to provide information accumulated by Mayo, Chapo, and others, against rival Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations to the United States government,” a motion for discovery states.

In return, the United States government allegedly agreed to dismiss the charges in the pending case against Loya-Castro (which they did), not to interfere with his drug trafficking activities and those of the Sinaloa Cartel and not actively prosecute him or the Sinaloa Cartel leadership.

Taken directly from the motion filed in federal court:

“This strategy, which he calls ‘Divide & Conquer,’ using one drug organization to help against others, is exactly what the Justice Department and its various agencies have implemented in Mexico. In this case, they entered into an agreement with the leadership of the Sinaloa Cartel through, among others, Humberto Loya-Castro, to receive their help in the United States government’s efforts to destroy other cartels.”

“Indeed, United States government agents aided the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel.”

The government has denied this and says the deal did not go past Loya-Castro.

Zambada-Niebla was arrested by Mexican soldiers in late March of 2009 after he met with DEA agents at a Mexico City hotel in a meeting arranged by Loya-Castro, though the U.S. government was not involved in his arrest. He was extradited to Chicago to face federal drug charges on Feb. 18, 2010. He is now being held in a Michigan prison after requesting to be moved from Chicago.

“Classified Materials”

During his initial court proceedings, Zambada-Niebla continually stated that he was granted full immunity by the DEA in exchange for his cooperation. The agency, however, argues that an “official” immunity deal was never established though they admit he may have acted as an informant.

Zambada-Niebla and his legal council also requested records about Operation Fast and

Furious, which permitted weapons purchased in the United States to be illegally smuggled into Mexico, sometimes by paid U.S. informants and cartel leaders. Their request was denied. From the defense motion:

“It is estimated that approximately 3,000 people were killed in Mexico as a result of ‘Operation Fast and Furious,’ including law enforcement officers in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, the headquarters of the Sinaloa cartel. The Department of Justice’s leadership apparently saw this as an ingenious way of combating drug cartel activities.”

“It has recently been disclosed that in addition to the above-referenced problems with ‘Operation Fast & Furious,’ the DOJ, DEA, and the FBI knew that some of the people who were receiving the weapons that were being allowed to be transported to Mexico, were in fact informants working for those organizations and included some of the leaders of the cartels.”

Zambada’s attorney has filed several motions for discovery to that effect in Illinois Federal District Court, which were summarily denied by the presiding judge who claimed the defendant failed to make the case that he was actually a DEA informant.

In April, 2012, a federal judge refused to dismiss charges against him.

From a Chicago Sun Times report: “According to the government, [Zambada-Niebla] conveyed his interest and willingness to cooperate with the U.S. government, but the DEA agents told him they ‘were not authorized to meet with him, much less have substantive discussions with him,’” the judge wrote.

In their official response to Zambada-Niebla’s motion for discovery, the federal government confirmed the existence of “classified materials” regarding the case but argued they “do not support the defendant’s claim that he was promised immunity or public authority for his actions.”

Experts have expressed doubts that Zambada-Niebla had an official agreement with the U.S. government, however, agree Loya Castro probably did. Either way, the defense still wants to obtain DEA reports that detail the agency’s relationship with the Sinaloa Cartel and put the agents on the stand, under oath to testify.

The documents that detail the relationship between the federal government and the Sinaloa Cartel have still not been released or subjected to review — citing matters of national security.

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