

Amid 2 days of cartel firefights, Matamoros mayor asks public to stay indoors

Ildefonso Ortiz | The Monitor

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pm

McALLEN — The city of Matamoros is under a virtual state of siege following two days of shootouts, blockades and panic related to ongoing infighting in the Gulf Cartel.

The shootouts began early Sunday morning and spread throughout the day, leaving at least 13

gunmen dead, Tamaulipas state officials confirmed. **But that figure appears to be relatively low given the intensity of the shootouts.**

Richard, one Christian brother, former trafficker told me the unofficial count is at 156 today.

On Monday afternoon, Mayor Leticia Salazar issued a statement warning the public to stay indoors because of the violence.

“At this point, based on the information provided by federal authorities, we are inclined to advise the public that violent incidents could spark throughout the city,” Salazar said in Spanish in a prepared statement. “Therefore we ask the public that if you are not facing any situation that forces you to leave your home to please stay indoors to avoid any situation of risk.”

Salazar’s warning comes after years of virtual silence by her predecessors in Matamoros who appeared to ignore previous shootouts, refusing to comment and referring any inquiries to the Mexican military.

“*Mijo*, it’s about time that someone got a pair of pants and spoke about what is really going on,” Maria Hernandez, a healthcare provider in Brownsville who has relatives in Matamoros and fears for their safety, said via telephone Monday. “For the longest time (Mexican politicians) said that nothing bad happened that it became a joke. This is a welcome change.”

It is unclear if the mayor’s outspokenness is connected with her political party — the National Action Party, known as PAN. The rival Revolutionary Institutional Party, known as PRI, controlled Matamoros during the previous administration.

The Tamaulipas Autonomous University also issued a statement closing its campuses Monday and Tuesday because of the “unforeseen circumstances.” Classes were expected to resume Wednesday.

GULF CARTEL INFIGHTING

Stoking this week's clashes, the Reynosa cell of the Gulf Cartel — called the Metros — lashed out at the Matamoros cell — called the Ciclones — in an effort to take over the latter's turf, said a Tamaulipas law enforcement official who asked to not be identified, citing security reasons.

The Gulf Cartel is a crime syndicate that traces its roots to the 1940s, profiting from importing and exporting prohibited goods, but it has since expanded into other criminal activities. Since 2010, the Gulf Cartel has gone through a series of internal conflicts and splits over the group's leadership and betrayals that have led to bloody armed struggles.

The two sides in the latest struggle are the Metro and Ciclones. The Ciclones are loyal to the Cárdenas family, which had led the Gulf Cartel since the early 1990s but has lost power in recent years after the arrest and deaths of key members. The Metros used to be loyal to the Cárdenas clan — including the cartel's now-imprisoned, former No. 1 man, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, and his late brother, Antonio Ezequiel “Tony Tormenta” Cárdenas Guillén. But the Metros grew upset after jailed capo Rafael “El Junior” or “900” Cárdenas Vela was arrested in Port Isabel in 2011 and became a government witness in federal court, the Tamaulipas official said.

“You have both sides accusing the other of pointing fingers to authorities,” the official said in Spanish.

While the official death toll as of press time Monday stood at 13 gunmen dead, the true figure is much higher, the official said, because authorities have not accounted for the clashes in the outlying rural areas, known as *ejidos*.

“It's a lot worse than what it's being made out to be,” the official said. “What you have is convoys driving around looking out for a rival group and clashing where they meet.”

Mexican authorities also confirmed the slaying of Consuelo Garcia, 70, who was the mother of the Monica Gonzalez, the Tamaulipas state tourism and economic development secretary. Garcia's body was found with hands and feet bound inside her home in the San Francisco neighborhood of Matamoros. It was unclear whether the woman's slaying was connected to the recent wave of violence in the city.

iortiz@themonitor.com