

# Mexico Questions Police Officials About Ambush

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MEXICO CITY, March 18 — Three high-ranking state police commanders and a former police chief were being held for questioning on Sunday in the attempted killing of the Tabasco State secretary of public security, after hundreds of soldiers and federal agents raided the police headquarters there the day before.

The raid was the latest in a series of similar operations President [Felipe Calderón](#) has ordered to counter the influence of drug cartels in state and local police forces. “It’s part of the general strategy to go into the states that have problems with narcotics traffickers,” said Miguel Monterrubio, a spokesman for the president.

On March 6, gunmen yet to be identified tried to kill Francisco Fernández Solís, the secretary of public security who took office only a few months ago. Mr. Fernández Solís survived the ambush but his driver was killed.

Last Thursday, a severed human head was thrown on the ground in front of the police headquarters. The grisly act was seen as a warning to officers to avoid meddling in the drug trade. Over the last year, decapitations have become a common way for drug traffickers to intimidate rival gangs and the police in [Mexico](#).

On Saturday afternoon, about 350 federal police officers and 150 soldiers and federal agents surrounded the state police headquarters in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, seized the armory and disarmed the local police, as they have done in Tijuana, Oaxaca and other cities since Mr. Calderón took office in December.

After the raid, state police officers returned to duty with only nightsticks, while armed federal officers patrolled in pickup trucks. Federal investigators were testing the guns to determine whether any had been used in the attack on the police chief or in other crimes, officials said.

Federal authorities also detained three high-ranking state police officials: the assistant security secretary, René Castillo Méndez; the state police chief, David Sánchez Alejandro; and the chief of the governor's security force, Fernando Santiago Rodríguez. Several hours later, a former police chief, Juan Cano Torres, was arrested in the city of Frontera. All were brought to Mexico City for questioning Sunday night.

Investigators in Tabasco originally theorized that drug dealers had attacked the police chief because he was cracking down on their business, but now federal prosecutors are pursuing a second line of inquiry, officials involved in the investigation said. That theory holds that a shadowy "brotherhood" of rogue officers angry over the new police commander's rigorous approach to fighting the drug trade carried out the attack.

Sara Salas, a spokeswoman for the federal attorney general, said that federal prosecutors were interrogating the Tabasco officials in Mexico City about the assassination attempt, but that no charges had been filed at this point.

"They have not been arrested," she said. "They are being asked to make a declaration about what they know."