

Tapes Implicate Tijuana Police in Drug Trafficking and a Killing

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TIJUANA, Mexico, July 31 — Just days before a critical governor's election in Baja California, federal authorities have released tapes to a newspaper suggesting that many members of the Tijuana police force have worked for drug traffickers and helped in the killing of a federal agent, the newspaper reported Tuesday.

Transcripts of recorded conversations over police radios show that the municipal police regularly informed members of the Arellano Félix drug gang about federal raids and helicopter surveillance going back at least three years.

The tapes also suggest that several officers kept drug dealers apprised of the movements of federal agents on May 3, 2006, when an antinarcotics agent, Eduardo Reyes, 27, was gunned down by drug traffickers. Another tape strongly suggested that members of the department offered their services as gunmen for drug runners and indicated that they would transport drugs for the Félix cartel.

The existence of the tapes and of an investigation into them were reported Tuesday in La Reforma, perhaps the most influential newspaper in the country and one whose editorials often coincide with the ideas of President [Felipe Calderón](#), a conservative from the National Action Party. Mr. Calderón's party has held the governor's office of Baja California for 18 years, but this year its candidate faces a strong challenge from Jorge Hank Rhon, the mayor of Tijuana and the scion of a powerful political family from the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which ruled Mexico without serious opposition until the late 1990s.

On Tuesday night, Mr. Hank Rhon called the release of the tapes a political stunt intended to damage his campaign. He said the federal government had previously provided him with the same tapes but none of the officers could be identified.

He said that he asked the attorney general to “tell me which municipal officer is criminal, and I will put him in jail,” but he was never given the names, so he took no action.

“How strange it is that five days before the election they come out with a rumor,” he said.

Over the years, Mr. Hank Rhon, who owns hundreds of casinos and betting parlors, has been accused of having links to drug traffickers, laundering money, trafficking in exotic animals and having a hand in the execution of a journalist who delved into his affairs in the 1980s.

But none of those charges were ever proved, and he easily won election as mayor in 2004. He is running neck and neck for governor now against the National Action candidate, José Guadalupe Osuna Millán, Tijuana’s mayor from 1995 to 1998.

Mr. Hank Rhon has campaigned on a law-and-order platform, asserting that he has reduced crime over the last two and half years, a time when by most independent accounts Tijuana has seen more drug-related killings and kidnappings than ever.

The violence in Tijuana was so bad last year that President Calderón sent in thousands of troops and federal agents to restore order and to stop the killings among drug dealers. He also temporarily disarmed the local police earlier this year.