

7-13-2015

Jimmy Gurule was quoted in The Wall Street Journal, "Mexico Drug Lord's Escape Was Foretold"

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Recommended Citation

Gurule, Jimmy, "Jimmy Gurule was quoted in The Wall Street Journal, "Mexico Drug Lord's Escape Was Foretold"" (2015). *NDLS in the News*. Paper 270.

http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndls_news/270

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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WORLD

Mexico Drug Lord's Escape Was Foretold

Signs that Guzmán was to flee were abundant, including U.S. intelligence shared with local officials



Soldiers guard a house near the Altiplano maximum security prison where Mr. Guzmán escaped. *PHOTO: MARCO UGARTE/ASSOCIATED PRESS*

By **DUDLEY ALTHAUS** in Mexico City, and
DEVLIN BARRETT in Washington

Updated July 13, 2015 11:46 p.m. ET

In the months before Mexico's most infamous drug lord scurried to freedom through a mile-long tunnel, neighbors of the maximum security prison holding him witnessed dump trucks carting away thousands of tons of rubble from a humble house set in a nearby pasture.

U.S. intelligence agents had also picked up chatter on several occasions that Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán might be planning a breakout, and shared the tips with their Mexican

counterparts, U.S. officials said on Monday.

There was even a heads-up of sorts on Twitter. An account widely believed to belong to the crime lord's son assured followers in May that the "General will soon be back."

Despite those warning signs, no one in Mexico's government either connected the dots or did much to prevent Mr. Guzmán's second jailbreak in the past 14 years, raising troubling questions about gross incompetence in Mexico's security institutions, outright corruption, or a toxic combination of both.

"It's profoundly worrying to think that corruption could reach this high," said Ernesto Lopez Portillo, a Mexican law-enforcement expert. "At the same time, it's profoundly worrying that there is incompetence of such magnitude that they couldn't stop it. Either way, it's bad."

The escape has prompted angry questions inside the U.S. government—which twice helped painstakingly gather intelligence to help capture the drug lord only to see him get away—about how to proceed now that Mr. Guzmán is again free, said current and former American officials.

While U.S. authorities immediately pledged to help Mexico recapture him, some American law-enforcement officials believe the escape should prompt changes in how the two countries coordinate on anticartel efforts, and a stronger push by U.S. diplomats to quickly extradite senior cartel bosses when they are captured, the current and former officials said.

At the time of his escape, Mr. Guzmán was awaiting trial in Mexico, but U.S. authorities had also filed multiple indictments against him.

"What it does is strain the relationship between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement on sharing of intelligence," said Jimmy Gurulé, a University of Notre Dame law professor and former federal prosecutor in Los Angeles who helped pursue Mexican crime bosses.

"At the core of El Chapo's escape is this underlying concern of government corruption, of officials looking the other way or even assisting him," he said. "As long as that is a viable concern, the U.S. will be reluctant to share as fully as they would like."

Michael Braun, a former head of intelligence at U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, predicted that if Mr. Guzmán is captured again, Mexico will quickly agree to extradite

The Drug Lord Who Got Away – Twice

Mexican police and soldiers were searching Monday for reputed Sinaloa cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán Loera after he fled the maximum-security Altiplano Prison near Mexico City.



him to the U.S.

“If he’s taken alive, then I believe the president of Mexico will turn him over pretty quickly,” said Mr. Braun, now at SGI Global, a security and intelligence consultancy firm. But Mr. Braun also said it was likely to be harder to capture him again because his cartel will have learned from mistakes that led to his previous arrests.

On Monday, Mexican officials said they were scouring the countryside for Mr. Guzmán, who is believed to be 58, and trying to figure whether and how corrupt jailers or others aided his Saturday night flight. Some 49 officials, mostly officials from the Altiplano prison, had been hauled in for questioning, the Interior Ministry and Attorney General’s Office said in a joint statement.

Attorney General Arely Gómez announced a \$4 million reward for information leading to Mr. Guzmán’s capture. Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong said he had fired the penitentiary’s warden and two more senior prison system officials. “There will be no place for impunity,” Mr. Osorio Chong said at a news conference announcing the firings. “Everyone involved in this escape will fall.”

The escape of Mexico’s most notorious crime boss deepens the cynicism that most Mexicans have toward their government, especially when it comes to issues of corruption, policing and a prison system that is widely believed to be in the hands of criminals rather than wardens.

One social-media post making the rounds in Mexico City showed a thick wad of dollar bills rolled up, and said: “The tunnel through which El Chapo escaped.” Other posts likened Mr. Guzmán’s burrowing skills to those of Super Mario or Bugs Bunny.

Mr. Guzmán, first captured in Guatemala in 1993, busted out of another maximum security prison in 2001, hidden in a laundry cart that was calmly wheeled outside by a prison janitor. Several guards were later convicted of having taken bribes to look the other way.

He went on to become the country’s most important drug lord as leader of the powerful Sinaloa cartel, and was finally recaptured early last year for a second time in the Mexican port city of Mazatlán.

But it didn’t take long for reports to surface that El Chapo was trying to bust out again. Last summer, DEA agents in Los Angeles received information that Mr. Guzmán’s son, Ivan Archivaldo Guzmán, had hired lawyers and people with backgrounds in the Mexican military to devise a plan to free his father, U.S. officials said.

Earlier that year, DEA agents on the same case were also told another gang linked to the cartel might try to bribe or threaten prison workers into helping Mr. Guzmán escape, these officials said. In December 2014, DEA agents in Houston were told of a possible deal to release Mr. Guzmán and another senior drug trafficking suspect held in Mexico, U.S. officials said.

Those tips were all shared with Mexican authorities, officials said. Even without the tips, U.S. and Mexican law-enforcement agencies were aware Mr. Guzmán would likely try to escape, since he had done so before.

Even Mr. Guzmán’s use of a tunnel should not have been a surprise since he is widely credited with having pioneered the use of drug-smuggling tunnels as well as used elaborate tunnels to elude capture during his 13 years on the run following his first escape.

While Mr. Guzmán is the most high-profile prisoner to have escaped from Mexican penitentiaries, he is far from alone.

At least 132 alleged members of the Zetas gang broke out of a prison in the city of Piedras Negras in late 2012, also using a tunnel from a prison carpentry shop. Another 191 men escaped from another state jail in the city of Nuevo Laredo in 2010, out the back gate.

Federal police in 2010 arrested the warden and a number of guards of a maximum-security prison in the northern city of Gomez Palacio, charging them with allowing the jailed members of a gang affiliated with Mr. Guzmán to slip out at night to kill gangland rivals.

Two years later, police detained jailers in a state prison outside the city of Monterrey, accusing them of leading members of one drug trafficking group into the prison yard to be slaughtered by those of another.

The Altiplano federal prison, on the barren highland plains near Mr. Pena Nieto's hometown west of Mexico City, was thought to be as secure as any in the world. Most of Mexico's top crime bosses have been imprisoned there for the past 25 years. Mr. Guzmán is the first known to have escaped.

CARTEL LEADER'S ELUSIVE PATH

- **Mid to late 1950s:** Guzmán is born in La Tuna, Sinaloa.
- **November 1992:** Now at the Sinaloa cartel, Guzmán orders his gunmen to target rivals from the Tijuana cartel in a Puerto Vallarta disco, killing five.
- **June 1993:** Guzmán is arrested after surviving a Guadalajara airport ambush in which rivals gunning for him kill a Catholic cardinal instead.
- **Jan. 19, 2001:** Guzmán escapes from prison and cements his control over the Sinaloa cartel.
- **2004-12:** Guzmán wages war with rivals along U.S. border for smuggling routes and evades multiple attempts at capture in his native northwestern mountains.
- **May 2008:** Guzmán's rivals kill his son Edgar in Sinaloa's capital, Culiacán.
- **March 2012:** He escapes arrest attempt by minutes in Mexican beach resort Los Cabos.
- **Feb. 22, 2014:** Guzmán repeatedly evades Mexican Marines using escape tunnels in Culiacán before his arrest in Mazatlán.
- **July 11, 2015:** He escapes maximum-security prison through a tunnel.

Construction experts calculated that more than 1,300 metric tons of dirt—enough to fill nearly 400 dump trucks—had to be carried away from the house during the months of digging the sophisticated tunnel.

Starting at the house in the pasture, the tunnel was drilled directly into the shower stall in Mr. Guzmán's cell, an engineering feat that almost certainly required plans of the prison, analysts say.

“With all that security there had to be bribes,” said Mexico City security analyst Raúl Benítez. “It took a long time to dig that tunnel and nobody knew anything. Someone

inside the prison received a lot of money.”

The house where Mr. Guzmán emerged from the tunnel sits within sight of the prison. A state police school and a military base sit nearby.

Neighbors said there were movements of pickups loaded with sand in recent months. They didn't find it unusual, the men said, because workmen had been using heavy construction equipment on a nearby expansion of a drainage system.

“Who could think those trucks were related to the escape of El Chapo?,” asked Ricardo González.

President Enrique Peña Nieto and his top security aides has brushed aside U.S. back channel requests to extradite Mr. Guzmán to face trial in one or more of the seven federal courts where he faces indictments. The crime boss would be tried in Mexico, they said, and would spend decades in prison here.

But now he's gone, again.

“Good things come to those who wait,” said a July 6 post on the Twitter site that experts believe belongs to Ivan Guzmán, the criminal's son.

—*Juan Montes in Almoloya de Juárez, Mexico, contributed to this article.*

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