

RATHER Reports

Episode Number: 104

Episode Title: Border War

Description: More Americans have been kidnapped in Mexican border towns than in Iraq. The drug cartels have all but taken over several of Mexico's northern border cities. *Dan Rather Reports* looks at the growing violence that's just next door.

Transcript:

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT A NEIGHBOR IN CRISIS. MEXICO IS A COUNTRY DIVIDED WITH A NEW PRESIDENT AND A HUGE PROBLEM.

RATHER

As Butch Cassidy said to the Sundance Kid, who are these guys?

SHERIFF RICK FLORES

They're paid assassins

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NOT FAR FROM THE BEACHES OF ACAPULCO A BLOODBATH. NARCO-TRAFFICKERS HAVE ALL BUT TAKEN OVER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY LEAVING ITS CITIZENS PARALYZED.

RATHER

Tell me what scares you most.

STUDENT

Being in the, at the wrong place at the wrong time. Nowadays, you get shot everywhere.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND WITH HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS AT STAKE

MIKE BRAUN

It's all about greed. It's all about turf.

RATHER

STAYING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW FOR THE POLICE CAN BE A LIFE OR DEATH CHOICE. MANY OF THOSE COPS PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE, .

BRAUN

They wouldn't take the silver. They wouldn't take the gold. They took the lead.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BORDER WAR - TONIGHT, ON RATHER REPORTS. IT'S A COUNTRY WHERE VIOLENCE HAS BECOME A WAY OF LIFE, RAGING GUN BATTLES, ASSASSINATED POLICE AND POLITICIANS, BEHEADINGS AND DOZENS OF AMERICANS KIDNAPPED.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IT IS NOT AFGHANISTAN OR IRAQ BUT IT IS A WAR ZONE AND IT'S RIGHT IN AMERICA'S BACKYARD. THIS IS THE BORDER BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND MEXICO, ACROSS THAT BRIDGE NUEVO LAREDO A LAWLESS CITY IN A VAST AND LAWLESS REGION NOW CONTROLLED BY DRUG CARTELS. WHO ARE BATTLING OVER A MULTI- BILLION-DOLLAR DRUG BUSINESS. AND THIS IS THE MAIN GATEWAY BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES. THIS IS A VERY, VERY IMPORTANT ISSUE.

RATHER(VOICE OVER)

ON THE U.S. SIDE IN LAREDO, TEXAS SHERIFF RICK FLORES IS WELL AWARE OF HOW CLOSE THE DANGER IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER.

RICK FLORES

I have never, ever seen the border in such violence. We have never seen so many homicides on the other side. I have never heard of gun battles lasting up to 45 minutes. The hardest thing is realizing that it's very common just 300 yards from here you know, they have gun battles going off during the day, in broad daylight, they have gun battles when the sun goes down.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GUN BATTLES HAVE BECOME SO COMMONPLACE HERE THAT THIS FIERCE FIREFIGHT BETWEEN FEDERAL AGENTS AND DRUG CARTEL MEMBERS WAS CAPTURED ON VIDEOTAPE.

FLORES

We've heard the gunfire going off on the other side. Using high powered weapons that we don't use on this side AK 47s, rocket propelled grenades. You have a 45-minute gun battle with a fair number of people using Ak47s and 50 caliber weapons.

RATHER

50 caliber?

RICK FLORES

Yes sir.

RATHER

Well you can hear it over here -- loud and clear?

RICK FLORES

Yes, sir.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NUEVO LAREDO, MEXICO, ONCE A QUIET BORDER TOWN -- IS NOW ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACES IN THE WORLD. IT IS AN UNPLEASANT FACT, BUT A FACT. ALL OVER MEXICO, DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE IS REACHING UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS. 2,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED THIS YEAR ALONE. THESE AREN'T RANDOM MURDERS VICTIMS ARE KIDNAPPED, TORTURED AND EXECUTED OFTEN IN BRUTAL WAYS. IN THE MOST GRISLY EXAMPLE 5 HEADS WERE ROLLED ONTO A DANCE FLOOR IN A POPULAR NIGHTCLUB. THIS WAS A REVENGE KILLING THE HEADS BELONGED TO LOCAL DRUG DEALERS.

RATHER

It seems incredible that anyone would actually do this

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT IT IS NOT JUST CARTELS SLAUGHTERING ONE ANOTHER, DOZENS OF ELECTED OFFICIALS, POLICE OFFICERS AND JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN TARGETED AND SYSTEMATICALLY KILLED. AND INNOCENT CIVILIANS ARE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE.

FLORES

When you see people that have no regard for life women and children especially. It's something that is alarming to all of us.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE IS DEEP CONCERN AMONG U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT THAT MEXICO'S ESCALATING VIOLENCE WILL SPIRAL OUT OF CONTROL AND SPILL OVER THE BORDER.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

JUST OUT THERE, ABOUT 100 YARDS, IS THE RIVER THAT SEPARATES THE U.S. FROM MEXICO.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

I WENT OUT WITH SHERIFF FLORES' DEPUTIES TO SEE FOR MYSELF WHAT THEY DEAL WITH ON A NIGHTLY BASIS.

RATHER (ON CAMER)

OVER THERE IN NUEVO LAREDO IS A VIRTUALLY LAWLESS CITY. ALL PART OF THESE TWO WARRING DRUG CARTELS WANTING THE TERRITORY. AND IT'S NOT TOO STRONG TO SAY THAT ON THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER IN

LAREDO, THAT THEY ARE DOING EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO KEEP WHAT'S HAPPENING IN NUEVO LAREDO FROM SPILLING OVER HERE.

POLICE OFFICER

We had a homicide at this intersection.

RATHER

Shooting? Homicide?

POLICE OFFICER

Yes, exactly, with an AK 47.

RATHER

One of the things that's changed – they've got heavy automatic weapons.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT, SHERIFF FLORES' MEN ARE TRYING TO SERVE A WARRANT BUT DISCOVER THEIR SUSPECT HAD FLED TO THE NO-MAN'S-LAND ACROSS THE BORDER.

FLORES

They will detain him and hopefully they'll extradite him.

RATHER

His mother says he is in Nuevo Laredo

FLORES

And they've seen him, so they've been traveling across. They go across and they're walking the downtown and stuff like so if they spot this guy

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

ANOTHER ROUTINE STOP AND WHAT IT SHOWS YOU IS THE CRIME TRAFFIC THAT GOES SO EASILY BACK AND FORTH, BETWEEN NUEVO LAREDO AND LAREDO.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THE BIGGEST TRAFFIC IS THE DRUG TRAFFIC THAT COMES ACROSS THE 3 BRIDGES THAT CONNECT MEXICO TO LAREDO, TEXAS.

FLORES

The cocaine industry has shifted from Florida now into Mexico. Mexico is the main corridor into the United States Now our bridges here, we've got 6,000-7,000 trucks crossing on a daily basis.

RATHER

On a daily basis?

FLORES

On a daily basis. Do you think that US Customs Enforcement inspects every single truck? I think not.

MIKE BRAUN, CHIEF OF OPERATIONS FOR THE US DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

America has an insatiable appetite for drugs.

RATHER

A large percentage of the drugs that come into this country come in thru this route, one way of the other come up through Mexico.

BRAUN

That's correct.

RATHER(VOICE OVER)

MICHAEL BRAUN IN THE CHIEF OF OPERATIONS FOR THE US DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION.

BRAUN

The overwhelming majority of drugs that enter our country it's somewhere between 80-90% and I'm talking about cocaine, heroin, both South American and Mexican heroin, methamphetamine, large amounts of meth, marijuana and club drugs, ecstasy and other drugs make its way across that southwest border and into the United States.

RATHER

And the argument that says because the U.S. is such a consumer of illicit drugs that we have blood on our hands?

BRAUN

Do we have blood on our hands? I believe we do because there's a lot of blood being spilled behind this phenomenon.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S BECAUSE ALMOST ALL OF THE VIOLENCE TAKING PLACE IN MEXICO IS THE DIRECT RESULT OF A TURF WAR BETWEEN TWO POWERFUL CARTELS.

BRAUN

That swath of territory that corridor that leads into the United States has been traditionally controlled by the Gulf Cartel. And right now it's under attack.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE GULF CARTEL'S TERRITORY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY WHICH INCLUDES THE CITY OF NUEVO LAREDO. BUT WHEN THE CARTEL'S LEADER, OCIEL CARDENAS WAS ARRESTED AND IMPRISONED IN 2003 IT WAS THE OPPORTUNITY THE RIVAL SINALOA CARTEL, HAD BEEN WAITING FOR.

BRAUN

It's all about greed. And it's all about turf. That's what motivates these people from the time they get up in the morning until they lay down at night and go to sleep. And that's what they dream about in-between That's what motivates them.

RATHER

THEY QUICKLY MOVED IN AND BEGAN FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF MEXICO'S MAIN CORRIDOR INTO THE UNITED STATES -- NUEVO LAREDO. WHOEVER CONTROLS THAT CITY CONTROLS THE MAIN ROUTE FOR TRAFFICKING THE DRUGS THROUGH LAREDO AND UP INTERSTATE 35, THROUGH TEXAS AND ON INTO AMERICA'S HEARTLAND. IT'S A PIECE OF REAL ESTATE THESE TWO CARTELS ARE FIGHTING TO THE DEATH OVER. FOR GOOD REASON.

BRAUN

It provides them with not millions, but hundreds of millions of dollars in profit each year.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SO FAR THE GULF CARTEL HAS KEPT CONTROL BUT WITH SO MUCH AT STAKE, THEY HAVE HIRED ENFORCERS CALLED ZETAS WHO WATCH EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN NUEVO LAREDO, WHO COMES IN AND WHO GOES OUT. THEY HAVE AN ELABORATE SYSTEM OF SPOTTERS AND HIGH TECH EQUIPMENT WHICH RIVALS THAT OF U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT. AS A RESULT THEY OFTEN KNOW WHAT HAPPENS IN TOWN, EVEN BEFORE THE POLICE DO.

RATHER

As Butch Cassidy said to the Sundance Kid, who are these guys?

FLORES

Who are they? They are ex-Mexican military defectors who were trained in Fort Benning, Georgia, in the School of the Americas so they can go back and fight narco-terrorism. Well, they ended up going back saying, "Well, it ain't worth it. You know I don't get paid too much money in the Mexican military. So we might as well work for the cartels."

RATHER

Any idea how many there are?

FLORES

They say that there there's probably over 10,000 that have defected the Mexican military and nowhere to be found. These youngsters, they easily get drawn in by money, drive nice cars drugs and women They live for today, they don't live for tomorrow. They're paid assassins, and they're trained and that's what they do.

RATHER

Have you been to Nuevo Laredo lately?

FLORES

No sir. Not anymore.

RATHER

Do you go over there at all?

FLORES

Not anymore.

RATHER

Why?

FLORES

Because I'm afraid to go over there.

RATHER

Wait a minute, wait a minute. The Sheriff of Webb County Texas, with all the tradition of border police and Texas Rangers is afraid to go into Nuevo Laredo?

FLORES

I could be a target. Dan, see, I've already seized \$17 million worth of narcotics, and have seized \$1.5 million in cash. You think that I'm welcome over there?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND JOURNALISTS INVESTIGATING NARCO-TERRORISM AREN'T ESPECIALLY WELCOME EITHER. WE WERE ADVISED THAT IF WE WERE GOING ACROSS THE BORDER, TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE - AND GO EARLY. AND THAT'S WHAT WE DID.

(BREAK)

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE HEADED TO NUEVO LAREDO SHORTLY AFTER DAWN CROSSING THE BRIDGE TO A PLACE WHERE THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT WARNS AMERICANS TO EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION BECAUSE OF THE BRUTAL DRUG VIOLENCE THAT HAS BECOME ALMOST ROUTINE. OUR GUIDE WAS A JOURNALIST WHO DIDN'T WANT US TO USE HIS NAME BECAUSE HE HAS TO LIVE HERE AFTER WE LEAVE. ON THE HIGHWAY TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE CITY IS A SHRINE TO THE FEARSOME LOOKING SANTA DE MUERTE, OR SAINT DEATH. LIT CIGARETTES AND BEER ARE LEFT IN HOPES THAT FAVORS BE GRANTED AND PROTECTION OFFERED. IF THE CARTEL MEMBERS HAVE A GOD, THIS IS IT.

RATHER

It's what 7:33 in the morning. Raul Why are we coming so early.

RAUL

It's better if you take more early morning, sometimes at night it's hard to do this kind of activities. Because the problems in Nuevo Laredo.

RATHER

Problem being people shooting things?

RAUL

Yeah, it's dangerous to be here at night.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PERHAPS NO PEOPLE IN MEXICO HAVE BEEN HARDER HIT THAN THE FOLKS WHO LIVE HERE. SO FAR THIS YEAR, 170 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE. TWO MEN FROM LAREDO, SHOT AND KILLED TWO MEN - SHOT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT - DRIVING DOWN A MAIN STREET THIS MAN - SHOT AT THE FRONT DOOR OF HIS HOUSE THIS MAN - KILLED AS HE GOT OFF THE BUS.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE HERE VERY LONG OR BE MUCH OF A REPORTER TO SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS. THIS HOUSE TELLS A LOT ABOUT IT. BULLET HOLES IN THE GARAGE, BULLET HOLES UP HERE, THIS IS A PRETTY GOOD NUEVO LAREDO NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT WHAT HAPPENED WAS THE DRUG TRAFFICKERS IN THEIR FIERCE BATTLES FOR SUPREMACY SOMETIMES ERUPT INTO BATTLES THAT ENCOMPASS WHOLE NEIGHBORHOODS, AS IT DID WITH THIS ONE. ABOUT A WEEK BEFORE WE GOT HERE, 45 MINUTES OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE 4 PEOPLE KILLED. VIRTUALLY THIS WHOLE PART OF THE CITY WAS SILENT AND LISTENED IN FEAR AS THE BIG DRUG LORDS ARMIES FOUGHT IT OUT.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PERHAPS YOU'RE WONDERING WHAT THE POLICE ARE DOING TO STOP THE VIOLENCE THAT HAS THREATENED TO SHUT DOWN THEIR BUSTLING BORDER TOWN?

MARIANO CASTILLO

The police force in Nuevo Laredo I've seen gradually weakened over the past couple of years.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARIANO CASTILLO IS A REPORTER WHO COVERS NUEVO LAREDO AND

THE BORDER FOR THE SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS.

CASTILLO

For a long time, there's been problems with local police who were on the take with the Gulf Cartel. And that eventually led, about 2 years ago, to a giant gun battle between local and federal police.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT ALSO LED TO THINGS GETTING SO BAD THE FEDERAL POLICE STAYED TO PATROL THE STREETS FOR 6 MONTHS LAST YEAR.

CASTILLO

The result was a huge clampdown where all 800 officers in Nuevo Laredo were kind of put on hold all their backgrounds checked and, as a result, half of the police force was either quit or was fired.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND NOW THERE ARE EVEN FEWER.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

THIS IS PART OF NUEVO LAREDO'S POLICE STATION. THERE ARE ABOUT 160 POLICE OFFICERS. THEY ARE, OF COURSE, TARGETS PRIME TARGETS FOR THE DRUG CARTELS. THIS YEAR ALONE, ABOUT A DOZEN HAVE BEEN KILLED. THEY ARE OUTMANNED AND OUTGUNNED AND THEY KNOW IT.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CASTILLO WAS A WITNESS TO ONE INCIDENT WHEN AN OFFICER WAS GUNNED DOWN.

CASTILLO

I heard it was just, you know, machine gun fire. Right on the other side of the police station. I mean, right in the driveway of the police station. And my first thought was, is that really what I think it is?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS TIME THE OFFICER SURVIVED, BUT FAR TOO OFTEN OFFICERS ARE DYING IN A HAIL OF BULLETS, INCLUDING NUEVO LAREDO'S OWN POLICE CHIEF.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IF YOU CAN IMAGINE A CITY THIS SIZE NOT HAVING A POLICE CHIEF AND IT DOESN'T. HERE'S THE STORY OF WHY AND HOW. ALEJANDRO

DOMINGUEZ, ABOUT A YEAR AGO, WAS SELECTED AS THE POLICE CHIEF. THIS WAS HIS PRIVATE OFFICE. BEFORE HE COULD EVEN GET TO HIS NEW OFFICE AS POLICE CHIEF, HE WAS GUNNED DOWN HADN'T EVEN BEEN ON THE JOB EVEN A FULL DAY, HADN'T EVEN CHECKED HIS GUN YET. HIS FAMILY WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HIM BECOMING POLICE CHIEF, BUT HE WAS DETERMINED TO DO IT, DESPITE WARNINGS IF YOU DO IT BAD THINGS ARE GONNA HAPPEN TO YOU. NOBODY IMAGINED THAT BEFORE HE COULD EVEN GET TO THE POLICE CHIEFS' OFFICE HE'D BE SHOT DOWN. THESE BULLET HOLES TELL YOU THE STORY.

RATHER(VOICE OVER)

AFTER DOMINGUEZ WAS GUNNED DOWN, ANOTHER POLICE CHIEF, OMAR PIMENTAL TOOK OVER. A FEW MONTHS LATER, HE RESIGNED SAYING THE JOB WAS TOO STRESSFUL. TODAY THE POSITION REMAINS UNFILLED, LEAVING THE CITY OF MORE THAN 300,000 RESIDENTS WITH NO POLICE CHIEF. NO ONE WANTS THE JOB.

RATHER

Incredible as it, it's going to strike most people. Here's a North American city with no police chief.

BRAUN

And it's getting tougher to find someone to step up to the plate and take that job.

RATHER

Now doesn't this or does it make it extremely difficult to get new officers of integrity in Mexico. It seems to me if I were a Mexican mother I'd say, "Don't join the police force."

BRAUN

I would say that with respect to Nuevo Laredo, you know, the vast majority of the cops on that police department, I believe have not been corrupted. And many of them are paying with their lives. It, it's a catch-22 situation. And that, that's what's most troubling for me as I think about this. And I've, I've given it a lot of thought by the way. And it's very troubling from, for my Mexican colleagues as well. You talk about the cop on the beat. He either succumbs to corruption and takes the money or he chances being killed. I mean, that's, you know, that, that's a tough position to be in. But I can tell you, and I know this firsthand that many of those cops, you know, paid the ultimate price. Because they wouldn't, you know, they wouldn't take the silver. They wouldn't take the gold. They took the lead.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SO, WHAT'S IT LIKE TO LIVE IN A CITY WITH NO POLICE CHIEF. I SPOKE WITH SOME STUDENTS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN NUEVO LAREDO.

RATHER

Well, you were telling me though that, yes, we're afraid Nearly all of you said yes.

RATHER

And I can understand why. But tell me what scares you most.

STUDENT

Being in the, at the wrong place at the wrong time. Nowadays, you get shot everywhere. No matter if you go out, go to store even if you are playing outside with your friend.

RATHER

Are you afraid to go out most of the time?

STUDENT

Yes.

RATHER

Do you know anyone who's been hurt or good forbid, killed in the violence? Any friend of yours or family friend?

STUDENT

My uncle's friend. He got shot. Because I think he was mistaken by somebody else. And he got shot it was related with the drug

RATHER

Did it kill him?

STUDENT

He got killed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH SO MANY CONCERNS FOR THEIR SAFETY, THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT OF HERE.

RATHER

As things now stand, do you have a future here in Nuevo Laredo? Or somewhere around here?

STUDENT

I can't answer that question because I don't know what's happening in the city.

RATHER

Would you consider moving north, across the border or to the USA?

STUDENT

Maybe there is more security in the USA than in Mexico. I want to get a job in Canada maybe. Or United States. But not here. It's so insecure.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS YOU DRIVE THROUGH THE CITY, " FOR SALE" SIGNS ARE EVERYWHERE AND DOWNTOWN, BUSINESS AFTER BUSINESS IS SHUTTERED. "

RATHER

Anybody here closed or go out of business?"

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS TOURIST TOWN HAS BEEN HIT HARD AS SHOPPERS ARE STAYING AWAY.

RATHER

Has the tourist traffic fallen off as much as I think it has?

JAVIER IBARRA

The tourists used to come, well, let's put it this way, 40, 80, 100 buses a week from all over, from Louisiana, all over the United States.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JAVIER IBARRA IS A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER WHO HAS MANAGED TO SURVIVE.

IBARRA

People knew Laredo was the best place to shop, the best place to be in restaurants, the best place to go and visit the discos and bars. We don't have busses coming anymore.

RATHER

Well, what's happened to business? I mean, some of the stores are closed, some are open what's happened to business?

IBARRA

Well, business has been so bad that you cannot make up for the expenses, electricity, water, rent. We have been surviving. But we have about maybe 40 - 50 percent still from

the whole downtown area working.

RATHER

That's still, if you have 40-60%, that's a big loss.

IBARRA

It's a big loss. It's a big loss.

RATHER

What are the problems of the city?

IBARRA

Well, the violence. Except the newspaper never talked about violence like we have in our newspapers, like we used to have in our newspapers. Well, the newspapers now have no news of it at all.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN FACT, MOST FOLKS IN NUEVO LAREDO HAD NO IDEA A 45-MINUTE GUN BATTLE TOOK PLACE IN THIS UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD UNLESS THEY HAPPENED TO HEAR THE GUNFIRE. THAT'S BECAUSE MOST OF THE MEDIA HERE HAS BEEN INTIMIDATED INTO SILENCE AND THOSE WHO HAVE DARED TO REPORT ON THE DRUG CARTELS IN THIS CITY HAVE PAID A PRICE. GUADALUPE ESCAMILLA, A RADIO REPORTER WHO BROADCAST A WEEKLY CRIME SHOW, WAS GUNNED DOWN LAST YEAR OUTSIDE THE STATION.

CASTILLO

Journalists in Nuevo Laredo have one of the hardest jobs that I can think of. Even as an American journalist who covers some of this violence, you know, I can benefit from being able to parachute in and come back to Texas. It's a real distinct reality compared to what these Mexican journalists in Nuevo Laredo are up against every day.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHAT THEY ARE UP AGAINST IS THE CONSTANT THREAT OF RETALIATION FOR PRINTING ANYTHING ABOUT THE CARTELS.

CASTILLO

El Manana is the biggest paper in Nuevo Laredo. They're the leading daily and in February of this year, a group of masked men barged into the front door and just indiscriminately started firing two automatic weapons, hitting one reporter and seriously injuring him.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE REPORTER WAS LEFT PARALYZED. TWO YEARS EARLIER, THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR WAS STABBED TO DEATH.

CASTILLO

The newspaper to their credit did not bow down and continued to publish at least the basic facts, but eventually the threats got to many of them.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

WELL, THERE'S NOW THIS 4-INCH METAL BARRICADE IN FRONT OF THE NEWSPAPER, TO DISCOURAGE GUNFIRE IN THE NEWSROOM, BUT THIS ONCE BRAVE NEWSPAPER HAS STOPPED PRINTING NEWS ABOUT THE DRUG CARTELS ABOUT THE VIOLENCE THAT'S PARALYZING THE CITY. NOT ONE OF THE REPORTERS THERE WOULD TALK TO US ABOUT WHY THEY ARE NOT REPORTING ON THE BIGGEST STORY OF THEIR TIME IN THEIR COUNTRY.

CASTILLO

I mean, as a journalist you obviously feel a level of indignation. We're trained to go get the story out. And it's frustrating but as a person you understand. No story is worth getting killed over. Especially something that's been happening for years, and will continue to happen and that the government has not had much success in combating.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MEXICO'S TOP PROSECUTOR SAYS THERE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSES BUT IT'S ONLY TRIGGERED MORE VIOLENCE.

JOSE LUIS VASCONCELOS, PROSECUTOR

We've captured many of the leaders of these cartels and this destabilized things. They are now fighting, they are cornered. This is why we have a blood bath.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE SPOKE TO JOSE LUIS VASCONCELOS, WHO, AS MEXICO'S TOP FEDERAL PROSECUTOR FOR ORGANIZED CRIME, HAS BEEN THE CARTEL'S BIGGEST ENEMY FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS. HE'S HELPED CATCH AND CONVICT A NUMBER OF TOP CARTEL MEMBERS MOST NOTABLY THE HEAD OF THE GULF CARTEL, OCIEL CARDENAS. AS A RESULT, HE WORKS IN A OFFICE SURROUNDED BY METAL DETECTORS UNABLE TO GO ANYWHERE WITHOUT HIS SECURITY DETAIL.

VASCONCELOS

I've paid the price, The stress is something terrible, it gets to you, it's very strong, the

permanent threat is hard. But I think it is worth it. I think it has been worth it.

EATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALTHOUGH FORMER PRESIDENT VICENTE FOX TRIED TO AGGRESSIVELY PURSUE NARCO-TRAFFICKERS, VASCONCELOS ADMITS THAT MUCH OF THE BLOODSHED IN MEXICO RIGHT NOW IS A RESULT OF THE STEPS TAKEN TO BREAK THE SPINE OF THESE CARTELS.

VASCONCELOS

What we are seeing now on part of the government is full on combat there is zero tolerance for organized crime gangs. And as a result we're seeing very violent reactions from these groups because they've been left without leaders.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT VASCOCELOS KNOWS THAT NOT ALL THE LEADERS ARE BEHIND BARS

VASCONCELOS

We have many public enemies and, one of them is Chapo Guzman, Joaquin Guzman.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN WE COME BACK, YOU MAY BE SURPRISED TO KNOW WHERE PUBLIC ENEMY #1 NOW LIVES.

(BREAK)

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS THEY DRIVE TO ONE OF MEXICO'S MOST POPULAR RESORTS, MOST AMERICANS DON'T REALIZE THAT THIS PARADISE ON THE PACIFIC FAMOUS FOR IT'S BEACHES HAS BEEN HIT BY A WAVE OF VIOLENCE THAT IS THREATENING TO TURN ACAPULCO INTO A BEACHFRONT BATTLEFIELD. THIS IS NOW THE TURF OF ONE OF THE MOST WANTED NARCO-TRAFFICKERS IN THE COUNTRY.

RATHER

This man, El Chapo Guzman, know who he is?

BRAUN

Tough guy.

RATHER

Who is he?

BRAUN

El Chapo Guzman, he's a major cartel leader. He escaped from I believe it was La Palma prison a few years ago. He's on the run. And he is extremely violent, very dangerous trafficker.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ARRESTED IN 1993, HE ESCAPED FROM A FEDERAL PRISON IN 2001 AND WENT BACK TO HIS OLD GANG. U.S. AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE HIS LATEST BASE OF OPERATIONS IS ACAPULCO AND DEA CHIEF OF OPERATIONS MIKE BRAUN HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS 20 YEAR CAREER AT THE DEA TRYING TO PUT TRAFFICKERS LIKE EL CHAPO OUT OF BUSINESS.

RATHER

Your judgment is he, or is he not behind much of the violence in Acapulco?

BRAUN

I think he's absolutely behind much of the violence in Mexico.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ACAPULCO MAYOR FELIX SALGADO IS NOW DEALING WITH A PUBLIC RELATIONS NIGHTMARE.

FELIX SALGADO, MAYOR OF ACAPULCO

Lots of problems. We've had lots of problems with narco- trafficking. We had a very bad time here, a very bad period. The violence was out of control.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE'S TALKING ABOUT SHOOT-OUTS LIKE THIS ONE THAT BROKE OUT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT EARLIER THIS YEAR, JUST ONE MONTH AFTER HE TOOK OFFICE.

THE TURF WAR GOING ON BETWEEN THE CARTELS ON THE BORDER HAS NOW MOVED TO THE COAST. THIS IS THE AFTERMATH OF AN ATTACK ON A CARAVAN OF SUVS THOUGHT TO BE CARRYING EL CHAPO GUZMAN. POLICE FIRED ON THE CARAVAN AND A GUNFIGHT ENSUED LEAVING FOUR SINALOA CARTEL MEMBERS DEAD, AND THREE POLICE INJURED.

RATHER

Were you surprised to learn that there were shootouts in broad daylight, fairly lethal large shootouts in Acapulco?

BRAUN

Yeah, I'll be perfectly honest, I was. I didn't think it would spill over to a place like Acapulco.

RATHER

You thought it would be quieter than that?

BRAUN

Yes I did.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT IT WAS ABOUT TO GET WORSE. THE REVENGE FOR THE ATTACK, A FEW MONTHS LATER, SENT A CHILLING MESSAGE.

CRISTINA MASNER, HOTEL OWNER

One morning two policeman's heads were in front of police headquarters and you know, that was just so shocking for everybody.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CRISTINA MASNER WHO RUNS A SMALL HOTEL IN ACAPULCO WAS ALSO SHOCKED BY THE NOTE THE KILLERS LEFT AT THE CRIME SCENE " SO THAT YOU LEARN TO RESPECT." THE TWO SEVERED HEADS WERE LEFT NOT FAR FROM THE CITY'S BUSIEST TOURIST AREA.

MASNER

And it was like here in Acapulco, this is like, Acapulco's like a little town and it's a big city. It's already more than a million, too many people living here, but it's still a small town. So, for that to be happening here, it gives me the goose bumps, you know.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALTHOUGH CRISTINA SAYS SHE LOVES MEXICO, SHE FEARS IT MAY BE TIME TO LEAVE.

MASNER

I have a daughter now and I want what is best for her. And if it's gonna get too intense, I'm gonna have to move for her safety no?

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RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND WHEN RESIDENTS START TALKING ABOUT LEAVING, THAT SURELY SENDS A CHILLING MESSAGE TO TOURISTS AND TO THERESA DE JESUS, ACAPULCO'S DIRECTOR OF TOURISM.

THERESA DE JESUS, ACAPULCO'S DIRECTOR OF TOURISM

The main activity we have is tourists and we're in trouble. The average in hotels is about 60% occupation. And it's

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

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DE JESUS

The main activity we have is tourists and we're in trouble. The average in hotels is about 60% occupation. And it's not as good as we want, as good as we need to have them.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT AS LONG AS THE CARTELS ARE BATTLING IN THE STREETS, HALF EMPTY HOTELS ARE AN INEVITABLE REALITY.

DE JESUS

Teresa de Jesus, Tourism Minister: We recognize that it's a big problem because we cannot fight against them. We are not as powerful as they are.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL PLAYERS IN ACAPULCO MAY BE A TEXAN THEY CALL " LA BARBIE." BORN EDGAR VALDEZ HE GOT HIS NICKNAME, WE'RE TOLD, BECAUSE OF HIS GOOD LOOKS. HE'S A FUGITIVE IN THIS COUNTRY WANTED ON MARIJUANA CHARGES BUT HE'S WANTED FOR MUCH MORE IN MEXICO.

BRAUN

La Barbie is the fair skinned American. He was born in Laredo, but spent much of his adult life in Mexico, very violent individual an assassin himself. He also trains other assassins and thugs at remote places in Mexico.

RATHER

Is he the only American you know of that has crossed over the border and become a big man with the cartels?

BRAUN

Braun: That has crossed over and reached his level? Yeah, I'd say he's the only one that I know of.

RATHER

La Barbie is now believed to be the chief enforcer for the Sinaloa cartel in Mexico?

BRAUN

Yes, that's correct.

RATHER

Well, what do you know about this videotape which was sent anonymously to the Dallas Morning News which reports to show four men who've been beaten?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE VIDEO SHOWS FOUR MEN BEING INTERROGATED. ONE BY ONE THEY GIVE THEIR NAMES AND AGES AND THEN A SCENE THAT HAS BECOME FAMILIAR WITH HOSTAGES IN IRAQ A GUN COMES INTO FRAME. THE SHOOTER'S FACE IS NOT SEEN ON THE TAPE.

RATHER

Is it or is it not the belief that La Barbie was responsible?

BRAUN

Some believe that La Barbie was responsible for that, I mean there's been multi-source reporting that he was. But we don't have a smoking gun.

RATHER

Does the DEA believe that La Barbie is a chief enforcer for one of the larger cartels?

BRAUN

He is undoubtedly a chief enforcer for one of the larger cartels. He is a lieutenant. and not only does he run and train teams of assassins he is extremely adept and knowledgeable with

respect to surveillance. Complex, complicated, technical surveillance and counter surveillance on measures against law enforcement against the military.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH ENEMIES LIKE LA BARBIE, FOR THE POLICE HERE, IT'S A DEADLY BATTLE. THIS YEAR, 33 POLICE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE STATE OF GURRERO, WHERE ACAPULCO IS LOCATED.

SALGADO

Yes, they killed some police. Then things started to fall apart. No one wanted to be a policeman in Acapulco.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH GOOD REASON HOW COULD THEY CONFRONT THE ARSENALS OF THE DRUG CARTELS WITH WEAPONS LIKE THIS?

JORGE VALDEZ, POLICE OFFICER

You saw the weapons we had. They were a little obsolete because we're police who only prevent crime, we're not like SWAT team types.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

UNDER MEXICAN LAW, ONLY FEDERAL AUTHORITIES CAN ACTIVELY PURSUE THE CARTELS. BUT THE POLICE HERE NEED TO BE ABLE TO FIGHT BACK. NOW THEY ARE ARMED WITH INTIMIDATING-LOOKING AUTOMATIC WEAPONS A BIG CHANGE FOR A POLICE FORCE THAT, UNTIL THIS YEAR, WAS DEALING WITH PREVENTING CRIMES AGAINST TOURISTS. MAYOR SALGADO SAYS HE HAD NO CHOICE. TO KEEP HIS POLICE FORCE ON THE JOB, HE'S MADE LAW ENFORCEMENT THE # 1 PRIORITY IN ACAPULCO.

SALGADO

We have 101 new patrol cars, new weapons, body armor, everything we need to protect the public.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MAYOR IS ALSO TRYING TO RAISE SALARIES, KNOWING IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO COMPETE WITH THE PAY-OFFS OFFERED BY THE DRUG CARTELS.

SALGADO

The compromise has been to equip them with the tools they need for work and a good salary. Here a policeman makes 5,000 pesos a month.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S LESS THAN 500 DOLLARS A MONTH LEAVING POLICE OFFICERS VULNERABLE TO BRIBES. BUT ALL THE REFORMS FROM CITY HALL DID NOT GO UNNOTICED BY THE CARTEL.

SALGADO

They took my Chief of Security for City Hall. In the street, they kidnapped him, and they killed him.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HIS BODY WAS FOUND IN AN ABANDONED PARKING LOT HE'D BEEN BEATEN AND SUFFOCATED. SECURITY FOR THE MAYOR IS NOW AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH. WHEREVER HE GOES, HE IS SURROUNDED BY BODYGUARDS. BUT EVEN WITH BETTER EQUIPMENT, THE POLICE HERE LIVE ON EDGE. WITH SO MANY OF THEIR OWN KILLED, THEY KNOW THEY ARE EASY MARKS.

THIS YEAR AT LEAST 125 POLICE OFFICERS HAVE BEEN KILLED HERE IN MEXICO AT THE HANDS OF THE DRUG CARTEL. SOME BELIEVE THAT MANY OF THESE OFFICERS ARE CORRUPT. THERE IS ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT THIS. SOME MAY BE CORRUPT. I'M SURE THAT SOME WERE CORRUPT AND OFTEN TIMES WHAT HAPPENS, JUST LIKE ANY DRUG TRAFFICKER, THEY ARE IN IT BY THE WAY FOR THE GREED. FOR MANY IT COMES DOWN TO PLATA OPLOMO, TAKE THE MONEY OR TAKE THE BULLET. THE IMPORTANT POINT IS THAT WHEN YOUR DEALING WITH A THREAT THAT HAS HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO CORRUPT, YOU CAN BUY JUST ABOUT ANYTHING YOU WANT. BY ALL ACCOUNTS, MARCELO GARZA WAS ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS A POLICE CHIEF WHOSE JOB WAS TO GO AFTER THE DRUG CARTELS IN ONE OF MEXICO'S BIGGEST CITIES, MONTERREY.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

He didn't like bodyguards, he said ' I am not involved with any cartel with no group, I don't get pay-offs from anyone, they don't have any reason to hurt me.'

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO IS THE PATRIARCH OF A LARGE CLAN – MANY OF WHOME ARE DEDICATED TO PUBLIC SERVICE OR LAW ENFORCEMENT. HIS SON ALEJANDRO WORKS FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE. YOUNGEST SON MARCELO WAS CHIEF OF DETECTIVES FOR THE STATE POLICE AGENCY.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

Marcelo, always had a vocation to be a police detective, investigator. He was director of investigation for State police agency, what I was some time ago.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT WAS THE SAME JOB HIS FATHER HAD MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO.
DANGEROUS THEN EVEN MORE SO NOW.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

When I was in the job, I always went with a police officer accompany me.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARCELO'S BROTHER ALEJANDRO WORKS AT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S
OFFICE.

BROTHER

In August of last year precisely he helped detain a high ranking capo, and they detained 12
people.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALTHOUGH MARCELO GARZA WAS ON THE FRONTLINES OF MEXICO'S
DRUG WAR, HIS FAMILY WORRIED THAT HE DIDN'T TAKE THE DANGER
SERIOUSLY ENOUGH.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

He laughed about having security. And I told him ' this enemy isn't small, there's not a small
enemy. Be careful.' I told him, ' this isn't a small enemy.' and he laughed and said, ' Papa,
nothing will happen.'

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT SOMETHING DID

BROTHER

He only had a driver, he never had bodyguards. He was so sure of himself and so sure that
he was doing the right thing and whenever he had to do family things, he'd send his driver
home and go by himself.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED THREE MONTHS AGO. HE SENT HIS
DRIVER HOME AND WENT TO MEET HIS WIFE AT CHURCH.

BROTHER

I heard someone important had been killed at Fatima Church I tried calling Marcelo to find
out who it was but he never answered.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

I had gone to bed early and, my daughter called the house by phone ' Papa, something has happened to Marcelo, something happened to Marcelo!'

BROTHER

And then I spoke to Marcelo's deputy who was on the scene, and he said, ' I haven't gone near the body yet.' As soon as I found out the attorney general has shown up and when my brother didn't answer his phone, then I had an intuition. The person who was killed is my brother.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE HAD SEEN HIS BROTHER THAT MORNING AT BREAKFAST AND THEY HAD TALKED ABOUT HIS WORK.

BROTHER

He told me the job took him away too much he wanted to spend more time with his family.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

He was a good son. Very loving with his children and his wife. She's suffering, and so are we, of course. For us to remember him is very difficult.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE CITY OF MONTERREY HELD A CEREMONY LAST MONTH, NAMING A STREET AFTER MARCELO AND DEDICATING A PLAQUE IN HIS HONOR AT THE MAIN OFFICE WHERE HE WORKED. CONCERNED FOR THE FAMILY'S SAFETY, THE STATE HAS NOW GIVEN THEM THE BODYGUARDS MARCELO REFUSED.

ALEJANDRO GARZA DELGADO

The first thing I thought when I knew he was dead his confidence and his faith in people, killed him. His trust.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARCELLO GARZA IS ONE OF SIX POLICE CHIEFS KILLED THIS YEAR IN THE STATE OF NUEVO LEON.

BRAUN

I know for a fact that some of these officers that have been killed would not succumb to corruption. They refused. They dug in and would not allow themselves to be corrupted. And they paid the ultimate price. They were gunned down or they were stabbed or they were blown up. But they paid the ultimate price. And they're heroes in their country.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN WE COME BACK, DOZENS OF AMERICANS MISSING IN MEXICO.

(BREAK)

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT NIGHT, THE FESTIVE LIGHTS OF NUEVO LAREDO INVITE FOLKS TO CROSS THE BORDER FOR AN EVENING OF MARGARITAS AND MUSIC BUT MAKING THIS JOURNEY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DANGEROUS. IN CASE AFTER CASE, AMERICANS HAVE COME HERE AND SIMPLY DISAPPEARED.

PRISCILLA CISNEROS

It's 6 o'clock and they cross the bridge and never come.

ROSITA GONZALEZ

They never got home.

DANIELLE ORTIZ

He never came back.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHERIFF RICK FLORES THINKS THIS IS THE WORK OF THE DRUG CARTELS.

FLORES

Kidnappings are happening frequently, it's a way of showing that they're in control.

RATHER

Well, according to the figures I have, more Americans have been kidnapped in this general area than in Iraq over the last couple of years. Is that true?

FLORES

That is correct. We've got 40 people missing from Laredo, Texas.

RATHER

I think it's gonna come as a surprise to most Americans to hear you say, there's been 40 Americans kidnapped in and around Laredo. That's a staggering figure.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MOST OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE MISSING VANISHED IN NUEVO LAREDO ALL ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS. I MET WITH A SMALL GROUP TWO MOTHERS, A FATHER, AND A WIFE. EACH ARE WAITING FOR WORD ON WHAT HAPPENED TO A MISSING LOVED ONE.

ROSITA GONZALES' TWO SONS WERE COMING BACK FROM A DAY TRIP TO MONTERREY THEY CALLED TO SAY THEY HAD MADE IT TO NUEVO LAREDO AND WOULD BE HOME SOON. PRICILLA CISNEROS AND HER HUSBAND HAVEN'T SEEN THEIR DAUGHTER BRENDA SINCE SHE WENT ACROSS THE BRIDGE TO CELEBRATE HER BIRTHDAY. THAT WAS 2 YEARS AGO. DANIELLE ORTIZ'S BELIEVES HER HUSBAND SERGIO WENT OVER FOR A BUSINESS MEETING AND NEVER RETURNED.

RATHER

Did you consider Mexico a dangerous place, when your husband went?

ORTIZ

No. I mean, especially Nuevo Laredo for us is like, I mean, it's a border city. It's just only crossing the bridge and you're in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. But it's, for a lot of people here, it's considered almost the same town.

RATHER

And there was some law enforcement.

ORTIZ

There's like a three or four years ago, the law had stopped losing a little bit of control of the city and it's when the killings, kidnappings start.

RATHER

What do you think happened to your husband?

ORTIZ

At the beginning, we even had thought maybe it could have been a mistake of identity maybe it could have been at the wrong place at the wrong time.

RATHER

Did you ever receive a ransom note or a telephone call from somebody making contact?

ORTIZ

No, absolutely not.

RATHER

Nothing.

ORTIZ

Nothing at all.

RATHER

And the FBI? Have they been on the case?

ORTIZ

Yeah, the FBI has been investigating all those cases

RATHER

But they haven't turned up anything.

ORTIZ

They haven't turned up anything.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SAMUEL AND GERARDO GONZALES, AGE 18 AND 24, HEADED TO MONTERREY FOR THE DAY TWO YEARS AGO. THEY DIDN'T TELL THEIR MOTHER BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT HER TO WORRY.

RATHER

Did you know they were in Mexico?

GONZALES

No, they didn't want me to know.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE BROTHERS CALLED THEIR MOTHER AS THEY APPROACHED NUEVO LAREDO TO SAY THEY'D BE HOME IN LESS THAN AN HOUR. THAT WAS THE LAST SHE HEARD FROM THEM.

RATHER

What do you think happened to your boys?

GONZALEZ

I have no idea.

RATHER

No idea.

GONZALEZ

No idea

RATHER

Have you heard any news of them at all?

GONZALEZ

No.

RATHER

Well, seemingly, they just disappeared.

GONZALEZ

Yes.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BRENDA CISNEROS WAS CELEBRATING HER 23rd BIRTHDAY.

CISNEROS

In Sept 17, 2004, my daughter Brenda, she celebrate to 23 years. And my husband and me, I go to the local restaurant for the dinner and Yvette, the best friend, she goes to the restaurant and pick-up and Brenda was in surprise party and go to the Nuevo Laredo. And this is the best friend, and Brenda.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AFTER THE SURPRISE PARTY, BRENDA WENT ACROSS THE BRIDGE TO NUEVO LAREDO WITH HER FRIEND YVETTE TO ATTEND A STREET FAIR AND A CONCERT. THAT'S WHEN THEY BOTH VANISHED.

CISNEROS

My daughter is my only daughter, only my baby. And she was studying in college for the business. And I don't know what happened. Innocent victims.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN ALMOST TWO YEARS, THESE FAMILIES HOLD ON TO HOPE. SHERIFF FLORES FEARS THE WORST.

FLORES

I call it beauty can be a curse. Some of these women have gone across to party. And they've been kidnapped. It's my understanding that they've been kidnapped by these people and sent or taken to the drug lords and say hey, ' here are some gifts that I bring you.'

RATHER

Do you think she's still alive?

CISNEROS

Oh yes. I think in my heart is alive, yes. My faith is in God. And I hope alive.

RATHER

Do you think the boys are still living?

GONZALEZ

I make them like they're in a trip and then one day they'll come back.

RATHER

But mothers usually have a good instinct for these things. What did you, you feel? You feel that they're still living?

GONZALEZ

Yes. Maybe and come back.

RATHER:

And what about you? Wives also have a good instinct about their husbands.

ORTIZ

It's always been more than three years, almost four years for me to live without my husband. He's the only person I have here. And I think it's what is keeping me going on every day. Until I don't have any answer, I don't find anything of him. I will not admit he is gone.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE FAMILIES HAVE STARTED THEIR OWN GROUP DEDICATED TO FINDING THEIR CHILDREN, BUT SOME HAVE GONE EVEN FARTHER. WILLIAM SLEMAKER LOST HIS STEP-DAUGHTER YVETTE THE SAME NIGHT BRENDA DISAPPEARED.

WILLIAM SLEMAKER

I raised Yvette since I was nine years old and I love her as one of my own daughters.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ANGRY AT WHAT HE FELT WAS A LACK OF EFFORT BY MEXICAN AND US AUTHORITIES, WILLIAM SLEMAKER TOOK MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS.

SLEMAKER

I've knocked on drug dealers doors on this side and that side. I found Yvette's car. I went over there on a daily basis for 30 days. After 30 days, two the day, I found Yvette's car in Nuevo Laredo, it was in an impound lot owned by a Mexican judge.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE NEW MAYOR OF LAREDO, TEXAS, RAUL SALINAS, SAYS HELPING THE FAMILIES FIND THEIR LOVED ONES IS A PRIORITY.

RAUL SALINAS, MAYOR

We want to get answers. We want to come bring those families back. I mean the kids that are missing so they can rejoin their families. It's a very difficult thing. What can we do? We can continue to pressure the Mexican government. All the way from the local government to the federal government to ensure that these cases do not turn cold.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ONE OF THE CHIEF SOURCES OF FRUSTRATION FOR THESE FAMILIES IS THE ATTENTION INCIDENTS GET SUCH AS THE CASE OF MISSING TEENAGER NATALIE HOLLOWAY IN ARUBA THE CARIBBEAN. THESE PEOPLE FEEL FORGOTTEN.

GONZALEZ

Why nobody cares about us? We're and we're not only one family. We're a lot of families that we're suffering the same pain.

RATHER

What did you think about it when you saw this kind of constant coverage? DANIELLE: Why one person can get so much attention and here in Laredo we're 36 American citizens missing. "Could it be because we have all Hispanic last name?" And I think it is. SLEMAKER: I truly believe that is one of the main reasons nothing is being done.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FBI OFFICIALS SAY 60 AMERICANS HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED IN AND AROUND THE BORDER AREA SINCE 2004. THE LATEST FIVE MEN KIDNAPPED FROM A RANCH IN LAREDO NUEVO. AMONG THEM TWO AMERICANS STILL MISSING. COMING UP, A SECURITY THREAT FROM SOUTH OF THE BORDER THAT GOES WAY BEYOND DRUGS.

(BREAK)

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS PAST WEEK, A NEW PRESIDENT WAS INAUGURATED IN MEXICO CITY AND THE BRAWLING RECEPTION WITH JEERS AND CATCALLS THAT PROCEEDED FELIPE CALDERON TAKING OFFICE MAY BE A WARNING THAT OUR NEIGHBOR TO THE SOUTH IS FACING A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES BEYOND THE DRUG WAR THAT IS THREATENING TO TURN MEXICO INTO A NARCO-STATE.

THIS ELECTION WAS SO CLOSE LESS THAN 1% OF THE VOTES SEPARATED THE TWO CANDIDATES THAT A COURT ULTIMATELY HAD TO CERTIFY THE WINNER. BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP THE OTHER CANDIDATE FROM SWEARING HIMSELF IN AS THE WINNER.

WITH DEMONSTRATIONS OUT ON THE STREET AND INSIDE THE JOINT-SESSION OF CONGRESS, THERE IS LEGITIMATE CONCERN WHETHER PRESIDENT FELIPE CALDERON WILL BE ABLE TO KEEP HIS PROMISE TO ESCALATE THE WAR AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKERS. A PROMISING SIGN THAT HE'S SERIOUS HIS FIRST OFFICIAL ACT WAS TO ANNOUNCE HE IS SEEKING PAY HIKES FOR THE MEXICAN ARMY THAT IS BATTLING THE CARTELS BUT THE ARMY AND FEDERAL POLICE IN MEXICO HAVE FOUND THAT CUTTING OFF THE HEAD OF THE SNAKE HAS NOT SOLVED THE CRISIS. DEA OPERATIONS CHIEF MIKE BRAUN KNOWS THAT ALL TOO WELL.

RATHER

We talked to at least one high ranking Mexican law enforcement official who says he's cut off the heads of many snakes But the level of violence goes up. What's this tell us?

BRAUN

I've said from the beginning, although we've cut the head off of the snake, do I believe that some other cartel or syndicate is going to move into that area and take over or attempt to take over? Yeah, they will. But this is an opportunity for law enforcement and the Mexican gov't to gain or regain control of that piece of real estate.

RATHER

Forgive me if you must, but to an outsider who's grown up going to Mexico, for every time you cut of the head of the snake, you or the Mexican authorities, it seems another dozen at least rise up.

BRAUN

Yeah, they do rise up. But you either take it on and you deal with it or it ends up running the country. And you become a narco-state.

RATHER

If you cut off enough heads you will get a handle on it?

BRAUN

I believe you will get a handle on it. But I'm also gong to tell you, do I believe after 32 years in this business that we're going to extinguish this threat and this problem in its entirety and completely? Absolutely not.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND HOW DOES THIS THREAT AFFECT THE UNITED STATES? ACCORDING TO A RECENT REPORT BY THE HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS, THE GROWING VIOLENCE ALONG THE 2,000 MILE BORDER WE SHARE WITH MEXICO HAS CREATED A GROWING THREAT FROM COUNTRIES THAT SPONSOR TERRORISM. IN 2005, MORE THAN 650 INDIVIDUALS FROM THESE " SPECIAL INTEREST" COUNTRIES WERE APPREHENDED BY BORDER PATROL AGENTS TRYING TO CROSS INTO THE U.S.

FLORES

Yes about three or four months ago they caught 8 Iraqis in Mexico. There's been Sudanese money found on this side by local ranchers. They have found Korans in the dirt, in the property of local ranchers, all this information has been turned over to the FBI.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

LAREDO SHERIFF RICK FLORES SAYS THE IDEA OF BUILDING A WALL TO KEEP MEXICAN CITIZENS FROM CROSSING INTO THE U.S. MISSES THE BIGGER THREAT.

FLORES

My biggest concern is this that a lot of people in America don't know is that these people that came to harm us in 9/11 and smashed those airplanes in the twin towers were here legally. The people that are coming in to cause more destruction to America are gonna come in illegally. And those people look exactly like I do. And they blend in perfectly. They're chameleons. They're gonna come to Mexico. They're gonna learn the culture. They're gonna learn the language. They're gonna obtain fake IDs or passports. And they're gonna blend in with Mexican workers who are coming over to come and work. That's our biggest concern. But those people are not coming to work.

RATHER

You know that's gonna scare the hell out of a lot of people.

FLORES

It, it should scare the hell out of, of Washington and shake them up. And say, "Look, all we want is for people to come and start providing border security." You can't have homeland security if you don't have border security.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IN THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE JUST SEEN, IN THINKING ABOUT MEXICO, YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER THIS, WHILE OUR MILITARY DOES BATTLE 1,000 OF MILES AWAY TO KEEP AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ FROM BECOMING FAILED STATES HAVE WE LOST SIGHT OF MEXICO, A COUNTRY ON OUR VERY DOORSTEP AS IT STRUGGLES WITH IT'S OWN BRANDS OF CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE, AND CHAOS. EVEN IN THE HEATED IMMIGRATION DEBATE WE HEAR MUCH MORE ABOUT ECONOMIC CONCERNS THAN WE DO ABOUT HOMELAND SECURITY.

AT PRESENT, THERE IS THE DANGEROUS PROSPECT OF THE BRIBERY AND GUNFIRE, THE PLATO OPLOMO OF MEXICO'S DRUG LORDS FOLLOWING THE FLOW OF NARCOTICS INTO THE U.S. LOOKING AHEAD, DO WE ALSO RISK SEEING TERRORISTS TRAVEL THAT SAME ROAD INTO AMERICA. SOME TALK OF BUILDING A WALL ALONG THE U.S. MEXICAN BORDER, BUT IN OUR PERCEPTIONS OF MEXICO, WE ARE ALREADY LOOKING THROUGH A WALL, A WALL OF LONG STANDING PRECONCEPTIONS AND YES, PREJUDICE, A WALL OF APATHY AND INCOMPLETE INFORMATION THAT COLORS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THAT LARGE, TREMENDOUSLY COMPLEX AND IMPORTANT NATION WITH THE SEARING IN OF A NEW MEXICAN PRESIDENT COMES A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR AMERICANS FOR OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OUR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TO BREACH THAT WALL, TO VIGOROUSLY AND REALISTICALLY REASSESS WHAT IS GOING ON, WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON IN MEXICO. ALONG WITH THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSIDERABLE CHALLENGES THAT THE U.S. MEXICAN RELATIONSHIP PRESENTS. IF WE LET THAT WALL, THE WALL OF PRECONCEPTIONS AND PREJUDICE APATHY, AND LACK OF INFORMATION STAY IN PLACE. IF WE TURN AWAY FROM THE DANGERS THAT THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO ARE FACING TODAY, WE MAY WELL RISK FACING SOME OF THE SAME PROBLEMS HERE IN THE U.S. TOMORROW

FOR HDNNE RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.

(END)

