

Cantu Assassination

The Science of a Vehicle Attack



Rodolfo Torre Cantu was a physician and politician running for governor of the Mexican State of Tamaulipas. While driving in a non-armored two vehicle scenario he was ambushed and assassinated. This incident provides one of the better lessons learned. We had unusual access to information concerning the attack, including detailed photos taken at the ambush scene, and a video from a gas station surveillance camera. Although the video was taken from a long distance we were able to watch the beginning stages of the ambush.

Using forensic data gathered from the gas station video, pictures taken shortly after the assassination, dimensions taken from Google Maps, we managed to put together a time line of what happened seconds prior to the incident.

From the video and Google Maps data we get a good sense of when they saw the problem, and from that come up the dimensions of the kill zone. The time between the vehicles slowing down, an indication that they saw something and the vehicles coming to a complete stop is approximately 4 seconds. By looking at the video we get the following

By measuring the time between landmarks - the time it took the two cars to go from one land mark to another - then measuring the distance between landmarks - we can easily compute the speed as they drove into the Kill Zone.

Using some math we can come up with when they saw the problem. Here are the numbers.

The two Cantu vehicles were moving 90 KPH which is 56 MPH or 82.32 Feet Per Second. When they saw the problem they were 100 Meters (328 Feet) from where they eventually stopped. Some quick arithmetic tells us that four seconds elapsed from the time they saw the problem to the time they stopped.

The numbers indicate the amount of planning and the skill of the attackers.

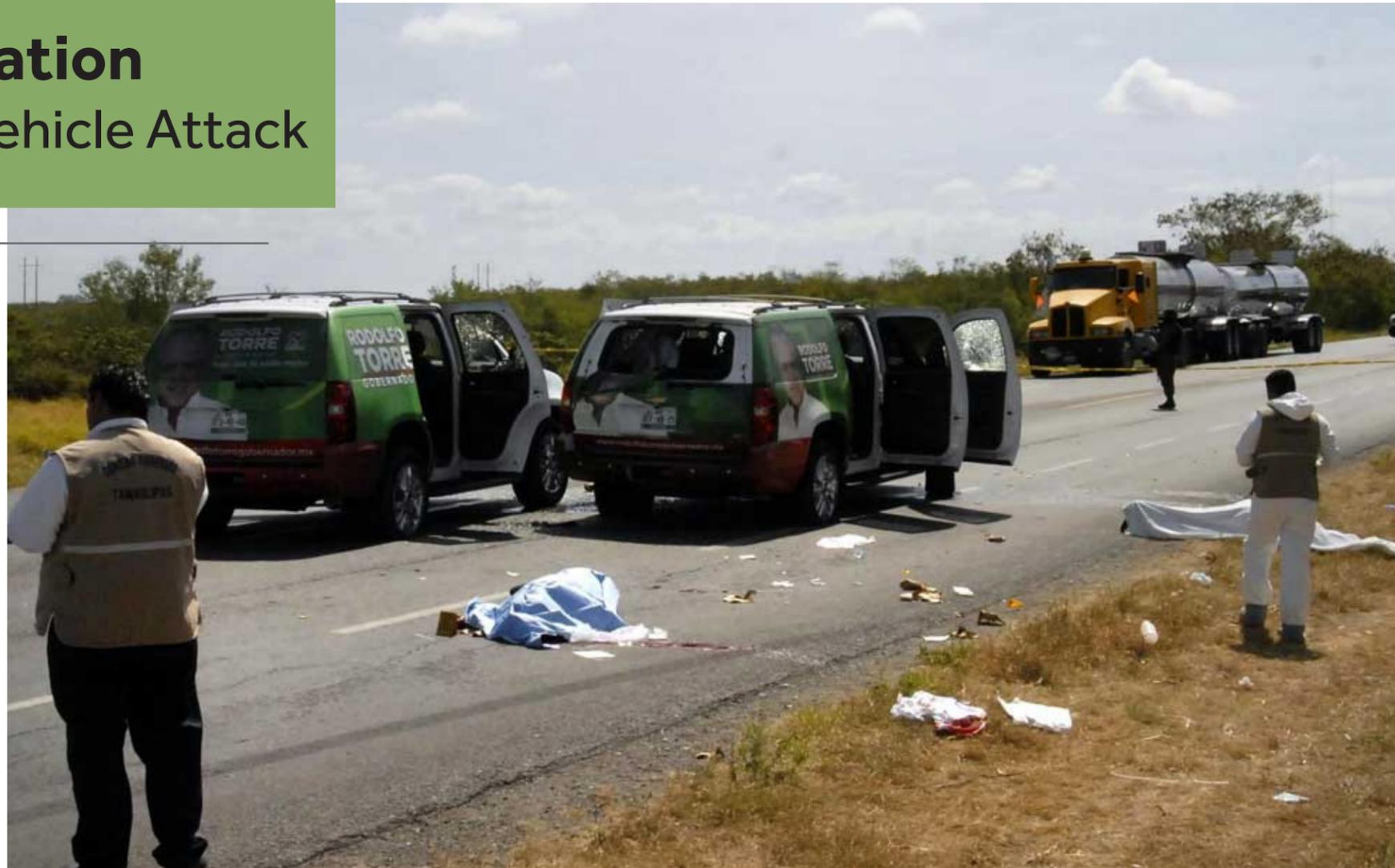
The attackers precisely maneuvered six cars in a 110 to 133 meter box. That takes skill – practice – and planning. Therefore the setup of the assassin's vehicles, the positioning of the assassins was all in that area. Everything that happened happened in that space.

The forensic data created from the Cantu Assassination pointed to some unusual tactics used by the assassins.

The video shows the attackers used a lead surveillance vehicle as a method of controlling the speed of the Cantu convoy therefor setting up the speed

at which the vehicles entered the kill zone.

Along with the assassin's lead car there was also a follow car. As Cantu's vehicles entered the precisely set up kill zone the follow car came up on their right side and cut in front of them. As the lead Cantu vehicle enters the kill zone a car following them comes up alongside and cuts them off. This would explain the reason the assassin lead car slowing the Cantu vehicles down as they entered the kill zone. It gave the overtaking car a better position. This was an incredibly well executed vehicle



attack that took expertise in driving and planning. The attackers maneuvered their vehicles, approximately six cars, with the precision of a well-organized team. That takes skill – practice – and planning, and those that engineered the ambush had extensive training in ambush and surveillance techniques.

Looking at the timing of the ambush, the design of the kill zone, and the implementation of the event, the best estimate is that the surveillance phase of the planning consumed 15 to 30 days, another of the many examples that point to the importance of Surveillance Detection.

Lessons learned

The lessons learned from vehicle attacks all seem to be the same Surveillance Detection is the most important skill one can acquire – in this case it was not only the best protection it could have been the only protection.

The value of a trained security team and security driver is directly proportional to the risk; Dr. Cantu simply did not believe he was at risk, which made the attacker's job easy.

In a high to moderate risk environment armored vehicles are a must – but in this case they had the Dr. Cantu's group trapped in a kill zone, once the vehicle or vehicles are stopped in the Kill Zone the chances of survival are greatly diminished.