

## Rumor mill inflames border debate

August 17 2010, By Alfredo Corchado, The Dallas Morning News

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The ominous reports have zinged around the Internet for weeks, raising fresh fears about border security: Armed members of the notorious Mexican criminal group, the Zetas, seized two ranches near Laredo, Texas.

But [law enforcement](#) officials say the reports are false.

The latest incident, officials say, is one more cautionary tale of how bloggers are trying to influence the agenda over [border](#) security by fanning fears based on stories that are going viral without first being thoroughly reported or confirmed.

The latest rumor began swirling the weekend of July 24, when editors and others received reports that the Zetas had invaded U.S. territory. The story was based on a law enforcement bulletin stating that officers were looking into a tip that the Zetas had invaded the two ranches.

The bulletin was leaked to freelancer Kimberly Dvorak, a conservative writer who lives in San Diego. On her blog, she describes herself as journalist dedicated to writing "fair free and balanced stories" about local, national and international news stories for more than 15 years. She could not be reached for comment.

The Internet report was picked up by other bloggers, and reporters made inquiries.

Laredo Police Department spokesman Joe Baeza told KGNS-TV in

Laredo that the story is "just one of many unconfirmed rumors and threats that we get here on a daily basis."

One police investigator, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "We're swamped with so many rumors that this takes away from us doing our jobs. The fears out there are unreal, and the ability of these bloggers to penetrate society is out of control."

As part of their illegal smuggling operations, criminal groups do control ranches on the Mexican side of the border, having either bought the land or intimidated ranchers into giving them access. This is possible because corruption in Mexico is endemic, and the rule of law is weak.

Many criminals hold dual nationality, and operating on both sides of the border is common. But the idea that they would try the same tactic on the U.S. side is unlikely, authorities say. Seizing land would be too risky because it would expose criminals to U.S. law enforcement.

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