



Mexican insurgents try out new tactics

A successful bomb attack by a resurgent revolutionary army has forced the Calderon administration into a dual-front battle to maintain security and, maybe, economic well being.

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Mexico's Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) was an afterthought until it claimed responsibility for the two July bomb attacks on the oil and gas infrastructure in the central Mexican states of Guanajuato and Queretaro.

The attacks attracted national and international media attention, forced the Mexican government to admit they had no idea it was coming, and have led many to believe the EPR will strike again. In short, the bombings were a success.

Across the country, Mexicans have lived with violence associated with organized crime and the drug trade. Now a separate organization threatens economic security and Mexican President Felipe Calderon has found himself fighting two enemies, each with distinct motives. Combined, they create a serious security situation that Mexico's police and military forces will find difficult to contain.

In a series of threats since the second bombing on 10 July, the EPR has vowed continue to target national and international organizations until either the national government or the government in Oaxaca prove that Edmundo Reyes Amaya and Gabriel Alberto Cruz Sanchez, aka Raymundo Rivera Bravo, are still alive. The Mexican government claims it has no knowledge of these men.

According to Reyes Amaya's daughter Nadin, who was interviewed by the Mexican press, her father made regular trips to Oaxaca - the known center of operations for the EPR - but she was not aware that he was an member of the EPR. Two of Cruz Sanchez's three sons are currently in a high security prison, convicted of bomb-making.

Conservative observers claim the EPR itself killed both men during various rounds of infighting between splinter groups within the umbrella organization. The rebel group claims both men were arrested and tortured in Oaxaca on 25 May 2006 during the violent protests in Oaxaca City.

The recent attacks on Mexico's energy infrastructure proved that the pipelines are vulnerable. But more importantly, the EPR demonstrated that it knew precisely where to plant the bombs to elicit specific economic damage.

According to an unnamed US official interviewed by the *Miami Herald*, the bombs were placed on the side of a major valve that would disrupt supplies to oil and gas to factories, not to local refineries or for export.

The Mexican chamber of manufacturing industries reported that some 1,200 factories across Guanajuato, Queretaro, Aguascalientes and Jalisco were forced offline. *The Washington Post* reported that Mexican glass maker, Vitro, lost some US\$800,000 a day while it waited for Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) to restore the energy feed. Mexico's beer manufacturer Modelo SA along with food manufacturer Hershey and auto makers Nissan and Honda were all forced to close temporarily.

These are acute economic effects, not felt at the national level.

The bombs used in these explosions have been confirmed as being constructed with material commonly used for construction and mining. Presumably such bomb material is not hard to procure, store or disperse.

As a terrorist organization, the EPR is considered an umbrella group that since its inauguration in 1996 has been a rallying point for over a dozen splinter groups that fight for the rights of Mexico's indigenous and poor communities and for the downfall of the Mexican government.

These recent attacks, some claim, are in part to attract the government's attention. But they were also designed to attract the attention of Mexico's various revolutionary groups.

Mexican security analyst, Diego Enrique Osorno, claims these attacks are an effort to reunite up to eight of the nine revolutionary armed groups that Mexican intelligence considers "active."

With over a year of nearly constant civil unrest in Oaxaca, the EPR has found a new political handle for its anti-government activity. It is savvy enough to know that more killings will likely not gain Calderon's attention and may alienate it from its popular support base. As such, striking economic targets is the logical choice for future attacks.

On 19 July, Mexican Interior Minister Francisco Ramirez Acuna admitted it was not yet possible to know if there would be more attacks. But he went on to tell the Mexican daily *La Jornada* that the country's intelligence agency would not be able to prevent another bombing.

If the EPR continues on its current path, it will significantly threaten Mexico's economic well being, forcing Calderon into the unfortunate position of fighting for both human and economic security.

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author only, not the International Relations and Security Network (ISN).

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