

Bombings in Mexico — A Sign of Upcoming Unrest?

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In early July there were several attacks on Pemex, Mexican Petroleum, installations in the central states of Guanajuato and Querétaro. Bomb strikes on gas pipelines that subsequently caused a loss of production in possibly 1 million small and medium sized businesses, with a cost of at least 100 million pesos [US\$9.2 million] daily due to the absence of natural gas. This in the industrial areas of the Bajío, that include not only Guanajuato and Querétaro but too Aguascalientes and parts of Jalisco. Furthermore, some 80,000 households were affected.

So far no losses of life have been reported, officially at least.

On July 12 rebels of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) claimed credit for the attacks, and by doing so they have directly challenged the Mexican government and its institutions.

As well, the National Security and Investigation Center (CISEN), an agency within Mexico's Interior Ministry with the responsibility for intelligence, risk alerts, and the prevention of acts that could harm national security, was taken by complete surprise by the sweeping guerrilla attacks against Mexico.

The reappearance of the EPR guerrilla group adds another ingredient to an already explosive political situation in our country, and this increases the pressure that other forces have been exerting for months in order to damage Mexico.

The way this guerrilla force reappeared represents a qualitative leap in their strategy, and in the focus of their objectives of not only making the country more violent but towards the destabilization of Mexico and its institutions as well. In the media, the government has sought to minimize the attacks and damages by playing them down, but its media strategy and other actions taken in the fight against insecurity have not had the expected results. As a result, the situation in Mexico is becoming more complex and difficult day by day.

And these elements, along with others, could be the first symptoms of a future social explosion. Accordingly, we should review the following:

1. The credibility of the Mexican government and its institutions.

The lack of transparency and certainty during the 2006 federal electoral process, as well as the presidential election, have brought about a strong social uneasiness among many who simply do not believe what government officials say. This malaise has been increasing due to recent corruption scandals, with the discoveries of what took place during the administration of ex-president Vicente Fox (2000-2006), and because current officials have not found anyone culpable. What is seen is a strong commitment of the current government with the past administration, and this is causing a number of political and social players (Andrés Manuel López Obrador; the Federal District government; the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and Labor Party (PT); the EPR; et al.) to strongly criticize actions undertaken by the current administration. The way this government came into being, its lack of vision and strategy in order to face challenges, and the country's current situation has created a perception of weakness in this government and its institutions.

2. Probable ties of guerrillas with drug traffickers.

In recent years the drug cartels have increased in strength in Mexico, and official recognition of this fact has led to a government strategy to fight drug trafficking, and the channeling of more money to support this strategy. However guerrillas and the drug cartels continue to grow stronger, plus traffickers especially have large amounts of money at their disposal, which has made the Mexican people everyday witnesses to acts of violence, disputes between cartels, and murder. There is a fear of circumstances and events occurring in Mexico like those that have taken place in other Latin American countries. The recent attacks on Pemex pipelines are reminiscent of those in Colombia in the 1990s, by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Or the bombings of public works by Sendero Luminoso guerrillas in Peru.

3. The government's inexperience and inabilities.

The recent attacks exceeded the Mexican government's abilities in all areas, including its communications strategy and response competence. This calls attention to a government that is inexperienced, without the wherewithal to respond to situations when under pressure, and a lack of results in its strategy against insecurity. Historically, in a number of areas worldwide, government incompetence has stimulated the growth of guerrilla and destabilizing movements.

Admittedly the challenges faced by the Mexican government are many, however national security must always be a top priority. Especially with early symptoms of future social explosions and unrest having already surfaced.

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