



Mexico After The Elections

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Introduction

General elections took place in Mexico on 1st July. It came as no surprise that Enrique Peña Nieto, the candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), won the election. During the campaign, and despite a very dynamic pre-elections atmosphere, Peña Nieto remained ahead in voter preferences throughout the campaign. Constant media presence was a main reason for his success. His rivals, Josefina Vázquez Mota, from the former ruling Centre-right National Action Party (PAN) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador from the Centre-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) were not able to compete on this score.

Winning the elections was easier for Peña Nieto than the challenges that he will face during his presidency. Mexico has many features of a failing state: Corruption, nepotism, fragile government structures, a weak police and justice system, civil organizations incapable of producing significant changes and an exponential increase of brutal violence that has already caused the death of more than 50,000 people over the past six years. Those are some of the issues that the new administration is going to have to deal with. Which strategy Peña Nieto is going to apply and which role external players such as the United States and Central America are going to play is the subject of this paper.

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ANALYSIS

An alarming increase in the number of the victims due to drug-related violence has occurred during the past years in Mexico. The main reason for this has been the struggle between the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and other criminal groupings which strive to control lucrative and illegal businesses such as human trafficking, arms trade, money laundering and even organ trading. The control over the smuggling routes and the drug market are at the center of the violent conflict between criminal organizations in Mexico and the government.

The former administrations' harsh methods and military strategy in its anti-drug policy led to an unprecedented increase of violence. In its efforts to attack the power of criminal organizations and to counter drug-related violence, it strongly relied on the military. This in turn was a continuity of the policy of the past administrations.

This dependence on the military brought about an escalation of violence with the inevitable rise of victims and the increasing use of controversial methods such as torture during interrogations and other human rights abuse.

Furthermore, eliminating the "godfathers" of selected DTOs has turned out to be counterproductive. This vacuum in the hierarchy of such criminal organizations following elimination has led to infighting between members for the leadership and has often provoked the split of the organizations. This has led to a doubling of such organizations from five to ten. Also, as a result of the previous administrations anti-drug strategy, some federal states such as Chihuahua, Nuevo León and Jalisco have become "narco regions", where functions and institutions of government have been handed over to the cartels. In such cases the power is today very much in the hands of criminal elements, the local governments role is that of a spectator with little or no influence.

There are no indications that the security situation will improved under the new elected president. Peña Nieto, has already expressed that he will adapt his predecessors policy and will not make any radical changes. Thus his approach to manage and combat threats such as murder, kidnapping and corruption will rely on the formation of a national gendarmerie manned by the military but with a civilian character.

Nieto is counting on the support of the ex-director of the Colombian police force, General Óscar Naranjo, as a security consultant. Naranjo has had many years' experience in this field and he played a crucial role in the dismantling of the Cali and Medellin drug cartels in Colombia in the 90's. He worked closed with the DEA and other American intelligence agencies in the capture of Pablo Escobar.

Following the advice of Naranjo, Nieto will undoubtedly also try to strengthen cooperation with the United States. This country is not only an important global player, neighbor and its only significant partner on the foreign policy agenda. 90 % of all drugs produced in South America destined for the US pass through Mexico, thus it can be assumed that the US will seek continued close cooperation with Mexico in order to fight this huge problem.

Unlike the role the United States played in Plan Colombia were US troops were deployed in Colombia, the US in this case will help Mexico in interrupting the flow of drugs, illegal migration and arms trade at the borders.

It can be assumed that there will be a strengthening of the Merida Initiative, an unprecedented partnership between both states to fight organized crime and associated violence. Based on the principle of respect of



sovereignty, the assistance is likely to include further training and support of the legal institutions, equipment such as helicopters and surveillance aircraft and the rapid deployment of law enforcement agencies to Mexico. Support should also include an increase in the provision of intelligence and the establishment of secure communication technology. Since its creation in 2007 the Merida Initiative has frequently been blamed for paying too little attention to Central America. Following the increase in attacks on drug cartels in both Mexico and Colombia, drug traffickers have moved their operational bases to the countries in the “Northern Triangle” of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras which has led to a significant increase in criminal activity and rate of homicide in this region.

The porosity of Mexican borders further worsens the security landscape of the country. As a major transit country of illegal migration to the United States, its rail routes leading north have been a popular and dangerous means of illicit migration. Besides that, crime groups have made a steady business of preying on migrants. Instead of finding a job, illegal immigrants end up working for the DTOs which are also very active in Central America. Los Zetas, Mexico’s most violent criminal organization, not only purchase weapons and armaments in Central America but have turned to kidnapping and migrant-trafficking. There is a strong presence of this group in Guatemala, where it operates training camps and instructs people to become killers or drug smugglers (drug mules). This has led to the creation of the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), a multi-million dollar plan of the U.S. State Department to combat the effects of organized crime and strengthen the rule of law in Central America.

Forecast

It must be assumed that the security situation in Mexico will continue to deteriorate and will remain a key concern for the new administration. The newly elected president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has shown a willingness to assume the same aggressive anti-drug strategy as the outgoing president.

It is too soon to foresee whether the coordination between the federal security forces, state and local forces will improve under the new administration.

President Nieto faces an uphill battle. As the political and financial power of the Narco – Criminal organizations grow the incoming administration will have to combat the main problem within the legal system and law enforcement agencies which is widespread corruption. As long as criminal organizations can buy the loyalty of the authorities we cannot expect the situation to improve. While a lack of effective border controls aids the smuggling of people and drugs, it is the low pay and lack of strategic intent of the authorities which is at the heart of the problem. Unless the new administration addresses these issues and dramatically improves the economic situation of its civil servants, even a minimal improvement of the security situation is unrealistic. The situation is further compounded by the economic attractiveness of the drug trade; with the best will in the world this problem cannot be solved by the incoming Mexican administration.

Mexico’s true problem is the economic success of the Narco Industry and the country is as much a victim of this vicious business as are the addicts in the United States of America.



Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

About the Author of this Issue

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