

Is Mexico a Narco-State?

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[Mexico](#) – In the wake of Mexican President Felipe Calderon’s recent state visit to the U.S and Canada, a burning question remains without any clear answer.

2010 is historically significant for Mexico. It is its bi-centennial year of independence (in 1810 the country began to break free from Spanish imperial tutelage) and perhaps more significantly is also the centenary year of the 1910 Mexican revolution. There is little to celebrate though. The country this year, is still reeling from the vortex of drug-trafficking crimes, the global economic down-turn and the fall-out from the histrionics and panic induced by the H1N1-Swine flu “pandemic” of 2009.

Mexico after a decade of the centre-right almost “corporatist” PAN (National Action Party) party’s rule, (as in 2000, the first PAN candidate won the presidency, Vincente Fox) has been practically “Balkanised”. And as a result, it is now faced with a crippling fragmentation of the federation itself, due mainly to territorial battles or “turf wars” going on between rival drug cartels, which operate almost with impunity in many Mexican states. Possibly, the most fascinating and insightful read on this phenomenal topic is: [Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?](#). While I was pondering over the question raised by the book’s title , I was somewhat astonished to read in (despite what I witnessed first hand in Mexico) the concluding chapter, a rather reassuring reply. That basically, Mexico is far from becoming another Somalia, Pakistan or Haiti.

“Only a Cassandra in deep funk. could conclude that Mexico will implode as is possible in Afghanistan or Pakistan. There are too many factors-the Mexican armed forces, the Roman Catholic church, the middle class, the Monterrey business community, the banking system, labor and professional organisations, the U.S government, and international financial institutions [IMF,World Bank], etc.- to let this happen. Felipe Calderon, and his successors must act to prevent ungovernability in cities like Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, and in states like Guerrero, Durango, Sinaloa, and Michoacan.”

So writes the author George W. Grayson, a professor of Government at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Although Mexico is not on the verge of an all out collapse, it appears to be sliding towards a civil war situation reminiscent of the 1910 popular uprisings led by the “outlaws” Pancho Villa and Zapata. Or an armed revolt, or struggle over who will control the entire Mexican state at the end of the day: will it be the government and its main backer the Mexican military, or the most powerful (who have crushed their competitors), cash-rich and well - armed drug cartel(s)? Or maybe as some experts in the field speculate, an arrangement between both main warring parties might be made. Which would be a good thing. But why?

Because the “war on drugs” cannot be won as long as narcotic sales are illegal. There is no end game, in this conflict which is bound to just drag on, (but at variously different levels of intensity) endlessly. In the present it is just too profitable for everyone concerned. An unthinkable, yet practical, sort of modus vivendi must be, and will likely be achieved (as was the case under the previous PRI regime, which ruled Mexico for 71 years) between the belligerents, if any semblance of stability is to be restored to this fragile republic; plagued by chaotic internal violence and unceasingly oppressive militarization .

Is Mexico a “Narco-State”?

While Mexico is not a failed state by any means, it does possess the characteristics associated with a classic “narco- state” like Colombia. That is, it’s faced with a prolonged and protracted “narco-insurgency”, has a highly corrupt judicial system, and also contains a “home grown” narcotics -drugs’ production, distribution industry which operates both within and beyond its borders.

Naturally, this presents a pressing “ national security” threat , or danger to its northern neighbours. That is to both the U.S and Canada. There is that dreaded “spill-over” effect of the conflict fuelled by the drugs and guns trade. Simply because the narcotics traffickers would be foolish (on the contrary they seem to be brilliantly clever and ingenious when it comes to promoting their business enterprises, and widening market access for their illicit goods) not to take advantage, or ruthlessly exploit, the increasing inter-dependency in trade and commercial activity, or an increased integration of the continent into what is officially known as the NAU (“ North American Union”). Something Mexico’s President Felipe Calderon advocates (“Calderon calls for closer ties with Canada, U.S.” – AFP, 05-27-2010). North America, therefore risks becoming “narcofied” in the not too distant future. Now back to Prof. Grayson’s hard -hitting and minutely researched book.

The Mexico academic and analyst warns that in this perilous context there’s a chance the Mexican government might be forced to cede power to the narcotic’s syndicates. And thus a regime of “dual sovereignty ” might emerge. Grayson describes this hybrid polity, by referring to a classic work by Crane Burton called “ The Anatomy of a Revolution”, as a state where the government remains in “control of certain political, economic, social and cultural areas,” while at the same time, “ abdicating responsibility and domination of organised crime to others...” Presumably the Mexican drug barons and their powerful narco-militias and networks which operate from Tapachula in Southern Mexico all the way up to Vancouver, Canada.

A possibility which most U.S and Canadian officials or anti-narcotics specialists , including many in the law enforcement community , might not relish. And least of all, perhaps, the Mexicans themselves who are caught in the crossfire of this conflict. They are terrorized and besieged by state para-military and federal army troops, while also being subjected to drug-war related violence in their neighbourhoods and streets almost routinely these days.

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