

THE RUINS OF THE FUTURE

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THE FACTS

The killing of the Iguala students is the most brutal and distressing event that Mexicans have lived through, and shown to the world, in the 21st century.

We declare that it is the worst, but it is not the only one: the recent executions in Tlatlaya (Estado de México) perpetrated by the Army, the massacre of migrants in San Fernando (Tamaulipas) at the hands of a murderous gang, the lengthy wave of femicides in Ciudad Juarez, the fire at the Casino Royale in Monterrey and the rule of crime over complete territories in Michoacan, are examples of a deep political, social and moral breakdown that has been lurking for decades and that is already affecting a significant portion of the Mexican State and of the national territory.

We declare that it is the worst because of its unbelievable cruelty, reminiscent of an extermination camp; because it exhibited a criminal “form of labor”, in which the routine killings in the wilderness, concealed in pits to hide the homicide, were nonetheless signals that were most effective towards terrorizing and controlling a whole city, with no escape possible. It is the worst because it constitutes undeniable proof of the daily complicity between the police, the government authorities and the criminal bands. Like no other criminal episode in our country, this one has displayed the failure of the Mexican State and the Government’s failure to meet their fundamental obligations:

- Within the municipal police, hand-tied and at the service of the criminal gangs.
- Within the state police, with no reflexes or capacity to respond, nor to pay minimal attention to the known and reported incidents of extreme violence happening in the City of Iguala.
- Within the Army, that neither could, nor wanted to, ensure the population’s safety, nor of the 43 students who found themselves in an extreme situation.
- Within the processes that political parties follow to elect their candidates –this time, the national left (PRD and PT)– which made it possible for them to endorse an individual with clear and direct family ties to the drug cartels.
- Within the administration of justice, at the State and Federal level, indifferent and indolent when presented with homicide accusations against the Mayor of Iguala in 2013.
- Within an incompetent and deliberately slow investigation: through its negligence crucial time was lost in the search to discover what happened.
- Within the intelligence services, incapable of alerting or preventing the consequences of organized crime control in a community of over one hundred thousand.
- Within the paralysis and erratic reaction of the Federal Government, which took ten days to take over the investigation of a crime against humanity, it was remiss for over a year in processing homicide accusations presented against the Mayor of Iguala.

In sum: police bodies, the Army, political parties, Departments of Justice, intelligence services, local and Federal Governments, have a serious and inescapable responsibility. And their conduct, by either action or omission, demonstrates a monumental failure of the Mexican State.

To reform and rehabilitate the State is –and must be– the major endeavor of these times, now made more urgent by these terrible events. The illusion according to which we should first take care of the “structural reforms that the country needs” and then, and not until then, pay attention to inequality, redistribution of wealth, institutional reform and the creation of a Democratic State under the rule of law, has proved to be tragically false in these ill-fated times.

But in order to rehabilitate the State, a first condition must be met: all encompassing visions and analyses must be left behind. It is vital to punish and break up the criminal gangs that have unleashed violence and terror, at a level unknown up to now. Public servants in collusion with organized crime should also be punished. It is equally necessary to identify institutions as well as persons that, from their positions as State officials, have fulfilled their duty, specifically the State’s duty to provide security and safety to its citizens, in spite of all difficulties.

The causes of the present crisis are, by their own nature, complex, because they affect fundamental issues of public life and did not emerge in one day. To determine their origins requires an effort of reflection and analysis, with no hidden areas, able to establish the defense of national interest as an urgent cry for those urgent reforms that are that are most needed. No significant solution can be conceived without mobilizing this civil society which has shown its repudiation of a state of affairs that guarantees superficial changes, without recovering the State’s purposes, a critical review of this state of affairs is an essential part of the effort to restore peace and harmony.

Against the authoritarian and simplistic dream to have, here and now, a pure society with no State, we must defend the need for genuine reform, capable of redirecting social life into the battered channel of democracy. It is undisputable that the greater degrees of freedom reached in previous decades dissolve in the face of the inequalities that divide and confront our citizens, to the point that, without a change of course, the future is unsafe for all, hostile and threatening.

There are no shortcuts or alternatives, neoliberal or anarchist: it is within the State, the public authority elected by Mexicans, within our institutions, where a crucial battle will be fought on two fronts: against the vicious criminal gangs, and simultaneously, to reform and update the institutions that should pursue them.

Nobody could predict the depth of the social roots of organized crime, nor its level of cruelty, but neither could we imagine the State’s disorganization and inefficiency both before and following the tragedy. The Mexican President went as far as to say that the disappearances were a “local matter” and the PRD decided, at first, to protect “its” Governor, already discredited by his own inactivity on the very night of the killings.

Thus, the tragedy of the 43 students destroyed the myth of a strong and united State: the evidence of political parties and public administration, here at the service of criminals, there uncoordinated and lacking the capacity to respond, everywhere alienated by its own rhetoric and by the image that is has built of itself. All of this paints the disturbing tableau of a weakened ruling class and State,

very distant from the real Mexico and very far from understanding and facing the seriousness of the Iguala events.

Certainly malaise and skepticism have been rampant in the country for some time now, mainly due to a disappointing economic performance; but the monstrous nature of what happened, and the institutional and political inefficiency shown, were recognized by international public opinion and both the Government and the President were placed at the center of international criticism.

REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

After almost 60 days, it is possible to assert that 2014 is already another dark year, with a trail of human and material costs, setbacks and social resentment which will continue to accumulate as long as the State does not articulate a response of a scope and size appropriate to the tragedy itself, a response able to hear the message of a society that is both damaged and mistrustful, a society that through its protests is demanding change in national life. A serious and articulate public debate that we are far from having is required to provide this response.

What followed after the night of September 26th is another tragedy, though of a different nature. Horror and indignation have flowed over a poor and mean public environment. The first and instinctive reaction of political leaders was to protect corporate interests and almost immediately produce mutual accusations, among different personalities and parties. For the main Leftist party in the State of Guerrero, trapped from the first day in the dead-end of political calculations instead of decisively assuming its indisputable responsibilities, the internal confrontation has been especially hard.

On the other hand, even today there has been no Government statement to explain the magnitude of this crisis, nor any effort to provide a complete explanation of what happened: How did organized crime come to dominate politics and administration in Iguala? How did it coexist with State Government? How did it exercise its fierce control? How were Federal controls avoided? How was violence triggered in the days and hours previous to the massacre?

The Attorney General's account has been the sole attempt to understand part of the circumstances, but it does not provide a full and coherent explanation of how organized crime achieved such extremes, such economic, political, social dominance and such degree of cruelty. The absence of these explanations does not make it possible to exterminate these evils, nor to discover the ways to reconstruct civil society, neither in Iguala nor in the rest of Guerrero.

The lack of a serious, documented and no compromises diagnosis is one of the worst errors of the Federal Government which, in the midst of the explosive situation created by the crisis, only managed to produce a generic condemnation of violence and two hollow sentences, sufficient to get by but leaving only bewilderment in its wake.

The vacuum, the paralysis and the political and governmental confusion were followed by an equally confused spiral in the media. Published opinion has been raucous and erratic, a vehicle of unfounded versions, ramblings and rumors, more or less biased or absurd. After the first five weeks,

the activity of commentators has not generated a platform for constructing a diagnosis, a consistent narrative or even clues as to way out of the state of shock and the political and social crisis.

Following these events, Mexico has seen a powerful wave of social dissent, motivated by the conviction that crime and corruption have gone too far. The enormity of the tragedy provoked social reactions throughout the country, especially among the youth, bearers of the malaise, the rejection and the most basic demands for justice and punishment, engulfed in rage and mistrust, spreading like a trail of gunpowder all over the nation. These demonstrations have showed, at all times, a peaceful and civic determination unrelated to groups of violent provocateurs that promptly appeared at each demonstration.

Nevertheless –it must be said– the necessary, healthy and vast wave of moral indignation that haunts dozens of cities in Mexico (and in many other parts of the world) has not found, aside from a total rejection of impunity, a distinctive message. However, as frequently happens with spontaneous actions, their great energy and will to change, have not led to a course of action nor devised a formula to organize achievable demands and specific transformations.

Grand slogans appear overnight, as reminiscences of other situations, but –because of their very simplicity– may become void of all content: “It was the State”, “They must all go”, “Peña resign”, constitute an understandable expression of the emotions of millions, but their vague and antipolitic character, may lead into a mere non-conformist spiral, a dead-end and new collective frustrations. The “It was the State” slogan, far from clarifying the relations between the different levels and powers involved, and the possible chains of complicity, buries the possibility of judgment for the direct perpetrators of these murders, who can hide in the undergrowth of these verbal generalizations. Thus, the “It was the State” slogan can –unintentionally– exculpate those actually guilty of the massacre: the drug trafficking gangs in Guerrero, highest in the list of public condemnation in our country.

Violent actions perpetrated by different groups have erupted within this setting of generalized indignation. This violence only increases uncertainty and its offshoots: destruction, fear and eventually death. When they accompany peaceful demonstrations, they tend to destroy the public’s initial sympathy and –most importantly– their increase and reproduction may be the prologue of an outcome that deepens the mistrust among sectors of society and the State.

Universities and similar institutions have been natural venues for the expression of very genuine social indignation, but, by their very nature, they turn out to be particularly vulnerable to provocations, misunderstandings and stalking, as shown by acts of intimidation that have taken place at the National University during these last weeks. Respect, support and care for the National University is a political duty of all levels of Government and all political forces, especially in such times as these.

Very few have tried to look further and go beyond fear and indignation. Political forces, State institutions, civil society and demonstrations have not managed to open a public space for establishing bridges towards dialogue, deliberation, proposals, so as to forge initiatives and strategies that provide some sense for the moment and a horizon for the nation.

We wish to acknowledge the scarce appeals which have been put forward to exhaust all options that might lead to understanding and dialogue, to deactivate the spiral of violence and provocation, to find formulas to solve the critical problems that afflict our country.

MOVING ON

The Iguala massacre also showed us how little we understand contemporary Mexico and the chasm that exists between the day-to-day reality of millions and the incantations of modernity.

There is no such thing as “over diagnosis” in Mexico. There is a repetitive predominant discourse that thinks it knows which formulas and reforms are required to put us on the road to prosperity. However, this discourse has proved, in a very short timeframe, to be too fragile and too weak in the face of reality.

The leisurely agenda of the Federal Government (according to which institutional reforms could wait until after the promised bonanza brought about by the “structural reforms”) has fallen under its own weight –as a collection of mere hypotheses– in the face of the evidence of the State’s impotence and paralysis.

Given the gravity of the present situation, and because the great indignation and national mobilization generated by these events must find an institutional channel and its own agenda for change, the Institute of Studies for a Democratic Transition, proposes the following seven actions to address and facilitate the social and political pact so urgently needed.

1. Henceforth, Human Rights must be at the center of all debates and policies: an accommodating policy in this matter can no longer be tolerated. The appointment of an independent and trustworthy personality to head the CNDH (National Commission for Human Rights) is a step forward, but much more is needed.
2. Attention to the victims –at present the families of the students– must remain a relevant issue, because they are at the center of the pain and indignation in our country. The CNDH must lead in implementing a course of action with professional backing, information, dialogue and protection for the bereaved parents and relatives, in addition to a fair compensation. Care for these victims is a necessary foundation for reconciliation and social reconstruction in the State of Guerrero.
3. Review and establishing of municipal power. At this point it is clear that this is a prime area (though not the only one) for organized crime to reproduce its control. What policies should be followed in order to strengthen its institutional capabilities? Which of its powers should be turned over to State Governments and which to the Federal Government? Re-centralization is not an option, neither is indifference and unconcern in the face of weak governments confronting criminal organizations that amply overpower them. Maybe the time has come to completely revamp the municipal map of Mexico, considering the possibility of mergers, extensions, reinforcement and redefinition of capacities, responsibilities and rights. Mexico must review with utmost seriousness the question of Federalism, an essential aspect of the State, that has been long awaiting democratic reform. This is a far-reaching discussion that merits much more attention in the immediate future.



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4. The provision of justice in another key problem that will not be resolved by bigger budgets nor by the magic attributed to oral trials. It must be said, with great emphasis, that there is a crisis at the center of the rule of law, and that this crisis puts the yearnings for justice and equality in a quandary. Corruption is not a lesser evil. On the contrary it constrains the working of institutions and aggravates the frailty of social coexistence.
The judiciary as a whole –and specifically its top authority, the Supreme Court– has great responsibility in this task (shared by Congress) of starting immediately to implement the changes that the seriousness of the situation requires. For example, petitions of habeas corpus for known criminals must be supervised by higher courts and not be granted by isolated justices. Trials in critical cases must develop in clear and timely trajectories, without administrative excuses. The Tlatlaya case –in relation to military justice– must be fully elucidated, but above all, the arrest and punishment of the perpetrators of the Iguala massacre is equally crucial for the credibility of any future State or Government initiative.
5. Poverty and inequality are the breeding ground for endemic violence and for the ever easier transit of youth towards criminality. It is impossible to separate the backwardness and lack of economic growth and opportunities from the decision of thousands of Mexicans to enroll in the existing criminal army that has put the State under siege in wide areas and territories. This is the perfect opportunity to seriously rethink the whole spectrum of social programs at the Federal, State and Municipal levels, to update the programs for combating extreme poverty and hunger, but above all to promote an unambiguous message of social cohesion. In this sense, the proposal to increase minimum wages acquires today special significance and importance. Not only has its macroeconomic feasibility been clearly demonstrated (it does not generate inflation and/or unemployment), but it provides an opportunity for the State, businesses and unions to give an unequivocal demonstration of commitment to the country and social cohesion.
As for the conservative utopia which thought it possible to eliminate the system of rural schools for teachers by inertia, it has demonstrated its irrelevance and requires urgent and total attention from the education authorities. It is particularly pressing to generate alternative, innovative and inclusive options for the high school and college systems, so that the country can incorporate more youths and offer them a more significant life path (more significant than unemployment, curricular deterioration or crime) as well as channels which allow them to get involved in the demands of a society that still has a demographic window of opportunity.
6. The battle against corruption is the concrete form which the huge demand against impunity and for the rule of law has taken today. A genuine reengineering in the structure of accountability, particularly in the primary levels of the State is clearly and urgently present in the national agenda. New ways and means to combat corruption are mature, both in the academic world and politics, and there is no reason to keep postponing them.
7. A crisis in representation, a crisis in administration, a crisis in the power of response of the Government, all of these represent a disturbing picture that should call for a wide political discussion, about the regime and the form that State power is organized in México. Presidential rule, its excesses, the personality cult it generates and its many institutional schemes show, once and again, that it does not have the means or the tools to manage the problems posed by the plurality and diversity of the country. Like it or not, we are faced with a crisis of our own democracy, of the Left, of the party system, of the rule of law and of politics itself, as the essential activity to process public interest and find common solutions.



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Reform of public power is the horizon that must frame national discussion in the next months.

IN CONCLUSION

The unprecedented and dreadful circumstances which face us today make it imperative for us to carry out a most profound reform. In the IETD we are not betting on the collapse of the system nor do we share the senseless idea that “worse is better”. Social mobilization must be the catalyst for reviewing and eventually reforming each and every one of the links that has to do with the provision of justice. We are referring to the police, public prosecutors, judges, prisons. No magic can resolve what must be addressed by timely diagnostics and relevant initiatives.

Faced with the paralysis of vast areas of political power, with the avalanche of reprimands among the political parties and the astonishment that frequently becomes confusion in the productive society, it is urgent to define a direction and to make of these reforms –fueled by social mobilization– into a virtuous circle which targets the institutions of the State.

We need to renew public discourse giving it new formats. We envision an agreement, based on the convergence of legitimate authority, political parties, social organizations and movements that have made known their existence, the validity of their claims and their will to participate.

Iguala is the last stage of a problem of vast dimensions, that crosses borders (drug trafficking) and with enormous power to corrupt; we will continue to live with its painful consequences for the days and years to come. It is a tragic and exceptional stage that demands exceptional responses, democratically developed within the institutions, and taking into account this irate and participative Mexico, suddenly illuminated from this small city in the State of Guerrero.

The golden legend, according to which endemic corruption can be managed and its excesses controlled, is now over. Our aged economic (and mental) model and its prime time reforms should wake up and look at the foundations of their own subsistence: less government, low salaries, regulation evasion, inequality, postponing the welfare of millions to mere hypotheses and good luck, always located in the future of “structural reforms”.

A few months ago, it was assumed that we were taking giant steps towards our definitive modernization. But the old unsolved problems, the problems always postponed –violence, poverty, inequality– have plunged us into the ruins of a future that never arrived.

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