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Mexico

We Are All Ayotzinapa

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“They took them alive and we want them back alive” demanded the families of 43 students kidnapped from Ayotzinapa in the Mexican state of Guerrero. The cry was taken up everywhere, even though many believed they must by now be dead.

At this writing on December 5, students, labor unionists and community groups had taken over the Sonora State Legislature, while teachers blocked the Highway of the Sun that links Mexico City to the resort city of Acapulco with the Christmas holiday season just about to begin. [The charred remains of one of the students, Alexander Mora, were confirmed a day later “ ed.]

Mexico has not seen such a crisis at least since the election protests of 2006. Indeed, perhaps it has never seen anything quite like the wave of social protest that has engulfed the country since, on September 26, police working with gangsters killed six, wounded 25, and kidnapped 43 students.

Protests over the murders continued throughout October, some spontaneous and others well organized, reaching a peak on the November 20 anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution when tens “ some say hundreds “ of thousands marched and rallied in the zócalo, the national plaza.

Already in late September, protestors striking out at symbols of government and politics burned the Iguala city hall and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) state office in Chilpancingo. A large protest crowd on November 8 burned the door of the National Palace in Mexico City. The parents of the disappeared students led some of the largest marches and rallies.

The United States shares responsibility. President Barack Obama repeatedly lauded the government of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and its war on drugs even as 60,000 were killed, 20,000 disappeared, and 1.5 million displaced. And Obama has, in the last two years, praised President Enrique Peña Nieto, even as thousands more died in Mexico’s drug wars.

Washington spent \$3 billion in the last six years on the Mérida Initiative, a border security, counter-narcotics, and counterterrorism program established by the George W. Bush administration in 2008. Clearly the U.S. support for the Mexican government dramatically magnifies the level of violence and damage to Mexican society.

Violence and impunity, however, are principally a problem of the Mexican government and political parties.

Presidential Corruption

The Ayotzinapa disappearances and the protests over them would alone constitute a serious national crisis.

Then in early November, the media discovered that, in a flagrant conflict of interest, President Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife Angélica Rivera had a \$7 million home in an exclusive neighborhood “ the president’s wife called it “their real home” “ a house belonging to a subsidiary of Grupo Higa, a company that had done hundreds of millions of dollars of business with the State of Mexico when Peña Nieto was governor, and had just signed a contract on November 3 with a Chinese-led consortium to build a \$3.7 billion high-speed railroad between Mexico City and Queretaro.

The president and his wife quickly announced that the house was not a gift but that she was buying the home and government officials claimed to be canceling the contract for construction of the railroad.

Peña Nieto's government has been embarrassed by the revelations of conflict interest and the government at the highest levels has been shaken by the wide-spread criticism and massive protests. Realizing the depth of the crisis, the extent of the public disaffection, and the size and significance of the movement, on November 27 Peña Nieto took the movement's slogan "We are all Ayotzinapa!"

In a remarkable official statement showing that the government has been shaken by the crisis, the president said, "The shout 'We are all Ayotzinapa' is a cry to continue transforming Mexico. The shout 'We are all Ayotzinapa' is an example of a nation that has come together in solidarity in difficult moments. As a society we should have the capacity to channel our pain and indignation into constructive propositions."

Peña Nieto also proposed the creation of a new anti-corruption system, revamping the police, a government takeover of crime-controlled municipalities, and special economic zones to help the country's most backward regions. Few are impressed with these oft-repeated strategies.

The Crisis of the PRD

While the disappearance of the 43 students has challenged the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of President Enrique Peña Nieto, it has had a devastating impact on the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Both Iguala and the state of Guerrero where the students were killed were run by the PRD.

The PRD, founded in 1989 by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and other leaders of the PRI, former Communists, and other leftists became a major left-of-center political force, although electoral fraud kept it from ever winning a presidential election.

Cárdenas, the founder, three-time presidential candidate (1988, 1994, and 2000), the symbolic leader and the moral authority of the party announced on November 25 that he was resigning from the PRD "a serious, some suggest possibly mortal, blow to the party.

At the same time, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was the PRD's presidential candidate in 2006 and again in 2012, has also been linked to the PRD establishment in Guerrero. As a presidential candidate of the PRD, López Obrador campaigned alongside the PRD state governor and Iguala mayor in Guerrero, and his opponents have suggested that López Obrador and his National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) are also tainted.

The left's electoral parties are in no position to give leadership to this movement. That, no doubt, is for the best. The movement itself, however, could produce a new left.

[ATC](#)