

Mexican Government Under Assault From Drug Cartels, Washington Yawns

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Suspected Mexican drug traffickers from the Zetas drug cartel on 20 September drove two trucks to a main avenue in the Mexican Gulf coast city of Boca del Rio in Veracruz state and dumped 35 corpses during rush hour while gunmen stood guard, menacing frightened motorists with automatic weapons.

So, why is this being written about here?

Well, if for no other reason, Mexico's drug cartels have declared a de facto war with the government for control of the country's northern provinces for exports routes into the United States.

Meanwhile, Washington, fixated on the decade-old war on terror, the Middle East and stopping Palestine's incipient bid for statehood at the UN, doesn't even mention a yawn, despite the fact that in the last five years drug violence has claimed more than 35,000 Mexican lives, according to government figures. And that's the low end of the curve, as a number of human rights groups estimate that the true death toll is 40,000.

Forty thousand.

More than 12 times the number of Americans killed in the 9/11 2001 terrorist attacks, in a neighboring country.

Who cares? After all, we all know that Central America is prone to violence, and well... that's just the way it is. Why should Washington care?

Quite aside from the human issues involved, Washington should care because, according to the U.S. Energy Administration, of United States total crude oil imports now averaging 9.033 million barrels per day, Mexico with its 1.319 million barrels per day of exports is exceeded only by Canada as the U.S. top importer of crude, and exceeds Saudi Arabian imports by over 200,000 bpd.

But in dealing with Mexico, Washington is in a classic state of addict denial - and, after all, it is addicted to not one, but three Mexican narcotics - oil imports, drugs and cheap labor.

As for oil, it is worth remembering that all of Mexico's energy imports fall under the purview of Petroleos Mexicanos state oil monopoly, more familiarly known as Pemex. Accordingly, threats against the government's authority, as the Boca del Rio massacres most assuredly are, ultimately threaten the central administration's ability to rule, which in turn calls into

question larger governmental policies.

And the assault on oil exports is led by the cartels' determination to both preserve and expand its footprint in the lucrative gringo market north of the border.

If we are to believe official Washington, these thugs have somehow managed to thwart border controls to flood the U.S. with cheap narcotics. The real truth, which one can only uncover by a close reading of the regional U.S. press in border communities, is that drug money has largely co-opted the local, state and federal authorities responsible for policing the frontier. Of course, in the post-9/11 security debate this is not discussed to unsettle the electorate.

And the third element complicating the issue is the estimated 35 million Hispanic immigrants, mostly illegal, now present in the U.S., a source of their wealthy employer's interest in cheap, undocumented labor, a handy device for driving down wages.

So, as long as America continues to inject cheap oil, drugs and below minimum-wage labor into its collective arm to satisfy its cravings, little will change.

But it's worth remembering that the U.S.-Mexican border, all 1,969 miles of it, is the only place in the world where the Third World washes up against the First. One can make a case for the divided Korean peninsula being a similar case, but the populations on both sides of the DMZ share a common culture, unlike the U.S-Mexican frontier, where a desperately poor Latino culture exists next door to the rich, English-speaking U.S. society.

Washington has got at some point to address all three interrelated issues - oil dependency, the drug culture destabilizing the frontier and the massive swell of undocumented aliens across the frontier. Washington's fixation since 9-11 on the Middle East and South Asia has allowed the issue to slip from what should be front and center of U.S. diplomatic policy, for all its ominous long term consequences.

Mexico's narco-terrorists have effectively declared war on the government's authority in Mexico City - rather than expending U.S. diplomatic capital in blocking the Palestinian's bid for independence at the UN, or nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington might refocus its efforts to our southern neighbor.

After all, imagine Mexico's carnage figures transplanted to Europe, or even the Middle East - Congress would be foaming at the mouth for intervention. To use the most recent statistics - last month, before the final push on the Libyan capital Tripoli began, a representative of the Transitional National Council estimated that 35,000 Libyans had been killed. [editor's note: largely resulting from NATO bombings]

Grievous as the 35,000 Libyan deaths are, a similar number of casualties have occurred in Mexico - America's neighbor.

In the Western Hemisphere. Next door.

Time for a rethink in Washington - Mexico City is clearly under siege, and Mexico's destabilization bids ill for those oil exports.

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