

## Little Civil Wars

By Luis Rubio, President, Centre of Research for Development (CIDAC), Mexico City  
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Mexico is experiencing a growing universe of “little” civil wars that can end up with it in ruins. By the same token, the dynamic that this is creating could in like manner finally generate a country-wide platform for transformation: it all depends on how these processes are channeled or, more appropriately, whether there is someone in charge willing to lead such a transformational venture.

The open fronts are multiple and implacable. Some have been left ajar by the current administration, others have accumulated from before, but if the criterion to focus on the opportunities and risks is one of stability, viability and peace, all entail consequences. The nation is experiencing a growing civil war, or better said, an ensemble of mini civil wars, each one different in origin, circumstance, and dynamic, but the ensemble nonetheless puts in evidence the weakness of the government and that the propensity for toward anarchy grows. What is pathological about all this is that many of these “little wars” are the product of the incompetence and impaired vision of the promoters of these very wars, in many cases those most committed to exactly the opposite of what they are engendering.

A “snapshot” of the general panorama says more than a thousand words:

- The most useless (and, in fact, ludicrous) of civil wars is that which President Peña fostered with his initiative in terms of egalitarian marriages. I have nothing against each couple resolving their lives as they see fit, but it seems to me that the presidential initiative in the matter was foolhardy, counterproductive for him and for his party but, above all, absolutely unnecessary. The war that the Catholic Church started in the wake of that decision can bring nothing good, and all the more so when,

à la Mexicaine, the problem was “solved”: Mexico City permits everything; why change a status quo that works? As the phrase attributed to Talleyrand says, “it was worse than a crime, it was a blunder”. An enormous blunder.

- Corruption corrodes everything, but has opened many fronts, all costly. Above all else, there are the protagonists, first of all the governors, who exhibit not the least decorum: they interpret an electoral triumph as a license to steal and, if they can, to arrive at the presidency. This war is not going to go away, even if the political parties reach an agreement on what corruption is and thus, who goes -or does not- go to jail, and in exchange for what. Justice? Up against the wall. Even worse: it provides incentives for the next breed of corrupt governors.

- Then there are the new Torquemadas, now dedicated to corruption or witch-hunts where the last thing that matters is justice, legality or due process. To denounce, to abuse, to attack and to evidence is the new mantra. What is important is not to eradicate corruption but to light bonfires, many bonfires. López Obrador will thank them profusely.

- The PRD and Morena, the two political parties on the left that split, like Cain and Abel, are undergoing the most Bizarre of the disputes. Everything for power, all of the power of before and all of the power of now, but above all that of the future. What is important is to mutually finish each other off: what that entails for the people in the turfs that they formally “govern” is least in importance. Ask the denizens of Condesa, where a war is brewing between the two currents, throwing open the door to organized crime and all of what that implies: murders, extortion, abductions. Morena trades in the future but is stuck in the past because it has no other option: its “product” is even more archaic than that of the present federal government: a return to the Stone Age. In the meanwhile, the inhabitants of their demarcation pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. What is important is power. Long live corruption.

- The tax “reform” that was promoted three years ago by the federal government spawned a little war with the taxpayers; the government won, but the economy is now stagnant. A Pyrrhic victory. In one of his many extraordinary and unforgettable readings of the reality, Winston Churchill stated that “I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.” Taxes are necessary, but not as a trade-off for prosperity.

Wars, affirmed Thucydides in his History of the Peloponnesian War, start because of fear, interest or honor. Civil wars, or little civil wars, are not very different, but their essence is quite distinct on one very important regard: instead of adding, they divide.

Mexico is enduring an accumulation of grievances and conflicts, some out in the open and others entombed, but all conducive to greater divisions, if not to open war. That is the risk, the one that is exacerbated inasmuch as the federal government disappears from the map. In contrast with other nations (Spain, which functioned quite well without a government for more than a year, is a good example), Mexico cannot live without an active arbiter: an arbiter devoted to propitiating dialogue and social concert. The divisive factor in Mexico is power: without dialogue, conflict lurks just around the corner.

Minxin Pei has just published a book on corruption in China\*. His argument is that the Chinese system renders corruption inevitable and that corruption will be the cause of China’s eventual collapse. It is evident, by any reckoning, that there is no proportion vis à vis China: with all of Mexico’s shortcomings and defects, the problems here are aired out and are public. That means they could be dealt with. One must maintain a sense of proportion that allows for a terse transition, whether or not it takes another decade. But someone has to lead it.

\*China’s Crony Capitalism

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