

State and Security

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Joaquín Villalobos, strategist and extraordinary reader of the criminal reality, wrote a long article* in which he clearly and precisely describes the dilemma that Mexico is confronting. I transcribe here the core sentences of his argument:

- The State develops from the monopoly of violence, that is, from the capacity that a governing class possesses to exercise authority over a determined territory in order to protect those who inhabit it.
- Security is the first right of the citizens and the prime responsibility of the State. Thus, the coercive power of the State is the main power because the certainty of being protected with respect to life, patrimony and human rights are preconditions for everything else.
- Every void in the State's authority derives in the growth of criminal power. This vacuum facilitates the convening and hierarchizing of small groups until they become great criminal organizations that eventually control the territory and co-opt the institutions.
- During the Cold War, police and military were deployed to the territory in considerable amounts to react to protests, uprisings and coup d'états. It is with institutions founded on those ideas that emerging democracies now intend to respond the tsunami of criminal violence.
- The police officer in the street was left with fewer resources, a low salary, debilitated authority, without social recognition, with doctrine and know-how learned from authoritarianism and nevertheless obliged to respect human rights.
- It is not possible to face the present criminal violence without a transformation of the security institutions, without a new deployment of these into the areas-of-concern and without a substantial increase in manpower. Preventive social policies will not be effective if citizens lead lives terrorized by crime; it is indispensable for the coercive power to quash the fear and reestablish the authority of the State in the communities. The police is the first line of contact between the State and the citizenry and the foundational pillar of all security; if it fails, the entire system fails.
- The way that authority was exercised in the past forged the base for the confusion between authoritarianism and strong State; when the former did not imply the latter, contrariwise the State was weak.
- The debate to find solutions to security problems has revolved around emphasis placed on repression or prevention. The first current of thought attests to impunity being what

multiplies crime; therefore, the punishment should comprise the preeminent instrument to reduce it. The second establishes that the delinquent is a social victim, thus supposing that social programs should reduce crime.

- It is understandable that some demand decriminalization or regulation of the drug consumption, commerce or production...; however, in our case the criminal violence would simply move on to other crimes, with the aggravating circumstance of an increase of consumption that could create a public health problem for us that we do not have.

- Our security will only improve if we make advances in the construction of State and citizenry.

- For us the main task at hand is to strengthen the authority of the State and to protect our citizens. A strategy based on prosecuting drugs does not imply, necessarily, our fortifying our security; however, if we do strengthen our own security we will doubtlessly be more effective in combating narcotrafficking and any type of crime.

- The intent to solve problems with weak institutions that are the legacy of authoritarianism gave crime the time to put down cultural roots in our societies.

- The primordial task in security is to avoid there being victims; a society is safe when no crimes occur and not because the number of criminals who are processed and imprisoned.

- The criminal activity that chiefly evidences the defeat of the dissuasive power of the State is the massification of extortion.

- In the case of Mexico, the PRI regime preserved the peace by means of extensive and effective social control throughout the territory exercised by an extensive network of organizations that were the premier component of the so-called "inclusive authoritarianism".

- The old Mexican security model was based on social control and institutional weakness... It was a derivation of authoritarian periods, therefore not repeatable.

- Recovering the territory implies that delinquents be deprived of stability, comfort, mobility, the power of intimidation and the capacity to concentrate on acting with impunity... It is not enough to catch and jail delinquents, it is crucial to counteract all of the attempts of these to intimidate, flaunt their power and act with violence.

- Pacifying communities and arresting delinquents are not contradictory undertakings... Capturing delinquents depends on being able to rely on intelligence and special forces, while avoiding crime requires territorial control.

In sum, says Villalobos, the current security crisis is a crisis of the State, by its absence, by its co-opting or by its weakness. Every vacuum of authority in the territory is occupied by another power, be they criminals, insurgents or paramilitaries. Without reforming the security institutions bequeathed by the authoritarian regimes it is not possible to protect the citizens. If the police resemble delinquents, they will end up delinquents.

*Bandidos, Estado y ciudadanía, *Nexos*, enero 2015

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