

POLICE REFORM PLAN IS “ALL OR NOTHING” FOR PRESIDENT ENRIQUE PEÑA NIETO

By ESISC team

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto vowed on Thursday November 27 to undertake a vast reform plan to restore law and order in the country, so as to put an end to the endemic corruption of the local police forces.

A few hours before, eleven bodies were found along a road in Guerrero State, increasing the anger triggered by the mass kidnapping and probable slaughter of 43 students on September 26 in the city of Iguala. To recall, the students were abducted by the “Guerreros Unidos” crime organization, on orders from the mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez and his wife María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa.

With the protest movement having spread to the whole nation, President Peña Nieto is now presented with his own responsibility regarding the widespread links between local authorities and drug cartels. Consequently, he will present a bill to Congress on Monday December 1 that proposes the creation of unified commands throughout the country’s 31 states in order to reform the current structure, which consists of several hundred independent and uncontrollable police forces, especially at the municipal level.

Although previous failed attempts to reform the police system are casting serious doubts about the feasibility of such a project, this initiative might well represent the last chance for Enrique Peña Nieto to regain control of the situation. Indeed, the developments of the last days strongly illustrate the scale of the popular anger and the loss of trust in public authorities.

The most notable development took place on Thursday November 20, when the country was set to commemorate 1910’s Mexican Revolution. Instead, large-scale demonstrations, mostly peaceful, took place across the country, including in the capital. Three separate protest marches consisting of up to 100,000 people merged in Zocalo Square (“Plaza de la Constitución”) in front of federal executive’s seat at the “Palacio Nacional”. The demonstration ended with clashes between the federal police and a group of masked youths who were attempting to reach the main door entrance of the National Palace by throwing sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails. According to

local media, 31 people were arrested during these incidents, which demonstrate the risks of violent extremists linked with the protest movement.

In the following days, smaller-scale incidents have multiplied across Mexico:

- On Thursday November 27, a group of masked men set on fire the headquarters of the Guerrero State's Secretariat for Public Education at a demonstration held in the city of Chilpancingo.
- Also on Thursday, around 2,000 members of the Guerrero State's Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CETEG) set up a roadblock near Chilpancingo on the "Autopista Del Sol" highway, which connects Mexico City to Acapulco. Three days before, 300 members of the CETEG had occupied the headquarters of the public prosecutor's office in Chilpancingo, demanding justice for the 43 missing students.
- On Tuesday November 25, roughly 2,000 people held a protest march on Mexico City's Zocalo Square, demanding the release of 11 people arrested on November 20 during a previous demonstration on the same square.
- In a similar show of anger, dozens of central-American migrants occupied Oaxaca State's Special Prosecutor's Office for migrant issues ("Fiscalia de Atencion al Migrante") in the city of Ixtepec on Tuesday. Protesters denounced the lack of actions taken by local police forces following the kidnapping of a 10-year-old Honduran child by three unidentified gunmen on November 16 near Chahuities, in the southern part of the State.

Given the depth of cartels' ties with Mexico's political and security establishment, the reform proposed by Enrique Peña Nieto can only be considered as a first step towards the stabilization of the country. As mentioned above, it should also be kept in mind that even meeting this first objective may be almost impossible due to the likely opposition of the local elites.

Nevertheless, federal authorities are now compelled to act and to demonstrate their strong determination to fight the organized crime if they want to avoid losing the little credit that they retained in public opinion. Otherwise, one can expect further radicalization of the protest movement, which can only lead to an escalation of violence across the country.

FIN

Copyright© ESISC 2014