12-19-2012

President Enrique Peña Nieto Presents Anti-Crime Strategy

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
President Enrique Peña Nieto Presents Anti-Crime Strategy

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2012-12-19

During the presidential campaign, Enrique Peña Nieto promised to develop a new approach to address drug-related violence and insecurity, which had spiraled out of control during the administration of President Felipe Calderón. In mid-December, just two weeks after taking office, President Peña Nieto made good on his promise and announced a public-safety strategy that adopts a regional focus and creates a national police force to replace the Army and Navy in drug-interdiction efforts.

Peña Nieto’s strategy includes several central concepts: planning, crime prevention, respect for human rights, coordination, revamping law enforcement and the judiciary, as well as a process of continual evaluation.

Plan proposes national police force, regional coordination

An important change is the removal of the Army and the Navy from law-enforcement duties. The armed forces would eventually be replaced by a national police force, which will initially consist of 10,000 members. The national police will be deployed to regions of the country where violence and instability are more prevalent.

Peña Nieto revealed his strategy to consolidate the fight against crime by eliminating the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (SSP) and putting the Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB) in charge of oversight (SourceMex, Dec. 5, 2012). Under the plan, the government would divide the country into five separate regions and coordinate a strategy for each of those regions.

Other important elements of the plan include launching a national program to prevent crime and creating local units to monitor and ensure that human rights are protected. Some targets also deal specifically with police, including a professional training program, a code of ethics, and new evaluation and certification mechanisms.

The plan would provide resources and require states to keep their crime databases up to date, incorporate members of civil society into the national public security council (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública, CNSP), and consolidate units specialized in preventing kidnappings.

"By putting a greater emphasis on planning, we will be better able to assign responsibilities and set precise timetables to meet our goals for each unit of the federal government and for local governments," Peña Nieto told reporters.

The president did not offer a timetable for creating the national police force but said the military, for the time being, would remain in the streets in an effort to maintain order. But the emphasis is already switching to federal law enforcement. As part of the plan, the federal police will add 15 units that will focus solely on kidnapping and extortion.
President gains support from governors, opposition parties

In announcing his plan, the president said the initiative would be carried out in partnership with the country’s 31 governors and the mayor of Mexico City, all of whom were on hand for the president’s announcement.

"This is the beginning of a relationship of respect and responsibility to achieve the justice and peace that our country demands," said Peña Nieto, who took office Dec. 1. "Mexicans want a Mexico at peace, and they demand respect and support for human rights."

Opposition members in Congress also offered to support Peña Nieto. "We are behind any proposal that will restore security and a sense of tranquility to Mexican citizens," said Deputy Luis Alberto Villarreal, floor leader for the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in the lower house.

Similar sentiments came from Deputy Silvano Aureoles, coordinator of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in the Chamber of Deputies, who endorsed the proposals to incorporate citizens into the CNSP, form regional strategies to address crime, and boost training for police forces. "If these goals are accomplished, then this will go a long way toward addressing the [security] problems that are hurting Mexican society," said the PRD legislator.

Also on hand at the announcement were members of the Cabinet ministries that deal with public safety, including Interior Secretary Osorio Chong and Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam.

Osorio said the president’s plan would put strong emphasis on combating the types of crime that make Mexicans feel insecure, such as homicide, extortion, and kidnapping. "The president has pledged to combat these crimes, without assigning fault or making excuses," said Osorio Chong.

Plan received with caution, skepticism

No mention was made of the cost of implementing the plan, but some critics pointed out that the new national police might not become a reality in the near term because the 2013 budget that Peña Nieto presented to Congress does not include the new police force. Alejandro Hope, a security expert, also noted in an interview with Radio Fórmula that the president has not explained how the national police force would differ from the existing federal police agency, the Policía Federal Preventiva (PFP), and other federal law-enforcement entities.

Analysts offered mixed reactions, with Hope suggesting that Peña Nieto’s plan does not deviate significantly from Calderón’s strategy. "The protocol and the systems that were presented offer an interesting message of continuity," said Hope, a former official with the government’s investigative agency (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, CISEN). One practical difference, he said, is the manner in which local and state governments will be allowed to participate in the effort, especially through the allocation of anti-crime funds and subsidies.

But others said there is a marked difference in the manner in which the strategy is being developed and communicated to the public. "The first step in a war is to understand the enemy and why we are fighting," said nationally syndicated columnist Sergio Sarmiento. "Next, you need a clear strategy that offers a reasonable possibility for success. We didn’t have any of that with the previous government."
Still, Sarmiento offered a note of caution. "To have clear goals is important. But we will have to see whether the Peña Nieto government is able to make its goals a reality and truly reduce the crimes that most afflict society. The challenge of efficiency is not going to be easy. But it is easier to reach the goal if we identify the enemy and determine why we are fighting," said the columnist.

Some observers cited other obstacles that the administration would have to face. "The problem can be broken down to impunity and corruption," said Ana María Salazar, a columnist for the Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal. "And it is not clear to me that the president's strategy resolves the first of these two concerns."

"If Peña Nieto's proposal is implemented correctly, then it might solve the insecurity problem in the long term. Perhaps we could have a result in 15 or 20 years," said Salazar. "But the fundamental question is how we are going to address in the short term the out-of-control violence that Mexicans are suffering. How will things work out in the next three or six years?"

Some critics were very skeptical about the president's proposal. Columnist Carlos Puig suggested the president's emphasis on planning and evaluation were shallow goals. "How can you speak of a new emphasis on prevention when the budget presented to the Congress barely increases funding for such a purpose," said Puig, who writes for the Mexico City daily newspaper Milenio.

"I do not believe that the residents of Torreón or Saltillo or Acapulco, where violence has escalated in December, will feel more at ease now that they know that there will be an evaluation of the results of the anti-crime program," said Puig. "Nor will they be appeased with the knowledge that the president has asked the governors to ensure that their police officers play a more useful role in the anti-crime efforts. And I don’t think that the criminals are going to tremble in fear because there is now a new anti-crime coordination group."

Still, there were those who strongly supported Peña Nieto's plan as a fresh alternative to the strictly law-and-order strategy employed by Calderón. "The plan that was presented was not simply a program of security and justice," columnist Ernesto López Portillo wrote in El Universal. "What was offered was declaration of principles."

"I have to adopt an optimistic stance," added López Portillo. "If the principles do become reality, then we will be talking about the advent of a new phase in our history."

-- End --