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Editor's Note: FNS will try to get one more story out before we sign off. Meanwhile, here are a few notes.

11-29-16

Politics/Human Rights News

Mexican Musings, Caribbean Winds and Border Destinies

As 2016 approaches a tumultuous end, possible changes in the U.S.-Mexico relationship are cooking. The election of Donald Trump as the next U.S. president, the apparent shelving of the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership fervently supported by the Obama and Pena Nieto administrations and statements from north of the border of cancelling or renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are all generating consternation and introspection in Mexico.

Mexican nationalism is stirring, with actors of different political stripes urging a reexamination of U.S.-Mexico relationships, defined by Proceso columnist Jesus Cantu as a "nortedependencia," or a northern dependence, which put Mexico at the mercy of the economic forces steered by its powerful neighbor across the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. While such talk is not new, it has taken on a greater urgency with the rise of Trump and his promises to build a giant border wall, deport undocumented immigrants and toss out NAFTA.

"There has to be a total rethinking of the root of our nationalism, of our capacity, of our pride..." economic consultant Rogelio Ramirez de la O told a recent Mexico City business forum. Of course, as some Mexican officials have suggested, it remains to be seen if Trump will truly take on the entrenched economic interests which have benefited from NAFTA, both U.S. and Mexican, or allow his anti-trade pact pledge to evaporate into so much past campaign rhetoric.

Cuba could play a role in a revived Mexican nationalism, especially if in the wake of Fidel Castro's November 25 death, the new Trump administration reverses the Obama Administration's thrust towards normalizing U.S.-Cuban relations or even assumes a more overtly hostile posture vis a vis Havana along the lines pursued by numerous, previous U.S. administrations.

This week's statement by Trump and members of his inner circle that Cuba must change internal and external policies for the thaw to deepen is a no-starter in Havana, smacking of a return to the Cold War or even a big stick, Monroe Doctrine era not only for Cuba but Latin America as well.

Though far enjoying from a loyal love affair, Mexico and Cuba have a special history and relationship. For days now, the Mexican media has been filled with stories debating the Cuban Revolution's legacies, reporting on international reactions to Castro's death and exploring the long, complicated and rich history of Mexico-Cuba ties.

Fidel, his brother Raul and Che Guevara relaunched the Cuban Revolution in 1956 from Mexican soil (rumor has it the "bearded ones" even poked around the Juarez-El Paso borderland possibly in search of U.S. arms, as did the Mexican revolutionaries of 1910), and Fidel even referred to the Aztec Republic as his "second country."

Despite Cuba-related spying by Mexican officials done on behalf of the CIA, Mexico maintained diplomatic relations with the socialist government throughout the Cold War and opposed Washington's trade embargo. At an advanced age, former Mexican president Lazaro Cardenas offered to go to Cuba and physically defend the island nation after the CIA's failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

If the new occupants of the White House simultaneously move ahead with building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, deport large numbers of Mexican immigrants and put the screws on Cuba, such developments will certainly influence the 2018 Mexican elections.

In a hint of things to come, Mexican presidential hopeful Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador sounded off after the death of Fidel Castro at age 90 was announced. "Those that believe they are lords of the world cannot decide the policies and destinies of other countries having to do with the dignity of the peoples and the principles postulated by their leaders," Lopez Obrador said.

Yet as recent Mexican press commentaries have underscored, Mexico has few cards left to play on the international table. Half the nation's food is now imported, foreign banks control the financial sector, the country's energy resources are wide open to transnational takeover and migrant remittances- which constitute an important part of Mexico's foreign exchange- could become subject to taxation in the U.S. Tourism from El Norte also ranks very high in the foreign exchange category.

Citing a noted Mexican essay authored by Daniel Cosío Villegas in 1947 that criticized the anti-national detours of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, Mexican historian Lorenzo Meyer contended that his country is currently in no position to resist a hardline that could soon usher forth from Washington.

In a recent column Meyer wrote: "...This radical change in Washington's priorities as the product of an election leaves a denationalized Mexico in a position of extreme vulnerability: shaken by uncontrolled violence, rickety economic growth on a downslide and a government wrapped up in corruption and without legitimacy."

As mentioned in recent FNS pieces, the immigration question foreshadows one of the great political showdowns of 2017- on both sides of the border. Meantime, thousands of Haitian, Central American and African migrants/refugees are stranded in northern Mexican border cities with little prospect of achieving their goal of political or humanitarian asylum in the U.S.

Rosario Lozada, director of migrant attention for the municipal government of Tijuana, estimated that 3,000 Haitians alone are in limbo in San Diego's sister city. With export factory cities like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez confronting "labor

shortages,” trial balloons are floating in the air that propose employing the new migrants in the low-wage maquiladoras and other industries which are not attractive to Mexican job-seekers.

In fact, African refugees have been reported working at a ranch in the Mexicali Valley. Baja California Labor Secretary Juana Perez Floriano called on employers to regularize the status of foreign workers so they could be covered under her country’s labor law. “Some are already working. It’s necessary to come up with a labor project that doesn’t exploit them in the maquiladoras and service sector,” Raul Ramirez Baena, executive director of the Northwest Citizens Human Rights Commission, earlier commented.

Ironically, with their American Dream denied or deferred, the new migrants/refugees could wind up assembling gadgets for the fantasy life of the Promised Land they can wistfully watch on television from across the border.

Nohemi Alvarez Quillay never made it to the Land of Milk and Honey. In 2014, FNS extensively covered the story of the 12-year-old Indigenous girl from Ecuador who was found hanging in a Ciudad Juarez shelter. Called a “martyr of migration” by the Ecuadoran government, Nohemi disappeared for weeks while en route from South America to New York City where she planned to reunite with her undocumented parents. Mexican press reports indicated that the school girl had been raped at some point before her suspicious death.

For the Mexican and U.S. governments, the case became an opportunity to tout a closer binational anti-organized crime collaboration when arrests were made and/or indictments issued against alleged members of the smuggling network responsible for transporting Nohemi and presumably abusing her. This fall, however, a Ciudad Juarez who was allegedly in the company of Nohemi when the pair was stopped by police in the border city, Domingo Fernas Uves, was released once again from prison by a judge.

A Mexican federal judge likewise absolved an agent of the Office of the Federal Attorney General (PGR), Socorro Graciano, from any legal responsibility in connection with Nohemi’s death. Reportedly, Graciano had shouted at Nohemi only hours before the girl supposedly took her own life, thus contributing to a suicide. Mexico’s official National Human Rights Commission investigated the affair, issuing a recommendation that the PGR sanction officials for wrongdoing. The Juarez delegate of the PGR at the time of Nohemi’s detention/death, Cesar Peniche Espejel, took office as the new Chihuahua state prosecutor last month.

A long time Juarez activist who followed the case commented on the outcome. Hernan Ortiz, spokesman for Citizens for a Better Public Administration, said he did not have the elements to judge whether the PGR simply did not have the “capacity” to investigate or if “innocent people were charged.”

Even as new people from faraway places land on a border that might well become their permanent homes, relatives of prior migrants missing in Mexico relentlessly search for their loved ones. On November 15, another caravan of Central American mothers embarked on a journey across Mexico seeking to procure leads of what happened to lost sons and daughters.

A press statement from the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement stressed the perennial importance of the caravans in keeping downtrodden spirits alive. “The magic of the caravan dissipates fears and anguishes and gives us the strength to do what we have never done: to separate our journey, but only to come together again on the march, revved up with new leads, with more force and dreams,” the statement read in part. On November 26, the Central Americans joined a

Mexico City demonstration with the parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa college students forcibly disappeared by Mexican security forces in Guerrero state back in September 2014.

Solidarity with Ayotzinapa was also expressed at the beginning of a November 26 citizen search (the third in the last two months) of the desolate Navajo Arroyo near the Mexico-U.S. border, where the remains of 19 presumed femicide victims from Ciudad Juarez were discovered beginning in 2011 and relatives suspect the bones of more disappeared young females as well as men are concealed.

It fell to a student from the rural women's teacher college in Saucillo, Chihuahua, a sister school of Ayotzinapa, to deliver opening words captured on an Internet video posted by the Paso del Norte Regional Popular Assembly. In her comments, the young woman placed Ayotzinapa in a local and national context, saying there were disappeared "all over the country." She led the group of dozens that was preparing to dig into the cold, grainy border ground in chant, culminating in a countdown that's resonated throughout Mexico and the world since 2014: "1,2, 3, 4.....43!"

As in the previous two citizen probes of the Navajo Arroyo, searchers found more suspected human remains, discarded garments and items of interest. Of the 19 female victims so far reassembled from bone fragments found at the site in the rural valley outside Ciudad Juarez, one is still unidentified, similar to the eighth female victim of an earlier, clandestine mass murder dumping ground in Juarez, El Campo Algodonero, discovered in November 2001.

Who were the two unknown victims, separated by time but not destiny? Mexican orphans? Central American refugees? U.S. castaways? And how many more like them are out there in the dusty reaches of the U.S.-Mexico frontier, their smiles, dreams and lives obscured and then crushed in the roar of power politics, the whisper of secret commerce and the whirr of industrial expansion that grinds away at the land?

Additional sources: Nortedigital.net, November 27 and 29, 2016. Articles by Herika Martinez and editorial staff. El Diario de El Paso, November 27, 2016. Article by H. Carrasco and M. Giacomini. Proceso, November 24 and 26, 2016. Articles by Jesus Cantu and Pedro Zamora Briseno. El Sur, November 24, 2016. Article by Lorenzo Meyer. La Jornada, November 7, 25, 26, 28, 2016. Articles by Cristina Gomez Lima, Juan Carlos Miranda and Fernando Camacho Servin. La Jornada (Baja California edition), November 21, 2016. Article by Antonio Heras. El Sol de Tijuana, October 31, 2016; November 4, 12, 21 and 27, 2016. Articles by Juan Miguel Hernandez, Raul Garcia Salguero and Rocio Galvan. Norte, September 25, 2016. Article by Miguel Vargas.

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