

Military Resistance 11B8



**Armed Mexican Villagers Take
The Power:
Defense Guards In State Of
Guerrero “Now Forbid The
Mexican Army And State And
Federal Police From Entering”
“A Dozen Villages In The Area Have
Risen Up In Armed Revolt Against
Local Drug Traffickers That Have
Terrorized The Region And A**

Government That Residents Say Is Incapable Of Protecting Them From Organized Crime”

Fates Of Criminals And Drug Gang Members “Hinge On Public Trials That Began Thursday When The Accused Were Arraigned Before Villagers, Who Will Act As Judge And Jury”



February 1, 2013 By NICHOLAS CASEY, Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

AYUTLA, Mexico —

Masked men, rifles slung over their shoulders, stand guard on a lonely rural road, checking IDs and questioning travelers.

They wear no uniforms, flash no badges, but they are the law here now.

A dozen villages in the area have risen up in armed revolt against local drug traffickers that have terrorized the region and a government that residents say is incapable of protecting them from organized crime.

The villages in the hilly southern Mexican state of Guerrero now forbid the Mexican army and state and federal police from entering.

Ragtag militias carrying a motley arsenal of machetes, old hunting rifles and the occasional AR-15 semiautomatic rifle control the towns.

Strangers aren't allowed entry. There is a 10 p.m. curfew.

More than 50 prisoners, accused of being in drug gangs, sit in makeshift jails.

Their fates hinge on public trials that began Thursday when the accused were arraigned before villagers, who will act as judge and jury.

Residents say kidnapping ceased when the militias took charge, as did the extortions that had become the scourge of businessmen and farmers alike.

The leader of one militia group, who uses the code name G-1 but was identified by his compatriots as Gonzalo Torres, puts it this way: "We brought order back to a place where there had been chaos.

"We were able to do in 15 days what the government was not able to do in years."

Yet a few shaken townspeople in Ayutla, the area's primary town, have stories of being arrested and held for more than a week before being deemed innocent and released.

And one man was shot dead trying to escape the masked men at a checkpoint.

"The Uprising Around Ayutla, A Two-Hour Drive From The Resort City Of Acapulco, Differs From The Others Because It Has Started To Spread Locally"

Village justice has long been part of life in rural Mexico. Now it's playing a growing role in the country's drug war.

Across Mexico, from towns outside the capital to along the troubled border with the U.S., mobs have lynched suspected drug traffickers and shot those accused of aiding them.

Last year a logging town in a neighboring state took up arms when traffickers of La Familia Michoacana, a drug cartel, attempted to lay claim to their forests.

The uprising around Ayutla, a two-hour drive from the resort city of Acapulco, differs from the others because it has started to spread locally.

In the two weeks, bands in six other towns in Guerrero state have declared vigilante rule, including in Iguala, a city of 140,000. In the nearby Jalisco state, groups say they are considering similar action.

Ayutla's mayor, Severo Castro, says he welcomes the new groups. On a recent evening, he pointed toward a checkpoint blocks away and said the town is nearly crime-free for the first time in years.

"There are two police departments now," he said. "The ones in uniform and another masked one, which is much more brave."

That sentiment seems to be shared even among local police, who are still technically on duty but who now seem limited to the role of directing traffic around the central square, leaving the rest of the patrolling and police work to the militias.

Police Commander Juan Venancio, a broad-faced middle-aged man with a mustache, said local police are too afraid of organized crime to make arrests.

"We could arrest a gangster for extortion, but if we couldn't prove it, we'd have to let him go," he said. "But then what about our families? Do you think we're not scared they will take revenge on us if they are out? Of course we are scared."

In some ways, life is getting back to normal here after years of insecurity. Village rodeos attract young cowboys and girls in traditional dresses, and weddings stretch late into the evening.

The same townspeople who were once extorted by drug gangs now bring melons and tamales to the militiamen standing guard at checkpoints.

Suspicion of the government and outsiders runs high here.

During a visit by The Wall Street Journal last week to the nearby hamlet of Azozuca, rumor spread that the reporter's car was bringing state human-rights officials. An angry, stick-wielding mob of about 150 blocked the only road into town and didn't allow the reporter to enter.

"Get out of here! Don't take another step!" yelled a woman waving a wooden bat.

Remote villages in Guerrero, one of Mexico's most independent regions, had long complained that too few police looked after their towns. In 1995, the state passed a law allowing towns to form "community police" groups that worked much like neighborhood-watch organizations, permitting the groups to detain suspects and hand them over to authorities.

But the laws didn't allow the groups to pass judgment on those accused.

By 2006, Mexico's drug war had begun to weaken its already-troubled institutions. Areas like Mexico City remained under tight control, but the power of the state in rural areas diminished.

Some 65,000 Mexicans have been killed since 2006, but only a fraction of the killings have been solved—or even investigated, according to the government and legal experts.

“Mexico has a 2% conviction rate, and Mexicans have taken note of that,” says Sergio Pastrana, a sociology professor at the College of Guerrero who has studied rural regions.

“It’s caused unrest and a determination among some to take the reins themselves.”

“We Had Shown The Power Armed People Have Over Organized-Crime Groups”

Villagers in Ayutla say the town was never crime-free — bandits sometimes robbed horsemen riding the road, for example — but the specter of organized crime was something new.

Several years ago, a group known by villagers as Los Pelones — literally, the Bald Ones — entered Ayutla and began a racket which included both drugs and other crime, people here say.

Mr. Castro, the mayor, says his 19-year-old daughter was kidnapped two years ago and he paid a “large sum” for her release.

Last July, the body of the town’s police chief Óscar Suástegui was found in a garbage dump outside town. He had been shot 13 times. Authorities said it looked like the work of a criminal group. No arrests were made in either case.

Townpeople say Los Pelones moved into extortions last year, demanding protection money from those who ran stalls in the market adjoining Ayutla’s central plaza. The payments were usually 500 pesos, or \$40, a month per stall, according to several vendors, a large sum in the impoverished town.

As harvest season approached last fall, the group fanned out into the countryside, demanding monthly payments of 200 pesos, about \$16, for each animal that farmers owned. Several farmers say the gang made a list of those who had agreed to pay and those who had not.

In November, a spate of kidnappings began.

Gunmen in the village of Plan de Gatica captured the village commissioner, a kind of locally elected mayor, along with a priest in a nearby village who had refused to pay extortion fees for his church.

A second commissioner was kidnapped in the village of Ahuacachahue in December. The three men eventually were released after ransoms were paid, villagers say.

When a village commissioner named Eusebio García was captured on Jan. 5, several dozen villagers from Rancho Nuevo grabbed weapons and formed a search party. The

next morning, they found Mr. García in a nearby house with his kidnappers, who were arrested and jailed, say the militiamen.

“This was the turning point, the moment everything exploded here,” says Bruno Placido, one of the leaders of the armed groups. “We had shown the power armed people have over organized-crime groups.”

“They Instituted The Curfew And Declared That State And Federal Authorities Would Be Turned Away At Checkpoints”

As word spread of Mr. García’s release, farmers in villages around Ayutla also took up arms.

Their plan: to descend into Ayutla, where they believed the rest of the Los Pelones gang was based.

That night they raided numerous homes throughout Ayutla, arresting people they believed to be lookouts, drug dealers, kidnappers and hit men, and brought them to makeshift jails.

Other villagers set up checkpoints across the town.

The vigilantes were now in charge.

They instituted the curfew and declared that state and federal authorities would be turned away at checkpoints. Villagers were allowed to make accusations against others, anonymously, at the homes of militiamen.

The group ordered most schools shut down, saying Los Pelones might try to take children hostage in exchange for prisoners detained by the vigilantes.

“I hadn’t seen anything quite like this before,” says state Education Secretary Silvia Romero, who traveled to Ayutla after the initial uprising to negotiate for classes to resume.

Some teachers agreed that suspending school was necessary until all top gang leaders were under lock and key. “The students were an easy target for the criminals,” says teacher Ignacio Vargas.

“He Militiamen Remain In Control And No State Or Federal Officials Are Permitted To Enter The Villages Around Ayutla”

Many schools have since reopened. The army, after negotiations, set up a checkpoint at the entrance to the region.

Beyond that, the militiamen remain in control and no state or federal officials are permitted to enter the villages around Ayutla.

Townpeople interviewed recently said the masked men are ordinary farmers and businessmen, not rival criminals looking to oust Los Pelones. The mayor agrees. Still, Mr. Torres, the lead militiaman in Ayutla, acknowledged the risk of “spies from organized crime coming into our ranks.” He said he encourages his men to turn in anyone seeking to join the vigilantes who might be linked to crime groups.

On a recent day, two pickup trucks filled with masked men pulled up carrying bar owner Juan de Dios Acevedo. They alleged that Mr. Acevedo, 42, had been involved in the rape of a local woman. One of them pulled a shirt over his head while another bound his hands with rope. His mother and sister comforted him and cried.

As he was being bundled into one pickup, his mother fetched signed papers from the local prosecutor’s office that said he had already been arrested for the same crime, and cleared by prosecutors. “This is a false accusation, and now I’ve been arrested for the second time,” Mr. Acevedo protested.

The vigilantes were unmoved and took him away for questioning. Later that day, he was released unharmed.

“The Village Will Be Their Judge,” He Said. “If The Village Saves You, You Will Be Free. If Not, Then You Are Condemned”

A makeshift detention center run by villagers in El Mezón is home to two dozen men and women accused of being with Los Pelones.

There is no budget to run the prison, villagers say. The prisoners eat donated tortillas and rice and sleep on cardboard on the floor. On a recent afternoon, seven men were clustered behind bars in a tiny, dark room that smelled of urine. It was hot and dirty. There were no visible signs of physical abuse.

The masked commander of the facility, who wouldn’t give his name and declined to allow interviews with the prisoners, said the men are being treated well and will be given a chance to defend themselves in a public trial in the village.

They won’t be allowed lawyers, he said, and villagers will decide their sentences by a consensus vote.

Possible punishments include hard labor constructing roads and bridges in chain gangs, he said, although it will be up to the villagers, not the militia, to decide.

He added that executions, which are not permitted under Mexican law even in murder cases, were not on the table.

“The village will be their judge,” he said. “If the village saves you, you will be free. If not, then you are condemned.”

Nightly raids of suspected drug traffickers have provided the militiamen with a clutch of high-powered weapons, including AR-15 rifles.

On Jan. 6, the night the checkpoints were erected, a man named Cutberto Luna was shot dead by the vigilantes, state authorities say. Mr. Torres, the Ayutla militia commander, says the man refused to stop at the checkpoint and opened fire on the men standing guard, who responded by firing back.

He also alleges Mr. Luna was a “known leader of organized crime.”

On a recent day, a group of militiamen in the village of Potreros discussed what lay ahead.

A rancher in a nearby town was thought to have collected extortion money on behalf of the criminal gangs. Several militia members wanted to organize a raid to take back the money, then use it to buy ammunition. The men also discussed the merits of shooting on the spot criminals they believed to be guilty rather than taking them to village courts.

MORE:

**“The Detainees, Whom The
Movement Refers To As ‘People
Under Investigation’ Not
Prisoners, Would Be Given A Trial
By An Assembly Of Villagers”
“They Will Bring Charges Ranging
From Organized Crime To
Kidnapping And Extortion Against 50
Men And Three Women Who They
Have Been Holding Prisoner At
Improvised Jails”
“The Growing Movement Toward
Self-Policing Has Since Spread To
Other Towns In Guerrero”**



Masked members of the community of Ayutla escort detained people to a community assembly in the town of El Meson, Mexico, Jan. 31, 2013. Vigilantes have taken up arms against drug cartel. Photo By Christian Palma, Associated Press

Jan 31, 2013 By MARK STEVENSON, Associated Press [Excerpts]

MEXICO CITY —

Vigilantes who have taken up arms against drug cartel violence and common crime in southern Mexico announced Thursday they will bring charges ranging from organized crime to kidnapping and extortion against 50 men and three women who they have been holding prisoner at improvised jails.

Villagers armed with hunting rifles, old pistols and small-bore shotguns set up armed patrols and roadblocks in the township of Ayutla almost one month ago to defend their communities against crime, saying authorities have failed to bring peace and safety to the Pacific coast state of Guerrero.

So far, the state government has tolerated but not formally recognized the self-defense squads.

“What is happening in Guerrero state is a warning sign that should alert authorities to do their duty and guarantee public safety, to avoid having these (vigilante) activities grow and outstrip the power of official institutions,” said the head of the National Human Rights Commission, Raul Plascencia.

Villagers in squads of about a dozen patrol roads and search passing motorists, checking their identification against handwritten lists of “bad guys.”

On Thursday, the unbound, unsmiling detainees were marched between rows of armed, masked vigilantes in the town square of El Meson, in the township of Ayutla. While the detainees appeared to be clean and adequately fed, and bore no obvious signs of mistreatment, reporters at the scene were not allowed to speak with them.

Bruno Placido, the head of a community activist group and a leader of the vigilantes’ movement, said the detainees, whom the movement refers to as “people under investigation” not prisoners, would be given a trial by an assembly of villagers.

The town square of El Meson was crowded with villagers and local farmers watching the prisoner roll call Thursday.

Guerrero state Attorney General Martha Garzon Bernal told local media Thursday the vigilantes have no legal right to hold detainees, and said kidnapping complaints could be brought against them.

Since 1995, about 80 villages in Guerrero state have organized legally-recognized “community police” forces in which poorly armed villagers detain and prosecute people.

With their own jails, “courts” and punishments that can include forced labor for the town or re-education talks, the community police are usually recognized by state law. However, the self-defense forces in Ayutla don’t belong to that system.

MORE:

HOW IT BEGAN:

“There Isn’t One Of Us Who Hasn’t Felt The Pain ... Of Seeing Them Take A Family Member And Not Being Able To Ever Get Them Back”

“Now He Has Joined Hundreds Of Other Men In The Southern Mexico State Of Guerrero Who Have Taken Up Arms To Defend Their Villages”

“The Upstart Self-Defense Movement Has Spread To Other Towns And Villages Such As Las Mesas And El Pericon”

“On A Recent Day, Associated Press Journalists Saw 200 To 300 Masked, Armed Men Patrolling, Manning Checkpoints And Moving Around In Squad-Size Contingents”



In this photo taken Jan. 18, 2013, masked and armed men sit in the back of a pick-up truck at the entrance to the town of Ayutla, Mexico. Associated Press/Dario Lopez-Mills

Jan 21, 2013 By MARK STEVENSON, Associated Press [Excerpts]

Housewife Audifa Miranda Arismendi showed up at the vigilante checkpoint in El Pericon with a vat of chilate, a local beverage made of rice, cocoa beans and cinnamon, for the masked men. “It’s good to help out here, because this is for the good of all,” she said.

“When the people are united, it doesn’t matter if it’s a .22, a 16-gauge shotgun or 20-gauge. It’s that when we are united, not even bullets from an AK-47 can defeat us,” said the self-defense commander in Las Mesas. “They can’t kill us all.”

AYUTLA, Mexico —

The young man at the roadside checkpoint wept softly behind the red bandanna that masked his face.

At his side was a relic revolver, and his feet were shod in the muddy, broken boots of a farmer.

Haltingly, he told how his cousin’s body was found in a mass grave with about 40 other victims of a drug gang.

Apparently, the cousin had caught a ride with an off-duty soldier and when gunmen stopped the vehicle, they killed everyone on the car.

“There isn’t one of us who hasn’t felt the pain ... of seeing them take a family member and not being able to ever get them back,” said the young civilian self-defense patrol member, who identified himself as “just another representative of the people of the mountain.”

Now he has joined hundreds of other men in the southern Mexico state of Guerrero who have taken up arms to defend their villages against drug gangs, a vigilante movement born of frustration at extortion, killings and kidnappings that local police are unable, or unwilling, to stop.

The reach of drug gangs based in Acapulco, about 45 miles (75 kilometers) away, had intensified to the point that they were demanding protection payments from almost anybody with any property: truck and bus drivers, cattle ranchers, store owners.

In a region where farmworkers make less than \$6 per day, the situation grew intolerable for everyone.

“When they extorted money from the rancher, he raised the price of beef, and the store owner raised the price of tortillas,” said a short, stocky defense-patrol commander who wore a brown ski mask and a black leather jacket.

Because the patrols are not formally recognized by the courts, the law or the government — and they fear drug cartel reprisals — most members wear masks and refuse to give their full names.

An example of the danger came in late July when the city’s official police chief was found shot to death on the edge of town.

It was another attack by criminals that sparked the movement in Ayutla: In early January, gang members kidnapped a commander of an existing community police force in a nearby town.

“Maybe they wanted to intimidate us, but it backfired. They just awakened the people,” said one of the older vigilantes, a straw-hatted man without a gun.

Since then, the upstart self-defense movement has spread to other towns and villages such as Las Mesas and El Pericon.

On a recent day, Associated Press journalists saw 200 to 300 masked, armed men patrolling, manning checkpoints and moving around in squad-size contingents. Some had only machetes, but most had old single-shot, bolt-action rifles.

Waving guns, they stop each vehicle, and ask for driver’s licenses or voter IDs, which they check against a handwritten list of “los malos,” or “the bad guys.” They sometimes search vehicles and frisk the drivers.

The commander of the Las Mesas vigilantes explains their motives. “We are not against those who are distributing drugs. That’s a way for them to earn a living. Let anyone who wants to poison themselves with drugs do it.

“What we are against is them messing with the local people.”

The movement so far seems to be well-accepted by local residents fed up with crime that plagued this stretch of mountain highway.

“In less than a month, they have done something that the army and state and federal police haven’t been able to do in years,” said local resident Lorena Morales Castro, who waited in a line of cars at a checkpoint Friday. “They are our anonymous heroes.”

One vigilante passed sheepishly down the line of waiting cars with a jar asking for donations. Some people tossed in coins or small bills.

Housewife Audifa Miranda Arismendi showed up at the vigilante checkpoint in El Pericon with a vat of chilate, a local beverage made of rice, cocoa beans and cinnamon, for the masked men. “It’s good to help out here, because this is for the good of all,” she said.

In 2011, townsfolk in the pine-covered-hill town of Cheran in neighboring Michoacan state began armed patrols in the face of what they said were the killings of farmers by illegal loggers in league with drug traffickers.

In the northern state of Chihuahua, a community of farmers and ranchers known as Colonia Lebaron — most of whom hold dual U.S. citizenship — set up self-defense squads following the 2009 killings of two of its members.

And in the drug-plagued northern state of Sinaloa, the mayor of Concordia, Jose Elijo Medina, responded to a massacre, which forced everyone in a remote hamlet to flee, by calling for the Mexican army to revive the Rural Self Defense Corps, units of armed farmers it once helped train and supervise.

While the army did not respond to requests to say how many of the units remain, local media have reported the army has been trying to wind down the few remaining units.

Since 1995, about 80 villages in Guerrero state have organized legal “community police” forces in which poorly armed villagers detain and prosecute people.

With their own jails, “courts” — actually village assemblies that can hand down verdicts — and punishments that can include forced labor for the town or re-education talks, the community police are recognized by state law, though rights activist Hernandez said there is still friction when community rules intersect with the formal legal system.

He pointed to one incident in 2012 where a judge and a detective in the Guerrero town of San Luis Acatlan arrested a community police leader for exceeding his authority. Villagers responded by arresting the judge, the detective and an assistant.

“When the people are united, it doesn’t matter if it’s a .22, a 16-gauge shotgun or 20-gauge. It’s that when we are united, not even bullets from an AK-47 can defeat us,” said the self-defense commander in Las Mesas. “They can’t kill us all.”

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

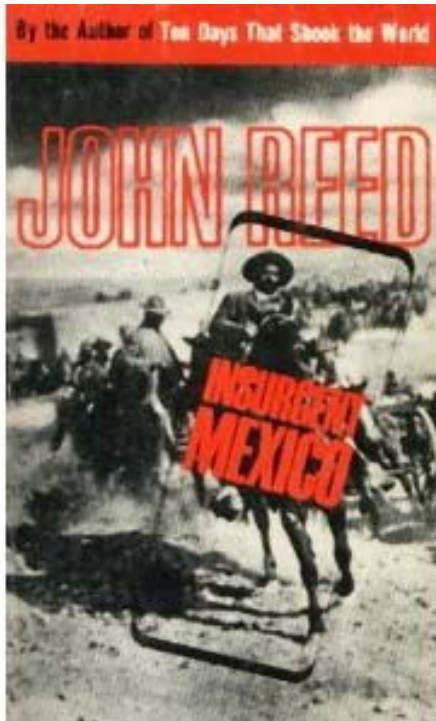
“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

Entre los individuos, como entre las naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.

-- Benito Juárez

Insurgent Mexico 1913: John Reed “Lived Among The ‘Grunts’, Mexican Campesinos Who Made Up The Bulk Of Villa’s Forces”



Accounts of the Mexican Revolution written by John Reed in Mexico, 1913-1914

[*Insurgent Mexico*; John Reed; Collected articles written 1913-1914. Review by El Cutachero at Amazon.com]

This book has been notorious since its publication in 1914.

The author was a vagabond leftist reporter for the American radical press, and did not go to Mexico City riding in relative comfort on the press train accompanying the Division del Norte of General Francisco “Pancho” Villa during his successful Constitutionalist southward campaign against the Federalista forces of the usurper General Victoriano Huerta; he who had murdered president Madero and his vice president, and seized power in Mexico City in conjunction the forces of Zapata.

Instead, Reed, in accord with his common man leanings, while on campaign, lived among the “grunts”, Mexican campesinos who made up the bulk of Villa’s forces.

There are incisive pen portraits of the Constitutionalist leaders, descriptions of the wretched living conditions of the people, observations on the siege of Torreón, N.L.. and nearby Gomez Palacio, neighboring key strategic cities on the railroad south from Juarez to Mexico City.

This is not history or reporting but a collection of impressionistic and justifiably biased essays.

Still very valuable for the feel of the times and has been translated into many languages.

The author later went to Russia and wrote "Ten Days That Shook the World." about the October Revolution.

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