

OUR VOICE

George W. Bush is getting increasingly weaker and has been progressively losing credibility. Even his most loyal Gallies at home and abroad view him with suspicion. His political position has weakened and his initiatives have been systematically rejected by broad layers of society and the national and international political classes, who have been increasingly wounded by his government's clumsy arrogance and offensiveness. He bet on policies so extreme that he got burned and burned his possibilities of governing effectively and with dignity. His skirmishes with Congress are indicative of the fix he is in. Trailing behind him is a veritable political shipwreck that not even Truman or Nixon endured at their worst moments.

This is the head of the most powerful nation in the history of the global village, who opted to exercise *hard power*—and now he is paying for it—and, as a result, his foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East and Iraq, have stopped being rational. Its rational center, which guaranteed U.S. leaders certain equilibrium in local and international decision-making, has been lost. Inside the United States, the facts testify eloquently to this crisis. His closest collaborators (Powell, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Tenet, Bolton, Rove, Gonzales and a long list of others) have abandoned him. Whether because they were worn out or because of political or administrative incompetence, they resigned exhibiting the administration's great fiascos: Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, the Patriot Act, immigration reform, the U.S.\$160 billion budget deficit, etc. The current U.S. administration is discredited domestically and international at historic levels: fewer than 30 percent of Americans approve of the government's performance; internationally the figures are similar, the lowest in modern history for the imperial presidency.

This is a crisis of legitimacy reminiscent of the political crisis of the 1960s. Bush is practically a political liability, what is known in political jargon as a "lame duck", even among some Republicans, who try to disassociate themselves from him. Given his administration's paralysis, today it is managing the remains of what could be a latent crisis of the state, with already palpable consequences due to the breakdown of the political consensus. Certainly, this three-level crisis began with Bush's widely questioned election in 2001, continued tragically with the September 2001 terrorist attacks and sharpened dramatically beginning in March 2003, when Washington illegally, illegitimately and unilaterally decided to invade Iraq. Since then, we have witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the United States presidency: Bush has prematurely begun to wind down his mandate; he no longer has the social and political support he needs to govern credibly. To top it all off, his decisions lack a strategic vision, not a vision that would let him win, but one that at least would allow him to simply get out of the infernal maze the United States is in the theater of war in Iraq.

In short, it should be emphasized that President Bush is not only managing the shipwreck of his mandate badly: what we are witnessing is the inexorable decline of the United States as a great power. This does not mean that it will not continue to embark on adventures of war games that it does not even know how to get out of anymore. All of this will soon be left to the next administration, which, regardless of the party that wins, will have only one way out: moving toward the center to avoid the extremism and confusion that George Bush has subjected us to.

Today, the future of politics in the United States will depend, perhaps more dramatically than ever, on the course of its foreign policy. If Bush in his desperation insists on attacking Iran in an attempt to distract the public's attention, the next occupant of the White House will inherit an extremely dangerous powder keg. And undoubtedly, that political situation will worsen the precarious domestic and external conflict in which Bush has submerged his country and the entire world.

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The insensitivity of the current U.S. administration and, it must be added, also of broad sectors of that country's political class has affected millions of our compatriots living and working on the other side of the border. This is proven by short-sighted and largely ineffective measures like the fence, or the proposals to criminalize undocumented migrants and curtail amnesty to a minimum. These are the topics dealt with in our "North American Issues" section by researchers Mónica Vereá and César Pérez. Vereá analyzes the different immigration bills presented to both houses of Congress and delineates their increasingly conservative stances. Pérez describes the ultra-conservative, apparently pragmatic—but actually cynical and ahistorical—environment in which the immigration debate is taking place, now dominating both U.S. parties.

Mexico has begun a long-awaited period of change: the much heralded structural reforms. We seem to be shaking off the lethargy of the lack of political consensus. However, the real scope of this trend is not clear yet. A lot of changes

are still to be made. Several articles in the “Politics,” “Economy” and “Society” sections deal with this issue. First, Roberto Gutiérrez looks at the recent electoral reform and its most applauded points like the new relationship it establishes between parties and media by forbidding the purchase of campaign spots at election time. This is a good starting point for the still pending reform of the state. Then, Ricardo Becerra offers us his vision about the enormous importance of the amendment of Article 6 of the Constitution, ushering in a new era for transparency and accountability in Mexico. The amendment is a definite advance in regulating the protection of personal data, determining when it is possible to override banking secrecy or ensuring compliance by public institutions in turning over information requested from them without questioning the reasons behind the request.

Gregorio Vidal offers us a critical analysis of the recently approved fiscal reform, which he considers is actually a series of superficial changes that will not resolve the real need for more government revenues. On the contrary, he thinks the new law will unduly tax small and medium-sized companies without closing any of the loopholes that make it possible for some corporations to avoid paying money into government coffers. Eduardo Andere presents an analysis of basic and middle education in Mexico, pointing to the need of a profound reform. Linked to the issue of education is the state of scientific research policies in Mexico, which also need immediate attention. Mario González Rubí deals with this issue, recognizing some advances, but also pointing to the big problems in development and funding, which in Mexico’s case lags way behind the percent of GDP recommended by the UN. It must be said that as a public university our position on the subject radically differs from those visions that consider that higher education is not a public good. These positions have been proven wrong and ignore that it is a commodity that demands our attention as a problem of mayor state strategic importance and as a matter of national security.

This issue of *Voices of Mexico* also touches on other topics relevant to Mexico today. Jesús Esquivel contributes an article about drug-trafficking-linked violence, which has led the Calderón administration to change its priorities on the Mexico-U.S. bilateral agenda, replacing immigration with the fight against organized crime, a strategy which still remains to be proven right. Enrique Pino also writes about Mexico’s bilateral agenda, but this time *vis-à-vis* Canada, analyzing the specific weight that our two countries’ relations have had in the integration of North America.

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Our “Art and Culture” section joins the national and international celebrations of the centennial of Frida Kahlo’s birth with a review of two exhibitions. The first, in Mexico City’s Fine Arts Palace Museum, brought together the largest number of Frida’s works and objects ever gathered in a single exhibit, including paintings never before displayed, personal objects, letters and photographs. The second, at the Frida and Diego “Blue House” Museum, where Frida lived and died, revealed her treasures, documents, photos, books and other items that had been locked away until recently at her husband Diego Rivera’s request.

In a related article, Guillermo Tovar de Teresa explains the background behind the current exhibit of photographs by Frida’s father, Guillermo Kahlo, and American photographer Henry Greenwood Peabody at the Old San Ildefonso College. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century photographs of monumental Mexican architecture are landmarks in Mexican society’s recovery of our appreciation for our architectural heritage.

“The Splendor of Mexico” is dedicated to the state of Campeche. Starting with the capital city, Campeche, declared a World Heritage Treasure in 1999, we take in the walls built to protect it from pirates. Then, Leticia Staines offers us the first of two articles about the different architectural styles found in Campeche’s archaeological sites, which preserve the monumental remains of great Mayan cities of the past. Lastly, Jorge Javier Romero gives our readers a taste of Campeche’s cuisine, the result of the mixture of traditional regional recipes with others from old Spain that make for a unique gastronomical identity.

The vast Mayan legacy can be seen in the state’s historical buildings, in themselves worthy of admiration, that now house museums like the Museum of Mayan Archaeology in the San Miguel Fort, one of the two built to defend the city from pirate forays. Its splendid view of the sea is only equaled by its marvelous collection of original Mayan pieces: jade masks, stelas, necklaces, ceramics and the remains of burial sites. In the “Ecology” section, Francisco Gurría analyzes the future of the Calakmul ecological reserve, particularly those areas where human settlements demand the implementation of sustainable development strategies.

Lastly, in our “Literature” section, Arturo Cosme and Rosa María Jasso contribute an article about the treatment of death in pre-Columbian poetry, offering us a very affecting focus on the cosmogony and sensibility of the founding peoples of our land.

In closing, I am happy to announce that *Voices of Mexico* has been awarded the 2007 National Chamber of the Mexican Publishing Industry (Caniem) Prize for Publishing in the category of “Political and General Information Magazines.” We are very proud of this recognition, but above all, it will encourage us to double our efforts to offer our readers a better and better magazine.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde