THE DAILY tribune

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

THERE WAS NEVER A NIGHT OR A PROBLEM THAT COULD DEFEAT SUNRISE OR HOPE.
BERNARD WILLIAMS

Very rare scenes from the borderland

Presidential powers include the power to manufacture a threat where none exists

ROGER COHEN

I have a suggestion for President Donald Trump. Instead of fanning fear, stroll across the Paso del Norte Bridge into Ciudad Júarez.

Join the 70,000 people crossing four bridges who daily form the human tissue linking the United States and Mexico. They work, they study, they eat, they shop, all part of what Dee Margo, the mayor of El Paso, calls "one region, one culture."

I crossed the bridge. Things slow down, as they do when you move from the developed to the developing world. Secondhand clothes for sale hang on simple brightly painted homes, the poorest made of pallets and corrugated iron roofs.

Júarez, home to many of the foreign-owned assembly plants known as "maquiladoras," has a violent history and big social problems, but in the dusty streets and cafes serving steaming bowls of tripe-and-bean soup I discerned no tension.

"It's simple," Julián Cardona, a photographer, told me. "Everyone here knows Trump hates brown people. We call him 'Trompudo,' or 'big mouth.'"

From that mouth seeps the sinister spectre of an "invasion." Thousands of active-duty troops are dispatched to the border. Concertina wire spreads.

The government shutdown that ended on Jan 25 was followed soon by Trump's declaration of a national emergency to build his wall. Presidential powers include the power to manufacture a threat where none exists.

Central American immigrants speaking this month with a United States Border Patrol agent at the border fence in El Paso.

"From my vantage point in El Paso there is no crisis," Margo, the mayor, told me. "You look south and you can't tell where El Paso merges into Júarez."

Bridges, in other words, trump walls.

At one of the shelters run by the nonprofit Annunciation House, I met Iris Galindo Maldonado, an undocumented 43-year-old woman from Guerrero state, in southwestern Mexico, who entered the United States on Jan 15 with her 10-year-old daughter to request asylum. Her husband was killed seven years ago by drug dealers angered by his refusal to cooperate with them. She said they have threatened her in turn for refusing to help them smuggle cocaine.

"I've already lived," she told me. "I hope the American authorities support me for my daughter, so she's not in danger, she's not menaced, and gets educated. I told her, even if we stay one week, two weeks, however long it is, use the opportunity to learn English. She's already in school, and I pray to God a lot."

Galindo has been processed by ICE, fitted with an ankle bracelet, and let go to face a long wait in American limbo, along with several hundred thousand others, before her day in immigration court. She has no family in the United States.

El Chapo's conviction isn

The catastrophe that is Mexico's drug war is so much bigger than one man

IOAN GRILLO

People lined up for hours outside the federal court in Brooklyn last week for a chance to hear the jury instructions at the trial of Joaquin Guzman, known as El Chapo. On Feb 12, the jury handed out guilty verdicts on all counts, including murder conspiracy and money laundering. During the trial, while American audiences were focused on the courtroom, the Mexican government held a news conference on forced disappearances south of the border. The figures were alarming. The two stories — of Guzman being tried in New York and the continuing bloody tragedy here in Mexico — are intrinsically connected.

Government officials said at the Feb. 4 news conference that Mexico has records of more than 40,000 people who have vanished, many in the areas where drug traffickers are strongest. Investigators have discovered 1,100 graves, and there are a stunning 26,000 corpses in public morgues that have not been identified. "This reveals the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis," said Alejandro Encinas, Mexico's undersecretary for human rights. "Our territory has become a huge clandestine grave."

Amid the details about Guzman's personal allure and venality presented during the three-month trial, it was easy to forget that his real significance was his position at the top of the Sinaloa drug cartel, one of the forces that plunged the nation into a painful armed conflict that has led to so many massacres, mass graves and refugees.

The tales of Guzman running naked through tunnels with his lover, the glamour of his beauty-queen wife coming dutifully to the court, the brutal murder of police informants, the inventiveness of smuggling cocaine in cans of chile pepper — it all made entertaining coverage. As a TV reporter mused to me in the Brooklyn courtroom, it all provided a certain light relief away from the divisive political climate that dominates American news.

But the focus on the individual can distract from the size of the crisis in Mexico. The Feb 12 verdict followed more than 200,000 murders over the past decade, a level of bloodshed that has ripped at the heart of the nation. More than 100 journalists have been slain, including my friend and colleague Javier Valdez, whom one of the witnesses against Guzman was questioned about. An entire movement has grown of family members of those killed and disappeared, pushing to see the violence against their loved ones punished, or at least to find the bodies.

In the face of such slaughter, it is obviously good that Guzman, a leader of one of the drug cartels involved, is convicted and is likely to spend the rest of his life in a tough prison. But considering this was the biggest trial to date related to Mexico's catastrophic drug war, it seems only a bittersweet victory in the battle for justice.

It is a painful fact that Guzman was convicted in the United States and not in Mexico, where he has sown corruption and terror. After he escaped from two top security prisons here, the Mexican government conceded that its institutions were not powerful enough to hold him and extradited him north. As a result the charges were mostly related to his trafficking drugs to Americans rather than murdering Mexicans.

In the trial, 14 fellow criminals testified against their former cohort, using the long-criticised system of cooperating witnesses. One of them, Juan Carlos Ramírez Abadía, alias Chupeta, confessed to ordering as many as 150 murders, mostly in his home country, Colombia, yet hoped to have

Emma Coronel Aispuro, the wife of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo, after her husband was convicted of conspiring to murder rivals, money laundering and more.

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