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National Security and Armed Forces In Mexico:
Challenges and Scenarios at the End of the Century

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MEXICAN NATIONAL SECURITY AT THE END OF THE CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Raul Benitez-Manaut

Abstract

The main hypothesis of this research document is that the Mexican transition to a liberal democracy and an open market economy, could create conditions to increase a major crisis in economic, social and also state structures. To deter this tendency, the state reform must be successful and has to be implemented in law enforcement, judiciary and national security institutions. The mayor challenges to the Mexican national security are the international and domestic crime (mainly drug-trafficking), the peasant and indigenous uprising in Chiapas and the citizens insecurity. The government is reinforcing the capabilities of the armed forces to confront these threats. Another aspect of Mexican national security is the new relationship with the United States, and the development of new geopolitical concepts like "North America." In US-Mexican relations, the most important issues are the war against drugs and the reforms implemented in the Mexican economy and state institutions, and the solution of major political problems of Mexico like the Chiapas crisis. Finally, there exists different scenarios towards the year 2000, when the presidential elections will take place.

I

The bitter pill

Between the 1930s and 1980s, Mexico's political system was stable. In these fifty years Mexico had relative autonomy from the United States and created strong institutions to control political and social movements. The United States reluctantly accepted Mexico's authoritarian regime (with a ruling party with non-democratic institutions) during the cold war years which offered stability, rather than a fragile democracy. During these years the United States acknowledged the relative autonomy of Mexico

In US-Mexican relations from the 1930s to the 1980s there were several bitter pills which the United States was forced to swallow: the nationalization of the Mexican oil industry in 1938; the Mexican dissident position in Guatemala's crisis in 1954; the diplomatic support of the Cuban government; Mexico's support of Panama's efforts to negotiate the Canal treaties in the seventies; the support of the Sandinista revolution and the promotion of negotiated settlements with the leftist movements of El Salvador and Guatemala during the eighties, etc. For Mexico, these actions were an important expression of Mexican autonomy.

This "anti-imperialist" and autonomous foreign policy was one of the main pillars of the national security concept during the cold war

period. In these years, the Mexican revolutionary government developed political institutions to preserve internal stability. This was another pillar of national security. In the sixties and seventies, leftist guerrilla movements emerged, but Mexican national security and law enforcement institutions (Secretaria de Gobernacion, Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional, Procuraduria General de la Republica) could control the conflict successfully. Unlike other Latin American countries, Mexico had the political and military instruments to address these challenges and did not need the support of the United States. The political structure of the Mexican revolution weathered the storm. Mexico has been spared the traumatic experience of other Latin American countries where there has been a coup d'etat.

Mexico underwent several changes in the 1980s. Internally, it suffered the 1982 economic crisis; a strengthened opposition emerged and forced the government to gradually open the political system. Externally, Mexico was subject to foreign pressure to modify the orientation of its government's policies, particularly in the area of economics. All these factors served to change the perception the Mexican establishment had of the United States. Consequently, the Mexico-U.S. relationship began to change from one of confrontation to cooperation.

The United States also changed its perceptions of Mexico and at the end of the decade both governments began negotiations for a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This change created a new relationship and a new definition of "North America" emerged which included Mexico. At first, NAFTA was a geo-economical idea; however, now NAFTA is important in geopolitical terms.

II

North America

"North America" is a concept which has many definitions. In the post cold war period, economic factors have become the most important aspect of security for the nations, and open and integrated economies are the priority of the governments. Canada and the United States signed a free trade agreement and later expanded it to include Mexico. For this reason, in the nineties, NAFTA is an important component of security for the three countries. Nevertheless, the differences between the conceptions of national security of Mexico, United States and Canada are considerable.

In Mexico, a debate has arisen between the nationalists and the globalists-regionalists. Mexico has a nationalist and isolationist conception of national security. It is linked to its history, and also has connections with the principles of foreign policy (non-intervention, self-determination, cooperation among nations, peaceful resolution of conflicts between nations) and the defense doctrine, which has three pillars: DN-I (defense of the territory and population without foreign aid); DN-II (defense of the institutions and the political stability against one internal turmoil); and DN-III

(protection of the population and reconstruction of the infrastructure when there are natural disasters). Mexico opposes the use of military forces abroad. Mexican diplomacy supports negotiations and international law to solve conflicts around the world.

The United States has a national security doctrine which has a global projection. To confront its national security challenges it seeks the support of other nations through security and defense alliances. The United States rejects the participation of other countries in the defense of its territory even while participating in many military missions around the world.

Canada has another national security doctrine based on the Commonwealth structure of defense. Where there are common objectives, defense is shared among the members of the Commonwealth. Canada is also one of the most active countries within United Nations peace keeping missions.

These different concepts of national security are one of the reasons which explain why Mexico's government cannot share the US hemispheric objective to build a new Inter- American Defense System in the nineties. The other explanation is domestic. The political leadership of Mexico, both the ruling party and members of the opposition parties, need to have a nationalist ideology in order to maintain the support of the population.

For the Mexican leadership, NAFTA is only a trade treaty. For the United States, it is a strategic long-term alliance. For this reason, the United States seeks the support of Mexico to build a consensus on the definition of global threats, and create bi-national or hemispheric common defense structures for the next Century. Mexico is nervous about the creation of these security structures.

III

Contradictions of Mexican National Security

The National Security doctrine of Mexico has two dimensions:

The first one is based in the Constitution of 1917 and the principles and laws which were elaborated between the years of the revolution (1916-1917) and the thirties. This utopian theory has four aspects:

autonomous foreign policy;
defense principles;
mixed economy to seek social integration and raise the populations' standard of living;
governance through strong leadership.

This National Security doctrine involved a long-term view. The problem is the gap between its principles and the short-term formulation and

implementation of policies every six years with each new president. In addition, Mexico's lack of resources means that it is unable to reach these ideals. The contradictions between theory and practice are made clear in the four last Mexican government planning documents:

Plan Global de Desarrollo 1980-1982 (Jose Lopez Portillo)
Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1983-1988 (Miguel de la Madrid)
Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1989-1994 (Carlos Salinas de Gortari)
Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1995-2000 (Ernesto Zedillo)

Since the beginning of the eighties the Mexican government has started to make economic and political reforms.

The state changed how it intervened in the various sectors of the economy. After the 1982 crisis, Mexico began a process of privatization. In 1986, Mexico became a member of GATT demonstrating its willingness to open the economy. Social spending was reduced due to the economic crisis as well as pressure from organizations like the IMF and the World Bank.

The reduction of social spending obviously has had a political impact, mainly on the poor, whose wages are subsidized by the state. At the same time, in the 1980s, the political system was slowly moving towards a liberal democracy, and the crisis of the populist state began. New types of social movements emerged (with autonomy from the state) and corporatist institutions began to redefine their relationships with the state. The crisis of populism was first manifested in the countryside. The political apparatus and the ruling party and the government could not control this process. In some parts of the country, the radical guerrillas of the 1970s reemerged.

The other dimension of the national security crisis is inside government institutions. In many law enforcement and national security agencies there is an internal structural crisis. Most of these institutions were created after the armed period of the revolution. During the cold war years, they have redefined their doctrines, institutional organization, legal structure and training. Many of them are corrupt and inefficient. The new social, economic, political and international challenges cannot be confronted with the methods used in the past.

The main contradiction of Mexican national security is between the theoretical formulation and the implementation of policies. The theoretical level is utopian; however, when the government implements the national security policies, the coherence of the utopian ideals is lost. In other words, the implementation of national security measures is not connected with the constitutional and theoretical formulation.

While communism is no longer a danger to national security, new threats have emerged. Current challenges to the security of nations place new pressures on the traditional structures and institutions of the nation-state. The new issues for countries like Mexico are:

- a) Incomplete transition to democracy as a factor of conflict
- b) Structural crisis of the traditional institutions
- c) Emergence of non traditional radical political and social movements (guerrilla movements like the EZLN)
- d) International organized crime. Mostly drug trafficking
- e) Citizen insecurity

a) Mexican political change towards a modern liberal democracy has been the slowest in Latin America. Because of this slow process, both traditional and modern institutions co-exist in the state and in society.

On the one hand, parts of the federal government underwent structural modernization. The existence of an independent electoral structure (Instituto Federal Electoral), a government commission on human rights, and the new role of Congress in the decision making process, etc. are indicative of the creation of a modern state apparatus.

On the other hand, the ruling political elite of the PRI has resisted changes which threatened its privileges. The opposition, both on the right side (PAN) and on the left (PRD, PT, PVEM) have won many political positions at the local and state level. This situation has created a dual and contradictory political arena of confrontation: "dinosaurs" against modern politicians. At many levels, civil society has also emerged with autonomy from the state and the PRI.

The three most important states of the country (Distrito Federal, Jalisco and Nuevo Leon) have governors from the opposition, and the ten biggest cities also have mayors from the opposition. In this new reality of dual power, the opposition controls the urban areas while the PRI is supported by the ancient regime forces, who are mainly in the countryside, headed by the landowners.

The PRI's resistance to modernization has caused conflict with the social movements headed by leftist leaders in urban areas as well as in the poorest suburbs of the cities and in rural zones. In the poorest states, like Chiapas and Guerrero, the "caciques" confront the peasants with great doses of violence. Since the eighties this has created a scenario of small civil wars in many municipalities. The rule of law is absent in the countryside and the state institutions (political and judiciary) lack the capacity to resolve these conflicts.

In addition, the popular organizations have become more radical. Both elements: the resistance of the rural ruling class and the radicalization of peasant and indigenous movements in Chiapas and also

in Guerrero and Oaxaca create conditions for guerrilla movements. This crisis has created a national security problem.

b) The law enforcement and national security institutions have demonstrated a high resistance to change. Their doctrines, structure, and personnel, were functional in the traditional one-party system; however, many of them have been in major internal crises since the eighties. The other issue in Mexico is the inefficiency of the law enforcement institutions at the federal, state and local levels. These institutions continue to deteriorate and have high levels of corruption.

At the judicial level, the most important institution, the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR), and its police corps, the Policia Judicial Federal (PJF), has been in a permanent crisis and many of its top leaders (The "Procurador") try to reform the system but cannot (by political and institutional obstacles) accomplish real change. At the state and local levels, law enforcement institutions suffer from the same phenomenon. This is the source of anxiety for the majority of citizens and is seen as a national security problem for many analysts.

At the political level, the Secretaria de Gobernacion is responsible for managing the political order and the civil intelligence system. Under the PRI's hegemony, it focused its attention on the opposition and social movements. In the nineties, with the process of modernization and democratization, the Secretaria de Gobernacion is not suited to a democratic political system.

The Mexican armed forces are small (compared with other countries), and the government has only used them in exceptional cases. The military in Mexico is subordinate to the civilian authorities and its missions are mainly internal (DN-II). The army plays a dissuasive role in the countryside and in the cities its presence is rare. Nevertheless, in the nineties, due to the crisis of law enforcement, the appearance of radical peasants movements, increased violence in rural zones, the inefficiency of the police corps, and the rise of drugs trafficking, the military appears to be the only institution capable of solving these crises. This has opened debate in the political arena and in the media over the role of the military in civilian affairs. These new functions of the military also make it susceptible to corruption.

In national security -at the civilian and military levels, and in law enforcement agencies- there is a lack of accountability. The reform of these institutions is occurring at a slow speed. The civil society (mainly the media) and the opposition have pressured for faster change, but the ruling class has resisted. The most important problems of national security (Chiapas crisis, citizen insecurity and drug trafficking) have created tension

.

This tension has increased due to the employment of the military for crisis management. Civil society and the media currently are protesting the immunity given to the armed forces for human rights abuses. Also international pressure has appeared over the issue of Chiapas.

1994 is a key year for Mexico. In January of that year, two important things occurred: NAFTA was implemented and the Chiapas crisis surprised the world. In the long-term, NAFTA is a measure of national security because it seeks a new strategy to rebuild the weak mixed economic model. In the short-term, it could provoke many social and political conflicts.

c) The Chiapas uprising has many causes. Among others, it can be attributed to the failure of the political structures at the state and local level, the absence of rule of law, the increased rural political violence between peasants, indigenous people, and landowners, the presence of the "new left" like the EZLN with autonomous and radical political leadership structures (with the support of adherents to the "theology of liberation"), and the indirect influence of Central America's guerrilla movements of the eighties. With the emergence of the EZLN military offensive in January 1994, the Chiapas conflict became a national security crisis. We will focus on the national security implications of Chiapas in the next paragraph.

d) After the collapse of the Soviet Union, organized crime has spread and has appeared in new forms around the world. We have seen the rise in illegal arms trade and underground organizations--ranging from materials to build nuclear weapons to small arms appropriate for guerrillas movements and drug traffickers. In the hemisphere, since the end of the seventies, the drug traffickers have increased cocaine exports to the United States. The production and the consumption of drugs combined with the increase of illegal and legal arms trafficking, caused by the Central America crisis, as well as open markets for arms in the United States, has resulted in the enlargement of the international cartels.

The increased influence of drug cartels and the inefficiency and corruption of law enforcement institutions has had a direct impact on national security. Drug cartels have penetrated the law enforcement institutions. Consequently, there are many pressures, both domestic and abroad (United States), to use the military to deter organized crime and drug trafficking. The Mexican government is faced with a major challenge because the organized crime and drug trafficking cartels have transnational structures and international cooperation is needed to fight them. The major danger of this is the possibility of corruption inside the army.

In the Mexican government and also in society and the media, there are two views on cooperation with the United States to fight the cartels. On the one hand, many people are concerned with preserving Mexican

sovereignty. On the other hand, some view cooperation as a necessary evil.

e) In the nineties, a dramatic change is observed in the level of citizen security. Crime in the streets has increased and affects members of all social sectors. Insecurity has become a key political issue for the population. Insecurity is also the manifestation of the crisis of a one-party system with corrupted and inefficient police and judicial institutions. All the sectors of the society demand a quick response from the government at the federal, state and local levels. In the places where the opposition is in power, they also have felt the pressure of providing for citizen security. Both the ruling party and the opposition have offered various reforms, none of which has been effective. In all of the country the situation is deteriorating.

Delinquency and crime has many faces. No classes are safe from its effects. There has been an increase in the activity of organized crime groups against the rich and middle class people (for example the higher frequency of kidnapping and car jacking), and higher rates of crimes committed against poor people in the suburbs and in major cities. In the rural zones, this reality is critical. Most disturbing is the fact that in many cases, members of police agencies are involved in these activities.

Another issue which is responsible for the increased rate of crime is the absence of correspondence between how laws are written and their implementation. The judiciary system is inefficient and many of the judges (Ministerio Publico) are corrupt. Citizens have lost confidence in the law enforcement institutions.

The immediate solution to this problem of increased crime has involved military forces at all levels. In 1996 and 1997, the upper level of the police department in Mexico City was replaced by military officers in an institutional compromise. Also ex-military officers head the majority of the police corps in many states. This strategy has had poor results and is highly criticized by public opinion and the media for three reasons: inefficiency, impunity, and violation of human rights.

V

The Chiapas crisis and its repercussions on national security.

The history of the EZLN as a guerrilla group has two periods. The first one was between 1984-1993, when it transformed its small and clandestine structure into a new organized leadership. At the same time, in these years, it forged links with the political leadership of the indigenous communities in Chiapas (mainly in Las Canadas) and peasants movements. It also developed strong relationships with the leaders of the Catholic church in the state.

The second period started on the first of January, 1994. The EZLN was prepared for a prolonged war. It began its military offensive against

the army and took possession of six towns in the highlands of Chiapas for a few days. Its objective was to draw attention to the poor living conditions and the repression of the state. They sought to create political support, both domestic and international. The Mexican government offered a cease fire on January 12th, 1994. They accepted the proposal and the fighting was ended.

The Mexican government, in contrast to other Latin American countries who have confronted the guerrillas with military measures, sought a cease fire as a unique pragmatic decision to avoid a military confrontation in which the outcome was uncertain. At that moment, (mid-January 1994) the military establishment argued that the quick capture of the leadership ("Subcomandante Marcos") would resolve the situation. The danger for the PRI and the President was the spread of rebellion into other areas of the country. In that year, the main goal for the ruling class was victory at the ballot box, not winning in the jungle. Rather than fighting, the military agreed to follow presidential orders and accepted it.

A low-intensity and prolonged negotiating process (with many mediation formulas) between the EZLN and the Mexican government began. The result of this process has been mixed. On the one hand, the cease fire has been effective in military terms. On the other hand, the political and social situation in Chiapas has worsened and there has been a lack of good will on both sides. The real negotiations are at a standstill after four years and this is affecting the process of democratization throughout the country.

The Zapatista uprising exacerbated other conflicts which exist in Chiapas. For this reason, since 1994, there have been four main types of conflict:

The first one is "class struggle" (as defined by Marxist theory) between the poorest people and the richest. The poor people are lead mainly by the EZLN and other leftist groups and parties. They are fighting for land and have illegally occupied many properties. As a reaction, the landlords developed a paramilitary "self-defense" system. The state government gives impunity to the landowners because there is not much of a difference between the economic ruling class and the political ruling class in Chiapas. Since the 1980s, the occupation of properties has increased. "Self-defense" through the employment of paramilitary groups, has heightened political tensions and has had national repercussions. The most important action was the Massacre on December 22, 1997 in Acteal where 45 indigenous people were killed.

Religious war between three different branches of the Christian church is the second type of conflict. The struggle has been between the Catholic traditional Church, the Catholic "Theology of Liberation," and many Protestant churches. This confrontation began between the forties and sixties. In many places segregation and violence occurred between the followers of the different groups.

Currently the two Catholic branches both support the leadership of Samuel Ruiz (Bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas) to deter the influence of the Protestants.

Political war is the third type of conflict. The opposition in Chiapas, mainly the new influence of the PRD, challenges the local and state apparatus of PRI and in many cases violence occurs. The PRI is linked to and supported by the landowners (caciques), and the PRD leaders have been influenced by the ideology of the EZLN. There is a high level of polarization in the political struggle.

Military war, which is currently at a standstill, is the fourth type of conflict. The army, for political reasons, cannot fight the EZLN but is instead using the show of force to dissuade another military uprising. One of its major objectives is to create a belt of security around the Zapatista territory.

These four manifestations of different "wars" in Chiapas are connected and influence one another. The present crisis was not created only by the Zapatista uprising. The EZLN movement was "the straw that broke the camel's back" in 1994.

The EZLN has demonstrated a high level of political skill and has shown the world that it is different from other guerrilla movements in Latin America. It does not want to appear to be a fundamentalist group; on the contrary, its goal is to develop and maintain the support of many social and political movements, in Mexico and abroad. Because indigenous people are the base of the guerrilla organization, they create the image of fighting a "just" war. Since the cease fire, the EZLN has employed a new strategy. Because of the obvious differences in military capabilities between the EZLN and the army, they have sought to win the war in other arenas. Consequently, they receive strong support from many groups in Mexico and from abroad which has lent legitimacy to their cause. The Mexican government cannot stop this tendency. Because of strong international and domestic support for the cause of the EZLN, they are able to dissuade the government from using military force against them. This is a postmodern defense system.

According to Clausewitz's theory, there are two types of forces used by armies in all wars: the moral force and the material force. The EZLN employment of the "moral force" deters military aggression with political means. The army, while it has unlimited resources (in equipment and soldiers), cannot use them for political reasons.

Another important strategic settlement in the Chiapas crisis is the combination of three civilization waves as articulated in Alvin Toffler's theory. The EZLN develop the war of the first civilization (the mobilization of agrarian-indigenous people) and have the potential to build legitimacy and support. They also employ the war strategy of the third wave using internet resources to communicate with sympathizers around the world (NGOs, the "international civil

society"). This has created a new type of soldier, the invisible and transnational, who combat in the net lines; the Mexican government and army cannot do anything against them.

The Mexican army is deploying a strategy of the second civilization, a nation-state strategy, and is training its forces to fight a conventional war between guerrillas and a professional army with the tactics of the cold war. The problem is that in Chiapas this type of war is very unlikely. For this reason, in strategic terms, the EZLN has successfully confronted the Mexican army.

The negotiation process has had many periods. The first was between January of 1994 and the beginning of the cease fire. It created the "Zapatista territory" in Ocosingo. Between February and May, the government offered the first package of reforms and the EZLN rejected it. At this time, father Samuel Ruiz became the main mediator. Between May and August, the national political focus turned to upcoming presidential elections, and conversations between the parties were on hold until November. The elections were won by the PRI candidate, Ernesto Zedillo. To restart the negotiations Samuel Ruiz created the Commission of National Intermediation (CONAI) at the end of 1994.

In December of 1994, the new government came to power, and the EZLN tried to enlarge its territory. This caused the military tensions to increase. In February of 1995, the government started a military offensive which sought to capture subcomandante Marcos. This effort failed; there was opposition from the civil society, the media and abroad to stop the army, and a second period of negotiations began. In this moment, the Congress Commission for Peace in Chiapas (COCOPA) was created.

From March of 1995 to February of 1996, four sided roundtable negotiations were conducted. The four parties were the government commission, the COCOPA (at this time closely aligned with the official side), the CONAI (closely aligned to the Zapatistas), and the EZLN commission, headed by indigenous leadership. One year later they signed the San Andres Larrainzar Agreements in February of 1996. However, the Mexican government failed to submit the Agreements to Congress for discussion. This is the cause of current tensions. From February of 1996 to date, the peace talks have broken down. The EZLN does not want to change the San Andres agreements and the government is offering other compromises.

In strategic terms, this low intensity negotiation failed, but it is impossible for both parties to return to the use of military forces. Neither real negotiations nor direct combat exist. Due to the stalemate, a third alternative, paramilitary groups headed by the landowners with the passive support of the federal government, have been developed. This implies the "feudalization" of the conflict, and has created the conditions for the spread of small civil wars in the communities.

The situation is made worse by the fact that there is a lack of judicial resources to solve the conflicts, and local security and police forces are involved in the massacres, (as in Acteal). This "feudalization" has provoked domestic and international accusations of human rights abuses.

The "feudalization" strategy poses dangers to national security because it means the empowerment of hard liners ("caciques" and "dinosaurs") in the political system, and also reduces the possibility of real negotiations to solve the conflict.

The Mexican government is in a dilemma because of the pressure it receives, both domestic and foreign, and the political system is not capable of solving these types of problems. For this reason many analysts have called for the creation of a new negotiation formula with the EZLN.

VI

The Mexican armed forces and the national security.

In the revolutionary age, the Mexican political system built institutions and replaced the militaries. The country underwent a successful demilitarization process. The armed forces focused on creating modern and professional institutions. When the mechanisms of political control did not work and the people protested, the government employed the army, but this was rare.

Nevertheless, the army is deployed to confront internal missions (the actual structure of twelve military Regions and forty Zones). Only in principle and doctrine are the Mexican armed forces (army, air force and navy) prepared for a foreign war (DN-I). The three branches developed structures to prevent internal turmoil (DN-II) and also are well trained to help the population when there are nature disasters (DN-III). The main reform inside the army since 1995 has been the creation of the special operations teams in each military zone (GAFES). This structure is to combat the new challenges with the best trained and equipped personnel. The employment of GAFES depends on the military zone. In the north and the center of the country they are deployed to combat drug traffickers, and in the south, they are used for counterinsurgency efforts.

In the sixties and seventies, radical peasant and urban guerrillas movements emerged. The army began professional training to confront them. Also, when the drug trade increased, the government used the army rather than the PGR to destroy marijuana and opium crops. The Mexican army learned to fight in the mountains. After the action against the student movement in October of 1968, the army did not want to do the "dirty work" in political terms, and also did not want to be subject to public scrutiny. The opposition argued that the army in

many cases was employed as the branch of the PRI, but the army argued that they serve the general good, or nation-state goals.

Since the armed years of the revolution, the army has been deployed as a measure of "dissuasion" in rural zones. The police and security corps are in poor condition, are non-professional and are frequently corrupt, especially in the countryside.

The army also has another traditional mission: to help build roads, communication systems and help with social services (for example health care) in the most isolated regions where the poorest people live. For this, they have developed a social doctrine.

These traditional missions are indicative of the weaknesses of other state institutions, and demonstrate the different level of evolution of modern and professional government apparatus. This created a myth that the army can solve problems which were originally the responsibility of civilian agencies.

The "reform of the state" since the eighties has had two contradictory dimensions. On the one hand, the reform is in neo-liberal terms and has reduced the budget of the government agencies which are responsible for social services like education, health, etc. This created a vacuum and other social and political actors had to substitute for state functions in many parts of the country, mainly in the countryside. The army could not fill the vacuum and this created opportunities for NGOs, political parties, church organizations to act.

The "reform of the state" is also a way to create modern structures, without bureaucracy and corruption, and also to slowly build an accountability system. The army, for institutional reasons is modernizing and is receiving a larger budget due to the expansion of its responsibilities.

The contradictory political reality puts the army in a existential conflict. The politicians need the army because of the inability of other institutions (the failure of the populist state) to control many popular radical expressions. The army is increasing its role in order to maintain stability (in dissuasive or active terms). However, this employment of the armed forces is contrary to the modernization process. To meet new demands, the army and navy have increased their budgets and personnel in the nineties.

The army has been brought in to control political instability in rural areas. Its presence has deterred groups like the EZLN, but social and political tensions continue to exist. In the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, the old guerrilla movement of the seventies were reborn. In 1996, the Ejercito Popular Revolucionario (ERP) appeared; they proclaimed the unification of 14 small guerrilla groups and initiated other warfare against the Mexican government. The EPR is different than the EZLN in that it does not have strong popular support. Its

campaigns to obtain solidarity have failed allowing the army to use similar strategies employed during the seventies in Guerrero without civil society and media protest.

In the nineties, due to the crisis of the judicial system and the police corps, as well as the increase of crime activities, many army and navy officers were asked to head police organizations throughout the country. Also, at the institutional level, the army was involved in the reform of the country's main police unit in Mexico City. Public opinion and the media view this as a process of "militarization" and have opposed it. On the one hand, citizens desire security and are less concerned about how it is attained. Many people agree with the use of the army. On the other hand, the army is not efficient. The war against crime appears to be lost and the hard line strategies employed in some cases involve violations of human rights and impunity. Additionally, the danger of corruption is high due to the powerful influence of crime groups.

The participation of the army in public security matters has had negative effects and discredited the military in the eyes of the citizens. Also, inside the military institutions many officers agree that public security is not a military mission and that if it is treated as one it could create conditions for corruption.

Another controversial mission of the armed forces is the war against drugs. Within the three branch structure of the military high command (Estado Mayor) there are special sections to conduct the war on drugs. This mission has existed since the fifties and the real cause of that involvement is the structural crisis of the PGR and its police, the PJF. Due to inefficient, unprofessional and corrupted law enforcement corps, the military has had to do the job.

The Mexican government has received a high level of pressure from the United States. The two governments have different points of view on how to confront the drug problem. For the Mexicans, it is primarily a problem of consumption and then a problem of traffic. For the Americans, the strategy begins with combating supply. Nevertheless, both governments developed a high level of cooperation against drug trafficking. This is one of the major issues in the bi-lateral relationship because it is considered to be an issue of international security.

The United States has also developed a bi-lateral, hemispheric and global strategy. One part of this is the Congressional certification process. This is a major point of tension and many governments, not only the Mexico's, are working against it. The certification process has two contradictory effects in the war against drugs. On the one side, it puts pressure on the Mexican government to control the drug trade. This is good because the Mexican government is obligated to be effective. On the other hand, it raises concern about Mexican sovereignty.

The main issue in Mexico is the militarization of the drug war and its effects. Of particular concern is the involvement of Colombian cocaine cartels and their international links. The army's participation is justified with the argument that it is the only institution strong enough to effectively conduct the drug war. The army has personnel, trained soldiers, officers and equipment. The United States cooperation is through traditional means -IMET and MAP and also directly through the Department of Defense. There are many critics of this cooperation who oppose the use of traditional military strategy and tactics to fight a non-conventional war. Nevertheless, the worst issue is the inability of the Mexican federal government to build a professional, well-paid, and well-trained civilian law enforcement agency to combat drugs.

The armed forces in Mexico are trapped between the new demands of modernization and the short-term requirements of the politicians. The Chiapas crisis shows the ruling elite's inability to solve a social and political problem using military force. Increased national insecurity is a result of and evidenced by the slow speed of reform in the law enforcement institutions, increased citizen insecurity, internal instability, and the new dimension of international organized crime (the challenge of drugs trafficking). Where are the limits of military involvement in these missions?

All these missions, if the army is involved in the field, can create conditions for potential violations in human rights. As a result of the modernization process, the media and the public can criticize government actions and aggressions. The trend is to end impunity and to create accountability. In a democratic society the public debates the role of the military, and determines what changes are necessary in the structure of the Command (for example the transformation of the Secretary of Defense, the creation of civilian guidance and administration) and the formation of a three branch common structure.

VII

Scenarios at the end of the Century

In conclusion, during the years of stability in the political system (1930-1980) democracy was not an issue (except in critical moments like the 1968 students movement). For this reason, there was not a national security problem during this period. In recent years, the goal is liberal democracy with stability. In the past the institutions have been adequate, but in the nineties the "reform of the state" became a national security problem.

The new political movements (some of them with radical expressions) and an active civil society put the government in a dilemma: how to convince opponents to accept the rule of law and democratic norms without using repression and at the same time how to respond to the opposition's demands for change?

The presence of international organized crime, and the increase of crime in society put the Mexican government "up against the wall".

At the end of the Century, many things impact on national security: the evolution of reform and modernization of all the branches of the state, mainly those who have responsibilities in the judiciary, law enforcement and national security levels; NAFTA's affect on the economy and society, at the macro-economic and individual level; long-term economic growth; advances in the transition to democracy (which includes changes in the modus operandi of the most important political parties, both in the Congress and when they use its political apparatus around the country); a good relationship with the United States, etc.

In the law enforcement and national security institutions, the change of doctrines, the professionalization of the personnel and the modification of their goal (searching the constitutional mandate) has to be the objective. If this is not accomplished, this will cause a major crisis in the political stability of the country in the next years.

The armed forces are a well established institution where there are professional career officers, doctrine, spirit of corps, and personnel training. Nevertheless, the armed forces cannot substitute for the Secretaria de Gobernacion to deal with domestic political affairs (for example in rural zones) and to create compromises between the parties and leaders. Also, it cannot do the job of the PGR and PJF at federal and state level. This could cause a saturation of responsibilities and could distort its constitutional mandates. The overuse of the military is dangerous because it could be interpreted as a major failure in the Mexican transition to democracy. Further, it is significant that since the 1920s the Mexican military, to all intents and purposes, had no external national security mission.

The different scenarios for the future are the following:

a) The worst scenario is a major crisis at the economic and political level: slow or no growth in the rate of GDP; the failure of the negotiation in Chiapas (with the possibility of renewed military confrontation); the increasing inefficiency of the police and security corps; the lack of negotiations between the political parties and a crisis in the Congress; and an increased rate of drug trafficking. This could provoke the employment of the armed forces to stop the turmoil, its re-politization, and also pressure from the United States will increase. This scenario is not very probable, but has to be considered. In summary, the major danger is the militarization of the political struggle and the feudalization of power which may cause the spread of many small civil wars around the country. It is the ghost of the Mexican revolution.

b) A political crisis in the context of stable economic growth. This scenario is possible if the parties do not agree to reform

negotiations for the presidential electoral process of the 2000. Also, it is possible if the Chiapas crisis continues the current low-intensity negotiations. With this, the preeminence of the conservative faction of the PRI (dinosaurs), the control of the party by the radical sectors of the PRD, and the lack of efforts in the PAN to have agreement with other party leaders a major confrontation (possible with violence in parts of the country) in the political arena may occur. The United States will probably pressure the actors in the Mexican political system for a consensus to stop the fighting. Many international forces will also pressure the government and political parties in order to re-establish the stability and to stop the militarization and feudalization in Chiapas and other parts of the country. The pressure will focus on a well-organized and clean electoral process to solve the differences.

c) The best scenario could happen as soon as the year 2000 with economic growth and political stability. This requires complete reform in the institutions of the state; the decrease of the rate of crime; the successful negotiations in Chiapas; the reduction and control of drug activity and organized crime (domestic and international); etc. This will create national security, political stability and governance, as well as help the people re-establish confidence in the institutions.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE MEXICAN MILITARY AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Stephen Wager

Over the last three or four years, especially since the Chiapas crisis, President Ernesto Zedillo has been working hard to keep the lid on political pressures in Mexico long enough for some of his political and economic reforms to take effect. When Zedillo and his advisors made this decision, it became clear to him that to control these pressures, he had to do something about the situation in the country. Raul Benitez has focused on the many challenges to security: high rates of crime, something that existed in the past, but not to the extent that it has over the last couple of years; the growing internationalization of the drug trade with Mexico becoming a major player at least in the transshipment of drugs from the Andean countries; and the general dissident and insurgent movements which have sprung up around the country, which climaxed with the insurrection in Chiapas. All these have ultimately created a problem for political development in Mexico. In order to preserve security in the country, Zedillo looked at what resources were available. I think by default he turned to the military. There was no other institution that he could call upon (for various reasons that Raul Benitez talked about, such as the judiciary crisis). The military is the one institution that had more resources, more discipline, and more loyalty in comparison with Law Enforcement institutions which had developed a reputation for corruption.

Unfortunately, because of Chiapas and other problems (e.g., the growing sophistication of the narco-trafficking, not only in Mexico, but in other parts of Latin America), the military was already finding itself with major strains on its man power and its financial resources. The timing for the military was bad. Since the 1980s, the Mexican military was trying to modernize and modernization for the military meant distancing itself from police functions. In the midst of trying to do this, the military suddenly found itself with a wide range of new responsibilities; this placed a really big strain on military resources and the military itself.

The political system, as we have known it for the last 69-70 years, obviously appears to be eroding. This situation has given rise to great deal of uncertainty throughout society and throughout the institutions of the government itself. The modernization of the economy is causing massive suffering among large sector of the population, putting additional pressure on the system. The social fabric of Mexican society has started to crumble due to the pressure of all these changes, and the results have been a significant increase in corruption at all levels of society, crime waves, and growing narco-trafficking.

Zedillo's goal is to have the Mexican military contain threats to the system, buying time for his political and economic reforms. Obviously, people right now are looking at the presidential election in the year

2000 as the most significant event that will take place in Mexico during the next two years. Obviously, Mexico hopes to weather what could be a major storm in 2000. The president would like the system to hold together, at least until the year 2000, so that there exists a credible chance of continuing stability. The military, as a result of the desires of the political leaders, has found a lot of new responsibilities thrust upon it. One might look back historically and say that the Mexican military had a similar role in 1968, and its performance received considerable public criticism. As a result, the military withdrew from public view as much as it was permitted to, because of what was perceived as its failures in 1968 (a number of these failures being political in nature). Now the military is being forced to accept similar responsibilities. The president has turned to the military, probably the most loyal institution in the government, and military leaders have accepted these added responsibilities. Most people would probably agree however, that this role acceptance has not been whole-hearted, and there continues to be some underlying dissent among top ranking military leaders over this expanded role. Many of them perceive themselves solely as soldiers and military officers, not police officers. Consequently, this is a source of tension within the military institution itself. What is happening in society is also being reflected within the military.

I see perhaps four scenarios that could occur in the next two to five years. I will go over them briefly. Some of them are more realistic than others, but I believe that it is always useful to throw out ideas and then dissect them later:

The first scenario suggests growing corruption within the Mexican military stemming from its increased exposure to the drug trade. The second is the failure of the military to accomplish all its missions due to a lack of resources and a general lack of training and experience. This has already been mentioned in part above. The third scenario has the military playing a significant role in the event of an electoral deadlock in the year 2000 that would allow for the formation of a transitional or caretaker government in which the military would play a role as a "societal enforcer". In this context, the military would allow this transitional or caretaker government to perform despite a lack of support from the majority of the Mexican population.

Finally, the last scenario, which I really do not give much credence to, is the outbreak of civil war and the introduction of martial law.

From a personal point of view, it appears to me, that while people criticize the PRI and assert that it is part of Mexico's past and no longer has a major influence in society, it is still a significant force in Mexico. If the PRI goes, there will be a political vacuum. Is there any group out there that is capable of filling the void? I don't think so. What I anticipate is that the system will, over the next two to three years, muddle through, "walk up a muddy hill" so to speak, without a permanent resolution to the problem. Let's face it: we can simply look at crime in the United States; if we cannot reduce

it in the United States, why should we expect them to reduce it in Mexico?

Having said all this, allow me to elaborate on these scenarios.

With regard to the first scenario (widespread corruption in the military), the reason I pose this scenario is that for the last few years or so we have seen this growing corruption in Mexico. Since the arrest and subsequent incarceration of the head of Mexico's "war on drugs", Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo (former director of the Instituto Nacional para el Control de Drogas) other high-ranking military officials have been exposed as corrupt. Despite declarations by the U.S. drug czar, retired General Barry McCaffrey, Mexico's war on drugs has not produced significant results. I see a mild dilemma now emerging within the military. It seems that the public and the government (although the government would never publicly admit it) are starting to lose confidence in the military's ability to make a major dent in the war on drugs. In defense of the military, they have been thrust into a role that they have little experience in, a role that is, in part, political.

The military has been involved in drug eradicating since the end of World War II. They know all the tricks of the trade: they know how to set up road blocks, they know where people plant drugs, how to cut off the irrigation system to stop this, etc. What they don't know about is how to prevent the cartels from infiltrating the banking system, or identifying the extent to which these cartels influence Mexican society, its political system, politicians, prominent businessmen, etc. As a result of this, the military, probably in the next 2-5 years, will be forced to assume more of a reduced role in the war on drugs, a role I think they will accept. I believe a sizable number of military officers see the military's role in the battle against drug traffickers as something that can only produce additional problems for the military: it can result in increased corruption and also impede modernization.

I think Mexican officials need to look at the long-term ramifications of this, because I think this will have a detrimental psychological effect on society: the military will no longer be looked upon as the least corrupted institution in Mexico. The recent investigations by the press and the recent declarations by military officers that some of their colleagues have been intimately involved with drug traffickers does not bode well for the military. But it also does not bode well for society, because President Zedillo called in the military and expanded its role as a last resort. He may now feel that his force of last resort has not resolved this serious problem, leading to the question "what does the future hold?".

The second scenario is one in which a lack of experience and resources in the military could lead to the incorrect response in certain situations, ultimately forcing the military to withdrawal from its expanded role and to disengage from police activities. This is

probably not as serious a threat as the previous scenario. Failures on the part of the military have caused a good deal of debate, obviously behind closed doors, within the upper echelons of the military hierarchy as to the what the future role of the military should be. Those who are promulgating the idea that they should stay involved in police activities are not going to have very much positive evidence to support their case.

The third scenario is one in which no candidate wins a majority in the 2000 presidential elections, or if unrest in the cities and in the countryside erupts due to electoral fraud (although many political groups will most likely avoid inciting unrest because they would regard it as self-defeating). Ultimately, because of electoral fraud and contending declarations by various political parties, the military would be forced to step in to support and reinforce a transitional/caretaker government until a more genuinely popular government could be put into place.

Finally, the last scenario is the one the "gloom and doom-sayers" would like to promote: one in which political unrest and economic collapse would create a major crisis, creating the threat of civil war and prompting the military to step in and seize power and establish martial law. This is something the vast majority of high-ranking military officers would be against. This is something the military has no experience at. The failed experiences of their regional counterparts in the 1970s and 80s would be fresh on their minds. In short, this scenario remains highly unlikely.

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