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Mexico: A Reluctant Regional Security Provider

Roberto Domínguez



European University Institute  
**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**  
Global Governance Programme

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the role of Mexico as security provider or source of insecurity through the analysis of regional security governance. It argues that in contrast with other countries in the region such as Brazil, which has displayed policies aimed at building a node of regional security, Mexico has become a reluctant regional security provider as a result of its traditional historical inward looking roots and the inherent state weaknesses augmented by the current instability in the area of security. This paper looks into four categories of security governance (assurance, prevention, protection and compellence) in order to evaluate the role of Mexico in the context of regional security. Part of the task of this paper will be to explore the extent in which Mexico carries out one or more of these dimensions and the extent in which it contributes to regional (collective) security governance.

## **Keywords:**

Regionalism, Security Governance, Mexico, Latin America, Drug Trafficking





## **Introduction**

As the cyclical economic crises of the end of presidential administrations have been absent since 1994 and the alternation of political parties in the executive powers of the three levels of government has been part of the democratic normalcy, some analysts have argued that Mexico, along with South Korea, Indonesia, and Turkey (MIST countries), should be included in the group of significant economies of the multipolar world. This positive perception of Mexico contrasts with the “war on drugs” that Mexico has waged against organized crime organization since the mid-2000s resulting in the deaths of more than 60,000 people. This paper analyses the role of Mexico as security provider or source of insecurity through the analysis of regional security governance. It argues that in contrast with other countries in the region such as Brazil, which has displayed policies aimed at building a node of regional security, Mexico has become a reluctant regional security provider as a result of its traditional historical inward looking roots and the inherent state weaknesses augmented by the current instability in the area of security. This paper looks into four categories of security governance (assurance, prevention, protection and compellence) in order to evaluate the role of Mexico in the context of regional security. Part of the task of this paper will be to explore the extent in which Mexico carries out one or more of these dimensions and the extent in which it contributes to regional (collective) security governance.

## **Regional Perceptions of Threats and Security Policies**

The transformations of the Mexican security perceptions and policies have changed in the past decades according to the nature of the threats. This evolution is clearly divided into four periods. The first lasted from the end of World War II to the late 1970s. While economic growth, social peace, and stable borders made a national debate on security unnecessary, the government primarily equated the concept of security with control of dissident groups, and relied upon intelligence activities and force to do so. Monitoring the activities of opposition leaders and co-optation were strategies of the governmental apparatus to manage subtly political dissidence. Likewise, when the government felt threatened by public demonstrations, military force was used, notably the suppression of student protests in 1968 and 1971.

The second period was initiated in the early 1980s. The historical context facilitated the conditions to broaden and externalize the concept of security as a result of two main events during this period. The first was a reaction to the Central American conflicts, the other being the discovery of new oil reserves that created the illusion in the governing elite that the time to project the Mexican power abroad had come, particularly in Central America. The de la Madrid administration (1982-1988) attempted to define the concept of national security for the first time in the National Development Plan, including elements such as economic development of the nation, the maintenance of liberty, peace and social justice, and the primary function of the armed forces as guarantors of national security.

The third period was distinguished by the convergence of domestic and external factors. Internally, the political system crumbled in the electoral fraud in 1988 and as drug trafficking organizations gradually scaled to the top of the government’s security concerns and displaced organized domestic political opposition as the internal threat to the Mexican state. Externally, the end of the Cold War motivated the Salinas de Gortari Administration (1988-1994) to negotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was intended to reinforce the opening of the political system and to mark the formal transition of an inward-oriented and protectionist economic model to an outward-oriented open economy. The National Development Plan of the Salinas de Gortari Administration stated that one of the objectives of the Mexican security was to act decisively to avoid any action that

could threaten national security. Likewise, the same document included drug trafficking as the main threat to security (Bagley and Quezada 1993).

The fourth period started with the inauguration of the Fox Administration (2000-2006), the first government from an opposition party in seven decades. Within the new government the post of the national security advisor was created, whose main responsibility was to coordinate a long-term perspective on national security, national sovereignty, preservation of the rule of law and democratic governability. Despite high expectations for real change, the transformations were partial, and unfortunately, the Fox was unable to inhibit the spread of organized crime, which has since amassed unprecedented power and became the most important item on the national security agenda under the administration of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) (Rodríguez Sumano 2007). The return of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 2012, continues the confrontation of drug trafficking organization and the attempt of a new design of the security forces based on the French model of gendarmerie.

The current challenges for Mexican security in the second decade of the twenty-first century are reflected in the priorities already mentioned, as well in public opinion. According to the several surveys of “Mexico, the Americas, and the World”, the main threat for national security is drug-trafficking and organized crime, which was ranked as the number one threat in 2012, with 82 percent of respondents identifying them as a “grave threat” (González et al. 2012). This perception has been consistent over the four editions of the survey (2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010, 2012), which reiterates that the main source of threat in Mexico is domestic. Other high ranked threats, in the 2012 survey, are weapons trafficking (ranked fifth), nuclear weapons (ranked seventh) and international terrorism (ranked eighth) as an intermediate threat. In a regional context, Mexicans are less worried about border conflicts (ranked tenth), territorial disputes (ranked eleventh), and instability in neighbouring countries (ranked twelfth).

## **Sources of Power**

Jim O’Neill, chairperson of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, became famous worldwide in 2001 when he coined the catchy acronym BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). The analysis of O’Neil has once again indicated the significant role of a new group of four fast-track growing countries: Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey. Since the days when Mario Vargas Llosa coined the phrase “Mexico: The Perfect Dictatorship”,<sup>1</sup> the country has consolidated the open economy model and improved the democratic standards. Freedom for political participation and contestation are now part of the normal political culture and reforms have made political institutions more accountable. While the general trend is stimulating for improving quality of life in Mexico, there are still challenges to overcome: income inequality remains one of the largest in the world, the government runs into obstacles to effectively solve problems that citizens face, consensus is hard to reach in the legislative power, and the judiciary and police are still plagued by corruption (Martinez-Gallardo 2013) despite the democratization of the past two decades (Morris 2009).<sup>2</sup>

From the economic perspective, Mexico has implemented sound policy frameworks since the end of the 1980s, which have resulted in developing favorable financial conditions that have supported national economic activity. Placed as the second largest economy in Latin America and closely integrated with the US industrial production, Mexico has remained resilient to the 2008-2013 US

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<sup>1</sup> A combination of democratic and authoritarian practices that guaranteed stable, effective government with minimal oppression.

<sup>2</sup> Morris argues that “limited support linking democracy to lower levels of corruption and success at combating corruption... the defeat of the PRI at the state level and the rise of opposition-controlled state executives did seem to play a role in lowering the overall levels of corruption and perception, but the impact seemed to diminish somewhat over time” (191)

economic crisis and the financial turmoil in Europe. Simultaneously, the Mexican economy still needs to reduce inequality in order to consolidate its project. Based on World Bank figures, the number of Mexicans living in poverty in 2010 was 46.2 percent of Mexico's total population, while 10.4 percent was in extreme poverty in spite of targeted social protection programs such as the *Oportunidades* conditional cash transfer initiative and the *Seguro Popular* universal health insurance (World Bank 2013).

While Mexico has held three peaceful electoral processes since the end of the PRI rule in 2000, the consolidation of the democratic political system is not experiencing a linear evolution in the direction of democratic consolidation. Instead, as Dreser argues, "the political system seems to be caught in a permanent, uneasy tug-of-war between the past and the future, between change and actors who seek to place obstacles in its path... ..what the presidency had given up or forced to concede, Congress has gained... What the executive relinquished, vested interests have been quick to pick up" (Dreser 2008, 242). In light of all these transformations, drug traffickers and organized crime organizations have overshadowed the achievements in Mexico's economic area and the democratic transition. Security has become one of the most significant challenges in Mexico. By mid-2013, it was estimated that Mexico's drug war had caused 70,000 deaths in six years (Thomson 2013). This dramatic number was the result of the convergence of several elements. While the PRI regime was able to contain the problems of drug trafficking rather than confronting them, the transition to democracy opens an opportunity for organized crime to infiltrate political parties as well as municipal government around the country.

Externally, other factors also contribute to increase the power of drug trafficking organizations: breaking up the two main major Colombian cartels, disruption of traditional supply routes and tightened up of security measures of the US southern border, among others (Bow and Santa Cruz 2013, 2-24). While the Fox Administration made some changes to deal with the problem, the Calderon Administration waged a military frontal war against cartels that were seeking to seize and to maintain control over several areas of the territory. The Peña Nieto Administration continued the militarization of the conflict and simultaneously emphasized the role of development as the tool to break the vicious circle of poverty and organized crime. In this context, the militarization and the escalation of violence also increased human rights abuses committed by troops, eroded civilian oversight, and undermined coordination efforts between security agencies (Sotomayor 2013, 42-3).

## **Security Governance Policies**

### ***Assurance Policies***

The non-intervention principle has been one of the main pillars of Mexican foreign policy. As an approach, it was quite useful during the decades of PRI rule in Mexico because it acted as a shield against criticisms pointing to the absence of democracy within the country. This explains why Mexico's participation in United Nations (UN) missions in post-conflict areas was not foreseen as part of the national agenda. To date, Mexico's only participation in a post-conflict operation has been with United Nations Observers Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), which was established under Security Council Resolution 693 (1991) on 20 May 1991. While the ONUSAL mission focused on human rights, and deployed military and police contingents, the Mexican contribution to the operation was limited to the participation of a small group of police officers. In 2000, the Fox administration examined the possibility of partaking in UN peacekeeping operations. The initial responses from Congress and the public were negative and reflected the fact that the non-intervention principle is still an essential part of the Mexican security and political cultures. Mexican society remained divided on this issue; in a 2012-13 public opinion poll, only 37 per cent of the respondents would support Mexican participation.

The Mexican government has limited plans for aiding in foreign economic reconstruction owing to internal economic restrictions of the overall Mexican budget. The last significant contribution took place in the early 1990s, when Mexico contributed to El Salvador's reconstruction. Since then, the Mexican government has not employed systematic policies in this area. A second area in which the Mexican government has intervened in post-conflict situations with economic or financial aid was the Guatemalan migration to Southern Mexico in the early 1980s. In this regard, the United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees (UNHCR) opened an office in 1983 to support Mexico's efforts to help thousands of Guatemalan refugees, many of whom either became Mexican citizens or returned to Guatemala. This policy eventually decreased the number of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico from 34,569 in 1996 to 3,229 in 2005 (Echandi 2007). It is calculated that in 2013 there were only 1520 refugees and 357 asylum seekers in Mexico and the contributions to UNHCR have decreased from \$100,000 in 2008 to \$25,000 in 2013 (UNHCR 2013). Noticeably, while the vast majority of the original refugee population was from Guatemala, today, the largest number of refugees originates from El Salvador (UNHCR 2008a).

While war has been absent in Central America for more than a decade, the reconstruction and development of the region has been of interest to Mexican government. Accordingly, the Fox Administration laid out a broad vision for the economic and social development of the region and, in 2001, proposed the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP) for regional development in southern Mexico and Central America. In 2006, Colombia also joined the Plan (Roett 2005). Showcasing the concrete initiatives generated by this program, during the 2008 Summit of the PPP, the heads of state agreed to create a Housing Program for Central America with the aim of building 50,000 houses for \$33 million (Presidency of the Republic 2008a). The PPP transformed into the Meso-American Project in 2009.

Finally, the Mexican government also assists with economic reconstruction in areas, which affected by natural disasters. Mexico regularly sends assistance mission in cases of natural disasters in Central America, and when it has been requested, sends missions to South America and even the United States. Mexico's unprecedented offer to aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina combined with America's unprecedented acceptance of the aid brought the first deployment of troops from the Mexican Army into Texas since the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-48. The aid to disaster victims of Hurricane Katrina included assistance ranging from 195 Army troops to 162 tons of food, clothing, and medicine to two ambulances with mobile surgical units (Córdoba 2005).

### ***Prevention Policies***

Prevention policies encompass democratization, mediation of conflicts and immigration, among other policies. Mexico was traditionally reluctant to include the spread of democracy as an element of foreign policy. After the 2000 democratic bonus encouraged decision makers to make democracy part of foreign policies, some actions in such direction fired back. President Vicente Fox became more assertive with regard to the role of democracy in foreign policy. The main target of democratization was once Castro's regime. Several diplomatic disagreements between Mexico and Cuba in 2002 made it clear that Cuba had become a liability for Mexico's foreign policy due to the Cuban regime's responses. Under the Calderon and Pena Nieto administrations, the promotion of democracy promotion was back into the lower priorities of Mexican foreign policy.

With regard to forestalling international conflicts via negotiated settlements, Mexico has cautiously promoted negotiated peace settlements in a few cases. Mexico actively participated with the Contadora Group in the mediation of Central American conflicts during the 1980s. Then in the 1990s, Mexico was a key player for a peace agreement in El Salvador; it also used its diplomatic good offices and mediation to assist negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrilla groups. In this century, Mexico has withdrawn itself from being a location for peace settlements. For example, even in the case of the Colombian conflict, Mexico closed down the representation of an Colombian insurgent movement in Mexico City.

Unlike the discrete use of diplomacy in conflict prevention, migration is of the utmost relevance for the Mexican society. Mexico is as an exporter and transit country for economic migrants. Its geographic proximity to the U.S. labor market has made the United States an attractive destination for more than 18 million Mexicans. Likewise, the shared border of 3,200 kilometers is a great attraction for citizens from Central and South America, who use Mexico as a bridge to the American dream. With this in mind, three main security-migration complexes can be identified. The first pertains to the role of Mexicans immigrants in the United States has in the Mexican economy; the second is the securitization of immigration policies in the United States; and, the third is the problem of organized crime in Mexico, particularly with regard to transit migrants from Central America.

Mexico is by far the most significant emigration country amongst the OECD. Almost five hundred thousand undocumented Mexicans immigrate to the United States every year with most crossing the border to seek employment in the agriculture, construction, and service industries. Since the early 1980s, the number of Mexican emigrants, as percentage of the Mexican population, has grown from 4 to 11 percent in 2005 (Fitzgerald 2006). In response, U.S. local, state, and federal governments have launched policy initiatives including the building of higher walls along the border, expanding guest worker programs, and even deporting undocumented workers (Escobar Latapí and Martin 2006). Particularly in the context of the current recession in the U.S. economy and in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, negative views towards immigration have gained greater prominence in the United States.

From the Mexican perspective, the economic impact of a massive deportation of Mexicans or even higher unemployment rates would reduce the significant annual remittances to Mexico, which amounted to \$25 billion in 2007. As most of the remittances are used for consumption, the Mexican government has developed programs to institutionalize the emigrants' ties to Mexico. They have organized emigrants to invest in their communities through the 3x1 program, where each dollar invested by a migrant organization in their hometowns is matched by an additional dollar by both the local and federal governments. This program has expanded fourfold in the past five years and its procedures have been modified to allow for more projects.

The second element to consider is the securitization of immigration in the United States. While the prospects of comprehensive migration reform seem unlikely in the near future, an alternative solution has been stopping the undocumented migration with the recent construction of a fence between both countries. As of December 2008, a pedestrian fence of 370 miles and a vehicle fence of 300 miles were completed along the southwest border of the United States (Security 2008). The United States has also expanded the border patrol from 6,000 officers in 1996 to 18,000 today, an increase representing the largest expansion of a U.S. agency in history. Likewise, in January 2008, Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff, stated that, consistent with the recommendations of the 9-11 commission, the U.S. government would end the process of accepting oral declarations of citizenship at land and sea ports and would begin the process of strictly regulating the kinds of documents accepted points of entry (Chertoff and Mukasey 2008).

At the regional level, far from being a solid regional security complex, Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. have established the Security and Prosperity Partnership in order to increase border security. In its first stages, agencies from both countries are harmonizing risk assessment mechanisms, exchanging information, and establishing protocols to facilitate detection of fraud and smuggling. Under the United States-Mexico Voluntary Repatriation Program, more than 35,000 persons were returned to their home in a secure, legal, and humanitarian way in 2006 alone.

The third component is the securitization of migration policies in Mexico. Since 2000, the National Migration Institute (NMI) has been in charge of coordinating the protection of migrants, particularly with the creation of the Beta Groups. These groups attempt to save the lives of migrants in "dangerous zones." Originally organized to deal with migrants in the northern regions of Mexico, the Beta groups have increased their presence along the southern border and have steadily expanded in size to sixteen

groups; in 2007, they rescued 6,091 migrants in dangerous situations, and it was in this context that the NMI was legally recognized as institutional body of the Mexican National Security Council in 2005.

While the number of immigrants going to Mexico is quite small, the government has developed policies to prevent irregular legal situations with non-citizens residing in Mexico. In 2010, the numbers of immigrants within Mexico accounted for only 0.5 percent of the country's total population; a large majority of the migrants come from the United States (69 percent), followed by Central America (9 percent), and South America (5.9 percent) (United Nations 2006a). In order to prevent an increasing number of illegal residents, the Mexican government has initiated programs to normalize the immigration process for foreigners living in Mexico. From 2002 to 2007, 17, 658 foreigners normalized their legal immigration situations in Mexico (INM 2007).

### ***Protection Policies***

Protection policies encompass a variety of areas, ranging from health to organized crime, terrorism, and environmental degradation. In the area of terrorism, the incidents have been isolated and already linked to guerrilla organizations, and more recently to organized crime. Thus, some actions, presumably targeted at other drug trafficking groups, have unfortunately affected innocent citizens. On 15 September 2008, the public was outraged when a drug trafficking group hurled two grenades into a crowd of innocent people on Independence Day in the state of Michoacán. Eight people were killed and more than 100 people were injured. At the international level, the Mexican government has sought to link domestic and international counterterrorist initiatives by establishing the High Level Specialized Committee (HLSC) in May 2007. The aim of this committee was to create international collaborations in order to deal with terrorism, disarmament, and international security. In particular, this committee is in charge of implementing three important UN Security Council Resolutions on terrorism: 1373 (2001), 1540 (2004), and 1624 (2005).

Organized crime has been the most important target of protection policies in the past few years. In order to make the police and military more reliable in regards to drug trafficking, the Mexican government has increased the salaries of its army by 40.9 percent and navy by 57.5 percent since 2006 (Presidency of the Republic 2008b). Many cities and states have also announced pay raises for their police force, amounting to as much as 40 percent, to dissuade the police from joining the “narcos.” Likewise, since 2007, the office of Public Security Secretary replaced 284 federal police commanders and ordered federal and state officers to undergo training courses with United States, Canadian, and European experts (Padgett 2007).

The United States is key to any analysis of Mexico's fight against drugs, as about 90 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States is trafficked through Mexico; Mexico is also the United States' largest foreign supplier of marijuana. Additionally, a 2007 report indicated that 99 percent of all methamphetamine produced in the country is exported to the United States (United Nations 2008). However, bilateral cooperation is permeated by a distrust that operates in two directions. On the one hand, in light of the structural weaknesses of the Mexican state as a security provider, the United States is inclined to adopt unilateral policies. On the other, as a result of US interventionism history in Mexico and the disparity of power between the two countries, Mexico has been reluctant to cooperate in the area of security. Against this background, drug trafficking has been one of the main sources of threat in the bilateral relationship. The power amassed by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) has challenged the ability of the Mexican government to curb corruption in the forces fighting the phenomenon (Chabat 2012). Due to its illegal nature, the magnitude of the economic power of drug trafficking organizations is unclear and the estimates vary depending of the sources and the calculation method: the US Justice Department estimates that the profit of Mexican and Colombian cartels reach between 18 and 39 USD billion from drug sales in the United States each year; the RAND Corporation calculates that all Mexican cartels generate close to 7 USD billion; and the Mexican Secretariat of

Public Security speculated that the cartels spend more than one billion USD each year just to bribe the municipal police (Keefe 2012).

The inability of the Mexican government to control the power of DTOs, has produced operations that either implicitly or explicitly illustrate the distrust of the US government on the Mexican government as a reliable partner. Such operations include Operation Intercept (1969), which consisted of exhaustive searches of vehicles entering the United States through the Mexican border; Second Operation Intercept (1985), which was implemented two weeks after Enrique Camarena, an agent of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), was abducted in Guadalajara; and Operation Casablanca (1998), which was developed by the DEA and the Treasury Department to uncover banks engaged in money laundering without informing the Mexican government. Another sign of distrust came into light as a result of the assassination of a US Border Patrol agent in December of 2010 with guns connected to the Fast and Furious Operation. This operation consisted of 2,000 weapons that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives purposefully did not seize between 2009 and 2011 and allowed to be imported to Mexico by illegal buyers known as “straw purchasers” (O’Keefe 2012). In this context, based on cables made available by *WikiLeaks* in 2012, the US Ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual, put into question “the ability of the Mexican army to pursue drug-trafficking organizations, warned about poor coordination among local security forces, and complained about official corruption, among other statements” (Economist Intelligence Unit 2011).

While US unilateral actions have produced tensions in the bilateral relationship, sequential post-facto dialogues have been produced as remedies to alleviate distrust and eventually to pave the way for temporary cooperation. Some examples include the creation of the bilateral High Level Contact Group (1996) after the unilateral Casablanca Operation; the establishment of the Operation Falcon (1990) after the kidnap of Alvarez Machain; and the Operations Cooperation and Condor after the unilateral Operation Intercept (Chabat 2012). A turning point in the bilateral cooperation is the Merida Initiative (MI) because this is the first time the US provided military and police assistance to Mexico. In qualitative terms, the MI implies a change in perception in the bilateral relationship. On the one hand, the US government acknowledged that the US is corresponsive of the violence that has occurred in Mexico due to the high levels of drug consumption in the United States. On the other, the Mexican government also recognizes that the country needs the help of its northern neighbour to fight against organized crime. Thirty years ago, it would have been difficult for the Mexican government to resort to US help in security matters. In quantitative terms, however, the MI does not represent a significant amount of money because the US government only contributed 1.2 billion dollars for three years (2007-2010). This amount is insufficient compared to the Mexican challenge of drug trafficking. More precisely, some elements included in the MI are the following: a) non-intrusive inspection equipment, b) software to improve communications, c) training for investigators and prosecutors, d) introduction of a witness protection program, e) thirteen Bell 412 EP utility helicopters and eight much larger UH-60 Black Hawk transport helicopters, f) four Spanish-built CASA CN-235 planes, and g) anti-gang equipment (Langton 2011).

While the progress made by the MI is modest, it has paved the way for further multinational cooperation. The most graphic example of the widening US support for President Calderon’s strategy was the confirmation in March 2011 that the US Predator and Global Hawk drones were flying over Mexican territory in an effort to locate suspected drug traffickers and track their movements (Galen Carpenter 2011). Likewise, the Department of Defense (DoD) increased its counter-narcotics support to Mexico by 17-fold from funding levels of 3 USD million per year before 2009 to 51 USD million in fiscal year 2011, according to a top Pentagon official (Mora 2012).

Another area of policies of protection is public health. Mexico has not securitized the outbreak of natural pandemics, but on a regional level, Mexico, United States, and Canada have worked to mitigate the impact of pandemics. The three countries have outlined a collaborative approach in the *North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza*. The implementation of actions in the three countries to timely control the 2010 swine flu showed that cooperation works.

### ***Compellence Policies***

There is no evidence that Mexico has engaged or ever will engage in military operations abroad. However, under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN, Mexico has participated in four peacekeeping operations with civilian staff. The UN missions include the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala in 1994 and the UN operation in Timor Leste during 2005. More recently, operations occurred under the legal authority of the OAS: Mexico participated in the 2004 OAS Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti and the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia.

During the seven decades of PRI governments, Mexico consistently denied using military force to solve international problems. This resulted in a doctrine in which the armed forces focused more on the preservation of internal order (Díez and Nicholls 2006). In the 1990s, in light of the growing threat of drug trafficking, the armed forces increased their presence in civil institutions, emulating the responsibilities of law enforcement. Although the armed forces focused primarily on domestic security, the external component has been important as well. In 2001, President Fox argued that the 1947 Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance Treaty, also known as the Rio Treaty, had become obsolete with the end of the Cold War, and that his government, after consulting other Latin American nations, would withdraw from it in 2002.

While the hemispheric military doctrines of Mexico and the United States have diverged, the bilateral military relationship has been reinforced since 2001. Information sharing and military cooperation have taken place on different levels, particularly since the revamping of U.S. military structures. Mexico is considered an area of responsibility for the US Northern Command (NORTHCOM). Formed in October 2002 and operational since October 2003, NORTHCOM's international role has been to build and to sustain relationships and to acquire the capabilities necessary to deter, detect, prevent, and defeat current emerging threats in all domains. The relationship does not include the stationing of U.S. troops on Mexican soil, the transfer of large modern military hardware to Mexico, or the Mexican commitment of troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it has led to the Mexican adoption of U.S. standards and practices in terms of security procedures and widespread intelligence sharing (IISS 2008). While military cooperation with the United States is quite important, Mexico's non-intervention sentiment could be argued as isolationist, or believing that most international affairs should come second to the country itself. This position was reiterated again in early 2003 when, as a member of the UN Security Council, Mexico refused to support the U.S. initiative to attack Iraq. This decision alienated the Bush Administration and forestalled a meaningful bilateral dialogue at the Presidential level for the remaining term of Fox administration (Roett 2005).<sup>3</sup>

The size of the Mexican armed forces increased with the expansion in both its responsibilities and budget allocation. While in 1985, the total number of active personnel stood at approximately 130,000, that number increased to almost 240,000 by 2009. The main increase occurred within the Army, while the Navy and Air Force have experienced a more modest growth. While the armed forces have taken on newer roles, such as combating drug trafficking, this has not lead to a significant increase in government spending within its sector. The total government expenditure on the military has remained stable for the past two decades, consuming between 0.4 and 0.5 percent of national GDP. The main variation took place in 1996, when the expenditure reached 0.6 percent of the GDP, with the emergence of guerrilla groups in the states of Chiapas and Guerrero (Central Intelligence Agency 2008). Mexican military expenditures as a share of GDP are comparable to countries such as Bahamas, Gambia, Georgia, and Laos, but more importantly are in line with the Latin American average of 0.54 percent of GDP. In order to combat drug cartels, however, the Mexican military has undergone a process of modernization. Despite important investments in new equipment, including

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<sup>3</sup> An important turning point came with the November 2003 resignation of the Mexican ambassador to the UN, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, who, as a defender of Mexico's independent foreign policy, was viewed by the White House as a negative element in the relations between Mexico City and Washington.



helicopters and light aircraft in the past few years, the public still believes that the military still lacks the necessary resources to combat drug traffickers successfully.

## **Assessment**

The examination of the Mexican policies of security governance provides the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the Mexican security culture. The assessment of security governance in Mexico reveals a government working emphatically on combating organized crime, a priority captured by the massive allocation of resources to that task. However, the security culture has gradually evolved in the past 20 years by broadening the concept of security whereby more public policies have included a security component.

Several obstacles have hampered the role of the Mexican state as a security provider. Foremost is the weakness of the Mexican government to implement effectively the rule of law. However, from the perspective of the security governance framework, a deeper obstacle is that most of the officially recognized threats are regional or international in nature. Thus, the four policy domains possess a common feature: each is approached from a Westphalian orientation towards the external environment. In the area of foreign policy, debates are developing over the viability of the non-interference principle given the external and internal security context facing the Mexican government. Nonetheless, Mexico has become more, rather than less, cautious towards participating and implementing international assurance and compellence policies. When issues related to democracy promotion and peacekeeping operations rises, Mexico relies upon the principle of non-interference and refrains from active participation in several international forums.

Unlike the European Union where a post-Westphalian security culture prevails, Mexico is part of the North American region where Westphalian values are still dominant. However, increasing levels of cooperation between Mexico and the United States are being realized in the areas of combat against organized crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Some initiatives, such as the Security and Prosperity Partnership or the Merida Initiative, suggest a different direction in Mexican security policy: deeper cooperation without the construction of regional institutions of governance. Consequently, dense cooperation with its neighbours remains low and the use of regional actors to address collective threats are absent. In sum, Mexico has modified its Westphalian preoccupation with sovereignty and has opened up channels for deeper cooperation, a development that would have been proscribed by the Mexican security culture as recently as a decade ago. This change has occurred in those policy areas where there is a shared understanding of common regional threats, such as the actions of drug trafficking groups. This transformation of Mexico's Westphalian security culture is ongoing. Mexican political elites and publics will continue to reconsider those tenets of its security culture that pose a barrier to the safety of its citizens and the stability of the region.

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