



Mexico's National Guard: When Police are Not Enough

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AFI	Federal Investigations Agency, 2001-2012
AMLO	Andres Manuel López Obrador, President of Mexico 2018-2024
CNS	National Commission of Security, SSP reorganized under SEGOB by EPN
CUMAR	Unified Center for Maritime and Port Protection, a Navy-led organization established to provide law enforcement functions in a Mexican port
EPN	Enrique Peña Nieto, President of Mexico 2012-2018
Gendarmeria	a military-trained/civilian-led paramilitary force, part of the PF, est 2014
PF	Federal Police, est 2009
PFP	Federal Preventive Police (1999-2009)
PGR	Attorney General's Office (Federal)
PAN	National Action Party, right-wing political party est. 1939
PM	Military Police, deployed in support of law enforcement
PN	Naval Police – originally similar to Military Police, but in its recent form a Marine infantry force deployed in support of law enforcement
PRD	Democratic Revolution Party, left wing political party est. 1989
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party, center-left wing political part est. 1929
SCT	Secretariat of Communications and Transports
SEDENA	Secretariat of National Defense, comprising Army and Air Force
SEGOB	Secretariat of Governance, similar to a Ministry of Interior
SEMAR	Secretariat of the Navy
SSP	Secretariat of Public Security (2000-2012)
SSPC	Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection est.2018
UIN	Naval Intelligence Unit, est. 2009
UNOPES	Naval Special Operations Unit
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

Contents

Introduction.....	4
1. The Origins of the National Guard	5
1.1 Enter the democratic era of competitive elections and out goes the PRI	6
Conclusions from the Fox administration	7
1.2 Calderon: frustration, re-engineering, and expansion.....	7
Conclusions from the Calderon administration	10
1.3 The return of the PRI (2012-2018)	10
Conclusions from the Peña Nieto administration	13
2. Enter the National Guard	14
2.1 The Plan	15
2.2 Operational Concept	15
2.3 Leadership Selection	16
2.4 Manpower and Geographic Deployment	17
3. What is Next for the Mexican Armed Forces?.....	19
3.1 Counter Fuel Theft.....	20
3.2 International Airport Construction	20
3.3 Border Security and Immigration Control	21
3.4 Education, Agriculture, Seaweed Collection, and Culture	22
3.5 Conventional Capabilities: from Stated Requirements to Aspirations	22
4. A brief review of US-Mexico military relations and foreign operations in the context of the AMLO presidency.....	23
4.1 The continued US-Mexico military-to-military partnership	23
4.2 Peacekeeping and Foreign Support... under the radar	23
5. High-level recommendations for the AMLO administration and US agencies interacting/ supporting/ cooperating with the Mexican military to avoid potential institutional roadblocks.....	24

Introduction

The shootout between cartel gunmen and the Mexican armed forces in Culiacan, Sinaloa put a somber twist on Andres Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO) security strategy on 17 October 2019. The battle, which erupted when the Army captured the cartel's heir apparent, Ovidio Guzman, ended in an order from the Mexican Government to release him.

The order to yield before organized crime was deeply humiliating for Mexico's armed forces. However, it proved that the chain of command remains intact and that the military will obey the legitimately elected civilian powers. Furthermore, nation-wide homicide figures published in late December by the *Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System) reported close to 27,000 murders,¹ with estimates that it may reach up to 36,000, making 2019 the deadliest year in Mexico's modern history.²

The country's security services appear to be trapped in an operational impasse that highlights the need for profound institutional redesign, which will lead, yet again, to the creation of a new security force. AMLO's administration is not the first (and likely not the last) to launch a complete restructuring of the security apparatus in what appears to be an unending search for the ideal security force. Each administration since the advent of democracy in 1997 has tried to reshape the security structures with some overall but limited progress, as most civilian-led law enforcement organizations become political piñatas which are re-imagined, re-organized, re-uniformed, re-painted, and basically re-invented every 6 years.

From the late 1990's, Mexico's leaders have sought -in the absence of effective, efficient, or trustworthy civilian law enforcement- to create a hybrid, intermediate, force that can combine trustworthy military-trained personnel with a law enforcement mandate under civilian leadership. This paper explores how -despite constant intentions to build a civilian led national police force - Mexico's democratically elected political leaders have had to rely on the military as the only constant state response to the spiraling violence and everyday threat of organized crime. Even under a self-titled 'alterative' political leadership, Mexico's military remains the last and sometimes only option.

¹ [Incidencia Delictiva del Fuero Comun 2019, SESNSP, 20 Dec 2019](#)

² [2019 cerrará con 36,000 homicidios y solo 1 de cada 10 se castiga: reportes](#), Expansion, 3 Dec 2019

1. The Origins of the National Guard

The cornerstone of AMLOs security initiative is the establishment of a civilian-led National Guard that will take over from the military as the country's main security force. The desire to create a civilian-led intermediate security force has been on the Mexican leadership's agenda for over 20 years.

Law enforcement during the 71-year "Perfect Dictatorship" period in which members of the *Partido de la Revolucion Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party) ruled over Mexico was mostly entrusted to the states, whose state governors (most also PRI members) would execute the government's security agenda via state-level preventive police and investigation agents (the infamous *judiciales*). The state police usually reported directly to the *secretarias de gobierno* - whose head was in both theory and practice the governor's closest appointee, while the *judiciales* investigated crimes and depended directly from the state-level Attorney General's office (PGJ). The state-level PGJ was also directly appointed (and potentially removed) by the state governor.

Beginning in 1983 a constitutional amendment allowed local (municipal) governments to stand up their own police forces, but these were relatively scarce. Opposition (non-PRI) mayors became the champions of municipal police forces as they wanted to have more control over local security issues.

The *Procuraduría General de la República* (PGR –Attorney General's Office) was in charge of the *Policía Judicial Federal* (PJF - Federal Judicial Police). Besides the federal-level *judiciales*, the Federal government could only make use of relatively small law enforcement agencies, the largest of which was the *Policía Federal de Caminos* (PFC-Federal Highway Police) that had primary responsibility for patrolling Mexico's major highways.

The PFC was originally established to patrol federal highways as part of the the predecessor to the *Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes* (SCT Secretariat of Communications and Transport) back in July 1928.³ Other law enforcement agencies, such as the Fiscal Police, which was the law enforcement arm of the *Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público* (SHCP - Secretariat of Treasury and Public Credit) or the Immigration officers from the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (SEGOB) provided only token and narrow-focused capabilities.

The federal government, however, would need to rely on the Army to undertake significant internal security operations, usually in support of the PGR. Internal security was the Army's main operational role since its creation in 1913 and since it was reorganized under the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (SEDENA - Secretariat of National Defense) in 1942.

The Navy in turn, functioned as the main internal security force at sea and in major port cities such as Veracruz and Tampico. Having established its own cabinet-level ministry during WWII, the *Secretaría de Marina* (SEMAR - Secretariat of the Navy), the Navy was somewhat

³ [Exponen historia de la Policía Federal de Caminos en fotografías](#), 20 minutos, 08 June 2016

marginalized from the federal government's central security policy and as a result, also generally absent from the mainstream media and public perception which revolved around Mexico City. With a single-party monopoly in place, the decision-making process, as well as, implementation of the federal security policy created de-facto streamlined security system, where policy implementation or specific actions would flow down from the President to state governors and mayors relatively smoothly. Whenever there were any conflicts, federal agents -and in drastic circumstances, the army- would step in to resolve.

1.1 Enter the Democratic Era of Competitive Elections and Out Goes the PRI

The advent of electoral democracy in the mid-term elections of 1997 paved the way for the left-wing *Partido de la Revolucion Democratica* (PRD-Democratic Revolution Party) party led by Cuauhtémoc Cardenas to win the Mexico City government election that year, while the right-wing *Partido Accion Nacional* (PAN-National Action Party) won several state governorships. Vicente Fox (PAN) became the first non-PRI candidate to win the presidential election in Mexico's modern history in 2000. The election of opposition political leaders fragmented the streamlined -yet informal- law enforcement system.

There was no precedent for an opposition-party president coming into a still highly influenced PRI-country would fare to implement a nation-wide security policy. The Fox administration pondered its options: using the *judiciales* or increasing the use of the Army were not perceived as positive options. Instead, the administration embraced the notion of creating a stronger federal law enforcement institution creating the *Secretaria de Seguridad Publica* (SSP - Secretariat of Public Security) which was intended to de-politicize security policy by separating it from the powerful *Secretaria de Gobernacion* (SEGOB- Secretariat of Governance, similar to a Ministry of Interior).

In an effort to create a civilian-led security force which could be deployed nationally, including operations against organized crime and drug trafficking organizations, the federal government created the *Policia Federal Preventiva* (PFP-Federal Preventive Police). For practical purposes, the PFP was to be a hybrid force built on the PFC and significantly reinforced with some 7,500 troops from the Army's 3rd Military Police Brigade and the navy's Marine Infantry force.⁴ While not within its mandate, the establishment of the PFP was also highlighted as a 'Federal' response to curtail the growing wave of kidnappings, illegal immigration (from Central America), and weapons trafficking throughout Mexico. The new force was fast-tracked, and while not ideal, it proved necessary as there would not be time in Fox's six-year term to create a completely new police force from the ground up.

⁴ [La Guardia Nacional, otro intento para abatir la ola de violencia en el país](#), La Jornada, 02 January 2019

To complement the PFP and transform the *judiciales*, the Fox administration established the *Agencia Federal de Investigaciones* (AFI- Federal Investigations Agency) in 2001. The AFI was touted by Fox as a Mexican version of the FBI, recruiting college-graduates intended to develop a core of professional law enforcement agents that practice a technical and scientific approach to policing. The AFI was supposed to work in parallel with, and enhance, the PFP, providing the investigation capacity to the otherwise preventive (ie reactive) PFP. Nevertheless, the AFI remained under the operational authority of the PGR, which became a competitor with the SSP for resources and somewhat constraining their interactions.



Conclusions from the Fox administration

Fast-tracking the creation of an intermediate security force by mixing law enforcement and military units was:

- 1) Necessary due to the relatively short timeframe that a 6-year presidential term provides but proved difficult, in practice, because of the challenges involved in integrating very different law enforcement cultures in each institution;
- 2) Lacked an adequate legal framework defining roles and responsibilities for conducting investigations; and
- 3) It was not effective to mash multiple military and police forces in the long-term unless there is significant investment (and know how) in cross-pollination practices to harvest an independent esprit de corps. In practice, most of the units that comprised the PFP remained relatively isolated from each other, creating "divisions" such as the *Fuerzas Federales de Apoyo* (Federal Support Forces - the former army MPs) and the *Servicios Regionales* (Regional Services - the former highway police).

1.2 Calderon: Frustration, Re-engineering, and Expansion

As Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) -also from the PAN- replaced Vicente Fox and launched an all-out war against organized crime in December 2006, his government continued the buildup of the security forces while at the same time implemented strategic re-engineering processes.

The Calderon administration's early assessment was that the civilian law enforcement institutions - the SSP and PGR- still lacked the manpower, mobility and technical capacity to implement significant security operations, particularly against cartels. Cartel influence and firepower had visibly grown and dramatically consolidated during the Fox administration, with militia-like criminal organizations adopting "brand names" such as La Familia Michoacana or Los Zetas now becoming feared household names throughout Mexican society, so a more advanced force was deemed necessary.

Corruption scandals, dismissals, and desertions had dwindled the PFP's numbers down to about 4,500 and it was, therefore, not up to the task -in force size or capabilities- to challenge the capacity and firepower of the cartels. Calderon therefore ordered the military to significantly increase its operations against cartels, expanding its presence in urban areas and launching an unprecedented bi-national initiative with the United States.

The army was ordered in early 2007 to establish a 10,000-strong (Corps-size) unit, the *Fuerzas de Apoyo a la Seguridad Publica* (FASP - Federal Public Security Support Forces) -composed mainly of special forces- that were slated to become the spearhead of the administration's fight against cartels. The FASP would remain under SEDENA, but would respond directly to the President himself, which, would serve to reinforce the PFP. The khaki uniformed FASP troops were swiftly organized and deployed by the Army, even participating in the 16 September 2007 Independence Day Military Parade in Mexico City aboard khaki-painted pick-up trucks. The FASP was stood down by Mexico's Congress a few months after their inception, after (now PAN) opposition representatives expressed concerns it could become a praetorian guard. Calderon remained committed to inserting much-needed manpower into the fight, and SEDENA restructured the FASP offering a slimmed-down version of 5,000 troops directly subordinate to the Secretary of Defense. That too was a no-go for Congress and some analysts believe also lacked the full backing of the Army, which wanted to avoid the potential risk of having its best troops eventually transferred to enhance the SSP.

Further from the media spotlight, SEMAR launched a major reorganization and expansion of its land component with the creation of 32 marine infantry battalions beginning in June 2007. The establishment of these light infantry battalions would allow SEMAR to exercise a major footprint in the administration's war against cartels. The marines soon became a well-known and highly respected entity as they took on a leading role in the administration's high value targeting campaign against cartels. SEMAR was also better acquainted with conducting activities with foreign forces and became the main interlocutors on the Mexican side as the security and intelligence cooperation relationship with the United States grew closer.

With its marine infantry battalions as the main priority, naval construction and procurement projects became a lower priority. By 2011, SEMAR was able to mount significant operations nationwide and was directed to take control of law enforcement in two key municipalities of the state of Veracruz (the Port of Veracruz and Boca del Rio) where local police had been deemed insufficient or unreliable. SEMAR set up a 2,000-strong *Policia Naval en Apoyo a la Secretaria de Seguridad Pública del Estado* (Naval Police in Support of the -Veracruz- State Public Security Secretariat). The PNASSPE would eventually grow to take over law enforcement for Jalapa, Tuxpan, and Coatzacoalcos, all of which had heavy cartel activity.⁵ In this way, SEMAR began participating in stability-type operations by providing contingency forces that would be at least temporarily assigned for public security/law enforcement operations.

⁵ [Prospectos para la Guardia, desde hace 8 años en Veracruz](#), Milenio, 27 Feb 2019

Simultaneously, Genaro Garcia Luna,⁶ the founding head of the AFI and later Secretary of Public Security under Fox, launched an ambitious expansion and transformation program for the PFP. The PFP dropped its “Preventive” title and was renamed as the *Policia Federal* in 2009 and re-organized into four divisions. The PF absorbed the investigative capabilities of the AFI, although in theory the AFI remained under administrative control of the PGR, which was headed by Eduardo Medina Mora.⁷ Collaboration between both institutions was fragmented by intense personal rivalry between Garcia Luna and Medina Mora.⁸



Figure 1. The reinvented emblem of the Federal Police incorporated the AFI's previous Jaguar/Eagle Warrior crest symbolizing Night and day vigilance.

Under Garcia Luna, the SSP and PF underwent its biggest expansion to date, growing from an estimated 4,500 in 2007 to over 35,000 in 2012. The increase in manpower allowed the PF to implement stability operations which in some areas rivaled that of the Army. However, the rapid increase in PF personnel was not accompanied by a similar increase in physical infrastructure, so large PF deployments required the SSP to lease space from hotels in cities to accommodate the PF surges.⁹ This created a tense environment with local inhabitants, some of whom soon became annoyed with the extended presence of the PF.

Besides its manpower increase, the SSP and PF grew in capabilities beyond that of a traditional police force to include military-grade armament such as .50 cal general purpose machine guns and equipment such as the Sikorsky UH-60L/M Black Hawk assault helicopters and Elbit Hermes 900 medium altitude long endurance unmanned aerial vehicles. The Black Hawk helicopters

⁶ Genaro Garcia Luna was arrested for Drug-Trafficking Conspiracy and Making False Statements on 9 December 2019 in Dallas, Texas source: [US DoJ](#).

⁷ Eduardo Medina Mora then served as Mexico's ambassador to the UK (2009-2012) and US (2012-2015) before being designated as Supreme Court Judge in 2015; he was investigated for corruption by Mexican authorities and resigned on 3 October 2019 source: [Senado de la Republica](#)

⁸ [Pugna entre Medina Mora y García Luna frenó combate al narco](#), La Jornada, 5 Dec 2010

⁹ [Policías Federales hicieron de hoteles su base de operaciones](#), El Occidental, 21 May 2019

(delivered via the US funded Merida Initiative), and the Hermes 900 UAV's procured from Israel were both far superior to comparable equipment procured (or supplied via the Merida Initiative) by SEDENA and SEMAR at the time, which also contributed to friction with the military.

Conclusions from the Calderon administration

The Calderon administration ran into political barriers when trying to overtly create a force that would specifically take over counter organized crime activities from SEDENA. However, it was able to develop somewhat similar capabilities via the SEMAR and the SSP. Both SEMAR and SSP were able to amplify their visibility and influence during the Calderon period by:

- Increasing their mass media profiles by proactively engaging media outlets; and
- Establishing comprehensive international cooperation channels, particularly with the U.S.

While SEDENA contributed the bulk of the manpower and operations, its actions were hard hit by accusations of human rights violations, leading to significant criticisms, mainly reflected in Mexico's mainstream media.

1.3 The Return of the PRI (2012-2018)

Twelve years was enough for Mexican society to give the PRI a second chance and vote the PRI back into power. Mexico had sadly become a country of military roadblocks, mass executions and unmarked graves. In an effort to differentiate his security strategy from the previous PAN governments, then presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) from the PRI announced he had hired Oscar Naranjo, a retired Colombian National Police General close to the US military and security agencies- as his security adviser.¹⁰ The central piece of the Pena Nieto campaign's security strategy was the proposal to create a new intermediate force which in essence – similar to the Colombian National Police - would take on the lead in the fight against organized crime. EPN proposed the formation of a *Gendarmeria Nacional* (National Gendarmerie) would be composed of 10,000 SEDENA and SEMAR personnel which would eventually grow to around 40,000 by 2018, replacing the army and marines as the main forces against organized crime.

Upon assuming the Presidency, Pena Nieto reorganized the security cabinet demoting the SSP from a full cabinet ministry to a commission within SEGOB. The rebranded SSP – now the *Comision Nacional de Seguridad* (CNS-National Commission of Security) and the PF took a step back from the limelight and the bureaucratic hierarchy.

Implementation of the Gendarmerie ran into significant resistance from Mexico's NGO's, academia, and political forces, all of which demanded clarity as to the chain of command and mandate of the new force, augmenting that the PF had been originally created (back in 1999) precisely with that end in mind.

¹⁰ [Mexico's president-elect wants close security ties with U.S., with limits](#), Washington Post, 5 Jul 2012

Nevertheless, the Gendarmerie was created on 22 August 2014 with an approved force strength of 5,000. It was to be a part of the CNS, mainly as the seventh division of the PF, joining 1) Intelligence, 2) Regional Security (Highways), 3) Counter narcotics, 4) Investigations, 5) Federal Forces and 6) Scientific divisions.¹¹ Intergovernmental and political compromises led to the redesign of the Gendarmerie from a mainly military organization specialized in counter organized crime activities to a civilian-led organization with a relatively diverse and somewhat unorthodox set of roles and missions. As the new Gendarmerie was looking to ‘find its place’ among the Mexican security community, it took on innovative, yet isolated roles such as the protection of ‘economic cycles’ via its rural security group, providing physical security for citrus producers in northern Mexico, border security, tourist safety, environmental protection, and community policing – the last three of which are not traditional for an intermediate force.



Figure 2- the Gendarmerie’s emblem took on the Federal Police (and previously AFI) Jaguar/Eagle Warrior crest but included a burning flame that symbolizes “transformative fire”

Ultimately, the Gendarmerie did not grow beyond 5,000 while the PF as a whole actually experienced a decrease in personnel numbers to around 4,500.

Coincidentally, SEDENA launched a reorganization of its Military Police (MP) Corps in 2014, creating the General Directorate of MP in June 2016 with a vision to reorienting its mission away from the general MP duties -and an internal (somewhat disciplinary) security force- broadening it to provide direct support for public security beyond the Army. Up to then, the MP consisted of three brigades, each with three battalions of MPs, all of which were based around Mexico City. They were decentralized and SEDENA begun to build a new brigade-level base in the outskirts of Monterrey in Mexico’s northern state of Nuevo Leon. To fund construction of the base, SEDENA sought to involve both the state governments of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, as well as, the business community, all of which contributed funding for a new base in Escobedo, Nuevo Leon. The objective was to be able to deploy a brigade of MPs per each of the Army’s 12 Military Regions, obtaining nation-wide coverage.

¹¹ [La Gendarmeria Nacional de Mexico](#), Mirada Legislativa, Instituto Belisario Dominguez, Senado de la Republica

Similar efforts took place in other hotspots such as Irapuato, Guanajuato, the La Laguna region on the border between Durango, Coahuila, and Chihuahua, where cartel activity had significant impact on local violence. SEDENA's plan was to stand up twelve brigade MP units, with around 3,000 troops organized into three MP battalions and one MP Special Operations battalion each. To accelerate the expansion of the MP brigades, regular units were re-trained as MPs undertaking fast-track law enforcement courses in the proportional use of force, use of non-lethal equipment, human rights, evidence chain of custody procedures, crime scene preservation, and the adversarial criminal justice system. From 2015 the *Heroico Colegio Militar* (the Army's Military Academy) began to offer an MP concentration to train a new generation of officers for the force. SEDENA planned to have at least 36,000 MPs in uniform by December 2018. So, while the civilian-led *Gendarmeria* fell significantly short of its manpower target, a separate, military-run force with a similar purpose was created in parallel.

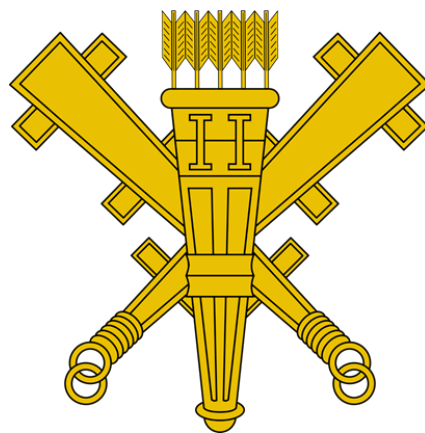


Figure 3 - The MP crest

During the Peña Nieto administration, SEMAR sought to consolidate its marine infantry units completing the planned 32 battalions, strengthen its Special Operations forces via the establishment of the *Unidad de Operaciones Especiales* (UNOPES – Special Operations Unit); and enhance its intelligence collection and analysis capabilities by improving the technical intelligence capacities of the *Unidad de Inteligencia Naval* (UIN – Naval Intelligence Unit). Despite a continued and somewhat expanded role on land, SEMAR's main modernization effort focused on the reorganization of its surface naval components seeking to establish a division between its scarce and ageing Blue Water Navy and its competent and relatively modern Coast Guard-type force.

From early 2017, the Coast Guard component took on additional relevance as the administration sought to increase security in Mexico's seaports. By amending the Constitution, SEMAR was able to assume the role as the National Maritime Authority at Mexico's ports, a role previously exercised by the Secretariat of Communications and Transports (SCT). To administer the 119 harbor captains, SEMAR established the *Dirección General de Capitanías de Puerto y Asuntos Marítimos* (General Directorate of Port Captaincy and Maritime Affairs).¹²

¹² [Crean la Dirección General de Capitanías de Puertos y Asuntos Marítimos](#), El Universal, 03 Mar 2017

The constitutional amendment clarified SEMAR's maritime law enforcement mandate via the establishment of a *Centro Unificado para la Protección Marítima y Portuaria* (CUMAR - Unified Center for Maritime and Port Protection).¹³ Each CUMAR is supported by *Unidades Navales de Protección Portuaria* (UNAPROP- Naval Units for Port Protection), and mostly comprised of Navy officers and a force of 30 marines. The UNAPROP's role is to carry out surveillance, verification, board, inspection and maintaining coastal guard functions within each port.¹⁴ At least nineteen CUMAR-UNAPROPs were stood up; however, further expansion to the remaining 119 ports would require a significant increase in manpower and resources. The close to 600 marines deployed to the UNAPROPs were committed to providing security at the ports of Ensenada, La Paz, Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, Lazaro Cardenas, Acapulco, Salina Cruz, Puerto Chiapas, Guaymas, Topolobampo and Mazatlan on the Pacific coast; Matamoros, Altamira, Tmpico, Tuxpan, Veracruz, Coatzacoalcos, Progreso, Dos Bocas, Ciudad del Carmen, and Cozumel on the east coast

In an effort to increase security around its headquarters in Mexico City, SEMAR created a Naval Police battalion in March 2016 which would be made available to support the civilian authorities during disturbances against naval installation and in response to natural disasters.¹⁵ The new battalion was recruited from existing marine infantry companies and assigned a similar role to the Federal Protective Service (SPF).¹⁶ The Naval Police, as such, were created to provide security to naval installations pretty much in a traditional MP role, and not with the expanded mandate as with the redesigned SEDENA PM force was redesigned. Overall, the number of marines performing Naval Police functions fluctuated between 2,570 and 3,000 as the administration of Peña Nieto drew to a close.

Conclusions from the Peña Nieto administration

SEMAR worked hand in hand with SEDENA during this period, avoiding -when possible- direct comparisons that would lead to inter-service rivalry. SEMAR also refocused on its sea-going and port security activities which made competition or comparisons even harder.

While SEMAR continued to lead as the main international cooperation entity in terms of intelligence sharing, SEDENA took on a broader role in the international dimension, mainly with the US, and particularly with NORTHCOM and US Army North forging a set of strong partnerships at the regional and local, particularly along the border.

¹³ [MANUAL de Operación del Centro Unificado para la Protección Marítima y Portuaria](#), SEGOB-DOF, 26 Nov 2015

¹⁴ [ACUERDO Secretarial número 333 mediante el cual las Unidades Navales de Protección Portuaria](#), SEGOB-DOF 17 Sep 2018

¹⁵ [Crean Policía Naval en la Ciudad de Mexico](#), SIPSE, 8 Mar 2016

¹⁶ [Crea SEMAR el Batallón de Policía Naval en la CDMX](#), MVS Noticias, 8 Mar 2016

Under the mantle of SEGOB, the once blossoming Calderon-era SSP had to take a back seat in terms of implementing the security agenda and the much debated and anticipated Gendarmerie’s presence and capabilities did not mature to reach the 2012 campaign promises. The CNS was also constrained in terms of international cooperation as SEGOB sought to manage the security cooperation agenda at the strategic level.

Unlike the previous administration, in which its activities to create a special force were constrained and its actions highly criticized by the media and civil society SEDENA was able to reorganize, stand up a substantial internal security-focused component via the PM. Through the PM it was SEDENA -and not the Gendarmerie, the PF, or the CNS- which positioned itself to become the basis of Mexico’s future public security guarantor.

2. Enter the National Guard

AMLO was elected president of Mexico on 1 July 2018 and during the next few months he described his security strategy only in broad strokes. His electoral motto had been ‘Abrazos, no Balazos’ (Hugs, not bullets) and he had announced from early on in his campaign, that if victorious, he would select Alfonso Durazo Montano as secretary of public security.¹⁷ AMLO confirmed upon winning the election that Alfonso Durazo would head the new Secretariat for Citizen Security and Protection (SSPC), which was formed using the previous CNS as a basis, but reinstated as a full cabinet ministry -independent from SEGOB- on 30 November 2018.



Figure 4- Three administrations, Three names, Three reorganizations, One institution

After some back and forth over the creation of a new intermediate force during the transition period from 1 July-1 December 2018, Durazo announced on 7 November 2018 that “siempre si” (actually, yes) the new government would create a new joint military-police force that would combine personnel and equipment from the armed forces and the Federal Police.¹⁸ He added that the name of the new force would be either National Guard or Civil Guard (in reference to the Spanish Guardia Civil – a military organization run by the civilian Ministry of Interior in Spain).¹⁹ The title National Guard was selected, likely out of pragmatism as the term was already established in the Constitution.

¹⁷ [¿Quién es Alfonso Durazo y los consejeros de AMLO en materia de seguridad?](#), El Financiero, 04 Jan 2018

¹⁸ [Siempre si Habra Guardia Nacional](#), El Economista, 07 Nov 2018

¹⁹ [Conoce a la Guardia Civil](#), Guardia Civil, accessed 14 Dec 2019

Mexico's original National Guard was stood up prior to the Mexican American War of 1846-1848, although the initial notions of a National Guard in Mexico date back to 1822, when the then newly established constitutional congress decreed Provisional Regulations for a Civil Militia.²⁰ A National Guard is contemplated in the current Mexican Constitution of 1917, although there are no known instances of such a force existing in any way or form through the rest of the 20th Century.

2.1 The Plan

The *Plan Nacional de Paz y Seguridad 2018-2024* (National Plan for Peace and Security 2018-2024), which was published on 14 November 2018, contained eight action items, including four subsections and an annex: a) Rethink national security and reorient the armed forces, b) create a National Guard, c) (establish) national, state and regional coordination's, and d) operational guideline; the annex is titled Operational Concept for the National Guard.²¹

2.2 Operational Concept

The Operational Concept described that the National Guard would join the Army, Navy, and Air Force as the fourth military force and would be integrated into SEDENA. It would be composed with vehicles, uniforms, insignia, and equipment that would identify the new force with its public security functions and aimed to be close to the population to gain social trust.²² The National Guard's personnel would be recruited in three phases:

- Phase 1 would integrate the Army's PM (expanded during 2015-2018), the Navy's PN, and personnel from the PF.
- Phase 2 would include recruiting personnel from the armed forces who wanted to join the new force
- Phase 3 would recruit up to 50,000 civilians to be trained by the armed forces.

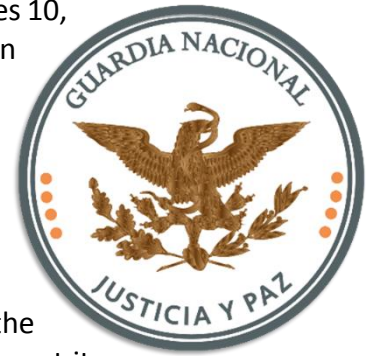
The main distinctive from the regular army troops is the adoption of a grey camouflage uniform for the National Guards field uniforms and a two-tone dark grey uniform for proximity policing. Besides the use of less-lethal weapons the National Guards will only be equipped with semi-automatic weapons, leaving full, autonomy to the armed forces.

²⁰ Antecedentes de la Guardia Nacional, Guardia Nacional, 12 Sep 2019

²¹ [Plan Nacional de Paz y Seguridad 2018-2024](#), MORENA, 11 Nov 2018

²² [Plan Nacional de Paz y Seguridad 2018-2024](#), MORENA, 11 Nov 2018

Representatives in congress presented an initiative that reformed articles 10, 13, 16, 21, 31, 32, 36, 55, 73, 76, 78, 82, 89 and 123 of the Constitution to allow the armed forces to undertake law enforcement functions for a period of 5 years and approved the creation of the National Guard. The National Guard was officially stood up on 26 March 2019, however it did not have leadership. Lopez Obrador announced in early April that the National Guard would be headed by an active duty military officer, leading to criticism from human rights and civil society organizations that were anticipating a civilian.²³ Obrador reiterated the need for an army officer to head it arguing “they (the army) will help us set it up.”



2.3 Leadership Selection

Brigadier General (US Army equivalent to Major General) Luis Rodriguez Bucio was selected as the new commander of the National Force on 11 April 2019. General Bucio at the time was the President of the Interamerican Defense Board in Washington D.C., a multi-national military organization that was created in 1942 and is part of the Organization of American States. An infantry officer, fluent in German, Bucio holds a PhD in National Security and Defense from the Mexican Navy's CESNAV, where he focused his research on his thesis: The effectiveness / efficiency of public security policies to address the threat of drug trafficking in Mexico. Despite having an intense military career with significant experience in intelligence, counter-narcotics, internal security, and academia, Bucio had been passed over for promotion in 2018, which meant he was scheduled for retirement in 2019.

Adjacent to the Commander, the GN stood up an Interinstitutional Operations Coordination (COI) with representatives from SEDENA, SEMAR and the SSPC. COI is meant to function as a 'bridge' between the GN Commander and the SSPC Secretary. These included Major General Xicotencatl Nunez Marquez, Rear Admiral Gabriel Garcia Chavez from SEMAR (a Marine infantry officer), and Dr. Patricia Rosalinda Trujillo Mariel who was the founding chief of the PF's scientific (forensic) division.

Directly subordinate to the GN Commander are the Administration and Finance, Police Coordination, Human Rights, Internal Affairs, Legal Affairs and Transparency, Territorial Coordination, State Coordination (subdivided into 32 state-level liaison units), and the Chief of Specialized Organizations units. The latter is comprised of the following specialized directorates:

- Intelligence
- Investigations
- Highway and Installations Security
- Scientific

²³ [Un militar en activo encabezar  la Guardia Nacional, confirma L pez Obrador](#), Proceso, 5 Apr 2019

- Counter-narcotics
- Air transports
- Judicial Procedures Security (similar to US Marshals)

2.4 Manpower and Geographic Deployment

The initial accounting of the National Guard's force was estimated at over 57,400 troops, the bulk of which came from the transfer of 37,775 troops from the PM; 5,584 marines from the PN; and 14,054 combined from the Gendarmerie, Federal Forces, and Regional Security divisions of the PF. By September 2019, the number had increased to over 81,000 with the commissioning of a further 15,375 army troops, and 8,878 personnel from the PF's administrative services. The goal was for a further 21,170 national guard to be recruited during 2019, with about 70% to be trained by SEDENA and the remaining 30% by SEMAR.

SEDENA and SEMAR designed two training courses for National Guards:

- New Recruits undertake a three-part training course that consist of a 5-month initial phase followed by a 2-month specialized training, and a final 1-month unit-level training scheme.
- For veteran personnel the initial phase is shortened to 1.5 months followed by the same specialized and unit level training phases.

SEDENA recruitment took place at all twelve regional recruitment centers and the training took place at two training centers, both in Mexico state, Santa Lucía and San Miguel de los Jagüeyes.

Military Police, which was absorbed into to the National Guard, received multiple specialization courses, the most relevant of which included a First Responder course (23,186 trained) and a Force Multiplier Effect Course of which 5,000 were trained up to July 2019. Human Rights training consisted of a two-tiered online diploma (300 completed the 1st tier and 500 both the 1st and the 2nd tier) and a 'Women Human Rights' specific seminar (2,231 trained).²⁴

SEMAR created the Unidad de Policía Naval (UNIPOLNAV – Naval Police Unit) in April 2019 and comprised of a Naval Police Brigade that would coordinate SEMAR's support for the National Guard. The 5,000+-strong brigade was in addition to the marines deployed in support of the Veracruz State Police, which in December 2018 numbered some 1,600.²⁵

The National Guard divided Mexico into 32 state coordination units and these, in turn, into 150 subdivisions, designated *Coordinaciones Regionales* (CR-Regional Coordinations). However, once enough manpower and infrastructure are in place the geographic division will increase to 266 CR's. Each CR has been classified as a high, medium, or low region for criminal activity.

²⁴ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEDENA, p.128

²⁵ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEMAR, p.53

The territorial deployment is somewhat different from SEDENA's traditional territorial division of Mexico, which divides the country into 12 Military Regions and then each of these into several Military Zones that are subordinate to the Regional Command. The National Guard's territorial division of Mexico follows a strictly political subdivision, with a state-level authority as its law enforcement mandate will be constrained to state jurisdictions, facilitating interaction with state governments, unlike the purposely less-political SEDENA division. SEMAR deploys the UNIPOLNAV assigned to 34 CR's in the 17 coastal states.²⁶

The National Guard has begun building its national infrastructure identifying in late 2019 the need for 81 company-level installations; and procurement of over 2,700 land vehicles the majority of which will be 4x4 commercial pick-up trucks adding to the 646 vehicles already commissioned from SEDENA; along with the relevant IT and communications networks.²⁷ There is no immediate visible requirement for its own aviation component although it is likely that the National Guard will absorb the PF's existing fleet of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and UAVs as these provide a significant mobility capacity and a sophisticated Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capability.

²⁶ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEMAR, p.53

²⁷ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEDENA, p.130

3. What is Next for the Mexican Armed Forces?

During AMLO's First Annual Report to the Nation, he declared: "Who are the soldiers? Who are the sailors? They are the people taking care of the people... that is the National Guard." AMLO has not been shy about his animosity towards the military and in an interview, declared "if it was up to me, I would disappear (dissolve) the army and convert it into the National Guard."²⁸

The AMLO administration's vision for the Mexican armed forces is described in Article 8, section A of its security plan known as the Plan de Paz y Seguridad 2018-2024 (PPS 2018-2024). As with most (global) defense policies, strategies, plans and/or white papers the document begins with a description of the main threats facing Mexico; however, in the case of Article 8/A PPS 2018-2024 the document details that Mexico has not faced an external threat since the end of WWII. It continues that given the current geopolitical situation it is highly unlikely that a confrontation with the United States or Mexico's southern neighbors would take place. It highlights that -unlike almost every other Latin American country- Mexico has no territorial disputes with its neighbors and, therefore, the threat of an external aggression -of any kind- is considered by the AMLO administration to be low to non-existent. This is a significant 'principle' as it will likely guide the development of the Mexican armed forces away from its primary stated mission of providing national defense and territorial sovereignty from external actors along with its token conventional capabilities encapsulated in a relatively limited conventional equipment, doctrine, training, and organization.

Article 8/A PPS 2018-2024 praises and sets the Mexican armed forces apart from all other Latin American militaries describing its 'institutional' character, their obedience to the civilian authorities, and their general apolitical past -mainly their lack of open and direct participation in national politics. The document explains that a (generic) military force's ultimate purpose is to face, neutralize, and exterminate an opposing force, and argue that these factors have been the main cause of human rights violations that negatively affecting the civilian population.

PPS 2018-2024 highlights that, despite the alluded to human rights violations... "in the current security environment, it is not feasible to disengage the armed forces from their public security roles." The Mexican armed forces are therefore tasked with the creation and development of the National Guard, as well as to use all the tools at their disposal, including its "Information technologies, engineering, cartography services, as well as, the naval and military industries for national economic development."

SEDENA's mission priorities have traditionally focused on non-military roles such as security and law enforcement support functions, counter narcotics, civil defense and natural disaster response, and as far afield as vaccination and literacy campaigns. However, with the PPS 2018-2024 vision in hand, SEDENA's mission priorities for the AMLO period will further deepen its non-traditional (military) activities. So far, some of these new missions have included:

28

3.1 Combating Fuel Theft

The Army and Air Force took on a leading role in the *Plan Conjunto del Gobierno Federal para combatir el robo de hidrocarburos en PEMEX* (Joint Federal Government Plan to fight the theft of hydrocarbons from PEMEX) from early 2019.

The army was put in charge of securing the land transportation of PEMEX fuel while pipelines were being shut down to fight fuel syphoning. The army was initially ordered to provide drivers and security for transporters, as well as procure over 600 fuel tankers in the commercial market, and eventually recruit over 1,600 civilian drivers, to support the government's anti-syphoning strategy from PEMEX pipelines. At reported USD 85 million were expended to procure 571 fuel trucks in the United States during January 2019.²⁹ Furthermore, SEDENA deployed over 4,000 troops, multiple (or dozens?) of aircraft and UAVs to patrol PEMEX pipelines and deter 'huachicoleros' (fuel thieves) while an unknown number of army engineers were assigned to destroy illegal fuel takes. SEMAR deployed marines and special forces in Veracruz as well as landlocked Hidalgo, Puebla, and Mexico State to detect illegal fuel takes.³⁰

The *Sistema Integral de Vigilancia Aerea* (SIVA-Integral Airspace Surveillance System), a mainly Air Force run organization tasked with providing air surveillance through a network of four ground-based radars and an air wing with ISR manned and unmanned aircraft - mainly facing Mexico's southeast border, was ordered to support the government's anti-fuel theft strategy. SIVA was put in charge of developing a new operational concept, using SEDENA, SEMAR, CNI, FGR, PF and PEMEX aircraft and assets to provide airborne surveillance over PEMEX pipelines and distribution centers. The *Anti Fuel Theft* mission is in addition to the regular SEDENA assignment of over 5,700 troops, seven aircraft and 36 UAVs deployed to provide security in and around over 70 PEMEX installations and seven principal oil pipelines, and SEMAR's deployment of marines to secure 55 PEMEX installations.

3.2 International Airport Construction

SEDENA was instructed to transform its No.1 Military Airbase (BAM 1 also known as Santa Lucia) in Tecamac, Mexico into the General Felipe Angeles International Airport as part of AMLO's political campaign promise to cancel the construction of the Nuevo Aeropuerto Internacional de la Ciudad de Mexico (NAICM- New Mexico City Airport) in Texcoco, which had been contracted out to private companies during the Peña Nieto administration. SEDENA will expand the existing BAM 1 infrastructure to accommodate a third flight line and will build a commercial terminal. The new airport is expected to cost MXN 92 billion (USD 4 billion) with an estimated completion date of June 2021.

²⁹ [Gobierno compra 571 pipas por 85 mdd; AMLO garantiza que se estabilizará abasto de gasolina](#), Animal Politico, 21 Jan 2019

³⁰ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEMAR, p.45

The *Aeroports de Paris Ingenierie (ADPI)* airport engineering firm was contracted to design and develop a master plan. ADPI had previously worked in Mexico for the OMA airport group designing Terminal B of the Monterrey Airport.³¹ The Army's Corps of Engineers has been tasked with building the airport.

3.3 Border Security and Immigration Control

In line with AMLO's original immigration policy which declared open borders and that no migrant was illegal, SEDENA was initially tasked with providing humanitarian support to the immigrant caravans originating in Central America and roaming through Mexico. SEDENA and SEMAR together set up twelve community kitchens to provide close to 600,000 meals to migrants passing through Mexico, plus sanitation units.

However, after what was apparently a direct threat from U.S. president Trump announcing the imposition of strict and escalating commercial tariffs on Mexican goods if AMLO's government did not do more to stop irregular migration, SEDENA was ordered to significantly increase its support for immigration enforcement effort to stem the flow of undocumented migrants from Central America. From 13 May to 11 June 2019 SEDENA coordinated the Southern Border Joint Deployment alongside the National Guard. The 'joint deployment' evolved into the *Plan de Migración y Desarrollo en las Fronteras Norte y Sur* (Plan for Migration and Development of the Southern and Northern Borders) after 12 June, with SEDENA now in direct support of the National Immigration Institute. The border plan was implemented through the creation of two Operations Coordination Centers (CCO): Rio Suchiate and Rio Bravo.

The Rio Suchiate CCO in Tapachula, Chiapas was stood up to oversee ten regional coordination's – seven on the border with Belize and Guatemala- and three in the Tehuantepec Isthmus. Some 2,000 troops have been assigned to the border outposts, a further 6,500 to patrol known immigration routes, up to 19 navy vessels have been deployed on the coasts, and a further 2,000 troops have been assigned to the Isthmus, which becomes a natural bottleneck to better identify and interdict migration flows. Some 10,500 troops were assigned to conduct immigration control duties on the southern border.³²

The Rio Bravo CCO in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon was also created with the mission of enforcing immigration policy, mainly focused on the south-to-north-bound immigration flows in northern Mexico. SEDENA assigned over 15,100 personnel deployed in three main areas: Northwest (3,800), Central (3,300), and Northeast (5,000). Overall, SEDENA has deployed 25,600 troops on border security and immigration control. Since 30 June 2019, the National Guard has also deployed a further 4,500 personnel. Running a statistical analysis of a very small sample of migrants 'secured' by SEDENA during June along the southern and northern border areas shows that 1,166 individuals were 'secured' daily during June, of which 83% were apprehended in the southern border and 17% on the northern border.

³¹ [Groupe ADP se adjudica muchos contratos internacionales y con países de ultramar](#), Business Wire, 22 May 2019

³² Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEDENA, p.85

3.4 Education, Agriculture, Seaweed Collection, and Culture

Other new tasks that the Mexican armed forces are undertaking in the AMLO administration include the transport and distribution of up to 28 million textbooks to key municipalities in states where they have been requested (Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Baja California Sur, Chiapas, San Luis Potosi, Tabasco, and Guerrero); escort the delivery of 180,000 tons of fertilizer to farms and agriculture producers in Guerrero; and support the transformation of some 240 acres of prime real estate in Santa Fe, Mexico City, currently part of the 1F Military Camp, into a cultural compound which will house an assortment of museums, recreation centers, nature conservancies and parks.

With the arrival of millions of tons of sargassum (a macroalgae) to the busy beaches of the Mexican Caribbean, SEMAR received a presidential mandate to coordinate with tourist authorities and academic institutions to design a plan to clean Mexico's revenue generating beachfront in May 2019.³³ SEMAR undertook a series of studies and leased a purposely designed seaweed clean-up vessel and in record time designed and began construction of four similar vessels at the Astillero de Marina No.3 naval shipyard in Coatzacoalcos. Each vessel will cleanup as many as 80 tons of seaweed daily, adding seaweed collection in support of the Quintana Roo tourist sector, to the Navy's missions.³⁴

3.5 Conventional Capabilities: From Stated Requirements to Aspirations

The Mexican Armed Forces have a plethora of stated requirements to fulfill if it is to develop into a modern (even if compact) military force capable of unilaterally protecting the country's maritime borders, resources, airspace, let alone its trade routes or national interests.

These include modernizing its outdated field artillery as the current 9 regiments use a mix of outdated and obsolete 105 mm light guns and 120 mm mortars; standardizing a new generation of armored fighting vehicles for its 8 mechanized infantry regiments which operate museum-grade armored vehicles; expanding airspace coverage from a currently optimistic 32% (at times described as 28%) up to a desired 72% via the acquisition of a new generation medium to long-range ground-based radars; replacement of its air combat squadron with a new generation of multi-role fighters as the existing fleet of eight F-5 supersonic fighters will need to be replaced by 2024, at which point they will be over 40 years old; replace and augment the C-130 transport squadron which has been depleted significantly over the past ten years; and getting the navy's blue water fleet back up to full strength with its full complement of eight light multi-role frigates and two replenishment ships by 2030.

³³ Primer Informe de Labores 2018-2019, SEMAR, p.94

³⁴ [Financia, diseña y construye la Semar 4 recolectores de sargazo](#), La Jornada, 21 Aug 2019

Given AMLO's vision for the Mexican armed forces, again quoting his frank remarks as to his desire to convert the armed forces into a National Guard, these stated requirements seem to be relegated to an 'aspirational' tier. However, AMLO has proven in his first year of government that he significantly adapt, at times up to 180 degrees, his original policies, goals or desires, either to intense political (internal or external) pressure or... to reality.

4. A Brief Review of U.S.-Mexico Military Relations and Foreign Operations in the Context of the AMLO Presidency

4.1 The Continued U.S.-Mexico Military-to-Military Partnership

Despite a vigorous and at times humiliating anti-Mexican rhetoric employed by Trump, the bond solidified between the U.S. and Mexican militaries over the past 12 years has remained strong. U.S.-Mexican military relations have grown to mirror both countries' commercial, economic, and cultural reality. Senior level interactions between senior military officers from both SEDENA and SEMAR remain frequent with NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM, Army North and the US Coast Guard being the main points of contact.

The Border Commanders' and Regional Commander's conferences have continued periodically, as have the border contact meetings with both the U.S. Army and Border Patrol. Likewise, SEMAR and the U.S. Coast Guard hold regular coordination meetings, and SEMAR has continued to deploy units and personnel to participate in U.S.-sponsored international exercises such as *Tradewinds* and *Quickdraw*.

The more strategic military cooperation roundtables and meetings between chiefs-of-staff also continue as part of the bilateral agenda and take place periodically on both sides of the border.

As part of a new initiative, Mexican medical military personnel deployed aboard the USS Comfort, which sails on humanitarian support missions throughout the hemisphere. While the latter may seem a relatively low impact action, it is the first joint deployment of Mexican military personnel aboard a U.S. Navy ship, on an international mission and sets a precedent that may pave the way (likely in a post AMLO era) for future combined, bi-national deployments.

4.2 Peacekeeping and Foreign Support...Under the Radar

Despite AMLO's revival of the Estrada Doctrine, Mexico's foray into international peacekeeping operations remains unabated despite not progressing beyond token participation. During AMLO's first year in power, Mexico deployed military observers to MINURSO (Western Sahara), MVNUC (Colombia), and MINUSMA (Mali), with the main highlight being the first participation of SEDENA female officers in PKO deployments.

SEDENA has also taken a prominent role in supporting the development of the Haitian armed forces since April 2018.³⁵ Mexican military personnel trained Haitian troops in multiple bases in Mexico as well as in Haiti. The first phase of the training ended in April 2019 and SEDENA plans to follow up with a train-the-trainer component.

5. High-Level Recommendations for the AMLO Administration and U.S. Agencies Interacting/Supporting/Cooperating with the Mexican Military to Avoid Potential Institutional Roadblocks

U.S. agencies interacting with the Mexican military are somewhat limited by the current constraints caused by the rhetoric and political turmoil taking place in Washington DC, therefore high-level recommendations are also limited:

- Continue to emphasize the strong and meaningful bond between militaries built on trust while ignoring political rhetoric that may disrupt the relationship. US agencies working with the Mexican military have been mostly successful in maintaining distance from the White House's rhetoric.
- Continue to build military-to-military communication through innovative exercises- such as the USS Comfort deployment- that seek to bolster bilateral interoperability, partnership, and trust.

Some high-level recommendations for the AMLO administration:

- Maintain clear and separate chains of command between the strategic and tactical/operational levels. Converting a military force -the National Guard- into a civilian force includes significant risk if boundaries within the chain of command are not clearly understood and exercised. Civilian leadership needs to oversee the political management of security policy -the strategic level-; and exercising strategic leadership should not be mistaken as being directly inserted in the chain of command at the operational or tactical levels. This innovation will be a challenge for Mexico's military forces, which are traditionally led -at the political level- by active-duty general officers. These senior military officers have significant experience in the operational and tactical levels and understand the complexities of their actions. The forces under them are accustomed to having the 'political' leadership involved at the operational and tactical levels.
- Separate "emergency tasks or functions" from traditional defense roles. The new emergency functions, which have required a necessary surge in capabilities

³⁵ [Sedena intercambia experiencias con Haiti en casos de desastres naturales](#), Excelsior, 10 Apr 2018

sourced from military units -such as the counter fuel theft operations or the escort of fertilizer convoys in Guerrero- represent a significantly divergent role and mission for the armed forces in the long term. Cases in point:

- The seaweed collection mission should be turned over to a civilian entity, such as the *Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT- Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat) or *Secretaria de Turismo* (SECTUR-Tourism Secretariat) once the four seaweed-collecting vessels have been built, tested and delivered. SEMAR should take on a mentoring role and could even remain involved in supporting the vessels' logistics, but crew and operation procedures should not be in the military domain.
- Immigration enforcement is not a military function. The deployment of over 25,000 troops in the southern and northern border areas to 'rescue' (or rather capture) undocumented migrants should transition to the organization of a dedicated civilian-led border patrol force, trained, organized and equipped for border surveillance and immigration enforcement under either the National Guard, the SSPC or the *Instituto Nacional de Migracion* (INAMI-National Immigration Institute). This force should be sourced from a mix of active duty volunteers willing to transition to a civilian-led organization as well as new recruits.
- Re-engage and expand Mexico's participation in international peacekeeping operations. Both SEDENA and SEMAR have worked hard to establish a PKO training center in Santa Gertrudis, Chihuahua, which should serve as the nucleus for at least a battalion-ready deployable force. Understanding the value that comes from gaining experience in international operations, and how lessons learned can be applied to domestic stability operations, still needs to be absorbed and socialized.
- Increase the defense budget to reflect reality. A quick benchmark assessment indicates that defense expenditures in Latin America has decreased in real terms from 1.51% of GDP in 2009 to 1.23% of GDP in 2019. However, Mexico's 0.5% of GDP remains significantly lower than similar countries.³⁶ While the AMLO administration has highlighted the lack of foreign threats to Mexico, or the diminished need for conventional (equipment) requirements when compared to that of other countries in the region, procurement of equipment represents only a small portion of that 1.23% of GDP spent overall. Mexico's underfinancing of the defense sector is likely to negatively impact manpower, training, and operations, not just modern equipment -such as fighter jets, frigates or artillery- deemed expensive and unnecessary by the AMLO administration. Investing appropriate resources sends the right message... security is not free, there is always a cost. The government's priority is to make sure that the cost is paid in pesos, not in blood.

³⁶ Defence Budgets Annual Report 2019, Jane's, 03 Dec 2019

- Last but not least, understand that the use of any military as a stabilizing force will produce a time-limited effect in high-violence regions, the key to long-term stability resides in other state tools such as education, economic prosperity, but above, all justice... There cannot be peace without justice.

About the Author

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