

National security and internationalization: a study of the Mexican army in its traditional and new roles.¹

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Theoretical Framework

In a couple of brushstrokes, we could affirm that our present international setting is delimited by:

- 1.1. The incomplete US hegemonic decadence.
- 1.2. The present impossibility of a global substitute.

Points 1A and 1B allow for the presence of foreign elites in the US sphere of influence: Europe (with a leadership crisis herself) and Japan, and importantly, the People's Republic of China.

At the hemispheric level:

- 2.1. The rapid incorporation of the Mexican economy to North America.
- 2.2. The affirmation of some regional integration agreements; chief among them, the Mercosur.

Direct consequence of 2.2 is the progressive consolidation of a regional sphere of influence centered on Brazil, and the strengthening of regional international entities like the Organization of American States under South American leadership.

Mexico seems to walk north while South America goes in the other direction. This is naturally effecting the Mexican security policy. A reversal of roles between Mexico and Brazil occurred within this briefly sketched international setting. Before the mid-80s, Brazil used to be "circumspect" in relation to the US foreign policy towards the region (Central America was the area then requiring most attention), while Mexico was highly critical of the US involvement in the Isthmus.

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Within Mexico, at the same time, extraordinary changes were taking place. Economically, Mexico endorsed Neoliberal economics, and was admitted to the NAFTA.

Diplomatically, the Mexican relations with Cuba and Venezuela (and, in turn, with other countries like Bolivia and Argentina) grew problematic. However, as I will further insist later in this paper, Mexico re-oriented her foreign policy, but has not elaborated yet a new foreign policy doctrine. How and when did all this happen?

Before the change

Let us make clear that due to Mexico's geo-strategic location, the majority of her foreign policy issues are linked directly or indirectly with her bilateral relation with the US.

Mexico observed for many years, a remarkable adherence to her own proclaimed principles of:

1. National self determination
2. Non-intervention in states' domestic affairs
3. Peaceful solution to controversies
4. Prohibition of the use or threat of force in international relations
5. States' legal equality
6. International cooperation for development
7. To strive for peace and international security

Let us underline in this regard, that Mexico has always diplomatically struggled to put an end to arm races and she has always rejected armamentism. Ambassador García Robles² got the Peace Nobel Prize in 1982, for his efforts towards Latin American nuclear disarmament. In a nutshell: Mexico has spent her lifetime membership in international organizations claiming for international peace. An instance of this was Mr. Antonio Carrillo Flores's (then Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico) speech before the UN on 24 September 1969, entitled *General and Total Disarmament and a Global Development Strategy*.³

² Alfonso García Robles (1911-1991) got the Prize jointly with the Swedish Alva Myrdal.

³ Pellicer, Olga (editor). *Voz de México en la Asamblea General de la ONU, 1946-1993*. Mexico, SRE-FCE. 1994. p 197-205.

Before the well-known recent participation of Mexico and Chile in the United Nations Security Council at the times of Gulf War II⁴, Mexico had already been there always as a non-permanent member, on a couple of occasions: 1946 and 1980-1981. Mexico never brought a controversy to the Security Council's attention, as few have been the cases involving Latin American countries. When the occasions arose and the controversy affected her national interest, Mexico was invited to partake in "Groups of Friends" thus created. So was the case with El Salvador, Guatemala (the group included Colombia, Spain, the US, Norway and Venezuela), and later Nicaragua.

That righteous attitude of Mexico in the international fora was key under the Cold War scenario. For instance, in relation to the ITRA⁵, a treaty now in decadence of which Mexico is no longer member since September 2002. ITRA has been applied against the organization's own members, notably Guatemala (1954) and Cuba (1960-61)⁶. In both cases, as in many others suffered by Latin American countries, the interventionist power judged and qualified the reason of been of its own intervention. Mexico opposed such interventionism, as she opposed interventions for "humanitarian purposes" decided by individual countries. That included all pretensions to get universal validity to a national law; or in legal terms: the extra-territoriality of US law.

Up to now, the Mexican army takes no part in UN missions, often geared to obtain peace through coercive methods. Violent methods are not the cure for violence, and they can be counterproductive. In the case of Somalia, for instance, not only the UN prestige suffered but the conflict itself worsened.⁷ Similarly, Mexico has often criticized that the five permanent members of the Security Council are also the main producers and exporters of conventional weapons.⁸

However, the meaning of national security in Mexico started to evolve in the 1980s. Before such change, national security was understood as "the integral development of the nation" and as "the tool to maintain the liberty, peace and

⁴ Rather than opposing the US invasion of Iraq, both countries remained "undecided". At the end, the opposition of other permanent members of the Security Council led the US to attack Iraq without the vote of the UNSC.

⁵ Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (TIAR), also known as the Río Pact.

⁶ Green, Rosario. "El debate ONU-OEA: ¿nuevas competencias en el ámbito de la paz y la seguridad internacionales?" in Tello, Manuel. *Las Naciones Unidas hoy: visión de México*. Mexico, SRE-FCE.1994. p. 77-78 and footnote 5.

⁷ Rozental, Andrés. "Las Naciones Unidas y la nueva agenda multilateral" in Tello, Manuel. *Las Naciones Unidas hoy: visión de México*. Mexico, SRE-FCE.1994. p. 221.

⁸ Solana, Fernando (ex Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico). *Cinco años de política exterior*. Mexico, Porrúa. 1994. p 331.

social justice condition within the constitutional framework". One of the army functions was to "collaborate, help or contribute" to national security.⁹

For many years, it was assumed that the exterior and the US in particular represented a potential threat to national sovereignty and security. But national security was in the practice equated to development, sovereignty, domestic affairs, and the internal control of opposition using force. After 1988, under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, drug trafficking came forward as a top national security preoccupation. The enemies, although not enlisted in the national reports, were the drug dealers, the corruption of Mexican officials and the US demand for drugs.

Importantly, the drugs issue had come to the fore at the UN Conference on Drugs, Vienna 1988.¹⁰ At the Third Commission of the General Assembly, Mexico stated her position:

1. To ensure respect to the states sovereignty and their internal order, and the national territorial jurisdiction without any interference.
2. To re-orientate international action towards fighting all the stages of drug trafficking, from production to consumption, contemplating the criminal activity within a new multidisciplinary approach, attacking not only its effects but its social, cultural and economic causes.
3. To avoid fiscalizing and certifying the actions of other states within their own jurisdiction, substituting the sanctions for harmonious concertation and cooperation against an enemy common to all the peoples.

The Vienna Convention was approved on 19 December 1988.¹¹ In Mexico, the law was enforced on 11 November 1989.

In 1989, for the first time, Mexico gave herself a National Security Cabinet including the ministers of the Interior, Foreign Relations, National Defense and Navy, and the General Procurer of Justice.¹² Notoriously, national development

⁹ Aguayo, Sergio. "Un concepto de seguridad nacional mexicana para la década de los noventa" in Roett, Riordan (ed). *Relaciones exteriores de México en la década de los noventa*. Mexico, Siglo XXI. 1991. p 87.

¹⁰ Prior to the Vienna Conference there had been only the International Conference on Opium (1909) and the 1961 Convention on Drugs and its 1972 Protocol.

¹¹ Mexico signed it on 16 February 1989 and the Mexican Senate voted it on 30 Nov 1989. Mexico deposited her ratification before the UN on 11 April 1989. González Félix Miguel Ángel. *México en la definición de la política mundial y las estrategias internacionales para el control del narcotráfico 1988-1994* in Las Naciones Unidas Hoy. Tello, Manuel and Olga Pellicer (eds.). Mexico, SRE-FCE p. 263.

¹² Military sources date the first national security cabinet one year before, 1988, and include the Ministry of Finances (Hacienda) among the members of such cabinet.

was not represented in the cabinet's composition. I stress this because national security used to be "an integral part of national development", before the 1988-89 change. Later, other ministries were also included in this Cabinet: Public Security, Public Functionariat, Communications and Transportation, and the General Director of National Security and Investigation (CISEN).

Other developments were observed as national security evolved; namely the lower profile Mexican participation in Third World organizations and in Latin America where the Mexican positions became more moderate. The great exception to this was the country's continuing effort in Central America until peace was achieved in El Salvador (27 April 1991) and Guatemala (29 December 1996).

The Change...

By the 1990s, according to some academic (as opposed to military) authors, the once Mexican very zealous defense of non-intervention and self-determination had started to weaken.¹³ The Mexican internal affairs went "internationalized". In 1998, Mexico accepted the Inter-American Court for Human Rights jurisdiction.

Perhaps the discourse of Fernando Solana, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the UN XLIV General Assembly (1989), reflected only partially the international changes Mexico was reacting to. On that occasion, Mr. Solana expressed satisfaction to see cooperation superseding the "rivalry stereotypes" and the impact that could have on the Central American conflict.¹⁴ At the same time, the Mexican diplomat insisted upon cooperation in the war against drug-trafficking, stressing again that included "demand, production, trafficking and illicit consumption"¹⁵ And, he also said "Mexico gives highest priority to total and general disarmament".¹⁶ In similar terms, Mr. Solana expressed the Mexican position again in 1993 before the XLVIII UN General Assembly congratulating himself that the nuclear essays moratorium was extended by the US, France, the UK and Russia and hoping the remaining nuclear powers including China would follow suite.¹⁷ And on

¹³ See Covarrubias Velasco, Ana. "Los principios y la política exterior de México" in Schiavon et al (eds). *En busca de una nación soberana*. Mexico, CIDE-SRE. 2006. p 413.

¹⁴ Solana, Fernando. *La ONU, imprescindible en la negociación y la aplicación de acuerdos*, discourse pronounced at the XLIV UN General Assembly (1989), in Pellicer, Olga (ed.). *Voz de México en la Asamblea General de la ONU, 1946-1993*. Mexico, SRE-FCE. 1994. p 423.

¹⁵ Solana, Fernando. *La ONU, imprescindible en la negociación...* op cit, p 427.

¹⁶ Solana, Fernando. *La ONU, imprescindible en la negociación...* op cit, p 428.

¹⁷ Solana, Fernando. *Las Naciones Unidas del siglo venidero*, discourse pronounced at the XLVIII UN General Assembly (1993), in Pellicer, Olga (ed.). *Voz de México en la Asamblea General de la ONU, 1946-1993*. Mexico, SRE-FCE. 1994. p 459.

drugs, the Mexican minister insisted again on “international cooperation respectful of sovereignties without preeminence pretenses”.¹⁸

Another important “new” subject in the national security agenda was international migration. The country had developed a great sensitivity to the issue, and she had insisted upon the respect of national jurisdictions. At least in the official discourse, Mexico attempted to avoid (human rights) abuses while fighting illicit drugs in the country.

The country re-iterated many times, that responsibility for this war effort within the Mexican territory corresponded exclusively to the Mexicans. And that there will no be joint military operations with other countries. Mexico wanted recognition to every peoples’ identities, demanded respect to sovereign rights, and rejected all sorts of hegemonic impositions, reproaches policies, or distributions of guilt according to useless geographical manichaeism’s. Every sovereign nation should cooperate acting sovereignly in her own territory, and all actions should be carried out paying due respect to international law. Mexico rejected all initiatives geared to create multinational military forces, joint military exercises or aerial pursuits across borders.¹⁹

In 2000, Mexico signed an Economic Association Agreement with the European Union including a “democratic clause”, which would have been rejected as interventionist years before. Finally, Mexico became in turn interventionist when the Fox administration decided to lecture Cuba on human rights.²⁰ At all costs, it is important to stress that albeit inconsistently Mexico remained bound by its own proclaimed traditional foreign policy principles.

The Mexican Army

The Mexican army self-image matches the Mexican national self-image image and foreign policy.

Mexico has a long history dating back to 2000 BC. Unlike many other American countries which assume themselves as a transplantation of European culture into this continent, so shortening their history to the arrival of their European immigrants, Mexico’s history grows as “new” older cultures are unearthed. The Mexican contemporary army traces its origins back to the Aztecs, the last civilization to inhabit and dominate the country’s central lands for 200

¹⁸ Solana, Fernando. *Las Naciones Unidas del siglo venidero*. op cit, p 460.

¹⁹ Solana, Fernando (ex Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico). *Cinco años de política exterior*. Mexico, Porrúa. 1994. p 444.

²⁰ Covarrubias, op cit. p 416.

years: 1320s to 1521. The army soldiers study the Mexica formations, education, war tactics, traditions, etc. For instance, the *Revista del Ejército Oct 93* features the history of the Mexican infantry since pre-Columbian times with a strong emphasis on the Mexica civilization. The Mexican soldiers' history education includes the Spanish colonial period, the armed struggles for independence, the many civil wars of the XIX century, the traumatic loss of half the Mexican national territory to the United States (1848) and the Mexican final victory on the French occupation (1862-1867). It also includes the long period of the Díaz dictatorship and, importantly, the Mexican Revolution of 1910.²¹

The army library was first established between 1867 and 1877.²² Over the years the Mexican military system has expanded. By 1985, most of the present structure was completed: 23 facilities including: the National Defense College, the Superior School of War, the Military Medical School, the Military School of Engineers, the National School of Dentistry, the Air College, the Heroic Military College, the Military School of Transmissions, the Military School of Nursing, etc, etc.²³

The Mexican Revolution is a cut-off point for the national institutions, and the army is no exception. As an institution issued from the Mexican revolution, and as the rest of the national institutions, the army shares the baggage of revolutionary-nationalism that has been the Mexican presentation card for so many years.

Another crucial fact to understand the Mexican army is its long history of subordination to civilian governments. The last time Mexico had a general as president was in 1945, and it has been said often that both Gen. Ávila Camacho, very much as his predecessor Gen. Cárdenas were "civilians in uniform". Such Mexican armed forces subordination to the civilian power was crucial during the 1970s, when the US government sponsored military coups in the hemisphere. In Mexico, the efforts conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce and some local entrepreneurial groups to destabilize president Echeverría's government failed completely. That was due, by the way, not only to the faithfulness of the Mexican military but also to the corporative nature of the Mexican state: the national workers unions, the ministries, the state-controlled companies, the army, even some important independent entrepreneurs remained loyal to the federal

²¹ Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos. Órgano de Divulgación Militar. Época III, Año 87. Mexico, October 1993.

²² Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos. Órgano de Divulgación Militar. Época III, Año 87. Mexico, December 1993.

²³ Problemática Militar Nacional. Compendio de Lecturas Requeridas. Colegio de Defensa Nacional. XVI Antigüedad. Mexico, December 1996.

government during such period of conflicts.²⁴ It is thus necessary to underline that even though the Mexican army has been used and it is been used to repress dissent and criminal activities (not that I personally agree with it), it has always been commanded by the Mexican civilian power.

Among the tasks the Mexican armed forces fulfill is DN III. That is the plan executed in case of national disasters. The Mexican army provides relief to other countries too. The first times the Mexican air force was deployed abroad for disaster relief were in Nicaragua in 1973, then in Honduras 1974 afflicted by Hurricane Fifi.²⁵ More recently, Mexican army contingents have been deployed for such purposes in other countries like Peru, Venezuela, El Salvador, Honduras, the Tsunami area in South East Asia and the USA.

True, in recent years, the armies in South America seem to be quickly evolving; at least that is what a number of statements from prominent Latin American armed forces members' leads to understand²⁶. In contrast, and in many respects, the Mexican army remains "traditional". Their concept of *national security* evolved in February 1995 to become *economic security*. Yet if we read it well, that was largely an academic effort involving concepts such as interdependence, asymmetry, MNC, and notably the "functions of the national state": survival, defense, stability, national project and development.

Then the concept of national security was rekindled as:

the creation of the adequate conditions for the national state to accomplish itself following its own national project based upon its own values and supported by its own institutions.²⁷

This 1995 national security doctrine modernization was indeed an academic essay at including up-to-date concepts to understand power, national power, military power, orientation of the national power, as well as strategic planning, and considerations of the most powerful countries' defense concepts.²⁸ Let us note that "national security" is not in the Mexican Political Constitution. Although

²⁴ For a specialized research on the Tepic see: Dávila Villers, David R. Les Conflits entre l'État et le patronat au Mexique: 1970-1976. Doctoral dissertation. University of Paris VIII. 1984.

²⁵ Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos. Órgano de Divulgación Militar. Época III, Año 87. Mexico, December 1993.

²⁶ See Dietrich, Heinz (ed). El pensamiento militar latinoamericano del nuevo siglo. Mexico, Jorale. 2008.

²⁷ Santos Caamal. La Esencia de la Seguridad Nacional (reformada y aumentada). Mexico, February 1995.

²⁸ Santos Caamal. La Esencia. op cit.

Const. Arts. 73, 76, 89 and 119, and Federal Penal Code Arts. 123-141 definitely serve as legal framework for the army's activities.

By 1996, there were several concerns that occupied the Mexican army, chief among them: the northern border and illicit drug trafficking. The northern border encompassed several inter-related problems: migration, floating population thus delinquency, drug trafficking, public corruption, insufficient public services and housing. Equally important were the small-scale arms smuggling and the proliferation of organized crime. But the Mexican army also worried about other topics like the US nuclear waste at 35 km of Mexico, the lack of potable water in Nuevo Leon (for human use) and in Tamaulipas (for agricultural use).²⁹

By 1996, the narcos were already among the main alarm reasons. One of the Mexican army publications warned that, during critical moments, up to ¼ of the army was attacking those gangs of racketeers.³⁰ Another publication, one year later warned that the narcos individually counted with better weaponry, sophisticated means of transportation and communication, money, medical assistance, supply lines, etc. The army also remarked caustically the corruption of federal institutions (like PGR), the quarrels among them about the seized resources, and the pressures from foreign countries. The conclusion could not be harder: The rapid development of the narco has been made possible by corrupt society and government.³¹

The DEA in Mexico in 1985

Drugs as an issue, as we have anticipated, came to be one of the main points in the national security agenda. By 1985, Mexico was already the main origin of the marijuana and heroine consumed by the US and the main crossing way for cocaine.

Then, the cases of Enrique Camarena Salazar (and Humberto Álvarez Machain) in 1985, and Víctor Cortés (and René Verdugo Urquidez) in 1986 came to alter the bilateral climate. On 7 February 1985, the US DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar was kidnapped and later murdered in the Mexican state of Jalisco by hit-men at the orders of drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero. The body was found on 5 March 1985. Soon afterwards, Caro Quintero was arrested in Costa Rica

²⁹ Problemática de la Frontera Norte. E. M. D. M. S-2 Inteligencia. Mexico, November 1996.

³⁰ Problemática Militar Nacional. Compendio de Lecturas Requeridas. Colegio de Defensa Nacional. XVI Antigüedad. Mexico, December 1996.

³¹ Problemática Militar. El combate al narcotráfico. Comité que origina a las fuerzas armadas. III Región Militar, 9ª zona militar. Mexico, January 1997.

on 4 April 1985. The Mexican government reinforced her actions against the drug criminals and corrupt policemen.³²

Both, Camarena and Cortés were US DEA agents working undercover in Mexico which were kidnapped by Mexican drug traffickers, tortured and killed.³³ The US government angered by the obstacles raised by the Mexican law enforcement authorities decided to slowdown the border crossings as a measure of pressure. Also, the US government led a campaign of discredit against the Mexican government in the US press and Congress. Only after President De La Madrid called Ronald Reagan, did the US ease border traffic again. That not only met strong opposition from Mexican authorities, jeopardizing the work of the DEA in Mexico and made the “certification” of Mexico by the US harder, but also made bilateral cooperation in general more difficult.

Later, as part of Operation Legend, the USDEA kidnapped, on 2 April 1990, Dr. Humberto Álvarez Machain in Mexican territory allegedly having participated in Camarena’s torture. Things got worse when, on 15 June 1992, the US Supreme Court of Justice decided that it was legal for the US to kidnap foreigners in other countries to be trialed at US courts.

Mexico considered invalid and unacceptable the US decision, called the kidnapping a felony and suspended all DEA activities in the country until the incident was cleared up. President Bush later sent President Salinas a letter promising not to avail anymore kidnappings, and by 15 December 1992 Álvarez Machain had been liberated. In the face of such US interference in Mexican domestic affairs, the country made the US government clear of her malaise denouncing “acts that run against our law system and sovereignty”, and that under no circumstance the country would accept the presence of US military units in the Mexican national territory.³⁴ Mexico also reformed her Penal Code to sanction with maximum severity those who kidnap Mexicans to deliver them to foreign authorities’ jurisdictions.³⁵

All this goes to illustrate that the US-Mexican relationship is far from being cozy, and that Mexico still needs to use her principles of non-intervention, self-determination, non-use of force in international relations, etc. However on this occasion Mexico and the US decided to isolate the Álvarez Machain case in order to

³² The capo Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and 13 implicated judiciary policemen were arrested. Commander Armando Pavón Reyes was suspended.

³³ In reprisal, US agents kidnapped two persons within the Mexican national territory (Álvarez Machain and Verdugo Urquidez) which were transported to US territory and “brought to justice”.

³⁴ Solana, Fernando (ex Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico). *Cinco años de política exterior*. Mexico, Porrúa. 1994. p 375

³⁵ Solana, Fernando. *Cinco años...* Op cit, p 417.

preserve the bilateral cooperation relationship. In 1992, President Salinas instituted the National Program against Drugs, and by June 1993, the National Institute against Drug Trafficking and on 27 October 1993, Mexico presented before the UN, her own Plan against Drug Trafficking with due respect to the states' sovereignty.

A new bilateral institutional density

Presidents Bush Sr. (1988-1992) and Salinas (1989-1994) met 11 times en four years showing a new level of cooperation between the two countries. On November 1993 the US Congress voted the inclusion of Mexico in the NAFTA. Interestingly enough, the Mexican government believed the NAFTA would curb Mexican emigration to the US³⁶. In the practice the largest Mexican emigrations to the US happened after the NAFTA was enacted.

The final turn in the Mexican foreign policy orientation happened under President Fox (2000-2006), who was the first Mexican president of Partido Acción Nacional. We could sum up this as follows: The change took over two decades: it started in correlation with the 1980 economic structural reforms, it accelerated with the Mexican inclusion in the NAFTA and the signature of lots of free trade agreements, and it landed with Fox.

The new roles the mexican army is called to play

Now, besides the traditional roles the Mexican army plays, which we have so far mentioned, there are "new" tasks waiting to be acknowledged. Some of those tasks are actually renewed or have become more serious, others have more recently emerged.

Clearly, the current war against illicit drugs is the most important of all. Guerrillas like EPR are also high in the army's priorities, and finally the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP; ASPAN in Spanish). The three demand serious upgrade from the national army. I will add, on my own, one more reason for army improvement: the Mexican diplomatic effort to secure a permanent siege in the UN Security Council will lead necessarily to re-think the size, preparedness, roles and uses of the Mexican army, which until now takes no part in UN missions.

One of the undesired effects of this war against illicit drugs is the damage inflicted on the civilian population's human rights. Logically, the use of the army in

³⁶ Solana, Fernando (ex Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico). Cinco años... Op cit, p 95.

the current war divides the Mexican public opinion. Several specialists have insisted upon the unconstitutionality of it. Neither the armed forces's own regulations allow them to carry out policing activities; although no legal sanction exist to punish the army for doing it.

Furthermore, there are risks involved in the possible discredit and disrespect to the armed forces of Mexico, an institution that is still worthy of esteem in the country.³⁷

It must be said that opposition in the Legislative Power makes the Executive actions difficult and tardy. For instance, on 12 October 2007, the Defense Commission of the lower chamber blocked an army budget increase explicitly requested to create the Special Corps of Federal Support Forces.³⁸

The narco has now managed to gain some of the Mexican state's highest spheres. With "corrupt society and government" as the military report said, this unequal war cannot be won. Generals, governors, legislators, judges and hosts of inferior officers have been confirmed to have illicit links with the narco. The panorama is frankly discouraging.

The army moral is also suffering. There is a great gap in army salaries. The salary of a division general is 66.7 times larger than the humblest soldier.³⁹ No wonder, the army faces a severe desertion crisis. One of the main daily newspapers of Mexico made public unbelievable numbers: between the years 1985 and 2006, a number larger than the national army deserted from it: 347 000. Importantly, that number included not only soldiers but officers as well, and from elite troops: 1 382 GAFE (Special Forces). It has been corroborated that some of those army-trained officers ended up joining the narcos' side of the war; particularly the Gulf Cartel (Los Zetas) and the Sinaloa Cartel (Los Pelones).⁴⁰ Better (narco-) salaries are only part of the explanation.

The drug lords equip their forces with better arms too, which they find abundant in the US market. This serious problem will not be solved unless the US modify Amendment II of their Constitution (the right to keep and bear arms) and severely control their own arms industry. Both things seems unthinkable to me, at the present time.

³⁷ "Insisten especialistas en el retiro del Ejército de la lucha contra el crimen". *La Jornada* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 22 January 2008.

³⁸ "Bloquean en la Cámara cuerpo militar decretado por Calderón". *La Jornada* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 12 October 2007.

³⁹ The Mexican soldiers perceive a monthly salary of about US\$ 210 dollars. "Persiste alta disparidad en sueldos del personal del Ejército Mexicano". *La Jornada* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 18 October 2007.

⁴⁰ "Hasta 2003, mil 382 elemento de élite dejaron el Ejército". *El Universal* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 5 November 2007.

While the narcos have superior individual weaponry, the Mexican army equipment faces obsolescence. That impinges upon the arms used against the narcos; for instance the airplanes, radars, armored vehicles (Hummers), etc.⁴¹ The same goes for the navy, since this war increasingly involves her.⁴²

New Tasks

With all these present limitations, the Mexican army is called to perform new tasks derived from the country's partnership with the US and Canada, particularly in the wake of the Merida Initiative. In other words, the Mexican army is being asked to do "more" than the Colombian inasmuch Mexico shares a border with the US ("more" in the sense of "guarding US south border"). The perceived threats come now from internationally organized crime whose illegal activities embrace: human trafficking, drug dealing, money laundering and arms smuggling. Hence the Merida Initiative also requires Central American countries' cooperation.

Mexico has given top priority to the Mérida Initiative.⁴³ In terms of budget, that means US\$2.5 billion per year of Mexican money. The Mexican government has quickly asserted that the Initiative implied "no US military personnel deployed in Mexico". Assuredly, that has been said to appease Mexican nationalism. However, everything seems to point towards further cooperation between the US and Mexico on military matters. The battery of NAFTA countries initiatives serves as a confirmation of this trend: the Southwest Border Anti-Narcotics Network (BANN), the NorthCom and ASPAN.

Joining the US in her security efforts, as the international relations' Realist theory establishes, implies losing the advantages of ambiguity and assuming the US alliances and rivalries. Under the presently concluding US administration and according to its own statements and in the hemispheric scenario only: Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, not to mention Cuba are considered threats. Outside the hemisphere, all the US enemies trying to sever oil supply to the US would think of attacking Mexico, specially her oil installations. Mexico needs to carefully evaluate the pros and cons of joining the US in, taking into consideration that the

⁴¹ "Equipo y materiales del Ejército, obsoletos, advierte el general Galván". *La Jornada* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 10 October 2007.

⁴² "Requiere la Armada renovar barcos, helicópteros, aviones, radares y vehículos". *La Jornada* (Mexico City's daily newspaper). 12 October 2007.

⁴³ See the website of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations: "*INICIATIVA MÉRIDA: Un Nuevo Paradigma de Cooperación en Materia de Seguridad*", dated 23 Oct 2007. Consulted on 24 March 2008: <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/eua/index.php?option=news&task=viewarticle&sid=334>

US government has a long history of cooperation with drug dealers that fought US (especially “Communists”) enemies. Unsurprisingly, some US government intelligence organizations have been used to “infiltrate” the DEA. In other words, Mexico runs the risk of joining the US drugs approach rather than solving the drugs problem.

Additionally, the XXI century concept of security has a stronger oil component related to intelligence and terrorism; inasmuch Al Qaeda was initially CIA-trained. In other words, and without wishing this to sound as a protective advice: One thing is to fight those problems cooperating with the US, and another much riskier is to embrace the US agendas.

Now, talking about agendas: it is elections and economic recession time in the US. While the US may feel comfortable reducing her budget for drug prevention, the Mexicans have a different opinion about the problem. The Mexican opinion (that US demand is part of the problem) is now shared by many Americans. Referring to the war on drugs, the New York Times editorial of 13 February 2008 reads: “Nothing can be achieved unless this country curbs its own demand for illegal narcotics”. The NYT also mentioned that “spending on drug prevention has fallen every year since 2002”.⁴⁴

Similarly, I say: the drug cartels’ profits of hundreds of billions of dollars cannot be hiding under someone’s mattress. I am saying that an insane amount of money as the cartels’ profits is difficult to hide unless the international financial system allows it! But the US prefers not to disturb (and even less under her present economic delicate economic condition) the international financial system. Put more clearly, the US prefers this war to be carried outside her territory, by the Latin Americans. But without reducing the US demand for drugs and without tracking the cartels’ profits in the international financial system, nothing can be achieved. It is tantamount to try to kill a crocodile by polishing its nails!

For the Mexicans, it is also time to discuss the “Wall of Shame” along the US-Mexican border. Is the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America compatible with the “Wall of Shame”? How can the US expect full blooded cooperation from the Mexicans if her security is in many ways against the Mexicans? President Felipe Calderón, assuredly a conservative Mexican president made these points clear, on 28 September 2007 when he asked the US government to approve a Migration Reform, at the occasion of the (bilateral) XXV Conference of Border Governors:

⁴⁴ “The War on Drugs Starts Here” Editorial of the New York Times. February 13, 2008.

“It is necessary that actions be carried out within the US too in order to reduce consumption and to fight the organized delinquency that also acts within and from the US territory”⁴⁵

The Mexican president also insisted upon “respect to each country’s sovereignty and jurisdiction” .

Conclusion

Cooperation with the US shall continue, but I sincerely hope that the Mexican political class shall be intelligent enough to persist on a “reluctant partner” image as more beneficial for Mexico than a fully-fledged military partnership with the US, in view of:

1. the nature and scope of the military tasks and challenges that the US is to face in the forecoming future (i.e.: her hegemonic decadence),
2. the sister Latin American nations which are eyed by the US security policy-makers (Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba),
3. the hidden agendas of the US in the war against drugs,
4. the lack of a clear US compromise to massively attack her domestic drug demand,
5. the lack of a US clear compromise to scan the financial system for drug-money, and, never to forget:
6. the outrageous border-wall that the US has nearly completed, which is dividing our two countries’ opinions far beyond landscape design!

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⁴⁵ *“FCH pide a EU corresponsabilidad anticrimen”* (newspaper article in *El Universal*, 28 September 2008) by Sergio Javier Jiménez y Marcelo Beyliss.

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