

# Strategy Research Project International Fellow

## México's National Security Challenges and the Military Endeavor

by

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United States Army War College  
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

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México and its armed forces are facing enormous challenges in the 21st century in the security domain. The complexity of the threats, such as organized crime, challenge Mexican stability thus provoking uncertainty and threatening the national security of Mexico. Current Mexican national security policy does not provide clear strategic guidance for all government agencies and the armed forces as they face current threats and challenges. In addition, military activities and operations have reflected limited participation in joint and interagency operations. Therefore, it is essential for the Mexican government to develop a new Mexican national security policy (and a supporting national defense policy). The policy must be oriented to the contemporary world and face current challenges and threats in a comprehensive way, providing strategic guidance to all government agencies, and especially to the military forces that are responsible for defending the nation and protecting national sovereignty, territory and the domestic population. This will ensure the military can become an efficient and successful organization aligned with the strategic environment.





## **México's National Security Challenges and the Military Endeavor**

The rapid evolution of world affairs, especially in security matters, has brought new threats and challenges to all nations around the globe. Each country must harness its own abilities and strengths in order to identify, address, prevent, and if necessary, defeat identified threats, to protect its national interests, and to be able to respond effectively to preserve the state. In this regard, all the military forces around the world are an essential tool of their state's national power. A state is obligated to empower them according to their national interests. In view of this, each armed force has different characteristics, peculiarities and cultures which, in accomplishing their nation's objectives, often translate into advantages or disadvantages in the current strategic environment.

The complex environment in the 21st century proves that new players are in the international arena, particularly in the security domain where ambiguous non-state actors, such as terrorists, insurgents, and organized crime, among other antagonists, are challenging and threatening various nations' security and provoking uncertainty and an insecure global environment. Due to the diversity and complexity of these new actors, which operate both domestically and transnational, some nations do not have the correct tools or understanding of the problem to ensure a quick and satisfactory resolution of the threats. Often, there are no solutions, only confusion and unsatisfactory choices<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of México, the current national security guidance is insufficient for confronting the current threats and challenges that have emerged inside the country and that have come from abroad, because there is no formal published government document that articulates the nation's national security policies and priorities for the

protection of Mexican sovereignty, territory and population. It does not have a clear document that provides strategic guidance to all government agencies in dealing with national security issues and advancing national interests. Therefore, there is insufficient direction and support for the armed forces, which are the anchor for ensuring the state's security in the current strategic environment.

The purpose of this paper is: first, to explain how and why México's national security framework for facing current challenges and threats is insufficient. The idea of national security has undergone a confusing evolution and it has always been controversial. Some governments have interpreted "national security" differently from what the constitution and national security law say. Furthermore, insufficient knowledge about the purpose of a national security policy throughout México's history has been the reason why Mexican authorities have not been able to develop a coherent, practical and modern national security policy that can be adapted to México's current realities and needs. Secondly, due to the inconsistent interpretation of national security and the government's limited ability to predict risks and threats to national security, organized crime became the prime Mexican national security threat and it undermines the stability of the country. Due to the severity of the threat, the Mexican military has been tasked to intervene and confront this non-state actor. However, it does not have adequate legal support and this poses a risk to the armed forces. And finally, this paper argues that the government's decision to give the armed forces the task of fighting organized crime has resulted in a strategic misalignment. This misalignment has created organizational problems that prevent the armed forces from achieving their primary national objectives, defeating external threats and guaranteeing the internal security of the nation.

## México's National Security Evolution

The purpose of México's national security guidelines and procedures has always been controversial. Throughout México's history, the different interpretations, assumptions, and decisions taken by successive governments has been the reason why Mexican authorities have not been able to develop a coherent, practical, and modern national security policy that can be adapted to the nation's realities and needs. The fact that México's national security policy is insufficient for confronting the current national and transnational threats and challenges is partially due to México's confusing evolution in the national security domain, its poor commitment to solving internal security issues, and its inability to identify its national security threats. Thus, there is no clear strategic guidance to all government agencies and the armed forces for working toward clear national objectives.

Viewing México's history through the lens of national security reveals a conflict between internal interests and external influences. During México's history, there have been different conceptualizations of national security and disagreements on the need for a published national security document. For some governments, survival of the party in power was the priority and they shaped actions and policies to ensure this. For instance, after the Mexican revolution in 1929 the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won the national elections and it governed México for 71 years.<sup>2</sup> At some point, it used the national security tools to advance its specific party interests, such as, spying on opponents, settling scores with foes, and operating as bagmen for payoffs from the underworld.<sup>3</sup> However, a new national security priority came to México during the Cold War era when the United States introduced its national security policy and strategy of

containment (NSC-68) to Latin America. Containment emphasized a shift from external defense to internal security in order to combat communist influence.<sup>4</sup> This new U.S. policy, in the beginning, was unclear and open to many interpretations. Furthermore, México was reluctant to accept the policy because of its mistrust of the United States due to the two nations' contentious history. Not only was the Mexican government unable to understand the significance and real meaning of national security, the PRI government was more concerned with internal affairs and maintaining itself in power than identifying threats and risks to the state.

In addition, the new U.S. policy contradicted both government policy and Mexican laws. A national security policy that was understood as the containment of communism, according to Mexican politicians, was against the constitution. Mexican principles of foreign policy assert the right of self determination for every nation and non-intervention in internal and external affairs.<sup>5</sup> This means México has the freedom to choose any type of political system and international relationship. Moreover, the Mexican international affairs policy was based on having good relations with every country, including some communist countries, such as Cuba, as well as the intention of having economic ties with other countries on the continent which were trying to adopt communist political ideology. As a result, there was limited interest in adopting the U.S. anti-communist policy.

The adoption of a formal national security policy in México was a long process and it was not well founded or clearly defined. During the 1980's, the United States made an effort to encourage Latin American countries to address national security problems that had transnational security implications on the continent.<sup>6</sup> It also proposed

a national security doctrine regarding internal security that included guidance for building capabilities related to intelligence gathering and unconventional warfare.<sup>7</sup> However, in México, these national security ideas and concepts were only partially adopted.

According to the Mexican Constitution, the president is responsible for guaranteeing national defense and internal security by all means necessary, including with the armed forces according to the law.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, México's national security requirements identify two domains: external defense against an aggression conducted by another state; and internal security against domestic risks, such as, social movements, insurgent groups, guerrillas, and natural disaster relief. However, the government did not publish an official document as strategic guidance, such as a national security policy, and it had no interest in developing a national security policy and strategy. Instead the only document published was the national development plan, which was strategic guidance for the government agencies that focus on social and economical issues.<sup>9</sup> In fact, true national security issues were neglected. Furthermore, the focus of the government resulted in the politization of national security. It used national security tools for political purposes, such as using the intelligence agencies in unlimited ways in the name of preserving the party.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the primary emphasis during the 1990s was on the economic sector. The national interest was focused on restructuring the country to fit a neoliberal economic model (liberalizing the economy) and on global economic integration.<sup>11</sup> So for a long time, political and economic considerations were the main priorities of the government.

The Mexican government's inattention to national security issues endangered the country's stability. The lack of concern for national security issues related to internal affairs eventually had negative consequences because in 1994 the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN), an insurgent group, threatened Mexican national security. The EZLN appeared in Chiapas State and it declared war on the Mexican government and its armed forces. The situation was a result of a lack of appropriate national security intelligence gathering and the government's failure to identify, prevent, and address internal risks that could endanger national stability. Consequently, shortly after the EZLN emerged and endangered México's stability, the government sent the armed forces on a counterinsurgency operation to defeat this threat. Ironically, the United States had encouraged Latin American countries to develop intelligence and counterinsurgency capabilities ten years before but México had rejected this.<sup>12</sup> It was at this time that the Mexican government realized the extreme necessity of focusing on national security issues and it created the Mexican national security law. This governmental effort provided neither the strategic guidance needed nor established the basic conditions required for dealing with all the country's national security challenges.

The current national security law, in spite of the fact that it represents the legal framework for national security, is limited in scope and too weak to support government policies and strategies to deal with current challenges. After the EZLN issue, on January 31, 1995, the Mexican Congress approved the first national security law, which is considered the foundation and main legal support for Mexican national security policy.<sup>13</sup> This law was a significant effort to try to establish the legal support necessary for national security. However, the effort was not enough. The conceptualization of national

security was ambiguous and the law was limited in scope, making it unable to address México's reality. For instance, there are enormous gaps in the law and a misunderstanding about which authorities are responsible for protecting the nation. As a result, policymakers do not have the legal support they need for making policies and strategies concerning the country's national security dilemmas and the proper employment of military forces. As stated above, the concept of national security is very vague and some other concepts considered important do not exist in the law. For instance, the concept of internal security, which is the government's primary concern today, does not clarify whether transnational organized crime is a criminal issue or a national security issue. More importantly, 90 percent of the law's content addresses just the regulations for the Intelligence Center of National Security (CISEN), which is a national intelligence agency.<sup>14</sup> It excludes all the other actors who play a significant role in protecting the national interest by dealing with security risks and threats, such as: the armed forces, federal police, and other security agencies. The law appears to be an internal regulation for the CISEN, instead of a national law. The law is too narrow to deal with current threats and so it constrains government decisions and military intervention dealing with domestic threats.

Unfortunately, to date the Congress has been unwilling to reevaluate the law and this endangers Mexican national security. Three years ago, President Felipe Calderon sent Congress an initiative to update and modernize the law, in order to make it clear and useful, and to include the participation of the armed forces as an essential part of preserving national security.<sup>15</sup> However, Congress, which is responsible for making national security laws, did not make this initiative a priority. In fact, Congress set the law

aside, due to its concerns about the role of the armed forces against such internal threats as transnational organized crime. Strong opposition to including the armed forces existed because of the fear of possible militarization, and issues related to martial law and collateral damage. In other words, some in Congress were concerned about the use of hard power (military forces) for internal problems, arguing that internal issues are not the armed forces' business. It is the responsibility of the civilian authorities. As a consequence, the recent decision to use the Mexican armed forces to confront transnational organized crime (drug cartels) in México is actually against the law and this jeopardizes the status of México's armed forces.

Due to the current impasse, protecting national security and assuring internal stability have become a challenge for the Mexican government, even though the Mexican Constitution states that the president is responsible for guaranteeing external defense and internal security.<sup>16</sup> The National Security Law does not address who the national security authorities are or their responsibilities. Therefore, the Mexican armed forces are operating without legal support in its participation in facing current internal threats, such as organized crime, drug trafficking, drug cultivation, kidnapping, and other challenges such as insurgency or guerrilla groups. Consequently, because of the apparent illegality of the government's employment of the Mexican armed forces against internal threats, the activities of the armed forces are highly questioned within the country and internationally. For instance, México's zealous National Human Rights Commission claimed to have received 5,055 complaints, many against the military. Moreover, pollsters for the Reforma newspaper found the majority of citizens (58 percent) believed that the armed forces committed human rights abuses.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, the



armed forces are vulnerable to accusations of human right violations and the assertion that their law enforcement activities are illegal. The enormous effort made by the military and its achievements and successes in protecting the nation against its internal threats have been minimized by all the accusations against the Mexican military.

The lack of legal support and government national security policy on the use of the armed forces against internal threats is endangering the military's prestige and its viability. National and international organizations blame the Mexican government and its armed forces for causing collateral damage against civilian populations. The argument relies mainly on the claim that the military forces were created for defending the nation against external threats, not for repressing the Mexican population. However, the failure of the public civilian security forces to deal with the drug cartels, its high levels of corruption, and the excessive violence in some regions of the country, obligated the government to utilize the Mexican armed forces against the threat. This decision taken by the government was reactive and made evident the confusion related to the concept of national security and the insufficient nature of México's national security policy. Moreover, it demonstrated the lack of coordination among the three branches of government for solving this national security issue. This alternative, to employ the military forces in confronting drug cartels without sufficient legal support and planning, is the result of a short term focus. Such reactive actions to deal with near term crises can have long term consequences in terms of the costs in blood and treasure. <sup>18</sup>

In the international security arena, regional organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS) have identified challenges, risks and threats to the states in Latin America. Accordingly, the OAS has

highlighted major challenges for nations in the region and their armies, such as poverty and lack of social development, massive migration flows, structural inequalities within states, drug trafficking, terrorism, subversion, tensions caused by economic competition, and territorial disputes.<sup>19</sup> However, these organizations can give only broad guidance to Latin American countries. As such, the Mexican government has the right and obligation to identify its own national security issues and the tools (instruments of power) to confront them. Currently, the challenges mentioned by the OAS are not identified in the Mexican national security law or national security policy. Nevertheless, the new Mexican government (as of December 1, 2012) will have to identify national security threats according to the national interest and provide strategic guidance to all government agencies and military forces for preventing or, if necessary, defeating them. It will have to develop a new, modern, and useful national security policy and strategy to achieve national objectives according to the contemporary strategic environment. It will need to modify the current national security law and evaluate if it is necessary to continue to use the armed forces for dealing with internal security issues. In this regard, it is important to consider the stated missions of the Mexican armed forces: defend the integrity, independence, and sovereignty of the nation; guarantee internal security; contribute to the nation's progress; help in case of public necessity and support civil authorities in the event of natural disasters.<sup>20</sup>

### México's Biggest Threat: Organized Crime

According to some intellectuals, non-state actors are the new enemy against which war must be fought. Every era has its own kind of war with different conditions and peculiarities and this is evident in México today.<sup>21</sup> An ambiguous non-state actor,

organized crime, is threatening Mexican national security, provoking uncertainty and an insecure environment. The imprecise national security framework in México and the lack of relevant strategic guidance represents a problem for the armed forces in confronting the threat and they provided a vacuum for organized crime where the drug cartels could become powerful enough to endanger the viability of the Mexican state. Therefore, it is crucial for the Mexican government to employ the necessary elements of power, in order to promote peace and stability in the country and guarantee the protection of the population. The analysis in this part of the paper argues that organized crime has become México's primary national security threat. The country is essentially in a state of war and therefore the government must employ all the elements of national power in dealing with the threat, to include the use of hard power. It must also articulate a modern national security policy to provide clear guidance to all governmental agencies, as well as update the legal framework in order to legitimize government decisions and actions in confronting this threat to national security.

To understand the parameters of this war, it is necessary to consider the relevance of the geostrategic situation of México, which defines the nature of the current conflict. Also, analyzing the conflict in terms of the three elements in Clausewitz's trinity - passion, chance and rationality - helps to understand the magnitude and complexity of the threat, which encompasses the entire country, as figure one indicates. Moreover, this conflict has its own grammar, the Mexican state against a non-state actor, but it shares the common logic of war since it involves the use of force to achieve a specific purpose.<sup>22</sup>

## Áreas de influencia de los principales carteles mexicanos

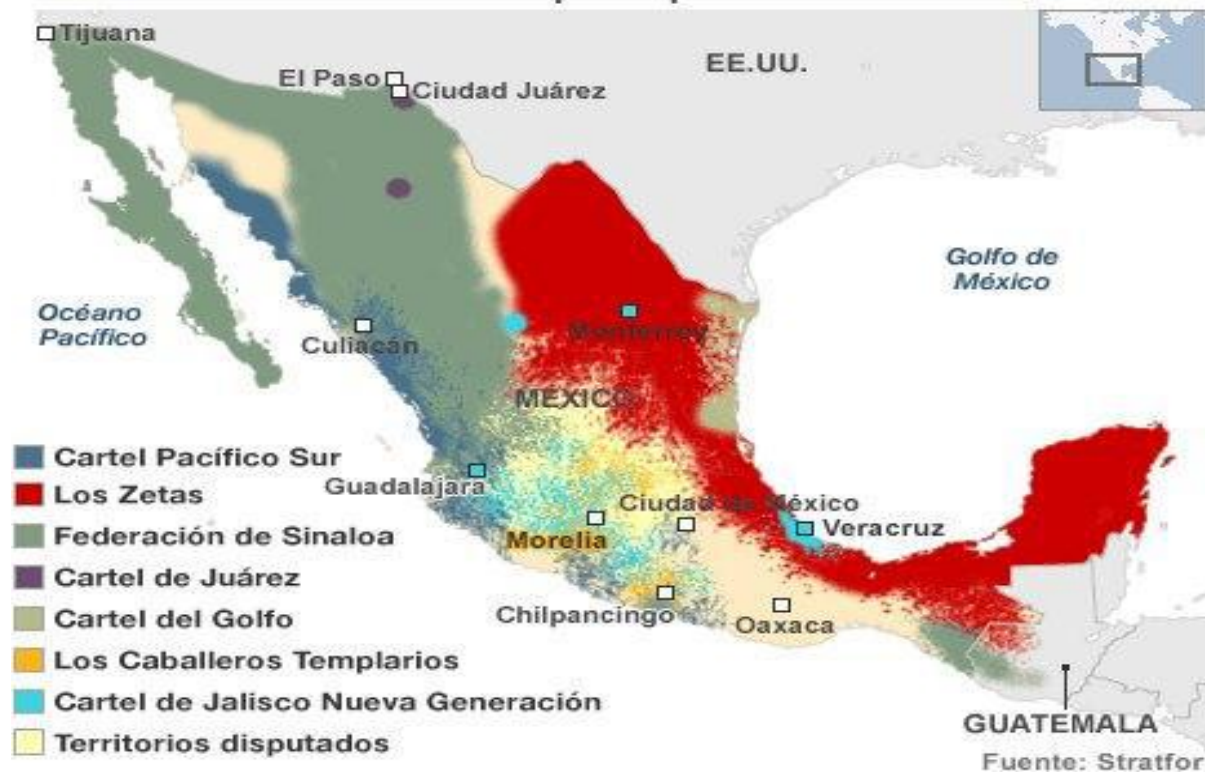


Figure 1. Drug Cartels' Areas of Influence. <sup>23</sup>

The nature and magnitude of the current conflict is not just confined to Mexican territory and it is asymmetric since it is being waged between the Mexican authorities and organized crime. The geographical location of the country is an essential factor because its location sets up the conditions for the conflict. The country is located between the drug suppliers in Central and South America and the drug demanders in the United States, Asia, and Europe. <sup>24</sup> The conflict involves powerful and illegal interests who are trying to control and dominate in the areas of drug trafficking, drug consumption, and drug cultivation. <sup>25</sup> Such illegal activities are conducted by organized crime as represented by the different drug cartels. Other illegal activities in which the cartels engage include ransoms, kidnappings, robberies, human trafficking, and money

laundering, and even the conduct of attacks on government authorities who investigate crimes, the mayors who govern towns, the journalists who write about the violence, as well as businessmen and policemen. The violence is such that some citizens are so intimidated they want to leave the country.<sup>26</sup> All of these illegal activities have tremendous impact on the political, economic, social, and military sectors. They undermine the viability of the state and generate insecurity, confrontations, and violence all over the country.

Even though this conflict takes place within one country, the Mexican territory, it is not a civil war, an insurgency, or terrorism. The drug cartels are criminals whose objectives for self-enrichment have created violence, confrontation, and friction along the way.<sup>27</sup> They do not pursue political power or create terror for a political purpose, but still they are endangering the stability of the country. According to Clausewitz's theory, the nature of war has not changed, just the players (character of the conflict). His theory is relevant for understanding how this non-state actor is an enemy, a threat, to the Mexican state and requires the employment of hard power to be defeated.

Analyzing the conflict in terms of the elements of Clausewitz's trinity reveals the complexity of the threat and the degree of the challenge that the Mexican government faces. Clausewitz states that in war there are always present a number of essential elements.<sup>28</sup> Emotion is evident in the hostile intent of the drug cartels that are making war against the government and civilians. Emotion is also evident in the hostile feelings the violence has generated in the Mexican population. Violence, hatred, and enmity are demonstrated in the passion of the people who oppose the drug cartels' illegal activities. Chance takes place in the course of the military operations that confront the threat.

Friction is demonstrated in the high level of violence throughout the country. And rationality is established by the governmental decisions and actions taken to confront the threat. These concepts are useful for describing the complexity of the situation, which is further complicated by the ambiguous national security guidance and lack of legal support. In sum, México is conducting a war against the drug cartels without clear rules of engagement which is a very basic requirement when military force is employed.

The illegal activities conducted by organized crime have generated a high level of violence. Some drug cartels not only want to control routes or specific areas, but they also want to expand their influence all over the country. For example, this is the objective of the Zetas drug cartel. They (the Zetas) want to increase their influence over drug trafficking and control a bigger market in order to achieve more self-enrichment and power. The only way of achieving these illegal interests and goals is by using a high level of violence among themselves, against Mexican authorities, and by striking the general population.<sup>29</sup> Thucydides argued that human beings are driven by honor among other attributes.<sup>30</sup> However, this view fails to explain non-state actors such as organized crime because they are criminals who do not have any ethics or moral values. They are cruel, illegal organizations capable of killing and dismembering people to prove their bravery or for money. For instance, when the government authorities capture a drug cartel leader, the members of the group fight each other within the same cartel to occupy the vacant leadership position or to create new smaller illegal organizations, as shown in figure two. This excessive violence in the last six years (2006-2012) has caused more than 47,000 deaths in México.<sup>31</sup>

<b>2006</b>	<b>2007-2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Sinaloa cartel	Sinaloa cartel	Sinaloa cartel	Sinaloa cartel
	Beltran Leyva cartel	South pacific cartel	South pacific cartel
			The hand with eyes
			New administration
		Acapulco independent cartel	Acapulco independent cartel
La Barbie cartel	Extinct		
Juarez cartel	Juarez cartel	Juarez cartel	Juarez cartel
Tijuana cartel	Tijuana Cartel	Tijuana Cartel	Tijuana Cartel
	El Teo fraction	El Teo fraction	Extinct
Golf cartel	Golf cartel –Zetas	Golf cartel	Golf cartel
		Zetas	Zetas
Michoacán family	Michoacán family	Michoacán family	Michoacán family
			Templarios Nights
			The uncorrectable
			The company
Millennium cartel	Millennium cartel	The resistance	The resistance
		New generation	New generation
<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>

Figure 2. Violence Roots, Atomization of Drug Cartels. <sup>32</sup>

Today, the hatred and enmity as demonstrated in the passion of the people, due to the violence generated by the drug cartels, have produced second and third order effects in the society. For example, the gruesome violence associated with the drug war has done grave damage to México's global image and potential tourism. Over the past few years, the northern border has suffered most of the violence and this has decreased tourism from approximately 80 million visitors in the 2000's to less than 60 million in 2011. <sup>33</sup> The Mexican population in many states, such as Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango, is fearful of organized crime. The majority of the people neither report illegal activities to the local authorities, nor denounce crime, due to their involvement in corruption and possible connection to organized crime. Denouncing

the cartels can in effect lead to being killed by organized crime. In some areas, the people are afraid of stepping out of the house because they fear being kidnapped or just being killed by these criminals, as a consequence of their criminal activities. Figure three indicates how insecure the people feel. Organized crime essentially targets the people who are confused. Do they denounce or stay still? The people are exhausted from the high level of violence. And their passion is exhibited in hatred of organized crime. A consequence of this passion was a rational decision in July 1, 2012, when the Mexican elections for a new president took place. The Mexican people chose a different party and a different leader who promised to stop the violence and protect the Mexican population. The violence created by the drug cartels strikes directly at Mexican society and it created an environment in which the military actions were necessary.<sup>34</sup>

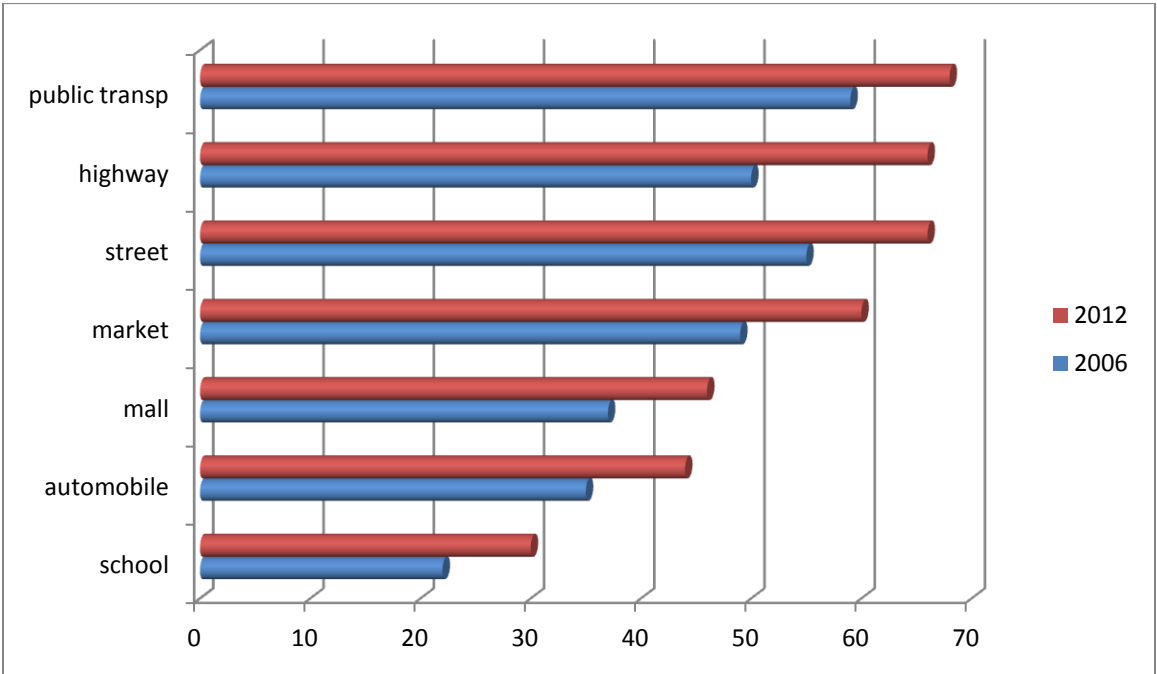


Figure 3. Percentage of National Perception About Insecurity.<sup>35</sup>



Organized crime in México cannot be treated as common criminality that is dealt with by local, civilian authorities due to the powerful nature and the diverse criminal activities of the cartels. At this moment, the military forces are the only useful tool the country has for facing them. According to Clausewitz, the most effective way of defeating the enemy is to fight.<sup>36</sup> The drug cartels in México represent a powerful organization that has different strengths, such as: defined structures in each drug cartel, including leadership, groups and cells; powerful weapons, such as pistols, rifles, machine guns, and even grenades; and unlimited resources, such as money, bullet proof vehicles and trucks, and secure houses. These capabilities allow them to corrupt and coerce local authorities, even police. They conduct attacks against Mexican authorities, such as local and federal police, and even against the armed forces, creating fog and friction over certain areas. As Clausewitz said, "Fighting is the central military act to compel the enemy to do our will."<sup>37</sup> The uncertainty generated by this situation in some places, and the fact that local authorities are not capable of confronting this threat, means the Mexican armed forces have to confront, deter, and defeat the organized crime elements which jeopardize Mexican stability and national security.

The rationality of the Mexican government was evident in its development of a strategy to defeat the drug cartels. As noted earlier, war is a purposeful activity where the employment of force is used in order to achieve political goals.<sup>38</sup> In this case, the Mexican government's objective is to defeat the organized crime (end) and compel it to stop conducting illegal activities. Policy must drive strategy.<sup>39</sup> In this case, even though there is no clear national security policy document, the Mexican government has

developed a strategy against the drug cartels that includes the employment of all its national security tools (means). According to Clausewitz, victory achieved through the application of armed forces is the decisive factor in war.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, the military forces are conducting operations all over the country: in the most affected urban areas, in deployments to different rural areas, and in diverse check points along the drug traffic routes in the country (ways). However, the harder the military pushes, the harder the organized crime pushes back.<sup>41</sup> Organized crime has reacted to military activities by buying more weapons and equipment and attacking local police stations as revenge against the government. This has generated not only friction and fog between these two actors, but also increased the level of violence in Mexican society.

In general, the current military effort to defeat the cartels is insufficient over the long term and the lack of an adequate national security policy and the problem with the national security law complicates the situation. Therefore, a written and published national security policy and revised legal support is needed in the current Mexican strategic environment, in order to develop a successful long term strategy to defeat the threat posed by organized crime. In this regard, it is necessary to strike directly at the means of organized crime. If the intention is to overcome the enemy (organized crime in México) one must match the effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed as the product of two inseparable factors: the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, organized crime in México has to be attacked in three ways: first, find, address, and block its economic strength which is its center of gravity; secondly, disarm it completely and keep it from getting any machine guns from

México and abroad; third, destroy the morale of organized crime by all means, including by using the military forces.

The previous analysis of the overall conflict in México demonstrates that organized crime is a threat to the nation that the Mexican government is facing. There have been some successes in this conflict for the government. After six years of confronting the drug cartels, the rates of murders are down seven percent, and 20 of México's 31 states have recorded a decline. President Calderon described it as a "turning point."<sup>43</sup> The military operations all over the country have successfully degraded the capabilities of the drug cartels. As such, the new government will have to decide whether to continue or redefine the current strategy. More importantly, it will have to develop a coherent national security policy (and a national defense policy), in order to protect Mexican sovereignty, territory, and the people against identified threats.

#### Military Misalignment

All the military forces around the world are an essential part of their nation's power. They are often essential for ensuring national security and achieving national objectives. Each government has to identify its national security challenges and threats, and develop a national security policy, in order to provide strategic guidance to all government agencies, especially to the armed forces which are responsible for the national defense. Governments must also develop coherent and adequate strategies to ensure they are able to face any challenges to the nation. The Mexican military is falling behind in this area and it is misaligned with regards to the necessities of the strategic environment. This misalignment is primarily due to the current ambiguous national security guidance and the government's limited understanding of the strategic

environment. To correct the misalignment it is necessary for the armed forces to take certain measures to ensure they will be able to successfully accomplish the missions given to them by the government, in particular dealing with organized crime, but also to enable them to improve their organizational effectiveness in the future.

Organizational cultures are not good or bad, right or wrong; rather, they are either aligned or misaligned with the strategic environment.<sup>44</sup> The Mexican armed forces have placed little importance on recognizing critical issues inside the defense establishment which limits their ability to deal with national security threats and challenges. Therefore, this part of the paper will identify, analyze, and discuss critical issues within the Mexican military that constitute obstacles to its being a successful organization. At present the current national security policy provides neither the necessary guidance for the military to face current national security threats, especially organized crime, nor enables it to successfully face future challenges.

Two critical issues are facing the Mexican military and they are culture and doctrine. First, the Mexican military is isolated. The Mexican armed forces generally have limited cooperation or participation in joint and interagency operations to confront current domestic threats. Each service of the armed forces is also reluctant to understand the strategic environment outside the service and this impedes the military's ability to respond and adapt effectively to current and future institutional and national security challenges. Second, the outmoded military doctrine impairs internal integration making the military unable to perform successfully in the current environment. These critical internal issues constitute a clear obstacle to the Mexican military's ability to be an effective organization now and in the future. Unfortunately, these issues are

generally not considered a problem. Instead, the current culture and doctrine are seen as inherent to the military identity, tradition, behavior, and values shared by the armed forces.<sup>45</sup>

In the security domain, the previous Mexican president, Felipe Calderon, at the beginning of his administration stated that the defeat of organized crime with all elements of national power was a priority to his government. The achievement of national objectives against organized crime and in the present environment requires a holistic approach that includes unity of effort and effective coordination and cooperation among all institutions and agencies. In the case of organized crime, the national objective implied the commitment of the armed forces and all the national agencies and institutions responsible for facing the threat. However, the activities conducted by the Mexican armed forces within the country have exhibited only limited unity of effort, across service and interagency lines. The deep cultural and doctrinal differences between the armed forces and national agencies (how to think, how to evaluate risk, how to define problems) and overall mutual ignorance created a gap between the military and civilian agencies.<sup>46</sup> In many cases, Mexican officials have been unable to achieve any progress during long interagency meetings in which representatives were trying to reach agreements on operational procedures, intelligence coordination, and personnel and logistical cooperation. These efforts (meetings) instead of being the means to achieve the end became the ends. These unsuccessful coordination meetings caused many difficulties, and created misunderstandings and mistrust among the military and the other agencies. As a consequence, the armed forces decided to focus

on defeating organized crime by themselves and with a little superficial coordination and interaction with other agencies.<sup>47</sup>

Even though the different services in the armed forces (army, navy, and air force) are under the same cultural umbrella, there are some cultural misalignments that affect coordination and cooperation between the secretary of national defense (army and air force) and the secretary of the navy in joint operations. Despite the fact that the Mexican armed forces share a common cultural framework, such as their way of thinking, planning and training, as well as doctrine and hierarchy, there have been rivalries between the services that inhibit an integrated effort in joint operations. For instance, in facing the primary national security threat, organized crime, the services have the same objective (to defeat organized crime), but they operate separately with their own ways and means and without clear common objectives and effective coordination. These discontinuities stem from an unwillingness to integrate operations, share experiences, knowledge, and valuable information due to the desire to gain higher prestige and national reputation. Therefore, there is no unity of effort which would enhance effectiveness. Instead, there is friction, mistrust, and misunderstanding between the services. This lack of cooperation and coordination complicates joint operations and harms national security. A cultural and doctrinal change is required in order to make the military more effective and better able to face current national security threats.

As noted earlier, another critical issue that impairs military operations is the antiquated Mexican military doctrine. Outdated doctrine hinders operations and the armed forces' ability to respond to current and futures challenges and threats. The doctrine has not captured the lessons learned from global operations conducted by the

many militaries throughout the world who are engaged in 21<sup>st</sup> century, asymmetric warfare against non-state actors. It is crucial for the Mexican armed forces to revise and modernize their military doctrine in order to be an effective institution and successfully face current and future challenges and threats to the nation, such as organized crime among others.

Finally, the lack of a national defense policy which should constitute the specific strategic guidance for the Mexican military forces to accomplish national security objectives has resulted in the armed forces being misaligned with the strategic environment. In addition, the Mexican military isolationism has limited its participation in joint and interagency environments. This is compounded by outmoded doctrine that is mired in mostly conventional operations and which has limited the military's ability to perform successfully in the current strategic environment. Unfortunately these cultural issues have little importance to the armed forces leadership. New inspired and energetic leadership must overcome these cultural and doctrinal issues. It must embed structural changes in systems and procedures, build trust, and enhance the unity of effort between the services in the armed forces, as well as increase interagency participation so as to create an efficient and successful organization which is able to operate successfully in the current and future strategic environment.

### Conclusion

México and its armed forces are facing enormous challenges in the 21 century in the security domain. The complexity of the threats such as organized crime challenge Mexican stability, provoking uncertainty and threatening national security. It is necessary for the Mexican government to identify, address, and, if necessary, defeat

identified threats in order to protect its population and achieve national security objectives. Current Mexican national security policy does not provide clear strategic guidance for all government agencies and the armed forces as they face current threats and challenges. The confusing and controversial evolution of “national security” and the government’s past limited ability in identifying national security challenges have made it crucial for the Mexican government to develop a coherent official, and published national security policy. It is necessary as well to update the national security law so that it fits Mexican reality. The current national security law is limited in scope and it is unable to support the armed forces in dealing with organized crime, which is the prime Mexican national security threat. Moreover, due to the limited strategic guidance, military activities and operations have reflected limited participation in joint and interagency operations.

It is time to break paradigms. It is essential for the new government to develop a new Mexican national security policy (and a supporting national defense policy). The policy must be oriented to the contemporary world and face current challenges and threats in a comprehensive way. It must provide strategic guidance to all government agencies, and especially to the military forces that are responsible for defending the nation and protecting national sovereignty, territory, and the domestic population. Furthermore, it must identify national security threats, strategic objectives, legal considerations and responsibilities, and synchronize joint and interagency operations. It must be a published policy that provides the doctrine for national defense.

Equally importantly, the Mexican military needs to modify structures, systems and procedures, and update existing doctrine to enhance unity of effort among the



different services (army, navy, and air force) and increase interagency cooperation and coordination. This will ensure the military can become an efficient and successful organization aligned with the strategic environment.

After this effort, México can start thinking about changing its perspective regarding military participation in multinational operations in order to contribute to global, regional, and national security in the 21 century. México cannot afford to be isolated any more in the security arena.

### Endnotes

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