

Mexican Security and Defense Doctrines: From the 19th to the 21st Centuries

RAUL BENÍTEZ MANAUT

Center for North American Research-UNAM, Mexico

The debate over security and civil-military relations in Mexico has been conditioned by a series of external and internal variables. The end of the Cold War has aided Mexico's democratization. Also, there have been domestic developments that have begun to shape civil-military relations. An active civil society has been created which has been complimented by parallel processes like a renewed respect for human rights, a reduction in acts of impunity committed by the state's military and police forces, and the construction of a modern political party system. In sum, the reform of the Mexican state has slowly abolished the authoritarian style of decision-making by controlling government corruption and reforming the country's economic and political structures.

Following the 1988 electoral process, pressure began to grow from civil society, political parties, and the international community for Mexico to democratize. The existing authoritarian political regime, based on the hegemonic control of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), was weakened under these demands. Security threats arising from the state apparatus have been redefined with the process of democratization during the 1990s and the introduction of NAFTA (1994) as well as other new schemes for economic and commercial integration. New social conflicts and the rise of "inter-mestic" phenomena like drug trafficking and organized crime have had repercussions on Mexico's national security.

These security issues have become chal-

lenges for Mexico's continued democratization as has been evident with the crisis in Chiapas. As a result of these difficulties, there has been a process of remilitarization in some parts of the country and within certain state institutions, principally those concerned with law enforcement, the administration of justice, and public security. Consequently, one can say that the obstacles to Mexico's democratization have also become national security issues.

THE MILITARY AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE REVOLUTION

Due to the lack of a strong civil society and developed government institutions, the armed forces in Mexico have historically played a key role in political leadership, in constructing the state apparatus, and in creating social cohesion. The military was an important factor in the process of national integration in Mexico. In the nineteenth century, it was the main political institution due to the wars with the United States, with France, and between conservatives and liberals in Mexico. The armed forces remained in a position of prominence in the century that followed and were the main institution behind the regime of Porfirio Diaz, whose fall marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

Once the military phase of the revolution was over, the armed forces continued to control Mexico during the long period of the state's reconstruction and consolidation (1917-1940). Every important policy that was implemented in these years was developed



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and supported by the military, including agrarian reform and the formation of the country's main political party, the PRI between 1929 and 1946. The PRI was a necessary and vital tool during this period because of the urgency to demilitarize the country's social and political relations in an orderly manner under the control of a new elite. The force and influence exerted by the armed forces in the design of the state was precisely the reason why the military was able to maintain a high degree of autonomy within the new structure and why they decided to support the new political elite. It was a harmonic relationship that continued even during the darkest crises in Mexico.

Since the 1990s, the social function of the military as well as its institutions have been reconfigured, but it has not greatly altered the civil-military pact that has prevailed since the 1940s. This agreement was based on the premise that the military would back the revolutionary elite and defend the civilian authorities "with shield and sword" while the elite, in exchange, would maintain absolute respect for the armed forces. This pact of mutual respect was what allowed the PRI to lead the country out of the revolution and to reformulate itself as a political machine for controlling the state—including the military—during the decades that followed. Therefore, while the armed forces can be considered the Mexican state's founding fathers, they only intervened when the PRI ran into trouble or asked them for help. They never had direct control over the functioning of the political system. This characteristic prevented the military from becoming a destabi-

lizing political factor as occurred with the armed forces of other Latin American countries.

MEXICO'S ARMED FORCES IN THE 1990S

During the decade of the 1990s, the Mexican state was remilitarized through the placement of military personnel in high-level positions within the government's public security forces. This shift occurred primarily during the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gotari (1988-1994). There was also a proliferation of operations under President Salinas that involved the armed forces in Mexico's fight against crime, drug trafficking, and armed movements such as the EZLN, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Turbiville 1997).

These events of the 1990s reveal an interesting correlation between Mexico's tendency toward militarization and its inability to govern; when the country's institutions are able to resolve political conflicts without the use of force, the military repositions and professionalizes itself, allowing the political system to become demilitarized. However, when instability arises in different segments of society or regions of the country, such as after 1985 when the PRI's power began to decline, the party uses the military as a mechanism of social dissuasion and to support the efforts of other agencies in maintaining public order. As a result, the political system militarizes itself as it did in 1968 after Tlatelolco.

Under President Salinas, militarization occurred both in qualitative and quantitative terms. By 1999, the number of personnel within the armed forces rose to 232,000 and the military garnered 0.60% of a significantly expanded GDP. This can be contrasted with defense spending at the beginning of the 1990s, which was only 0.48% of Mexico's national income.

The rise in spending can be linked to the fact that during the 1990s, there arose a serious challenge to the structure of the Mexican state. For the first time in the twentieth century, the opposition party gained a majority in Congress and began to demand accountability in the government's actions, including those of the armed forces.

However, the institutions of the state that were related to national security and defense did not undergo the reforms necessary to adapt to the new political situation in the country. Mexico's armed forces have maintained their tradition of rules, structures, and doctrines that date back to the 1930s and

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The project on "Creating Community in the Americas" is supported by a generous grant from the **Ford Foundation**.

Latin American Program Director: Joseph S. Tulchin
 Creating Community Project Coordinator: Meg Ruthenburg
 Translation and Summary: Pablo Iragorri
 Editing and Layout: Craig M. Fagan and Audrey Yao



the unspoken pact established in the 1940s with the new political elite. Consequently, it must be said that the Mexican armed forces have not gone through the same simultaneous process of democratization and demilitarization like other Latin American militaries (i.e. Argentina, Brazil, and El Salvador, among others).

Currently, there are three missions for the armed forces ascribed by the Constitution which could be used to better regulate the armed forces' actions. The first, DN-I, is related to the military's preparation for external defense. The second, DN-II, serves to guarantee the internal security and social peace of Mexico while the third, DN-III, is connected with the military's protection of the population in cases of natural disasters. Given the present geopolitical situation, the DN-I measure remains purely hypothetical because Mexico has no external enemies. The DN-III plan, in place since the 1970s, is a well-regarded military mission that has been successfully invoked in many natural disasters in Mexico and throughout Latin America. As for the activities set out in DN-II, the armed forces are presently confronted with a dilemma. They either will be forced to support a state that cannot sustain its own political stability, which in turn forces the military to intervene to maintain the social order, or they will serve a modernized and reformed state that requires the armed forces to operate in a professional capacity precluding their political involvement.

The modernization and professionalization of the armed forces will not come about as a result of the military's own actions. Rather, it is linked to the country's transition to democracy and depends on the ability of other state agencies to solve the country's multiple social conflicts. Only if these processes are successful will the military be able to concentrate on their central constitutional mandate and not on providing social peace and internal security. The failure of the Mexican state to respond to internal conflicts and to correct the country's semi-feudal power

structures has caused an unhealthy overextension of the military's duties into social spheres. Policies that address the root causes of the military's extended engagement will be the only way to keep the army in the barracks. For instance, the existence of non-governmental armed groups that control many parts of the countryside must be addressed. To rectify this problem, the state should end the tradition of "caciquismo" and uphold the rule of law in all rural areas in order to free the army from the responsibility of providing for these citizens' security. If Mexico



On Sept. 5, 2001, Dr. Raul Benitez Manaut met with other working group members of Creating Community in the Americas, a Latin American Program project.

wants to modernize and professionalize the function of its armed forces, it will have to address these and other issues that have come to threaten the nation's governability. In the meantime, the challenge of the armed forces is to modernize their combat style, taking into account respect for the human rights and political rights of the population.

The end of PRI's hegemony following President Vicente Fox's triumph in 2000 has generated many questions about how to redefine the role of the armed forces in Mexico. It has also raised a larger debate about the creation of new non-military government institutions and agencies to deal with the country's social issues. However, the danger is that the magnitude of the transformations which the state must undertake concerning the military is so great that the armed forces could begin to question their own loyalty to the state.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: MEXICO'S ARMED FORCES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As examples from around the world have shown, armed forces that are modernized and professionalized are composed of soldiers who are highly educated, well paid, and adequately trained. They have access to the most advanced technology, equipment, and defense doctrines available. The capacity to collaborate in humanitarian missions conducted by either their country of origin or international organ-





izations has become an important characteristic of professionalized forces over the past decade.

In the case of Mexico's attempt to modernize its armed forces, there continues to be a contradiction between their previous functions under the PRI and their new roles in fighting drug trafficking and assisting in humanitarian operations. This conflict exists despite the use of globally-accepted principles of military conduct to professionalize Mexico's armed forces. Nevertheless, globalization has had a positive impact on the doctrines of the Mexican armed forces. The new democratic political order of the country has been fully respected and it now seems very unlikely that the Mexican military would ever become "repoliticized." Another positive effect of globalization has been the armed forces' increased respect for the inherent rights of the population and the decrease in the military's attitude of impunity.

Changes to Mexico's military apparatus have also occurred as a result of transnational forces that are slowly influencing the missions, doctrines, and training of its armed forces. For example, the United States has pressured Mexico to be involved in the war against drug trafficking and in instruments of collective security (such as the

Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and the Inter-American Defense Board). However, the tendency has been for Mexico to refuse to participate in military operations, due to its foreign policy stance of non-intervention, and only to send troops abroad in humanitarian missions.

In the future, the activities of the Mexican armed forces will most likely oscillate between internal and external missions. In the medium-term, however, their internal operations to maintain public order and social peace in Mexico will not be eliminated due to the slow process of creating civic institutions that could replace the military's function in these missions.

In the end, the consolidation of democratic civil-military relations depends on the reform of the state. There has been a tendency to use state reform as a way to consolidate civil-military relations and to subordinate the armed forces to civilian powers. The success of these attempts, however, will be closely linked to the government's ability to achieve political control over the social and economic situation of the country, which has become increasingly threatened by the prevalence of poverty.

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