



# Continuity in Mexico's security police and historical institutionalism

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## **CONTINUITY IN MEXICO'S SECURITY POLICE AND HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM**

**ANAÍS MEDEIROS PASSOS<sup>1</sup>**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper intends to analyze the historical evolution of military involvement in internal security affairs of Mexico since the late 1940s. Recently, many critics have written extensively about Mexico's heavily militarized policy towards drug trafficking and the organized crime (f.ex: Moloeznik 2010; Manaut 2009; Artz 2003). But without recognizing the historical continuities underlying such policy model, we cannot fully comprehend its origins and effectiveness. Historical-institutionalism is a useful theoretical approach when we are dealing with slow-moving process not captured by a short-time perspective. This approach has emphasized how things that have been institutionalized are inert and un-changed (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). They consider institutions to generate different sets of power distribution that can be changed according to the actors' will. Pierson (Pierson 2000) in the work "Politics in Time" has argued that since what characterizes science is the discovery of causal relations we should consider time itself as an intervenient variable. In fact, causes and consequences may be separated over time and it may be useful to stretch the temporal horizon of a given analysis.

In the first section of this paper, I will explore historical institutionalism and the main theoretical predictions on how institutions can be a strong obstacle against change. More specifically, I will briefly present the work of Pierson. In the second section I will analyze Mexico's most important events concerning public security and militarization in the light of the theories previously presented since late 1940s. Lastly, I will proceed to our final conclusions and remarks.

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## **HISTORICAL NEOINSTITUTIONALISM**

How and why public policy tends to change is a contemporary question that has guided interesting research by political scientists, historians and sociologists. For example, Muller (1992) has emphasized how the relation between international and local factors has led to the decadence of the French sectorial corporatism. Hall (1993) has elaborated how social learning, together with sociological factors, may contribute to change political paradigms that guide public policy. Notwithstanding, if we are dealing with events that are characterized more by continuity than change, a different theoretical approach can be more appropriate. Historical institutionalism has been defined (Pierson and Skocpol 1997) an approach that underlies how institutions are simultaneously a way of decreasing uncertainty when actors behave strategically and of framing a vision of world that defines certain lines of actions.

It is important to emphasize that although continuity is the main topic addressed by historical institutionalism, those approaches have also developed different answers to the issue of institutional change. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) have emphasized how internal change in power distribution engendered by subversive actors can promote gradual but powerful institutional modifications. By contrast, Pierson (2004) stresses how external chocks can generate impact over institutions and promote change.

Pierson (2004) argues that time and sequence matter. That is why certain trajectories when started are difficult to reverse: the advantages of the current activity usually surmount those of change. Path dependence refers to social processes that are self-reinforcing, entailing positive feedback and generating “branching patterns of historical development” (Pierson 2004, 21). According to the author, path dependence can actually explain most of the important events in social history.

A second point made by Pierson pertains to the phenomenon of “increasing returns”, related to the first set of characteristics. This concept means that actors usually have an important reason to remain in one direction once the initial move has been taken towards. Technological development can actually help to elucidate many features of social interactions and consequently those of increasing returns (*ibidem*, p. 24). There

are considerable start-up costs that may at first discourage new social initiatives. But they also generate a high payoff for further investment in a given technology once the initial costs have been overcome. Secondly, learning effects encourage that once people acquire the knowledge necessary to handle with complex systems, higher returns will be gained from a continuing use. By its turn, coordination effects refer to the fact that technology may include network externalities, especially when they are connected with a given infrastructure. So people will be more willing to do further investment in the already existing technology. Lastly, Pierson emphasizes the role of adaptive expectations. Calculations about future are adapted to the current situation and tend to be self-fulfilling. That is, changes are not very welcome when someone has made his/her entire future plans since there is a current expectation that things will remain the same.

Microeconomic theory has based many findings on these features to explain the unequal and ever-lasting character of international trade. Pierson innovates by adapting them to politics. Positive feedback tends to prevail in politics due to a number of characteristics that are present in social relations. For instance, collective actions embody a diffuse relation between efforts and outcome. That is precisely the dilemma of collective action outlined by the literature. Frequently, the incentives for behaving as a free-rider surpass those of engaging for the pursuit of a common good. Adaptive expectations, meaning that everything depends on the other(s), are a key-point for strategic behaviors. Institutions that generate collective agreements mandatory for all individuals are a way of surmounting those dilemmas of actions, in a context of complex interdependence. Again, institutions tend to reinforce a given path and reward those that follow it.

The high degree of uncertainty and information asymmetry in politics gives incentives for actors to be more conservative and follow their present mental maps. We can expect a general tendency of conservative behavior in politics due to the complexity and limited nature of available information. Lastly, an actor that imposes his/her political authority by coercion to other actors can increase even more information asymmetry.

In addition to those characteristics, the author identifies the reasons why positive feedback can be especially intense in politics. Agents act with a short-time horizon, meaning that they are mostly worried with elections that at its best refer to a mandate for the next six years in office. There are also strong incentives for maintaining the

status quo because politics are complex and uncertain. And, differently from the price-mechanisms that help to allocate resources with best efficiency, there is an absence of mechanisms for efficiency and learning in politics.

When the process of self-reinforcing is present in politics, a number of characteristics will also be present. Inertia, meaning that when a process is going on, positive feedback tends to generate a balance and discourage change. Contingency, referring to the fact that small and perhaps insignificant events can create, in a given juncture, ever-lasting effects. And a multiple balance, because a given initial set of conditions embodies multiple and diverse outcomes. Together, these characteristics may increase even more the complexity and uncertainty underlying decisions in a political environment.

Since we do not intend to summarize all Pierson's argument, we will just add that he identifies what he calls threshold effects in big slowing processes. Change may occur in a very gradual and slow way. In many cases, those cumulative forces may have a very modest effect over the variable of interest until they reach a critical level that can stimulate major changes (Pierson 2003). That's why certain big, slow-moving processes can be invisible when our analysis is restricted to a short-time horizon.

## **SOME USEFUL CONCEPTS AND LEGAL DEFINITIONS**

Before proceeding to the next section, it is useful to clarify some concepts and legal definitions mentioned in this paper. Militarization has been used by different authors (f.ex. Artz 2003; Freeman and Luis Sierra 2005; Fazio 1996; Moloeznik 2010) to explain how civil-military relations in Mexico have evolved recently. Artz (Artz 2003) says that militarization is not only the presence of military members in traditional civil government areas (public security, attorney general, intelligence service). It also refers to a broader process where there's no investment in checks and balances mechanisms and most part of human and economic resources are directed to the military establishment. Zaverucha (Zaverucha 2008, p. 5) defines it as a process where Armed Forces' values get closer to those of society. Lastly, for Dunn (J. Dunn 1996a) it is a direct and indirect involvement of military forces in tasks of law enforcement.

The Program for National Defense (2009-2012) posits that national security involves “The protection of the Mexican nation against threats and risks faced by our country”, among them are armed groups, organized crime, borders vulnerability and the drug trafficking. Today one can argue that there is not a clear definition of external defense and internal security in Mexico’s legislation. But that is connected to the inherent nature of those menaces that have a transnational *modus operandis*.

According to the Organic Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force (26/12/1986) the Mexican Army and Air Force have, among their general missions, to guarantee internal security and external defense. As Sandoval (Sandoval Palacios 2000, 2) writes, public security and internal security have been gradually interpreted as equivalent and interchangeable terms. Additionally, more than one legal interpretation have classified as legitimate in Mexico their involvement with tasks related to public security (Artz, 2003)<sup>2</sup>

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Loveman (Loveman 1999) analyzes the case of Latin American armed forces and their relation to the nation. Based on a cultural approach and historical institutionalism, he develops an interesting portrait of continuity in civil-military relations in Latin America. The role of the military is not only defined by constitutional and legal norms, he argues, but also by a set of beliefs and expectations consolidated throughout decades and that form part of national political culture, which reflect both the military tradition of Iberia and the legacy of Portuguese and Spanish colonialism. As part of Latin American political culture, armed forces historically are seen as guardians in a “protected democracy”, that have to defend the nation from both internal and external threats (*ibidem*, xiv). Military officers usually say they are subordinated to civilian authorities, with the exception when they perceive that civilians have exceed their power or the nation is in danger. In fact, it’s a common practice in the region that constitutions assign

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<sup>2</sup> Artz (2003, 64) mentions the following documents: Interpretation regarding art. 129 of the Federal Constitution– Marzo 1996 and Jurisprudencial Tesis 1989 Octava Época, Instancia: Tribunales Colegiados de Circuito. Semanario Judicial de la Federación, Tomo: II, Segunda Parte- 1, pag. 61. Cita en Alejandro Carlos E. (2000) Derecho Militar Mexicano, Editorial Porrúa. México.

to the military several political guardianships such as “upholding the constitution, maintaining law and order, and the overall tutelage of the nation’s sovereignty” (*ibidem*, xiii). So it’s a central issue who and how someone can decide if the nation is in danger.

Historically analyzing the presence of the military in national administrations, the author begins his study at the 18th century. Early as 1780, military reforms have consolidated the role of captains-generals as one of the most important administrative officials in Iberian America, also giving them a permanent role in maintaining internal order and fighting political subversion. In fact, Loveman says that the military were the first national institution in Spanish America (*ibidem*, 15). This fact helped to consolidate the military’s identity as guardians of the nation. Throughout the 19th century, wars and rebellions were constant and we’ve assisted to a gradual militarization of Latin America with the political prominence of caudillos in national politics. They were generals and colonels once part of the rebel armies engaged with independent war, being rewarded with land grants for their service that keep doing politics according to their own objectives.

The Mexican Revolution that started in 1910 is a key event for understanding Mexico’s history. But actually we can trace back the historical patterns of military subordination and engagement in internal affairs to the period known as Porfiriato (1876-1911)<sup>3</sup>. Previously Mexico faced foreign invasion and a civil war. As the historian Jorge Alberto Lozoya writes, historically, the National Army has been oriented to internal rather than external operations. During the Porfiriato’s period, the army’s main mission was to protect the government system based on reciprocities (*sistema de fidelidades comprometidas*)(Lozoya 1976, 34) In fact, the political stability during Porfirio Díaz’s rule was a great achievement in the early history of Mexico, being know as “*la paz porfiriana*” (the profirian peace). López González (2012) writes that the Army converted itself into a guarantor of the President’s authority. Since there was no need to handle with civil or internal conflicts, the armed forces in this phase were mostly busy with internal security. Among their responsibilities, according to the author (*ibidem*, 66), was to suppress local rebellions and pacify or eradicate groups of bandits that were on the roads, between villages, cities and plantations. Also it is important stressing that these military officers had as mission to suppress political enemies of the regime and to

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<sup>3</sup> The name of the period makes reference to the domain of Gral. Porfirio Díaz, who ruled the country for 30 years.

collect information on subversive activity. Kidnapping, extrajudicial killings and torture were means largely employed to protect the Porfiriato regime from political dissent. At the same time, Lozoya (1976) identifies the first records of modernization inside the armed forces. All the programs organized by the Military College (*Colegio Militar*) were updated, following the French and German models. But these efforts were interrupted by the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

Concerning the employment of the military establishment as an instrument to protect the regime, Porfirio Díaz supported several measures that intended to neutralize their participation in politics. (Rouquié 2013, p. 83) writes that: “*L’ancien militaire putschiste se méfie de l’armée et des généraux* ». He reduces the size of troops and their budget, and also persecutes those that oppose to his policy. In 1880, 78% of state offices were occupied by military. This picture progressively changed. As Porfirio Díaz consolidated his power, military members gradually retreated from politics and administration.

The Revolution of 1910 contributed to the emergence of a new form of militarism. Ai Camp (Ai Camp 1992; Ai Camp 2005) is an author that has extensively explored the idea of Mexican Armed Forces as a professional corps created in the light of a social revolution. He stresses that in Mexico an army of civilian origin defeated the established military of Porfirio Díaz. Both political and military leaderships emerged from this experience in common. This shared political socialization may explain why this country is a unique case in Latin America of military subordination to civilian authorities. Such characteristic can also account, Ai Camp writes, for the prevention of a caste mentality among military officers. But at the same time they enjoyed good levels of autonomy in their corporative issues.

Notwithstanding, it is important to stress that until the creation of the National Revolutionary Party in 1929 (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PNR), power transitions were based in disputes between Army’s factions and the revolutionaries that usually ended with some kind of military conflict. The armed forces started to be insulated from politics with the presidency of general Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1949). Such tendency was consolidated by the next president, general Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), the last military president of Mexico’s history.



In 1945, when the PRM (*Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*) was reorganized and renamed as PRI (*Partido de la Revolución Institucional*), no military candidature was presented. Edwin Lieuwen writes that the social mission enjoyed by the armed forces as guardians of the nation during the first quarter of the Revolution had gradually been eroded. Eventually they became, “ a pliable and disciplined tool of the civilian leaders of the Mexican nation” (Lieuwen 1968, 149). From 1950 onwards, the author says that the deterioration of military’s influence in politics went along with the ascension of civilian political forces. While the decision-making process was in the hands of civilians, military increasingly lost political importance.

Although Lieuwen emphasizes the loss of importance of military members, the specialized literature on Mexican civil-military relations diverges on this issue. Apolitical could be an easy definition for Mexico’s Army after the Mexican Revolution, since the country did not face a military coup—making it unique amongst Latin American polities during the 1960s and the 1970s, as it enjoyed successive tenures by civilian governments. Notwithstanding, studies on civil-military relations in Mexico during the 1970s and the 1980s said that the political role played by the militia was far from disappearing.

Lozoya (1976) describes the gradual process of insulating Mexican military from politics and becoming professional, but he actually identifies a number of activities that were developed to sustain the regime, contradicting himself. He writes that history seems to demonstrate that the Mexican Army was always more in service to internal than external causes. Rural defense corps were composed of peasants, to guarantee internal order, controlling the rural population and the territory. Also, they created an extraordinary mechanism of information that permitted the national government to monitor any subversive activity against the regime. Clearly this rural militia was political. Additionally, the role played by the chiefs in zones (that correspond to the state boundaries) was also political, since these generals could replace the governors in case there was a conflict between the federal government and the state. Only after the second World War, a system of rotation in military zones would be institutionalized to avoid close political ties between generals and local political forces that could jeopardize PRI’s hegemony.

A second line of reasoning refers to specific roles played by the Armed Forces in more recent years. Authors such as Ai Camp (2005) and Ronfeldt (1985) have empirically demonstrated how the Armed Forces still conserve political roles through their strict loyalty to the Executive Power. According to Ai Camp (2005, 15–16) military's involvement with internal affairs has serious implications for democracy. Among the issues raised by such tasks are the exposure of high ranking officers to corruption, human right abuses without any punishment, enhancement of the military's public image in comparison to civilian authorities and the supremacy of the military over civilian authorities in many regions part of the anti-drug campaign such as Oaxaca, Sinaloa, Jalisco and Guerrero.

Ronfeldt (1985) envisages a potential closer cooperation between civilians and the military that could place them at a more central role into the political system at a moment where the PRI was starting to face a gradual loss of political strength. A modernized army corps, with improved institutional, technocratic and managerial skills could have extended roles in resolving the agenda on domestic and foreign security. But this, following his argument, would not provoke political instability and led to a military coup since the military's role were more likely to expand their roles in order to assist the civilian government, not to destabilize it, being support by the Executive. The central question is: has the security policy in Mexico been more militarized in the last twenty years, or are we just paying more attention to this fact? And how can we assess the degree of change behind it?

Historically, Mexican armed forces have been involved with multiple tasks typically carried out by civilian agencies. As early as 1938, Astorga (2007) identifies cases of eradication of crops at Sonora, with the support of agent Scharff from the United States Treasury Department. In the years after, more campaigns were deployed in the northeast of the country with the Army support and policy advice from US agents. On October 1947, the Attorney-General's Office, the National Defense Secretariat and the Public Health Secretariat deployed a new campaign (Astorga 2007, 57). The Army and the Marine provided support with personnel, weaponry and logistic for searching crops.

In addition to their role in the fight against drug trade, Ai Camp (2005, 100) stresses that civic action is another element of Mexico's residual political roles. Those policies are related with development projects and are directed to ordinary citizens, being a

component of the armed forces revolutionary tradition. Many analysts say this can blur the distinction between civilian and military missions, and also jeopardize civilian leadership. In the 1950s, the Army was involved with activities such as Little League baseball and the transportation of anti-malaria drugs. In the 1960s, almost 60% of military budget was destined to civic actions, including veterinary checkups and the distribution of potable water.

Ai Camp (2005) also stresses the historical connection of the Mexican Federal Security Department<sup>4</sup> with the military, a relation that was supported by an intentional civilian policy that saw the armed forces as an instrument to suppress political dissent. The 1952 edition of the basic manual on military ethics gave priority to the preservation of internal order while the defense of the national territory was placed at third. Between 1958-1959, the military was employed to suppress railroad works strikes and in 1960 the military was again used to repress telephone and postal workers. In 1968, a student demonstration was strongly repressed by military forces at Tlatelolco Plaza (*ibidem*, 102-103).

The ideology of internal warfare that influenced all Latin American countries in the Cold War era justified the employment of military forces to suppress insurgent movement. In Mexico, Monica Serrano writes that this goes on specially during the 1960s and the 1970s (Serrano 1995). Mainly in rural areas in the state of Guerrero, guerrilla groups were strongly combated by the armed forces. They were groups like the one formally known as *Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria* (ACNR), in the southeast, and *Partido de los Pobres*, that had many clandestine committees along Guerrero's Serra (López González 2012, 211–212). According to the author, it was not easy for military forces to adapt their operations for those areas. Initially (1970-1972) a high number of military members were seriously injured or dead during combat. But at the end almost all guerrilla groups were eliminated while several human rights violations were committed, during what it is known by Mexicans today as “*la Guerra Sucia*” (the Dirty War).

Decades later, in an official statement, the USA Secretary of National Defense said that national security was the third link necessary to strengthen Mexico-US relations (Fazio

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<sup>4</sup> It was the Mexican intelligence agency, created during Miguel Alemán administration. Its main objective was to preserve the stability against subversion and terrorism.

1996, 174). It is important to stress that low-intensity conflict (LIC) doctrines in the 80s were applied not only to counter insurgent movements, but also to fight against the drug trade. In fact, as Timothy Dunn explores in his book (J. Dunn 1996a), antidrug operations became one of the more dynamics components of LIC doctrine. Such policy principles were systematized during Reagan's administration (1981-1989), aiming to combat and suppress revolutionary movements in the Third World. LIC doctrine entails a set of sophisticated measures that ideally should be employed in advance, before an actual armed conflict takes place. Also, police and military functions tend to perform similar functions, blurring the line between them.

The issue of drug trafficking gained prominence during the 1980s, becoming a dominant element of both US domestic and foreign policies (J. Dunn 1996b)(Wola. Oficina de Asuntos Latinoamericanos en Washington. 1993). Reagan (1981-1989) and Bush (1989-1992) administrations coordinated highly publicized antidrug efforts to limit the supply of illegal drugs in the USA. According to (Isacson 2005) the War on Drugs provided a new rationale for military operations against an internal enemy in Latin America. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s Washington encouraged Latin American and Caribbean nations to militarize their counterdrug efforts through economic incentives and diplomatic pressure.

Employing around 10.000 Mexican soldiers, Operation Condor was an important event for the future of anti-narcotics campaign in the country. Its objective was to eradicate pavot and cannabis crops in the states of Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango (Astorga, 2007, 56). Jesús López-González (López-González 2012, 74) writes that “ paradoxically during a moment of low pressure from the United States, the Mexican government launched the strongest campaign ever known against drug trafficking in the country to eradicate illicit drug crops and dismember domestic drug-trafficking organizations”. Even though this military operation was successful in helping to reduce the offer of marijuana in the USA market from Mexico suppliers, (from 40 percent in 1977 to 3 percent in 1981), Colombian drug dealers soon filled this gap (*ibidem*, p. 74). In spite of this “half victory”, Operation Condor served as a model for a militarized policy to combat drug trafficking in Mexico, a tendency that would increase in the following decades.

The National Development Plan (NDP) elaborated during Carlos Salina de Gortari's term (1988-1994) contributed towards further institutionalization of the involvement of Mexican armed forces into internal affairs (Artz 2003, 6). Such document, that serves to set the priorities of security policy, recognized drug trade and trafficking as a serious threat to Mexico's national security. As a consequence, combating drug trafficking was a task incorporated into the realm of armed forces' general missions. Even though the NDP emphasized they should only assist the Attorney General, this relation soon evolved to a closer cooperation between the Attorney General's Office and the Defense Department (López-González 2012). These policies included military training for police members and the replacement of corrupt police officers by "trustworthy" military members.

In the next years, during Ernesto Zedillo's presidential term (1994-2000), a series of reforms were introduced in an effort to restructure and modernize the armed forces. Priority was given to the task of coordination of elite troops for deployment in urban and rural areas (Palacios, 2000, p.16) In 1995, the Law Establishing the General Basis of the National Council of Public Security provided a further justification for involving more military members in domestic affairs. This law gave a formal role to the military in public security decision making and policy making as an official member of the National Public Security Council (Freeman and Luis Sierra 2005, 268).

During the second half of Ernesto Zedillo's term, a National Campaign against the Crime (*Cruzada Nacional contra el Crimen*) was organized to reduce crime levels and modernize police departments. This operation was supported by Mexico's armed forces and sought to combat inefficiency and corruption among police officers. That same year, President Zedillo created the Federal Preventive Police, a new security agency that had almost 5,500 members coming directly from the Army and Navy (López-González 2012, 85). Lastly, a decision of the Mexican Supreme Court gave a further legal justification for employing the armed forces in public security operations. Such statement claimed that the armed forces were allowed to intervene in public security matters as long as civilian authorities requested to. (Moloeznik 2005)

An important clarification is about how drug trafficking has evolved in Mexico in the last twenty years. The specialized literature (Valdés Castellanos 2012; Astorga 2007; Moloeznik 2010; Rivelois 2004; Rivelois 1999) has classified the period from 1950 to

1980 as “*La Paz Mafiosa*”. These authors agree that there were collusive networks between drug dealers and state agents in several spheres of the government. The political system consolidated after the Mexican Revolution, especially since the creation of the PRI in the late 1940s, made it possible to concentrate power in the hands of the presidential authority. Consequently, the President was able to make political agreement with the federal, state and local level to accomplish his/her goals. Also, until the 1980s most part of drug trafficking in Mexico was controlled by two organizations, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Golfo Cartel. It was easier to control (or negotiate with) two criminal organizations than several smaller groups. Many authors say there was an informal agreement for a peaceful coexistence between these cartels and the government. While the former had permission to “do business”, the later was able to control violence levels and also get economic assets in exchange.

The imprisonment of important cartel leaders during the late 1980s, such as Rafael Caro Quintero, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo provoked fragmentation and the appearance of new criminal groups, such as the Tijuana Cartel, and Juárez Cartel. So in the 1990s a new phase begun, in which there was a constant dispute between criminal organizations to expand or regain their “territory” (Valdés Castellanos 2012). Together with the decaying of PRI, that since 1988 started to lose hegemony in state elections, this led to higher levels of violence in the 90s and following decades.

Vicente Fox (2000-2006) from PAN (*Partido de la Acción Nacional*) was the first president not belonging to the PRI to be elected since the creation of this political party. His election was historical for what is called as Mexico’s transition towards a less centralized and more democratic system (Ai, Camp 2014). Even though PRI was not the single existing party before, PRI’s candidates were able to perpetuate itself on power during decades. While this election has an important meaning for Mexico’s democracy and society as a whole, security policy has mostly maintained the same guidelines.

Vicente Fox designated a military general, Rafael Macedo de la Concha, to head the Attorney’s General Office. Such decision raised several criticisms. For example, Sigrid Artz (Artz 2003) identifies, as adverse effects, the jeopardizing of military’ and intelligence agencies’ professionalism. It was feared that it may provoke and increase tensions inside the Army and in their relation with the Attorney’s General Office. She

also posits that in the last years there was an increased deviation of the armed forces towards traditionally non-military tasks, such as fighting against the organizing crime and policing functions. This would also be strengthened, Sigrid Artz adds, because USA training and financial aid, a non-negligible amount, are directed to those issues. Consequently, there is an extra motivation to keep investing in this kind of militarized security model.

Since 2005, several special operations were realized in most violent areas throughout Mexico's territory (Astorga 2007, 234). They were part of the Plan *Mexico Seguro*. These operations by definition involved military members working along with police officers to counter drug trafficking and the organized crime. As in the low-intensity doctrine, civilian and military tasks appeared to be rather undifferentiated. In late 2005, an operation was conducted in the state of Guerrero (Dávila 2011). Next year, in November 2005 military members and the Federal Agency of Investigation engaged in joint operations in the city of Montemorelos (Nuevo León), near La Valentina's farm and El Bravo's farm, whose proprietary was assumed to be of the well-known drug dealer Joaquín 'el Chapo' Guzmán.

During his administration, Vicente Fox took several measures in order to restructure the security apparatus. He created the Secretariat of Public Security, a cabinet-agency level connected directly to the President and responsible for developing criminal policy. This agency was also in charge of cooperating closely with the Attorney General in combating drug trafficking and the organized crime. Roderic Ai Camp (2005, 118) writes that only two years in his administration 826 members of the Mexican army started to work in this agency. Additionally, the Army employed 33.794 troops monthly in 2001 in national security operations, representing an increase of 47 percent in comparison to 2000. The pattern of military involvement in internal security seems to have been remained unchanged.

Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), also from the PAN, took office on December 2006. Ten days latter, he announced a national campaign against drug trafficking declaring it as his government's top priority. Alain Rouquié (Rouquié 2013, 410) says this frontal attack led by the government against drug trafficking represents a rupture not only with his predecessor, Vicente Fox, fairly less active in this front, but also with the historical PRI's policy of peaceful coexistence with the organized crime. Providing security to

Mexican citizens is defined in the National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo – 2007-2012) as a guiding principle for all public policies led by the government.

Several measures were taken by the government, aiming to reform the security system (Calderón, 2012). For example, the creation of a Unified Criminal Information System (*Sistema Único de Información Criminal*) and of a new Federal Police (*Polícia Federal, PF*), replacing the previous Federal Preventive Police (*Polícia Federal Preventiva, PFP*). The former police model kept separate preventive measures and crime fighting. According to the former Federal Secretary for Public Security in office at the time, Genaro García Luna, they are part of a new security model in Mexico that emphasizes more a police empowered to conduct investigations and to systematize information based on intelligence processes (García Luna 2011, 24–25). Another legal innovation was the creation of a Special Unit for Federal Support attached to the Army, that gathered 7 thousand men and women to intervene for the benefit of order and public security, against the organized crime and any act threatening national security (DOF, 04/may/2007) All those initiatives were made in a context where the organized crime was fragmented, being present at the entire border with the United States (from Tijuana until Morelos) and also at the west coast, from Oaxaca to Sonora (Valdés Castellano, 2012, 364).

Plan *Mexico Seguro* was “radicalized” in his term, according to Felipe Calderón (Calderón, 2012, 8). In December 2006, Michoacán joint operation started, gathering 7000 men and women from the Secretariat of National Defense (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Sedena*), the Secretariat of Marine (*Secretaría de la Marina, Semar*), the Federal Preventive Police (*Polícia Federal Preventiva, PFP*) and the Federal Agency of Investigation (*Agencia Federal de Investigación, AFI*) and the Public Prosecutor’s Office (ASTORGA, 2007, p. 193). In the first half of 2007, four more joint operations were conducted in the states of Michoacán, Tijuana, Sierra Madre and Guerrero. On August 2008, a National Agreement for Security, Justice and Legality was signed between the federal and local governments to set guidelines for coordinating all state levels in security police programs. Such coordination was essential for allowing joint missions to take place. Military operations in the cities of Carácuaro and Nocupétaro (may/2007) were heavily criticized. The National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos*) received several complaints



involving illegal detentions, tortures and searches without a legal warrant in these areas (El Universal, 08/05/2007). In 2011 joint operations were again deployed in the states of Veracruz, Guerrero, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and in Laguna's region.

Charles Call (T. Call 2002) proposes a model that centers on the functions that were kept by the military after the transition and help to evaluate how much the Armed Forces are involved with internal security. He elaborates a security index to measure militarization before and after democratic transition, including variables such as: (1) the role ascribed by the Constitution to the armed forces in internal security, (2) the number of police officers that receives a formal military education, (3) military participation in intelligence systems, (4) main preventive officer's corps, (5) legislative supervision on police forces, (6) legal jurisdiction on police men and women, (7) police doctrine.

Jesus López Gonzalez (2012) applies this index to Mexico and concludes the country would have one of the lowest degrees of changing patterns of civil-military relations. Mexico would have militarized its system of public security after the democratic transition (2000), which is an uncommon event. How could we explain this kind of change? According to the author, by over evaluating the dimensions of historical dependence and critical junctures, we could underestimate the capacity of elites to change civil-military relations according to their short-term interests. The President, by delegating police functions to the Armed Forces, can show to the public he/she is responsible and committed with adopting "thought measures" in security. The extensive period of regime transition (that started with the state elections in 1988 and ended with the presidential elections of 2000) helped to promote a convergence of interests (*ibidem*, 50). At one side, the armed forces, willing to insulate the institution from judicial and legislative control. At the other side, politicians that needed to associate themselves with the military to gain credibility and electoral support.

Short-term interests and more pragmatic considerations may explain the increasing use of the armed forces in combating drug trafficking and the organized crime. The changing context of the organized crime during the late 1980s that entered into a more fragmented phase pressed governments to adopt tougher policies. Also the international context, with the USA leading a truly "war on drugs" and urging ally countries to join them into militarized practices. These events, together with the established role of the

armed forces in public security, helped to advance the military role in public security since the early 1990s with Ernesto Zedillo.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS**

It is clear that even before the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the armed forces have been involved with internal affairs in the country. Notwithstanding, since 1945 they have been outside electoral politics. We have not seen since then an attempt of coming back. Mexico's military was tamed by civilian authorities in a time where most Latin American countries were handling with civil-military coups and authoritarian governments. This political formula has been based on a exclusive subordination to the President in office<sup>5</sup>. Historical institutionalism can explain why the armed forces are now so present in public security, even though this approach is not helpful to measure the degree of change underlying this continuity. Attitudes, beliefs, military doctrine, and formal institutions (legislation, decrees, executive decisions) previously operating made it easier for presidents to further institutionalize and advance military's mission. If Mexico had a military that only fought international wars and was not present in domestic missions, presidents would find it harder to involve them in campaigns against drug trade and the organized crime. But this does not seem the case. As early as 1938 we have identified military participation in operations to destruct illegal crops. Additionally, civic actions and political repression were common missions for the armed forces under the PRI's rule. The combat of guerrilla movements, influenced by the internal warfare doctrine, was incorporated to the large realm of military missions during the 1960s and the 1970s. During the late 1980s, Mexico saw as increasing concern with drug trade and violence due to the fragmentation of criminal groups. This phenomenon was responded with more military, helping to institutionalize a security model that has increased since the democratic transition.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Jesús López González (2012) civil-military relations in Mexico are based on a dual relation of civilian control over the military. At the first level, the relation between the President and the Armed Forces is narrow and unequal, favoring the Executive's authority. Notwithstanding, at the other levels of public administration, where the Army interacts with other state agencies, the relation changes as a result of the new responsibilities that were delegated from the Executive to the military. Differently from what occurs at the top of the pyramid, the Legislative Power has a limited supervision over the Marine and the Mexican Army. They only report their annual budget appropriation to the Superior Federal Auditor. (p. 50-51)

Paul Pierson says that once a given direction is chosen, change is difficult because alternative paths are “obstructed” by this initial choice. Maintaining a chosen path is also awarded with increasing returns, since doing something we already know is easier than discovering something new and perhaps distant from our reality. Actually it does not make much sense to think actual security policies are blurring the line between national and internal security if historically there was not such division. Mexico’s military has been trained for ages to act in internal security affairs. It is less costly to invest in the already existing institution to combat new midlevel threats than creating a new professional corps to deal with such security menaces.

It is important to emphasize that adopting the “easiest and shortest” path may create new problems in the future for Mexico’s democracy. Since we are dealing with contemporary events, we are not certain how the continuous use of the military can affect their subordination to civilian authorities in a recent democratic system. Maybe we can be dealing with a “big-slowness process”, quoting Paul Pierson, towards a new model of labor division between civilian and military missions in security, with an intermediate civil-military security agency between. If that’s the case, political scientists, by focusing on short-term results, may lack the appropriate tools to assess what is going on Mexico and how the balance between civilians and military may be affected at the medium and long-terms.

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