

*The Mexican Armed
Forces in Transition*

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The Claxton Papers

The Queen's University Defence Management Studies Program (DMSP), established with the support of the Canadian Department of National Defence (DND), is intended to engage the interest and support of scholars, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, public servants, and participants in the defence industry in the examination and teaching of the management of national defence policy and the Canadian Armed Forces. The program has been carefully designed to focus on the development of theories, concepts, and skills required to manage and make decisions within the Canadian defence establishment.

The Chair of the Defence Management Studies Program is located within the School of Policy Studies and is built on Queen's University's strengths in the fields of public policy and administration, strategic studies, management, and law. Among other aspects, the DMSP offers an integrated package of teaching, research, and conferences, all of which are designed to build expertise in the field and to contribute to wider debates within the defence community. An important part of this initiative is to build strong links to DND, the Canadian Armed Forces, industry, other universities, and non-governmental organizations, in Canada and in other countries.

This series of studies, reports, and opinions on defence management in Canada is named for Brooke Claxton, Minister of National Defence from 1946 to 1954. Brooke Claxton was the first post-Second World War defence minister and was largely responsible for founding the structure, procedures, and strategies that built Canada's modern armed forces. As defence minister, Claxton unified the separate service ministries into the Department of National Defence; revamped the *National Defence Act*; established the office of Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, the first step toward a single Chief of Defence Staff; organized the Defence Research Board; and led defence policy through the great defence rebuilding program

of the 1950s, the Korean War, the formation of NATO, and the deployment of forces overseas in peacetime. Claxton was unique in Canadian defence politics: he was active, inventive, competent, and wise.

CANADA IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Is Canada an Atlantic regional nation or a western hemispheric nation? This question is odd, maybe even heretical and easily dismissed by Canada's international history. But in 2005, it is a question that deserves more than a passing regard. Many factors, including the fundamental changes to the structure of the North Atlantic alliance since the end of the Cold War, a more assertive European community, and increased trade and economic relations with Central and Latin America, have disturbed the easy assumption that Canada's interests can best be seen by looking out over the Atlantic Ocean.

By far the most disruptive factors, however, were created by the 9/11 attacks on North America. In an instant "defence of the homeland" became the sentinel issue in United States defence policy. Military commands were reorganized and bolstered, standing defence arrangements were realigned or new ones invented, and officers were redeployed to new duties. The most obvious and immediate change affected NORAD, its plans, organization and procedures. The second most significant change was the establishment of United States Northern Command. Although a Canada-United States Regional Planning Group has existed within NATO since its earliest days, planning for the defence of the continent has mostly been an air defence concern directed by the Pentagon and, after the end of the Cold War, not much of a concern at all. After 9/11, homeland defence became a wide-ranging national security responsibility embracing most departments and agencies of the United States government.

Continental defence, however, required Canadian cooperation, and gaining that cooperation required modifications to standing defence structures, including bringing NORAD into U.S. Northern Command and the integration of Canadian Forces officers and units into the new Command's plans and procedures. These changes fit easily into customary NATO, NORAD and Canada/United States (CANUS) organizations and understandings. Officers trained to watch over the northern approaches adapted readily to watching other horizons. Nevertheless, the customary threat assessments and lookouts did not address completely the threats

and vulnerabilities planners perceived following the attacks on New York and Washington. National defence required lookouts facing in every direction – to the south as well as to the north.

This basic conclusion turned the eyes of Pentagon planners towards Mexico and the Caribbean. Continental defence for the first time became a trilateral matter and, for Canadian Forces officers especially, introduced an entirely unfamiliar strategic dimension to Canadian defence policy and Canadian Forces operations.

Before the end of the Cold War, Canada had no Canadian Forces liaison officers in any capital south of Washington, although dozens of officers were deployed in Europe. Senior officers during this period attended meetings of various chiefs of staff sponsored by the Organization of American States, but until recently only as ‘observers.’

Her Majesty’s Canadian Ships paid port calls in the region from time-to-time, but interaction between military units from south of the United States and the Canadian Forces were sparse. When U.S. Northern Command drew Mexico inside its boundaries, the Canadian Forces were not well situated to understand the implications of this new arrangement.

Understanding the new arrangement involves more than discovering the military capabilities of the Mexican armed forces. Rather, the demands of continental defence outside the usual NATO context demands that Canadian Forces officers and government officials embark on a comprehensive investigation of the cultural, political, and military history of this large state. These studies, of course, provide the fundamental background to understanding of Mexico’s defence interests, policies and the “politics of national defence policy.” It is the politics of policy that is at the heart of international defence relations, for they define what might be possible (or impossible) when nations attempt to change policy intentions into viable outcomes.

Mexico shares with Canada and the United States a common history and many political concepts that shape its government, political culture and its armed forces. But there are important differences as well. If Canadian defence policies and bilateral military relationships are to prosper and provide for each state the defence outcomes they desire, then officers and officials need to become familiar with the history and the political culture of each others armed forces. This *Claxton Paper* is a step in this direction. It attempts to explain important aspects of Mexican military history and especially the changing nature of Mexican civil-military

relations in 2005. The paper emphasizes the high regard most Mexican citizens hold for their armed forces, and the important role the armed forces play in national development, especially in rural Mexico. The authors link these matters to policies that form the basis for military capabilities development, defence relations with the United States, and the professional development of the officer corps, among other things. These are the fundamentals that Canadian officers must understand as they become engaged with the armed forces of Mexico with the boundaries of Northern Command and in bilateral defence relations.

Canada's international relations in the western hemisphere are rapidly changing and reflect emerging conditions and new foreign and economic realities. Defence relations will invariably follow these leads and demand a greater awareness of the link between traditional policies for defending Canada and new links forged in the post-9/11 environment. Will Canada withdraw from the Atlantic tradition as it moves closer to the people and nations of the western hemisphere? Perhaps to some degree. But one outcome seems inevitable, Canada will increasingly see itself as a central member of every important issue that affects international relations on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Inevitably, defence relations will be a central feature of that transformation.

The authors of this *Claxton Paper* are especially placed to conduct this research and write this monograph. Dr. Jordi Díez studied Mexican security and defence policy and the internal workings of the Mexican Ministry of Defence as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto. He continued his work in Mexico, and wrote this paper as a post-doctoral fellow in the Defence Management Studies Program at the School of Policy Studies, Queen's University. He now teaches international relations and Latin American affairs at the University of Guelph.

Colonel Ian Nicholls, now retired, was the Canadian Forces attache in Mexico City, July 1998 to July 2001. In this position he developed a keen awareness of Mexico's military capabilities, policies and professional competence. He also established strong personal ties to senior military leaders in the Mexican armed forces and came to understand well their attitudes and ideas regarding North American defence planning. Colonel Nicholls' broad understanding of the Mexican armed forces and his continuing relationship with many of these officers and other leaders in Mexico greatly facilitated this research.

The *Claxton Papers* could not be produced without the continuing support of the dedicated members of the School of Policy Studies. Particular thanks are due to Lois Jordan, my ever well organized assistant. John Marteinson, former editor of the *Canadian Military Journal*, carefully edited this paper, adding to it his vast experience of things military and the demands of academic work. Mark Howes and Valerie Jarus, as usual, are commended for their usual, careful and helpful preparation of this publication.

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Acronyms

CENDRO	Centro de Control de Drogas / Drug Control Planning Centre
FFA	Fuerzas Federales de Apoyo / Federal Support Forces
FEADS	Fiscalía Especializada de Delitos Contra la Salud / Special Prosecutor for Drug Crimes
IFE	Instituto Federal Electoral / Federal Electoral Institute
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officers
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional / National Action Party
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República / Office of the Attorney General
PFPI	Policía Federal Preventiva / Federal Preventative Police
PRD	Partido Revolucionario Democrático / Democratic Revolutionary Party
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario / National Revolutionary Party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional / Institutional Revolutionary Party
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana / Party of the Mexican Revolution
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SEDENA	Secretaría de Defensa Nacional / Ministry of National Defence
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación / Ministry of the Interior
SM	Secretaría de Marina / Ministry of the Navy
TRIFE	Tribunal Federal Electoral / Federal Electoral Tribunal
UN	United Nations

Figure 1



CHAPTER ONE

North American Security and the Mexican Military

INTRODUCTION

Since coming to power in December of 2000, Mexican President Vicente Fox has continually expressed a willingness to pursue further North American integration beyond the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). At the Quebec City Summit of the Americas in 2001, for example, he declared his hope of moving toward a “North American Union” – an arrangement similar to the European Union that would involve a common currency, a customs union, new political institutions, the harmonization of a wide range of policies, and the establishment of a North American Regional Development Bank. The then-Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien received the proposal somewhat coolly, stating his view that North American integration should be strictly economic. U.S. President George W. Bush did not appear any more receptive to the idea. Fox has continued, nonetheless, to express his interest in further North American integration, but, despite having developed a close personal relationship with President Bush, his proposals have not got far: Bush has indicated that cooperation may be limited only to an immigration agreement.

The terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 significantly changed the foreign policy priorities of the Bush administration, to the extent that even an immigration agreement between the U.S. and Mexico may not now be achievable. Since September 2001, the U.S. has focused on issues concerning security and terrorism, and other parts of the world such as the Middle East have taken precedence over North American issues. Fox’s desire for closer North American integration does not appear to have abated, however, and he has in fact added a defence

component to his vision of a more integrated continental system. Soon after the attacks of September 11, he declared:

[W]e consider that the struggle against terrorism forms part of a commitment of Mexico to Canada and the United States, as a result of the need to construct the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement within which we build a shared space for development, well-being and integral security. At the hemispheric level, Mexico considers that the current struggle against terrorism is a basic component of our regional security that demands a redefinition of a doctrine of continental security and a redesign of the legal and diplomatic instruments for our legitimate defence.¹

More recently, at a meeting between Presidents Bush and Fox in Crawford, Texas in March of 2004, Fox spoke about a “North American Initiative” – a proposal to increase trade flow further and coordinate policies more closely, especially in the energy sector, as well as establishing a regional security framework that could protect the three countries from terrorism.

It remains to be seen whether a security system such as envisioned by Fox will ever be created. Formidable barriers – sensitivities in both Mexico and Canada about sovereignty – would first have to be overcome, and there has been little interest within the current political leadership in Canada or in the U.S. However, even if a continental security structure is not created, it is possible that cooperation among the three countries will increase. Indeed, at the Monterrey Summit of the Americas, Prime Minister Paul Martin declared that stronger relations with Mexico were a priority for his government. In terms of security, there has already been increased cooperation in areas such as the sharing of intelligence and the establishment of ‘smart borders.’ An example of such cooperation has been the decision by the Fox administration in December 2004 to allow FBI agents to operate freely at Mexico City’s airport inspecting ‘suspicious’ travellers – a development that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

It also remains to be seen what role the armed forces of the three countries might play in an eventual North American security structure, should it become a reality. Cooperation among armed forces of the three countries has indeed increased, especially between the U.S. and Mexico. The training of Mexican troops by the U.S. and the sharing of intelligence,

especially in regard to operations relating to the fight against drug trafficking, have grown in recent years, and there are signs that Mexican and Canadian military officials have at last increased interaction.

Whether the armed forces of Canada, Mexico and the U.S. take an active role in any continental security structure, or cooperate in foreign peace-keeping missions, one aspect of the relationship between Canada and Mexico that stands out is the scant knowledge that exists about the Mexican armed forces within the Canadian armed forces in particular, and the Canadian public more generally. This has in part been because the Canadian Forces has for decades worked mainly with the armed forces of NATO members, as well as because of the 'inward' orientation of the Mexican forces (unlike other Latin American countries that have taken part in foreign missions, such as Chile and Brazil, the Mexican military has focused almost entirely on internal matters such as drug trafficking and crime). This has resulted in very little understanding outside Mexico of the structure, doctrine, equipment or professional development of the Mexican armed forces.

Because of the possibility that the interaction between the Mexican and Canadian armed forces might increase – within or outside a continental security structure – or as a result of geographic proximity and the growing economic interdependence of both countries, better mutual understanding of the structure and inner workings of the other country's armed forces is not only desirable, but is also likely to be necessary in the future

The aim of this paper is to provide a general overview of the Mexican armed forces, with the intention of acquainting those in Canada, both military and civilian, with the Mexican armed forces and the changing nature of civil-military relations in Mexico. The authors hope that this will contribute to a better understanding in Canada of the history, structure and doctrine of the Mexican forces. We believe that this is long overdue, especially because of widespread misperceptions about the Mexican military that have been fuelled by allegations of human rights abuses and corruption within the officer corps. Although in some instances abuses certainly occurred, it should also be known that in Mexico the military is one of the most respected of national institutions among the population, and one on which many Mexicans depend, especially in rural areas, for things such as the delivery of medical services and natural-disaster relief.

The Mexican armed forces, we believe, are professional and well-respected institutions that are little understood outside Mexico, and about which the Canadian military ought to learn more.

The paper is divided into six chapters. The first places the formation of the Mexican military in historical perspective. This is important in that the distinctive characteristics of the Mexican armed forces are the result of very specific historical circumstances. Mexico is, after all, the only Latin American country not to have experienced a military coup during the 20th century. The second chapter provides an overview of the structure and organization of the Mexican armed forces, whose most notable feature is that there are only two distinct components: the Army, which includes the Air Force as a subordinate entity, and the Navy, which is smaller and generally more poorly funded. Unlike what has been the practice in most other Latin American countries, there has never been a single, unified national headquarters that exercised command over both components.

The third chapter of the paper deals primarily with three aspects of the Mexican military: its doctrine, its equipment and its professional development. The fourth chapter looks at the process of political change in Mexico over the last few years and the effects this has had on civil-military relations. As will be seen, it appears that the process of democratization the country is experiencing has altered some of the fundamental conditions that characterized civil-military relations since its revolution – the so-called ‘pact’ between the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the military – and that there are some areas in which progress needs to be made as the military still enjoys a significant degree of autonomy and lack of oversight by the civilian authority. The last chapter examines areas where military cooperation between Canada and Mexico might be possible.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Context: The Mexican Military under the ‘Perfect Dictatorship’

The political system that guaranteed more than seven decades of political stability in Mexico has been called the ‘Perfect Dictatorship’ by Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa². The system that emerged out of the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution – which spanned the period from 1910 to 1919 – was a well-developed mechanism of control and redistribution which depended on a delicate balance between cooption, selective repression and limited political freedom. It became an authoritarian-corporatist structure in which adherents were rewarded with material benefits, and opponents either co-opted or ultimately eliminated. It took the form of a hierarchical structure in which the various branches of government and social and political organizations (e.g., unions) were integrated vertically into the system, the whole controlled by the President at the top.³

One of the salient characteristics of the ‘perfect dictatorship’ was the absolute subservience of the Mexican armed forces to civilian authority. Unlike their Latin American counterparts, the Mexican forces never attempted to overthrow the government, nor did they intervene in domestic politics; they dutifully obeyed orders given by the President, to whom they gave unquestioned loyalty. The relationship between the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the military has been described as a ‘pact’,⁴ under which the PRI allowed full autonomy to the military in exchange for absolute respect for the civil authority. Because civil-military relations in today’s Mexico, as well as the structure and functioning of the armed forces, can only be understood within the historical context from

which they emerged, this chapter presents an historical overview of the armed forces in Mexico and their relationship with the PRI.

THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICAN ARMED FORCES

When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the 16,000 troops of the revolutionary army, called “The Army of the Three Guarantees”, became Mexico’s standing army; it was subsequently renamed the Mexican Imperial Army. The structure of Mexico’s first army replicated the Spanish colonial militia, in which officers were of Spanish descent and the rank-and-file were generally poorly-trained indigenous people who deserted frequently. As in most other Latin American countries, the half century following independence from Spain was characterized by social and political instability as the various factions and political forces vied for control and fended off foreign intrusions. The new nation dealt with a civil war between conservative and liberal factions, a war with the United States (1846-1848), and the French intervention of 1860. During this time, 50 governments rose and fell, and 30 men served as president.

The Army played an important role in the building of the country. Again, similar to what occurred in the rest of the region – and to what would later occur in other newly-independent developing nations – the Mexican Army was instrumental in building the state apparatus and providing social cohesion to the new political entity, all while centralizing power in Mexico City. The importance of the Army in the building of the country was such that for the first quarter century, in two out of every three years, its budget exceeded government revenues. After losing half of its territory to the U.S. in 1853, and after 50 years of instability, at the end of the 1860s Mexico began a process of state reconstruction, mostly carried out by the military.

It was during this process of reconstruction that in 1876 General Porfirio Díaz, ascended to the Presidency. Having experienced the political turmoil and violence of 19th century Mexico, once in office Díaz decided to curb the influence of the armed forces. He believed that the only way he could ensure that the military would not intervene in political affairs was to take power away from the officer corps. He thus embarked upon a process of providing significant material benefits and very generous salaries to the senior leaders who were loyal, and discharging

and forcing into exile those who opposed him. Díaz also co-opted potential opponents by promoting them to high-ranking positions, he established a personal constabulary (*rurales*) to crush opposition, and, to prevent enlisted soldiers developing strong personal loyalty to local commanders, he regularly shifted the commanders from place to place in the country's eleven military districts. At the same time, Díaz embarked on a process of professionalizing the armed forces, and he dramatically reduced the size of the Army. By the end of his term, there were only 20,000 enlisted soldiers and 4,000 officers, in a country of 14 million people.

While Díaz was successful in consolidating control over the military, he failed to appease civilian opponents. The centralization of power and flagrant contempt for democracy and political freedom – which involved a highly exclusionary style of policy making in the hands of a coterie of technocrats and the suppression of opposition among peasants, urban workers and the middle class – antagonized many elements within the country to such an extent that they took up arms. Díaz was finally overthrown in 1911, and in what was the bloodiest revolution in the hemisphere, more than one million people died, a tenth of the Mexican population. The ten-year period of the Mexican revolution was a time of extreme violence and chaos, during which all sorts of armed groups and factions (peasant movements, foreign troops and private militias) fought against one another. During the revolution, the size of the Army grew to over 80,000 troops, but they were poorly trained and badly led.

THE MILITARY AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The leaders that emerged victorious from the revolution all came from the Army, and they were to lead the state for several decades to come. This group, also known as the 'revolutionary family,' established a political pact with other sectoral interests and began the arduous process of re-building the state. They drafted a new constitution in 1917 and set about fulfilling the three ideological goals of the revolution: 'constitutionalism' – adherence to the liberal ideals guaranteeing individual rights enshrined in the constitution; social justice through improving living standards; and economic development. This revolutionary family, composed mostly of generals, responded to the population's desire for the restoration of political order through the establishment of a highly centralized political system that vested considerable powers in the president.

While the size of the military increased during the revolution, two general officers belonging to the revolutionary family became president in succession, Alvaro Obregón (1920 – 1924) and Plutarco Elias Calles (1924 – 1928). Both initiated a series of reforms intended to reduce the size and budget of the forces as well as to make them more professional. This was done in an attempt to de-politicize the forces and bring them firmly under civilian control. First, as had been done prior to the revolution, both purged the armed forces of rivals, or perceived rivals, by retiring hundreds of generals, arranging the mysterious disappearance of others, and bribing the rest. They filled the vacancies thus created with promising young officers who had graduated from the Colegio Militar at Chapultepec (created in 1917), dispatching some to areas where loyalty to the new regime was tenuous, sending others for training to military schools in Spain, Germany, France and the United States, and enlisting young men who had exhibited some loyalty to *caudillos* (regional strongmen). Second, with the assistance of the French, the Commission of Military Studies and the Superior War College were created in 1926 and 1932 respectively, with the intention of increasing both efficiency and professionalization. Third, the budget of the armed forces was cut almost in half.

While these reforms were successful in pacifying opposition, they were not enough to eliminate it completely. General Calles therefore decided to create a political party – the National Revolutionary Party (PNR)⁵ – with the aim of assuaging the political rivalries that remained among the various military *caudillos*. Controlled by the President himself, the PNR became a centralized political institution that forced military rivals to resolve their differences within the party in exchange for personal security, material goods and control over their regional areas. The establishment of the PNR coincided with the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s. As this global economic downturn severely affected the commodity-dependent Latin American countries, Mexico and the rest of Latin America adopted measures such as high tariff barriers in an attempt to protect their markets from foreign competition and spur internal production and consumption. What ensued was a process of state-led urbanization and an increase of the size of labour and popular organizations.

It was during this time of economic crisis (a third of the workforce was unemployed by 1933) and enormous social change that a well-respected general, Lázaro Cárdenas, was elected president. Cárdenas introduced

far-ranging changes to the political system that resulted in the consolidation of the national party and the establishment of a corporatist system with a populist veneer. These changes realigned forces and created political institutions that would last for several decades. Indeed, some of them, such as corporatist mechanisms of mediation, are still present. In 1938, Cárdenas renamed the party and integrated the labour movement as well as the peasant and popular organizations into the party's leadership. By this means sectoral leaders representing the various corporate groups (e.g., labour unions and the peasantry) exchanged party loyalty for material benefits. With remarkable political skill, Cárdenas managed to consolidate power in the office of the presidency and garner popular support for the new corporatist system through populist reforms that included land re-distribution, the protection of labour and nationalization of the petroleum industry. The new political pact guaranteed that the official party could rely on the many corporate groups to win elections in exchange for the provision of economic and political benefits.

Cárdenas also introduced a number of fundamental changes to the armed forces, some intended to reduce their power. For example, he divided the Ministry of War and Navy into two autonomous defence ministries, the Ministry of Defence, which included the Army and the Air Force, and the Ministry of the Navy.⁶ He enacted legislation barring serving officers from participating in any political activity. And, continuing earlier efforts aimed at the professionalization of the forces, he required all infantry officers below the rank of colonel to take examinations in military science, and made these competitive examinations a prerequisite for promotion. He passed the Law of National Military Service which established compulsory basic military training for eighteen-year old males. He also placed very heavy emphasis on the military's role in education and public works, rather than that as the guardian of national order. Thus, since the Cárdenas administration, the Mexican military has had responsibility for implementing the revolutionary ideals as part of its institutional culture. This, as we will later see, has been one of the reasons why the Mexican citizenry thinks very highly of the armed forces.

By the end of the Cárdenas administration, the Mexican armed forces had been weakened and brought under the control of the national party. During the 1940s, the military withdrew almost completely from the political process and agreed to support the civilian authority through the creation of what has been termed a 'civil-military pact'. That is, when the

first civilian president, Miguel Alemán, came into power in 1946, he accepted the authority that the generals of the revolution had given him in return for his absolute respect for the integrity of the military institution. For their part, the armed forces would give unconditional backing of the revolutionary elite and the revolutionary goals, unconditional loyalty and obedience to the civilian power. A fundamental component of this 'pact' was the significant level of internal autonomy that the military retained in both legal and real terms with regard to internal functioning, training and promotions, along with a high level of discretion in making expenditures.⁷ The pact was facilitated by a generalized rejection of violence by the population in the wake of the excessively violent period of the revolution, as well as by the successful professionalization of the forces in which the values of loyalty, discipline and subordination were emphasized.

This relationship between the PRI and the military became a strong and harmonious one that lasted for several decades. Just as in the case of the other corporate groups – labour, the peasantry and business – the armed forces were one of the pillars that sustained the regime. Unlike the practice in most other Latin American countries, the Mexican armed forces did not get involved in political matters, accepting subordination to the President in accordance with his constitutional mandate. This, some analysts believe, was one of the sources of political stability of the Mexican political system under the PRI.⁸ The armed forces, then, were the guardians not only of the Revolution, but also of the revolutionary elite.

While retaining its internal autonomy, the military was indeed called on by the PRI to assist in maintaining internal security. This was the case in 1958, when they were tasked to suppress a railroad workers' strike, in 1968 when they were asked to intervene against a student movement; and throughout the 1960s, when they were ordered to put down guerrilla uprisings, especially in the southern state of Guerrero. But these interventions were all temporary affairs, and the forces returned to their barracks once the situations were stabilized. What is important to note in all these cases is that the Army acted only at the behest of the civil authority. An observer has referred to this as a 'residual political role' of the armed forces, a form of duty carried out only in exceptional circumstances.⁹

As we will see in Chapter 5, several developments within the region, such as the Central American crises of the 1980s and the emergence of drug trafficking as a threat to national security, changed the role of the Mexican military as they acquired responsibilities well beyond acting as

guardians of the revolutionary family. In some cases these increased responsibilities sometimes put a severe strain on the civil-military pact. But throughout the PRI's 'perfect dictatorship', and until the PRI lost the presidency in 2000, the Mexican military acted as an armed branch of the state and adhered to the conditions implicit in the civil-military pact.

CHAPTER 3

Structure and Organization of the Mexican Armed Forces

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the structure of the Mexican forces is that there are two distinct components, instead of the usual three found in most countries. The largest, best funded and most important is the Army, which includes the Air Force as a subordinate entity. The second is the Navy. The two components do not come under a single unified commander at any level below the President. That is to say, there is no Minister of Defence as the term is usually understood. Instead, a Minister who is a serving officer – a four-star General in the case of the Army and an Admiral in the case of the Navy – heads each of the component parts. Each minister serves in a dual capacity: as a full cabinet member reporting to the President, and as the operational commander of his force. (The Presidential Guard is a separate entity.) The ministers are handpicked by the President, and may or may not serve in that position for the entire *sexenio*, (period of office) of the incumbent president.¹⁰ In the halcyon days of the PRI as ruling party, the selection of ministers was generally a pro-forma exercise, with strict attention being paid to seniority. In the past two *sexenios*, however, both Presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) and Vicente Fox (2000 to the present) strayed from the norm and reached down into more junior levels to select what some have described as ‘more progressive’ officers to lead the forces during times of change and, of course, support the President’s agenda. It is certainly true that after 1994 the military as a whole has come under much more intense public scrutiny, both domestically and internationally, and the challenges to the leadership to permit greater openness, better fiscal accountability to the public, and more productivity in pursuing new missions will no doubt persist.

The current Ministers, General Vega García and Admiral Peyrot, are considered by most observers to be progressive and academic in nature and background, although they have not strayed far from the monolithic image usually associated with the Mexican military. The public does not get much insight into whatever internal debates and dialogue may be occurring within the institution, and both services continue to be responsive instead of proactive in terms of public relations. The armed forces have indeed developed public access websites, but the content of these is essentially limited to basic information.

Returning briefly to the matter of the subordination of the Air Force to the Army, it must be pointed out that although there is a *de facto* Air Force commander, he and his staff are embedded in the Army headquarters, and never has an Air Force officer risen to the most trusted senior positions within the hierarchy. This subordination has allowed the Army to use the term 'National Defence' (SEDENA) for its organizational structure, and General Vega García and his predecessors have held the title of Minister of Defence (much to the annoyance of the Navy).

ORGANIZATION

Both the Army and Navy are organized on a regional dispersion basis. There are centralized national headquarters in Mexico City, and many subordinate regional headquarters. Historically, this has proven to be effective, as the military's main employment has been on domestic missions. Troops are stationed throughout the country to serve as an ongoing presence of authority and to allow for immediate response to crises. This regional dispersion has also facilitated programs of local recruitment for non-commissioned members, allowing them to stay near their families during their service, an important cultural consideration. Officers, on the other hand, are expected to be more mobile, moving between remote posts and to the centre, in Mexico City, with great frequency. This provides experience and, from an historical context, prevents any senior officer from staying too long in one location, developing local allegiances, and potentially becoming too powerful. The current strength of the forces is about 241,000..

Enrolment is voluntary, although there is nominally a draft system whereby a proportion of young men, on their eighteenth birthday, are

selected by lottery. Those so selected attend weekend training that emphasizes education, history, physical fitness and discipline. These recruits also act as a labour pool for a variety of public works social programs, such as tree trimming, clean-up of urban areas, painting schools, etc. Officer candidates from all three services are trained in a military college, in Mexico City for the Army, in Guadalajara for the Air Force and in Veracruz for the Navy. Officer candidates are generally selected from the lower and middle classes, and this therefore is seen as a mechanism for upward social mobility for the less privileged and less educated sectors of the population. The military colleges are not universities, but rather provide significant technical training related to employment after graduation in the various branches of the services. Great emphasis is also placed on military ethos (patriotism, honour, loyalty) and history, discipline, physical fitness and perpetuating the institution. The Armed Forces, among the most respected institutions in the country, enjoy a very positive domestic image in the *pueblo*.

THE ARMY AND THE AIR FORCE

There are three main components of the Army: a national headquarters, territorial commands, and independent units. The Minister of Defence commands the Army by means of a very centralized system and a large number of general officers. The Army uses a modified continental staff system in its headquarters. The headquarters structure is depicted in Figure 2.

At present there are twelve Military Regions, which are further broken down into forty-four subordinate Military Zones. In both cases, a numbering system is used for designation. There is no set number of zones within a region, and these can therefore be tailored to meet operational needs, with a corresponding increase or decrease in troop strength. The military zones are listed in Figure 3.

Chief among the independent troops is an Army Corps consisting of two mechanized infantry brigades located in Mexico City, with a full complement of combat and support troops. In addition, there are two brigades of the Corps of Military Police, Special Forces units, Presidential Guards (another motorized brigade) and a parachute brigade – all located in Mexico City where they act as a ready reserve and as centres of excellence.

Figure 2
Ministry of Defence Headquarters (SEDENA)

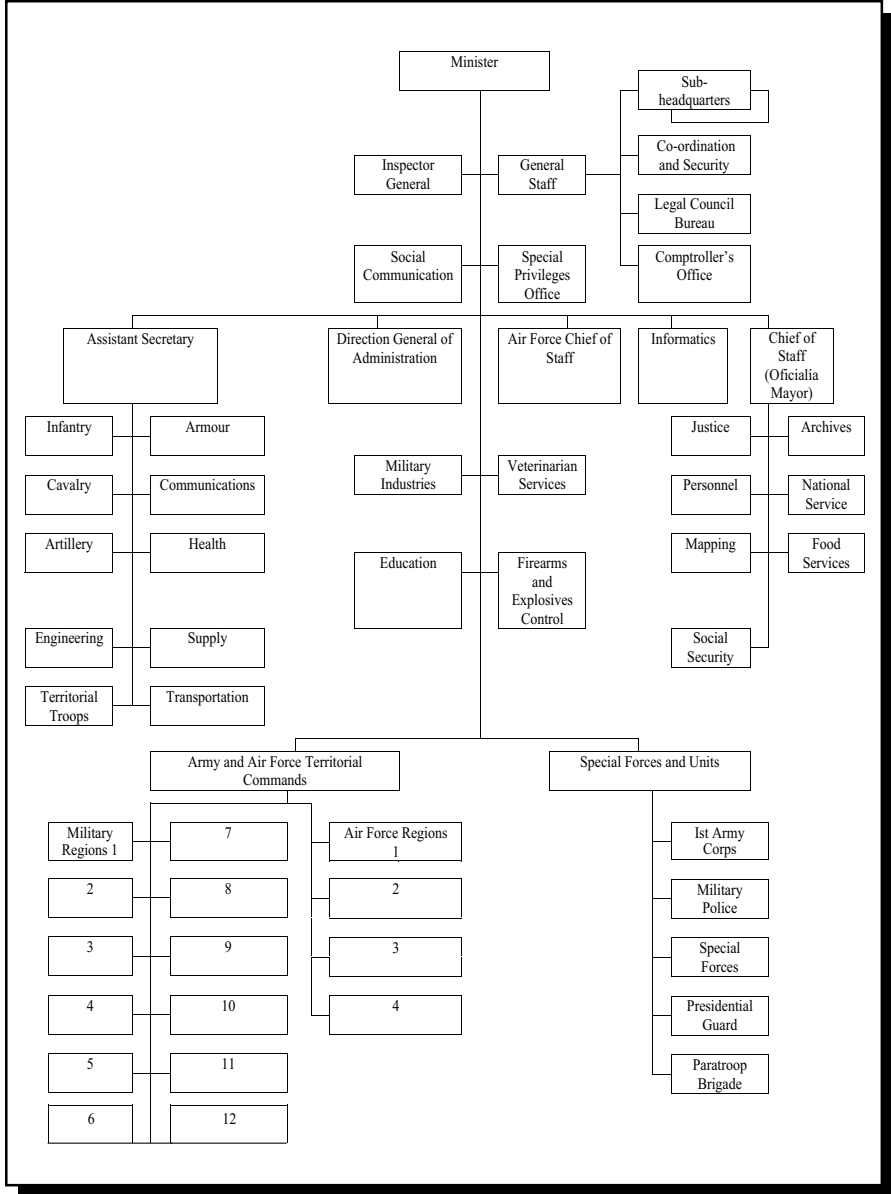


Figure 3
Military Regions

<i>Region</i>	<i>Location</i>
I	Distrito Federal.
II	Mexicali, Baja California
III	Mazatlán, Sinaloa
IV	Monterrey, Nuevo León
V	Guadalajara, Jalisco
VI	La Boticaria, Veracruz
VII	Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas
VIII	Ixcotel, Oaxaca
IX	Cumbres de Llano Largo, Guerrero
X	Mérida, Yucatán
XI	Torreón, Coahuila
XII	Irapuato, Guanajuato

THE AIR FORCE

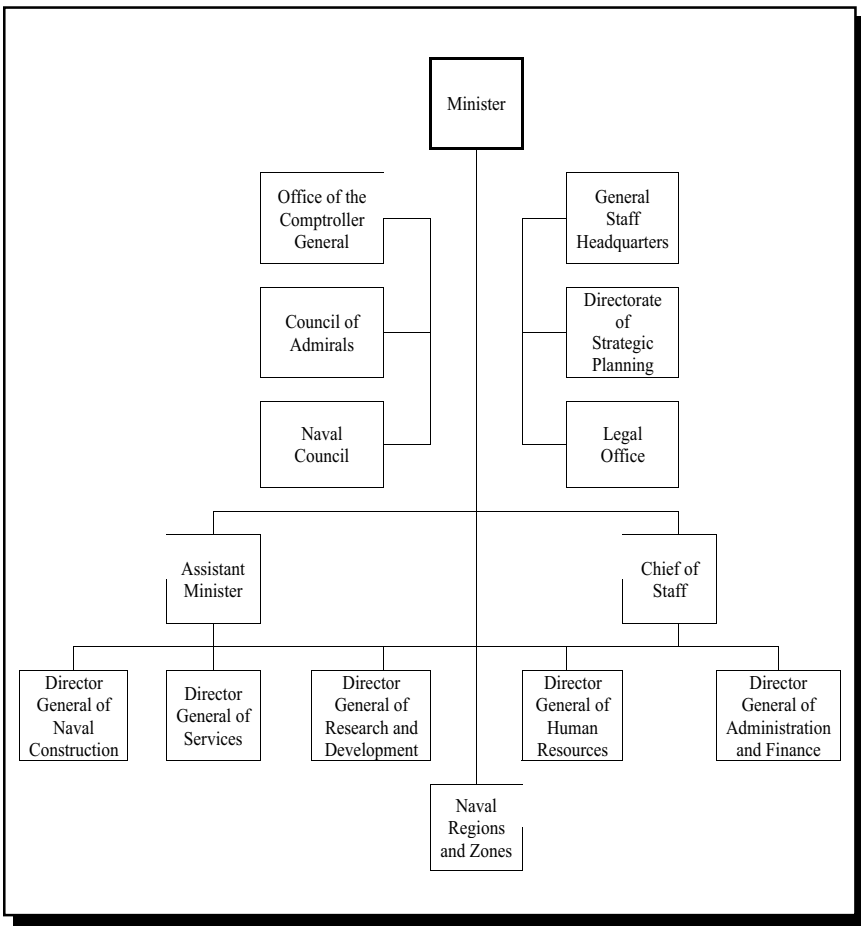
As mentioned, the Air Force national headquarters is embedded in the Army headquarters in Mexico City. It also follows the continental staff system, with the usual A1, A2, A3 and A4 sections. The tactical forces form what is loosely called an Air Division, but it is dispersed in four regions – Northeast, Northwest, Central and Southern. The Air Force maintains a total of 18 air bases, and has the additional capability of opening temporary forward operating bases in austere conditions for some of the rotary wing and light fixed wing assets.

THE NAVY

The Ministry of the Navy, the Navy's national headquarters is located in the southern part of the capital, Mexico City. It is a smaller organization than the Army. Its main components are shown in Figure 4.

The 'Junta (or Council) of Admirals' plays a unique consultative and advisory role within the headquarters, an indication of the institutional importance placed on seniority and 'year groups' that go back to the admirals' days as cadets in the naval college. They are a very tightly knit group, and great importance is placed on consultation amongst the factions within year groups: the Navy speaks with one voice.

Figure 4
Ministry of the Navy Headquarters



The Navy's operational forces are organized as two independent groups: the Gulf (East) Force and the Pacific (West) Force. Each has group has its own headquarters, a destroyer group, an auxiliary vessel group, a Marine Infantry Group and a Special Forces group. The Gulf and Pacific Forces are not mirror images of each other, as independence of organization is permitted. Both are subdivided into regions, with Regions 1, 3 and 5 on the Gulf, and 2, 4 and 6 on the Pacific. Each region is further divided into sectors and zones, so there is a proliferation of headquarters and senior officers. The Navy also has an air arm with troop transport, reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft.

The Navy has recently ceded most of its riverine responsibilities (formally handled by the Marines) to the Army, and has reduced the size of the Marine force, putting them back aboard ships where they play a vital role in drug interdiction and boarding of suspect vessels in territorial waters. The Navy maintains some impressive infrastructure, including naval dockyards that have the capability of building ships, such as the Holzinger class gunboats. These have a significant employment and economic impact in country.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK¹¹

The constitutional framework under which the Mexican armed forces operate is established by the following articles of the Mexican constitution:

Article 29: In the event of invasion, serious disturbance of the public peace, or any other event which may place society in great danger or conflict, only the President of the Mexican Republic, with the consent of the head officials of the State Departments, the Administrative Departments, and the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic and with the approval of the Congress of the Union, and during the adjournments of the latter, of the Permanent Committee, may suspend throughout the country, or in a determined place the guarantees which present an obstacle to a rapid and ready combating of the situation; but he must do so for a limited time, by means of general preventive measures without such suspension being limited to a specified individual. If the suspension should occur while the Congress is in session, the latter shall grant such authorization as it deems necessary to enable the Executive to meet the situa-

tion. If the suspension occurs during a period of adjournment, the Congress shall be convoked without delay in order to grant them.

Article 34, Sec. IV: [Among] the rights of the citizens of the Republic are to bear arms in the Army of National Guard in the defence of the Republic and its institutions, under the provisions prescribed by the law.

Article 36, Sec. II: [Among] the obligations of citizens of the Republic are to enlist in the National Guard.

Article 55, Sec. IV: [Among] the following are the requirements to be a deputy [or senator]: Not to be in active service in the federal Army nor to hold command in the police or rural *gendarmería* in the district where the election is held, within the last ninety days prior to the election.

Articles 73, Sec. XII, XIII, XIV, XV: [Among] the duties of Congress are:

- To declare war, in the light of the information submitted by the Executive;
- To enact laws pursuant to which the capture of enemy forces on sea and land must be declared; and to enact maritime laws applicable in peace and war;
- To raise and maintain the armed forces of the Union, to wit; army, navy and air force, and to regulate their organization and service; and
- To prescribe regulations or the purpose of organizing, arming and disciplining the national guard, reserving to the citizens who compose it the appointment of their respective commanders and officers, and to the States the power of training it in accordance with the discipline prescribed by such regulations.

Article 76, Sec. II, III, IV and VII: [Among] the executive powers of the Senate are:

- To ratify the appointments made by the President of the Republic as ministers, diplomatic agents, consuls general, high-level employees of the Treasury, colonels and other high-ranking chiefs of the national army, navy, and air force, in accordance with the provisions of the law.
- To authorize him [the President] also to permit the deployment of national troops beyond the borders of the country, the passage of

- foreign troops through the national territory, and the visits of squadrons of other powers for more than a month in Mexican waters;
- To give its consent for the President of the Republic to order he national guard outside its respective States, fixing the necessary force.

Article 82, Sec. V: In order to be President it is required [among other things]; not to be in active service, in case of belonging to the Army, within six months prior to the day of the election.

Article 83, Sec. IV, V, VI, VII and VIII: [Among] the exclusive powers of the President are:

- To appoint, with the approval of the Senate, the colonels and other high-ranking officers of the army, navy and air force, and high-level employees of the Treasury;
- To appoint the other officers of the army, navy, and air force, as provided by law;
- To dispose of the national guard for the same purposes, under the terms indicated in Section IV of Article 76; and
- To declare war in the name of the United Mexican States, pursuant to a previous law of the Congress of the Union.

Article 118, Sec. II and II: Nor shall the States, without the consent of the Congress of the Union:

- Have at any time permanent troops or ships of war; and
- Make war themselves on any foreign power, except in cases of invasions and of danger so imminent that it does not admit of delay. In such cases, a report shall be made immediately to the President of the Republic.

Article 129: No military authority may, in time of peace, perform any functions other than those that are directly connected with military affairs. There shall be fixed and permanent military commands only in the castles, forts, and warehouses immediately subordinate to the Government of the Union; or in encampments, barracks, or arsenals established for the quartering of troops outside towns.

Article 132: The forts, barracks, storage warehouses, and other buildings used by the Government of the Union for public service or for common

use shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Federal Powers in accordance with provisions to be established in a law enacted by the Congress of the Union; but in order that property acquired in the future within the territory of any State shall likewise be under federal jurisdiction, the consent of the respective legislature shall be necessary.

More specific laws include: the Código de Justicia Militar (Code of Military Justice), the Ley Orgánica del Ejercito y de la Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos (General Law for the Army and Air Force), and the Ley Orgánica de la Armada (General Law for the Navy).

CHAPTER FOUR

Doctrine, Equipment and Professional Development

Mexican defence policy has developed over time as a response to the historical reality of events since independence. It has always been extremely inward looking, although there are now indications that this may be slowly changing so as to allow at least discussion, if not adoption, of a more worldly view of defence and security, consistent with the country's self image as an emerging hemispheric leader. Despite energetic public discussion about many aspects of society and government under the current President, the military has avoided engaging in the debate, at least in public. The development of defence policy and doctrine has not been the result of a white paper-type process that starts with a traditional threat analysis, out of which missions and tasks for the military are identified, elaborated and set in priority, which sets the stage for decisions to be made about equipment and organization needed to meet these government assigned priorities. That should not, however, be understood to say that the military has not reacted appropriately to changing circumstances. Since the Chiapas uprising of 1994, and in light of the continual increase in drug trafficking, the armed forces have done their best to contend with new requirements and missions, but they have had to do so without any major adjustments in structure and especially in equipment.

MISSIONS

It is fair to say that Mexico does not face any external military threat. The Mexican military certainly could not defend the country against an attack by a force of equal size armed with modern weapons. However,

given the *de facto* umbrella of U.S. protection, similar to that enjoyed by Canada, this is not a major consideration. The Mexicans are correctly focused on internal defence. Should Mexico decide to play a role on the wider world stage, there would have to be significant changes. Currently, the Army/Air Force has five general missions assigned:

I. Defence of the Integrity, Independence and Sovereignty of the Nation

In effect, this is defence against external threats, the classic mission all national armed forces have as a result of the prime obligation of governments to protect and defend their population. But, as mentioned, this is not an important factor even though it plays well in public debates, in that the definition of what constitutes an external threat in today's climate of asymmetric threats is a matter of debate.

II. Internal Security

This is the most important and highest profile mission. It includes military actions against narco-trafficking, assistance and support to public security agencies, and maintaining internal order. Certain of these tasks may be very controversial, as questions often arise about the proper, perhaps intersecting, roles of the military, the civil police and security agencies in the essential matter of preserving civil order.

III. Civic Action and Social Projects that Assist in the Development of the Nation

This is an extremely important mission as it allows the government to actually provide help to the populace, even if the civil bodies one would normally associate with this type of work (and they all exist in Mexico) are incapable of delivering the service. Examples are reforestation, education through the National Military Service mentioned in the preceding chapter, and support to sporting activities. The Army does not receive much external credit for undertaking this mission.

IV. Assisting the Population in Case of Public Necessity

Similar to the above, this encompasses a range of assistance to poorer areas – feeding hot meals to entire villages, medical and dental consultations, including treatments and dispensary services, haircuts, painting residences, repair of domestic electrical appliances and veterinary services –

all at no cost to the recipient. This work is a major reason for the overall high approval rating the military has amongst the population at large. Another vital service is the provision of on-site potable water to rural locations.

V. Assistance to the Population in case of Natural Disasters

This form of assistance, provided under terms of Plan DN-III-E, is also a vital service to the nation. The geographical reality of Mexico, and most of Central America, is that natural disasters occur frequently, with the resulting negative effects on the population and the economy. The regional territorial commands of the Mexican forces are the prime responders in time of disasters, and they are leaders in subsequent reconstruction. The forces train hard for this role, and are regularly tested by devastating hurricanes, floods, mudslides, forest fires, volcanic eruptions, droughts and outbreaks of disease. In recent years the Mexican forces have deployed some of this capability and expertise to assist their neighbours in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and even Venezuela.

The Mexican Navy has two main stated missions, both derived from the Constitution – the use of Naval power to ensure external defence and to assist in internal security. The Navy further breaks this down into fifteen sub-missions, but, with the exception of such things as oceanographic scientific investigation and maritime contamination, their focus, and use by the government, is the same as the Army.

EQUIPMENT

Although rich in both natural and human resources, Mexico is not a wealthy nation and the equipment of its armed forces reflects this reality. In general, they have a plethora of too many different types of vehicles, weapons and equipment, and many of those are obsolete. This has resulted in units that are generally poorly equipped to meet the threats and challenges the country faces, such as small rural insurgencies and well-equipped drug traffickers. These latter two problems are, however, being actively addressed. Most notably, there has been emphasis on forming, training, equipping and deploying airmobile and amphibious Special Forces units/groups (GAFES/GANFES) in the war on drugs. These are serious soldiers who do well in their internal mission, and compare favourably to foreign counterparts. Strategically, increasing emphasis has been placed

within the Army/Air Force on acquiring airborne surveillance platforms, light aircraft, rotary wing aircraft and rapid troop transport. The Navy has obtained fast patrol boats and launches to interdict drug runners, it has built a fleet of fast gun boats, it has acquired shipborne helicopters, and it is replacing engines in its aging destroyers to make them more effective in fishery protection and drug interdiction.

ARMY EQUIPMENT

The Mexican Army, with a strength of some 144,000, has a wide variety of weapons and equipment in its inventory, much of it is procured off-shore but some manufactured by the military owned and operated “*Fabrica Nacional*” organization. Among the Army’s many and diverse types of equipment are: 136 French-built AMX-13 light tanks acquired from Belgium, some 105 armoured cars of various makes, roughly 575 armoured personnel carriers, mostly French made but including a number manufactured locally, about 195 artillery pieces and howitzers, over 1500 medium and heavy mortars, along with limited numbers of anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft missiles, and a wide variety of unarmoured troop transporters and logistics vehicles.¹² Much of this equipment is obsolescent or obsolete. The basic infantry weapon is the G3 rifle, made in Mexico.

AIR FORCE EQUIPMENT

The Mexican Air Force, with just under 12,000 members, has a fleet of 107 combat aircraft (including 10 F-5s, 70 Pilatus PC-7s and 17 T-33s), 71 armed helicopters, mainly Bell Jet Ranger and Huey variants, but including some Soviet Mi 8s, and another 90 transport helicopters. It has a transport aircraft fleet of 35 aircraft, including one Boeing 757, 3 Boeing 727 and 7 C-130 Hercules.¹³ In all, the Mexican Air Force maintains some 32 different types of aircraft.

In addition, they are obtaining Embraer surveillance and command and control platforms. At first glance, this is an impressive array. The reality, however, is that much of the equipment is outdated and often un-serviceable. The wide variety has caused a tremendous logistics, maintenance and training problem for the Air Force. Spare parts are increasingly difficult to obtain, maintenance personnel are lured away by the better

paying private sector and flying hours are low for pilots. Procurement of Russian rotary wing equipment at bargain basement prices has recently provided a boost to troop transport and rapid reaction capability but it has not solved the longer-term requirement. The Air Force is overdue for a major rationalization of its fleets, but senior Air Force officers do not have much of a voice in the hierarchy.

NAVAL EQUIPMENT

The Mexican Navy values its self-image as a blue-water navy, but suffers from the same problem as the Air Force – a hodgepodge of too many different types of vessels. Many of its larger ships are obsolete ex-United States Navy vessels of Second World War vintage. Among its newer acquisitions are eight Holzinger class gunboats, the first two coming into service in 1999. These were designed and constructed at the Navy's own shipyards, which are an important national strategic infrastructure. In addition, Swedish fast launches have been procured for interdictions close to the coastlines.

The Navy, with a strength of 37,000, has 11 principal surface combatants (3 destroyers and 8 frigates), 109 patrol and coastal combatants (44 offshore patrol, 41 coastal patrol, 6 inshore patrol and 18 riverine patrol), 3 amphibious LSTs (tank landing ships), 19 support vessels, as well as a host of auxiliary and training vessels. Naval aviation consists of 8 combat aircraft, several transport aircraft of different sizes, and helicopters of at least seven different types and ages.¹⁴

The Marines are organized in 3 brigades, each of 3 battalions, 2 airborne battalions, 1 Presidential Guard battalion, 11 regional battalions and miscellaneous coastal defence units.

The Navy suffers from the same logistics and maintenance challenges as the Air Force, but its network of naval shipyards provide a significant in-house maintenance and construction capability.

Notwithstanding the age and utility of some of this equipment, the Mexican armed forces are the most significant in the region between the Rio Grande border with the United States and the Panama Canal. None of the three forces has so far come under the sort of rigorous external fiscal scrutiny that might force a thorough rationalization of organization and equipment, and leading to a major new procurement program.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The 1994 Zapatista uprising had two effects on the Mexican military, principally the Army, that persist to this day. First, it served as a wakeup call for a proud institution that found itself held at bay by a group of lightly armed peasants, which brought international scrutiny upon the country and its security policies and forces. Second, it provided sound justification for additional funding for modernization. This was quickly recognized and taken advantage of by the military hierarchy. In addition to significant equipment purchases, the institution embarked upon a thorough review of its professional development of the officer corps, as well as of its training and organization.

The senior leadership of the Armed Forces recognized that mere perpetuation of the status quo was not enough to ensure their utility in the future, and that a far more focused approach was needed. Over the period of ten years, massive improvements to barracks and training facilities have been made throughout the country, and new courses for Special Forces and the Army in low intensity warfare developed. The most significant changes have, however, been in the field of professional development for officers. Schools and courses were developed for all rank levels, with successful completion being a prerequisite for advancement. There is a course for Captains, a course for Majors and Lieutenant-Colonels, and a senior course for Colonels and Brigadiers, all based at least in part on the American equivalents. These closely resemble the Canadian Army's junior staff course, the Canadian Forces Command and Staff Course, and the defence colleges of most Western countries. The Mexicans enjoy an active and productive exchange student program at the officer cadet and field officer level with several Latin American countries (e.g., Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela), with Spain and France, and with the U.S. Recently an officer attended the National Security Studies Course at the Canadian Forces College. The Mexican forces have also introduced computer-based simulation equipment and exercises. They have built a superb National Training Centre in Chihuahua where brigade-size all arms exercises are regularly conducted. These exercises usually include practicing the road, rail and air deployment of the formations from their home location to the training centre. Language training has received increased emphasis, especially in the Navy, and in the Army selected officers are being taught indigenous dialects to assist in communicating with the local

residents when the Army is deployed to provide social services in remote locations. Of course, because of their long standing but rarely discussed relationship with the U.S., hundreds of Mexican officers and non-commissioned officers train in American military schools every year.

However, perhaps the most noteworthy advancements have come in human rights training and Rules of Engagement (ROEs) formulation. Virtually every course, whether for Privates or Generals, includes a human rights component. As an example, many training areas include mock-ups of villages where situational exercises assist young soldiers in learning what is acceptable conduct and what is not. Discussions with human rights organizations show that the number of accusations of violations by the military has plummeted and very few of those are found to have substance. Rules of Engagement for a variety of situations have been put in place, and it is believed that they have resulted in remarkable restraint being shown by young officers and soldiers in some very provocative situations, often with media cameras rolling, hoping the military will overreact. These developments show a high degree of maturation and professionalization.

CHAPTER FIVE

Political Change and the Changing Nature of the Mexican Armed Forces

The coming to power of President Vicente Fox in December of 2000 was a momentous event in Mexican politics. After seventy-one years in power, the PRI was defeated at the polls, having received only 36.1 percent of the popular vote. The election of Fox to the Mexican presidency can be regarded as the culmination of a protracted and complex process of political change that the country has undergone since the mid 1980s. This process, as well as changing international circumstances, has affected the relationship between the civil authority and the Mexican military, as well as the roles the armed forces are asked to perform. This chapter looks at these important changes. So as to provide context for subsequent sections, the first part presents a brief overview of the process of political change in Mexico, highlighting the most important developments. The second section looks at the changing role of the Mexican armed forces. The several Central American crises of the 1980s, the emergence of drug trafficking as a threat to national security, and the Chiapas rebellion of 1994, have all contributed to growth in the size of Mexico's standing army, as well as expansion of its responsibilities, in what has been referred to as a 're-militarization of Mexico.' The last section points to the most important changes that have occurred in the way the military interacts with government. Both the process of democratization in Mexico and the increased responsibilities of the armed forces have altered this relationship.

POLITICAL CHANGE IN MEXICO

As was discussed in Chapter 2, by 1940 the structures had been put in place to sustain the 'perfect dictatorship' in Mexico, and between 1940

and the early 1980s, the PRI dominated all aspects of national life. Its authoritarian-corporatist structure allowed for the resolution of conflict within the party, thus maintaining political stability. Thirty years (1940–1970) of high and sustained economic growth¹⁵ – the so-called Mexican miracle – provided the regime with the financial resources to distribute in the form of patronage and other forms of pay off. One observer has described the PRI regime as a “gigantic, pork-barrelling political machine, soaking the bulk of the population and selectively rewarding its leaders and adherents”.¹⁶

By the early 1970s, the system had begun to crack. On the economic front, the corporatist-populist economic model, which had been very successful in sustaining economic growth, began to show signs of exhaustion. State-owned enterprises and tariff-protected private firms became highly uncompetitive, subsidies did not follow any economic rationale, the balance of payments deficit grew as agricultural production declined, and macro-economic policy became highly politicized. On the political front, the regime’s authoritarian structure came under strain as the PRI lost a great deal of its legitimacy. President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976) attempted to rebuild support for the regime by allowing for greater political expression through electoral reform that made it easier for small opposition parties to gain seats in the lower house of Congress. He also loosened government censorship over some media outlets, and co-opted some leaders of groups opposed to the regime.

Echeverría began to introduce austerity measures soon after coming to power, but they were soon abandoned in favour of an expansionist economic policy through which the state acquired several hundred business enterprises and increased total government expenditures. The discovery of oil in the southern states of Chiapas and Tabasco in the mid 1970s allowed the government to increase spending. Echeverría significantly expanded the size of the government bureaucracy, attempting to use public employment to foster economic growth, and thereby fuelling the gigantic political-corporatist machine with state resources. He contributed to improvements in higher education by building new facilities and giving financial support, he increased subsidies to organized labour, and he expanded social programs such as housing, social security, nutrition and rural development.

With the help of high petroleum prices and heavy borrowing from international financial markets awash in ‘petrodollars,’ Mexico enjoyed a

brief period of economic boom from 1976 until 1981, when the economy grew at an average of 8.5 percent each year. However, when international petroleum prices fell in 1981-1982, and the price of borrowing from international lenders increased, Mexico was unable to service its foreign debt or secure the foreign exchange necessary to pay for essential imports, thus forcing a steep devaluation in the value of the peso. The Mexican economy consequently crashed, and the old economic model crumbled. In 1982, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped by 1.5 percent, inflation reached 100 percent, unemployment doubled to 8 percent, and the public deficit soared to 18 percent of GDP. This economic meltdown – the worst since the Great Depression – marked the onset of a new era of economic reform, and the beginning of the demise of the PRI's hegemony.

Mexico experienced profound change in the 1980s, adopting a new economic model based on neo-liberal tenets, and beginning a process of political transition. The administrations of presidents Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) implemented structural adjustment policies and a fairly radical series of market reforms that culminated in the country joining the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in January of 1994. The first years of the de la Madrid administration saw the adoption of radical stabilization programs. In 1985 this became a comprehensive program of structural adjustment reforms, which were accelerated during the Salinas administration. These included an extensive program of privatization of state-owned enterprises, as well as the liberalization of trade, exchange rates and industrial policy. By 1987, tariffs had been reduced to 20 percent from levels of 50 to 100 percent, and, with the accession of Mexico to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, virtually all import licenses had been eliminated by 1987.¹⁷ The government also lifted restrictions on foreign direct investment, de-regulated both commercial and industrial activities, and eliminated numerous subsidies to targeted groups of consumers and producers.

The crash of 1982 and the ensuing economic deterioration, along with the series of economic reforms introduced during the 1980s, together had a severe impact on social conditions: unemployment increased, real wages dropped, and standards of living generally declined. This economic downturn had serious repercussions for the regime. Within the PRI, the economic meltdown strained the party's heterogeneous coalition, as it could no longer afford to provide resources to its various allies – the

peasants, organized labour, the federal bureaucracy and the employees of state-owned enterprises. This provoked infighting within the party over national economic policy. The internal struggles culminated in 1987, when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano (son of former president Lázaro Cárdenas) defected from the PRI and launched an independent presidential bid in 1988 – the first real challenge to the PRI since its coming to power. The elections of 1988 were marred by widespread allegations of fraud, further eroding the PRI's legitimacy. For the business community the economic downturn fractured their relationship with the regime and exposed the necessity for fundamental economic structural change. Perhaps more important, the economic crisis gave rise to large-scale social mobilization, as citizens began to withdraw from the corporatist structure of the party and place their demands directly on the state. By the end of the 1980s, the PRI had effectively lost legitimacy with the Mexican population, and the old regime was in crisis.

Faced with the collapse of the party's legitimacy, President Salinas attempted a difficult balancing act – restructuring the system through a deepening of economic reform, and establishing new institutions without ceding power to the opposition.¹⁸ Part of his strategy was to achieve economic reform while still retaining power. He took several measures to weaken the influence of organized labour on policy, such as creating new interlocutors in the labour movement under the banner of 'new unionism,' reconstructing the popular bases of the PRI at its expense, and reducing its influence on social policy. Although he appeared to have been partially successful in regaining support for the PRI in the midterm legislative elections of 1991 – the PRI received 61 percent of the vote – his attempts to revive the party through economic reform and neo-authoritarianism proved totally unsuccessful. A sluggish recovery exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, popular mobilization accelerated throughout the country, the media became increasingly critical, and opposition parties became viable governments-in-waiting. Moreover, in 1994 a guerrilla movement emerged in Chiapas, and the political infighting that had begun to brew in the party in the 1980s, culminated with the assassination of two prominent party officials. Political chaos deepened in late 1994 when Mexico's economy was again thrust into crisis, prompting another precipitous devaluation of the peso. By the end of 1995, the country was experiencing armed conflict, an unprecedented increase in incidents of violence, and the worst economic crisis in decades.

It was against this backdrop of severe political and economic crises that President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) began his administration. While Zedillo continued Salinas’ economic policies, he agreed to bring about significant political reforms. In 1996, by negotiating with the country’s main opposition parties, he got agreement to a major electoral reform (COFIPE) that granted the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) complete autonomy, and enhanced its power to oversee, supervise and administer elections. It also expanded the power of the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE), levelled the finance and media playing fields for all parties, and introduced restrictions on individual contributions to party financing and to media coverage. These reforms enabled opposition parties to make significant electoral inroads at the sub-national level, as they elected increasing numbers of municipal governments and state governorships – including the mayoralty of Mexico City in 1997 – as well as control over the Lower House of Congress in 1997, and, ultimately, the presidency in 2000.

Beyond the significant electoral reforms that Zedillo introduced, under his administration other significant changes took place, including a weakening of the centralization of power as it began to ‘disperse’ through the system. In terms of intergovernmental relations, for example, he introduced an important decentralization program under the banner of “New Federalism” that devolved power to state and municipal levels in areas involving education, health, poverty alleviation and development projects. It appears that Zedillo was either unwilling or unable to exercise the same degree of power as his predecessors. A good case in point was his refusal to intervene in a contentious election in the state of Tabasco, during which the PRI’s candidate was accused of having significantly exceeded the spending limits (by almost 50 fold!).¹⁹ He also curbed the power of the presidency in the selection of PRI candidates. Under the declared need to establish a ‘healthy distance’ between the state and the party, he essentially annulled the president’s ‘right’ to appoint his successor (*dedazo*), and brought in a U.S.-primary style candidate election process within the PRI in 1999. Zedillo in effect permitted a significant reduction in the power of the president. It has been argued that the reforms he undertook were the result of his reformist zeal. Although there is no doubt that he did demonstrate a commitment to some of the changes (i.e. decentralizing power), in other cases it seems he had little choice. Given the severity of the economic and political situation he inherited, the strong pressures

from below, and international pressure to democratize, it is difficult to see how the president could have refused to bring about substantive electoral reform without risking serious social unrest.

THE 'RE-MILITARIZATION' OF MEXICO

During the PRI's hegemonic rule, Mexico's foreign policy was firmly grounded on the principle of non-intervention, and PRI leaders consistently disavowed the use of military force to solve international problems. The country in effect did not have an international military policy. This resulted, as has been shown, in a policy/doctrine in which the armed forces focused on the preservation of internal order. From the 1950s until the 1970s, they concentrated on maintaining order by policing both urban and rural areas and on the active suppression of dissident guerrilla activities. During the 1980s Mexico started to experience a process of re-militarization as international conditions changed and new internal threats emerged.

On the international front, Mexico's isolationist position began to change in the late 1970s as it attempted to prevent a spill-over of numerous Central American insurgencies. In 1979, after having withdrawn its support for the government of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, and soon after endorsing the Sandinista revolution, Mexico established foreign policy goals of maintaining stability and minimizing external influence in the region. In effect, it became an active player by becoming an ally of France (through the endorsement of Salvadorian insurgents as a political force), by openly opposing American support for the political elites of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and by applying pressure on the Sandinista government not to change its economic policy. Most notably, Mexico was in the forefront of forming a regional alliance called *Grupo Contadora* that aimed at forming a common block with other countries that supported Mexico's position, such as Venezuela, Panama and Colombia. These actions affected the Mexican armed forces in a number of ways, but, most important, they resulted in the inclusion of generals in discussions about national security, about the deployment of troops to southern states, especially Chiapas, and about an increase in defence spending. Of special interest was the designation of a serving general, Abaslón Castellanos Domínguez, as governor of Chiapas from 1982 until 1988.

Domestically, the role of the armed forces began to change in the late 1970s. As the flow of illegal drugs through national territory increased,

mostly from Central and South America to the U.S., the Mexican government began to rely on the military to fight this new threat because of the notorious weakness and corruption-prone nature of its police forces. To put this significant effort into context, it is important to understand that the increase in the drug trade was largely the result of a continued increase in American consumption of drugs during this time. In 1977, the Mexican government instituted Plan Condor, an operation that assigned significant military resources in the anti-drug fight through direct action: it involved a force of close to 16,500 troops. By 1985, the number of military personnel involved had increased to 25,000, representing 18 percent of the active duty Army, a number that increased to 25 percent by 2000. By 1985, seven years after this struggle began, 315 military personnel had died in the 'war on drugs'.

The military's role in the anti-narcotics campaign accelerated in the late 1980s under the Salinas administration, after he declared drug trafficking to be an issue of national security.²⁰ The armed forces increased their interdiction efforts by establishing checkpoints along all major roads and highways, seizing maritime vessels suspected of carrying drugs, patrolling beaches, and increasing surveillance of the maritime approaches.²¹ Under the Zedillo administration (1994-2000), the role of the armed forces in counter-narcotics activities continued to grow. The Defence Ministry (SEDENA) issued what is known as the 'Azteca Directive' as a result of modification of the Constitution and the Criminal Code. This established the military's permanent campaign against drug-trafficking, with programs to eradicate drug crops, confiscate illegal drugs, and combat organized crime.²² It was during this time that the 'Plan to Combat Drug Trafficking' was established and the Drug Control Planning Centre (CENDRO) created. Zedillo sent the first of several thousand young men to the U.S. to study anti-narcotic tactics and apply them at home.²³

The armed forces increased their role in the fight against drug trafficking as successive presidents placed military officers in charge of civil institutions with responsibilities for law enforcement, public security and intelligence gathering. Since the Zedillo administration, for example, the Drug Control Planning Centre (CENDRO), the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) and the National Institute to Combat Drugs have been headed by military officers, and the Centre for National Security and Intelligence – Mexico's intelligence agency – has increasingly been run by the military. Moreover, when Zedillo established the PFP in 1999, he 'borrowed'

military personnel while new civilian officials were selected and trained. The number of soldiers within this institution has steadily increased, some of whom have been drawn from the Federal Support Forces (FFA) – which is made up of military police and members of the Navy. Eight entire Army units were transferred to the FFA, and 1,600 members of naval battalions were also added to the PFP.

Although President Vicente Fox pledged during his election campaign that he would reduce the military involvement in the fight against drug trafficking, it appears that quite the opposite has occurred. The armed forces have in fact been given responsibility for activities previously under the purview of civil institutions. Since he came to power, Fox has used special battalions and military intelligence in pursuing and arresting drug traffickers, and the Army has been directly involved in dismantling and tracking cartels and staging commando operations. Perhaps the clearest example of the increased penetration of the armed forces into the civil branches of government was the appointment in 2000 of Brigadier General Rafael Macedo de la Concha to be Attorney General, the first time in Mexico's history that a military officer has ever served in that office. Since that time, several other senior military officers have been named to counter-narcotics and intelligence positions within the Attorney General's Office (PGR). By late 2002 there were at least 227 military officers in the institution, 20 of whom headed up important bureaus overseeing intelligence, eradication, interdiction and seized assets. Overall, 107 members of the military were assigned to the Special Prosecutor for Drug Crimes (FEADS), 42 to the federal police, 8 to the CENDRO, and 70 others to various divisions and units.²⁴ In addition, both the PFP and the FFA are headed by general officers.

The Chiapas rebellion of 1994 also had a significant effect on the armed forces. The administrations of both Salinas and Zedillo relied on the Army to contain the uprising of Subcomandante Marcos and his Zapatista rebels while peace negotiations took place. During the Zedillo administration troops were deployed to Chiapas province, and numerous checkpoints were established on the highways that surrounded the so-called 'conflict zone.' It is important to note that large numbers of the troops deployed to the region were used for the provision of hot meals and medical services, and for transportation and general base duties. During the 1990s the armed forces also increased their activities through implementation of Plan DN-III (referred to in Chapter 3), which is intended to

assist the population in times of natural disasters through the provision of medicine, potable water and other basic necessities. For example, from 1997 until 1999 the military provided help to more than 115,000 victims of natural disasters. Also, from 1995 until 1999, Army and Air Force elements were responsible for fighting forest fires in a vast area.²⁵

These changes in the role of the armed forces have resulted in an increase in government spending on the forces allowing the size of the military to double from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s. In 1990, total government expenditure on the military (through the Ministries of Defence and the Navy) was .48 percent of GDP (See Figure 5). This increased to 0.57 percent in 1994, the year the Zapatista rebellion broke out. Despite a small decrease in 1995 and 1996 (the years following the Peso Crisis), the amount increased again, reaching 0.60 percent in 1999. This is roughly in line with the Latin American spending average, which is 0.542 percent, but it should be noted that Mexico, unlike the other large countries in the region, does not participate in expensive international operations. As a percentage of total government spending, there was an exponential increase in the military budgets during the 1990s, as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Expenditure on the Armed Forces

<i>Year</i>	<i>As a percentage of GDP</i>	<i>As a percentage of total government expenditure (budget)</i>
1990	0.48	1.96
1992	0.52	—
1994	0.57	3.93
1995	0.56	3.60
1996	0.56	3.68
1997	0.58	3.50
1998	0.58	3.60
1999	0.60	3.34

Based on figures from *The Military Balance*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies for the years cited.

The size of the Mexican armed forces also increased as a result of the expansion of their responsibilities and increased funding (Figure 6). While in 1985 the total number of active personnel stood at approximately 130,000, the number increased to close to 150,000 by 1990 and to some 240,000 by 2003.

Figure 6
Mexico's Armed Forces

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Number of Active Personnel</i>
1985	129,100
1990	151,500
1991	198,900
1992	203,800
1993	210,200
1994	217,800
1995	225,200
1996	235,000
1997	235,000
1998	235,000
1999	232,000
2000	237,000
2001	241,100

Sources: Compiled from *Statesman's Yearbook*, New York: St. Martin's Press; *The Military Balance*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies; *The Europa World Year Book*, Vol II, London: Europa Publications, 1995; Benítez Manaut, "Security and Governance", *Op. Cit.*; and Grayson, *Mexico's Armed Forces: A Factbook*, p. 38.

Figure 7
Important Institutional Changes and Events

<i>Year</i>	<i>Change or Event</i>
1977	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of the Airborne Special Forces Groups (GAFEs) – there are approximately 64 GAFE units across the country, 2 per military region and one per military zone – Plan Condor is established
1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – President Salinas declares drug trafficking a threat to national security
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Deployment of troops to the state of Chiapas – President Zedillo declares drug trafficking “the most severe” threat to national security – Promulgation of the Azteca Directive
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of the Drug Control Planning Centre (CENDRO) – Establishment of the Plan to Combat Drug Trafficking
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Special Anti-Narcotics Prosecutor (INCD) is disbanded and replaced by the Special Prosecutor for Drug Crimes (FEADS)
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP)
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – General Rafael Macedo de la Concha is appointed Attorney General
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reinforcement of Navy surveillance of oil installations in the Gulf of Mexico against terrorist threats – Federal Judicial Police (PFP) replaced by the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI) – Creation of two schools for Special Forces Training
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Re-organization of GAFEs through the integration of three brigades and nine special forces units. – Leader of the Tijuana Cartel, Benjamin Arellano Felix, is arrested
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishment of ‘Smart Border’ with the U.S. and increased co-operation in intelligence gathering – FBI and CIA agents are allowed to operate in Mexico City airport

As can be seen, the changes that have taken place within Mexico and internationally have altered and expanded the traditional role of the Mexican armed forces, which in turn has resulted in an increase in their size. The most salient aspects of their changing roles are perhaps the increased responsibility they have acquired in the fight against drug trafficking and in maintaining public security, and the increased influence they have had in the running of civilian institutions. This, in turn, has also affected the civil-military relationship that has characterized the country for several decades.

Since Vicente Fox came into power, he has instituted several important changes to the structure and organization of the armed forces.²⁶ He created the Public Security and Justice Services Agency, with cabinet-level status, to oversee and co-ordinate the formulation and implementation of security policies, and he increased the size of the PFP by 25 percent by bringing in 826 recruits from the Navy and the Army.

CHANGING CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS IN MEXICO

As discussed in Chapter 2, civil-military relations under the 'perfect dictatorship' were characterized by a 'pact' under which the armed forces afforded complete loyalty to the President and withdrew from the political and policymaking processes in return for autonomy in the internal running of the forces. An important consequence of the pact was that the civilian authority did not exercise much oversight over the forces, especially in regard to equipment acquisition and the promotions process. The pact remained stable until the mid 1980s.

The Central American crises of the 1980s and the increased responsibilities assigned to the military, especially in the fight against drug trafficking, had an effect on the civil-military pact. Because the new tasks demanded military planning, the senior leaders of the armed forces began to be consulted about the formulation of security and defence policy. This was accomplished primarily by means of better communications between officials the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) and the Navy and Defence Ministries, as well as through the National Security Council. Although there were serious differences of opinion between civilians and high-ranking officers – which became more pronounced after the Chiapas uprising, as the military had warned of in advance – there was also increased cooperation. Since President Vicente Fox came to power, he has

actively encouraged officials from all services to participate in inter-institutional efforts to establish federal policies, similar to the way inter-agency groups operate in the United States.²⁷ Staff Sections 2 and 7 of SEDENA (Army Intelligence and Military Operations) have taken over responsibility for investigating drug cartels' leadership structures, and President Fox has involved special forces battalions in supporting regional commanders' 'high impact' operations.²⁸ The appointment of a general officer as Attorney General has meant that there has been an increase in contact between that office and the armed forces (202 members of the armed forces were assigned to the PGR in 2003). It must also be noted that the Minister of Defence and the Minister of the Navy have both also encouraged a closer relation with the civilian authorities as they have made efforts to establish continuous communication with the President. This may have come about partly as a result of their more 'academic' background and open-minded outlook.

Increased opposition to the PRI during the 1980s also affected the civil-military pact. As the PRI began to lose its dominant place, and opposition parties acquired greater prominence, the traditional neutrality of the armed forces was called into question as some generals were openly critical of the regime, and in some instances even went so far as to express sympathy for opposition parties. In 1990, for example, General Alberto Quintanar declared that he would advise the left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) on security matters, and during the 1990s some others, most notably General Luis Garfias, were elected to Congress on the PRD ticket. Further, in an effort to ensure that the political elite of the PRI would not be able to use the military to their own advantage during the process of political change, members of the opposition demanded publicly that the armed forces declare their neutrality.²⁹ Since Fox's election in 2000, the Minister of National Defence has repeatedly declared that armed forces will obey the orders of the President, regardless of his political affiliation.

The growth of opposition parties has also led to some questioning of the constitutional role of the armed forces. For example, in 1996 the opposition IRD argued that the increased role of the military in policing and in the fight against organized crime violated Article 129 of the Constitution, and took its case to the Supreme Court. The Court ruled, however, that "while the authorities require the support of the army, and considering that the armed forces are at the order of the President, its participation

in assignments dealing with public security are not in violation of constitutional provisions.”

The PRI's loss of its majority in the lower house in 1997 meant that Members of Congress belonging to opposition parties have become more interested in military affairs, and have demanded more accountability from the military, especially in regard to the officer promotion process. This is perhaps one of the most significant changes in civil-military relations that have accompanied the process of democratization, and it has certainly altered the traditional civil-military pact. By law, Congress, through its standing committees (in both houses) is responsible of oversight of all government agencies and the procurement process. Members of Congress have become more active in exercising this responsibility, and are more critical. In 1999, for example, the PRD openly questioned some practices of the armed forces, such as the secrecy in which the promotion process takes place, and demanded a reform of the legal framework. In 2000 the newly elected Congress demanded that both the Ministers of Defence and Navy appear before Congressional standing committees, which they had never before been required to do.³⁰ The Senate has also become more active in reviewing the promotion process, as it has the right to veto any recommendation for promotion, and it has also become more active in the oversight of the procurement process. The increased interest in military affairs shown by opposition Members of Congress, and their efforts to carry out their oversight responsibilities, have resulted in far better communication between the legislative branch of government and top military officials.³¹ This is indeed a positive if rather novel development in civil-military relations in Mexico.

Improved oversight by Members of Congress, and the appointment of reform-minded Ministers of Defence and of the Navy have resulted in increased transparency and important structural changes, especially within the Navy. For example, a new generation of admirals has reduced the size of its administrative structure and created a Council of Admirals which advises the Minister of the Navy on policy and strategy. It also designates assignments for officers above the rank of Commander. As noted earlier, promotion of officers to senior rank, a purely internal matter under the so-called ‘pact’, was always a contentious issue, thus the creation of a Promotions Committee made up of captains and admirals to decide on officer promotions has been an important development.³² The Army has followed suit and, in October of 2003, created its own Promotions

Committee. But, the decisions of both committees must now be ratified by the Senate. As recently as the late 1990s, and part of the civil-military pact that under the PRI, the promotions process was mostly conducted within the armed forces by the top brass without significant input from the civilian authority. These changes point to a reduction in autonomy in the internal running of the military, and a positive step toward a better civil-military relationship.

The other salient aspect that characterized the civil-military pact was the secrecy within which the forces tended to operate. In this regard, there also appear to be important changes brought about by the process of democratization: transparency is now demanded of the armed forces. In 2003, President Fox enacted the Law of Access to Information (similar to the Canadian Access to Information Act) which requires that all federal government agencies disclose information to the public upon request. This has forced the armed forces to release information on, among other things, equipment procurement, the selection of private contractors, and all expenditures, a practice never before even considered. Both Ministers have been willing to comply.

The changes described may not amount to a complete reformulation of the civil-military pact – a demand made by some social and political circles soon after Fox's election to the presidency – but they constitute a significant alteration. There are, of course, other areas where further changes would be beneficial. For example, although Members of Congress have become more interested in military affairs, the fact that they are barred by the Constitution from running for a second term has a negative effect on their ability to develop expertise and thus be more effective in their oversight role. This is particularly the case with regard to the promotion process, as the lack of knowledge about military structures, the rank system and military life in general limits their ability to oversee the process.³³ Then too, there is still little control by civilian authorities over the internal allocation of resources. Finally, contrary to what some observers have suggested,³⁴ an informed and engaged 'defence community' – made up of civilians inside and outside government, academics and military officials – has yet to emerge. Such a community would facilitate the interaction and communication between civilian authority and the military. Regrettably, in Mexico there are only a handful of academics and journalists that are interested in military affairs, and rarely do they interact actively and openly with military officials.

Several points need to be made about the changing nature of the civil-military pact.³⁵ First, some observers are critical of the increased responsibilities the armed forces have been given, especially those relating to public security which in other countries fall under the jurisdiction of civil institutions.³⁶ This may be regarded as especially risky in a part of the world where the military has been an active political actor. What is important to note in the Mexican case, however, is that it is the civilian authority that has asked the armed forces to take on these new roles; this has not been a military initiative. It is because of the weakness of civil institutions such as the police forces that the military was directed by the government to broaden its political responsibilities. It is clear that the Mexican armed forces are firmly under civilian control, despite some shortcomings in oversight mentioned earlier, and there is absolutely no evidence of any diminished loyalty to the President. It is true that the Minister of Defence has become more outspoken and has begun to comment in public on matters of national political concern (such as the inability of Fox to cooperate with other political parties, and the failure to reduce poverty), but this can be seen as a part of changing and dynamic political relations between civilian and military forces described by Douglas Bland in his theory of 'shared responsibilities'.³⁷ The more active role can be considered a positive step toward healthier civil-military relations, as there has been an increased flow of ideas between the two.

Second, it must be remembered that the military is trusted by the Mexican people more than any other national institution. Polling consistently shows that Mexicans have more confidence in the armed forces than the police or the justice system,³⁸ despite negative media coverage during the Chiapas uprising and allegations of corruption. Because of the high levels of trust Mexicans have for the military, it is likely that the armed forces will continue to be tasked to carry out jobs that in other countries would be police or judicial responsibilities, simply so as to get things done. The real challenge for Mexico as it consolidates its democratization is the strengthening of its civil institutions so this is no longer necessary. Finally, there is a commonly held perception among foreign observers that there is widespread corruption in the Mexican armed forces. While it is true that the military's involvement in the fight against drug trafficking has given its members opportunities to engage in corrupt practices, successive administrations have been diligent in addressing the problem. Between 1995 and 2000, several military officers have been tried on

corruption charges,³⁹ and, to limit the temptations that might arise if an individual were to develop intimate links in any one location, officers are regularly rotated from one garrison to another. It is very likely that the problem has been exaggerated, given the high levels of trust the citizenry continue to express for the armed forces.

CHAPTER SIX

Toward Closer Cooperation between the Canadian and the Mexican Armed Forces?

This paper has been written for the express purpose of dispelling many of the common misconceptions about the Mexican armed forces, misconceptions that have resulted from its long-standing inward-oriented focus, from negative international press coverage, and because of the lack of knowledge outside Mexico about its structure and roles. In Canada, this is in part because for the past half century the Canadian Forces' external focus was on interoperability with the armed forces of other NATO member countries in Europe, or, to some extent, on foreign forces with which it worked in UN peacekeeping missions.

Despite problems and challenges of the past, the Mexican armed forces of today have made significant strides toward becoming vital and professional institutions within a country that is now taking its place alongside other democracies. The Army, Navy and Air Force are well-trained and dynamic organizations that are well respected by a significant number of Mexicans, and they are adapting well to the changing political circumstances. There are no doubt areas in which the Mexican forces could show further evidence of liberalization, perhaps especially in regard to the excessive secretiveness that continues to be prevalent. But, even here change is happening because of a new generation of senior officers who have a more open and outward-looking view of the world.

Having examined the Mexican military and the changing nature of civil-military relations in the Canadian context, two questions immediately come to mind: What has been the relationship between the Mexican

and Canadian armed forces in the past? And, is greater cooperation possible? It is a fact, regrettable perhaps, that direct military-to-military relations between the Canadian and Mexican forces have been of a relatively minor nature. Perhaps the most important recent step in that relationship was the exchange of military attachés in the early 1990s, so the groundwork to facilitate future initiatives does exist. It is true that, unlike the Mexican military attaché in Ottawa, the Canadian attaché in Mexico is also cross-accredited to seven other Central American and Caribbean countries, but his priority is clearly focused on the bilateral dynamic with Mexico.

To date, the few successful contact initiatives have been limited to a small number of Mexican officers participating in exercises at the Peace Support Training Centre in Kingston and at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Nova Scotia, and the attendance of a Mexican officer at the year-long staff college course in Toronto. There have also been port visits by Canadian vessels on the West Coast of Mexico, and a member of the Canadian Forces participated in a cruise on the Mexican Navy's sail-training vessel. Of course, opportunities for greater Canadian Forces involvement are hampered by the lack of Spanish-speaking personnel, and that is likely to remain a serious limitation for reciprocal exchanges. The Mexicans, of course, have many English speaking personnel.

If we look at what type of cooperative ventures would benefit both armed forces in the future, the area that immediately comes to mind is Mexican interest in peacekeeping, and the Canadian Forces' interest and experience in employing its troops in austere locations with geographical conditions very different from Canada. Increased contact and cooperation between the two armed forces might be possible in the following areas:

- Load more Mexican officers on courses at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and the Peace Support Training Centre, especially the UN Observer course;
- Invite Mexican officers to observe pre-deployment training of Canadian units preparing to go on UN missions;
- Invite Mexican officers to visit Canadian units deployed on UN missions;
- Invite Mexico to provide junior staff officers to serve in a deployed Canadian headquarters;

- Invite the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to deliver courses, in Spanish, on site in Mexico and propose that Mexico in turn invite officers from other Central American countries to participate;
- Host reciprocal seminars on disaster relief operations;
- Organize small unit exchanges where, for example, Canadian troops participate in training in Mexico in mountain, riverine, anti-drug, desert and jungle warfare;
- Invite the Mexican Navy to conduct port visits in Canada;
- Organize reciprocal language training in both countries;
- Consider the exchange of intelligence on mutually agreed threats;
- Consider ways in which the Canadian 'defence community', especially the academic centers and NGOs that focus on security and defence issues, might help foster the development of a similar community in Mexico. This might be done through the organization of seminars, workshops and symposia at which information can be exchanged between civilians and military personnel;
- Encourage the exchange of officer cadets and academic faculty between the two countries' military educational establishments so as to encourage an exchange of ideas and the growth of personal friendships;
- Consider cooperation in natural disaster relief in areas (i.e., Central America and the Caribbean) where the Mexican military has experience and expertise.

This list is certainly not exhaustive, and may be slightly cavalier as it does not consider the administrative, diplomatic and funding implications inherent in the possible initiatives. However, these and similar types of activities demonstrate that there is room for mutual benefit, within our own continent, for enhanced military cooperation. Canada and Mexico share much in common in the areas of defence and security. Both are huge countries with diverse and challenging geography, immense wealth in natural resources, long and vulnerable coastlines, and shared borders with the U.S., to list just a few common characteristics. We should look to our neighbours. Indeed, in recent months President Vicente Fox has declared his desire to integrate the Mexican armed forces within U.S. Northern Command, despite original reservations. As the Martin administration implements the terms of its defence policy review, perhaps a closer look to the south might be in order.

Notes

¹Declaration made by President Fox at the Meeting for the Evaluation of Coordinated Action for Border and National Security, Tijuana, Mexico, 3 October 2001.

²Mario Vargas Llosa, "Mexico: The Perfect Dictatorship" in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter 1991 (Vol. 8, No. 1), pp. 23-25.

³For one of the best descriptions of the Mexican political system during the 20th century, see Roderic Camp, *Politics in Mexico; The Democratic Transformation*. London: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁴See Raúl Benítez Manaut, "Security and Governance: The Urgent Need for State Reform" in Joseph S. Tulchin and Andrew D. Selle, eds., *Mexico's Politics and Society in Transition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003.

⁵The PNR was re-named the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) in 1938, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946.

⁶The terms Minister and Secretary, and Ministry and Secretariat are used interchangeably.

⁷See Benitez Manaut, *op. cit.*

⁸Roderic Camp, *Generals in the Palacio*. London: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁹David Rondfelt, "The Mexican Military and Political Order since 1940" in D. Rondfelt, ed., *The Modern Mexican Military*. La Jolla, CA: University of California at San Diego, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies.

¹⁰Presidential terms last six years, and presidents are constitutionally barred from seeking re-election.

¹¹This section is taken from George Grayson, *Mexico's Armed Forces: A Fact Book*, pp. 6-8. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Americas Program, 1999.

¹²Numbers and types are from *The Military Balance 2001*, London: IISS.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵The Mexican economy grew at an average rate of 6.5 percent a year from 1940 to 1960.

¹⁶Chappel Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of the Free Press in Mexico*, p. 16. Berkley: University of California Press, 2002.

¹⁷Kevin J. Middlebrook and Eduardo Zepeda, "On the Political Economy of Mexican Development Policy" in Middlebrook and Zepeda, eds., *Confronting Development: Assessing Mexico's Economic and Political Challenges*, p. 8. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

¹⁸Salinas repeatedly stated that his administration favoured economic over political reform.

¹⁹The governor of Tabasco, and president of the PRI since 2002, Roberto Madrazo, refused to resign despite having publicly admitted that he had broken electoral rules and spent \$US70 million, far beyond the \$1.5 million limit.

²⁰Camp, *Generals in the Palacio*, p. 91.

²¹José Luis Sierra Guzmán, "Mexico's Military in the War on Drugs" in *Washington Office for Latin America Briefing Series*, April 2003, p. 2.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 9.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵Guillermo Garduño Valero, "The Organizational Transition of the Mexican Armed Forces in the New Millenium" in *Always Near, Always Far: The Armed Forces in Mexico*. San Francisco: Global Exchange 2000.

²⁶Upon assuming office, there were plans to create a new institutional structure for the Air Force, outside SEDENA, and have all three forces under one command (Estado Mayor Conjunto). The plan, however, was never executed. His former security advisor, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, also proposed the creation of a security council at which the Estado Mayor Conjunto would be given a seat. His proposal was also rejected (interview with Mr. Zinser, Mexico City, July 30, 2004). In terms of institutional organization, Fox restructured the 2nd, 3rd and 7th military regions, as well as the 30th, 31st, 36th and 38th military zones. Fox has also withdrawn troops from the state of Chiapas and reduced the number of checkpoints. Here it is important to note that the reorganization of military zones is a common practice to meet changing threat levels and population/recruiting demographics. Both Salinas and Zedillo undertook reorganizations themselves.

²⁷Roderic Camp, *Challenges to Civil-Military Relations in the 21st Century*. (forthcoming).

²⁸Sierra Guzman, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁹Monica Serrano, "The Armed Branch of the State: Civil-Military Relations in Mexico" in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, May 1987, Vol. 27, pp. 423-426.

³⁰Roderic Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Transformation*. London: Oxford University Press, 2004.

³¹As stated by the Minister of National Defence in an interview with Camp in February 2004 (Camp forthcoming) and by several Members of Congress in interviews in July 2004.

³²Camp, *Challenges to Civil-Military Relations*.

³³Interview with Senator Castañeda, PAN, Mexico City, 20 July 2004.

³⁴Benitez Manaut, *op. cit.*

³⁵The best work on civil-military relations in Mexico, especially after Fox became president, is Camp's forthcoming book, *Challenges to Civil-Military Relations in the 21st Century*.

³⁶See Sierra Guzmán, *op. cit.*

³⁷Douglas Bland, "A Unified Theory of Civil-Military Relations" in *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Fall 1999), pp. 7-19.

³⁸Several polls show this to be true. See, for example the poll cited by Grayson in *Mexico's Armed Forces* (p. 72) which shows that 71 percent of the population expressed a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the armed forces, compared with 44 percent for the federal police, 40 percent for the justice system, and 36 percent for the local police.

³⁹Most notably, in 2001 General Jesús Gutierrez Rebollo, the officer in charge of the government's anti-narcotics campaign, was tried on a charge of illicit enrichment and sentenced to 15 years in jail.

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