

## **Armed Forces and Drugs, Public Perceptions and Institutional Challenges**

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This essay proposes to briefly describe and analyze the evolution of the Army and Navy's role in drug interdiction, focusing on the patterns that have occurred since 1995, when the Army accepted responsibility for that task without internal dissent. Some of the changes that have taken place within the larger context of Mexico's shift in national security priorities will be highlighted. As part of those altered missions domestically, the changing posture of the armed forces relationship with their counterparts in the United States will be evaluated. Furthermore, we will speculate on interesting internal developments occurring in the Navy and the Army and in their relations with American armed forces. Third, some broad perspectives from public opinion surveys concerning the armed forces as an institution, its performance of the anti-drug mission, and how Mexican views of national sovereignty issues affect their perceptions of United States military and civilian involvement on national territory, will be analyzed. Finally, we will argue that the role of the Catholic Church as an increasingly influential actor in government attempts to curb the drug cartels, as well as the source of potential conflict with the armed forces over growing numbers of human rights abuses, are essential to understanding the consequences of the military's anti-drug mission.

### **The Evolution of the Military's Anti-Drug Role and Civil-Military Relations**

Mexico's armed forces have undergone significant changes beginning in 1995, when an internal memorandum, outlining significant criticisms of army structures and policies,

was released to the Mexican media. Despite the long list of complaints outlined in this document, only one assigned mission generated no dissent: the need for the armed forces to carry out the government's anti-drug trafficking mission.<sup>1</sup> The extent of the officer corps' agreement on this task was all the more remarkable given the opposition voiced to me in interviews from 1986-1992. Most of the individuals I spoke to were opposed to this mission because they believed it would expose the military to extensive corruption.<sup>2</sup>

During Ernesto Zedillo's administration (1994-2000), the military's primary tasks were to destroy the production of drugs in Mexico, and to prevent the flow of drugs through Mexico. The military took on greater responsibility for performing anti-drug trafficking tasks, assigning larger numbers of troops and officers to this specific mission. Despite the willingness of the military to perform this assignment, opposition to their substituting for civil authorities encouraged Vicente Fox, the National Action Party candidate for president in 1999-2000, to promise to withdraw the armed forces if he won the election.<sup>3</sup> Once victorious, however, he, like his predecessor, discovered that no

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of this document, see my "The Mexican Military, Marching to a Democratic Tune?," in Kevin Middlebrook, ed., *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 2004), 353-372. My original analysis was published in a two-part series in *Excelsior* in 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in a poll published by *Parametría* in early 2007, most Mexicans, 65 percent, thought the army would be corrupted in performing this anti-drug tasks, reinforcing the perception which the army leadership itself held in the early 1990s. Yet, in June 2009, in another poll, only 34 percent thought the army would be corrupted by drug cartels, suggesting that the public's perception after more than two years of intensely fighting the cartels, that the army has to a great degree resisted this outcome. 1,200 interviews, national sample, Jan 27-30 2007, +/-2.8 margin of error. Published in *Excelsior* 19 Feb 2007. The danger of that has been brought home in remarks by General Galván, Secretary of National Defense, to PRI members of the Senate, where he revealed that as many as 15,000 individuals detained in the drug war, had received some form of military training. Andrea Becerril and Victor Ballinas, "Negociar legalizar actividad de militares en la lucha antinarco," *La Jornada*, March 3, 2010, 8.

<sup>3</sup> His *Plan de Gobierno, 2001-2006* actually stated that the armed forces will be excluded from the public security sphere and will stop fighting drug trafficking. Sigrid Arzt, "The Shaping of Mexico's Civil-Military Relations under the Fox Administration in Light of the Law Enforcement Challenges," Unpublished paper, School of International Studies, University of Miami, September 8, 2001.

viable civilian alternative to the military existed.<sup>4</sup> Fox committed an average of 19, 293 troops yearly to this task during his administration.<sup>5</sup> Under Calderón, during the first two years of his administration, those figures increased to 45,000, or a 133 percent increase. During 2009, the Army has assigned 48,750 personnel to the drug mission,<sup>6</sup> of which 26 percent were involved in 20 ongoing joint operations.<sup>7</sup>

The victory of an opposing party in 2000, and the beginning of democratic consolidation, influenced other characteristics of armed forces behavior affecting civil-military relations generally. The most important of these potential influences in the late 1990s and 2000s was a shift in armed forces missions within newly redefined national security priorities to non-traditional tasks typically performed by civilian agencies. It is fair to say that the extent to which the Mexican armed forces are involved in national security decision making and its drug enforcement mission are the two most controversial roles affecting the established civil-military relationship.

These roles provoke controversy in the region because many scholars have argued for decades that when the Latin American military takes on such tasks, especially during the era of democratization, that such new missions enhance the armed forces prestige and influence, increasing their potential for creating an imbalance in the tenuous democratic civil-military relationship. In Mexico, journalists, intellectuals and scholars provocatively

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<sup>4</sup> The extent of weak civilian institutions is reflected by the recent request of PRD deputies that the government should examine the idea that National Defense, not customs, should be in charge of preventing arms shipments to Mexico. "El PRD propone que la Sedena controle las aduanas," *Diario de Yucatán*, January 6, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Transparency request, 0000700035209, March 20, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Transparency request, 0000700168109, November 14, 2009. The composition of the personnel carrying out these operations is also worth noting. For example, in the summer of 2009, 4, 921 cadets, students, and officers attending most of the military academies were involved in drug eradication missions, 388 of whom were women. Transparency request, 0000700107009, August 13, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Transparency request, 0000700108809, July 29, 2009.

label this influence as the militarization of civil society.<sup>8</sup> This linkage is a realistic concern in Mexico and elsewhere in the region. In a 2008 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked: When there is a lot of crime, a military take-over would be justified, 64 percent of Mexicans agreed with this statement. The higher the level of trust in the military, a prevailing condition in Mexico, the more likely support for a military government.<sup>9</sup>

Within the larger national security context, the military's mission is delineated in four defense plans known as DN I-IV. Plans II through IV, open the door for non-traditional military responsibilities, all involving internal, civilian-related responsibilities. DN-II responds to internal problems, including insurgencies, strikes, and other civil disturbances. The plan is relevant to the drug mission because it justifies both the use of the armed forces' intelligence services and preventative measures in responding to civilian actions deemed internal threats. Obviously, drug cartels fall into this category. DN-III, which has been implemented on numerous occasions, uses the armed forces to respond to natural disasters to avert the country's becoming vulnerable to internal or external enemies. The newest of these plans, DN-IV, organizes and legitimizes the military's anti-drug mission, and was implemented at the end of the Zedillo administration.

A sense of how Mexicans currently view the most prominent national security issues, which reinforces the rationale for the armed forces being assigned the anti-drug mission,

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<sup>8</sup> This term is not confined to Mexicans alone. Analysts, theorists and critics in the United States similarly use militarization as a crucial component of the imbalance between civil and military authorities. For a recent critical analysis, incorporated in a larger assessment of the Mérida Initiative, see Laura Carlsen, *A Primer on Plan Mexico*, Americas Policy Program, May 5, 2008, p. 3ff.

<sup>9</sup> Orlando J. Pérez, "Crime and Support for Coups in Latin America," *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 32 (2009), 1-8.

is suggested in Table 1. Broadly speaking, Mexicans are divided in how they

**Table 1-How Does Drug Trafficking Fit into Mexican Views of National Security in 2009?**

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**What are the principal threats against Mexican national security?**

**Threats** **Percent Who Chose**

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<b>Organized Crime</b>	<b>47(a)</b>
<b>Public Insecurity</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Kidnapping</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Corruption</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Armed Groups</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Poverty and Inequality</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Loss of Economic Competitiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Movements Against the Government</b>	<b>2</b>

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(a) The remaining 5 percent listed violation of national sovereignty, natural disasters, others, or did not know or answer the question. August 2009.

**Source:** Sistemas de Inteligencia en Mercado y Opinión, June-August, 2009, “Encuesta Seguridad Nacional,” 1,250 interviews nationally, July 24-27, 2009, +/-1.9 percent margin of error.

conceptualize national security. In August of 2009, 31 percent viewed it as the defense of national sovereignty and territory, while a nearly equal 29 percent viewed it as protecting the population from threats confronting the country. The remainder were split among four other responses. But when asked specifically what are the major threats confronting their country, organized crime, essentially the drug cartels, holds a commanding lead, followed by insecurity, both related to the drug cartel’s increased responsibility for the level of crime and violence. Furthermore, when Mexicans were asked what they considered to be the greatest threats to their country *from abroad*, 53 percent listed drug trafficking,

followed by 21 percent indicating arms trafficking. In short, three quarters of the perceived threats stemmed from drug cartels.

The public policy issue of crime and personal security has become a crucial concern to most Mexicans. The Pew Foundation survey results in September, 2009 demonstrates why personal security and crime have been the single-most important issue (economic concerns combined was most significant) during the last three presidential campaigns. In the Pew poll, strikingly crime actually ranked above economic problems, and crime, drugs and corruption specifically account for three of the four major problems. In part, these views also are determined by Mexicans' experiences with crime. In Latin America,

**Table 2-Mexican Views on Public Policy Issues**

<b>How Big of a Problem is....?</b>	<b>Percent Responding Very Big</b>
<b>Crime</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Economic problems</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Illegal Drugs</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Corrupt Political Leaders</b>	<b>68</b>

**Source:** Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S.—One in-Three Would Migrate," September 23, 2009. 1,000 interviews nationally, May 26 to June 2, 2009, +/- 3.0 percent margin of error.

33 percent reported they were a victim of crime in 2008. Mexico ranked second highest in the region, with 42 percent after Venezuela. Mexicans also perceive their country to be violent, 6.2 on a 10.0 scale, the fourth highest in Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> From *Latinobarometer* 2008 poll, [www.latinobarómetro.org](http://www.latinobarómetro.org), 2009. For a discussion of the factors associated with perceived public insecurity, see José Miguel Cruz, "Public Insecurity in Central America and Mexico," *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 28 (2009), 1-7.

Poverty too is linked to the drug mission, to the more than 450,000 individuals estimated by our intelligence community to be involved in the production or transportation of drugs, and therefore to how the armed forces and the drug cartels are viewed poor regions.<sup>11</sup> Poverty is, in the words of Fox's defense secretary, General Clemente Vega, the fundamental national security problem in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> The military has given various forms of civic action, directed at alleviating poverty, high priority in the past. Despite the fact that many elites would agree with General Vega's assessment of the number one security issue, underlying all other issues appearing in Table 2, only 5 percent of the public viewed it as a significant threat in 2009.

The military's potential effect on civil-military relations through the vehicle of national security, including its anti-drug mission, is dependant on the manner in which civilian and military leaders define national security. The trend toward an armed forces domestic national security function is universal. Some theorists expect it to become a primary function of the military in most countries, as is the case in Mexico. As I have argued, in the last twenty years Mexico has moved in the direction of the armed forces playing a growing national security role. The linkage between internal security and the military has a long history in Mexico, even if the military's own internal security role, in many respects, remained undefined until the mid-1980s. One outstanding feature of national security in Mexico was the peripheral participation of the military in defining national security and selecting the most appropriate means of implementing it.

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<sup>11</sup> The president of Mexico's Higher Agricultural Court estimated that 30 percent of Mexico's cultivatable land is used for producing drugs. The rationale for this is best expressed by one farmer as "for every peso that I invest in maguey, I earn seven pesos the following year... For every peso I invest in *mota* (marijuana), I get 500 pesos the following year." The difference in income is just too great for many poor farmers to resist. See Gardenia Aguilar Mendoza, "Cultivos de droga gana cada vez mayor terreno en México," *La Opinión Digital*, May 24, 2007, cited in Maureen Meyer, "At a Crossroads: Drug Trafficking, Violence and the Mexican State," Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C., 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview, February 19, 2004.

Within a week of taking office in 1988, President Salinas appointed his chief of staff to direct a technical cabinet comprising five sections. Salinas added a fifth section: national security, composed of the Secretariats of National Defense, Navy, Government, Foreign Relations, and the Attorney General. This was the first time at the cabinet level that both the navy and the national defense secretariats were represented formally in national security matters. Some observers believe that the armed forces replaced civilian agencies as the most important voice in this sub cabinet. Despite this new structure, responsibilities for national security decisions remained divided, and military intelligence was not shared with civilian intelligence. Under the Fox administration, the national security cabinet became more fully integrated after structural reforms were introduced in 2003. Its mission was clearly defined to include social cohesion, protection of rights, and “preservation of democracy based on economic, social and political development of the country and its citizens.” Its members consists of the Secretariats of Government, National Defense, Navy, Public Security, Treasury, Controller, the Attorney General, and the director general of the Center for Research and National Security (CISEN).<sup>13</sup> In 2007, in response to President Calderón’s request to the Secretariat of National Defense to provide a detailed description of its participation in his National Development Plan, 2007-2012, the Army outlined three national security goals in support of Mexico’s foreign policy: guarantee national security and territorial integrity, protect border security and the human rights of those residents, and strengthen international cooperation for security and defense of sovereignty; and two objectives for internal security: *strengthen*

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<sup>13</sup> *Diario Oficial*, April 19, 2003.



*the state in the confrontation against drug trafficking and organized crime and improve the level of development and living conditions of Mexicans.*<sup>14</sup>

Intelligence sharing between the military and civilian agencies improved dramatically under with Fox, especially as it related to the pursuit of drug trafficking. President Calderón reinforced this cooperation by the drug cartels as the central national security mission.<sup>15</sup> The potential contributions of the Secretariat of National Defense to government intelligence is suggested by the fact that under Fox and Calderon huge numbers of individuals were assigned to Section 2 (intelligence) on the general staff.<sup>16</sup> The extent of the cooperation also can be measured by the presence of military officers in important positions in the attorney general's office and the Public Security position in charge of police reform.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, *Programa Sectorial de Defensa Nacional* (Mexico: SDN, 2007), 12.

<sup>15</sup> This collaboration was helped immensely when Fox, for the first time in decades, appointed a career Army general, Rafael Macedo de la Concha, to a non-military cabinet post as Attorney General. Macedo de la Concha's father was a prominent general in the 1970s and 1980s, having been Chief of Staff of the Presidential Guards under Luis Echeverría, and a zone commander in the 1980s. Macedo de la Concha was Fox's first wife's cousin. Letter from General Luis Garfias, January 27, 2005; *La Jornada*, April 21, 2002; Mexican Political Biographies Project, 2009; *Diccionario Biográfico del Gobierno Mexicano* (Mexico: Presidencia, 1984), 257. Despite these improvements, there still continued to be disputes over which agency would receive the funding for the performance of specific tasks, including helicopters and airplanes for drug detection missions. See "El ejército desplaza a la PGR a un discreto segundo plane," *Diario de Yucatán*, March 3, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Service in the Staff Sections at National Defense headquarters always has been a valued component in the most successful careers in the officer corps. But serving as the Assistant Section Chief or Section Chief of Intelligence is appearing more frequently among top leaders of Army, including the current figures immediately under General Galvan.

<sup>17</sup> General Javier del Real Magallanes was appointed Assistant Secretary of Police Strategy and Intelligence, Secretariat of Public Security, in 2008, the highest post assigned to a general officer in the Calderón administration. He was appointed specifically to implement the new federal police model advocated by the Calderón administration, after a stellar career fighting drug traffickers, having been commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Military Region in Monterrey and head of anti-drug operations in North East Mexico. General Del Real Magallanes was Chief of the Intelligence Section at the Secretariat of National Defense from 1990-94, suggesting his long experience with intelligence and national security issues. Mexican Political Biographies Project, 2009; *Por Esto*, Dec. 5, 2008; *La Jornada*, Dec. 4, 2008; [www.sedena.gob.mx](http://www.sedena.gob.mx), 2000, 2003. The focus has been on the Army presence, but in recent months, the Navy has taken on a much more visible role, as Admiral Wilfrido Robledo Madrid became the personal adviser to the new Attorney General of Mexico, Arturo Chávez Chávez, and Admiral José Luis Figueroa Cuevas was appointed head of the National Center of Analysis, Planning and Intelligence (CENAP). See

Within this evolving national security context since 1988, how did the military become involved in the anti-drug mission? The army's initial anti-drug mission began under President Lázaro Cárdenas, when he ordered the military to destroy marijuana and poppy crops in Sinaloa in the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> However, this trade actually increased during World War II because the United States needed a legal source of morphine, thus expanding production of poppies, and marijuana, because it required hemp fiber.

The United States, by contrast, only seriously began its anti-drug interdiction program under President Nixon, whose Task Force proposed eradicating opium poppies and marijuana. In Mexico, during the 1960s and 1970s, the army was assigned an eradication mission, often in the same regions where it was performing civic action goals. During this period specific battalions, as far away as central Mexico, were sent to the drug producing states such as Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, where they would spend six months a year destroying crops.<sup>19</sup> Two significant changes occurred in this era which produced critical features characterizing drug trafficking today: large cartels replaced individual family producers, who in turn increased the number of growers; and United States efforts to interdict the flow of drugs through the Caribbean resulted in South American sources shipping drugs through Mexico.

Mexico's Plan Condor in 1977 was the first large-scale army operation against drug production. By 1985, nearly twenty percent of the active army was engaged in the anti-drug mission (during the years 1976-1985, for example, 315 military personnel died in

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Jorge Medellín, "De Orden Superior, Almirantes en PGR, contrapeso a la SEDENA," [www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx](http://www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx), November 19, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Sinaloa has always been a significant source of drugs and illegal alcohol, which were smuggled to the United States since Prohibition.

<sup>19</sup> In an interview with a Mexican sergeant who participated in these patrols for years in the 1980s, he asserted that the officers often excluded certain fields from being destroyed, indicating that his commanders were compromised by specific drug producers. February, 2009.

performing that mission). When Carlos Salinas became president in 1988, he increased the emphasis on the military's role in the anti-drug mission, simultaneously establishing the Drug Control Planning Center in 1991. When the officer corps expressed its opposition to such an enhanced role, Salinas narrowed the scope back to destroying drugs. The armed forces revived its expanded role in 1995, under President Ernesto Zedillo

In spite of the armed forces expanded responsibilities, its growth has been relatively limited in the last fifteen years. (Table 3) What is revealing about the change in the size of the Army since 1970 is the persistent decline in growth from one administration to the next. Although one could make a case for the 18 percent increase during the De la Madrid administration (1982-88), when the military took on the eradication mission in earnest, as the battle against the cartels intensified, the percentage increase declined under Zedillo, and even more dramatically under Fox and Calderón. In early 2009, the

**Table 3-Growth of the Army/Air Force, 1976-2009**

	1976	1982	1988	1994	2000	2006	2009
Nos.	93,278	113,509	133,673	161,252	182,392	194,143	202,355
% +		22	18	17	13	6	4

**Source:** Transparency request 0000700024708. These figures are from the last year of each administration since 1970.

combined military forces consisted of 255,506 officers, enlisted personnel, and civilian employees.<sup>20</sup> (Table 4) When comparing the size of the armed forces to the population,

<sup>20</sup> Transparency requests produced different figures. According to the Navy, in February 2009, it consisted of 191 Admirals, 1,892 Captains, 10,646 officers, and 37,943 enlisted, totaling only 50, 672. More

Mexico's figure is 2.4 percent, well below that of Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia, but above Argentina and Brazil. It is the same ratio as that of Australia.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 4-Composition of the Armed Forces**

Ranks	Army/Air Force		Navy	
	No.	%	No.	%
Generals/Admirals	537	0.3	221	0.4
Cols., Lt. Cols., Majors	5,364	2.7	1,713	3.1
Officers	30,110	15.1	12,586	22.5
Enlisted	162,686	81.5	40,378	72.2
Others	848	0.4	1,063	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>199,545</b>		<b>55,961</b>	

**Source:** Sedena and Semar, *Presupuesto de egreso de la federación, analítico de plazas*, 2008, Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *México Todo en Cifras* (Mexico: Aguilar, 2009), 185. As of May, 2009, 8,714 personnel in the Army/Air Force, and as of February, 7,471 in the Navy were women. Transparency request 0000700062709, May 7, 2009. In 2008, the Army introduced reforms to its organic laws which would allow women to obtain the highest positions. See "La Sedena abrirá más puertas a las mujeres," *Diario de Yucatán*, April 27, 2008, and "Army Careers Opening Up in Mexico," *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 2007. In the Navy, 13 women reached the rank of Frigate Captain as of December, 2008.

While the growth of the military has been relatively gradual, the overall increases in expenditures on public security have increased significantly. Expenditures of the Secretariat of National Defense increased by 338 percent from 2000 to 2008, while comparable expenditures for the Navy actually decreased by 8 percent. (Table 5) The combined expenditures for all national security agencies during the same period increased by 152 percent. As Marcos Pablo Moloeznik correctly pointed out in his analysis of defense spending in 2006, which accounted for 2.41 percent of the federal

interesting is the fact that 15 percent of those personnel were women, 21 percent of officers, 3 percent of captains, and 14 percent enlisted. As of March, 2009, the Army reached 202,355.

<sup>21</sup> Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *México Todo en Cifras* (Mexico: Aguilar, 2009), Table 15, 200.

budget, 80 percent went to personnel costs.<sup>22</sup> He argues that too little attention was paid

**Table 5-Public Security Expenditures for Navy and National Defense**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	% Increase
	<b>Millions of Pesos</b>									
<b>Navy</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>-8.40</b>
<b>Defense</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>1429</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>1049</b>	<b>1368</b>	<b>1434</b>	<b>1751</b>	<b>337.75</b>

Source: "Presupuestos, Seguridad y Defensa 2000-2008," *Atlas de la seguridad y la defensa de México 2009* (Mexico, 2009) Table 11, p. 268.

to maintaining existing and acquiring new equipment.<sup>23</sup>

How has the military's role changed since 2006, and why has the level of violence increased? When you compare the last ten years with the twelve years under the previous two PRI administrations, several important differences stand out. First, in the PRI era, military anti-drug missions were on-going while tolerance of drug traffickers at many levels was occurring, thus criminal violence rarely touched ordinary people.<sup>24</sup> Under President Salinas, for example, a compromised army unit was involved in a deadly firefight with agents of the Attorney General in Veracruz, protecting a landing zone for drug dealers against civil authorities.<sup>25</sup> For the first time in decades, a President removed

<sup>22</sup> Salary increases and reasonable retirement pay for the military were long overdue. Calderón increased both several times during his administration. Arturo Zárate, "El presidente Felipe Calderón propone incrementar el fondo de retiro para ex-militares," *Diario de Yucatán*, August 27, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, "Sistema de defensa, fuerzas armadas y profesión militar," *Atlas de la seguridad*, p. 56. Interestingly, according to the National Council of Private Security, Mexico's private sector spends 1 percent of its gross domestic product on security. Jorge Medellín, "La Seguridad," in *Atlas de la seguridad*, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Estimates of drug related killings vary widely. The most careful analysis suggests that the rate increased from 1.1-1.3 in the early years to 1.7-2.0 during Fox's last two years, to 4.8 and 6.1 deaths per 100,000 in 2008 and 2009 under Calderón, a dramatic increase. See *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009* (San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, USD, January 2010)

<sup>25</sup> Wesley A. Fryer, "Mexican Security," Unpublished paper, August 24, 1993, [www.wtvi.com/wesley/mexican](http://www.wtvi.com/wesley/mexican) security.

a secretary of the navy mid-term, in this case allegedly for “illicit enrichment.”<sup>26</sup> Zedillo experienced his own problems when he appointed a Division General, Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, as drug czar, only to have to remove him several days later for allegedly being involved with one of the cartels.<sup>27</sup>

These incidents, most notably the case of Gutiérrez Rebollo, symbolizes what many analysts have suggested about the pre-2000 governments: a higher level of toleration toward drug traffickers. A careful examination of the military’s own investigation of the general, exceeding 1,100 pages, makes abundantly clear that the general, who was the regional commander based in Guadalajara, Jalisco, openly associated with known drug traffickers for years, including his frequent attendance at social functions sponsored by these individuals. It was clearly impossible for Mexican military and civilian intelligence to be unaware of these associations, and equally surprising that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency had overlooked these activities.<sup>28</sup>

Calderón is pursuing an aggressive, pro-active strategy, temporarily reassigning large numbers of troops where the problems are most intense—in earlier eras, those battalions were conducting operations in isolated, rural areas.<sup>29</sup> Troops often have been stationed in major metropolitan centers, including Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. To the extent that this strategy has been successful in capturing cartel leaders and their

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<sup>26</sup> There was never a public investigation of these charges. *Proceso* provided what little evidence reached the media. See Carlos Marín, “Inexplicablemente rico, Schleske omitió declarar sus residencias en Houston,” *Proceso*, August 3, 1990, 8-13, and Francisco Ortiz Pinchetti, “Actividades de narcos de las que Schleske debió estar enterado,” *Proceso*, July 23, 1990, 8.

<sup>27</sup> General Gutiérrez Rebollo was convicted both for drug trafficking and arms trafficking in two separate trials. See Tim Golden, “U.S. Officials Say Mexican Military Aids Drug Trafficking,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> For background on this, see Sam Dillon, “Court Files Say Drug Baron Used Mexican Military,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1998, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). I read through all of these papers personally. They are available at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>29</sup> For a brief but interesting analysis of this new strategy, see Dan Lund’s report, “Shaping a New Administration in Mexico; Calderón Begins His Presidency with the Use of Massive Force against the Drug Cartels,” Series 7, No. 1, January 5, 2007, 1-4.

lieutenants, the government has exacerbated the internal battles among the cartels. Those conflicts are likely to increase.<sup>30</sup> The intensive, uncompromising federal strategy to defeat and destroy the drug cartels has contributed to increased levels of violence, and to the rise of homicides and other criminal activity.<sup>31</sup> The Army itself has suffered numerous casualties. From January 1, 2001 to May, 2009, 476 soldiers have died in carrying out this mission, including 105 officers, many from accidents.<sup>32</sup> From December 1, 2006, through February 18, 2009, 79 officers and soldiers have been killed, and 173 wounded.<sup>33</sup> By the end of 2009, 40 more soldiers had died. These conditions create an overall environment which affect the public's perception of personal security, and their views on other issues, including government priorities generally and national security priorities specifically.<sup>34</sup>

Perceptions can be different from reality, but regardless of whether they conform to reality they affect government legitimacy and potentially political stability. In 2008,

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<sup>30</sup> Such conflicts are not only the product of instability in cartel leadership as a result of army and police successes, but more importantly will be intensified as US domestic production of marijuana increases. As the *Washington Post* pointed out, marijuana “has long provided most of the revenue for Mexican drug cartels. More than 60 percent of the cartels’ revenue—8.6 billion out of 13.8 billion in 2006—came from U.S. marijuana sales...” Steve Fainaru and William Booth, “Cartels Face an Economic Battle,” October 7, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Many political analysts believe Calderón’s pursuit of this strategy was political, designed to establish his legitimacy as president after a close and disputed election. As I have argued, however, economic, crime and security issues have dominated the last three presidential campaigns. Most observers were surprised by Calderón’s heightened emphasis on this issue because he did not highlight it during the campaign. Furthermore, President Fox recommended to Calderón to remove the army from this task. See Francisco E. González, “Mexico’s Drug Wars Get Brutal,” *Current History*, February 2009, 72-76, for a discussion of the reasons behind his strategy, Jorge Medellín, “Fox, el ejército y la amnesia antidrogas,” *De Orden Superio*, [www.columas.ejecentral.com.mx](http://www.columas.ejecentral.com.mx), October 20, 2009, and my “Democracy Redux? Mexico’s Voters and the 2006 Presidential Race,” in Jorge I. Domínguez, Chappell Lawson, and Alejandro Moreno, eds., *Consolidating Mexico’s Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 29-49, for the importance of issues during the campaign.

<sup>32</sup> The Secretariat of National Defense provided a complete record, name, rank, age, place of origin, unit, date and manner of death. Transparency request 0000700068809, August 13, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Transparency request, 0000700000954, March 11, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> For Calderón’s own views of a war on organized crime, see extracts from a 90 minute interview with Jorge Zepeda Patterson “La Guerra al crimen organizado,” *Atlas de la seguridad*, 17-24, taken from *El Universal*, February 27, 2009.

Central America had a homicide rate 3 times higher than the world average and above the Latin American average. Yet, Argentina, Peru and Chile led the region with 57, 52 and 49 percent of residents respectively feeling insecure. Forty percent of Mexicans felt this way, and the figures for Americans and Canadians were 23 and 21 percent respectively. The author of this study concluded that “the perception that the local police are involved in crime and the presence of gangs and drug-trafficking in the neighborhood significantly increase feelings of insecurity” among Mexican and Central American respondents.<sup>35</sup> During this same year, 33 percent of Latin Americans reported they were a victim of crime. Mexico ranked second highest, after Venezuela, with 42 percent.<sup>36</sup> In the same poll, Mexicans also perceive their country to be violent, 6.2 on a 10.0 scale, the fourth highest in Latin America.

In response to the increased levels of violence, Calderón encouraged the collaboration between civilian and military agencies, including assigning retired or active duty military to civilian posts, believing that the military is less susceptible to corruption and more capable in confronting organized crime.<sup>37</sup> The data bear out this increasing pattern (Table 6), having risen from 4,504 in the last year of Zedillo’s administration

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<sup>35</sup> Jose Miguel Cruz, “Public Insecurity in Central America and Mexico,” *Americas Barometer Insights*, No. 28, 2009, 4. The question was: Speaking of the place or neighborhood where you live, and thinking of the possibility of becoming victimized by an assault or a robbery, do you feel safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe.

<sup>36</sup> Latinobarometer 2008 poll, [www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org), 2009.

<sup>37</sup> The last major example of the armed forces being tainted by drug-related corruption was the arrest of the entire 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, stationed in Sinaloa, for ties to the Sinaloa Cartel, in October, 2004. Although news reports indicated that only a small number were found guilty, apparently, according to a response from the Secretariat of National Defense, July 24, 2009, they could not confirm how many were arrested and incarcerated. They did indicate, however, that as of that date, 549 members of the military were serving in prison, but not specifically for drug-related crimes. Two were generals, four were Lt. Cols, and five were majors. The Navy reported that from 2006 to March 5, 2009, no individuals had been removed from duty for their links to drug cartels. Transparency request, 0001300008309, April 3, 2009. The Army, on the other hand, has detained 91 individuals from 2003 to 2009, for ties to drug traffickers. Transparency request, 0000700036209, March 18, 2009. For some specific examples, see Jorge Medellín, “Narcomilitares y enredos en Banjército,” [www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx](http://www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx), November 11, 2009.



**Table 6-Military Personnel in All Federal, State and Municipal Security Positions**

Numbers	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009(a)
	4504	4504	4504	5327	5327	5327	5327	7588	8274	2948

(a) 2009 figures only as of February.

Source: Transparency Request, February 24, 2009.

to 8,274, nearly twice as much 8 years later. The same pattern has occurred on the state and local levels. For years, retired military have taken positions as state and local directors of public security.<sup>38</sup> In the last few years, their numbers also have increased significantly, reaching 501 in the first two years of the Calderón administration,

**Table 7- Military Personnel in State and Municipal Security Positions, 2007-2009**

Rank	2007	2008	2009(a)
Generals	31	36	23
Lt. Cols/Cols	39	78	26
Officers	14	134	54
Soldiers	3	43	20

(a) 2009 figures only as of March.

Source: Transparency request 000070036909, March 23, 2009.

Increasing corruption within the ranks is not the only potential consequence within the army. The performance of such a dangerous mission may have affected the persistence of future officers at the Heroic Military College. Graduates declined from over 650 from 2003, to less than half, slightly over 300 in 2004 and 2005. Those who left did not adapt to the military environment or the school did not meet their future expectations. Transparency request, [www.sedena.gob.mx/leytrans/petic.2006/junio/01062006b.html](http://www.sedena.gob.mx/leytrans/petic.2006/junio/01062006b.html).

<sup>38</sup> At any given time, the army conducts operations in collaboration with local civilian agencies. For example, in January 2009 they were engaged in six joint assignments with civilians against organized crime in Chihuahua, Durango, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, and Veracruz. Transparency request, 0000700007409, January 26, 2009.

especially as drug cartels have threatened or assassinated civilian officeholders.<sup>39</sup> General Galván convoked a meeting of all military public security directors in November 2008 to discuss common strategies and new forms of collaboration between police and the army.<sup>40</sup>

Often, in spite of Galván's efforts, considerable friction has occurred between the armed forces and civilian police agencies, especially when the police are perceived as corrupt and collaborating with local drug traffickers. This tension is best illustrated by General Sergio Aponte Polito, Commander of the Second Military Region, in Mexicali, Baja California, who published a public letter in April of 2008, in which he bluntly

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<sup>39</sup> See George Grayson for numerous examples: "Mexican Governors and Mayors Place Ex-Military in Public Safety Posts," *Hemisphere Focus*, 17, No. 2, May 11, 2009, and his book, *Mexico, Narco Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Jorge Luis Sierra, "Los generales, inermes frente al narcotráfico," *Atlas de la seguridad y de la defensa de México* (Mexico, 2009), 207. The drug cartels sent a grisly message to military officers who take these posts, when it kidnapped, tortured, and murdered Brigadier General Mauro Enrique Tello Quiñones, who had been appointed head of public security in the popular resort of Cancún, in February, 2009. The General had been coordinator of the military's anti-drug strategy in Michoacán before retiring. To date, he is the highest ranking member of the officer corps to have been killed. Early investigations suggest a possible link between corrupt local police and a cell of the Zetas' cartel, a group originally founded by former and deserting soldiers. See *Justice in Mexico* (February 2009), 3. Deserters have been an important issue in Mexico. During the Fox administration, they were averaging more than 15,000 yearly, reaching 20,224 during 2005. Transparency request, Secretariat of National Defense, January 3, 2006 and March 11, 2009. Under Calderón, those figures began to decline dramatically after the first year of his administration. Among enlisted personnel, desertions were 16,500 in 2007, 9,050 in 2008, and only 5,316 in 2009. Among officers, the total for 2007 and 2008 combined was 203, most of whom were 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants. Transparency requests, 0000700158909, November 17, 2009, and 0000700319909. However, as one source discovered from examining numerous public documents, 90 percent of the desertions occur in the first two weeks of service (privates account for over 90 percent of enlisted desertions), when recruits realize that a life in military service does not meet their expectations. Currently, they are at an all time low if you subtract this figure from the reported totals. Communication, October 26, 2009. The argument that desertions increased as the battle against the cartels intensified is also sharply contradicted by the fact that the largest level in the last ten years occurred in the last year of the Zedillo administration, reaching nearly 21,000 enlisted personnel. Between 2000 and 2009, 29,641 were investigated and tried for numerous infractions. Of those, 25,882 were off duty desertions (comparable to absent without leave), 952 active duty desertions, 65 abandoning posts, and 1 deserting to a foreign country. From 2006 through July, 2009, the Army sentenced 7,702 individuals, 7,396 for off duty desertion, 1 for active duty desertion, and 2 for abandoning their post. In 2004, Jorge Medellín indicated that 1,382 members of the elite Mobile Air (GAFES) and the Amphibious (GANFES) Special Forces, established in 1995, had deserted out of a total of 5,500 members. At least forty members, according to the Attorney General of Mexico, had become members of the Zetas. "Desertan 1,382 militares de elite," *El Universal*, March 28, 2004. For a broader discussion, see Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, "Las Fuerzas Armadas en México: entre la atipicidad y el mito," *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 213 (January-February 2008), 156-69.

criticized the local prosecutor for his failure to investigate many of the murders, kidnappings and force disappearances, citing a number of specific cases. He concluded “that to obtain better results in the combat against drug dealing and organized crime, it is necessary to propel and pursue strategies that bring some police cadres in line, so as to avoid the perpetuation of delinquent activities—through impunity—that are detrimental to society.”<sup>41</sup> Confrontations between corrupt police and the army are happening in the field.<sup>42</sup> According to Associate Press, 65 such physical confrontations occurred in the first eleven months of 2009, versus only two in 2008. The police chief of the municipio of García, near Monterrey, Mexico’s second largest city, Brigadier General Juan Arturo Esparza, was murdered four days after taking office in November, 2009, and five local police officers were among those arrested.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, in Tijuana, where the head of public security and the chief of police are former military officers, the relationship between the army and the police has improved significantly, and inside sources describe it as “good.”<sup>44</sup>

The militarization of the drug war in Mexico has generated other consequences, some of them for civil-military relations, and others for the armed forces itself. The inability of the combined efforts of the attorney general's office, state police, and the

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<sup>41</sup> Excerpts from letter by General Sergio Aponte Polito to the Attorney General of the State of Baja California, April 22, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Most media coverage focuses on the weakness found in civilian agencies, but military personnel in these positions have been unsuccessful too. The most prominent case was Division General Ricardo Andriano Morales, who took over public security in Durango in September, 2009. In less than six months he resigned after a “series of complications and scandals in his administration.” See Jorge Medellín, “La ‘guerra oculta’ de la Sedena,” *De Orden Superior*, [www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx](http://www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx), January 19, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Olgar R. Rodríguez and Julie Watson, “Soldiers Wary of Often Corrupt Mexican Police,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2009. Also see [www.milenio.com](http://www.milenio.com), Nov. 5, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> January 28, 2010. This is all the more remarkable because several years ago the army took over all police functions and disarmed the police, who were viewed by the public and army as corrupt. Half of the present police are still considered by insiders to be “questionable.” Nevertheless, in an arrest made in February 2010, in addition to top leaders in a local cartel organization, two top police commanders appointed by the general in charge of public security were also arrested.

armed forces to rein in drug trafficking, in spite of its improved track record under Fox and Calderón, suggests that the government has a geopolitical security problem, and that its territorial hegemony is incomplete.<sup>45</sup> This perception, both from inside and outside Mexico, was highlighted by a statement appearing in the United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment, Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force* (2008), which argued that the two worse case scenarios for failing states “for the Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico.” It went on to conclude that “Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone.”<sup>46</sup> There is little question that the antidrug campaign has made the military the supreme authority, or in some cases, the only authority in parts of such states as Oaxaca, Sinaloa, Jalisco, and Guerrero.<sup>47</sup> The long-term effect of this is, of course, to potentially subvert civilian political supremacy and give the military a taste of political control on a regional level.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Mexican armed forces are unique in the region for the level of respect

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<sup>45</sup>If one examines the Army’s success at this mission, using comparative data for the first 24 months of the last three administrations, the armed forces have been more successful in every category. What is significant about these statistics, however, is the cost to results ratio. Essentially, between Fox and Calderón, expenditures increased from 12.3 million pesos to 122.8 million, a ten-fold increase. The expenditures under Zedillo were 8.1 million. In no category of the measurable results has their success more than doubled. Gobierno Federal, *La política mexicana contra la delincuencia organizada* (Mexico: December 4, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment, Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force* (2008), 36. Incredibly, the report provides no details as to why Mexico should be considered such an extreme example. No serious analyst to date supports this view.

<sup>47</sup> For example, the Attorney General of Mexico reported that at least 80 municipalities were controlled by drug cartels. See Godofredo Vidal de la Rosa, “Estado debil y estancamiento democrático en México,” Unpublished paper, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, December, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> One of the most interesting arguments is that a large percentage of the actual violence and murders are the result of cartels fighting each other for control, rather than the confrontations with the police or armed forces. As one well-informed observer who makes this argument noted, “In some ways, the Mexican military and security forces are a third party in this—not the focus. Ultimately, the cartels—not the government—control the level of violence and security in the country.” Rodger Baker, “The Big Business of Organized Crime in Mexico,” *Stratfor*, Feb 13, 2008, [www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com).

which they command. In a recent poll of the region, including Americans and Canadians,

**Table 8-Level of Trust toward the Armed Forces in the Western Hemisphere**

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**To What Extent do you Trust the Armed Forces?**

<b>Selected Countries</b>	<b>Percentage Response</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>79.3</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>74.8</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>70.8</b>
<b>Brazil</b>	<b>68.4</b>
<b>Venezuela</b>	<b>54.5</b>
<b>Peru</b>	<b>52.1</b>
<b>Argentina</b>	<b>36.3</b>

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**Explanation:** Response on a 1-7 point scale with 7 meaning “a lot,” recalibrated on a 0-100 scale. National average was 59.2 for twenty countries in the sample of US, Canada and Latin America.

**Source:** Figure 1, Daniel Montalvo, “Do you Trust Your Armed Forces,” *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 27, 2009, 1.

Mexico ranked third, closely following the percentages of respondents from Canada and the United States who expressed a lot of trust in their armed forces. The author’s statistical analysis of all countries demonstrated that repression alone (such as in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s) is not correlated with lower levels of trust toward the armed forces in Latin America<sup>49</sup> Instead, for example, an increase in the economic growth rate produced a much stronger positive relationship.

Not only is Mexican trust in their armed forces comparatively high throughout the region, but importantly confidence in the military ranks high among all other potential

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Montalvo, “Do You Trust Your Armed Forces,” *AmericasBarometer Insights*, No. 27, 2009, 3.

institutions within Mexico (Table 9).<sup>50</sup> Since the first surveys of citizen trust in

**Table 9-Confidence in the Military Compared to Other Institutions in 2009**

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**How Much Confidence do You Have in the Following Institutions?**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Much or Some %</b>
<b>Church</b>	<b>75(a)</b>
<b>Schools</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Army</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>National Human Rights Commission</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Media</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Supreme Court</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>President</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Federal Electoral Institute</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Secretariat of Public Security</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Police</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Congress</b>	<b>28</b>

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**Source:** Sistemas de Inteligencia en Mercado y Opinión, June-August, 2009, “Encuesta Seguridad Nacional,” 1,250 interviews nationally, July 24-27, 2009, +/-1.9 percent margin of error. The Church is the only institution where nearly a third of Mexicans strongly trust it. The combined score for schools is slightly higher.

Institutions were completed in the 1980s, the military consistently has been at the top. In the most recent poll, the Army ranked third after schools and the Church. Police, on the other hand, have consistently ranked at the bottom.<sup>51</sup> David Shirk found in the most

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<sup>50</sup> Another way to measure the prestige of the armed forces is to examine the applications for entry into the various military schools. Compared to the first years of the Zedillo administration, when one student was admitted to the Heroic Military College for every student who applied, the admission ratio became increasingly difficult. By 2005, 2646 individuals applied, and only 604 were admitted, approximately one in four. In specialty fields in 2005, admission rates were highly competitive, such as the Military Engineering School, where only 29 of 2019 were admitted, or Communications, with only five slots for 214 applicants, or Aviation, with 42 places for 1680 applications. On the other hand, the number of graduates decreased significantly. Graduates of the Heroic Military College declined from an average of over 650 from 2000-03, to less than half that number, slightly over 300 in 2004 and 2005. Those who left did not adapt to the military environment or the school did not meet their expectations for the future. [www.sedena.gob.mx/leytrans/petic.2006/junio/01062006b.html](http://www.sedena.gob.mx/leytrans/petic.2006/junio/01062006b.html).

<sup>51</sup> An indirect way of examining attitudes toward the armed forces is the level of support for obligatory military service. In a 2008 survey, 41.2 percent thought it should be only for men, 30.6 for both sexes, 25.8

detailed study of police in Mexico, in metropolitan Guadalajara, where 70 percent of the population consider crime and insecurity an urgent issue, that 49 percent of residents considered the police to be corrupt. Sixty-eight percent of those interviewed believed such corruption occurred at the highest levels. Interestingly, 51 percent of the respondents considered citizens responsible for this condition, 44 percent thought both citizens and police were responsible, and only 5 percent blamed only the police.<sup>52</sup>

General support for the armed forces as an institution has been consistent over time, on the other hand, support for the military's anti-drug mission is more complex. In the earliest survey taken during the Calderón administration, shortly after he took office, when citizens were asked if they supported the armed forces taking on the anti-drug trafficking mission, 89 percent agreed with the army fighting drug traffickers. However, when given a choice as to which institution they would prefer "to protect the streets," the police or the army, 43 percent favored the police and 45 percent the army. This response unquestionably suggests that despite the public's consistently low evaluation of the police, at least half of all Mexicans thought they should perform ordinary, local, anti-crime functions. Furthermore, in assessing the likelihood of the Army defeating the drug cartels, even before Calderón had fully implemented his strategy, 65 percent thought the use of the army would solve the problem only temporarily.<sup>53</sup> In August, 2009, strong support for the army carrying out the drug trafficking mission was 42 percent, while an additional 33 percent somewhat supported their role. In June, 44 four percent thought the

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opposed any obligatory service, and 2.4 didn't answer. "Public's View of Obligatory Military Service," Consulta Mitofsky, 1,000 interviews nationally, 25-29 July, 2008, +/- 3.1 percent margin of error.

<sup>52</sup>David Shirk and María Eugenia Suárez de Garay, Reporte Global, 2009, *Justiciabarómetro, Encuesta a policías preventivos de la Zona Metropolitana de Guadalajara*, Unpublished paper, 2009.

<sup>53</sup>Parametría., 1,200 interviews nationally, January 27-30, 2007, +/- 2.8 percent margin of error. Published in *Excelsior*, February 19, 2007.

Mexican Army was winning the war against drug trafficking where as 33 percent responded negatively.<sup>54</sup>

### **Collaboration between the Mexican Military and US Military**

A significant consequence of the expanded military role in drug interdiction having national security implications for both countries is the augmented possibility of increased United States military involvement in Mexico. Since the 1990s, the relationship between the American and Mexican armed forces has been cordial but formal. The Mexican officer corps never has collaborated with American military leadership, even when they have shared similar security interests, to the extent found elsewhere in the region. The reasons for this pattern can be attributed to the historic relationship between the two countries, and to the officer corps success in maintaining its own internal autonomy from Mexican civil and political intervention. It has sustained a closed, secretive posture even to the present day. In the past, the primary source of potential collaboration occurred through the numbers of Mexican officers who were trained in the United States.<sup>55</sup> Even though those numbers were extensive over many decades, such career experiences never enhanced institutional cooperation between the two armed forces at the highest levels.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Sistemas de Inteligencia en Mercado y Opinión, "Encuesta Seguridad Nacional," June-August, 2009. 1,250 interviews nationally, July 24-27, 2009, +/-1.9 percent margin of error.

<sup>55</sup> By the end of the Zedillo administration, Mexican soldiers and officers accounted for 34 percent of all individuals trained at the Army's former School of the Americas, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, at Ft. Benning, Georgia. At Lackland Air Force Base, Mexicans made up nearly 30 percent of Air Force personnel trained on site. Stanley Meisler, "U.S. Bolstering Mexican Military, Report Says," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1998, A4. The author of this article explicitly claims that "The statistics about the training of Mexicans by Americans reveal a surprising and close relationship between the two military establishments."

<sup>56</sup> From 1961-1998, 1,327 Mexican officers studied at the former School of the Americas. A complete list of personnel, enlisted and officers, who have studied at the School of the Americas since 1956 clearly demonstrates that most training is of short duration, generally 4-8 weeks. Mexicans and other Latin American soldiers are trained at dozens of bases and military programs in the United States, not just the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. More than 1,900 individuals from Mexico were



It is possible, however, to make the argument that Mexican training in the United States may have contributed to an internal security focus which took hold in the National Defense Secretariat at the higher echelons beginning under Salinas, reflected in the backgrounds of some of its top brass. For example, the official mayor of the secretariat (third ranked position) from 1988-1994, received added training in intelligence gathering, counter insurgency, and psychological warfare in the United States.<sup>57</sup>

In the mid-1990s, the United States army began training over 1,000 officers at more than a dozen bases in drug interdiction tactics, and the Central Intelligence Agency provided extensive intelligence courses to about 90 officers, who became part of the new counter-drug force in Mexico. From 2000 to the end of 2009, 1076 Army and Air Force personnel studied in the United States, 68 percent during the Fox administration. Under Calderón, their numbers averaged 76 yearly.<sup>58</sup> In 2005, the Navy reported 82 individuals studying abroad, confirming the huge disproportional ratio of foreign studies between the two services, with the Navy at 4 times that of the Army.<sup>59</sup>

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trained in the United States in the first three years of the Fox administration. “Blurring the Lines, Trends in U.S. Military Programs with Latin America,” Washington Office of Latin America, 2004. The strongest personal ties to date occurred between Defense Secretary William Perry and his counterpart General Enrique Cervantes Aguirre between 1995-1997. The fact that most of the top staff in the US Defense Department is civilian negates the ties that might occur through military training. See Craig A. Deare’s detailed review of these relationships in “U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface,” *Strategic Forum*, No. 243 (July 2009), 1-10. For a response from the head of Northern Command, General Victor E. Renuart, Jr., and Biff Baker, see U.S.-Mexico Homeland Defense: A Compatible Interface,” *Strategic Forum*, No. 254 (February 2010), 1-5.

<sup>57</sup> From 1965 to 1985, Mexico hosted 225 military personnel from other countries, most of whom studied at the Heroic Military College (46), the Higher War College (45) and the Military Medical School (63). Nearly all foreign students were from Central America, plus a handful from the Caribbean and Andean countries. Seventeen Americans and two Koreans attended the Higher War College. Transparency request 0000700140809, October 26, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Mexican personnel have studied in 28 other countries during these years. Large contingents have gone to different countries in a given year, such as 32 to Germany in 2008, 23 to France in 2003, 37 to Russian in 2000, 16 to Sweden, 2004, 15 to Colombia in 2007, and 14 to Israel in 2009. Contrary to some assertions, few have studied in Guatemala (20 in nine years). Transparency request 0000700168209, November 19, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Transparency request 0001300001406, February 24, 2006. This document contains a detailed list of regular but dynamic academic exchanges maintained by the Navy with various countries.

The most pronounced symbol of this indirect, potential American influence was President Fox's appointment of General Clemente Vega as his secretary of national defense. General Vega graduated from the counterinsurgency course at Fort Gulick, Panama Canal Zone, and is a military expert on national security, having authored a military manual on the subject used at the Escuela Superior de Guerra. Even though Vega personally received training from and contact with American Army officers, it did not produce significant changes in the relationship between the two armed forces during the Fox administration. However, Vega personally reported to me in 2004 that he felt their cooperation with the United States military had improved over that of his predecessor, even though Mexico was not willing to participate actively in the U.S. Northern Command.<sup>60</sup> The Canadian military reported the same difficulties as late as 2006 in developing closer ties to the Mexican military.<sup>61</sup>

Some of Calderón's appointees, and their most influential collaborators, offered similar points of contact which could bode well for increased collaboration between the two countries' armed forces. The President appointed Admiral Mariano Francisco Saynez Mendoza as his new Secretary of the Navy. Calderón's secretary spent more than a year in the United States, having served as the Assistant Naval Attaché to the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C., during which time he completed the graduate level Inter-Continental Defense course. Admiral Saynez is also fluent in English.<sup>62</sup> Mexico's current Assistant Secretary of the Navy, who previously was the Oficial Mayor from 2006-2008, also served as the Assistant Naval Attaché in Washington, D.C. Finally, the current Oficial Mayor,

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<sup>60</sup> Personal interview, February 19, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Conversation with representatives of the Canadian Army and Ministry of Foreign Relations, August, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Mexican Political Biographies Project, 2009.

Admiral Moisés Gómez Cabrera, the former head of Naval Intelligence and the Navy's most decorated officer in 2008, also speaks English and studied the international maritime curriculum at the Naval War College in the United States.<sup>63</sup> I will argue below that the most significant advances in collaboration between the armed forces of both countries has occurred between the navies. It is not an accident that the top three naval administrators share these career experiences and fluency in English.

In contrast to the Navy, Calderón's top appointment to Defense is General Guillermo Galván Galván, who except for his assignment as Military Attaché to Spain, has never trained or served abroad, or in the United States specifically, becoming the first Assistant Secretary of National Defense to receive the defense post since 1945. His current Assistant Secretary, like his superior, has served in a Spanish speaking country, Argentina, as an assistant attaché, with no experience in the United States. The only individual among the five generals who have held the top three defense posts to have served in any capacity in the United States, was the first Assistant Secretary of Defense, Tomás Angeles Dauahare, who was appointed the Assistant Army, and then Army Attaché in Washington, D.C. With the exception of General Angeles Dauahare, the other National Defense leaders, similar to the Secretary, boast extensive careers as troop commanders rather than staff administrators.

Nevertheless, one variable which is contributing to increase collaboration is continuity in Army leadership. The fact that this is the first time in half a century that a sitting assistant secretary of national defense has become the secretary of national defense is important because General Galvan was mentored by General Vega, and although he had much more experience as a troop commander on the ground than his boss, he too directed the military university system, just like his mentor. He was the senior division general in

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<sup>63</sup> *Milenio*, April 18 and 19, 2008 | [www.lajornada.unam](http://www.lajornada.unam), Nov. 23, 2006.

the army at the time of his appointment and had commanded seven zones and regions from 1988-2002, before moving to his last two administrative positions.

Off the record, both Pentagon officials and those in Northern Command have confirmed that increased cooperation exists between the militaries of both countries, and not just with the Mexican Navy. Some of my sources reported a “dramatic change” toward more openness at the Secretariat of National Defense, which they believe is what has facilitated this new cooperation.<sup>64</sup> Sources also report a huge increase in interactions between the Canadian and Mexican militaries, complementing what has happened between the US and Mexico.<sup>65</sup>

The most dramatic reflection of this collaboration is the significant increase in Mexican military training in the United States. All the sources I communicated with on both sides of the border agreed that these increased training programs have contributed to the improved relationship. Since 2006, the numbers of Mexican officers in US schools has grown markedly. Mexicans have the most officers in the Department of Defense IMET funded programs of any Latin American country. One source reports that the number of Mexican Lt, Colonels attending the Naval Postgraduate School was unthinkable just a few years ago. Furthermore, the entire class of Mexico’s premier National Defense College, consisting of all services, including its director, a two star general, visited US Northern Command, the US Air Force Academy, and the Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, for the first time in 2008.<sup>66</sup> It is also noteworthy to mention

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<sup>64</sup> One could even speculate that this greater level of openness to collaboration on Galvan’s part might have been affected positively from his studies in educational psychology.

<sup>65</sup> I witnessed a major meeting between numerous uniformed Canadian officers and the Mexicans at the Four Seasons Hotel in Mexico City in December, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin P. Gochman, “Fifty-one Sedena Senior College Fellows Visit USNORTHCOM,” *Agora*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April, 2008. One potential downside of the increased training is that some of that training in the US may benefit the drug cartels through deserters who join their ranks. One of the major cartels, the Zetas,

that there has been increased contact between the US military and Mexican political leaders, both at the National Defense University, which has been creating these contacts for five years, and more recently, at US Northern Command, in which congressional members from the National Defense, Foreign Relations and Navy committees visited in 2008.<sup>67</sup>

The Navy stands out as the leader in cross national collaboration. The Navy began assigning liaison officers at least four years ago. They have an officer in Key West at the Joint Interagency Task Force South; this individual is operational and plays a role in passing drug plane flight tracks to Mexico's Naval Ministry for the Navy to respond. Furthermore, information exchange between the U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet in Mayport, Florida and the Navy Ministry is excellent. The Mexican Navy activated another new position at Norfolk with the US Fleet Forces Command at the same time it established the position at Key West. Sources report increased cooperation between the US Coast Guard and the Mexican Navy, evidenced by the recent seizures of drug traffickers' vessels and mini subs in Mexican waters. In fact, the Mexican Navy liaison officer at U.S. Northern Command (assigned 2007) mentioned working closely with the US Coastguard in developing its own search and rescue schools.<sup>68</sup> Also, the Mexican Naval Chief of Staff specifically reported that he was happy with the level of intelligence sharing in real time

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some of whom may have received special forces training outside Mexico, initially were hired guns for existing cartels. For more details see George W. Grayson, "Los Zetas: The Ruthless Army Spawned by a Mexican Drug Cartel," Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2008. For an outstanding analysis of the Zetas as a "private army," see Max G. Manwaring, "The "New" Dynamic in the Western Hemisphere Security Environment: The Mexican Zetas and Other Private Armies," Strategic Studies Institute, U.A. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, September 2009.

<sup>67</sup>Benjam P. Gochman and Marshall Smith, "Comando Norte recibe a líderes legislativos de México," *Agora*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 50-51. It is worth noting that the Naval liaison officer at US Northern Command in 2009, a commander, graduated from the "Civic Military Responses on Terrorism" class from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School as well as from the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and the National Defense University in Washington, D.C..

<sup>68</sup>For his comments on these and other collaborative issues, see Marisara Martín, "Full Speed Ahead Toward Solid Relationships," *Agora*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2008, 16-18.

with the U.S. Coast Guard. Other sources see the cooperation between the US and Mexican navies as far more intense because of trafficking (human and drugs) in international waters. The Mexican Navy participated in the UNITAS Gold 2009 exercises in April-May 2009.<sup>69</sup> In July, 2009, the Mexican Army assigned an officer to U.S. Northern Command, and General Galván visited Northern Command headquarters, followed by a meeting with Robert Gates in Washington.<sup>70</sup>

The arrival of the Calderón administration and the government's dramatically pronounced emphasis on the anti-drug mission and the military's role in that mission, increased points of potential contact between the two militaries.<sup>71</sup> Institutionally, the implementation of the Mérida Initiative, which includes increased training as part of the funding, enhanced likely contacts.<sup>72</sup> But again, does that imply that the two militaries will be closer? Not necessarily. All sources agreed that the changes that have taken place *preceded* the Mérida Initiative. They largely view the Mérida Initiative as increasing

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<sup>69</sup> "Slipping the Moorings, Mexican Navy Brings New Dimension to UNITAS Gold 2009," *Agora*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2009, 30-37. This is a multinational fleet and the longest-running international military training exercise in the world, having started in 1959. For similar activities, and the British view that the Mexican Navy is "well-run and well-organized" and has quietly been modernizing, see Odin's Eye, "A New Mexican Wave," *Warships International Fleet Review*, February 2008, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin Gochman, "New Era of Increased Collaboration," *Agora*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2009), 22-23. In September, the head of Mexico's Air Force also visited their headquarters and publicly discussed the benefits of increased cooperation. See "Two Command for North American Security," 24-27.

<sup>71</sup> Many sources correctly suggest that this cooperation could have been easily sidetracked within the military and among the general public as a result of the Defense Department's statement which labeled Mexico as a likely failed state. The statement received widespread attention in the Mexican media.

<sup>72</sup> Even before the approval and implementation of the Mérida Initiative, between 2005-07, Mexico was the 12<sup>th</sup> largest recipient of US Foreign Operations Programs funding. Between 1996 and 2008, Mexico, with the exception of 2000 and 2003, has received larger sums for police and military assistance than social and economic assistance. The general ratio between military and economic assistance to the region in 2008 was 40 to 60 percent. For Mexico, however, the ratio was 72 percent military to 28 percent economic aid. "Below the Radar, U.S. Military Programs with Latin America, 1997-2007," Washington Office on Latin America, 2007. Requests for Mexico for 2010 for counter-narcotics and security assistance was \$485.6 million, \$167.8 million above the 2009 programs. [www.appropriations.house.gov/pdf/FY10](http://www.appropriations.house.gov/pdf/FY10), 2009. Ironically, as late as September 2009, the Government Accountability Office reported that only \$24.2 million has actually been spent. "Status of Funds for the Mérida Initiative," U.S. Government Accountability Office, December 3, 2009.

materiel, not personnel collaboration.<sup>73</sup> Most sources view the cooperation between the two countries as increasing as a result of the Mérida Initiative, but largely between Homeland Security and Justice. Sources believe it is too early to tell if the National Defense/Pentagon dialogue will produce similar results. An example of the Mérida Initiative producing disagreement is reflected in the Mexican Secretary of Navy's public statement in early 2009 that they did not want a small fleet of airplanes in the second phase of the program, but rather more helicopters, suggesting a lack of close collaboration in developing the composition of the equipment outlined in the Initiative.<sup>74</sup>

The question of how to increase collaboration between the two militaries has been a thorny question for decades. When I speak to military audiences in the United States, it is the first question on the minds of American officers.<sup>75</sup> My experience has been that currently such a change is likely to be accomplished on a person to person basis. Naturally, it typically is helpful when your Mexican counterpart has some prior contact with Americans. Regardless of the level of contact, however, to date American officers have a much greater chance in developing a more collaborative relationship with naval and air force officers. In addition to the fact that a much higher percentage of naval and air force officers have studied in the United States, it is also the case that the institutional culture of the Navy is much more open to discussion. I can illustrate this personally. I have given two

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<sup>73</sup> The Mexican Army is most interested in US military technology related to intelligence skills and collection, information operations, counter-drug operations, and peacekeeping operations.

<sup>74</sup> "La Armada rechaza aviones de EE.UU.," *Diario de Yucatán*, March 13, 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Of course, the more fundamental issue is whether or not it should be increased, which has long provoked controversy in the region. In this regard, a number of observers have recently been drawing analogies to the U.S. role in Colombia. My sources have indicated that as of 2009, the Mexican armed forces are unreceptive to hearing about the Colombian experience directly from Colombia's armed forces or police. Interestingly, however, Colombia is second only to the U.S. as a training site for Mexican officers in the last several years. The best analysis I have encountered of the Colombia-Mexico comparison is Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia," *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, Policy Paper, No. 12, March 2009. Also see Rory Carroll, "Why the War on Drugs in Colombia May Never be Won," [www.guardian.com](http://www.guardian.com), February 16, 2010.

presentations to the Mexican military, the first of which consisted of two talks on controversial issues related to civil military relations, presented at the National Defense College, an Army operated institution which brings together top senior officers from all three services who typically achieve the highest ranks. A question and answer session occurred after my lengthy presentations, during which I received a single question from an admiral. In contrast, when I gave two presentations at the Naval Center for Higher Studies, the Navy's own post graduate war college, I received dozens of questions and was surrounded by officers with further questions after the presentation.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of institutional culture cannot be stressed enough.<sup>77</sup> Many analogies exist between the way in which the Mexican armed forces interact with domestic and external institutions. The long-standing "closed nature" of the military to outsiders is a distinctive feature. Some alterations in behavior are beginning to occur, but again, those incremental changes are more dramatic in the Navy. For example, if we examine how the military interacts with the media, it is apparent that the Navy maintains a much more actively open policy toward the media than national defense. General Galvan, in the first three years of the Calderón administration, never held a press conference, where as

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<sup>76</sup> I found it revealing that the navy liaison officer for my visit to the Navy was none other than the great grandson of General and President Plutarco Elías Calles. This young officer was not a graduate of the Heroic Naval College, but a civilian who was given a direct commission. I would argue that if the United States educational experience has any impact at all on Mexican officers, it is most likely to influence their attitudes about questioning their instructors, rather than the content of these courses. For this argument in detail, see my *Mexico's Military on the Democratic Stage*, 199-200.

<sup>77</sup> Craig Deare offers another institutional obstacle as an explanation, arguing that the Mexican secretary of national defense has three counterpart agencies in the US, the secretary of defense, the chief of the joint chiefs of staff, and the chief of staff of the army. "Relaciones de defensa México-Estados Unidos," *Atlas de la seguridad*, 232-33. For a counter argument from the commander of U.S. Northern Command, see Victor E. Renuart, Jr., and Biff Baker, "U.S.-Mexico Homeland Defense: A Compatible Interface," *Strategic Forum*, No. 254 (January 2010), 1-6. This essay was written specifically to object to three of Deare's arguments for an "incompatible interface," which were; inadequate funding of the Mexican armed forces, the institutional structural differences indicated above, and lack of properly trained Mexican civilian leaders knowledgeable about military affairs.



Admiral Saynez Mendoza did so repeatedly.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, when the Navy issues a press release, it also tells the media whether or not more information is available, and responds promptly to requests.<sup>79</sup>

Another vehicle which has promoted collaboration between the American military and the Mexican navy are joint operations and joint peacekeeping missions. The Mexican Navy has participated in joint naval operations with the United States and other countries, which is not the case of the Mexican Army.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, the Mexican public, even more so than Mexican leadership generally, has increased their support for such missions (Table 10). This changing attitude is, I believe, part of a growing pattern of openness toward the

**Table 10-Public Perception of Military’s Role Outside of Mexico**

Percent Agreeing that Mexico Should Participate in Peacekeeping Missions, 2004-08			
Group	2004	2006	2008
Public	48	49	60
Leaders	55	49	35

**Source:** Guadalupe González, Ferrán Martínez i Coma, Jorge A. Schiavon, *México, las Americas y el mundo. Política exterior: opinión pública y líderes 2008* (Mexico: CIDE, 2008), cited in *Atlas de la seguridad y la defensa de México 2009*, Table 135, p. 395.

outside world, and toward changing Mexico’s larger, passive international role. Again,

<sup>78</sup> An interesting exception to their level of collaboration with the media was the Secretariat of National Defense’s decision to loan a helicopter and dozens of soldiers to Televisa in the filming of a movie focusing on the capture of a drug dealer. The Army defended the expenses of doing this as an additional means of promoting their efforts to combat drug trafficking among the general public. “Ejército mexicano presta helicóptero y soldados para una serie de Televisa,” *Diario de Yucatán*, June 9, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Jesús Aranda, “Prensa y fuerzas armadas,” *Atlas de la seguridad*, 199-201.

<sup>80</sup> In its Defense Plan submitted to President Calderón in 2007, the Secretariat of National Defense suggests clearly in several parts of the report that it will increase cooperation with international organizations and bilateral partners, including their drug missions. See for example pp. 29-30. The only known case of Army participation in an international mission was the deployment of two officers on a United Nations mission to Kashmir in the 1950s. Arturo C. Sotomayor and Mónica Serrano, “Mexico’s Security Problematique: Domestic and International Dimensions,” Unpublished manuscript, 84.

recent survey research strongly supports the view that the average Mexican is willing to invite outside involvement in police and military missions related to improving personal security and combating crime.

The data in Table 11 specifically asked ordinary citizens the extent to which they would accept help from the United States in combating drug trafficking. Support for funds is overwhelming positive, and more than two-thirds of Mexicans would accept equipment from the United States. These two contributions are major components of the Merida Initiative.<sup>81</sup> More importantly, citizens view American border agents as important to combating drug trafficking in Mexico, and most controversial of all, half of all Mexicans support the involvement of United States Drug Enforcement Agents on Mexican soil. In the

**Table 11-How Mexicans View US Role in Drug Trafficking Mission 2009**

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**Do you support or oppose the help of the US government to the Mexican Government in the fight against drug trafficking?**

**Percentage**

	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Support</b>
<b>Money</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Equipment</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Border Agents</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Agents in Mexico</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>

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**Source:** Parametría, 400 interviews nationally, 28-31 March, 2009, +/- 4.9 percent margin of error.

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<sup>81</sup> For a description of the funding categories and the beneficiaries in Mexico, see Andrew Selee, “Analysis of the Merida Initiative: Strengthening U.S.-Mexico Cooperation Against Organized Crime,” Unpublished paper, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1008. For the 2009 appropriations, see the Government Accounting Office, “Mérida Initiative Funding,” December 3, 2009.

summer of 2009, the Pew Foundation completed a broader survey, including a more specific question involving the armed forces, finding that 78 percent of Mexicans favored training personnel by the United States, 63 percent would accept money and weapons from the United States, and most surprisingly, 30 percent actually were in favor of deploying American troops to Mexico.<sup>82</sup>

United States Drug Enforcement agents have been present in Mexico for years, but the Defense Department has not conducted field training in Mexico. However, to my knowledge, for the first time, a training session took place between the Mexican Army and the Defense Department in 2003, when the Mexican government requested that the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management Foreign Purchasers class be held in Mexico, at the Secretariat of National Defense. A group of eighteen Army and Air Force field and company grade officers and noncommissioned officers took the class, which was arranged by Major David Whiddon, Chief of the Training Section of the U.S. Military Liaison Office at the United States Embassy. Many of the Mexican students in this class had taken prior courses in foreign military sales at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy at Lackland Air Force Base. The graduation ceremony was presided over by Division General Fausto Manuel Zamorano Esparza, Director General of Administration in Mexico's defense ministry and former Oficial Mayor of the Secretariat of National Defense under Zedillo.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S.—One in-Three Would Migrate," September 23, 2009. 1,000 interviews nationally, May 26 to June 2, 2009, +/- 3.0 margin of error. These figures are even more surprising considering the fact that in 2008, 30 percent of Mexicans considered the United States as an "enemy of Mexico's national security." The question was: Who do you consider an enemy of Mexico's national security? Fifty three percent said no country, followed by 30 percent US and 15 percent Columbia. SIM, 800 interviews nationally, September 6-9, 2008 6-9, +/- 3.46 margin of error .

<sup>83</sup> Lt. Col. Andrew P. White, "Mexico Hosts the Defense Institute of Security Management's Mobile Education Team," *DISAM Journal*, 2003, [www.findarticles.com](http://www.findarticles.com). It is important to point out that General Zamorano Esparza was a former Military Attaché to the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C., and chief

To some degree, public attitudes have helped pave the way for increased collaboration between the two militaries, in the same way that they have affected civil-military relations *within* Mexico and elsewhere in the region. Military officers, just like politicians, are products of the larger society, even though the officer corps is socialized by an pervasive institutional culture. From a broader perspective, this can be seen from survey data which explores how Mexicans view the causes of their drug trafficking and related criminal problems. While one would expect them to direct a large portion of the blame on the United States drug consumption habits, which most analysts identify as the root of the problem, ordinary citizens are far more critical of their own internal institutional culture, notably corruption.<sup>84</sup> The data in Table 12 demonstrate that among those who have an opinion on the causes for Mexico's drug problems, 70 percent point to general corruption. These data also explain why large numbers of Mexicans are willing to accept or tolerate help from the United States, including foreigners operating on their own soil.<sup>85</sup> One out of seven Mexicans in Ciudad Juárez were willing to invite the FBI or the UN to their city to solve the level of insecurity and violence; nearly six out of ten would accept their presence national-wide. Surprisingly, when comparing these two

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of the Mexican delegation to the Inter-American Defense Board. Mexican Political Biographies Project, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> This view is also supported in the excellent research by John Bailey and Pablo Parras, "Perceptions and Attitudes about Corruption and Democracy," *Mexican Studies*, 22, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 57-82, who concluded that citizens viewed the government as a whole only slightly more corrupt than society.

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps the most interesting example of this was the request by the Association of Maquiladoras in Ciudad Juárez, one of the cities with the greatest level of drug-related violence, for United Nations peacekeepers or advisers to come to their city failing the response of joint military-police efforts to control crime. Mark Stevenson, "Mexico Border City Groups Call for UN Peacekeepers," Associated Press, November 14, 2009. Calderón replaced army troops with federal police in April, 2010. Mark Stevenson, "Police Take Over from Army in Mexico Border City," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2010. However, lack of public confidence in the police probably explains strong citizen resistance to Calderón's efforts to unify federal and state. Only half of respondents favor such an option. [www.parametria.com](http://www.parametria.com), "Polariza a mexicanos utilidad de unificación," national survey of 1,200 respondents, +/- 2.8% margin of error, December 17-21, 2009.

foreign institutions with the Mexican Army, 41 percent compared to 47 percent viewed them as more efficient in solving Ciudad Juárez's situation.<sup>86</sup>

**Table 12-How Mexicans View US responsibility for the Drug Problems?**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage Who Agree</b>
<b>US consumption</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Corruption in Mexico</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>No Response</b>	<b>1</b>

**Source:** *Parametría*, 400 interviews nationally, 28-31 March, 2009, +/- 4.9 % margin of error.

### **The Armed Forces and Human Rights, A Growing Issue and a New Actor**

The increased presence of the Mexican armed forces as the central actor in the drug war has contributed to a significant, undesirable consequence, an extraordinary increase in human rights complaints. Those complaints have increased under President Calderón's administration. The most recent reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, citing data of alleged military abuses before the National Human Rights Commission, indicates the complaints numbered 182 in 2006, 367 in 2007, and 1230 in 2008, a nearly six-fold increase from 2006 through 2008.<sup>87</sup> The Commission reported 1,500 complaints in 2009 alone, 45 percent of which emanate from just three states: Chihuahua,

<sup>86</sup> "Ejército, FBI, o Cascos Azules: a quién le importa la soberanía,?" *El Universal*, March 24, 2010, based on a *Parametría* survey.

<sup>87</sup> Country Summary, Mexico, January 2010, 1; and Amnesty International, *Mexico, New Reports of Human Rights Violations by the Military* (London: AI, 2009). The total number of complaints from the Commission to the Navy for 2008 was 46. [www.semar.gob.mx](http://www.semar.gob.mx), December 27, 2009. The Navy formally established its own Human Rights Division, November 16, 2008, in response to the federal government's approval of a National Program of Human Rights, August 29, 2008. The Army has a similar unit, directed by General Antonio López Portillo, which was established in January, 2008.

Michoacán, and Guerrero, followed by Durango, Baja California, and Sinaloa, in short, where drug violence is most pronounced.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in a detailed report, Human Rights Watch argues that by allowing the military to carry out its own investigations, few convictions have resulted, the investigations and trials are not transparent, and despite repeated requests from Human Rights Watch, as late as January 2009, the National Defense Secretariat could not provide them with a list of actual cases.<sup>89</sup> As of September 2009, the Secretariat of Defense was investigating 47 alleged human rights violations from the National Commission on Human Rights initiated during the Calderón administration.<sup>90</sup>

The Secretariat of Defense reported that from 2000 to January 2009, they have received 470 complaints from civilians against soldiers in which military investigators could not produce adequate evidence to try the accused.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, they report investigating 372 complaints resulting in civilian deaths or injury, averaging 23 yearly under Fox, and 100 in the first two years of the Calderón administration, a 335 percent increase. Some insight into actual convictions and punishment is suggested by the fact that the Army claims that “despite an exhaustive search in the archives of the Attorney for

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<sup>88</sup> Eugenia Jiménez, *Mileno*, “Derecho Humanos ha recibido 1,500 quejas contra militares durante el año,” December 22, 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Uniform Impunity, Mexico’s Misuse of Military Justice to Prosecute Abuses in Counternarcotics and Public Security Operations* (April 2009). The documentation in this report is detailed. In an important exchange between HRW and the Secretariat of Government, after requesting detailed information about cases under prosecution in the Calderón administration, and receiving a letter from the Secretary identifying specific cases and penalties, HRW responded with further questions about discrepancies in the information provided. See [www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/11/20](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/11/20) for their response and Fernando F. Gómez-Mont’s letter. See William Booth and Steve Fainaru, “Skeptics Doubt Mexican Data on Military Abuses,” *Washington Post*, November 23, 2009, for an American media perspective. In 2010, the United Nations Human Rights Committee asked the Mexican government to remove soldiers from the battle against organized crime. *Diario de Yucatán*, March 10, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Transparency request 0000700120109, September 18, 2009. The report also contains a breakdown of the charges, which typically are physical violence. For a precise breakdown of all soldiers charged, not just for crimes against civilians, see Transparency request 0000700108909 cited above, which breaks down the charges from 2000-2009 for 29,641 cases, as well as the 7,702 sentences from 2006-2009.

<sup>91</sup> These accusations averaged 44 yearly under Fox, and 76 in the first two years of the Calderón administration, a 73 percent increase.

Military Justice, no information was encountered related to how many soldiers were tried” for such crimes. During that same period, only ten individuals were actually sentenced by military courts, 1 in 2000 for murder, 7 in 2001 for murder, 1 in 2004 for murder, and 1 in 2005 for injuries.<sup>92</sup> Equally revealing are the actual sentences meted out to those convicted of crimes against civilians ranging from sexual abuse to homicide, a total of 37 cases in all military courts between 1999-2009. The longest prison sentence the courts awarded was 12 years to two sergeants, one for assault which led to death, the other for rape. Only six convicted individuals were officers, two of whom were general officers, a division general and a brigadier general, on trial for voluntary manslaughter, but the first general died before completion of the trial, and the charges were vacated for the second. The only officer above the rank of captain convicted in that ten year period, was a Lt. Colonel, who received 3 years for sexual abuse.<sup>93</sup>

The increasing attention to human rights accusations incorporates the larger issue of military transparency in responding to civilian complaints and other government agencies, including the National Commission on Human Rights.<sup>94</sup> Reporters, scholars, and others have attempted to use Mexico’s version of the United States Freedom of Information Act to obtain information and increase accountability from all federal agencies. Table 13 Identifies how the Army and Navy respond to these requests. I have made more than fifty requests from these two agencies, and have read through more than 700 requests in 2008-2010. My experience suggests that frequently there are contradictory answers to the same

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<sup>92</sup> Transparency request, 0000700002709 January 13, 2009.

<sup>93</sup> Transparency request, 0000700109109, September 8, 2009.

<sup>94</sup> These criticisms have led to a Senate approval of a constitutional reform to Article 102 strengthening the National Human Rights Commission by assigning it the right to conduct “unobstructed investigations in cases of gross violations—a prerogative currently reserved to the Supreme Court—and my hold State actors accountable for violations.” Embassy of Mexico, April 2010.

**Table 13-Military's Record on Transparency Requests, 2003-09**

Type of Response	National Defense	Navy
	% of Total	
<b>Responded via internet</b>	<b>81.4</b>	<b>44.0</b>
<b>Information solicited does not exist</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<b>Information is already public</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Information is confidential</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Request does not correspond to the law</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Notification of the information's disposition</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>12.6</b>
<b>Not in the purview of this agency</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>5.9</b>
<b>Others</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>4.4</b>
<b>Total requests</b>	<b>6,294</b>	<b>2,096</b>

**Source:** Instituto Federal de Acceso de la Información Pública, cited in Table 122, p.373, *Atlas de la seguridad*.....Of the five national security agencies, National Defense has the highest response rate.

question, depending on the precise wording of the request. Moreover, both agencies often do not have important statistics or records, especially over time. The National Defense secretariat has given these requests more attention by typically placing general officers in charge of responding to requests, and creating an Information Committee of three generals, led by a Division General.<sup>95</sup>

The Army has responded by pointing to its significantly increased training in human rights, some of which is actually carried out on a yearly basis by the National Commission on Human Rights. In detailed responses to numerous requests related to internal human rights training in both the Army and the Navy, the Army has provided

<sup>95</sup> See their response to a vaguely worded request concerning human rights violations by the military. Comité de Información, No. CI/RR/1040/09, August 26, 2009. One of the committee members is Division General Roberto Miranda Sánchez, former Chief of Staff to President Zedillo.



detailed descriptions of its activities in the classroom and in the barracks. For example, the Heroic Military College, which graduates most future Army officers, requires two courses, 52 and 56 hours respectively, in the first two years at the College. The second year course is almost entirely devoted to human rights concepts and issues, ranging from the Geneva Convention to the legislation creating the National Human Rights Commission.<sup>96</sup> There is no question that the attention paid to this issue within the armed forces has increased significantly during the last two presidential administrations. The fundamental issue, however, remains the increased allegations, and therefore, the impact of the training on actual behavior in the field and the degree to which the officer corps takes this issue seriously in its internal investigations.

The complaints by domestic and international human rights organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, and widespread coverage in the Mexican media, has led to increased discussion of the acceptability of the armed forces pursuing this mission. Moreover, 15 percent of the federal funds allocated for this mission through the Merida Initiative were to be withheld, until the State Department reports that Mexico has met four specific human rights conditions, including that “civilian authorities are investigating and prosecuting army abuses, in accordance with Mexican and international law.”<sup>97</sup>

The most influential reactions to human rights abuses have emanated from Catholic bishops and members of the Chamber of Deputies. One issue which unifies various wings

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<sup>96</sup> The Zip file in response to this request contains complete information on every training program and curriculum offered in the Army and Air Force on human rights as of 2008. Transparency request, 0000700071708, June 23, 2008, and July 13, 2009. It also includes the names of all instructors. There are five military and four civilian instructors at the Heroic Military College, seven military instructors at the Higher War College. In 2007, 170,690 officers and troops from general on down received instruction, and as of May 2008, 74, 336 individuals. Human rights course work was first introduced in 1996, during the Zedillo administration.

<sup>97</sup> [www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/10](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/10).

within the Catholic Church is human rights.<sup>98</sup> Because of the consistently high level of trust most Mexicans assign to the Catholic Church and their priests, these actors potentially exercise an important influence on citizen views in support of government policies toward organized crime.<sup>99</sup> But because each diocese is autonomous from the other, Bishops address such issues individually. Occasionally, when considerable consensus exist, the Conference of Mexican Bishops will also issue a general statement.<sup>100</sup> Indirectly, its most telling support initially for the military and police in their confrontation against organized crime was to announce in their June, 2007 meeting that the Catholic Church had established chaplaincies for the army, air force and navy in dioceses near barracks, bases, and military hospitals, as well as for the police, with a special military bishop, Víctor René Rodríguez, in charge.<sup>101</sup> The episcopate, at its annual meeting, decided to examine insecurity and violence as a central issue, to be incorporated in its programs for 2009-12.<sup>102</sup> Many priests and bishops have taken a special interest in the drug war because priests themselves have become victims of drug-related violence, including a priest and two seminary students killed in Guerrero in

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<sup>98</sup> Roderic Ai Camp, *Crossing Swords, Religion and Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79-84.

<sup>99</sup> For a detailed analysis of their potential influence on politics generally, and electoral politics specifically, see my "Exercising Political Influence, Religion, Democracy, and the Mexican 2006 Presidential Race," *Journal of Church and State*, 50 (Winter 2008), 49-72.

<sup>100</sup> For a brief background on this in 2009, see my "Church and Narcostate," *Foreign Policy*, August 13, 2009.

<sup>101</sup> "El Ejército mexicano vuelve al redil," *Proceso*, June 17, 2007. This is truly surprising news for Mexico, given the historic confrontations between the Army and the Church as late as the 1920s and 1930s during the Cristero War and its aftermath. It deserved far more coverage in the Mexican media and the scholarly community. It is also essential to mention that in Latin America, where military chaplaincies have been common, scholars have suggested that the weak posture of the Catholic Church during Argentina's dirty war can be attributed to the excessively close relationship between Catholic priests functioning in this capacity, and the military, given that a number of such priests condoned the torture and murder of political prisoners. Apparently, the Navy had been inviting various prominent clergy, including the Cardinal Archbishop of Mexico and the leader of the Jewish community in Mexico, to give presentations at the Naval War College during the Fox administration. See Jorge Medellín, "Pastoral militar en México; religión y política," [www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx](http://www.columnas.ejecentral.com.mx), January 12, 2010.

<sup>102</sup> [www.arquichi.org.mx/modules/news](http://www.arquichi.org.mx/modules/news), "Obispos mexicanos reunidos en asamblea plenaria," November 11, 2009.

2009.<sup>103</sup> Sources suggest that seven bishops and 200 priests were threatened by drug dealers in recent years. Further, dioceses plagued by drug-related violence also have expressed strong positions against the consumption of drugs and proposals to legalize drugs, with the exception of their therapeutic use, viewing it as a grave sin.<sup>104</sup> Locally and nationally, public statements have expressed support for the collaboration between local and national authorities in their battle against organized crime.<sup>105</sup> The Church, in an episcopate statement, even has supported the government's cooperation with the United States.

The strongest public statement condemning military human rights abuses has been expressed by Raúl Vera López, Bishop of Saltillo, along with the civilian director of a diocesan human rights organization, condemning in detail, alleged human rights abuses committed by the Mexican Army on July 11, 2006, in Castaños, Coahuila.<sup>106</sup> In July, 2009, following the congressional elections, Bishop Vera López, expressed stronger criticisms against the drug war strategy, calling it an “irresponsible lost war,” while severely scolding the military, judges, investigators and others for remaining silent about human rights abuses, even including priests for “remaining blind and deaf to the

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<sup>103</sup> “Mensaje de los Obispos de la Provincia de Acapulco con motivo de los asesinatos en Ciudad Altamirano,” [www.cem.org.mx/secciones-y-prelaturas](http://www.cem.org.mx/secciones-y-prelaturas), June 22, 2009, from the four bishops in this region. They state that security forces need to participate in the battle against organized crime, but at the same time, attention should be paid to the human rights of the population.

<sup>104</sup> See the Archbishop of Chihuahua's blunt statement. [www.arquichi.org.mx/modules/news](http://www.arquichi.org.mx/modules/news), May 22, 2008. The six bishops of Chihuahua also issued a joint statement, urging their parishioners to make changes in their own behavior and attitudes, and not rely on the government, the military, or jails to solve the drug violence. March 2, 2009

<sup>105</sup> For example, Archbishop Rafael Romo Muñoz of Tijuana, who has expressed sympathy for police killed in the line of duty. “La Arquidiócesis de Tijuana se solidariza y ira por los policas,” [www.iglesiatijuana.org](http://www.iglesiatijuana.org), October 5, 2009. In turn, some municipal authorities have publicly requested the support of the Church.

<sup>106</sup> [www.derechoshumanos.org.mx/modules](http://www.derechoshumanos.org.mx/modules), July 20, 2006, a case often cited by national organizations.

injustices” the public has suffered at the hands of the military and organized crime.<sup>107</sup> Recently, in August 2009, Enrique Díaz Díaz, the Auxiliary Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in a published mass, “Arma Peligrosa,” described one of his priests being stopped at a road block, and being extensively questioned after opening a box in his car containing religious posters of Moses listening to the voice of God. In presenting the soldiers’ treatment of the priest, he described some soldiers as “likeable and attentive, others, despotic and aggressive.”<sup>108</sup> Even in dioceses where drug-related violence has not been a serious issue, such as Mexico City, the spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Mexico City, after Sunday mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral, told reporters that the federal authorities should not depend on the armed forces to combat organized crime because of human rights abuses, instead suggesting they should create a national police force.<sup>109</sup> Other dioceses have advocated a focus on prevention, rather than on force.<sup>110</sup>

President Calderón reacted to the heightened criticism of Army abuses by suddenly shifting some of the more visible tasks to the Navy, which given its less visible and direct role, has received little if any public criticism.<sup>111</sup> The use of Navy marines in the spectacular killing of top cartel kingpin Arturo Beltrán Leyva in Cuernavaca in December, 2009, symbolizes the Navy’s heightened role. However, an unintended

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<sup>107</sup> “María de Guadalupe nos enseña a ser colaboradores de Cristo en la Obra de la Justicia y de la Paz,” July 8, 2009.

<sup>108</sup> [www.cem.org.mx/secciones/voces-de-los-obispos](http://www.cem.org.mx/secciones/voces-de-los-obispos), August 28, 2009.

<sup>109</sup> “La Arquidiócesis pide el retiro del Ejército,” *El Universal*, December 14, 2009.

<sup>110</sup> See José G. Martín Rábago, Archbishop of León, Guanajuato, “La droga nos invade, qué debemos hacer?” January 22, 2010. For other references from various bishops, see “Preocupación creciente del episcopado mexicano,” [www.caritas.tv/index](http://www.caritas.tv/index), 2010.

<sup>111</sup> For a discussion of this shift, especially as it relates to public opinion, see Dan Lund, “Handicapping the Current Administration at Midterm,” *Opinion and Policy Report*, December 17, 2009, 3.

consequence of this strategy is to increase tensions between the Army and the Navy, which have existed for years.<sup>112</sup>

At the end of 2009, some members of the political class began to join their voices with human rights advocates and individual bishops. The Secretary of the Public Security Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, Teresa Incháustegui Romero, from the PRD, agreed with the statement emanating from the Archdiocese of Mexico City, suggesting that the use of the Army in public security functions was unsuccessful. In turn, the President of the Chamber's National Defense Committee, a PRI member, underlined his support for the armed forces frontal battle against organized crime.<sup>113</sup> Among the general public, tolerance is increasing toward accepting the presence of drug traffickers if the violence would abate.<sup>114</sup> The policy differences among political parties and their representatives are likely to increase, and the strategy for confronting organized crime, including the central role of the armed forces, will become a primary issue in the 2012 presidential race and its outcome.

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<sup>112</sup> For example, one source pointed out in March of 2009 that the Army had become somewhat jealous of the Navy's stronger relationship through Northern Command, and therefore was likely to assign its own liaison officer, which it did just a few months later.

<sup>113</sup> For both views, see Juan Arvizu and Andrea Merlos, "Perredista coincide con Iglesia sobre Ejército," *El Universal*, December 14, 2009, and Juan Arvizu, *El Universal*, "Analaizan dar nuevas facultades al Ejército," *El Universal*, December 25, 2009.

<sup>114</sup> The level of acceptance has increased from 33 to 48 percent from July, 2008 to December, 2009. "Crece tolerancia al narco por miedo a la violencia," [www.parametria.com](http://www.parametria.com), 2010. The level of discouragement toward the interdiction strategy was reinforced by a controversial interview between Julio Scherer, editor of Mexico's leading investigative weekly, *Proceso*, and a high-level drug cartel leader, who said killing him and other cartel leaders would not affect the presence of drug trafficking in Mexico. Jorge Carrasco Araizaga, "Encuentro Scherer-Zambada: El desconcierto oficial," [www.proceso.com](http://www.proceso.com), 2010.