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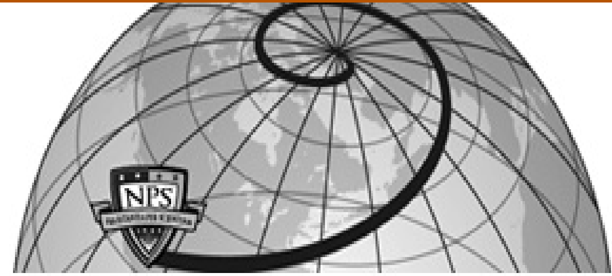

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Different paths and divergent policies in the UN security system: Brazil and Mexico in comparative perspective

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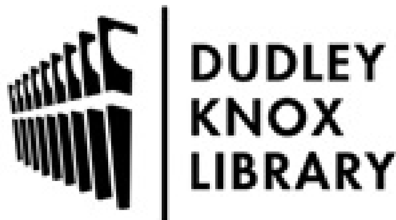

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Different Paths and Divergent Policies in the UN Security System: Brazil and Mexico in Comparative Perspective

ARTURO C. SOTOMAYOR VELÁZQUEZ

How can we explain foreign policy variation among UN member states? Brazil and Mexico are the most likely cases for international primacy in the UN system, given their territorial dimension, demographic tendencies, economic importance, geo political location and relative weight in Latin America. Yet, despite their structural similarities, their policies and behaviour in the UN system have varied, both in terms of engagement with the Security Council and commitment regarding peacekeeping. By comparing two of Latin America's most influential countries, this study identifies the underlying conditions and mechanisms that explain their differences in behaviour and policy in the UN. In particular, this article analyses and contrasts how geopolitics and civil–military relations in Brazil and Mexico affect their incentives to participate in international organizations and their overall international commitment to peace.

Brazil and Mexico are among Latin America's largest and most powerful states. They share many structural similarities, including the region's largest military forces and biggest economies, as well as regional influence – Brazil in the Southern Cone of South America and Mexico in Central America. They also have similar political systems, with the presidents vested with the power to conduct foreign policy, and with a hierarchically organized career Foreign Service, complemented by intermediate political appointments. Given these similarities, they are relevant cases for study. However, the two countries have historically evinced different forms of foreign policy behaviour and international roles. Nowhere are these differences more evident than in the UN system, in which both countries have followed different paths. For instance, Brazil has been a major UN troop contributor, an active non-permanent member of the Security Council and a serious candidate for a permanent position. In contrast, Mexico has resisted armed engagement under the UN flag, and has rarely occupied a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. In fact, it has not shown interest in becoming a permanent member of the Council. These differences are even more puzzling given the trends and developments in the post-cold war era. Both Brazil and Mexico witnessed the re-emergence of regionalism in the Americas and the democratization of their respective political systems. In many ways, regionalism and democratization should provide an especially potent impetus to join international organizations, since the latter can often help transitional states credibly carry out democratic reforms and assume international commitments.[1] Yet whereas

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Brazil appears to assume an international leadership role, Mexico's diplomacy has been characterized by caution and distaste for a protagonist role in the UN security system.

This article examines their varied approaches towards UN collective security and peacekeeping. It will focus primarily on the period from 1990 to 2005, which enables the collapse of the Soviet bloc to be held as a constant systemic variable. It also helps to analyse how democratization processes, which occurred in 1988 in Brazil and 2000 in Mexico, affected outcomes.

Two arguments are developed to explain the policy differences in the UN system. First, Mexico's less assertive UN diplomacy is in part a consequence of its geopolitical proximity to the United States. Those areas where Mexico might exert the most impact in the UN system are also well within the US sphere of influence, so the country's performance is constrained by the overwhelming presence of its northern neighbour. By contrast, Brazil is more distant from US hegemony, providing relative foreign policy autonomy: it has more alliance choices than those which are proximate to Washington. This line of argument is consistent with mainstream hegemonic explanations regarding weak state vulnerability to the aggressive demands of great powers.[2]

Second, Brazil's active participation in UN peacekeeping is related to the extension of civilian control over the military in the context of democratization. Indeed, foreign policy options not only reflect structural and systemic constraints, but are determined by trends in domestic politics. Peacekeeping represents a military dimension of foreign policy in which uniformed personnel are deployed to accomplish diplomatic and political goals. Yet, military backing for peacekeeping is not universal; some military institutions are reluctant to join such missions because they offer few institutional and professional enticements. Other armed forces are more willing to join a UN force in order to contribute to national interests or prestige. Therefore, the extent to which civilian governments can deploy troops abroad is determined by how much control they exercise over the military branches. In this regard, Brazil and Mexico differ substantially, as both countries exercise different levels of military accountability. This often translates into different defence policies and divergent levels of peacekeeping participation. Therefore, this second explanation is consistent with most civil–military relations theories, which contend that the dynamics of domestic civil–military relationships shape the likelihood of conflict and cooperation at the international level.[3]

These two arguments are based on two distinct levels of analysis –systemic and domestic – and can be potentially contradictory, especially if a neo-realist explanation is tested against a domestic politics explanation.[4] Nevertheless, the point here is not to determine which level matters most; they both do. More interesting and challenging is to determine how the two levels vary from country to country, and how they interact to determine policy outcomes.

The article begins with a brief overview of Brazilian and Mexican participation in the UN security system. It then discusses how different structural conditions and patterns of civil–military relations have divergent effects on their engagements in UN peace operations.

Historical Considerations

Since its inception, the UN has played an important role in Brazilian and Mexican foreign policies. Both were founding members and actively participated in the San Francisco conference. They had been fully committed to the Allies during the Second World War and their contributions were rewarded in 1946, when they were the only representatives from Latin America at the first Security Council meeting. Since then the two states have participated in all major UN bodies and have been among the world's major contributors to the UN regular budget.[5]

From the outset, Brazil and Mexico expressed their opposition to the Security Council's concentration of power *vis-à-vis* the General Assembly, but they also understood that a compromise was necessary to establish the world body. The two countries have continued to insist on the democratization of the UN and the importance of the General Assembly.[6] Despite their many differences and at times rival positions in the world body, participation served the common purpose of reinforcing their relative independence of the United States, exercising their regional influence in Latin America, building coalitions with other partners and expressing their mainly legalistic view of world politics.[7]

Nevertheless, by 1947 it was clear that a new configuration of power was developing, one which allowed little room for lesser powers. Mexico was the first Latin American country to reconsider its position in the UN and decided not to re-apply for election to the Security Council until 1980. In the view of many Mexican diplomats, bipolarity provided few opportunities for dissent, so confrontation with the United States and the Soviet Union had to be avoided at all costs. Similarly, its distancing on security issues reinforced its principled judgement about the flawed design and functioning of the Security Council itself, which became stymied by the vetoes and counter-vetoes of the major powers.[8]

In the course of the cold war, Mexico served on the Security Council only once after 1946 – in 1980–81. The latter, however, was more the result of a compromise than of assertiveness. Mexico was elected to the 'Latin American' seat, after the rival alternatives, Cuba and Colombia, reached a compromise and withdrew.[9] However, by the early 1980s a new global arms race was occurring and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan also brought an end to detente, leaving Mexico little room to exercise influence in the Security Council. Another 22 years would pass before Mexican diplomats returned to the Council in 2002–03, to face yet another global crisis.

A similar attitude prevailed with regards to peacekeeping. Aside from deploying two military observers to Kashmir during the 1950s, Mexico's diplomacy has long been characterized by distaste for anything that violated the principle of non-intervention. Consequently, during the cold war, Mexico tended to be a passive state, rarely involved in high politics and often abstaining from sending troops abroad. This is not to say that Mexico was indifferent to the main issues of international security, as it played a role in promoting nuclear disarmament (for which Mexican UN Ambassador Alfonso García Robles shared a Nobel peace prize in 1982 with Sweden's Ava Myrdal) and pacifying Central America in the

1980s.[10] However, Mexico was highly selective in its security forum options, often discriminating against the UN. In other words, it did not perceive or view the UN security system as an ideal forum to express its interest or show commitment; this often translated into a mostly defensive, and at times legalistic, multilateral policy.[11]

By contrast, Brazil was an assertive non-permanent member of the Security Council in 1946–47, 1951–52, 1963–64, 1967–69, 1988–89 (and 2004–05). In contrast to Mexico, Brazil has always regarded its exclusion from a permanent seat as a snub to be redressed. As a consolation prize, Brazil was given the right to be the first country to address the UN General Assembly every year during its annual meeting. However, it is notable that between 1968 and 1988, Brazil too had a period in which it decided not to participate in the Council. According to Ricardo Sennes, the assessment at the time was that holding that seat

> would bring political costs that would not be compensated by the benefits of being part of an agency that had extremely little decision-making power, and that was clearly dominated by the great powers, in which Brazil would not have veto power, and within which the members were fiercely antagonistic among themselves.[12]

Equally important was the military coup of 1964, which effectively installed a dictatorship that would last for more than two decades. The military regime had an ambitious agenda, including the development of nuclear power, but participation in the Security Council was not part of the plan. Like most bureaucratic–authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Brazilian military leaders reasoned that isolationism would silence international criticism of a poor human rights record. Although Brazil did join international military missions through the Organization of American States, it did not become heavily involved in UN peacekeeping again until re-democratization in the 1990s.

Still, Brazil had been far more involved in peacekeeping than Mexico. Historically, it has been one of Latin America's major troop contributors, having deployed UN observers and troops to missions in Sinai, Gaza, Congo, India–Pakistan and Cyprus. From 1957 to 1967, Brazil deployed its largest contribution to date with an infantry battalion to the Gaza strip as part of the UN mission in the Middle East (UNEF I), which gave 6300 Brazilians an experience of peacekeeping.[13] According to Davis B. Bobrow and Mark A. Boyer, between 1947 and 1988, Brazil was among the top 32 contributors, supplying regular personnel for a substantial share of operations, although it did little to finance them.[14]

Consequently, Brazil's and Mexico's commitment to international security and peace through the UN was mostly determined by systemic factors and domestic trends. The early 1990s would bring fundamental changes to both states, with the end of bipolarity and their own slow transitions to democracy. At the same time, policy differences between Brazil and Mexico in the UN system became more evident in this period. A quick comparison between the two countries during the years 1990–2005 illustrates this point. As already noted, Brazil became a non-permanent member of the Security Council at regular intervals, and claimed a permanent seat.[15] It also increased its peacekeeping contribution in the 1990s and early

2000s. By 2008, it ranked as the thirteenth largest contributor to UN peacekeeping forces; although it was still behind Uruguay and Argentina among Latin American troop providers. From 1990 to 2005, Brazil deployed 7444 soldiers to UN missions in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, East Timor, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Liberia, Mozambique and Uganda/Rwanda.[16] Some of these contributions reflected Brazil's zone of regional projection; Portuguese Africa and the Caribbean were preferred. For instance, in 2004 Brazil deployed a full battalion to Haiti and since then it has led the UN mission in Port-au-Prince.[17]

On the other hand, Mexico was disinterested in participating in the Security Council and in 1991 declined an opportunity to be a candidate. In 2002, when it finally returned to the Council, a national debate emerged over the government's decision to become part of a world body that had hitherto been characterized as requiring profound reform.[18] Similarly, Mexico declined to respond to calls for troops from the UN Secretariat. When El Salvador requested Mexican peacekeepers to support its pacification process, Mexico refrained from deploying soldiers and instead sent members of the judicial police to instruct the newly formed Salvadoran national police in the finer points of anti-corruption measures.[19] Peace negotiators were surprised at Mexico's stance, given that it had played an active role in bringing peace to Central America through the Contadora initiative. For this reason, scholars consider Mexico to be a reluctant middle power.[20]

Geography and Proximity to Power: The Bilateral versus Multilateral Policy

The most fundamental and perhaps obvious differences separating Mexico and Brazil are geography and proximity to power. Realist thinkers have often argued that balance of power issues shape alignment behaviour among powerful states, even for smaller states in the developing world.[21] As Stephen Walt argues, 'weak states are also likely to be especially sensitive to proximate power. Where great powers have both global interests and global capabilities, weak states will be concerned primarily with events in their immediate vicinity'.[22]

To some extent, Mexico reflects this condition, since it is reluctant to pick fights with the United States, particularly on issues that are sensitive in Washington.[23] Hegemony not only restrains Mexico's international behaviour, but imposes a foreign policy dilemma. Policy makers want to maintain relative foreign policy autonomy, but simultaneously cannot openly oppose Washington in the UN. As Mario Ojeda argues:

> The United States recognizes and accepts Mexico's need to dissent from United States policy in everything that is fundamental for Mexico, even if it is important but not fundamental for the US. In exchange, Mexico cooperates in everything that is fundamental or merely important for the United States, though not for Mexico.[24]

This means that Mexico simply cannot aspire to play a key role in the Security Council because it might find itself opposing US global interests on issues such as non-nuclear proliferation, peaceful settlement in the Middle East and terrorism. As Peter Smith notes,

> Mexico's strategic position has been severely restricted by the hegemonic power of the U.S ... Those places where Mexico might exert the most impact are also well within the U.S. sphere of influence, so Mexico's performance as a pivotal state is continually subordinate to the overwhelming presence of the U.S.[25]

Indeed, Mexico's relative autonomy was tested in 2003 in the face of the Iraq crisis. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, the country was on the horns of a dilemma. Although a resolution to authorize the use of force never reached the Council, Mexico decided, principally for domestic political reasons, to follow France, China and Russia in opposing the United States. Domestically, this antagonized the Mexican business community because it caused confrontation with Washington – and reduced the level of formal contact between the presidents George W. Bush and Vicente Fox. On one level, the incident appears to contradict the argument that Mexico cannot openly oppose American interests in the UN. On another level, it can be seen as evidence that abstention from participating in the Security Council avoids unnecessary confrontation with the United States.[26] When Mexico reclaimed a non-permanent seat in the Council for the 2009–10 biennium, the national debate was focused not on how the country should participate in the Council, but whether it was appropriate and pertinent to be involved at all.[27]

By contrast, Brazil has more foreign policy options available because it is not conditioned by preponderant influences and trading asymmetry. As Celso Lafer argues, 'for Brazil, the concept of frontier of cooperation has a much wider significance. It applies, for example, to its maritime frontier in the South Atlantic, as well as the line to its African neighbours'.[28] The weakness of hegemony in the Southern Cone of South America also enables Brazil to assume a larger regional role and even prominent position in world affairs than Mexico. As Peter Hakim argues, 'Brazil has sought to serve as a counterweight to the United States. At times, it has appeared intent on establishing a South American pole of power in the western hemisphere'.[29]

Furthermore, the United States matters not only in terms of proximity and power, but also in terms of political and social influence. Since the early 1990s, there has been a tendency towards bilateralism in Mexico, in which the United States role in Mexican politics has increased at the expense of multilateralism. For instance, Mexico has one of the largest economies in the world in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), and is one of the largest oil producers and trading nations worldwide (by far the most important in Latin America). But its economic and trade policy relies heavily on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), since more than 86 per cent of its exports go to the United States and Canada.[30] With more than 70 per cent of its GDP derived from trade, the bilateral relationship with Washington has a predominance that no other issue occupies in the Mexican foreign policy agenda.

There is no doubt that NAFTA has made Mexico and the United States close partners. This is evident in Mexico's voting behaviour in the General Assembly and in its historic support for Cuba in the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Jorge Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro note that in the General Assembly Mexico's voting coincidence with the United States rose after NAFTA was signed, from only 14.5 per cent in 1985 to 41.6 per cent in 1995 and 33 per cent in 2000.[31] In the Commission for Human Rights, Mexico supported a resolution in 2004 that condemned Cuba's human rights practices, an important shift that almost caused a formal break in diplomatic relations with Cuba.[32]

At the same time, a large number of Mexican migrants (one out of ten Mexicans) have permanently established themselves in the United States.[33] This social dynamic explains why Mexico has expanded its network of consulates in the United States (49 compared to 70 embassies worldwide). These consulates sustain projects targeted directly to the Mexican–American communities, such as formal education programmes in Spanish for public schools, arranging meetings with leaders of immigrant clubs and Mexican politicians and fostering various cultural and folklore programmes to enhance 'Mexicanness' (*mexicanidad*).[34]

Nevertheless, this strong bilateral policy has had a political cost. Personnel, resources, money and infrastructure go into North American representation, while diplomatic missions in Africa, Asia, Europe and the UN are poorly funded and staffed. In some cases, it is more costly to maintain a consulate in a US city than an embassy in Africa or Asia. In Africa, Mexico has only six embassies, attenuating links and networks with the strong African community in the UN. Mexico often lacks information about peacekeeping missions in Africa and the Middle East, and faces serious challenges to promote its interests in the UN system. With limited diplomatic ties in Africa, the Middle-East and Asia, Mexico is clearly at a disadvantage in the General Assembly, the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (made mostly of African and Asian states). In practice, Mexico does not exercise 'capital-to-capital and South-South diplomacy' to foster UN initiatives. Instead, Mexico's efforts focus on implementing a strong bilateral diplomacy with the United States.

In contrast to Mexico, Brazil's diaspora is smaller and its economy less heavily dependent on US trade. Brazil has more than 100 embassies around the world, Latin America's largest diplomatic network. This allows the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Itamaraty*) to reach out to a larger number of countries whose votes are strategically valuable in the UN system, especially in the General Assembly. Thus, more than any other Latin American country (with the exception of Cuba), Brazil places a considerable importance on Africa. Its active presence in the continent can be traced to the 1970s, when it took an active stand against colonialism and signed bilateral economic agreements with new African republics, mostly Lusophone countries.[35]

Brazil's diplomatic networks enable *Itamaraty* to implement a 'capital-to-capital and a South-South diplomacy', thus strengthening its UN position. For example, in 2003, India, Brazil and South Africa established a trilateral initiative (IBSA) to promote issues of mutual interest, including advancing their bids for a permanent Security Council seat.[36] The freedom to form strategic partnerships with other countries in the developing world gives Brazilian diplomacy the capacity to adapt established international norms to counter the dominance of the North. As Monica Herz argues, 'working within IBSA, Brazil might seek to change the

assumptions that underpin the workings of the UN Security Council, the WTO [World Trade Organization], and maybe the fragile Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty regime'.[37] Consequently, Brazil is in a stronger position than Mexico to exercise a multilateral policy through its more diversified diplomatic agenda. However, Brazil has been less successful in convincing the United States of the benefits of having a Latin American country permanently represented in the Security Council because, paradoxically, it lacks what Mexico has in excess – a strong and fairly institutionalized strategic partnership with the United States.

Democratization, Civil–Military Relations and Peacekeeping

Dag Hammarskjöld is constantly cited for arguing that peacekeeping was not a job for soldiers, but they were the only ones who could do it. Military influence in decision-making processes is therefore relevant for understanding troop contributions. In democratic theory, military advisers are supposed to be non-partisan and de-politicized. In practice, they rarely are. Military advisers usually have strong opinions about deployments abroad. And their views are often coloured politically by bureaucratic–organizational interests and the dynamics of civil–military relations.

Indeed, in both countries troop commitments for UN peacekeeping are influenced by different patterns of civil–military interaction. Both experienced democratization processes that put an end to years of authoritarianism. In both cases, the transition to democracy was slow and fought out between liberal politicians and autocratic elites. But their dictatorships had been quite different. The fact that Brazil's army ruled the country while the Mexican armed forces accepted civilian rule is a key to understanding the former's participation in peacekeeping and the latter's refusal to do so. The democratization process in Brazil entailed a reform of the military and an effort to consolidate civilian rule in defence policies.[38] In Mexico, the transition to democracy required electoral reform to enable small parties to compete in a mainly hegemonic-party system; but military reform was not part of the impetus for democratization.[39]

Brazil has used peacekeeping as a foreign policy tool and a mechanism to bring the military closer to international dynamics. The military still enjoys status from of its primary mission as protector of the 'homeland', particularly the Amazon.[40] Nevertheless, Brazil has provided the military with new operational roles in the prevention of illicit activities and in international peacekeeping. Full democratic and civilian control over the military is still far from being achieved, but Brazil's civilian leadership has redefined relations between the armed forces and political authorities.[41]

For example, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's elevation to the presidency in 1994 altered the balance between civilians and the military. In 1996, Cardoso published Brazil's first National Defence Policy. Although limited in scope, this delineated the parameters for the deployment of the armed forces into four situations: war, prevention of war, insecurity and peace.[42] In effect, this provided the context for contributions to peacekeeping. In 2000, Cardoso was able to establish an integrated Ministry of Defence and appoint a civilian as head of the defence

sector.[43] Although the military bargained for reserved domains in exchange for a return to barracks and some service commanders opposed such measures altogether, the normalization of civil–military relations assisted Brazil's foreign policy agenda.[44]

It was in this context of democratization that Brazil sent its first battalion to Angola in 1994, comprising about 900 soldiers. The mission ended abruptly after the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) violated the ceasefire agreements in 1997, by which time more than 4174 soldiers and 48 naval personnel had been involved in the UN mission, making it Brazil's largest peacekeeping contribution in the post-dictatorship era.[45]

Peacekeeping thus became part of a much broader policy of military reform in Brazil. First, it was an attempt to integrate defence with foreign policy by providing diplomats with additional tools to exercise international primacy. Second, engagement in peace operations provided additional monetary incentives, whereby the salaries of soldiers deployed abroad were substantially increased to parallel those earned by *Itamaraty* diplomats. This, along with a universal increase in military salaries, enabled Cardoso to qualm a general feeling of discontent among the armed forces.[46]

The administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva gave peacekeeping a new impetus from 2004 when Brazil sent over 1200 troops to non-Lusophone Haiti, potentially the country's largest foreign military deployment since Angola. In 2004, Brazilian generals commanded a UN force of 6700 (mainly South American troops) and 1600 police.[47] This military engagement coincided with the UN reform process, when Brazil publicly announced that it aspired to a permanent seat, and joined Germany, India and Japan in a diplomatic campaign to enlarge the Security Council. In this sense, the most relevant difference between Lula's and Cardoso's foreign policies lies in the latter's willingness to act in a more assertive and proactive way.[48] Brazil's role in peacekeeping is thus a foreign policy tool that provides a solid foundation for its aspiration in the UN system. This also reveals that a degree of military reform has occurred, since the armed forces have been more willing to accept international roles defined by civilian institutions.[49]

Brazilian military doctrine and geopolitical thinking have clearly assisted the process by which the armed forces have been slowly integrated into Brazil's grand strategy. Just as *Itamaraty*'s diplomatic *raison d'être* in the UN has focused on the Security Council reform, the dominant and perennial feature of military thinking has been developing power projection abroad to become a major military power. As a well-known expert on Brazilian military politics argues, 'ever since the early 1920s, and in a sense ever since the first Portuguese arrived, Brazil has been embarked on a Latin American version of Manifest Destiny'.[50] It is in this sense that Brazilian commanders have often linked peacekeeping to greater visibility of Brazil's military competence. For Brazilian military experts, a force that can deploy its soldiers abroad can equally mobilize them to counter a threat from a near-by enemy. Consequently, military thinking coincides with diplomatic doctrine as both generals and ambassadors perceive potential benefits in deploying troops abroad.[51] As a Brazilian military officer argued,

> given the remaining relevance of peacekeeping as a consequence of many latent conflicts spread throughout the globe, Brazil's enhanced participation in UN operations, if it does not contribute directly to gaining the objectives established in the current National Defense Policy, at a minimum will help to keep the prestige of the country as a distinguished contributor of UN peace efforts.[52]

Conversely, civil–military relations in Mexico have not been subject to a radical change since the advent of democracy in 2000. Decisions about joining UN missions rely on two strong federal bureaucracies, the Ministry of Defence (Army and the Air Force) and the Ministry of the Navy – not the Foreign Ministry (*Cancilleria*). The armed forces, however, do not have a unified voice. The Navy, with more international exposure than the Army but fewer personnel, supports peacekeeping. In 2004, the Navy devised a plan to allow personnel to join a peacekeeping force.[53] Nevertheless, peacekeeping often requires a level of manpower that only armies can provide. The Mexican Army, however, has opposed such engagement. In June 2005, Patricia Olamendi, the then Deputy Foreign Secretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, resigned in protest after President Vicente Fox's spokesman Ruben Aguilar flatly contradicted her statement that Mexico might someday contribute personnel to peacekeeping. Apparently, the Defence Ministry complained of civilian meddling in military affairs and, soon after Fox asserted that his administration would never authorize troops for UN missions, much to the chagrin of the *Cancillería*.[54]

The bureaucratic competition and division of labour between the *Cancillería* and the Ministry of Defence goes back to a pact in 1929, when the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) was established, whereby the military accepted the demilitarization of politics and the civilians conceded institutional autonomy. This facilitated a division of labour and made possible the emergence of a consensus, placing special emphasis on civilian supremacy, since there was nothing above the party. By 1946, when the first civilian president was elected, the military institution had not only been unified and disciplined, but had also been successfully subordinated to the civilian power. To ensure that the armed forces would remain loyal to the PRI, politicians limited budgets, reorganized military zones and imposed education programmes designed to reinforce loyalty to the party and instil discipline. Military–party links thus regulated, managed and co-opted the military's political behaviour, in exchange for which the armed forces had autonomy to decide promotions, doctrine, strategy, and, of course, military operations.[55]

The democratization of Mexican politics in 2000 did not modify the civil–military pact itself, but simply altered the political context. The Air Force and the Army continued to focus on their domestic missions, consisting essentially of maintaining control of the intelligence community, providing public services in rural communities, containing revolutionary movements (such as the *Zapatista* movement in Chiapas and elsewhere) and curbing trans-national organized crime (mostly drug trafficking).[56] Unlike the Brazilian armed forces, the Mexican military has never aspired to power projection because since the Second World War Mexico has not faced any external enemies. Even though the border with the United States is increasingly problematic due to drug trafficking and 'terrorism';

the situation does not raise the spectre of armed invasion, but requires daily socio-economic interaction with the northern neighbour.

Deployment of troops for UN operations is troubling for the Ministry of Defence since it would be perceived as weakening the military's ability to respond to its primary domestic roles. Various contentions have been used. First, it is argued that most Mexican soldiers do not fulfil the foreign language requirements established by the UN for observational posts, since mandatory English courses have never been part of their curricula. Second, there is concern about over-stretch when the military is already heavily engaged in multiple operations at home, including law enforcement and anti-drugs campaigns. Third, the military has shown anxiety about an increased involvement of US military forces in training peacekeepers for UN operations.[57] Finally, there are questions about budgets and peacekeeping costs, such as vaccines, uniforms and equipment for the mission, none of which are subsidized by the UN. Ultimately, senior officers regard missions abroad as an honourable task, yet a temporary exile to keep them busy and away from domestic politics.[58]

To date, there are few signs of change within the Mexican Army. In 2006, Felipe Calderón took office as president and called upon 450,000 military and federal security personnel to re-gain control of areas that had been lost to narcotics. The Army has thus been busy bolstering and, in some cases disarming and temporarily replacing, state and municipal police in key drug trafficking centres along the US–Mexican border and Pacific and Gulf coasts. This means that the military has not only increased its domestic presence, but has few incentives to participate in external missions with the UN.[59]

In sum, unlike the Brazilian military, the Mexican military has not been the main obstacle to democratization. The armed forces have had fewer incentives to rely on international commitments to anchor domestic reforms, and have experienced relatively little pressure from the outside world. Hence, the Mexican army has been able to successfully override the demand for reform, while maintaining its traditional mission and doctrine.

Conclusions

This article represents a preliminary step to understanding why countries with relatively similar underlying conditions and power capabilities behave differently in the UN. A comparative analysis of Brazil and Mexico provides not only a contextual description of Brazilian and Mexican foreign policies in the UN system, but also delineates causal mechanisms that explain divergent foreign policies. In doing so, this analysis has followed the comparative foreign policy approach. This analysis has also shown the tension that regional powers often face when they are proximate to hegemony. Bilateral and multilateral policy, especially in the realm of security, are not always complementary and, as the Brazilian and Mexican case illustrates, the closer a smaller country is to hegemony, the less likely that it will be able to exercise a leadership role in the UN.

The article sheds light on the theoretical question about how democratization prompts international commitment. To some extent, democratization theories

correctly highlight the commitment of countries undergoing democratic transitions to international organizations, and successfully identify the incentives for participation in them. International organizations can assist democratizing governments to make credible commitments to reform when domestic channels are limited.[60] However, the degree and level of international commitment varies substantially among democratizing states, since transitions to democracy are not homogenous political processes. The paired cases presented here support the claim that democratization trends can be affected by a number of factors, including civil–military relations and geopolitical factors, which in turn affect the extent to which countries under democratic transitions commit to international organizations. Additional case studies may provide the basis for identifying the underlying conditions under which international commitment will take place. It would be beneficial to conduct cross regional analysis, comparing democratizing states with other types of polities as well. The Indian and Pakistani or the South African and Nigerian cases come to mind as appropriate subjects to test the findings advanced here.

Finally, the findings may have implications for the UN, given that there have been pressures to modify the composition of the Security Council to reflect the contemporary distribution of power in the world. Similarly, there is a great need to involve more member states in contributing troops to UN peace operations. The evidence suggests that the extent to which states commit to the UN is not dependent on will, but on geopolitical and domestic considerations.

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