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THE DESECURITIZATION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO UNDER THE AMLO ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes, from the perspective of desecuritization theory, the manner in which Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) changed the policy of the Mexican government for tackling drug trafficking in the country from a military to a social approach. The aim is to establish whether this strategy has been successful in comparison with the open war waged against the drug cartels over the twelve years preceding the AMLO administration. Given that this desecuritization strategy resulted from political decision-making rather than social pressure, the analysis presented here focuses on the President's position and the actions he has taken.

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Introduction

On taking office, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) changed national policy with regard to drug trafficking organizations, deciding to exclude the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (SEDENA or the Secretariat of National Defence) and the *Secretaría de la Marina* (SEMAR or Secretariat of the Navy). The last two presidential administrations had charged these two ministries with managing the threat posed by trafficking organizations, a threat which remains foremost among the nation's priorities.

From the election as president of Felipe Calderon, in 2006, until the end of the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, in 2018, one of the main security issues facing Mexico has been the fight against drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). These previous administrations dedicated significant national resources to this effort, with Calderon even requesting support from the United States of America in the form of the Merida Initiative (MI).

In their theoretical proposal on the securitization process, Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde (1998) consider that the response, when a statesman or elite stakeholder declares something or someone to be a threat to national security, demands that a variety of resources be dedicated to responding to said threat. Both statesmen and elites must consider the actions and resources that will be required by this response. In some cases, society is aware of the threat when this securitization process is ongoing, supporting the decisions made by both statesmen and elites, while in others, society is either oblivious to or is not sufficiently informed of the threat as a result of said statesmen and elites keeping this information out of the public domain (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998).

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The present paper analyzes both the shift, in responsibility for security, from SEDENA and SEMAR to the newly established Mexican National Guard and the data corresponding to the implementation of social programs for young people with the aim of reducing violence and insecurity. It should also be noted that another aim of AMLO's desecuritization policy is also to eradicate corruption in public security institutions alongside the rollout of scholarship programs and job training to prevent the recruitment of young people by criminal organizations.

We will also analyze how AMLO proposed his desecuritization strategy by declaring "the end of the drug war", arguing that previous administrations' declaration of war on the DTOs had failed to resolve the threat and that the violence involved in this war had simply incited more violence. His position is that DTOs are not a security problem in themselves and are, instead, a symptom of economic and social injustice in Mexico. In light of the foregoing, the present paper seeks to explore how this desecuritization policy reduces crime, violence, and the threat posed to the State, comparing it to the securitization policy applied by previous administrations, which involved direct armed confrontation with drug traffickers.

Theoretical framework for securitization and the desecuritization process

Security from a constructivist perspective, describe the process of securitization and how it functions, as well as the role played by statesmen and the elites when publicly identifying threats and channeling resources and actions to prioritize their policy agenda. A securitization process involves identifying what statesmen and the elites consider as a threat to national security and the actions that they are willing to take to tackle it (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998).

Wolfers points out security can be either objective (when the threat is recognized as real) or subjective (the threat is merely perceived), a distinction crucial to establishing national security for the State, as it requires both an understanding of the perception of a threat and an assessment of the evidence supporting this perception (Wolfers, 1962).

Successful securitization comprises three factors: the existing threat; the emergency action taken to address it; and the effects of rules violations. Waever describes security as a "speech act", wherein an issue is presented as a priority that must be resolved by taking action, thus enabling an agent to claim the necessity and right to use significant measures and the resources they require. The main interest of this discourse is to understand how a threat is publicly presented and identified as a security issue (Waever, 1996).

The public must discuss the existence of a threat in order to be able to legitimize the measures and actions taken against it, which, once legitimized, can then be addressed by the State. The absence of public acceptance would entail solely a securitization movement rather than a securitized object. Securitization studies seek to understand how to securitize, what objects (threats) to securitize, who (subjects) to securitize, why

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(the reasons) to securitize, under what circumstances to securitize, and the factors that determine when securitization has been successful.

Desecuritization is "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere". The desecuritization process involves the choice not to rely on public scrutiny of the threat (namely whether it is subjective or objective) and is seen by said authors as the "optimal long-range option, since it means not to have issues phrased as threats against which we have countermeasures but to move them out of the threat-defense sequence and into the ordinary public sphere" (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998: 4-8).

Waever points out that the inner circle, "the elite", questions the actions of statesmen, who try to reestablish order by either affirming that the threat is present or pretending that nothing wrong has happened. However, in reality, circumstances are changed by the presence of the threat and the new priority should be to establish the truth pertaining to the situation faced by the State (Waever, 1995).

The present study focuses on the "speech act" conducted by AMLO, in which he announced the end of the war against DTOs, arguing that there are alternatives solutions. However, insecurity remains a problem that manifests in criminal violence, the constant expansion of the DTOs' operational capacity in Mexico, and the emergence of new criminal organizations (Cattan, 2019).
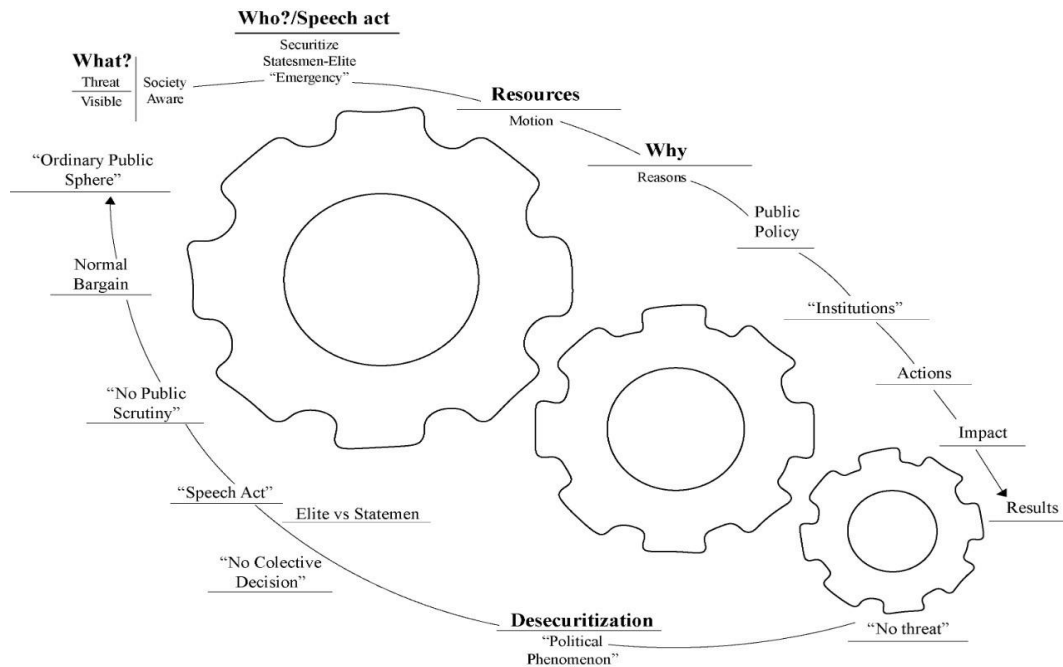
In her paper *Reconstructing desecuritization: the normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it*, Lene Hansen points out how an issue can be desecuritized, firstly by means of its relationship to politics, given that the securitization of an issue is a political phenomenon. Secondly, an issue can be desecuritized in the public sphere, which would be a much more political decision than simply politicizing the issue, while, thirdly, via a collective decision, society decides to desecuritize an issue as this would be more effective than securitizing it. Finally, Hansen invokes Waever's reflection about "détente" and how this concept forms the basis for desecuritization (Lene, 2012).

Based on the research described above, the present paper posits that the public sphere is a useful concept for explaining how Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) desecuritized the governmental response to DTOs, which can be framed as a bargaining process by means of which his government decided to downgrade a securitized emergency to a desecuritized issue.

Hansen describes how a shift in focus from an emergency or threat to a bargaining process conducted in the public sphere suggests a shift from the securitized (the issue relates to a sphere of public policy that requires the allocation of resources or some other form of communal governance) to the politicized (the state does not deal with the issue and it ceases to be subject to public debate and decision).

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Image 1 – Analysis of theoretical discussion

Source: Author's own

Boswell suggests a flow of ideas connecting public discourse and policy practice, while the Copenhagen School sees the political sphere as a dynamic space in which actors seek to justify their policies and destabilize those of their opponents. (Boswell, 2007).

The presidential election campaign and AMLO's promises

As stated above, from the beginning of Felipe Calderon's administration, in 2006, to the end of Peña Nieto's administration, in 2018, the principal security policy implemented in Mexico had involved confronting the DTOs. The initial objective had been to reduce violence on a national level and to prevent the DTOs from bringing their products into North America, for which specific purpose the US government provided Mexico military equipment and trained its military personnel (Astorga, 2015). While this US financial support was known in Mexico as the Merida Initiative (MI), it was largely perceived in the US Congress as simply a tranche of international aid to be approved year-on-year as part of its budget.

In Mexico, this security policy resulted in continuous violence and deaths, at the hands of both the DTOs and the State (which was now responding militarily), which was exacerbated by endemic corruption and a flawed justice system that failed to prosecute criminals. Therefore, the objectives of the MI shifted to promoting governmental and institutional reforms in Mexico, including the judicial system, and strengthening the rule of law (Cook, Rush, Ribando, 2008: 1-6).

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Although this financial assistance began in the last year of the administration of George W Bush, it was continued by his successor Barack Obama, who stipulated that Mexico needed to take more action to tackle the violence, stem the growth of the DTOs, and also address the corruption observed in governmental institutions. However, these criteria were not met, with the violence increasing year-on-year and the DTOs competing for market share. (Camhaji and García, 2019; Infobae, 2019).

During the period discussed above, AMLO was a prominent political figure, having run twice for the Mexican presidency and losing twice due to what he described as the corruption within the electoral system, and one characterized by the news media as a threat to national security. In his third presidential race, AMLO campaigned against a major opponent - the flawed security policy pursued by the last two administrations, representing two different political parties, the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN or National Action Party) and the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party).

Image 2 - Graph for homicides per year in Mexico
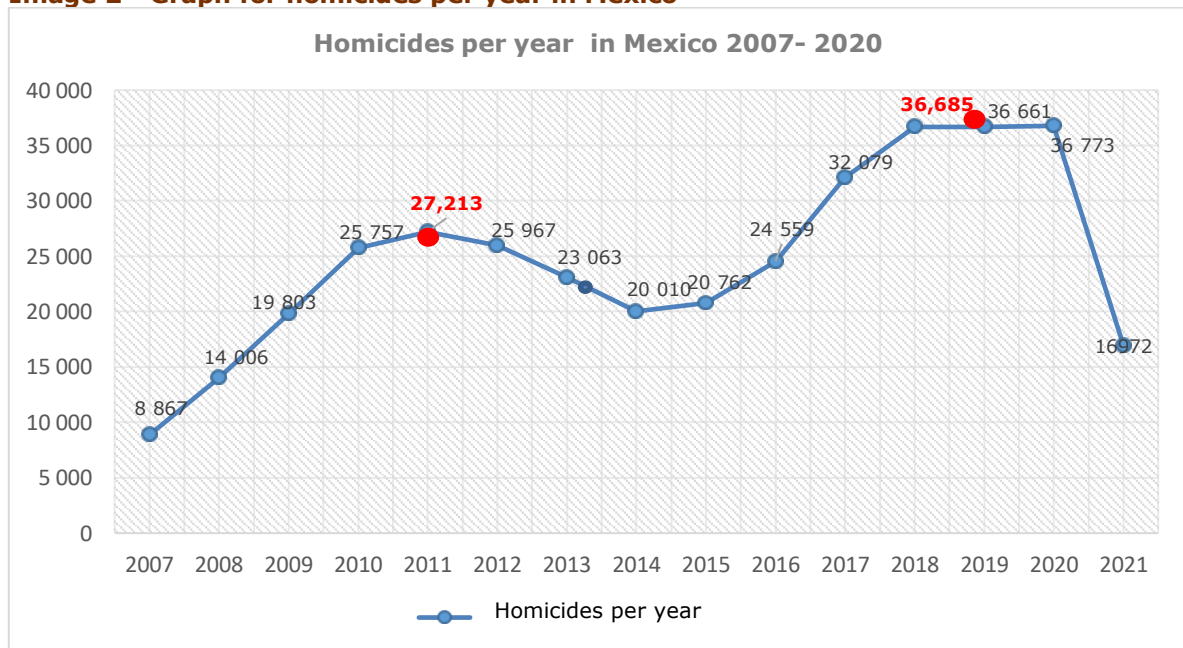
Data source: National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI) (2020). https://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/olap/proyectos/bd/continuas/mortalidad/defuncioneshom.asp?s=est

During this campaign, AMLO set out how he was going to deal with violence and drug trafficking from an alternative perspective, namely dealing with it as a social problem, solving the causes that draw people into drug trafficking and identifying economic and social alternatives for them. He proposed the removal of the military from the streets, not only because it was never intended to be used for public security activities but also because its constant human rights violations only increased the levels of violence. Finally,

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he proposed an amnesty for those involved in the drug trafficking business, particularly the poor (López, 2018: 105; Oré & Díaz, 2018).

By relating drug trafficking and violence in Mexico to social and economic problems, rather than a threat to the State and government stability, AMLO was signaling a change of perspective from that pursued by the last two administrations. He argued that the violence used by the State to regain control over drug smuggling routes into US territory was unacceptable, phrasing his approach as *"abrazos, no balazos"* (hugs, not bullet wounds.

Once elected, AMLO's policy position was enacted in the National Plan for Peace and Security 2018-2024, which claimed that "…violence and insecurity involve the confluence of a great number of factors, starting with those of an economic and social nature, such as the lack of quality employment, the insufficiencies of the educational system, and institutional breakdown…" (Gobierno de México, S/F: 2). The plan associated the objectives of achieving peace and security with two main factors: the institutional corruption that encouraged drug trafficking; and the need for both popular wellbeing and social justice to be reinforced by the law.

AMLO's scholarships and violence

Andrés Manuel López Obrador won the presidential election in 2018 with 53.19% of the total number of votes cast, becoming the first presidential candidate to receive that level of support in many election cycles, giving a clear mandate for him and his policy platform. Despite this mandate, critics pointed out that the popular expectations this had raised would not match the results achieved during his time in office (Rojas, 2018: 1-4).

The section on security in the National Plan for Development 2018-2024 states that the new vision for security in the country, given the deficiencies in terms of employment and education for young people, was going to *"…remove the social base from criminality by means of the mass incorporation of young people into education and work…"* (Presidencia de la República, 2019 (a): 11). The objective of this vision was to end the war on drugs in the country.

As part of the promises made during the campaign, AMLO began by announcing the social programs for students and young people under the rationale that this policy would best garner initial popular support. In February 2019, months after being sworn in, he announced, in a ceremony at *La Plaza de las Tres Culturas* (Square of the Three Cultures) in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, the first of these scholarships program, *Young People Writing the Future*, remarking that:

> *"…in our country there are 16 million young people living in poverty, imagine if a criminal offers to employ them as the "hawks", as they are known colloquially, who inform [their employers] as to who is entering and exiting the communities..."* (Presidencia de la República, 2019 (b): 27).

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As discussed above, the new strategy was to fight drug trafficking socially rather than militarily, the approach followed for the previous decade. From AMLO's point of view, as the root of the problem was the potential for teenagers to be recruited by DTOs and drawn into criminal activities, if they were provided jobs and an education, they would reject the advances of the DTOs as they would have another way of making a living.

Without prior studies or analysis indicating how many teenagers would benefit from these social programs, how they would be rolled out, the budget that would be allocated to them, or, even, what their results may have been, this was a political decision made by the president without considering whether the federal budget could cover it.

Four scholarships for young people were offered: Benito Juárez; Young People Writing the Future; Young People Building the Future; and Welfare for Families in Elementary Education. The scholarship payments range from $800 to $3,748 pesos ($40 to $187 USD) per month, which amounts to a combined federal budget of over twenty billion pesos, which critics pointed would be insufficient, given the absence of any prior research on the policy (Becas y Convocatorias, 2020).

It was at this point that the policy began to be subject to questions: Is this going to end drug trafficking and violence in the country? Why has the president associated violence with financial support for young people in the country? Are these scholarships going to resolve the main problem, namely the existence of DTOs in the country? These questions were prompted by the observation that, as drug trafficking in Mexico is sustained by the US illegal drug market, it does not depend on whether young Mexican people are in employment or their level of income.

The objective of the DTOs in Mexico was to gain control of the US illegal drug market and trafficking routes as well as other criminal activities, such as kidnapping and human trafficking. Many pointed out that the lack of job opportunities and education for young people were not the cause of DTO activity, either contemporaneously or historically.

Drug trafficking in Mexico began as part of the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States, with the former representing supply and the latter demand. Greatly influenced by their Colombian counterparts, Mexican DTOs were established with the purpose of profiting from drug trafficking and organized criminal activity and not because those working within them were uneducated or unemployed. In fact, there are many anecdotal accounts of how politicians, police officers, or other educated professionals were involved in DTO activity.

The policies enacted by AMLO, therefore, represent the first time that a Mexican politician saw his best chance of taking power was to offer financial support to young people with no restriction as to what they could spend it on, given that these social programs do not ask for evidence of expenditure.

This position also corresponds to the desecuritization of the fight to tackle drug trafficking, as Helsen describes, given the manner in which AMLO's policy represented a shift from an emergency to a politicized matter, a policy decision made by him and not by either the audience or the political elite involved in a public debate around the relevant issues.

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Image 3 - Intentional homicides during the AMLO administration
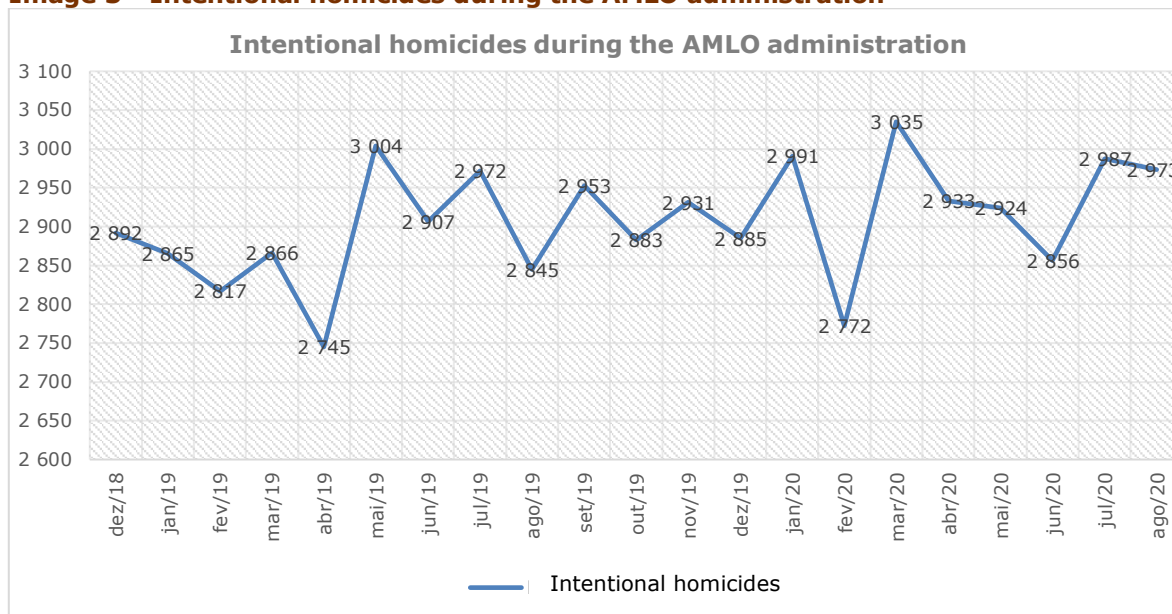
Source: *Total number of intentional homicides: 2018 - 36,685; 2019 - 36,661; and, up to August 2020 - 23,471. Source: A. López, 18 de septiembre de 2020, in "Robos y secuestros tienen histórica tendencia a la baja. Conferencia presidente AMLO". YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gZjtxV0LqY

The scholarships implemented by AMLO's government do not directly correlate to a decrease in violence in Mexico. As we can see in images 2 and 3, since he assumed the presidency, violence in Mexico only began to decrease in 2020 in the context of the SARS-COV2 pandemic. The sustained level of violence observed from December 2018 to August 2020 does not support the direct relationship proposed by AMLO between violence and poverty, education, and his scholarships.

AMLO's administration has, thus far, been more violent than the previous two, despite his Secretary of Security's protestations to the contrary. The highest peak in the levels of violence during the Calderon and Peña Nieto administrations was the 27,213 thousand intentional homicides recorded in 2011. Intentional homicides were recorded at 36,685 in 2018, at the end of which AMLO took office, and did not decrease until the reduction observed in 2020 as related to the SARS-COV2 pandemic. In the year and a half since the scholarships were introduced, intentional homicides have not decreased, and drug trafficking continues unabated (Image 3).

The creation of the National Guard

During his candidacy, AMLO insisted that there was a lack of coordination among public security institutions in a congested institutional environment that interfered in the fight against organized crime and efforts to reduce violence. To address this lack of inter-institutional strategy, he proposed the following:

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> *"…to integrate the police corporations, the Navy and the Army, (in) a National Guard. Right now, it is a disaster because each corporation does what it considers proper, on one side there is the Navy, on the other there is the Army, on another there is the police; it won't be like that anymore…"*
> (Hernández & Romero, 2019: 87-106)

His solution was to unify the security and enforcement actions taken against criminal organizations by creating a single military force under the sole command and direction of the president, what would become the National Guard (DOF, 2019). Thus, AMLO proposed, in the chapter *Safe Society and Rule of Law* of his election manifesto *Proyecto Nación 2018-2024* (Project for the Nation 2018-2024), a series of measures to end the violence that had blighted the country over the previous twelve years. The most important points included the following: the creation of the National Guard to replace the military, which would gradually retreat from certain high risk regions under the rationale that it should not be carrying out public security functions; the allocation of more resources for police training; the creation of the National College for Public Security with the objective of training specialist security corps, which would offer a career option attractive for the teenagers who do not work or study. In order to tackle violence and insecurity, AMLO set out a different approach to previous governments, in both operational and institutional terms, proposing three important changes: relieving the Secretary of the Interior of its security functions; the creation of the Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection; and the creation of the National Guard (Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana, 2019).

At the launch of this proposal, the future Secretary for Public Security, Alfonso Durazo, outlined the priorities for a potential Obrador government: "The first is to close the cycle of war. The second, to achieve a significant decrease in criminal violence within 180 days. Number three: to recover the trust of society in the security forces. Four: to strengthen the strategy within three years and, finally, to deliver a country in peace and quiet in 2024." (*Expansión Política*, 2018: 4). The deadlines set out by Durazo did not seem realistic and he was criticized given that violence did not decrease as a result of Felipe Calderón's 'war' on the DTOs and, while there was a slight decrease in crime when Enrique Peña Nieto took power, violence peaked towards the end of his administration, surpassing even the levels of the Calderón administration (Figure 2 / García, 2019: 4).

Shortly after AMLO won the election, Alfonso Durazo, who was in the running to be Secretary of Public Security, announced that the National Guard would no longer be created, with this shift in priorities meaning that the fight against organized crime would be pursued by focusing on money laundering. For Durazo, this would be the best approach to confronting criminal organizations in the country and could be pursued at a lower cost (Ramírez, 2018: 3-4).

Durazo's position was in keeping with the promise of "hugs not bullet wounds" made during the campaign (*Otro País*, 2019: 3-8). It should also be noted that, during the election campaign, the relationship between AMLO and the military had been strained in light of his statements regarding a possible amnesty for those involved in organized

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criminal activity and the withdrawal of the military from the streets, as well as his statements highlighting human rights violations committed by the military in Mexican territory (Zavala, 2019).

The National Guard was proposed as one of the indispensable instruments that would enable the federal government to provide security, investigating and arresting anyone jeopardizing the safety of Mexican citizens. It was envisaged that the National Guard would not be fully operational until 2021, with reforms to the Constitution also necessary, given that none of Mexico's armed forces could be in charge of public security and also that the policy required the dissolution of the Federal Police (*Gobierno de México*, 2019: 1, 4).

Once the constitutional reforms required had been approved in the nation's state congresses, the National Guard was officially established via an announcement, in March 2019, in the Official Gazette of the Federation. The 10th, 16th, 21st, 31st, 35th, 36th, 73rd, 76th, 78th, and 89th articles of the constitution were modified for this purpose while the National Guard Law was also enacted (*Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión*, 2019: 6). These reforms were criticized as representing the legalization of the intervention of the armed forces in matters of public security, although, in DW fact, this was a continuation of the measures implemented by both Calderón and Peña Nieto.

The failed capture of Ovidio Guzman

One of the main media strategies applied during the Calderon and Peña Nieto administrations was to generate publicity via the arrest of criminals and the killing of DTO kingpins. In an effort to foment support from the general public, the objective was to show that public security institutions were working hard to fight the DTOs all over the country. The objective of these media events was the same, irrespective of the DTO involved, leading people to think that they were purely performative and conducted for publicity purposes.

Criminals noticed that the policy of the newly elected president, AMLO, was different to past administrations, leading to a major embarrassment for the government during the attempt to capture Ovidio Guzmán, the son of Chapo Guzman (the past leader of the Sinaloa cartel in Mexico), on October 17th, 2019. The clear contradictions between all security institutions involved, as evinced from their public statements, showed a glaring absence of coordination for an operation of the utmost importance to the new AMLO administration.

Although the Secretary of Public Security should have at least been made aware of this top-secret operation, which was to be carried out jointly by the National Guard and SEDENA, his public comments showed the opposite. He stated that the operation "was circumstantial" (Camarillo, 2019: 3) and that "Ovidio was never arrested", continuing that no deal had been made with the Sinaloa organization to secure Ovidio Guzman's release and, finally, admitting that there were failures in the execution of the arrest without indicating why (Guerrero, 2019: 2).

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On 21st October, AMLO announced that SEDENA and the National Guard were going to recapture Ovidio, but not by military means this time, because this would put the general public at risk, something his government was not going to do. He stated that "I was informed about this action because there is a general recommendation. I think SEDENA knew about it" (Alvarado, 2019: 13-18).

Statements from all the Secretariats involved underlined this lack of coordination, contradicting AMLO's repeated policy objective of greater coordination. Further to his statements, outlined above, Durazo later said that the military carried out the operation based on an extradition order from the US. Given that AMLO's account seemed to change with every new statement and that he was failing to account for what was clearly a SEDENA-led security operation, the conclusion drawn was that the president had neither been informed about the operation nor did he have any real idea as to why the military had been involved (Alvarado, 2019).

Pointing to what can be described as the desecuritization of the fight against DTOs, given the avoidance of direct violent confrontation with one specific organization in this case, AMLO was signaling his prioritization of civilian life over the waging of 'war' against DTOs. The real issue related to this desecuritization policy is that, while AMLO, like his predecessors, appears not to want criminal violence to be perpetrated on society by the DTOs, he clearly prefers that this kind of operation fail if it could result in civilian casualties.

By releasing a high-ranking DTO member, such as Ovidio Guzmán, in full view of society, AMLO showed his commitment to his promise not to provoke these organizations, despite them being high-value targets for US extradition and reiterated his stated preference for peace over violence. This episode provided evidence of AMLO's policy of desecuritizing the fight against DTOs. Although he was criticized for this political decision, it was consistent with his promise not to use violence in the fight against the DTOs, as it had been used in the past. Considering that AMLO's desecuritization policy is making the confrontation between DTOs and the state less evident than in the past, it can be said to be a success; however, the statistics for violence in the country can be said to show the opposite (Figures 1 and 2).

The approach followed by the AMLO administration to desecuritize the fight against the DTOs, which even involved publicly releasing a senior narcotrafficker after his capture by AMLO's own armed forces, will not achieve the results that he hopes.

The SARS-COV2 a pandemic and the Mexican army

The SARS-COV2a began to spread across Mexico in March 2020, with 2,000 deaths and 20,000 cases reported by 21st April (Hernández, 2020). The National Guard was brought in to assist with the implementation of public safety measures, such as encouraging social distancing and mask use and supervising the security of public health institutions (Rodríguez, 2020). The Mexican army and navy were then brought in because they were much more organized and experienced due to the armed forces' *Plan de Auxilio a la Población Civil en Casos de Desastre* (Plan DN-III-E or Civil Aid and Disaster Relief Plan).

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However, this plan was established in 1965 to provide aid and relief during natural disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, and fires, did not include the National Guard, which was not established until 2019 (Nájar, 2020).

The decision to bring in the military was announced via presidential decree, on March 26th, 2020, in which AMLO set out the activities to be undertaken by the armed forces in support of the National Guard's work to prevent the spread of the virus. On May 4th, 2020, he stated that, as the army and navy had the appropriate experience and personnel for this task, they were going to administer both Plan DN-III-E and the Navy's own contingency plan.

The National Guard was responsible for the repatriation Mexican nationals abroad, with the private flights required coordinated by the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, and was also charged with the following: the refurbishment of military facilities to make them suitable for treating civilians; the production of medical material; the hiring of specialized health personnel; the procurement of foreign ventilators; the closing of beaches, businesses, and public places; the monitoring and prevention of potential outbreaks of looting; the application of sanitary control points in public places; the monitoring and closure of public transit; shutting down parties; and, the imposition of curfews (although this last activity led to censure by the Secretary for the Interior). Acting in support of these initiatives, the armed forces have been criticized for actions they have taken when keeping people off the streets, encouraging mask use, closing businesses, and, even, closing public places, as occurred in the state of Guerrero when beaches were closed by the use of public force (Rodríguez, 2020).

Durazo, the Secretary of Public Security and Citizen Protection, stated that, in carrying out public security activities, the armed forces were subordinate to the National Guard, stressing that this action did not represent a militarization of public security in the country, as has been alleged. Moreover, he announced the number of military personnel involved in these actions: SEDENA – 27,364; SEMAR – 12,508; National Guard – 10,470; and Federal Protective Service – 637. Their duties, according to Durazo, were to guard warehouses, protect businesses and hospitals, help with the transport of medical supplies, and distribute food to inaccessible parts of the country (García, 2020).

Durazo wanted to reassure the public that the armed forces were not taking over the country or represented a threat and that their responsibilities and duties were clear and would be made evident by their actions. He was clear that, both under the law and by the actions taken, the armed forces were not undermining or even a threat to the presidency. He also cited the provisional fifth article regarding the use of the armed forces to support the National Guard: "…while the structure, capacities, and territorial jurisdiction of the National Guard are being developed, the President of the Republic may make use of the permanent Armed Forces in matters of public security in an extraordinary, regulated, audited, subordinate, and complementary manner" (DOF (b), 2019).

By the end of 2020, on December 23rd, SARS-COV2a vaccines began to arrive in Mexico and the armed forces were assigned the task of ensuring their security, distribution, and safety, namely their storage, transportation, and administration to the population.

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Vaccination was considered vital to the national interest, given that it was seen as the only practical effective measure to stop the spread of the disease. In his speeches, AMLO has rejected the criticism that the armed forces are being deployed in this context as part of an effort to militarize Mexico, because he considers that his government is using the military to ensure public safety (Storr, 2020).

The desecuritization policy of the AMLO administration represents an attempt to pursue a different policy trajectory, wherein the armed forces have been withdrawn from security operations against the DTOs; however, at the same time, the National Guard is not yet ready to take on the responsibility of conducting these operations.

Conclusions

The present article sought to examine the process of desecuritization in Mexico, as carried out by the AMLO administration with the aim of ending the 'war' against drug trafficking". The desecuritization policy was the product of AMLO's view that DTO violence is a social problem rather than a threat to both State and society, with poverty and the social problems resulting from economic inequality the main causes of violence in Mexico.

Under this perspective, AMLO proposed the scholarship programs for teenagers as the first step in the desecuritization process. However, no direct relationship between violence and social injustice has been found and, moreover, as a social program, the scholarships do not have a stated objective, are not subject to demographic tracking, nor are their results published. There is no way to measure either the relationship between these scholarships and the level of violence or how the AMLO administration is going to achieve the results that he has promised. As the award of the scholarships does not depend on a commitment from the recipient to spend the money for a specific purpose, such as further study, there is no evidence that teenage scholarship recipients are not being recruited into DTOs.

The second step in the desecuritization process followed by AMLO in his public policy was the creation of the National Guard to conduct the public security function formerly fulfilled by the Mexican armed forces (SEDENA and SEMAR) under previous administrations and which resulted in major human rights violations. However, most of the personnel of the National Guard have been recruited from both SEDENA and SEMAR, meaning that, in practice, it is not a civilian force but a militarized force, despite the original intention to create a civilian one.

The real test for the desecuritization process was the release of Ovidio Guzmán. The Sinaloa Cartel is one of the main DTOs in Mexico - a transnational and international threat. The decision taken by AMLO during the crisis sparked by Ovidio's arrest was to show that he was not going to risk the safety of the general population. His desecuritization policy led him to choose to release Ovidio over starting an open war with the Sinaloa Cartel, a decision that is going to be interpreted by the DTOs as signaling that the State represents a diminished threat to them.

The present document sought to establish whether AMLO's desecuritization policy will reduce crime, violence, and the threat to the State in contrast to the securitization policy

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of previous administrations. We conclude that, rather than reducing violence in Mexico, public policy has not significantly reduced violence in Mexico, with homicide data showing the opposite, not only when comparing the two years of the AMLO administration to its stated objectives, but also in comparison with the two previous administrations, during which homicide rates were both high and increased.

Former president Calderon was criticized for declaring a "war against drug trafficking" while Peña Nieto saw an increase in the levels of violence all over Mexico during his presidency. The current president is inclined to take the opposite tack, having declared the "end of the war", although the results achieved do not provide evidence of a reduction of violence in Mexico. While he promises that violence will decrease as a result of his desecuritization policy, the statistics show the opposite.

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