



POLICY ADRIFT: MEXICO'S SOUTHERN BORDER PROGRAM

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“Policy Adrift: Mexico’s Southern Border Program”

Introduction

Programa Frontera Sur (PFS) is the latest in a series of public policy initiatives dealing with one of three aspects (or more commonly, all of them) pertaining to Mexico's southern border: migration matters, border issues, and security concerns. While these three areas are not always and necessarily connected, the significance of the border in U.S. foreign policy strategy and the progressive escalation of a securitization agenda at the southern border have increasingly brought them together, for the most part. Viewed from a historical perspective, PFS shares some of the same features that characterized prior attempts to regulate matters at the border and to manage migration. Despite the fact that PFS was conceived as an instrument of state policy intended to foster development and reinforce border security while mitigating migrants' vulnerability, the program's results so far raise deep concerns as to whether it has complied with its stated spirit. Meant at first as a comprehensive initiative, PFS ended up being merely a program to contain in-transit, undocumented migrants (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte 2015), from a security standpoint.

PFS took effect at the same time as—and, in fact, has been a response to—a perceived “crisis.” The number of unauthorized Central Americans¹ who pass through Mexico on their way to the United States has slowly but steadily increased in recent years. Statistics on the number of people apprehended by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM by its acronym in Spanish) provide an approximate measure of this trend. While the number apprehended in 2013 was 79,908, in 2014, it had risen to 118,446; the following year, it climbed to 177,949, showing a twofold increase over 2013 (Unidad de Política Migratoria-Secretaria de Gobernacion 2013, 2014, 2015).² In addition to this increased flow, a growing number of individuals and entire families are fleeing from violence in their home countries, making them potential asylum applicants. While the phenomenon is not new per se, the fact that more claims for refugee status are being filed in Mexico is a relatively recent development. Furthermore, there is a substantial increase in the number of minors (accompanied and unaccompanied³) that join the exodus (Carlson and Gallagher 2015). Adolescents, in particular, comprise a significant amount of those seeking asylum as they have become direct targets of gangs' recruitment attempts or directly threatened by these criminal groups.

This paper attempts to shed light on the performance and legacy of PFS as a policy instrument meant to deter unauthorized migration to the United States, a common concern of both the United States and Mexico. Research focuses mainly on developments that have taken place along the beginning of the two main migrant routes at Mexico's southern border region; primary field information came from Tapachula (Chiapas) and

¹ As a working definition, and without prejudice to Belizeans, Nicaraguans, and Costa Ricans, the term “Central Americans” in this report refers to nationals from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Over the last 15 years, citizens from the latter countries have made up more than 85 percent of unauthorized migrants passing through Mexico.

² Mexican authorities report “events” under the rationale that one person may have been caught more than once.

³ Defined as a person under the age of 18 not accompanied by an adult relative or legal guardian.

Tenosique (Tabasco). One route starts at the Ciudad Hidalgo (Chiapas)/Tecún Uman (San Marcos) border crossing and extends all the way to central Mexico via Oaxaca. The other follows the Gulf coastline and begins at the port of entry known as El Ceibo and nearby locations at the Tabasco (Mexico)/Petén (Guatemala) borderline, passes through Veracruz, and on to Tamaulipas. The data gathering process included, on the one hand, interviews with two migrants' rights advocates, a former consular member of the Guatemalan government, a migrant shelter volunteer, a state officer in Chiapas, and an ex-employee from a government-run shelter for minors. Attempts to talk with INM personnel and the former head of the PFS proved unsuccessful.⁴ On the other hand, the research involved obtaining information from secondary sources, including reports by NGO and advocacy groups, the media, and official government documents.

The study addressed a number of different questions. Did PFS contemplate a working strategy to reconcile its dual objective of implementing both protective measures for migrants and enforcement policies? To what extent does PFS embody seemingly conflicting public policy aims? Is Mexico turning into a “migration manager” for its northern neighbor, as suggested by one source (Rietig and Dominguez 2014)? Will Mexico be able to implement an autonomous policy regarding immigration and transmigration, independently from U.S. interests? What are the program's achievements, and what was its overall performance? What have been some of its intended and unintended consequences? In light of the program's assessment, what changes are needed for Mexico's migration policy as a whole? What are appropriate policy recommendations for achieving an orderly and prosperous southern border with a particular focus on public policy toward Central Americans? What are specific suggestions for all governmental parties involved—the United States, Mexico, and migrants' countries of origin? What feedback do civil society actors require to better deal with PFS' outcomes?

The Current Context of Out-Migration: Mixed Flows and Unaccompanied Minors

The nature of out-migration from Central America to the United States has undergone a qualitative change in the last decade. Whereas people fled due to politically motivated violence in the early 1980s, nowadays a variety of “social” violence riddles the region, triggering the exit of thousands of people: domestic (e.g., gender-based, parent-to-children), street (robberies, extortion), structural (chronic poverty and social and economic disenfranchisement), and organized crime (gang-motivated) violence afflicts Hondurans, Guatemalans, and El Salvadorians. This has resulted in the ripping apart of the social fabric of society. Today, mixed flows—i.e., people who are migrating due to a combination of

⁴ When the author of this report requested an appointment with the former head of Programa Frontera Sur (Humberto Mayans), the latter expressed willingness to talk about anything but the program (email communication, May 2016). Notwithstanding the efforts made through a close collaborator of the author of this report and local intermediary in Tapachula—someone who wishes to remain anonymous—no National Migration Institute field personnel in that location were willing to discuss PFS, either. Other analysts have faced the same issue. See: Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute 2015, 5; Nolan 2016.

reasons, such as economic need, family reunification, and escape from general violence—characterize human mobility from Central American nations (Knippen, Boogs, and Meyer 2015, 5).

In consequence, over the last few years both economically motivated migrants and asylum seekers from Central America have headed north, usually side by side. In the United States, the second-largest refugee host country in the world, people from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico have filed the most applications for asylum. In 2015, individuals from these four countries accounted for 51 percent of all claims, up from 35 percent in 2013 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2016, 38). When looking at the breakdown by Central Americans only, the following picture emerges: in 2012, 20,900 people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras sought asylum in the United States and Mexico; by 2015, the figure had risen to 109,800 (UNHCR 2016, 7). Violence connected to organized crime and gangs was “likely” the main reason for the hike in the number of asylum claims (UNHCR 2016, 7).

In turn, the growth in mixed flows is overloading governmental and nongovernmental organizations that do relief and migrant-related advocacy work. In an interview from May 2016, Humberto Roque Villanueva, Mexico's then-undersecretary for population, migration, and religious affairs, acknowledged that INM was stretched to its limit in terms of available resources, due to the high number of unauthorized migrants coming into the country (International Crisis Group 2016, 6). INM has neither the capacity nor the means to handle too many unauthorized migrants in its detention centers. The federal government's Mexican Commission to Help Refugees (COMAR by its acronym in Spanish) faces similar challenges, too. With only a handful of professionals to take care of thousands of asylum applications—15, according to the International Crisis Group (2016, 18)—along with the continued growth in the number of claims, it might soon find itself in a dire situation.

Project Counseling Services, a funding agency, has asserted that COMAR may be purposely delaying asylum applications to alleviate the claims overload, encouraging people to give up on their attempt to obtain asylum status (Project Counseling Services 2015, 5, 9). In particular, at INM's Siglo XXI detention center in Tapachula, Chiapas, the largest facility of its kind in Latin America, it is somewhat common for applicants to abandon the process because of the trying conditions they endure, including a protracted length of time spent in detention at the facility (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014, 33). Another way to resolve the problem has been to expedite and increase the number of deportees, according to Julio Carmona (pseudonym), a psychologist and former government shelter officer (personal communication, May 2016).

The situation is most acute in Tapachula, where all parties involved—including government agencies (detention facilities, shelters, and other public services), church shelters, and NGOs—are also stretched thin in terms of resources because of the number of people they have to tend to (Julio Carmona, personal communication, May 2016). For instance, an upsurge in the number of deportation cases meant more advocacy work for an NGO like the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matias de Cordova, a migrants' rights advocacy group.

The center has addressed more cases of human rights violations, including deprivation of freedom, and taken on additional asylum applications since PFS' implementation, said its coordinator Diego Lorente (personal communication, May 2016). Tenosique, another city with a growing influx of mixed migration flows, faces tough challenges as well. The problems in that town have to do with the shortage of services available to the incoming populations. Institutions such as UNHRC and Asylum Access (an NGO) began working in Tabasco as recently as 2015. As will be shown, the direction PFS followed completely overlooked implementing any kind of response to solve these problems.

The event that sent warning signs to U.S. authorities concerned the unprecedented number of migrant children (some unaccompanied, others with their mothers) that showed up at the U.S.-Mexico border in the first half of 2014. In January, the number of children arrested by the U.S. Border Patrol reached the 3,711 mark, but by June, the figure had nearly tripled to 10,631. This increase of around 7,000 represented more than double the amount of children apprehended in June 2013 (U.S. Border Patrol data, as cited by Knippen, Boogs, and Meyer 2015, 16). It should be noted that this so-called "crisis" of 2014, as asserted by the media and some politicians, could be largely unfounded. In a recent paper, for instance, Gruben and Payan (2014) argue that, by looking at historic statistics on apprehensions and other variables, there is hardly any evidence of a recent migration crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, they suggest that we need to look more closely at the combination of pull factors in the United States (a modest rise in employment opportunities) and push factors in Central America (increased violent conditions in societies of origin) in order to explain the rise of unauthorized migrants and potential refugees to the United States.

The direct response to the "crisis" came not from the United States but from Mexico. PFS effectively curtailed, temporarily, the flows coming from Central America. However, the real problem continues unabated, as statistics from INM indicate (for example, see item six in the section, "By way of conclusion: Lessons Learned"). As has happened in the recent past with similar public policy agendas, PFS was only a temporary solution, not a permanent one.

Background to Understand Contemporary Public Policy Regarding Mexico's Southern Border

The attention given to the southern border is a rather recent development, especially when compared with the focus paid to its counterpart in the north. Mexican authorities began to launch policy instruments for the southern region in the late 1990s. Coincidentally or not, at that time security concerns also mounted in the United States and led to an increase in U.S. deportations due to the implementation of tougher immigration regulations, particularly the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008; Rodriguez and Hagan 2004).

Soon thereafter, the events of Sept. 11, 2001, would mark an inflection point in the reconfiguration of national security policy in the United States and the impact it had on immigration matters. Under the argument that terrorists could enter the country to wreak havoc, some migrants, particularly Muslims, became a potential threat to U.S. national security. At the same time, the United States began a policy of externalizing its borders, that is, expanding its security apparatus, directly and indirectly, to neighboring countries' borders, airports, etc. (frontexwatch 2008; Casas, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2010); one way of accomplishing this aim was by pressuring neighboring countries to apply stricter immigration control measures. This securitized agenda soon permeated Mexico's policies. During the 1990s, Mexico had 25 migrant detention centers; the following decade, twice as many had emerged, most of them located in the southern part of the country (Casillas 2016, 18). This may be perceived as an escalation of policing strategy against unauthorized migrants. Another step toward further securitization of migration issues dealt with the incorporation of INM into Mexico's national security apparatus in 2005 (Casillas 2016, 34).

Most Central American migrants use Mexico as a transit country. Nonetheless, Mexico has gradually played the role of a "migration manager" for the United States under a securitized lens. The southern border has become the main barrier to migration flows bound for the United States, similar to what has happened with countries such as Morocco and Turkey in relation to the European Union. Mexican public policy regarding the country's southern border is scrutinized against this backdrop.

PFS did not emerge as a unique and innovative public policy; the next section will show that initiatives that preceded it followed a similar, general pattern. The program is the latest in a series of incremental, though disjointed, efforts to tighten Mexico's southern border against alleged threats, both real (i.e., organized crime) or imagined (i.e., undocumented, in-transit migration). Mexico began implementing a southern border-specific policy agenda in the 1990s, and from 2008 onward, the U.S. government has supported such plans, at least in part. The Merida Initiative is a program that has funneled "security aid" under four directives, or pillars, namely: "(1) disrupting organized criminal groups, (2) institutionalizing the rule of law, (3) creating a 21st century border, and (4) building strong and resilient communities" (Seelke and Finklea 2016, i). At least US\$1.5 billion was delivered to Mexico between FY 2008 and FY 2015 for "training, equipment, and technical assistance" (Seelke and Finklea 2016). Part of this funding has addressed Mexico's southern border security issues.

PFS From a Historical Perspective: An Examination of Earlier Policies Implemented at the Southern Border

This section summarizes initiatives that have shaped the course of Mexico's southern border public policy over the last two decades. The exercise is not an in-depth analysis of each plan or program. Instead, the purpose is to make an initial comparison between prior policies and PFS in order to find commonalities (in terms of objectives, duration, accomplishments, etc.) and, in turn, establish recurring patterns in policy design and implementation.

Operación Sellamiento (1998–c. 2000)

Head of State in Office: Ernesto Zedillo

Goals: Stop the flow of drugs at Mexico's borders and its coasts (Baja California, Yucatán Peninsula, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific coast) (Presidencia de la Republica 1999).

Summary: Drafted in 1996, it apparently originated from another initiative called *Programa Sustentable de la Frontera*.⁵ According to an official source, as many as 22,000 agents from the military, the Federal Police, and the Attorney's General Office (PGR for its name in Spanish) were involved in the program (Presidencia de la Republica 2000). After 2000, no reference to the program appears in any official document. Yet in late 2001, a reporter quoted PGR personnel asserting that: "*los logros alcanzados en la Operación Sellamiento han posibilitado que este esquema pueda ser utilizado también para combatir otros delitos que se realizan a través de la frontera más porosa que posee nuestro territorio*" ("achievements made under Operación Sellamiento have made it possible to fight other crimes that happen through the most porous border in our territory") (Castillo 2001). The statement hints at two things: first, that up until then, this initiative continued to be in place, and second, that "other crimes" may have involved controlling undocumented migration, something a second source suggested (Giron 2013).

Plan Sur (2001-2002)

Head of State in Office: Vicente Fox

Main Goal: Strengthen inspection and migration checkpoints along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific coast (Casillas 2002).

Operational Goals: Combine efforts among different agencies and municipal and state governments to manage unauthorized migrant flows; use the resources of INM regional offices in the best possible way to monitor migrants; and increase the number of apprehended migrants and the detention of people involved in human trafficking (Casillas 2016, 20-21).

Summary: The program was announced in June 2001 and implemented the following month (Casillas 2002). Two control belt regions were set up, one stretching from Chiapas through Tabasco, the other from Oaxaca through Veracruz (Casillas 2016, 20). According to Rebecca Gallemba, an anthropologist who has worked at the Mexico-Guatemala border, the United States sanctioned this program to "not only strengthen its southern border with Guatemala, but also to implement militarized internal checkpoints." Furthermore, she noted the following: "Mexico's implementation of Plan Sur was largely motivated by the expectation that the United States would improve the treatment of Mexican migrants if Mexico strengthened its own southern border enforcement. However, such an agreement, debated just a few days prior to September 11, 2001, was abandoned after the terrorist attacks" (Gallemba 2015).

⁵ One other source indicates that other main objectives of this program included: a) keeping a better registry of border crossers, b) promoting bilateral programs to defend migrants' human rights, and c) training for migration agents (Grupo Guatemala-México, Migración y Desarrollo 2008, 43-44).

Propuesta de Política Migratoria Integral en la Frontera Sur de México (2005)

Head of State in Office: Vicente Fox

Core Strategies: a) Facilitate authorized temporary and permanent immigration to southern border states, b) protect the rights of migrants who traverse the southern border, c) address security matters at the southern border, and d) update management and immigration legislation according to the characteristics of migration populations at the southern border (INM 2005, 9-34).

Summary: *Propuesta de Política Migratoria Integral en la Frontera Sur de México* was simply that, a proposal. Apparently, this design became the blueprint for Felipe Calderón's own initiative on the southern border (Ureste 2014). A military analyst has summarized Fox's migration policy in these terms: "Facilitate the regulation of undocumented workers whose temporary and definitive destination is the southern states of Mexico, protect the rights of illegal migrants in transit, foster the security of the region, and update the management of migration flows" (Perez 2014, 94).

Plan de Reordenamiento de la Frontera Sur (2006-2007)

Head of State in Office: Felipe Calderón

Goals: Orderly migration and security at the border (Presidencia de la Republica 2006).

Summary: The plan was announced in December 2006. At the time, President Calderón made public the creation of a Border Police Unit in Chiapas. *Plan de Reordenamiento* was part of the National Development Plan 2007-2012. Some analysts have argued that, in addition to managing migration and border issues, Calderón increased efforts to fight organized crime through this initiative (Donnelly 2014, 10). In this regard, Perez (2014) advances a keen, contrasting observation about Fox's and Calderón's policies: "The Calderón administration used the security arrangements to regulate migration. The use of belts of control, multiple checkpoints, and the militarization of the border that characterized the Southern Plan during the Fox government to regulate migration were not explicit in the Plan for the Reordering of the Southern Border of Mexico, but measures implemented were even tougher. The involvement of more security forces to secure the border and fight organized crime was used evenly to enforce migration laws and to watch drug trafficking routes" (123).

The plan never got off the ground. By late March 2007, there had been no concrete steps to enforce it (see Ramos 2007), and any annual presidential reports thereafter did not mention it. Even though the Calderón government's actions in terms of migration and the border were consistent with stated objectives in the National Development Plan, by 2010 or so migration issues became part of his government's security agenda and were "not a humanitarian and regional integration issue" (Perez 2014, 117).

Taken as a whole, these initiatives share common characteristics. Typically, and until recently, programs and plans have lacked clear-cut road maps, i.e., programmatic documents. Most importantly, if they did have such documents, very seldom were they made public. The various programs come across as ephemeral policy efforts. All of these

initiatives lasted two years at most, not even a full presidential term. Resources apportioned to these policy programs have fallen under the broad term of security, be it field operations, equipment, or other items; no funding has been earmarked for social programs, for instance. These programs have had very limited real impact on the ground, something related to their equally narrow scope and goals. Practically no final assessments or evaluations on the outcomes of the programs have been carried out, neither from within or independent from the government; in short, lack of accountability is a recurrent issue.

What are the commonalities between PFS and these prior similar initiatives? In this regard, a number of items stand out. For Perez, PFS is a combination of its two immediate predecessors (*Plan Sur* and *Plan Reordenamiento*) because “it includes security measures, border restrictions, and calls for the reordering of the border for the regulation and protection of migrants” (2014, 128).

According to a migration expert, *Plan Sur* caused migrants to readjust their travel routes to evade official controls and provoked an increase in coyotes' fees (Casillas 2016); such developments are similar to the results of PFS. In the post-September 11 context, there was even talk about sealing the southern border; *Plan Sur* simply accelerated control measures that had been already considered for the border (Casillas 2016, 25). These objectives mirror the intended goals of PFS, namely the avowed protection of migrants' human rights and securing the border.

Joint operations between several government forces took place during Calderón's term in office, (*Segundo informe de ejecución del Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, as cited by Perez 2014, 118, footnote 469), as was the case with PFS. This relates to one other problem: by (mis)design, these initiatives sometimes duplicate functions already in place by other government agencies. The governing body of PFS (see discussion of *Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur* in the next section) seems to be a good example, as Perez (2014) has aptly pointed out:

There are no representatives of the different agencies in the coordination [unit], communication and operation processes are not defined, authority and subordination relations are confusing, and this body does not have real power over the distribution of resources and the execution of operations. The government has already implemented the Special Program for Migration, the Migration Policy Unit, and the Advisory Council on Migration Policy. The creation of another institution—without defining its relation with previous programs, and without the organizational strength to execute its mission—is harmful to the regulation of migration⁶ (130).

PFS' priority on security constitutes, perhaps, the most salient characteristic that the program shares with prior initiatives. Despite the short-lived nature of each plan or program, a securitization continuum clearly emerged. It has progressively escalated over

⁶ One point of clarification is in order: the Special Program for Migration has never materialized.

time and is the common thread among components of otherwise incoherent state policies. National security is the overall guiding philosophy behind these initiatives. Several of these programs and plans were meant to fight drug trafficking, yet, whether directly or indirectly, at times they also were used to deter, even if only temporarily, unauthorized migrants at the southern border.

The Genesis and Implementation of PFS

On July 7, 2014, President Enrique Peña Nieto publicly announced the creation of PFS, sometimes referred to as *Plan Frontera Sur*. Strictly speaking there is a conceptual difference between a program and a plan, a point I will address later. However, no official document laid out the structure of the program, i.e., there was no programmatic road map to steer it. To run PFS, the government created a coordinating hub of sorts, the *Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur* (CAIMFS). In August 2014, Humberto Mayans Canabal, a senator, became the head of the agency. In its first year, CAIMFS operated with a budget of Mex\$102 million and a staff of 94 people (Torres 2015b; Martinez 2015).

In addition to following in the steps of prior programs, the intent of PFS can be found in several higher order public policy instruments: the National Security Program, 2014-2018 (Project Counseling Services 2015, 1) and the Special Migration Program, 2014-2018, the latter of which is formulated within the National Development Plan, 2013-2018 (Gobierno de la Republica 2013, 173). PFS is part of eight strategic guidelines included in the Special Migration Program (Gobierno de la Republica 2014, 116, 117, 119, 121, 124), a directive that, to date, has not been implemented.

Conceived as a *comprehensive* program, PFS never achieved that goal. The stated purpose of the program was to address migration issues at the southern border and to foster the social and economic development of the 23 municipalities next to Guatemala and one adjacent to Belize (Secretaría de Gobernación-Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur 2015, 3-4). Information on an initiative of this sort first emerged on June 3, 2013.⁷ On that date, there was a meeting in Tapachula, Chiapas, attended by the secretary of the interior (SEGOB); the governors from Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, Quintana Roo, and Veracruz; the secretary of the Army; the head of the Attorney General's Office; and a representative from the unit that oversees population, religious, and migration issues within SEGOB. Secretary of the Interior Miguel Angel Osorio Chong used the occasion to announce the launch of "a comprehensive program to tend to the south-southern region in the country" (Peters 2013; Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco 2013). The following year, the governors from the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, Guerrero, Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Yucatán, and Tabasco drafted a regional program to promote an initiative called the National Strategy to Develop the South-Southeastern Border (see Conferencia

⁷ That is, evidence made available to the general public can be tracked down to that date. Perhaps there was discussion of the issue, within government circles, at a much earlier time.

Nacional de Gobernadores/Comisión Sur-Sureste 2014).⁸ Soon afterward, Humberto Mayans would declare that this blueprint aimed “to rescue” the south-southeast region, i.e., to bridge the gap that separates Mexico’s developed north from its underdeveloped south (Torres 2015a).

In other words, PFS was already in the works in 2013, but its details had not been developed at the time of its implementation, rather hastily, in mid-2014. Interior belt controls to stop migrants, for example, had been in the planning stages before they became part of PFS (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014, 26). In mid-2013, a newspaper published an article revealing that Mexican and U.S. authorities had discussed a multi-tier security system to contain “drugs and human traffickers” at the southern border region, something that would have been funded in part through Merida Initiative resources (Geertz 2013). In February of the following year, the governor of Chiapas and a representative from the National Security Commission presented a plan for the “comprehensive care” of the southern border (*Sdp noticias* 2014), one among a number of such hollow announcements.

In the end, most analysts agree that PFS emerged in response to the migration “crisis” that took place at the Mexico-U.S. border earlier in 2014, as mentioned before. Circumstances would have forced the (hurried) implementation of PFS. Hence, the program became a middle-ground step between a full-scale program and an emergency, scaled-down, initiative.⁹ Another critical reading is that PFS was a smoke screen to enforce containment actions, instead of promoting economic development, behind an avowed comprehensive initiative; this perspective comes from one migrant human rights advocate, Friar Tomás Gonzalez, coordinator of La 72 Shelter (personal communication, May 2016). The actual program was in effect for one year, August 2014 to July 2015. After that period, the migration deterrence components lingered on to some extent.

In the end, PFS aspired to fulfill the expectations of an ambitious plan, but never embodied much of a program either. In fact, PFS has been mislabeled a “plan” in some of the available literature and in the media. The distinction is important when considering the conceptual differences between the terms. Mostly, a program stems from a plan. A program outlines, based on a timeline and in a coherent fashion, all the actions, services, and processes that make possible (i.e., realizes) the objectives of the plan; it also designates

⁸ The strategy seems to have been based on one of a series of studies commissioned by government officials. The most important one seems to have been an assessment (*diagnóstico*) of the south-southeast region (Chiapas, Campeche, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatan) that appeared under the name “Programa Regional de Desarrollo Sur-Sureste 2014-2018”. Published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* on April 30, 2014, the secretariat for agrarian, territorial, and urban development authored the assessment. See: http://diariooficial.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5343111&fecha=30/04/2014.

⁹ According to Diego Lorente, the foundation for what would eventually be PFS was set in 2013 in Tapachula. The federal police force was beefed up with 500 new agents, for example. These officers engaged in intelligence work and began asking questions to get to know the city. There were raids at bus stations in early 2014, something unseen before. Lorente has called this an identification stage. The “crisis” of June 2014 only accelerated plans already in the making. There was even speculation about creating a border patrol at some point (Michel 2014). With or without a migration crisis, policy action akin to PFS would have taken place, says Lorente (personal communication, May 2016).

who is responsible for carrying out the different components of the program, be it government officials or managers (in business), to mention two realms among many others that may be involved. To put it differently, PFS never fulfilled Humberto Mayans' higher aspirations concerning border development; the program simply turned into an instrument of migration containment.

Actions on the Ground and Program Outcomes

The main developments resulting from PFS include the following:

1. Roadblocks, checkpoints, and new infrastructure were set up along the routes migrants use. Examples abound. A report written for the U.S. Congress declared that INM set up "more than 100 mobile highway checkpoints as part of PFS" (Seelke 2016, 22). A coyote revealed to a journalist that, in mid-2015, there were 22 checkpoints between the Guatemala-Mexico border (from Ciudad Hidalgo to Tecún Umán) and Puebla, in the center of Mexico (Soberanes 2015), with 11 of them between Tapachula and Arriaga alone (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014, 18). At a different location, in Chablé, Balancán (Tabasco), a permanent, new checkpoint began operating in the second half of 2014, according to a former Guatemalan consular representative in Tenosique (e-mail correspondence, June 2, 2016). Others have sprung up in strategic locations such as Estacion Chontalpa, a train depot in Tabasco. At Estacion Chontalpa, INM set up a checkpoint on the outskirts of the village; additionally, it assigned a group of officers to permanently patrol the area. There are reports of a higher number of military checkpoints in the interior of Chiapas, along the border with Guatemala, as well (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014, 34).

Of particular note are the so-called Centers for Comprehensive Management of Border Traffic (CAITF by their acronym in Spanish), mega facilities to control the movement of people and goods.¹⁰ The first one opened in 2013 in Huixtla, near Tapachula; it was again a precedent of what was to come later. A couple of centers were built at Trinitaria and Playas de Catazajá, both in Chiapas, in April 2015 (SEGOB-CAIMFS 2015, 36), and in 2016 another opened in Palenque (Chiapas). A fourth one had been planned for Frontera (Tabasco) (SEGOB-CAIMFS 2015, 37) but as of the publication of this paper has not been finished. Alongside other related developments, PFS aggravated already critical conditions at the Siglo XXI facility. Siglo XXI is overcrowded with both migrants and asylum seekers. However, this center is unfit to hold asylum applicants, who, in addition to spending extended periods of time there, are reportedly fed and treated poorly and lack medical and psychological attention (PCS 2015, 5).

¹⁰ Although the Centers for Comprehensive Management of Border Traffic (CAIFT) were originally entrusted to the Department of Treasury (*Secretaría de Hacienda*), President Peña mandated that these centers broaden their scope to include migration management, too (See SEGOB, 2015, May 11). Mayans declared that seven federal government departments are clustered at each CAIFT (Torres 2015b). The CAIFT follow a design already implemented in the United States, says one source (Rietig and Dominguez 2014). As of late 2015, two such facilities were in full operation: one in Huixtla and another in Playas de Catazajá, both in the state of Chiapas; the one at Trinitaria was scheduled to open in early 2016 (SEGOB-CAIMFS 2015, 22).

2. Unlike in the past, when only INM officials conducted roundups, as of August 2014, raids began to include members of the military, the navy, federal police (including the gendarmerie¹¹), and state and municipal police, all working together in joint operations (Diego Lorente, personal communication, May 2016; former Guatemalan consular representative in Tenosique, e-mail correspondence, June 2, 2016). Even members of Grupo Beta, a unit within INM set up to offer first aid and to protect and defend migrants' human rights, cooperated actively at some point in the operations, for instance by escorting migrants into custody in Tapachula (Diego Lorente, personal communication) or helping other agents apprehend migrants in Tenosique (Yaatsil Guevara, personal communication, May 2016). In this sense, Beta officers violated the group's mandate, a troubling development. Official statistics from INM presented in an independent report show that the number of enforcement operations in which different authorities participated in controlling unauthorized migrants climbed after July 2014 (Knippen, Boogs, and Meyer 2015, 11).
3. The freight train ("The Beast"¹²), the main means of transportation for many migrants, had fewer riders in 2014, reportedly because some companies offered trains that traveled at a higher speed, others hired private guards, and still others set up concrete posts alongside the train tracks. At its peak, as many as 100 agents conducted raids on one train in Tenosique (Friar Tomas Gonzáles, personal communication, May 2016). All these measures made it difficult to climb aboard a moving car. Also, there was an increase in the number of joint raids carried out by officers from different agencies on the railroads (Sorrentino 2015).
4. In contrast to recent historical trends, between the second half of 2014 and the first six months of 2015, Mexican authorities apprehended more Central American migrants than in the same period of the previous year (Isacson and Meyer 2015). Likewise, between October 2014 and April 2015, more Central Americans were detained in Mexico than the number caught at the U.S. southern border (Washington Office on Latin America 2015). Consequently, the number of people detained in and deported from Mexico went up, too: "from July 2014 to June 2015, detentions rose 73 percent compared to the same period in the previous year" (Knippen, Boogs, and Meyer 2015, 31). As Javier Urbano, a migration scholar, has pointed out, migrants were not deterred; rather, the flows were dispersed and people sought alternative routes (2015). As migrants got pushed off main traveling routes, organized crime took advantage of this situation (Friar Tomas Gonzalez, personal communication, May 2016).

¹¹ Created in August 2014 by President Peña, this military police-like force, the first ever in recent Mexican history, was originally meant to work in rural conflict areas or regions with a high incidence of criminal activity (See Guerrero Gutierrez 2017). The gendarmeire arrived in Tapachula on September 2014 (Martín 2014).

¹² For a number of years, undocumented migrants rode, as freeloaders, on a cargo train that travels from the Yucatan Peninsula to central Mexico (Gulf route) and from Arriaga, Chiapas, to the center of the country (Pacific route), respectively. This way of traveling, in a northbound direction, is not exempt from its own perils.

5. Eyewitness accounts report other abuses that took place, such as the apprehension of Mexican nationals during the raids and the unjustified confiscation of *tarjeta de visitante regional* (TVR) permits from Guatemalan citizens¹³ in Tenosique; INM agents argued that such documents were no longer valid. In some instances, these agents took away Guatemalan identification papers from people as well, an outright violation of their rights (former Guatemalan consular representative in Tenosique, e-mail correspondence, June 2, 2016). La 72 shelter volunteers were arrested and detained, for some time, by police in May 2015. Friar Tomas Gonzalez attributes the death of at least 12 migrants near Tenosique due to PFS-related actions between June 2014 and July 2015 (personal communication, May 2016).
6. PFS reduced, temporarily, the volume of the unauthorized in-transit migrant flow. A report based on information generated by 13 Catholic church-sponsored shelters across Mexico states that, at the peak of apprehensions under PFS (the second half of 2014), the number of migrants who made use of shelters decreased, yet another outcome of the program (Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes 2015, 22).
7. There were other outcomes, some expected, some unforeseen. Not surprisingly, to evade authorities and other obstacles, migrants opted to walk instead of riding the train (*Diario de Palenque* 2015). In Veracruz, authorities noticed that migrants were using freight trucks (Perea 2015). An observer in the field indicated that, due to the difficult situation migrants passing through Tabasco faced at the peak of PFS' operations, people opted to head toward destinations other than the U.S.-Mexico border. They went instead to the so-called Riviera Maya (Quintana Roo), where jobs were available in the service sector of the tourist industry (Yaatsil Guevara, personal communication, May 2016).
8. The program entered a new, uncertain phase in mid-2015. After Mayans handed in his resignation in August 2015, no one replaced him. According to Mayans, PFS would have fused with other entities within SEGOB, including INM (Torres 2015a). At the time, a journalist's source stated that the Mexican Department of Treasury exerted pressure to make other government offices take over the work of PFS, arguing that fiscal cuts made such a measure necessary (Martínez 2015). Undoubtedly, the program was scaled down; in 2016, around Mex\$93 million in funds were allocated to PFS (Soto 2015b). At a press conference in late 2015 and in response to questions about what were perceived as the negative effects of PFS' enforcement policy, a high-level official within SEGOB declared that the program continued to be a policy instrument to "organize" migration flows (Soto 2015a). The more recent available official information suggests that toward the second half of 2016, CAIMFS had in fact been incorporated within SEGOB. Late in the same year, news came out about the latest steps that the Coordinación, or what was left of it, planned to execute. Social programs

¹³ TVR stands for *Tarjeta de Visitante Regional* (formerly known as FMVR or *Forma Migratoria de Visitante Regional*). It is a permit that allows Guatemalan and Belizean citizens to visit Mexico's bordering states for up to three days.

went into effect across the 23 municipalities next to Guatemala and Belize on November 28. Over a week-long period, officers from the municipal, state, and federal branches of government would carry out “communal and social” work in each municipality (SEGOB 2017). Such actions included free dental, physical, and gynecological check-ups offered to local populations; brigades completed the restoration of public buildings, and public officials received training on human rights issues (SEGOB 2017). These components of PFS began in Chiapas (López 2016) and a few months later in Tabasco (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco 2017). Apparently, and from the information at hand, CAIMFS’ main role befell on an office called The Directorate of Accords, Integration and Follow Ups, which is led by Crescencio Jimenez Nuñez (SEGOB 2017).

Criticism

1. The most salient critique about PFS is that the program has made the journey through Mexico more perilous for migrants and forced them to seek alternative routes, as has already been noted. Diverse sources (Centro Fray Matias et al. 2015; Knippen, Boggs, and Meyer 2015; REDODEM 2015; Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014; Isacson and Meyer 2015) agree in pointing out that PFS effectively hardened Mexican migration policy because of the consequences associated with increased control at or near the southern border. The results are summed up as follows:
 - a) The program’s management of mixed flows was questionable, in particular its serious human rights violations against in-transit migrants and an inadequate policy to handle asylum seekers. This report has provided several examples.
 - b) Containment measures have made routes more dangerous for people heading north. There has been an increase in smugglers fees as further complications to crossing Mexico have evolved. Bribes went up, for example. Municipal police officers who, historically, have preyed on migrants through outright extortion became particularly upset because outsiders (such as federal police agents) had to be let in the scheme. As more people got involved, the larger the pool of the corrupt gains to be apportioned among accomplices and participants. All the ills and abuses migrants endure, be it extortion, kidnappings, robberies, rape, etc., were aggravated, said Friar Tomás González (personal communication, May 2016).
 - c) Deportations under *Programa Frontera Sur* considerably increased. According to a report prepared by a number of advocate groups working with migrants, during the period July 2014-June 2015, the percentage of migrants apprehended rose by 73 percent compared to the same period the year before (Knippen, Boggs, and Meyer 2015, 31). In addition, some people who were denied asylum status and eventually deported tried to migrate north, again.

2. The program's lack of structure and a clear-cut roadmap may well be at the center of its problems. There are very few official documents specifying details about PFS. The only formal directive was the decree published in Mexico's Official Journal of the Federation on July 8, 2014, pronouncing the creation of CAIMFS (Diario Oficial de la Federación 2014). During a working meeting that took place in Campeche on September 29, 2014, neither Mayans nor his closest advisors made a thorough, detailed presentation of a work plan (personal observation). They offered scant substantive feedback on how the program would be operational on the ground or what kind of coordinating efforts would be established with other government agencies and civil society actors. The information disclosed was largely general and lacked elaboration, such as:
 - a) CAIMFS was to have two main headquarters, one in Villahermosa (Tabasco) and another in Tapachula.
 - b) 187 projects were planned for the states at the southern border.
 - c) There would be five "mirror" programs across the border, in neighboring Guatemala, aimed at having "high" social impact.
 - d) In terms of enforcement, the program envisioned the implementation of three "security belts": the first was made up of the 11 official entry points already in existence at the Guatemala-Mexico international borderline; the previously mentioned CAITF facilities would constitute the second belt; and a third was to be set across the Tehuantepec Isthmus (Oaxaca).

In the end, only the fourth item ("d") materialized in full; it took two years before social components linked to PFS (item "b") shyly took off—in that way, security components prevailed over all other aims.

3. Since its inception, PFS has stirred controversy among nongovernmental sectors because it remains unclear where its funding comes from. As suggested before, available evidence points to the Merida Initiative as one, if not the main, funding source (Sorrentino 2015). A newspaper speculated that, two days prior to Mayans' appointment, the U.S. government requested the transfer of US\$86 million from the Merida Initiative to PFS (Torres 2015b). In other words, the offer to use Merida Initiative resources was delivered right before Peña proclaimed the creation of PFS (Gonzalez 2014). However, Mayans has rebutted this notion (Martinez 2015). But hard evidence is difficult to track down. There is only so much one can infer from available sources. Consider the following quote, taken from a 2016 research paper sponsored by the U.S. Congress:

The State Department has allocated more than \$130 million of Mérida Initiative assistance for border security in Mexico, at least half of which will support southern border efforts. This figure includes \$70 million in FY2013–FY2015 appropriations and \$60 million in FY2011–FY2012 appropriations that have been reprogramed.⁸² As of February 2016, the State Department had delivered \$20 million of assistance for Mexico's

southern border region, mostly in the form of nonintrusive inspection equipment, mobile kiosks, canine teams, and training in immigration enforcement. Additional funding will support a biometric system, a secure communications network for Mexican agencies in the southern border region, and other new projects. The U.S. government will likely provide additional support for these efforts using a portion of the roughly \$139 million in Mérida aid appropriated in FY2016; an additional \$129 million in Mérida aid is requested in FY2017” (underlining added)⁸² (electronic correspondence with a State Department official, February 26, 2016, as cited by Seelke 2016, 22).

4. There is also evidence that U.S. personnel have been active at Siglo XXI Center, possibly in connection to PFS. The aforementioned Diego Lorente saw a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at the facility in late 2015 but was not allowed to approach this person and find out what he was doing there. An officer within the center confided to Lorente that the CBP agent was investigating corruption allegations at Siglo XXI (personal communication, May 2016).
5. Another worrisome issue is the fact that available information about PFS' progress during Mayans' time in office or about Mayans' personal performance is scant, as pointed out in the media (Torres 2015b). The one official document available thus far is a report put out by SEGOB-CAIMFS in mid-2015; nothing of the sort exists for the post-2015 period. The text highlights what authorities consider mainly positive outcomes (arguably in some instances) arising from PFS (see Appendix A).

Evaluating the Performance of PFS

Aside from the shortcomings mentioned above (i.e., the commonalities PFS shares with former initiatives) the program can be described as improvised, fragmented, incoherent, and even obscure. PFS represents makeshift *governmental* policy because of its haphazard character—it's not part of long-lasting, well-thought-out *state-oriented* planning. Programs such as PFS have been reactive, rather than proactive. They respond to particular circumstances or crises or to special interests. As Diego Lorente has put it, they last as long as they remain politically expedient or until the driving forces that brought them into being subside or disappear (personal communication, May 2016). This flawed, short-term vision causes discontinuity and fragmentation in public policy, in turn generating incoherence in terms of its implementation and results (which have limited impacts). Let us consider two things to illustrate this point:

- a) The incompleteness of this supposedly thorough initiative ran contrary to the very goal of tending to the protection of migrants from an all-encompassing perspective that included two other building blocks: development and border security. None of the 187 border programs materialized, nor did the “mirror” initiatives in Guatemala. Thus, “compromised comprehensiveness” describes what PFS meant—hollow public policy, i.e., a rhetorical declaration that remains at the level of well-meant intentions.

- b) To many, PFS represented an unnecessary effort as it resulted in the duplication of functions already performed by other government agencies. Why set up a new agency (CAIMFS) when there were already institutions in charge of dealing with migration, notably INM? (PCS 2015; Grupo de Trabajo sobre Política Migratoria 2014).

Initiatives of this kind have lacked clarity and transparency. Rodolfo Casillas, an expert on Central American in-transit migration through Mexico, has argued that, since their inception, many of these plans and programs have been part of a series of closed-door deals secretly agreed upon by the United States and Mexico (2016, 26). They have been approved in the shadows, as it were, and made accessible to very few high-level officials. He adds:

And even though most [agreements] are discussed publicly, the ones best guarded are those signed by the Mexican and U.S. governments concerning in-transit migration; most of them have been classified under the label “National Security Affairs” ever since the 1990s and up to the present (Casillas 2016, 26).

This opacity is closely related to the absence of accountability mechanisms, which would include, among other things, making programmatic documents accessible to the public, exposing budgetary matters to public scrutiny, and providing feedback and evaluations on the progress of public policy programs. In this sense, the evaluation model proposed by Perez (2014) for programs such as PFS seems fitting. He suggests assessing public policy from a “breaching” perspective: to what extent is there cohesiveness across stated policy, actual practices (enforcement), and consequences (that result from policy)? Perez outlines three gaps. The first is a discursive gap, meaning a distance between what is written and what is done. Perez calls the second an operational gap, i.e., a variance between what is in a program and the way it is implemented. Finally, there is the efficiency gap, namely the difference between intended results and actual outcomes (Perez 2014, 87).¹⁴ PFS ranks poorly when measured against this breaching model, in all three categories.

By Way of Conclusions: Lessons Learned

1. As the examples above show, PFS represents an unsound, disjointed state policy that has followed an inertia of its own. Eventually it may fade away or become a fixed feature that will continue to replicate its main and only component: the containment of migration flows. The program practically ended because of the government's financial limitations, and because the immediate goal, handling a migration “crisis,” was accomplished. Yet, the enforcement part of PFS drags on, a sort of policy by default.

¹⁴ As part of a thought-provoking exercise, Perez uses his proposal to evaluate *Operación Sellamiento*, *Plan Sur*, *Propuesta de Política Migratoria Integral en la Frontera Sur de México*, and *Plan de Reordenamiento de la Frontera Sur*. Results vary among the programs, but, by and large, their review yields poor results (Perez 2014, chapter IV). Because Perez wrote his study around the time PFS was announced, the work does not provide a full assessment of how the program may fare.

2. PFS can be regarded as part of a prevailing philosophy that has guided public policy for Mexico's southern border, characterized by agendas that rarely ever get fully developed, i.e., "allowed to mature" (Perez 2014, 140). PFS was a temporary, partial fix to resolve the child migration "crisis" of mid-2014. It did not emerge as a thorough, well-thought-out policy package. It integrated some of the components from similar initiatives of the past while lacking the resources, organization, know-how, and power to effect true changes (Perez 2014, 140). In this sense, PFS' fleeting response to in-transit, unauthorized migration never confronted the critical issues that have been in place for a long time; for these problems to be solved, different, durable approaches are required.
3. Since border management and security concerns are in some ways linked to migration on Mexico's southern border, these three issues need to be handled accordingly. PFS reproduced a practice that has repeatedly characterized internal policies that deal with these issues, namely the securitization of Mexico's border and migration agendas and the disregard of other approaches.
4. As a corollary of the previous item, PFS followed, and contributed to, a general historical trend leading to further militarization of the border. Yet this "toughening" of border security policy in Mexico has been "hard to define, at times contradictory, and unevenly implemented" (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014, 2) due to problems already mentioned (incoherency, opaqueness, etc.).
5. By promoting the unsupervised, multi-sided patrolling of government agencies as part of the program's enforcement maneuvers, PFS fostered conditions that allowed continued bribery, extortion, abuses, and other hideous misdeeds against migrants. This situation is part of chronic problems related to the lack of accountability and widespread corruption within the Mexican government. As Lorente has pointed out, these maladies ensure that public policy is used against migrants, not in favor of them, thus distorting the purpose of the policy (personal communication, May 2016).
6. Initiatives like PFS will not alleviate, much less solve, problems associated with unauthorized in-transit migration and asylum petitioners passing through Mexico's southern border. At best, PFS may have temporarily stopped what it is a growing tide of mixed flows. Let's take the case of minors under 18 years of age. The number of children apprehended by INM, according to official statistics, went from 9,600 in 2013 to 23,000 in 2014 and to 36,000 in 2015 (data cited in Human Rights Watch 2016, 17). Again, a different approach is needed to face this crisis because prevailing conditions in Central America (pervasive violence, failing economies, chronic poverty, etc.) will continue to fuel emigration from such countries. In light of this, migration crises in the region ought not be considered temporary phenomena but rather systemic, long-lasting developments. The problems that *Programa Frontera Sur* was meant to address in terms of migration will continue to plague Mexico as long as beleaguered Central American nations remain caught up in a spiral of violence and other ills.

Recommendations¹⁵

1. For Mexico and the United States

- a) There has to be a drastic shift in the current focus toward migration and border policy agendas, both in the Mexico and the United States, particularly when it comes to initiatives like PFS. Any policy concerning the southern border and migration issues needs to be shaped with a humane approach. Such an approach is especially critical for people who are fleeing from countries besieged by violence. As a migrant advocate said, those who are fleeing violence fear being sent back above anything else. Given this predicament, the non-refoulement principle¹⁶ becomes an imperative when a person has been denied refugee status.
- b) Mexico and the United States have to continue exerting pressure on Central American governments to do something to address the root causes that drive outmigration. All parties ought to coordinate initiatives to improve economic and public safety conditions in migrant-sending communities via programs that alleviate poverty, promote employment opportunities, and create safe environments for all residents. This is a cornerstone of mending a social fabric torn apart due to many acute, built-up problems. Programs that embrace the focus and philosophy that has characterized PFS will not solve these deep-rooted difficulties.

2. For Mexico

- a) Mexico ought to try harder to protect migrants transiting through the country to ensure that its enforcement policies do not embrace the current securitized perspective that victimizes migrants and enables those who would abuse them. Policy should respond to the particular situation of asylum seekers (humanitarian migrants) and the conditions that force them from their communities. Circumstances at Siglo XXI Center illustrate well the lack of a humanitarian perspective. Overcrowding and difficult conditions are taking a toll on human lives at this detention facility, where several individuals have committed suicide, including one person of African origin; some people also have been in detention longer than what the law says, namely asylum applicants (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matias de Córdoba 2016).
- b) Mexican refugee policy is in need of an overhaul. Asylum seekers receive the same treatment as in-transit migrants, a problematic approach. Mexico can improve cooperation efforts with, and provide further support to, international agencies and

¹⁵ Annex B contains a discussion about recommendations found in some of the literature reviewed for this research that deal directly and indirectly with PFS.

¹⁶ Any signatory country of the 1951 Convention has to comply with the non-refoulement provision: an asylum seeker cannot be returned to a country where he/she will find himself in danger of being persecuted due to his religion, race, national origin, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. See <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>).

other groups who work with asylum petitioners. The decision to repatriate can be a matter of life and death for those that seek refugee status.

3. For the United States

- a) The United States can help in a number of different ways on several fronts. For example, the allocation of some Merida Initiative resources to other initiatives besides securitization measures would serve a better purpose rather than funding the type of shortsighted policy PFS represents. For instance, aid could go toward reinforcing social programs in Mexico's southern border municipalities to fight unemployment, corruption, and other ills. Attempts to investigate corruption charges in places like Siglo XXI Center (as reported) constitute steps in the right direction to help Mexico get rid of such malfeasance, yet they need to be handled carefully because of the sensitiveness of such actions. The July 26, 2016, announcement by the U.S. government in support of admitting more Central American asylum seekers seemed a positive development in ameliorating an issue of common concern to Mexico and the United States (Amy Pope, Homeland Security adviser, as cited by Davis 2016). The new administration may act otherwise, though.
- b) The U.S. government can do much more in Central America through agendas such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the so-called Alliance for Prosperity program if other solutions that didn't involve securitization were implemented. Supporting community-based initiatives to abate violence, as proposed in a recent report (International Crisis Group 2016, iv), is the sort of initiative that is urgently needed. In other words, the United States should directly address the driving forces that impel people to migrate or flee.

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Appendix A

Highlights of a report presented by the office of the Secretary of State and the Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur (SEGOB-CAIMFS, 2015)

1. Coordinación representatives held numerous working meetings with federal, state, and municipal authorities and embassy personnel from Canada, Guatemala, and the United States between July 2014 and December 2014.
2. During the second half of 2014, Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) issued 112,050 visiting permits to Guatemalan and Belizean border residents (Tarjetas de Visitante Regional) and 15,391 work permits to border laborers (Tarjetas de Trabajador Fronterizo) as part of Programa Frontera Sur's design to facilitate the movement of (certain) border residents.
3. The Coordinación has commissioned the writing of monographs on the 24 border municipalities with updated information on the following topics: population, migration, security, governability, and human rights. This is part of an effort to build a database and information system within the Coordinación.
4. Prosecutor Offices to Solve Crimes Committed against Migrants (Fiscalías especializadas para atención de delitos contra migrantes) in the states of Campeche, Tabasco, and Quintana Roo had been set up during the first half of 2015. These offices respond to PFS' mission to infuse migration management with a humanitarian approach.
5. The Coordinación set up the three aforementioned Centers for Comprehensive Management of Border Traffic (CAIFT) facilities and launched plans to build two more through 2016 and 2017.

Appendix B

A brief discussion on recommendations regarding issues closely related to PFS.

The author of this report deemed it useful to review what others have proposed to address some of the problems directly and indirectly related to PFS (the border, security concerns, migrants and asylum seekers, and unaccompanied migrants who are minors). What are the commonalities, if any, among recommendations put forth by experts? Or did they have contrasting views? Some interesting findings emerged after a quick review of six recent reports that included recommendations.

There are expected commendations. They include a request that Mexico's government terminate PFS (PCS 2016, REDODEM 2014), an appeal to implement anti-corruption actions (Human Rights Watch, 2016, 132) or a call to stop deporting people, particularly young people (International Crisis Group, 2016, iii). Advice, whether general or specific, is usually addressed to governments, mostly the United States and Mexico, but at least one focuses on their counterparts in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (see International Crisis Group, 2016, iii). In some instances, suggestions were aimed at specific bodies, such as international organizations (see Georgetown Human Rights Institute 2015, 55-56 for proposals intended for UNHCR), or particular government agencies, namely the Commission to Help Refugees and INM (see Human Rights Watch, 2016, 7).

Other things are revealed upon closer examination. One particular issue appears time and again in five out of the six documents, one that underlines the urgency of the situation: the plight of humanitarian migrants in Mexico. Overall, proposals emphasize greater responsibility on the part of Mexico to do more than it does now. This is suggested through ideas such as implementing a proper asylum and protection policy by Mexico (Knippen, Boggs, and Meyer 2015, 47), the infusion of more U.S. resources "to improve and expand Mexico's capacity to process asylum claims" (Human Rights Watch, 2016, 7), or facilitation of refugee integration in Mexico (International Crisis Group, 2016, iv). The two latter ideas deserve particular attention because their promoters assert that the United States should contribute to such a process. It also bears a close connection to the proposition advanced in two documents about the need to set up UNHCR "processing" centers in Mexico and other transit countries (e.g., Costa Rica) to manage asylum claims and/or search third country resettlement options for refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2016). All of this may suggest that the weight of the burden on caring for refugees should fall mostly on Mexico and, to a lesser extent, on the United States.

Other recommendations address specific topics of smaller scope, but not of lesser importance, i.e., ending massive deportations, paying special attention to migrant children (a particularly vulnerable population), etc. Remarkably, very few authors take on the root causes that are driving outmigration from societies of origin. Three ideas could be found in the perusal of the available reports, two of which remain at a very general level. One is a call that U.S. aid should be aimed at improving living conditions of the residents with greatest need in Central America. The second is that U.S. assistance to Mexico and Central

American countries should be based on a human security focus (i.e., investing in the areas such as education, health, job programs), not on a militarization platform (PCS 2016, 29). A third, concrete suggestion is that the U.S. government put money, for five years, into “targeted programs to address community violence prevention, institutional reform, and poverty” (International Crisis Group, 2016, iv).