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3 Militarization in Mexico and Its Implications

Arturo C. Sotomayor

In recent years, violence, caused by turf wars between drug cartels and the government's offensive launch against them, became distressingly familiar in Mexico. Government officials claimed that drug-related violence was mostly concentrated in the northern border and Pacific regions, including the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Michoacán, and Sinaloa.¹ Although violence was traditionally contained within cartels and the security forces, recent trends indicate that conflict is now spreading to the population at large. Available statistics on the escalation of violence vary from source to source. Yet Mexico's official figures, last revealed in January 2012, estimated that close to forty-seven thousand people have died since President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006.² Mexico's fear of drug-trafficking violence was justifiable; powerful drug cartels engaged in turf wars, arms trafficking, kidnapping, and executions.

To deal with this security challenge, the Mexican government relied increasingly on military and conventional security strategies. Indeed, militarization became the preferred means to deter and to dissuade organized crime. Thousands of soldiers were incorporated into the federal police force, and President Calderón deployed more than forty thousand troops across the country to fight drug cartels.³ In fourteen of thirty-two federal states, a member of the armed forces ran the agency responsible for public security, while an active-duty military officer served as head of the local police in six states.⁴

The use of military means to deal with public security and law enforcement is certainly not new, but the rise of violence and the increased role of the armed forces in policing have raised concerns about the impact of militarization and securitization. Two questions drive this study: What factors contributed to the move toward militarization in Mexico, and what were the effects of such a strategy?

Concerning the first question, I argue that the militarization of Mexican politics was not merely a reflection of an issue (drug trafficking) being a security threat but the result of political choice. That is, the government's military strategy stemmed directly from international and domestic pressures. On the one hand, U.S. military aid and Colombia's military approach

to drug trafficking influenced and shaped Mexican strategy preferences. On the other hand, civil society shared a portion of the blame for tacitly supporting such policies while failing to make the government accountable for its actions. This is where Joel Migdal's concept of "the state in society" becomes relevant for this study. In looking at state-society relations, Migdal deals with the issue of how societies in weak states tolerate, facilitate, and permit the state to develop capacities.⁵ In Mexico's case, the state increased its coercive force to deal with organized crime, but it did so at the expense of the society it claimed to protect.

I argue that militarization increased human-rights abuses committed by troops, eroded civilian oversight, and undermined coordination efforts between security agencies. Hence, in relationship to the second question, I claim that militarization generated an insecurity dilemma—that is, "an internal predicament in which individuals and groups acting against perceived threats to assure their own security or securities consequently create an environment of increased threat and reduced security for most, if not all, others within the borders of the state."⁶ Ironically, in the case of Mexico, the insecurity dilemma was not restrained to its domestic entourage, in which society was eventually left with an increased sense of insecurity, but went beyond its borders, affecting Mexico's regional community.

To develop my argument, this study is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the sources of militarization in Mexico's strategy by focusing on the international and social demand for military action. The second section analyzes the unintended consequences of such actions, including repressive policing, negative effects on accountability and human rights, and spillover effects in the Central American region.

The Move toward Militarization

To analyze Mexico's security dilemma, we must first identify the sources of militarization. Although the literature contains many meanings of the concept of "militarization," I define the term as a process "of adoption and use of military models, methods, concepts, doctrines, procedures, and personnel in police activities, thus giving a military character to public safety (and public space) questions."⁷ Militarization is not restricted to policing and may include judiciary matters, natural-disaster rescue missions, and public-health issues. To some extent, militarization is part of a broader political process. Once a decision has been made about the transformation of an issue into a security matter, politicians can then decide to use military means to tackle security concerns. In fact, militarization has become the norm in most, although not all, developing states. Substantial descriptive work has empirically demonstrated that states with very scarce resources have a tendency to spend significant amounts of money on defense and military policy to deal with public-security challenges.⁸

Mexico has not been an exception. As described in the introduction, militarization was the preferred means to deter and to dissuade organized crime, especially during the Calderon administration (2006–2012). The key military actors in this case were two autonomous ministries: the army (the air force is subsumed within the army's structure), also known as the Ministry of Defense, or Sedena; and the navy, also known as Marina. The army was the president's preferred law-enforcement agency to counter narcotics and crime, which reinforced its role as guarantor of internal security and order. Because it was the larger service, it received the bulk of the financial resources and the media's attention. Its budget increased at higher rates than the navy's. For instance, in 2000, at the beginning of the Fox administration, Sedena was allocated \$20.4 billion pesos as part of its budget. By the end of his administration, the amount increased to \$26 billion pesos, a 27 percent increase (compared to the 15 percent increase the navy received during the same period of time). In 2007, President Calderón's inaugural year, Sedena's budget jumped to more than \$36 billion pesos (a 23 percent increase from the previous year), while the navy's budget was maintained at roughly the same budgetary level (\$10 billion pesos in 2007 versus \$9.1 billion pesos in 2006).⁹ Similarly, in the Calderón administration, the navy assumed a much more active role in the government's fight against cartels. Specifically, the Marines were deployed to such states as Veracruz and Tamaulipas to capture and to disrupt the Zetas, considered the most extreme, violent drug cartel, established by former army commandos, and the Golfo Cartel.¹⁰

Certainly, Mexico had used military forces to eradicate drug plantations and cartels for decades.¹¹ However, the visibility of the armed forces in law-enforcement operations was different and substantially increased after President Calderón took office. In the past, the Mexican government had stayed away from the conventional national-security rhetoric and had focused its concerns on the so-called structural roots of drug trafficking, such as demand, economics, and social issues. In recent years, however, Mexican officials explicitly embraced a national-security approach to drugs, claiming that cartels amassed a large number of capabilities and posed a serious security threat to the state, which, in turn, justified the use of armed forces. As Alejandro Poiré, then federal security spokesman, revealed during a press conference, cartels and their turf wars have been responsible for 30,913 execution-style killings, 3,153 deaths in shootouts between gangs, and 546 deaths involving attacks on authorities.¹²

Hence, the most widely held view in Mexico is that the Calderón administration had no alternative but to rely on the armed forces to tackle the security crisis. This implies that decisions were based on the lesser-evil principle, which maintains that politicians were confronted with few viable civilian solutions and thus tempted by military options. Indeed, law-enforcement institutions in Mexico had suffered from institutional corruption, lack of accountability, and trust deficits. On the one hand, national,

regional, and local police forces did not have the investigative capabilities, intelligence, or resources to cope with the challenges posed by organized crime. On the other hand, civil society had been traditionally skeptical toward law-enforcement agencies, as a culture of mistrust prevailed in the relationship between police authorities and citizens in general (more on citizens' perceptions below).¹³

The institutional fragility of Mexico's public-security forces thus provided incentives to militarized strategies and policies. However, police corruption and lack of trust were not the only motivating factors. According to Stephen Randall and Juliana Ramírez, "All nations, whether Canada and other North American countries or the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America, face challenges in developing a culture of trust between police institutions and the nation's citizens."¹⁴ As I argue in the following sections, the impulse toward militarization was also reinforced by two dynamics: international socialization and societal demands for militarization. Both of these dynamics, in conjunction with law-enforcement fragility, foreclosed certain options and reinforced others, ultimately leading to undesired outcomes.

International Incentives for Securitization and Militarization

The move toward militarization in Mexico cannot be understood without examining the influence exercised by the U.S. In fact, the U.S. government has traditionally seen the challenge of drug trafficking through a national-security lens, and its policies have shaped preferences across the region. Militarization can be traced back to the Nixon administration, when the term "war on drugs" was first coined during the Cold War era. This implied that fighting organized crime could be treated like conventional warfare and drug leaders regarded as enemies. Their ability to inflict social damage could thus be negated (deterred) and weakened (dissuaded) via military force. During the Reagan administration, the "war on drugs" took on a different dimension, as legislation and executive measures were approved to encourage Latin American military intervention in the fight against drugs.

As Adam Isacson argues, through such measures as the 1989 Andean Initiative, U.S. government officials provided strong economic incentives to involve the armed forces in antinarcotic campaigns: "With U.S. training, equipment, and diplomatic backing, Latin American militaries on counter-drug missions began to mount roadblocks, perform internal surveillance (including wiretaps), execute searches and seizures, force down suspicious aircraft, eradicate corps, patrol rivers, and, in some cases, arrest and interrogate civilians."¹⁵ U.S. antidrug programs focused their energies on four policies: military economic aid, arms transfers, training and professionalizing armed forces, and using private military companies.¹⁶ These programs effectively militarized drug-trafficking policies, therefore providing the initial impetus to use military means to solve narco-trafficking concerns.

No other U.S. initiative has had so much influence on Mexico's strategies toward drug trafficking as Plan Colombia. The plan was originally engineered as a six-year package by President Andrés Pastrana to help Colombia eliminate drug trafficking and to promote peace after decades of civil war. Yet U.S. objectives placed a premium on military strategies to combat cartels and encouraged crop substitution to decrease drug supply. The tragic events of 9/11 provided an additional impetus to accelerate militarization, as a new terror/drug nexus was identified. Plan Colombia was thus transformed from a strategy to bring down drug supplies and prices to a tool to fight insurgency and domestic insecurity.¹⁷

With U.S. military assistance, the Colombian armed forces were able to strike a number of military victories against the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia in Spanish or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), all while pulverizing (but not eliminating) some of the most active cartels, which, in turn, had a close relationship with many of the guerrillas. The military decreased the insurgents' and cartels' capabilities to engage in kidnapping, extortion, and illegal roadblocks, leading to the pacification of Cali and Medellín. Nevertheless, Plan Colombia had no effect on the price, purity, and availability of cocaine and heroin in the U.S.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, in the Colombian example, the Mexican government found a source of inspiration for its own security strategy. In fact, President Calderón visited Colombia more than any other Latin American country during his first three years in office (three official visits between 2006 and 2009).¹⁹ Like their counterparts in Colombia, Mexican officials would want to pacify northern and Pacific cities most affected by cartel violence.

Indeed, Mexico's national-security policy was strikingly similar to the one designed for the Andes by the U.S. It too involved the deployment of a large number of security forces—including army and Marine troops as well as military police—to clear cities by hunting members of violent gangs and drug traffickers. This was then followed by months of heavy patrols in which several state agencies moved in to provide basic services. Ideally, the strategy should have worked to allow for the withdrawal of security forces, leaving behind functioning civilian forces and peaceful neighborhoods. In practice, however, the strategy led to an almost permanent presence of military troops.²⁰

Like its counterpart strategy in Colombia, Mexico's policy toward drug cartels partially relied on U.S. military assistance. The so-called Mérida Initiative (MI) channeled additional U.S. resources—US\$1.2 billion for a three-year period between 2007 and 2010²¹—to assist Mexican authorities, including military aid to purchase technology and equipment to improve its fight against drug cartels. During its first year of operation, MI benefitted mostly, although not exclusively, the army, because it included scanners, telecommunications systems, helicopters, and transport aircraft used by the forces on land.²² Furthermore, U.S. military training programs were

also extended to Mexico to help professionalize military and police troops, leading to joint exercises and sharing of intelligence information.²³

For instance, in December 2009, the *New York Times* revealed that the U.S. embassy initially told the Mexican Army where a major cartel leader was hiding out, but the military failed to respond. The embassy then told the navy, which proceeded to deploy an elite American-trained unit into the action, eventually killing the leader after he refused to surrender.²⁴ This led to the infamous confidential cable incident, in which then-U.S. Ambassador Carlos Pascual praised the country's military-led drug strategy but noted interagency rivalries and called the Mexican Army "risk averse."²⁵ The confidential cables revealed the extent to which U.S. influence shaped operations and even tactics in Mexico, even as strong service rivalries persisted between the forces themselves.

Finally, in February 2011, the *New York Times* once again revealed that the U.S. Department of Defense had authorized the use of unarmed drones over Mexican skies to collect information to turn over to Mexican authorities. A high-altitude drone is believed to have helped Mexican law-enforcement agencies find the suspected killers of a U.S. Immigration and Customs agent, murdered in Ciudad Juárez.²⁶

Consequently, militarization is not merely a reflection of drug trafficking's becoming a serious security threat. In fact, the Mexican strategy was fed by regional dynamics, including international pressure from the U.S. and emulation from Colombia. On the one hand, U.S. policies provided economic and political incentives that favored national-security strategies and doctrines. On the other hand, the experience of neighboring states, such as Colombia, provided the "know-how" for applying the military framework in the fight against drug cartels.

Social Demand for Militarization

It would, of course, be naïve to believe that international dynamics were solely responsible for Mexico's securitized and militarized strategy. The conventional wisdom that developing states are dependent on structural conditions (such as international powers or powerful elites) does not apply to Mexico. Migdal has pointed out a tendency to "too facily assume that those at the pinnacle of politics can effectively repress or transform the rest of society."²⁷ Following Migdal's insights, the coeditors of this volume argue in their introduction that elites may control state institutions and attempt to shape society, but they are equally constrained and redirected by societal factors. Indeed, the Mexican government has not been a passive agent of international demands and pressure; society has facilitated militarization.

For decades, the most concerning issue for Mexicans was unemployment; this was a logical outcome after the country experienced multiple economic crises triggered by inflation, debt, and financial collapse. Nevertheless, as the economic setting in Mexico stabilized, Mexican citizens became much

more concerned for their own security. Recent survey polls conducted by one of Mexico City's leading public research institutes showed that Mexicans feel threatened by drug trafficking and organized crime, global warming, AIDS, food shortages, and the global economic crisis, in that order. By contrast, concern about international terrorism and tougher U.S. immigration policies decreased from 70 percent and 63 percent respectively in 2004 to 66 percent and 51 percent in 2008.²⁸

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the fear of organized crime, Mexicans overwhelmingly supported the increased role of the military in law-enforcement activities. In a 2007 survey conducted by the newspaper *Milenio*, more than 80 percent of those surveyed believed the armed forces should be used for public security, while less than 9 percent was against such measures.²⁹ More recent polls, conducted between March and April 2011 by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitude Project, found that an overwhelming majority of Mexicans (83 percent) still favored the use of the military to fight cartels. At the same time, 74 percent supported U.S. military training for Mexican troops, and 64 percent welcomed U.S. assistance programs for the Mexican police and armed forces. (See chart below for reference.)

Therefore, society in general accepted and tolerated the use of military means to deal with public-security issues. It has at least legitimized

Table 3.1 Support for Using Mexican Army to Fight Drug Cartels

	2009	2012	2011
Using Mexican army to fight cartels			
Support	83	80	83
Oppose	12	17	14
Don't know	5	3	3
U.S. help in training Mexican military			
Support	78	78	74
Oppose	17	19	26
Don't know	5	3	1
Provide money to Mexican police/military			
Support	63	57	64
Oppose	28	37	33
Don't know	8	6	3
Deploy U.S. troops to Mexico			
Support	30	26	38
Oppose	59	67	57
Don't know	11	7	4

Source: Pew Research Institute 2011

militarization, if not explicitly demanded it. Yet, as argued in the following paragraphs, such overwhelming support had unintended consequences.

The Unintended and Spillover Effects of Militarization

The side effects of militarization were multiple and unanticipated. As Robert Jervis has informed us, domestic- and foreign-policy actions have consequences, even though the effects are not always seen in the areas anticipated by policy makers.³⁰ In the past five years, militarization yielded four sub-optimal and unintended consequences, including a toughened approach toward crime—*mano dura*—increased human-rights abuses, erosion of civilian oversight, and spillover effects into Central America.

The *Mano Dura* Approach, Agency Competition, and Military Erosion

The use of armed forces for law-enforcement activity has had a direct impact on police and justice reform in Mexico.³¹ Public officials often justified the presence of troops in such cities as Ciudad Juárez as a provisional device until enough federal and local police forces were trained and selected.³² However, five years into this strategy, the number of military-police operations has all but decreased. Deploying troops was a highly visible action that required little or no coordination with multiple actors, such as states, local authorities, agencies, and courts. This was a top-to-bottom approach to decision making, relying essentially on presidential powers. The strategy did not have to succeed to yield political outcomes; it only had to be visible enough for society to notice and to perceive an increased presence of the state. As argued in the introduction of this chapter, militarization was a politicized response to organized crime. What were the effects of such policy?

First, militarization contributed to the emergence of the so-called *mano dura*, or iron-fist approach toward policing in Mexico. According to Mark Ungar, “*Mano dura* is a toughened version of ‘zero tolerance,’ a policy based on ‘broken windows’ theory, which argues that petty crimes, intimidation, and physical deterioration are the real causes of crime because they scare off law-abiding citizens and allow delinquency to take the root in an area.”³³ In consolidated democracies, such an approach can be implemented only with proper police training, oversight mechanisms, and coordination with social services. But in “Latin America, zero tolerance is applied without such support or outside controls, so that the *mano dura* is often just a continuation of predemocratic practices and a justification for the dividing line drawn by many officials between ‘public order,’ associated with a strong state, and ‘human rights,’ associated with delinquency.”³⁴

Indeed, the *mano dura* approach applied in Mexico was based on the principle that a forceful response against crime would deter future

criminal behavior. The goal was no longer to contain and to control but to dissuade or to eliminate criminal acts by imposing harsh and forceful penalties on those who commit minor or major offenses. The strategy also relied heavily on enforcement, including raids, operatives to hunt criminals, and intrusive street patrolling. To some extent, *mano dura* tactics endorsed the potent virtues of the proverbial military iron-fist or strong-deterrent approach. The strategy was indeed based on military deterrence, in which the underlying message was: “Do not show up, because if I see you, I can catch and kill you.”

The use of military forces in public-security functions was thus an attempt by the Mexican state to deter criminals through a more forceful presence. Policing practices followed suit, as law-enforcement agencies increasingly adopted and emulated military iron-fist norms and standards. Repressive policing was in fact inducted and indoctrinated by military agents. The military trained newly recruited federal police forces, and police agencies were structured following the armed forces’ image. For example, the structure of the federal police (FP), created in 1998 by the merger of several agencies, resembled the army’s internal structure. According to Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, this was particularly true for the FP general staff, which had a resemblance to the military’s chief of staff. As the author argues, “Militarization is also visible in the composition of the Coordinación General de las Fuerzas Federales de Apoyo—Federal Support Forces Office—one of the central administrative units of the organization. Concretely, and because of an agreement between the Ministry of Defense and the Interior Ministry in 2000, 4,899 soldiers from the Third Brigade of the military police were sent to the Federal Support Forces.”³⁵ Moreover, active members of the armed forces ran many state agencies responsible for public security.

Besides the *mano dura* approach, militarization had perverse effects on interagency cooperation efforts. The diplomatic cable incident described above revealed that the so-called war on drugs ignited service rivalries between the navy and the army. However, competition was not restricted to the military branches; it also included rivalries between the armed forces and local police units. Quite often, military operations engaged in fighting against local police forces that were convoluted with the cartels themselves. For instance, in the state of Nuevo León, the army arrested and disarmed more than 250 police agents in one single campaign conducted in September 2011.³⁶ Surely, institutional corruption has been a serious challenge for law-enforcement efficiency, but military operations fostered mistrust between forces and did little to increase transparency or jointness. Militarization duplicated security functions and agencies, increased costs, and created serious coordination problems for civilian agencies and military establishments.

Finally, the use of military strategies in public-security issues also weakened the military as an institution. On the one hand, antinarcotic campaigns and law-enforcement operations exposed the armed forces to the same dangers of institutional corruption that have so far tainted police

forces. For instance, a report submitted by the Chamber of Deputies in 2008 estimated that in an eight-year period, close to 150,000 soldiers had deserted the armed forces (the army has a force of 183,700 men), many of whom eventually joined drug cartels, such as the Zetas.³⁷ On the other hand, such operations undermined military professionalism and encouraged national-security doctrines. For almost seventy years, civilian control over the armed forces in Mexico was established through the professionalization of the officer corps, which effectively neutralized the military as a political factor and subordinated it to the political imperatives of the dominant party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI).³⁸ Hence, Mexico evaded the dangers of military dictatorship and national-security doctrines that dominated the rest of Latin America. Nevertheless, the current strategy placed the armed forces in the front and center of political order and put an emphasis on the internal uses of force, which effectively resembled national-security doctrines. For scholars of military affairs, such as Alfred Stepan, this approach not only affects training, professionalism, and combat readiness for conventional warfare but also politicizes soldiers as they become increasingly concerned about internal warfare, placing a premium on political stability.³⁹ Under this context, the Calderón strategy blurred the distinction between police and military forces.

Civilian Oversight and Human-rights Abuses

Politicians and legislators increased the military’s role in public security but did not take any significant steps toward increasing military accountability and oversight. Congress authorized defense budgets and promotions without properly reviewing or discussing these issues.⁴⁰ Lawmakers did not seem to know how to legislate on military affairs, especially because the armed forces were placed in the front and center of Calderón’s security strategy. This effectively translated into attention deficits—that is, a widespread disinterest in defense policy and a general lack of concern for the “development of plans and processes designed to provide for the oversight, organization, training and deployment, and funding of the armed forces.”⁴¹

In particular, congressional committees showed no interest in investigating the increasing number of human-rights abuses committed by the military. Antidrug campaigns required raids and troop patrols with armored personnel carriers in highly urban settings. This included not only ground troops but also air support in which helicopters were used to shoot at targets. Because cartel leaders mingled with local residents, however, distinguishing between criminals and bystanders was simply impossible. Hence, soldiers often shot at people indiscriminately, leading to collateral damage. Furthermore, troops were then delegated with multiple law-enforcement functions, from arrests and traffic tickets to investigating domestic disputes, arresting drunks, and running prisons and police academies.⁴² In the absence of oversight, accountability, and training mechanisms, the

potential for military abuses was never properly minimized. Indeed, allegations against the military for human-rights abuses reached alarming levels under the Calderón administration. According to the National Human Rights Commission, the number of allegations of serious abuses committed by troops increased from 182 complaints in 2006 to a cumulative total of more than 4,800 in 2011. These included warrantless arrests and detentions, unintended civilian casualties, and deliberate extrajudicial killings.⁴³

The position held by most legislators was that the military could be trusted to judge its own when abuses occurred. Most of these arguments were based on a narrow interpretation of the military's code of justice and constitution, which allowed for military jurisdiction for crimes and faults against military discipline. Hence, civilian authorities routinely accepted the military's jurisdiction in cases involving human-rights abuses.⁴⁴ Military tribunals, however, failed as a self-monitoring mechanism, because none of the cases analyzed by military investigations led to the criminal conviction of a single soldier. Amnesty International described military trials as lacking basic safeguards to ensure independence and impartiality.⁴⁵

The issue eventually reached international dimensions in 2009, when the Inter-American Human Rights Court ruled that Mexico's military could not handle cases of abuse against civilians. This binding decision was one of four since 2009 where an international body ruled that Mexico had to modify the military's code of justice to make it compatible with international standards.⁴⁶ Mexican human-rights organizations then turned to the International Criminal Court and requested that it investigate President Calderón, accusing him of allowing soldiers to kill, torture, and kidnap civilians.⁴⁷ Strictly speaking, this decision could be treated as a fire alarm that, under normal conditions, should have triggered civilian intervention in defense policy. Yet politicians failed to take corrective measures.

In response to international pressure, President Calderón proposed to transfer a limited jurisdiction to civilian courts to deal with certain abuse cases involving troops but leave serious crimes aside, such as extrajudicial killings. However, most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and human-rights activists felt that such measures fell short of what was required by the international community.⁴⁸ Congress, on the other hand, failed to bring a legislative initiative to the floor, so neither the Lower House nor the Senate ever debated the issue. The absence of congressional action motivated a judicial decision by the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice in July 2011, which finally ruled that civilian judges might prosecute members of the military who commit human-rights violations. The court did not automatically remove all such cases from military tribunals, but rather made a recommendation that may require further congressional approval.

Ironically, the most recent effort to bring accountability and reform came from judges and not from legislators. This might increase the chances of bringing justice to victims of abuse, but it raises other questions. From a justice perspective, civilian courts can be equally ineffective in punishing

impunity precisely because of their lack of expertise in military affairs. As David Shirk argues, "Mexico's civilian courts have proved woefully ineffective. . . . [I]f military human rights violators find the same degree of impunity we see for other criminal actors, then their victims will have little justice and this decision will have little real meaning."⁴⁹ From a defense-policy perspective, this case sheds light on the intrinsic problems of involving the armed forces in *mano dura* policing activities without proper mechanisms of transparency and accountability.

Certainly, these rulings were contested and opposed, as military leaders declared that they could not operate without some legal protection from prosecution. Several lawmakers, from the left and the right, seemed to agree and supported them by failing to legislate.⁵⁰ Civilian politicians thus grappled with how, or even whether, to police the military. In the long run, politicians ceded authority to the military, allowing it a degree of institutional autonomy that has actually undermined civilian control at a time when Mexico is also democratizing. The end result is not only more drug violence but also less transparency and, in fact, more violations against the citizens the Mexican state aims to protect (creating an insecurity dilemma). Ultimately, militarization has triggered and instigated more violence and insecurity.

Spillover Effects

So far, this chapter has focused on the unintended consequences of militarization in the domestic level. It has argued that Mexico's official security strategy not only was inefficient but also triggered more violence, weakened state institutions, and undermined public security. An insecurity dilemma was generated—that is, an attempt by the state to increase its domestic security yielded more insecurity over the long run. The term "insecurity dilemma," first developed by Brian L. Job, was intended to describe the internal security paradox and challenge faced by most developing nations. It stressed the national or regime level, in opposition to the international level or image, which, although anarchical, had more stability and certainty than many developing states. As Job has argued, the insecurity dilemma does not make the state more vulnerable to external threats, because "the norms and responses of the contemporary international community protect states from such threats and results, despite their lack of capacity and failure to achieve any national consensus."⁵¹

Nonetheless, the insecurity dilemma in Mexico is no longer constrained to the domestic arena. In fact, its collateral effects are now being exported elsewhere. Just as U.S. policies and Colombian strategies in the early 1990s shaped Mexican strategies, militarization in Mexico is now affecting the Central American region. This is another indicator that drug trafficking and the conventional strategies to tackle it are truly global.

Indeed, according to *The Economist*, which dedicated a special issue to analyze the effects of organized crime in the region in 2011, "Central

America forms a bridge between Colombia, the world's biggest cocaine producer, and Mexico, which is the staging post for the world's biggest market for drugs-U.S. As pressure has mounted on the mobs, first in Colombia and now in Mexico, Central America has attracted more traffic. Ten years ago it had fewer cocaine seizures than either Mexico or the Caribbean; by 2008 it accounted for three times more than both combined. Over the same period the murder rate rose across the region, doubling in some countries."⁵²

Ironically, the push toward militarization is forcing powerful Mexican cartels, such as the Zetas and Golfo, to move some of their operations into smaller, nearby countries, such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. This is having unintended and tragic consequences. In some of these countries, the murder rate has spiked to almost three times that of Mexico (forty-six homicides per hundred thousand people in Guatemala.)⁵³ In other words, the strategy implemented in Mexico is having a spillover effect in the region.

Surprisingly, in spite of or because of Mexico's security failure, some Central American states have emulated Mexican militarized strategies. For instance, in January 2012, Otto Pérez Molina, a former army general, was inaugurated as president of Guatemala. He was the first military official to lead the country since its return to democracy in 1986. Upon taking office, Pérez requested an overturning of a long-standing ban on Washington's military aid to Guatemala. Like President Calderón in Mexico, Pérez ran on a *mano dura* campaign that promised to crack down on organized crime. He too has requested more U.S. military assistance to fight Mexican cartels.⁵⁴

Given the evident institutional weaknesses within these states (from local police to courts), it is not surprising that some of these Central American countries, such as El Salvador and Guatemala, have been emulating the Mexican path by militarizing their own security strategies. The unintended consequences, however, can be much more devastating here, precisely because these states share legacies of civil war, human-rights violations, and military abuse. For these cases, the fear is not just an insecurity dilemma but also the virtual collapse of the state.

The international community is certainly not attenuating these perverse effects. So far, North America (U.S., Mexico, and to some extent Canada) has provided the usual prescription: limited aid (mostly coming from MI), intelligence information, and more military and police training.⁵⁵ Yet Canada and the United States are not completely immune to the collateral effects of militarization. It is worth remembering that violence and civil war in Central America triggered a massive wave of immigration into North America in the early 1980s. The current failure to contain violence caused by cartels and the repressive measures undertaken by many Central American states and Mexico could potentially trigger a similar outcome—increased flows of immigration. Furthermore, the tactics used to decapitate drug-cartel leaders in Mexico are unlikely to change or to modify addiction or consumption patterns in the Western Hemisphere. Militarization and

intensified law enforcement may disrupt established drug routes and lead to an increase in arrests and drug seizures. But, as Michael Kenney argues, these measures are ephemeral, as the illicit drug trade quickly readapts and moves its transportation routes and distribution networks closer to where the consumers are located (North America and Europe). Ironically, increased militarization has forced smugglers to develop complex criminal international networks that reach the U.S., Canada, and even Europe.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

The arguments developed in this chapter deal with the origins of militarization in Mexico and its side effects. I have argued that Mexico is not alien to international influences. The drive toward militarization has been shaped in part by external dynamics, including security policies in the U.S. and Colombia. Securitization is, in fact, reinforced by geography and proximity. As Barry Buzan and Ole Waever argue, "Simple physical adjacency tends to generate more security interaction among neighbors than among states located in different areas. The impact of geographical proximity on security interaction is strongest and most obvious in the military, political, societal, and environmental sectors."⁵⁷

Similarly, I have argued that the move toward militarization has been facilitated by domestic trends. In the Mexican case, society has enabled the state to hold a virtual monopoly over the security apparatus and has granted a tacit approval to use military means to deal with public-security challenges. Ironically, the move toward militarization has increased the role of the Mexican state. Civil society has indeed facilitated and permitted the state to develop coercive capabilities. Increased public resources (money, equipment, technology, and personnel) have been invested and mobilized to improve public security. But, as Migdal reminds us, "One must be extremely cautious before equating a growing state apparatus and ability to get rid of a strongman with state predominance."⁵⁸ In the Mexican context, increased state capabilities have not translated into increased state control over organized crime.

The immediate risk is not just that the military evolves its own political thinking, disconnected from the society that it serves, but also that it may come to exercise an unjustified use of force, leading to an internal paradox of increased violence and insecurity. Efforts by civil society and politicians alike to seek closer vigilance over the armed forces and to demand greater accountability in handling public security have, thus far, been insufficient. In this context, militarization has actually worsened and deteriorated public security, undermining the ability of the state to deliver a basic public good: safety.

Indeed, the side effects of these processes have been devastating. Security institutions have been undermined and weakened and civilian oversight eroded, while crime rates increase or, when they appear to decrease, they

cannot remove the generalized sense of insecurity. The result is, in effect, an emerging insecurity dilemma. This is a security paradox, compounded by the internationalization of the “war-on-drugs” strategy that now affects the Central American region.

Given this bleak diagnosis, what can be done? For good lessons learned, the North American region should perhaps look at Costa Rica and Nicaragua instead of Mexico. These Central American states have lower murder rates than any of their neighbors and have opted for preventive, community-based policing, all while avoiding the temptation of militarization and repressive policing. Likewise, the report by the UN Global Commission on Drug Policy recently declared the war on drugs a failure and advocated to replace the criminalization of drug consumption with the offer of health and treatment services to those who need them. This new approach shifts the emphasis of drug consumption from criminalization and militarization to health care and addiction treatment. Although these alternative approaches do not eliminate trafficking and organized crime per se, they could yield better security results, with fewer unintended regional consequences.⁵⁹ At least these proposals shift the military away from the traditional antidrug campaigns and internal roles that have been sorely unsuccessful in Colombia, Mexico, and Central America.

NOTES

1. “Q&A: Mexico’s drug-related violence,” *BBC News*, August 26, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10681249>; and Blog de Presidencia de la República, “El décimo mito: México es uno de los países más violentos del mundo,” August 15, 2011, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/el-blog/el-decimo-mito-mexico-es-uno-de-los-paises-mas-violentos-del-mundo/>.
2. See Damien Cave, “Mexico updates death toll in drug war to 47,515, but critics dispute the data,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2012.
3. On the impact of militarization, see Moloeznik 2009, 5–7; and Lopez-Montiel 2000, 79–94.
4. See Luz González, “Usan más militares como policías: CIDE,” *El Universal*, September 17, 2011.
5. See Migdal 1988, 33–41.
6. Job 1992, 18.
7. Zavarucha 2000, 8.
8. See, for example, Krause 1992, 121–142.
9. For references on military spending in Mexico, see Abel Barajas, “Multiplica Sedena gasto para sueldos,” *Reforma*, December 29, 2006; Benito Jiménez and Abel Barjas, “Gasta Sedena más en narcos,” *Reforma*, December 29, 2006; and Alfredo Mendez Ortiz, “Informa Sedena que erogó \$5 mil 500 millones en 3 meses de lucha contra el narco,” *La Jornada*, April 10, 2007.
10. See BBC News Latin America and the Caribbean, “Mexico navy smashes Zetas cartel communications network,” *BBC News*, September 8, 2011; and Silvia Otero y Francisco Gómez, “Marina ‘descabeza’ al cártel del Golfo,” *El Universal*, November 6, 2010.
11. For a historical analysis of Mexico’s antinarcotics policy and the use of military means, see Freeman and Sierra 2005, 263–302.
12. See Mark Stevenson, “Mexico: 34,612 drug war deaths; 15,273 in 2010,” *Huffington Post*, January 12, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/12/mexico-drug-war-deaths-2010_n_808277.html (accessed August 15 2012).
13. For a critical diagnosis of Mexico’s police forces, see Azaola 2009, 147–172; and López Portillo Vargas 2002, 109–135.
14. See Randall and Ramirez 2011.
15. Isacson 2005, 23.
16. Ibid. On the use of private military companies, see Singer 2003, 206–209.
17. See Ramírez Lemus et al. 2005, 106–137. Although U.S. military personnel were restricted from undertaking counterinsurgency operations, Plan Colombia did allow the use of private military contractors who were engaged not only in crop dusting but in combating local guerrillas. See Singer 2003.
18. Singer 2003 and Veillette 2005.
19. See “Viajes realizados al extranjero por el C. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1º de Diciembre de 2006 al 16 de noviembre de 2009, Mexico City, Mexico, Lower House, November 2009,” <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/cedia/sia/spe/SPE-ISS-20-09.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2010).
20. For a description of the Mexican strategy, see Matthew Price, “Mexico’s struggle to win ‘war’ on drugs,” *BBC News*, June 9, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10275565> (accessed August 15 2012). The strategy has also been known as “pacification” and has been implemented in other countries, including Brazil. For a brief description of Brazil’s pacification strategy, see “Rio de Janeiro’s pacification program,” The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), http://www.wola.org/rio_de_janeiro_s_pacification_program (accessed August 15 2012).
21. Under the Mérida Initiative, the U.S. Congress authorized a package of \$1.6 billion for a three-year period to assist Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. During its first year, funds were distributed as follows: \$400 million for Mexico, and \$65 million for Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. For the second year, Congress approved \$300 million for Mexico and \$110 million for Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. In 2009, Congress authorized an additional supplemental appropriation of \$420 million for Mexico and \$100 million for Central America. See Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “Merida Initiative: Myths vs. Fact,” fact sheet published by the U.S. State Department, June 23, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2012/187119.htm> (accessed August 15 2012).
22. See Ginger Thompson and Mark Lacey, “U.S. and Mexico revise joint anti-drug strategy,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2010.
23. See “Mexican drug trafficking,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2011. http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/mexico/drug_trafficking/index.html (accessed August 15 2012).
24. See Elisabeth Malkin, “U.S. aided Mexican drug war; with frustration,” *New York Times*, December 2, 2010.
25. Ken Ellingwood, “U.S. ambassador to Mexico resigns,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2011.
26. See “Mexican drug trafficking.”
27. Migdal 1988, xvi.
28. See González et al. 2008.
29. See “El gobierno, más o menos bien,” *Milenio*, February 26, 2007.
30. Jervis 1997, 61.
31. For a broad discussion of justice reform in Mexico and Latin America, see Cornelius and Shirk 2007; and Bergman and Whitehead 2009.

32. See Blog de la Presidencia de la República, "El segundo mito: Las Fuerzas Armadas usurpan las labores de la policía y violan sistemáticamente derechos humanos," June 6, 2011, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/blog/alejandro-poire-romero/page/2/> (accessed August 15 2012).
33. Ungar 2009.
34. Ibid. On the iron fist approach in Latin America see also Fuentes 2007.
35. See Moloeznik 2006, 179.
36. See "Detienen a 250 policías de Linares, NL," *El Universal*, October 9, 2011, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/82473.html> (accessed August 15, 2012).
In 2009, a similar campaign led to the arrest of more than thirty police agents and the disarmament of more than three thousand law-enforcement agents. See Jonathan Tapia, "Arrestan a 32 policías de NL; los acusan de cuidar a narcos. Fuerzas federales y estatales realizan las detenciones tras desarmar a 3,400 agentes; prevén más capturas," *El Universal*, October 9, 2009.
37. Jorge Alejandro Medellín, "Buscan dar mayor seguimiento a desertores del Ejército," *El Universal*, December 11, 2008.
38. For a discussion of civil-military relations during the PRI-era, see Camp 1992.
39. Stepan 1971; Stepan 1973, 47–65.
40. For a broad discussion on legislative oversight, see Díez 2008, 113–145.
41. On the sources of attention deficit, see Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2007, 76–100.
42. See Steve Fainaru and William Booth, "An army takeover quells violence in Mexico: Drug killings in Juarez plummet, but rights complaints surge," *Washington Post*, April 21, 2009.
43. See Tracy Wilkinson, "Mexico high court rules civilian courts should handle alleged military abuses," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2011.
44. For a discussion on military tribunals in Mexico, see Sierra 2009.
45. According to Human Rights Watch, in Mexico, the secretary of defense wields executive and judicial power over the armed forces. Military judges have little job security and may reasonably fear that the secretary could remove them or otherwise sideline their careers for issuing decisions that he dislikes. Civilian review of military court decisions is very limited. To make matters worse, there is virtually no public scrutiny of or access to information about what actually happens during military investigations, prosecutions, and trials, which can take years. See Human Rights Watch 2009.
46. Human Rights Watch 2011.
47. See Karla Zabludovsky, "Mexico: Complaint over president is filed with Hague Court," *New York Times*, November 25, 2011.
48. Ken Ellingwood, "Mexico seeks to require civilian trials for troops," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2010; Randal C. Archibold, "A proposal to address rights abuse in Mexico," *New York Times*, October 19, 2010. On the impact of international pressure on human-rights abuses committed by the military, see Anaya 2008 and his chapter in this volume.
49. Cited in Randal C. Archibold, "Rights groups contend Mexican military has heavy hand in drug cases," *New York Times*, August 2, 2011.
50. Ibid.
51. Job 1992, 18.
52. "The rot spreads: Organised crime in Central America," *The Economist*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/17963313> (accessed August 15 2012).
53. See "The Tormented Isthmus," *The Economist*, April 16–22, 2010: 25–28, <http://www.economist.com/node/18558254> (accessed August 15 2012).

54. See Whitney Eulich, "What Guatemala's new president wants from the US," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 14, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2012/0114/What-Guatemala-s-new-president-wants-from-the-US> (accessed August 15 2012).
55. Silvia Otero and Alberto Morales, "Impulsa FCH plan regional antinarco," *El Universal*, June 22, 2011.
56. See Kenney 2007, 67–77.
57. Buzan and Waever 2003, 45.
58. See Migdal 1988, 265.
59. See The Global Commission on Drug Policy 2011.

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