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JORGE CHABAT

Mexico: The Security Challenge

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Tel. 5727•9800 exts. 6090 y 6092
Fax: 5727•9885 y 5292•1304.
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Abstract

The paper describes the evolution of the security problem in Mexico since the 1980s. It considers security in its many dimensions: from personal to hemispheric and collective. The paper also analyzes the way in which the Salinas, Zedillo and Fox administrations have responded to the security challenge, and it makes an evaluation of these responses. The nature of the security problem has evolved during the past two decades. During the early 1980s the main concern of the Mexican government was the instability coming from Central America. However, since 1985, drug trafficking became a serious threat to national security. This threat provoked some institutional changes and fomented the collaboration with the United States. In the 1990s, drug trafficking challenged Mexican stability in a direct way and it paved the way to a dramatic increase in crime rates by the mid-90s. Since then, the Mexican government has implemented a long list of institutional reforms, from the Bill against Organized Crime to the creation of the Federal Preventive Police. During the Fox administration, reforms continued and they included a re-definition of the concept of national security and the creation of the Federal Agency of Investigations, which pretended to be a Mexican FBI. However, by the end of 2005, crime rates were still high and the violence generated by drug trafficking was affecting the Mexican stability as well as the relations with the United States. The limited success of Zedillo and Fox suggests that partial reforms are insufficient and that what is necessary is an integral reform of the police, judicial and prison systems. If this reform takes place, it will take years to have a significant impact in the security crisis that Mexico is experiencing right now. Such a reform requires a political negotiation among the main political forces. This is one of the main challenges that will face the next Mexican president.

Resumen

El documento describe la evolución del problema de la seguridad en México desde los años ochenta. Considera a la seguridad en sus múltiples dimensiones: desde la seguridad personal hasta la colectiva. El documento también analiza la forma en la cual los gobiernos de Salinas, Zedillo y Fox respondieron al desafío de la seguridad, y hace una evaluación de estas respuestas. La naturaleza del problema de la seguridad ha evolucionado durante las dos últimas décadas. Durante los inicios de la década de 1980, la principal preocupación del gobierno mexicano era la inestabilidad proveniente de Centroamérica. Sin embargo, desde 1985 el narcotráfico se convirtió en una amenaza seria a la seguridad nacional. Esta amenaza provocó algunos

cambios institucionales y fomentó la colaboración con Estados Unidos. En la década de 1990, el narcotráfico amenazó la estabilidad mexicana en una forma directa y abrió el paso a un incremento dramático en las tasas de criminalidad a mediados de los noventa. Desde entonces, el gobierno mexicano ha instrumentado una larga lista de reformas institucionales, desde la Ley contra la Delincuencia Organizada hasta la creación de la Policía Federal Preventiva. Durante el gobierno de Fox, las reformas continuaron e incluyeron una redefinición del concepto de seguridad nacional, así como la creación de la Agencia Federal de Investigaciones, que buscaba ser un FBI mexicano. Sin embargo, para fines de 2005, las tasas de criminalidad eran todavía altas y la violencia generada por el narcotráfico estaba afectando la estabilidad mexicana así como las relaciones con Estados Unidos. El éxito limitado de Zedillo y Fox sugiere que las reformas parciales son insuficientes y que lo que se necesita es una reforma integral de los sistemas de policía, judicial y de prisiones. Si esta reforma tiene lugar, llevará años para que tenga un impacto significativo en la crisis de seguridad que México está experimentando ahora. Tal reforma requiere una negociación política entre las principales fuerzas políticas. Este es uno de los principales desafíos que enfrentará el próximo presidente mexicano.

Introduction

Mexico is facing a serious security threat. During the last two decades, the levels of insecurity in different areas have grown substantially. The reasons are several, but foremost among these are: the weakening of Mexican police forces due to their political misuse and corruption; the development of non-traditional threats such as drug trafficking and terrorism; and the process of globalization. An additional factor that explains this phenomenon is the process of political transition that Mexico is experiencing, in which the old rules no longer work and the new rules are still in the process of creation. Insecurity is present at many levels: it reaches from the personal level (human security) to national and international levels (national, hemispheric and collective security). The Mexican government has responded to this situation in different ways: legal and institutional reforms dating back to the 1980s; increased international collaboration; and the combat of corruption. However, the results are far from satisfactory. The general sense among Mexicans is that insecurity is growing, and pressures from the outside, particularly from the United States, have increased. This makes security one of the biggest challenges facing the Fox administration. Notwithstanding, there is a kind of impasse in this area that does not allow for much optimism. The political gridlock that the Mexican government is currently suffering from regarding needed political and economic reforms is affecting security too. At the same time, the replacement during the last four years of the officers in charge of security has contributed to a very poor performance in providing security for the country and the population. The problem is enormous. It supposes the implementation of several reforms: judicial, police, prison system and fiscal. It is quite difficult to make all of these reforms at the same time. Besides, there is no consensus on some core questions. Do Mexicans want to move to a judicial system based on oral trials? Do they want autonomy for the attorney general's office? Do they need to give more money to the police forces? Do they need to replace all of the policemen or just re-educate them? Do they need to pay policemen a better salary? Is it necessary to have more international collaboration or to use the Army in fighting crime? Are long-term plans necessary? And what would those be? Is it necessary to close Mexican borders? What kind of collaboration is going to be developed with the US? Do Mexicans need to make more legal reforms or just make the present institutions work better? Does the Mexican judicial system need harsher penalties? As we can see, there are many questions and few answers.

The purpose of this chapter is to expose the security challenge that is facing the Mexican governments and the responses of the Salinas, Zedillo and Fox administrations. The main argument of this article is that, despite the long list of reforms made during the last three administrations, these reforms

have failed because of their lack of continuity and coherence. In fact, as we will see in the case of the Fox government, if the reforms in one area are not accompanied by reforms throughout the prison, security and judicial systems, there will be unintended consequences that generate new problems. At the end of the article, we will evaluate the efforts made by the Fox administration and outline some conclusions.

Background: How the monster grew up

During the last decades, Mexico has had the insecurity problems typical of an authoritarian system. The security forces worked to defend the interests of the political and economic elite. For many years the security forces were used to intimidate the political opposition, and human rights abuses were quite common. In this sense, the Mexican State was not only unable to provide security to its citizens but was itself a source of insecurity and the violation of human rights. The high levels of corruption and inefficiency in the security forces were accompanied by a very deficient judicial system. This situation made justice a very scarce commodity that could be obtained only by rich people. Poor people were exposed to the insecurity generated by criminality and natural disasters, as well as to the possibility of human rights abuses and of being unfairly accused by the Mexican authorities. Besides, the reforms made by the Mexican government did not have any continuity, which aggravated the problem. The inefficiency of the government in providing security to people was clearly exposed in the outrageous levels of corruption that characterized the offices of this area.

What is more surprising is the fact that, until the 1990s, nobody in the government seemed to be worried about insecurity. Even when the State was very inefficient in performing this task, the authoritarian political system that existed in Mexico during most of the 20th century was able to maintain low levels of protest. However, the political system entered into a profound crisis in the 1980s and security was one of the areas in which it was most evident. This crisis put the issue of democracy and human rights at the top of the agenda. At the same time, the Mexican State began to show a great inability to control its security forces. They were acting increasingly on their own and compromising the rights of the population in unprecedented ways. The public image of the police forces deteriorated to a very important degree¹ and even the pro-government media was unable to defend them. Some of these forces were openly involved in criminal activities, like Arturo Durazo Moreno, the head of the Mexico City police during the López Portillo administration. Some corporations like the Federal Directorate of Security (DFS), which was part of the Secretary of Governance (Gobernación), were accused of participating in drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping. The crisis of legitimacy was so serious that the Mexican government decided to eliminate the DFS and replace it with the General Directorate of Investigation and National Security (DISEN) in 1985. Four years later, DISEN was replaced by the Center for

¹ For a general overview of the Mexican police, see Ernesto López Portillo Vargas, "The Police in Mexico: Political Functions and Needed Reforms" in John Bailey and Jorge Chabat (eds), *Transnational Crime and Public Security / Challenges to Mexico and the United States*, San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2002, pp. 109-136.

Investigation and National Security (CISEN). The new center was supposed to develop intelligence activities without armed policemen.² The creation of CISEN was part of a growing concern of the Mexican government with national security. As a part of this concern, in December 1988, president Salinas also created the national security cabinet as a way to coordinate government actions *vis-à-vis* external and domestic threats. Nevertheless, at the time there was no clear definition of national or regional security. In fact, the Mexican government had an ambiguous and broad definition of security that inhibited the participation of the country in foreign military alliances.

The reasons for this are several. First, the dramatic experience of the 19th century, in which Mexico suffered territorial invasions from Spain, France and the United States (losing half of its original territory at the hands of the US), reinforced the perception that the outside was a source of danger and threats. The fact that Mexico suffered serious military defeats against the major powers of the 19th century gave origin to the principle of non-intervention as a way of dealing with external threats. This principle was developed by the governments of the Mexican Revolution and had a very clear political purpose. Since the authoritarian governments of the Mexican Revolution Party (1929-2000) did not want to be under any kind of scrutiny from the outside, they made the principle of non-intervention the cornerstone of Mexican foreign policy. It obviously had an impact on the use of military force abroad and the participation in security alliances, especially the American organizations.

Second, foreign policy was a source of legitimacy for the Revolutionary Mexican governments, through nationalism —especially anti-US nationalism— and through pacifism. The rhetorical reference to international peace had a direct correlation to the condemnation of foreign military regimes, which contributed to the appearance of Mexican governments as “democratic” compared to other “dictatorships”. Therefore, the refusal to support military alliances —particularly those dominated by the United States, like the Rio Pact— provided a significant amount of legitimacy to governments that had not achieved it through democratic elections.

Third, the fact that Mexico possesses a long border with the United States meant that the Mexican governments did not have to worry about an external military attack. As Mario Ojeda pointed out in 1976, Mexico did not have to worry militarily about its neighbors: one of them (the US) was so powerful that any effort to prevent an attack would have been useless; the other one (Guatemala) was too weak to constitute a threat. In case of an external attack, Mexico was under the “atomic umbrella” of the United States, so it did not have to maintain neither a big and costly army nor a system of military alliances.³

² See Leonardo Curzio, “The Evolution of Intelligence Services in Mexico” in John Bailey and Jorge Chabat, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-180.

³ Mario Ojeda, *Alcances y límites de la política exterior mexicana*, México: El Colegio de México, 1976.

Finally, there was a fourth reason for the lack of a national or regional security strategy: the domestic balance between civilians and the military. Since 1946, Mexico has had civilian presidents. Also, there has been an explicit will of Mexican governments to maintain the military independent from politics and they have received “generous material incentives”⁴ in exchange. At the same time, members of the military who wanted to participate in politics had to do so as civilians, forfeiting their military status. This led the Mexican Army to have a minimal expenditure compared to the rest of Latin American countries.⁵

All of these factors explain why the Mexican government has defined its national security more in social and economic terms rather than in military terms. Actually, the Secretary of Defense contemplates three levels of action in the case of emergency: the DN-I Plan, in case of an external aggression; the DN-II, in case of a domestic enemy (any political or armed movement against the Constitution or Mexican law and institutions, or private property); and the DN-III, in case of natural disasters and aimed to protect civilian population. The fact that the Mexican Army has dedicated most of its resources and attention to the DN-II and DN-III levels during the last decades contributed to the lack of a hemispheric defense policy and the reluctant participation in continental alliances. However, it is worth mentioning that Mexico signed the Rio Treaty in 1947, though it has never been an enthusiastic supporter of it. Mexico always resisted the military use of the Inter American Reciprocal Assistance Treaty. Consequently, Mexico maintained a distant position in the case of the invasion of Guatemala in 1954, and opposed the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. In fact, the Mexican government maintained a very distant position in the Organization of American States during the Cold War and even had open disagreements with the majority of the OAS’ members, including the United States (as in the case of the Cuban embargo of 1964). As mentioned, this position was based on the broad concept of non-intervention, which was the guiding principle of Mexican foreign policy during the post WWII era but was also related to the authoritarian nature of the Mexican political system.

This situation was maintained until the 1980s, when the immediate environment began to change. The crisis in Central America during the late 1970s and early 1980s affected the traditional concept of regional security. The instability created by the revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala directly affected Mexico. The most evident impact on

⁴ W. A. Cornelius, “Mexican Politics in transition / The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime”, San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California San Diego, 1996, Monograph series No. 41. Quoted in Agustín Maciel Padilla, “La Seguridad Nacional; Concepto y Evolución en México”, paper presented at the Conference on Research and Education in Defense and Security Studies, Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, August 7-10th, 2002, Brasilia, Brasil (mimeo).

⁵ Agustín Maciel Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Mexico was the presence of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico beginning in 1981, when the army of that country implemented the counter-insurgency policy of "tierra arrasada" (ravaged land).⁶ Guatemalan refugees in Mexico dramatically altered the traditional concept of Mexican national security concentrated on the domestic dimension. The presence in Mexico of these persons proved that the Mexican border was not impenetrable and exposed the need to modify the security strategy *vis-à-vis* the outside. This incident led Mexico to implement sub-regional security mechanisms, like the Contadora Group, conformed along with Panama, Colombia and Venezuela. The Contadora Group was created on January 8-9, 1983, on the Panamanian island of Contadora in order to promote peace in the isthmus. The justification for this initiative, sponsored by the Foreign Ministers of the Contadora Group countries, was to seek "Latin American solutions to Latin American problems".⁷ This effort was consistent with the need to have stable neighbors and thereby avoid similar flows of refugees from other Central American countries in the future. At the same time, Contadora ended a decade of Mexican isolationism from Latin America and inaugurated a period of a new kind of multilateralism in Mexican foreign policy: the ad-hoc diplomacy. Additionally, Contadora was compatible with the Mexican tradition of peaceful resolution to conflicts and with the principle of non-intervention⁸ since it never tried to impose a solution on Central American countries.

Even when the Contadora Group was unable in the end to reach a peace agreement in Central America, the impossibility for Mexico to ignore its security environment became evident. Also, despite the fact that Contadora was not a military alliance, it showed the need for Mexico to have hemispheric mechanisms to prevent conflicts. In many ways, Contadora represented for Mexico the re-discovery of Latin America in security terms.

In the 1980s, the Mexican concept of security also changed in a dramatic way with the growth of an old problem: drug trafficking. During the 1970s, there was an impressive reduction in the volumes of marijuana and heroin produced in Mexico, which made many think that drugs were not going to be a significant domestic or international problem for Mexico. During the 1980s, however, the successful campaign against drugs began to collapse and Mexico recovered the place it had in the 1970s in terms of drug production. This change was due in part to the deterioration of the Mexican political

⁶ Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, "Mexico and the Guatemalan Crisis" in Richard R. Fagen and Olga Pellicer, *The Future of Central America. Policy Choices for the US and Mexico*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1983, p. 167.

⁷ Bruce Michael Bagley and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, *Contadora: the Limits of Negotiation*, Washington, D.C.: School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 1987, p. 1.

⁸ In the Information bulletin issued in the creation of the Group, in January, 1983, is established the respect to the principles of non-intervention and self-determination. See Bruce Michael Bagley, Roberto Alvarez and Katherine J. Hagedorn (eds.), *Contadora and the Central American Peace Process / Selected Documents*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985, p. 165.

system and the evident official corruption, but was also due to the spectacular increase in the amounts of cocaine trafficked from South America to the United States. By the mid-80s, drug trafficking was a serious problem for Mexico both domestically and internationally. The assassination in 1985 of DEA agent Enrique Camarena by Mexican drug traffickers in complicity with Mexican policemen (and possibly certain higher authorities) showed that this problem was out of control.⁹ This situation led president Salinas de Gortari to declare drug trafficking as a security threat in the 1989-1994 National Development Plan.¹⁰ As a consequence, the Mexican government included the issue of drug trafficking in the meetings of the diplomatic Latin American mechanisms like the Group of Eight, created in 1987 as a consequence of the merging of the Contadora Group and the Contadora Support Group and then called the Group of Rio, and also the Iberoamerican Summit, created in 1991 under the auspice of president Salinas. At the same time, drug trafficking was a permanent issue in the relationship with the United States and the source of constant friction between both countries, especially since 1986 when the United States established the so-called process of "certification", aimed to punish those countries which, in the eyes of Washington, did not collaborate sufficiently in the fight against drugs. It is worth mentioning that despite the increasing seriousness of the problem and the creation of some regional and bilateral mechanisms to deal with it, Mexico did not have a global strategy to combat this threat, and its main emphasis was on diplomatic collaboration rather than on law enforcement instruments.

Changes in the 1990s: Crime on the rise and institutional responses

The deterioration of security was quite serious during the 1990s. On the one hand, there was a notorious increase in crime rates in the mid-1990s.¹¹ It is quite difficult to establish the causes of this increase, though it seems that many factors coincided and conspired. The economic crisis of 1994-1995 was one important reason that propelled many people to engage in criminal activities. At the same time, another element present in this phenomenon was the deterioration of security forces that took place in the 1980s along with the attempts of the Mexican government to depurate the attorney general's office. As a result of this, many corrupt policemen were sent to the

⁹ In this regard, see Jorge Chabat, "Drug trafficking in the US-Mexican relations: what you see is what you get" en Bruce M. Bagley and William O. Walker III, *Drug trafficking in the Americas*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers/North-South Center, 1994.

¹⁰ Agustín Maciel Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹¹ Centro de Estudios Económicos del Sector Privado, "La inseguridad Pública en México", *Entorno*, No. 168, September, 2002.

streets, increasing the crime rates. Also, during that decade, the Mexican drug cartels grew up in a very important way, occupying the space left by the dismantled Colombian cartels. All of these factors combined to provoke a human security crisis with some particularly aggressive manifestation like kidnapping, and evolving in such a way that Mexico occupied at the end of the decade the second rank in Latin America, below only Colombia. On the other hand, some illegal actors appeared on the political scene. In January 1994, there was an indigenous insurrection in the southern state of Chiapas that took form in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a postmodern guerrilla group that defied the legitimacy of the Mexican government. Even though the Zapatista movement was not a strong military insurrection, it contributed significantly to the political instability of the country and the deterioration of security. In the following years, other guerrilla groups appeared in the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. These movements, the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) and the Insurgent People Revolutionary Army (ERPI), were more traditional Marxist guerrillas disposed to use violence. As a reaction to these movements, some paramilitary groups appeared in those states, generating yet more tension in the national political environment.

Given this crisis, the Mexican government implemented a long list of legal and institutional reforms that had a mixed result. These changes were propelled by domestic and foreign factors. Internally, there was a growing pressure from opposition parties and society to improve the situation as part of a more general transition to democracy. Also, there were pressures from the outside related to the process of economic opening. In 1990, president Salinas started a process of negotiation leading to a North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. This process increased international concern about human security in Mexico. In this context, the Mexican government created the National Commission of Human Rights in 1990 and made several legal reforms aimed at improving the capacity of the government to fight drugs. In June of 1993, one month after the assassination of Cardinal Posadas in the city of Guadalajara, Salinas created the National Institute for the Combat of Drugs, which sought to establish an increased coordination of the fight against drug trafficking. By the end of 1993, the Criminal Code was reformed in order to increase the length of sentences for drug traffickers and the number of days they could be maintained in custody. These reforms also facilitated the confiscation and sale of goods belonging to drug traffickers and the government's access to information.¹² In July of 1993, the Federal Fiscal Code was modified to establish the requirement of notification upon the entry of foreign exchange into Mexican territory in

¹² United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, April, 1994. See chapter on "Mexico". See also Héctor A. González, "El narcotráfico ha desestabilizado economías nacionales / Aseguran reformas a la ley para impedir el lavado de dinero", *El Financiero*, September 2nd, 1993, p. 28.

amounts of more than US\$10,000. In 1990, money laundering was classified as a felony.¹³

Concerning international collaboration, the Salinas administration showed a notorious will to maintain and increase agreements in the fight against drug trafficking and developed several programs in collaboration with the US. In 1990, the Northern Border Response Force was implemented. This mechanism was considered by the US government as the "centerpiece" of US-Mexican law enforcement cooperation.¹⁴ The Mexican government also increased its involvement in anti-narcotics operations in Central America.¹⁵

As we can see, the Salinas administration decided to make reforms in the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking due in part to the pressures associated with the commercial opening and the negotiation of NAFTA. During the months leading up to the NAFTA approval in the US Congress in November of 1993, speculations arose about an increase in drug trafficking from Mexico to the United States thanks to the increase in trade between both countries.¹⁶ A declassified memorandum from the Defense Intelligence Agency Joint Staff in Washington, DC, confirms the perception that the Salinas government was particularly concerned about the impact of the drug issue on NAFTA negotiations. According to this document, written in December 1992, Salinas' cooperation with the United States on drug matters "reflects in part president Salinas' hope that paying more attention to drug issues will minimize frictions with the United States that could jeopardize Mexico's economic recovery, his top domestic priority". This memorandum directly linked the approval of NAFTA to Mexico's counter-drugs policies: "As such, NAFTA's pending approval probably will continue somewhat to influence president Salinas' policy decisions on drug issues *vis-à-vis* the United States".¹⁷ A complementary interpretation of this perspective was suggested by an American newspaper, which stated that the Bush and Clinton administrations

¹³ *Ibid.* See also "Apoyará la SHCP a autoridades en casos de narcotráfico", *El Financiero*, June 16th, 1993, p. 38.

¹⁴ United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Report*, April 1994, p.160.

¹⁵ Alberto Ugalde García, "Compromiso con EU: Involucramiento de México en la lucha antidrogas en CA", *El Financiero*, February 25th, 1992, p. 35.

¹⁶ Tim Weiner, Tim Golden, "Free-Trade Treaty May Widen Traffick in Drugs, US Says", *The New York Times*, May 24th, 1993, pp. A1, A2. This journalistic information made reference to a report written by an intelligence officer at the US Embassy in Mexico, according to which the cocaine traffickers "intend to maximize their legitimate business enterprises within the auspices of the new US-Mexico free trade agreement". This report was originally written on January 22nd, 1992. See Army Intelligence and Security Command, "Narcotics / Possible Intentions of Mexican Drug Organizations", January 22nd, 1992, 2 pp. (mimeo).

¹⁷ Defense Intelligence Agency, "Untitled memorandum". December 1st, 1992, 3 pp. (mimeo). According to Jorge G. Castañeda, it is possible that drug traffickers have concluded since mid-1991 that Salinas' government decided to break the implicit agreements with the drug lords, because of US pressure. See Jorge G. Castañeda, *Sorpresas te da la vida / Mexico 1994*, Mexico: Aguilar, 1994, chapter VI, pp. 157-173.

exaggerated Mexican success in the fight against drugs in order to protect NAFTA negotiations.¹⁸

President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) also made very important reforms. Zedillo established the National System of Public Security in 1995, seeking to coordinate the actions against crime at the three levels of government and beginning the compilation of a data base with information about the police forces in the country as well as the criminals. He also enacted a new law against organized crime in December 1996. This law increased the penalties against organized crime, and prosecuted the criminal association, like the RICO law did in the United States. The new law allowed telephonic interception, covert agents, seizures of goods, and protected witnesses. To implement this law, Zedillo created the Special Unit against Organized Crime (UEDO in Spanish) in the office of the attorney general. He also created a Special Unit against Money Laundering. In 1997, the National Institute for the Combat of Drugs was abolished after the arrest of its Director, who was accused of collaborating with drug traffickers. Replacing the Institute, the Special Attorney for Crimes against Health was created inside the attorney general's office. In August of 1998, Zedillo launched a National Crusade against Crime to modernize the fight of criminal activities. In December 1998, the Federal Preventive Police was created, conformed of various federal police forces, like the Highway Police, the Fiscal Police and the Migration Police. The following year, the Mexican government launched the so-called "Sealing the Border Operation" to stop drugs before they entered into Mexican territory. This strategy supposed an additional expenditure of around \$500 million over two years. The plan relied on high-tech hardware, such as X-ray machines to inspect trucks coming from Central America, high-speed boats and small surveillance planes. In a groundbreaking decision, President Zedillo also authorized the direct involvement of the Mexican Army in counter-drug efforts, which has provoked strong criticisms.

Regarding international collaboration, there was an increase in cooperation with the United States, especially in counter-drugs efforts. In 1996, the High-Contact Level Group was created, aimed to facilitate the exchange of information between the United States and Mexico while preventing major diplomatic crises. In 1997, president Zedillo agreed to the temporary extradition of drug traffickers to the United States. In January 2001, the Mexican Supreme Court declared legal the extradition of Mexicans to other countries. Zedillo also granted US vessels and planes access to Mexican airports and ports. Furthermore, there were reports in the media, officially denied by the Mexican government, that DEA agents were allowed to carry guns in Mexico. Also, during the Zedillo administration, the US

¹⁸ Two articles related to drug trafficking in Mexico appeared in *The New York Times* on July 30th and 31st, 1995. See "Bush y Clinton han exagerado los éxitos de México contra el narcotráfico, asegura el NYT", *La Jornada*, August 1st, 1995, pp. 1 and 8.

government collaborated closely with the Mexican police forces in the training and selection of the members of the new Mexican anti-drugs unit.

Zedillo also arrested some important drug lords. In 1995, the Mexican Army captured “El Güero” Palma, leader of the Sinaloa cartel. In January 1996, Juan García Abrego, leader of the Gulf cartel, was arrested and deported to the United States, alleging his US citizenship. Zedillo also captured Ismael Higuera Guerrero, known as “El Mayel”, and Jesus Labra (“El Chuy”), both members of the Tijuana cartel as well as Óscar Malherbe, a former lieutenant of the Gulf cartel. During his administration, Zedillo captured more than 400 members of drug trafficking organizations. In 1998, the Mexican government implemented the so-called “Maxi-proceso”, an operation that attacked the Juarez cartel and led to the arrest of some businessmen and the prosecution of the acting governor of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, Mario Villanueva Madrid. He could not be arrested because he escaped some days before the end of his term. Villanueva was finally captured in May 2001 by the Fox administration.

Zedillo also arrested in 2000 other high military officers such as General Arturo Acosta Chaparro, a one-star general, and General Francisco Quiros Hermosillo, a three-star general, accused of collaborating with the Juarez cartel. Also, there were some arrests of police officers, including that of the former Director of the Federal Judicial Police, Adrián Carrera Fuentes, who was allowed by the Mexican government to go testify in the United States. By the end of the Zedillo Administration, there were more than 3000 law-enforcement officers suspended for corruption.

The Fox years: successes and failures

Since the beginning of his administration, president Fox established security as one of his priorities. In the National Development Plan of 2001-2006, the Mexican government established the guarantee of public security as one of the eight guiding objectives in the area of order and respect, one of the three main areas of the plan.¹⁹ This document asserted that “public insecurity is one of the major concerns of citizenship and the new government”. The plan establishes that this state of affairs has been caused by many factors: corruption, institutions penetrated by crime, lack of observance of the law, obsolete legislation, unequal justice administration, evasion from justice and impunity, policemen with a standard below international average and poor training, as well as a bigger presence and belligerence of organized crime and

¹⁹ México, Presidencia de la República, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2001-2006*, Chapter on “Orden y Respeto”. <http://pnd.presidencia.gob.mx/>

illicit drug trafficking.²⁰ The strategies established by the Fox administration to combat insecurity were: a) crime prevention to guarantee citizen security; b) integral reform of the public security system; c) fighting corruption, depuration and dignifying of the police forces; d) integral restructuring of the prison system; e) promotion of the participation and organization of citizens in crime and felony prevention.²¹

In terms of national security, the Fox administration insisted on the importance of a modification of this concept. In the National Development Plan of 2001-2006, the Fox administration made harsh criticisms of the concept of national security used by previous administrations. The plan states that “the concept of national security was used in the past to justify illegitimate acts of authority, whose only purpose was to facilitate the continuity of the political regime”. According to the document, this led to a “distorted use of the country’s intelligence institutions, to the institutional discredit and to an abandonment of the primary tasks needed for the effective care of national security”.²² According to the Fox administration, the confusion of national security with regime security had as a consequence the lack of attention to the “real threats”: the increase of organized crime, corruption and environmental degradation, among others. Consequently, the Mexican government made a call to adapt national security to “the new times and the new phenomenon of vulnerability”. The Fox government put much emphasis on the need of the Mexican State to possess sufficient, timely and reliable information to guarantee national security. In that sense, the National Development Plan establishes the following priorities:

- Develop a doctrine for the identification and evaluation of the factors that can put at risk national security, and for the effective protection of Mexico’s vital interests.
- Elaborate a risk agenda to promote prevention measures in government actions through a systematic analysis of the risks to national security.
- Develop a judicial and institutional framework that respects constitutional guarantees of citizens and coordinates federal government offices and the three levels of government.
- Prevent in a timely and efficient way risks and threats to national security, democratic governance and rule of law, through the operation of a system of investigation, information and analysis that contributes to the preservation of integrity, stability and the permanence of the Mexican State.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

- Promote a legal framework in order to establish what national security is for the Mexican State and its elements. The federal intelligence agencies should be ruled by the operational criteria of a democratic state and an institutional accountability system.

It seems quite evident that the Fox administration's concept of security puts significant emphasis on intelligence and information. This characteristic along with a broad concept of security accentuated the historical distance of Mexico from the Rio Treaty and the traditional, military-oriented concept of security. Consequently, the Fox administration announced its intention to drop out of the Inter American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance on September 7, 2001, just days before the terrorist attacks on the United States. One year later, Mexico made the official announcement. The reason argued by the Mexican government was that it was necessary to have a "multidimensional and modern security structure that responds to the real needs of the Western hemisphere".²³ It is worth mentioning that the Mexican government, conscious of the impact that this decision could have had on its relations with the United States and Latin America, proposed that Mexico would hold the Especial Conference on Security agreed in the Third Summit of the Americas, designed to revise the security conditions in the continent in light of the recent changes in the world. Moreover, Mexico argued that its retirement from the Rio Treaty allowed it to organize in a better way the Security Conference.²⁴

The Conference was originally scheduled for May 2003. However, the organizers did not want to contaminate it with the US attack on Iraq that started in March. Consequently, the conference finally took place in October 2003 in Mexico City, and the president of the Commission of Hemispheric Security was the Mexican ambassador to the OAS, Miguel Ruiz Cabañas. Even when this meeting did not provide a replacement of the Rio Treaty, it made substantial improvement in terms of the definitions of security, and considered the multidimensional approach supported by Mexico.²⁵ The basis of the broad definition of threats was that every state has different security priorities and confronts different threats. It is worth mentioning that the Security Conference did not define a unique way to confront threats: they require multiple responses and the action of national organizations, along with associations between governments, private enterprise and civil society. In

²³ Mexico, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "México se retira del Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca", Comunicado de prensa No. 194/02, September 6, 2002, (mimeo) 2 pp.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Consejo Permanente de la Organización de los Estados Americanos, Comisión de Seguridad Hemisférica, "Proyecto de declaración de la Conferencia Especial sobre Seguridad". OEA/Ser. G CP/CSH-558/03 rev. 8, October 21st, 2003 (mimeo).

order to deal with the new threats, it is also necessary to have an adequate hemispheric cooperation because most of the new threats are transnational.

As a consequence of the importance given to security, the Fox administration made some reforms at the beginning of his administration. He took out the Federal Preventive Police from the Secretary of Governance and assigned it to the newly created Secretary of Public Security (SSP). Even when the Secretary of Governance was dispossessed of the Federal Preventive Police, it retained the CISEN, which became a fundamental piece in the fight against non-traditional threats like terrorism, guerrillas and, to some extent, organized crime. In order to more clearly and democratically regulate the activities of CISEN, the so-called "National Security Law" was approved in January of 2005.²⁶ This law established the need of a judicial authorization for telephonic intervention made by CISEN, similar to what was established for the attorney general's office in the Law Against Organized Crime. Also, Fox appointed a military as Attorney General, Gral. Rafael Macedo de la Concha. This facilitated the collaboration between the attorney general's office and the army, which proved to be a very effective formula for the dismantling of the drug cartels. Macedo promoted important reforms inside the PGR: at the end of 2001, the Federal Agency of Investigation (AFI) was created, designed to be a Mexican version of the FBI and using modern and scientific techniques of criminal investigation.

During the Fox administration, human security continued deteriorating. Even when the figures are sometimes contradictory and there are differences in the crime rates among the different states in Mexico, the perception of the majority of the population during the first two years of the Fox government is that some crimes have increased: street drug sales, robbery in the street, theft car, robbery at home, robbery in stores and kidnapping.²⁷ Due to this perception, on June 27, 2004, there was a huge demonstration in Mexico against insecurity organized by several NGOs.²⁸ This march, which attracted around 350,000 people, put additional pressure on the Fox government as well as on the local authorities, especially those of Mexico City. However, there was no clear response to the protest. Actually, president Fox declared one week after the rally that the battle against insecurity "will take years".²⁹

One of the most serious crimes, which had a very deep impact on society, was kidnapping. However, the analysis of this crime is difficult since the figures are not very reliable because there is a large percentage of

²⁶ México, "Ley de Seguridad Nacional", *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, January 31st, 2005, <http://www.cddhcu.gob.mx/leyinfo/doc/LSegNac.doc>

²⁷ Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad, A.C., "Primera Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad Pública en las Entidades Federativas", May, 2002, and "Segunda Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad Pública en las Entidades Federativas", June 2002.

²⁸ Yetlaneci Alcaraz and Nayelli Cortés, "Sacuden al país", *El Universal*, June 28th, 2004, p. 1A.

²⁹ Xóchitl Álvarez and Jorge Teherán, "Tomará años combatir los delitos: Fox; recibe crítica", *El Universal*, July 5th, 2004, p. 1A.

kidnappings that are not reported to the authorities and it is a crime attended both by local and federal authorities. Even with these limitations it is possible to perceive a peak in kidnappings in 2004 with 200 cases attended by the Federal Agency of Investigation, compared to 174 cases in 2003. By July 2005, there were 77 cases reported to the AFI. From 2000 to 2005 there were 616 cases of kidnapping attended by the AFI. However, if we include the kidnappings reported to the local police all around the country, the figures can increase significantly. In Mexico City, the city with the highest number of kidnappings reported, from 2000 to 2005, there were 917 cases reported to the local authorities.³⁰ Even when the number of victims of kidnapping is not as high as the victims of other crimes, the social impact of it is very deep. It affects the life and psychological health of those kidnapped and their families, and generates a sense of vulnerability. The fact that some of the victims are public figures contributes to the perception of insecurity in the Mexican population.³¹

In this context, the Fox administration proposed to Congress a very ambitious reform on public security and criminal justice, in March of 2004. This proposal was aimed at continuing a “deep reform” of the system of justice promotion and administration. This document acknowledges the “ancestral lack of trust” of the institutions of justice promotion. The Fox administration’s proposal took into account some of the recommendations made by the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, such as the autonomy of the Attorney General and the implementation of oral trials. This proposal sought to transform the Attorney General into an investigative office and to create a Secretary of the Interior that would concentrate the police forces. Due to the radical transformation proposed by this reform and the lack of collaboration between the Fox administration and the opposition parties, by mid-2005, this reform was not even discussed in Congress. Even when this issue does not polarize the political forces in Mexico as was the case with the tax and energy reforms, there are still some ideological differences between the governing National Action Party and the leftist PRD or the nationalistic PRI. Consequently, the chances of getting this reform approved in 2006 are not very high, since that year there will be a ferocious competition for the presidency.

Due in part to the significant level of collaboration between the military and the attorney general’s office, and also because of the arrival to the presidency of a different political party than PRI affected some of the traditional networks of corruption, the Fox administration was very efficient in dismantling the most important drug organizations. In May 2001, the

³⁰ Vicente Hernández Elías and Ignacio Alzaga, “Secuestros / Delito en auge”, *Milenio*, No. 409, July 25th, 2005, pp. 26-29.

³¹ Among the victims of kidnapping are public figures, like TV or sports stars. In July 2005, the coach of the popular soccer team, Cruz Azul, was kidnapped in Mexico City.

Mexican government arrested Adán Amezcua, the leader of the Colima cartel, dedicated to the production of methamphetamine. In February 2001, all officials in the attorney general's office in the Mexican state of Chihuahua were arrested, accused of collaborating with the Juárez cartel. In April 2001, Fox arrested one of the leaders of the Gulf cartel, known as "El June". In May 2001, he also arrested fugitive Mario Villanueva, the former governor of Quintana Roo. In February 2002, one of the leaders of the Tijuana cartel, Ramón Arellano Félix, died in a gunfight with policemen in Sinaloa. The following month, Benjamín Arellano Félix, the other leader of the cartel and Ramón's brother, was arrested by the Attorney General's forces.³² In March 2003, the main leader of the Gulf cartel, Osiel Cárdenas, was also arrested in the city of Matamoros in the North of Mexico.³³

Despite all of these successes, the Mexican government showed an alarming weakness in other areas, particularly with the prison system. In January 2001, one of the most important drug lords, Joaquín Guzmán, known as "El Chapo", escaped from a high-security prison, embarrassing the Fox administration in the eyes of the international opinion. The prison system proved to be a constant headache for the Mexican government and entered into a crisis in 2004-2005 when three consecutive assassinations ordered by drug traffickers took place inside the high-security prison of "La Palma". These events led the government to make serious revisions of the conditions of the federal prisons, which aggravated the violence in the Northern states of Mexico since 2004. However, drug-related violence persisted at high levels since the beginning of the Fox administration. This led president Fox to launch a national crusade against drug trafficking and organized crime in January 2001 in the state of Sinaloa, one of the most affected by this kind of violence. Notwithstanding, this crusade was not very effective. In 2005, drug related violence climbed to levels never seen before. During the first six and a half months of 2005, more than 700 people were executed, half of them in the state of Sinaloa.³⁴

The wave of violence on the US-Mexico border provoked open complaints from the United States government. In January 2005, Tony Garza, the American ambassador to Mexico, sent a letter to the secretary of Foreign Relations and the Attorney General making reference to the "incapacity of the local security forces to face the battle among drug criminals, kidnappings and violence in general". For Garza, this incapacity could negatively affect the exchanges, tourism and trade between Mexico and the United States.³⁵

³² Julián Sánchez y Carlos Avilés Allende, "Nuevo golpe al cártel de Tijuana", *El Universal*, March 10th, 2002, p. 1.

³³ Francisco Gómez, "Cae Osiel Cárdenas", *El Universal*, March 15th, 2002, p. 2.

³⁴ By July 12th, 2005, the assassinations related to drug trafficking were 717. "Ola de violencia deja 8 muertos; uno era celador", *El Universal*, July 12th, 2005, p. 15.

³⁵ "Carta del embajador Antonio O. Garza", *El Universal*, January 27th, 2005, p. 1.

Even when the Fox administration's response was to reject Garza's accusations, the problem worsened in the following months. In June 2005, the newly appointed Director of Nuevo Laredo police, Alejandro Domínguez Coello, was killed after being on the job for only 7 hours.³⁶ This was the straw that broke the camel's back. After this crime, president Fox launched an operation on the Northern border called "Safe Mexico" (Mexico Seguro). The Army and the Federal Judicial Police took the control of eight cities in the states of Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Baja California.³⁷ This emergency plan was clear evidence of the security crisis at the end of the Fox administration.

Even while the Mexican security situation has not yet generated a major crisis in US-Mexican relations, that risk is still present because of terrorism. Two months after the attacks of September 11th, US ambassador to Mexico, Jeffrey Davidow, admitted that there was a possibility that terrorists could use Mexico as a point of entry to the United States because people from all around the world have been using Mexico as a springboard to the US, bribing Mexican authorities and violating Mexican law.³⁸ During the proceeding years, there have been reports in the media of the possibility that Al Qaeda could use Mexico to enter into the US in alliance with Central American gangs,³⁹ but the fact is that there is no evidence of this. However, the possibility is a source of concern for the US government, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed as much in March 2005.⁴⁰ That possibility has been denied by the Mexican government but the truth is that it cannot be completely discarded, and the consequences of such an event would be disastrous for the US-Mexican relations. This can also likely explain the significant levels of cooperation between both governments, particularly in the exchange of information. From this perspective, the US concern for security conditions in Mexico is a crucial factor propelling future improvements in this area.

Regarding international threats, it is important to mention that during recent years Mexico is facing a new threat from the outside: the Central American gangs called "maras". These gangs originated in Southern California in the 1980s with Salvadoran refugees who were running away from the Civil War. Some of them were trained in military techniques, helping them to create these extremely violent gangs. The "maras" went back to El Salvador

³⁶ Carlos Corta and Luis Carlos Cano, "Sólo 7 horas fue director de Seguridad", *El Universal*, June 9th, 2005, p. 1A.

³⁷ Alberto Nájjar, "Ejército y PFP 'toman' 8 ciudades", *La Jornada*, June 14th, 2005, p. 7.

³⁸ "Conferencia de prensa del subsecretario de Relaciones Exteriores, embajador Enrique Berruga, y el embajador de Estados Unidos en México, Jeffrey Davidow. Tlatelolco, D.F. 7 de noviembre de 2001" (mimeo) 12 pp. p. 9. <http://www.consulmexoxnard.com/comunicados/2001/noviembre/07-11-2001.htm>

³⁹ Bill Gertz, "Terrorists said to seek entry to US via Mexico", *The Washington Times*, April 7th, 2003; Jerry Seper, "Al Qaeda seeks tie to local gangs", *The Washington Times*, September 28th, 2004.

⁴⁰ José Carreño and Natalia Gómez, "Al-Qaeda intenta entrar a EU vía México: Rice", *El Universal*, March 11th, 2005, p. 1.

in the 1990s and began to spread out all over the Central American region. They have been entering illegally into Mexico during recent years and by 2005 had a presence in 21 states of Mexico, although 85% are concentrated in the Southern states of Chiapas, Veracruz and Oaxaca.⁴¹ These gangs have spread out quickly in Mexico and they are operating in Mexico City.⁴² From January 2003 to April 2005, the Mexican government has arrested 1,193 “maras”, giving an idea of the seriousness of the problem.⁴³ Even though there is no evidence of links between terrorist groups and the “maras”, some US and Mexican officers have suggested the possibility,⁴⁴ making these gangs a credible national security threat. The presence of the “maras” makes evident that the Mexican government needs to strengthen the international collaboration, especially with the governments of the United States and the Central American countries.

Finally, we have to mention another possible risk for national and human security that has been latent for years: the guerrilla groups. Even when the groups that appeared in the 1990s, from the “Zapatistas” to the EPR and ERPI, have not represented a serious security threat, there is evidence of insurgent activity as a result of the fragmentation of the old guerrillas. It is difficult to see these new groups as a serious challenge to Mexican governance, but they are a source of instability that can evolve into a major problem if the conditions are favourable.⁴⁵

Evaluation

The security balance of the Fox administration is mixed. There have been some improvements at the conceptual and at the implementation level. On the one hand, there is a new concept of national security that puts emphasis on new security threats, as well as a good diagnosis of the problems that the Mexican government is facing, reflected in president Fox’s proposed reform of the security system. There have also been some achievements in the fight against drug trafficking, particularly in capturing drug lords. There have been some limited successes in the fight against corruption and some progress has been made in the levels of control of the civil intelligence service. On the other hand, however, these achievements have been obscured

⁴¹ “Han sido detenidos más de mil ‘maras’ en México de 2003 a la fecha”, *La Crónica de Hoy*, December 2nd, 2004. <http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?idc=156099>, See also “Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa del secretario de Gobernación, Santiago Creel, al término de la presentación de los resultados del operativo Frontera Sur-Costa, realizada en el Salón Juárez de esta dependencia, 2 de diciembre de 2004” (mimeo).

<http://www.curp.gob.mx/templetas/fotografico.php?idBDEC=3483&idFoto=1026&counter=5>

⁴² “Admite Encinas la presencia de ‘Maras’ en 3 delegaciones”, *Diario de México*, December 4th, 2004.

⁴³ Cecilia Téllez, “Los Maras, problema de seguridad nacional”, *Excelsior*, April 21st, 2005, p. 4A.

⁴⁴ “Investigan a maras”, *La Voz* (Phoenix), December 14th, 2004.

⁴⁵ Jorge Alejandro Medellín, “Admiten focos subversivos en valle de México”, *El Universal*, July 26th, 2005. p. 1A.

by the persistence of high crime rates, especially those crimes that affect the physical integrity of persons like kidnapping, and the inability of the Mexican government to control drug-related violence. The reason for this is quite simple: the Mexican government has put all of its energy and political will into dismantling the drug cartels while the rest of the security and judicial systems have remained the same. Except for the progress made with the creation of the AFI, which has not eliminated scandals involving some of its members,⁴⁶ the rest of the security forces have experienced little change. In fact, the National System of Public Security, established during the Zedillo administration, has been working deficiently, as acknowledged by the Assistant Attorney General, José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, because the police forces in the country do not want to collaborate with the system.⁴⁷ The lack of change can also be found in the judicial and prison systems. Consequently, insecurity is still a major problem for Mexico and it has had international consequences, particularly in the relationship with the United States. Paradoxically, one of the big gains in dismantling drug cartels has been the congratulations of the White House. This gain has gone astray because of the high levels of violence on the US-Mexico border. It seems unnecessary to mention that if the Mexican government is unable to prevent the entrance of a terrorist on his way to the United States, the consequences for the bilateral relationship would be catastrophic.

Given the political gridlock that exists in the Mexican Congress, the prospects for a meaningful security reform are not very high although it is in the interest of the political parties to solve the problem. Consequently, it is very possible that the security deficit will increase during the following years and that this issue will be very important in the political campaigns of 2006. The problem will persist until there is an integral reform of the Mexican State in this matter. Everything suggests that the domestic and international pressures will increase until there is a serious crisis that accelerates major changes. Meanwhile, security will be an unsolved point of the Mexican agenda.

⁴⁶ In July 2005, 6 AFI's members were investigated for their alleged participation in the assassination of Enrique Salinas de Gortari, ex president Salinas de Gortari's brother. Teresa Montaña and Silvia Otero, "Indagan a 6 'afis' por caso Salinas", *El Universal*, July 15th, 2005, p. A13. From December 2000 to July 2005, 857 members of the Attorney General's Office were investigated. More than half of them (435) were members of the AFI. In 2005 AFI had more than 5,000 members. See Silvia Otero, "435 agentes federales con procesos penales", *El Universal*, July 15th, 2005, p. A13.

⁴⁷ According to Santiago Vasconcelos, the National System of Public Security is not working "in the way it should do" and the police forces in the country are "not interested in entering into the dynamics" generated by the Federal Secretary of Public Security, which is the office that coordinates the National System of Public Security. See Canal del Congreso, "Causas y efectos del secuestro en México", June 21st, 2004, 22 pp. (mimeo) http://www.canaldelcongreso.gob.mx/article.php3?id_article=666

Conclusion

Security in Mexico entered into a serious crisis since the 1980s. The factors that caused that situation are the growing presence of drug trafficking in Mexico; the appearance of new international, threats like transnational organized crime and terrorism; the severe deterioration of the police forces in Mexico; and the political transition that Mexico is experiencing in which the old informal rules no longer work. The solutions proffered by the Mexican government during the last 20 years have been erratic, incomplete and lacking continuity. However, some important reforms were made in the 1990s and in the 2000s. These reforms were aimed at strengthening the existing security institutions and creating new ones. Some of these changes have had limited success, such as the National System of Public Security, the Federal Preventive Police and the Federal Agency of Investigation. With the arrival of the Fox administration, there were radical changes in the concept of national and human security. However, these changes had little expression at the institutional level and have not produced long term dynamics. On the one hand, the multidimensional approach proposed by the Fox administration at the hemispheric level has not materialized in a new regional security mechanism. On the other hand, it is true that the attempt to transform institutions that protect people rather than regimes has led to the creation of the SSP and the AFI. However, the levels of collaboration between the SPP and the Attorney General's office have been low and marked by conflict, while the success in dismantling the drug cartels produced by the collaboration between the Army and the Attorney-General has been a pyrric victory: it only exposed the limitations of the prison and judicial systems.

The failures in the efforts made by the last three administrations in Mexico have showed the difficulty of the task and the nature of the challenges. Radical changes are necessary at the international, national and local levels. More collaboration is necessary at the hemispheric level in order to face transnational threats like drugs, organized crime and terrorism, especially with the United States and Central America. Also, some structural reforms are needed in the police forces as well as in the prison and judicial systems. It is important to make all of these changes simultaneously in order to get a sustainable reform. Even while these changes could be approved by Congress at some point, corruption will continue to be a serious problem. Another challenge will be continuity. If these reforms are approved, they need at least 10 to 15 years to be effective. It supposes a long-term agreement between the main political forces in Mexico in order to maintain these modifications, independently of who the President of the country is. Finally, one more challenge will be to resist the temptation of making spectacular reforms to gain time and deal with domestic and international pressures. As

we have seen, the last two decades are full of short-term reforms that are aimed at appeasing public opinion rather than at solving the problem.

Security is not just another issue in the public agenda in Mexico. It is the main challenge facing Mexican democracy. If the Mexican state is not able to provide security at the different levels, all the other national tasks cannot be performed. Security is the state's *raison d'être*. It is the basic requirement for the development of political, economic and social activities. Consequently, it is the biggest challenge that the Mexican government will face during the next decades.

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- Bravo Pérez Héctor Manuel, *et al.*, *Evaluación económica del convenio de distribución de aguas superficiales del lago de Chapala y su efecto en el bienestar social*, AP-175
- Bravo Pérez, Héctor Manuel, Juan Carlos Castro Ramírez, *Construcción de una matriz de contabilidad social con agua para el estado de Guanajuato*, AP-176
- Bracho González, Teresa y Giulianna Mendieta, *El proceso de focalización y las estrategias estatales de selección de beneficiarios: El caso del Programa Escuelas de Calidad*, AP-177
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- Sour, Laura, *Pluralidad y transparencia en el proceso de aprobación presupuestal al interior de la Cámara de Diputados*, AP-180
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- Gómez Galvarriato, Aurora, Rafael Dobado and Jeffrey Williamson,

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- Gómez Galvarriato, Aurora and Aldo Musacchio, *Larger Menus and Entrepreneurial Appetite: An Empirical Investigation of Organization Choice in Mexico*, E-363
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