



**Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive**  
**DSpace Repository**

---

Faculty and Researchers

Faculty and Researchers' Publications

---

2007-10-18

## Mexico's Insecurity in North America

Sumano Rodriquez, Abelardo

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

---

Homeland Security Affairs (2007), Supplement no. 1  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/25103>

---

*Downloaded from NPS Archive: Calhoun*



Calhoun is the Naval Postgraduate School's public access digital repository for research materials and institutional publications created by the NPS community. Calhoun is named for Professor of Mathematics Guy K. Calhoun, NPS's first appointed -- and published -- scholarly author.

**Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School**  
**411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle**  
**Monterey, California USA 93943**

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

# **Mexico's Insecurity in North America**

Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano  
Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey  
October 18, 2007

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will argue first that Mexico's incapacity to develop a coherent national and regional security framework has paralleled Mexico's inability to undergo a reformation of the Mexican State, and with it, of national security reform. Second, rather than true democratic change, authoritarian legacies have been more robust and abundant in Mexico since the arrival of the right wing, the National Action Party (PAN), in the year 2000. Third, the controversial result of the 2006 presidential election in Mexico has exacerbated the polarization between the right and the left to construct consensus and platforms for local and national security regarding terrorism, natural disasters, and drug trafficking due to the lack of "legitimacy" in the new government.<sup>1</sup> These circumstances encapsulate the current Mexican framework and highlight the exacerbation of threats and vulnerabilities Mexico faces in order to address the changing regional and international security environment and the prospect of creating a "new" security perimeter in North America.

## **BEYOND A DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

In the 1990s several academics argued that a Mexican transition to democracy was the only way to develop a coherent national security doctrine for the country because the corrupt nature of the Mexican political system created sources of instability and distrust in Mexico and abroad after decades of a single party in power. For example, in 1996 Guadalupe González stated that democracy could "give the country enduring stability and internal peace. Genuine democratization requires not just clean and fair elections but also effective administration of justice and decentralization of power."<sup>2</sup> Today, Mexico's transition to democracy is in question after the 2006 presidential election. Despite the political opening in 2000, the Fox administration did not manage to develop a coherent national security doctrine, structure, organization, or a solid legal framework. Unfortunately, the new government of Felipe Calderón has not delineated the bases of a global and integral plan of state reform on national security especially in terms of Mexico's deepening integration with its North American neighbors of Canada and the United States. Within its current political, institutional, and conceptual vacuum, Mexico is much more vulnerable and unsafe than a decade ago and unable to effectively defend its national interests. Were the assumptions of the 1990s wrong? Or is the lack of a national security doctrine in Mexico today the outcome of intense and deep divisions among the political elites? What are the consequences for North American regional security initiatives?

## **EXPLORING SOME EXPLANATIONS**

In 2000, the Mexican transition to democracy equipped Vicente Fox with unprecedented legitimacy, not only for the government, but for the viability of the Mexican State. The "democratic bond" given to the new government through the ballot boxes was a historical opportunity to (1) redirect the relationship with the

United States and (2) carry out the reform of the state and the national security apparatus.

Some of the first successes of Mexican foreign policy were the suspension of the decertification policy by the U.S. Congress, the recognition of a North American Community, initial negotiations of migratory reform, and the public acceptance by the Bush administration that Mexico was “the most important nation for U.S. foreign policy.”<sup>3</sup> For President Fox and his then minister of foreign relations, Jorge G. Castañeda, their proactive initiatives represented an important departure from the defensive nature of Mexican foreign policy in their first months of power. Within the new government – the Commission of Order and Respect led by Adolfo Aguilar Zinser – the national security advisor had the responsibility to coordinate a long-term perspective on national security, national sovereignty, preservation of the rule of law, democratic governability, public security, administration of justice, and honest government in coordination with cabinet members including:<sup>4</sup>

Minister of the Interior	}	Commissioner in Order and Respect, Adolfo Aguilar
Minister of Defense		
Minister of Army		
Department of Justice		

Theoretically, the proactive foreign policy and the institutional framework on national security, focused in the preventive agenda, meant a substantial improvement in democratic governance in Mexico. But, in reality, disorganization and political infighting eclipsed the good intentions presented by Fox’s administration since the very beginning. In fact, a Mexican national security strategy failed to develop for several reasons. On the one hand, Fox was unable to conceive a project that encapsulated the diverse interests of his interior ministry, nor was he able put into action an effective plan to assuage an opposition Congress. On the other hand, the Mexican Congress and the political system itself reduced the real power of the executive due to its legacy of contradictions, limitations, and authoritarian inertia. An illustration of Fox’s limitations on matters of national security was confirmed in his books published before he became president. For example, in *Fox a Los Pinos, un recuento autobiográfico*, he does not present a strategy on security. Rather, he confuses concepts and methodologies; his main preoccupation is, and his energy focuses on, defeating the PRI. In his second book, *Vicente Fox Propone*, he maps out a series of proposals for government, but offers no clear strategy on security and foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Once in power, in his *National Plan of Development* Fox presented a strategy, which was conceived by Adolfo Aguilar Zinser after having a serious confrontation with Jorge G. Castañeda, regarding the organization of government. In any event, the strategy on security was very ambitious and included Zinser’s desire to create a new doctrine, concept, and law compatible with democratic consolidation and respect for human rights. Moreover, the new national security advisor proposed to define the threat in the following terms: poverty, organized crime, drug trafficking, and natural disasters. However, any initial prerogatives to develop a national security law eroded, soon after the government took power on December 1, 2000, as a result of a series of contradictions among the cabinet members.

Today it is evident that the ministers of foreign relations and the interior, Jorge G. Castañeda and Santiago Creel, respectively, were more preoccupied with their personal agendas than consolidating a democratic government and performing the duties of their cabinet positions. Both figures wanted to be presidential candidates, Castañeda as an independent and Creel as a member of the National Action Party. However, both politicians failed in their ambitions to gain power.

Furthermore, according to the Mexican Constitution, foreign policy is conducted by the president.<sup>6</sup> Yet, under the Fox administration, foreign policy was carried out by Castañeda (2000-2003). This system created many problems for the military, an institution subordinate to the president under Mexican law. As the driving force behind the president's national security agenda, military leaders were reluctant to comply with Zinser's Commission of Truth and Commission of Order and Respect or Castañeda's proactive agenda. These new institutional arrangements within the Fox administration created major differences in the government. Additionally, Fox did not have a majority in the Chamber of Deputies nor in the Senate, and since his arrival in power he had to battle the opposition in Congress to get consensus on his domestic political reforms.

## THE TRANSITION

In addition to the political dynamics within Mexico, it is important to highlight the impact of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Just days before the attacks President George W. Bush stated that "the United States has no more important relationship in the world than the one we have with Mexico."<sup>7</sup> Bush's declarations looked to inaugurate a new relationship. For Mexico, and Fox in particular, this was a golden opportunity to talk to the United States face-to-face as equal partners. However, the devastating impact of 9/11 completely reshaped the perceptions, structures, and priorities, not only of the White House, but of the United States and the international system. Once the international system was radically transformed by 9/11—as were U.S. priorities with regards to foreign policy and national security—the nature of bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States was deeply transformed.

In contrast to the United States' aggressive foreign policy in the wake of 9/11, Mexico was unable to articulate a coordinated, clear, and strong response to the United States and the concomitant changes in the international system. Moreover, President Fox's responses to the terrorist attacks were ambiguous and cold. His government became divided after 9/11 over its relationship with the United States. For example, the minister of foreign relations was not careful in crafting a Mexican response to the attacks, stating that "an attack on the U.S., it is an attack on Mexico." The minister of the interior diverged from Castañeda with a more nationalistic approach. The Mexican Armed Forces were reluctant to declare support for Castañeda. National Security Advisor Adolfo Aguilar Zinser attempted to coordinate and expedite a response to the terrorists attacks that came from an agreed-upon list of Mexican vulnerabilities developed prior to 9/11. Lastly, the Mexican Congress was hesitant to allow President Fox to visit the United States, while leaders around the world traveled to Washington to pay their respects to those who had died. Mexico was divided and its response to U.S. security concerns was extremely uncoordinated in the aftermath of 9/11.

For the Fox administration, 9/11 was a failure for Minister of Foreign Relations Jorge G. Castañeda and his agenda on migratory reform. The notion of the "whole enchilada" disappeared in Washington.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Castañeda experienced

several problems within his own office in articulating a national response to the United States. For example, the Armed Forces disagreed with the declarations of “total” support to the United States made by Castañeda. The minister of the interior, Santiago Creel, favored a response based on the Mexican Constitution.<sup>9</sup> Hence the national security advisor experienced drastic institutional constraints to articulating a national response due to the lack of a constitutional law and full agreement on a national security agenda within the Fox administration. As a result, Aguilar Zinser’s efforts to develop a State response failed dramatically.<sup>10</sup> In the end, the President did not support the national security advisor and Castañeda ran into problems communicating his agenda to the Cabinet, Congress, and the Mexican public in general. This latter episode is crucial to understand the fragmentation of the Fox administration in terms of national security, foreign policy, and Mexico’s relationship with the United States.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that internally, at the Commission of Respect and Order, there was an institutional effort to develop an integrated Mexican response to 9/11. For example, the minister of the interior, through the intelligence services and the National Institute of Migration, supervised all points of trans-border movement; the secretary of defense implemented a plan for the protection of the Mexican population and critical infrastructure along the U.S.-Mexican border; the secretary of marine acted to monitor the oil industry in the Mexican gulf; the secretary of transportation mobilized resources inspecting airports and customs in coordination with the secretary of public security; and the Ministry of Treasury enacted an analysis of external investments and the Mexican Stock Exchange, among other institutional resources. Unfortunately, the Commission of Order and Respect was unable to convince the Cabinet and the president of the urgent need for creating a master plan on national security vis-à-vis the devastating situation in the United States and, over all, the internal dynamics of Mexico. Additionally, Aguilar Zinser’s efforts to develop a policy recommendation in order to conceive a master plan for national security disappeared from the Fox administration’s agenda and did not reemerge throughout the rest of his presidency.

Certainly, after 9/11, the idea of migratory reform collapsed and Washington’s priorities were reshaped by the security agenda. With 9/11 came an end to the aspirations of Fox and Castañeda to deepen economic and social integration in North America through a customs union.<sup>11</sup>

## **POST 9/11 CONSEQUENCES IN MEXICO**

The terrorist attacks in the United States demonstrated the necessity for Mexico to develop a policy of prevention in the protection of its national infrastructure and establish a better system to coordinate within its own structures of government and with the United States. Additionally, institutional contradictions, the absence of a national security project by the Fox administration, and the compounding problems presented by the diverse personal interests of other cabinet ministers made it more evident that a national strategy would not be forthcoming. In fact, national security coordination was dismantled and the national security advisor was sent to the United Nations, exacerbating the contradictions in Mexican foreign policy.

This vacuum created by the loss of a major actor in national security decision planning led to several problems. First, Mexico lost a golden opportunity to develop a democratic national security agenda. Second, the government did not take advantage of its chance to conceptualize a national strategy. Third, the lack of an institutionalized, conceptually coherent strategy, combined with national security

law, revealed Mexico's vulnerabilities. Consequently, the Mexican government experienced a political, conceptual, and institutional vacuum and was unable to coordinate, plan, and administer the resources of the state in order to cooperate effectively with the United States.

Moreover, between January 2002 and March 2003, it was not clear who was in charge of coordinating national security in Mexico. According to the Constitution, the president and the minister of the interior are responsible, and after the departure of Zinser to the United Nations, the Fox administration neglected to clearly define new roles within his government. Some general ideas were announced in April 2003, but no strategy was defined.<sup>12</sup> After 9/11, the contradictions within the Fox administration were exposed when the national security advisor was sent to the United Nations without coming to an agreement on a new strategy within his own cabinet. Equally important, Aguilar Zinser was not supported by his former political ally and friend, Jorge Castañeda. In fact, Castañeda was against his appointment.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, they became political enemies with very different positions on several issues. Castañeda was in support of the White House; Aguilar Zinser was against the war and in favor of United Nations participation regarding the war on Iraq. These major differences exacerbated the position of the Mexican government and created tension in the bilateral relationship with the United States. They also further emphasized that Fox did not have a plan.

In Mexico, policy makers were divided in the face of the new national security environment. The United States had responded to 9/11 with a radical unilateral initiative championed by President Bush and his administration beginning September 20, 2001. President Bush received extraordinary support from the U.S. Congress and public opinion to respond forcefully to the terrorist attacks. Accordingly, the United States established a new National Security Doctrine, inaugurating the U.S. Northern Command, the Department of Homeland Security, and initiating wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of its war on terrorism.

The current U.S. strategy has reshaped perceptions in Mexico regarding the United States. In general terms, the war in Iraq was not supported by the Mexican government and Mexican public opinion. As a result, Jorge G. Castañeda left his position as minister of foreign relations due to the lack of support in Washington for his migratory reform and his impasse with the ambassador to the United Nations, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser.<sup>14</sup> In addition, bilateral relations changed when the former governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, was made the new U.S. cabinet-level official in charge of homeland security.

Mexico was unable to develop a national security strategy, before and after 9/11. The contradictions and constraints in Mexico's relationship with the United States have become more tangible due to Mexican opposition to the U.S. unilateral national security strategy, which continues to generate negative reactions instead of cordial coordination and support. For practical purposes, the U.S. strategy to defeat terrorism and transnational crime is exacerbating an already fragmented Mexican state, despite the fact of a bilateral relationship in progress. In sum, the United States has a national, regional, and global security strategy to deal with the world, while Mexico's response has been reactive and short-sighted. This is due in large part to Mexico's history, size, geographic position, and plurality of views. For instance, this lack of a coordinated response is creating obstacles to maximize its cooperation in North America. Currently, there is not a single unified strategy for addressing the types of security challenges Mexico faces internally and abroad, nor for the type of policies Mexico needs to implement regarding organized crime and drug trafficking, much less for terrorism.

## **MEXICO IN THE NEW PERIMETER SECURITY DISCUSSION**

Concurrent with the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the economic crisis of 1994-95, U.S. secretary of defense, William Perry, led a historic visit to Mexico in 1995 promoting a close alliance with the Mexican Armed Forces as the “third link” in the U.S.-Mexico relationship. In this light, the U.S. strategy was to create a close relationship in trade, politics, and security matters to anticipate major challenges to American security. All of these changes were conducted during the initial stages of the Zedillo administration, which has been referred to as the weakest Mexican presidency throughout the PRI’s seventy-one years of power.<sup>15</sup> However, under the Zedillo administration a new approach to security and military affairs was inaugurated with the United States in a post-cold war context. This relationship was “fractured” when the Mexican drug czar, General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, was found guilty of linking the Mexican military – as an instrument of power – to drug cartels in 1997.<sup>16</sup> In the end, those encounters formed the bases of a new approach to security relations with the United States, one not seen since World War II. Corruption in Mexico’s government illuminated a series of structural setbacks in security planning and security coordination at the top of government. Paradoxically, today there is still an urgent need for reform of all civilian and military intelligence services within the Mexican government. From another perspective, Robert Pastor is right when he points out some of the major deficits of NAFTA, after thirteen years, with regard to its broader security implications for the hemisphere:

First NAFTA was silent on the development gap separating Mexico from its two northern neighbors, and that gap has widened. Second, NAFTA did not plan for its success; and inadequate roads and infrastructure cannot cope with increased traffic. The resulting delays have raised the transition costs of regional trade more than the elimination of tariffs has reduced them. Third NAFTA did not address immigration, and the number of undocumented workers in the U.S. jumped. Fourth, NAFTA did not address energy issues, and eastern Canada and northeastern U.S. suffered a catastrophic power black-out in August 2003, even while Mexico imports natural gas from the United States. Fifth, NAFTA made no attempt to coordinate macro-economic policy, leaving the region with no way to prevent market catastrophes such as the Mexican peso crisis. Finally, NAFTA was silent about security, and 9/11 threatens to cripple the North American integration process by placing new and formidable barriers in the path of trade and movement of people.<sup>17</sup>

After 9/11 the definition of U.S. security was redirected and the defense of the homeland became the cornerstone of its new architecture for the twenty-first century. This new approach was reminiscent of that used in the period following World War II, when the United States reorganized its national security apparatus and created the National Security Council, the position of secretary of defense, the Department of Defense and the CIA to anticipate the risks to U.S. security interests. For fifty years, this equation dominated the U.S.-Mexico relationship – with its respective adjustments and changes – but now it is insufficient to meet the new threats to the region. The question today is how should the relationship between the two countries change?

## **MEXICO, SECURITY AND DEFENSE IN NORTH AMERICA**

On April 17, 2002, in the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Air Force General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, revealed one of

the most important changes to the structure of the Department of Defense since 1946, announcing the emergence of the U.S. Northern Command. The creation of the Northern Command (NORTHCOM), as well as other changes, extended U.S. military forces to “cover the whole Earth for the first time.”<sup>18</sup> The transformation consisted of putting NORTHCOM on a par with the North American Aerospace Command (NORAD). The second structural change within the Pentagon’s new Unified Command Plan was the extension of the U.S. European Command to cover Russia. The Pentagon also announced that the U.S. Central Command and the U.S. Southern Command would remain in their present positions; however the U.S. Pacific Command would narrow its relation with the European Command and expanded its area of responsibility to Antarctica. Under this framework, the United States “must be ready to win today’s global war on terror, but at the same time prepare for other surprises and uncertainties that we will most certainly face in the 21st century.”<sup>19</sup> This announcement is consistent with the U.S. Homeland Security Strategy which was deeply altered by the effects of Hurricane Katrina, a major natural disaster in 2005.

In any event, one of the conclusions of the Second Symposium of Homeland Defense, held in Colorado Springs, Colorado in October 2004, was to increase the communication channels and “cooperation” with Mexico in projects that include the protection of North America. The symposium also emphasized the cooperation and the interoperability of NORAD and the expanded security relationship between the United States and Canada with regard to both maritime and territorial threats (not just airspace).

After his re-election in 2004, President Bush redefined and provided greater depth to a number of security measures. For example, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Security Paul McHale outlined the tasks that would include greater and better cooperation with Mexico. However, at the beginning of this new approach, Mexican Secretary of Defense General Gerardo de la Vega did not recognize NORTHCOM as an interlocutor in its relations with Mexico.<sup>20</sup> A second problem stemmed from the first goal of the command: “Maintain and improve its capabilities to defend the United States and North America *unilaterally* [emphasis added] or in concert with allies.”<sup>21</sup> The statement that the United States would take unilateral action in North America is not only a latent and permanent threat for the Mexican Armed Forces, it also contradicts the Mexican Constitution and the idea of sovereignty that exists in Mexico. With regard to collaboration and coordination in North America, Mexico will be hard pressed to offer support to U.S. policies that encourage unilateral action under “extraordinary circumstances” within its territory. The current framework obstructs real security coordination with Mexico. Through years of experience some sectors of the Pentagon, the American Embassy in Mexico City, and American academics understand the Mexican sovereignty issue (even NORTHCOM’s emblem is seen by some sectors in Mexico as a threat to a sovereign nation).<sup>22</sup> Despite this knowledge of Mexican politics, the United States is currently preoccupied in establishing an area of security in North America, beyond its border with Mexico.

For instance, since Bush’s reelection in 2004, there is greater coordination within the U.S. government to intensify and explore channels of cooperation with Mexico. Accordingly, Paul McHale declared “the message that we have communicated to Mexican military authorities is we are looking for a much closer level of engagement.”<sup>23</sup> The current U.S. stance is consistent with the goals and mission of the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security; as well as with the new intelligence mission of the director of national intelligence to coordinate and

safeguard the American interests. Accordingly, the United States has fortified the transatlantic relationship with Britain, NATO and the European Union, as well.

In 2005, during the tri-national summit between the United States, Canada, and Mexico in Waco, Texas led by Presidents Bush and Fox and Prime Minister, Paul Martin, President Fox showed a change of attitude when he agreed to establish the "Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America." For practical purposes, his statements represented a major compromise in protecting the borders and economic development of the region.<sup>24</sup> The bottom line is that Mexico does not have an internal security strategy, has much less relative to the new security "perimeter," and the new law recently approved by the Mexican Congress is limited in scope.<sup>25</sup> It does not provide a long-term strategy that would overcome the limitations of Mexico's national security apparatus. To better coordinate with the United States, Mexico will have to forego its current ambiguous, discretionary policy mechanisms demonstrated by the Ministry of the Interior and the National Security Research Center (CISEN in Spanish). In addition, the new minister of the interior has little experience in national security or the democratic governability needed to harmonize the security apparatus. It is doubtful whether he will be able to work with the Mexican Congress to develop strategies to anticipate threats and address the dilemmas of coordination that could potentially arise with the United States and Canada in case of an emergency situation.

## **THE CALDERON ADMINISTRATION**

The disputed outcome of the Mexican presidential election on July 2, 2006 marked a fracture in Mexico with some precepts of legitimacy, certainty, legality, and credibility. Doubts about and a lack of transparency in the performance of electoral institutions and the federal government became a source of misrepresentation and generated distrust of Felipe Calderón's administration. Consequently, today Mexico is a much more insecure nation than in 2000 for two major reasons: one, Fox did not deactivate organized crime and never reformed Mexico's institutions democratically and two, the major political actors do not share Calderón's policies on national security and foreign policy (thus increasing Mexico's vulnerabilities at the local, regional and federal levels).

In the end, the new government has failed to produce a national security strategy based on Mexico's national interest and place in the world. There is no explicit link between national security law and the National Plan of Development to position Mexico internally and abroad, neither among the Army, Air Force, Navy, Public Security or Department of Justice.<sup>26</sup> Without a doubt, the persistence of uncoordinated security apparatuses and an undefined common plan at all levels of government makes it certain that Mexico's insecurity in North America can be exploited by an aggressive and dangerous American security strategy regionally and globally.

Throughout its independence, Mexico has not articulated a coherent strategy on national security. With the election of President Fox in 2000, there were great expectations that he would implement state and national security reforms. Despite high expectations for real change, continuity with the past has prevailed. The transformations have been partial and moreover are not being updated to address the growing risks confronting Mexico specifically and North America in general. Equally important, the president of the Republic no longer has the power of past authoritarian governments when the Congress acted as a rubber stamp for presidential initiatives. Mexico is now a more open society, government institutions

are more open, and there are strong channels for expression and dissidence. The challenge for Mexico is to find a national consensus on security that articulates the national priorities and defines in better terms the nation's relationship with the United States and Canada. After 9/11 the borders and the institutions of the United States and the international system were modified completely. The implications of these world-wide transformations have not been studied enough in Mexico. Moreover, the federal government has not responded effectively to the circumstances. Rather, political factions and interest group have prevailed over national consensus. Also, the three main political parties have not presented platforms regarding their views of the new security perimeter. The PRI, PAN, and PRD present very general lines and ambiguous comments on the idea of Mexican sovereignty and there is no accounting for the dilemma that the new security architecture of the United States – in its global dimension – represents for Mexico.<sup>27</sup> Historically, the possibility that the United States would encroach upon Mexican territory has been a source of a tension in Mexico. However, there is no national debate about the “new security perimeter,” only sporadic articles on the matter.<sup>28</sup>

In order to coordinate successfully with the United States in the long run, Mexico needs to have a national discussion among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government – in addition to civil society and academia – to diagnose the costs of not having a strategy of State to confront the challenges of the new millennium. Based on the current framework of U.S. security and NORTHCOM, the possibilities of successful Mexican integration are farfetched.

On the other hand, the United States has put forth several strategies to engage Mexico. For example, in 2005 former NORTHCOM Commander Timothy J. Keating, through the American Embassy in Mexico City, invited the Mexican Committee on Marine Affairs to Colorado Springs to share with them their infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> The Committee on Marine Affairs revealed through *La Gaceta Parlamentaria* that they are studying the possibility of Mexico taking part in the U.S. Northern Command.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Major Lawrence Spinetta, U.S. Air Force, wrote that the Mexican Ministry of Defense (which consequently controls the Mexican Air Force) is unlikely to join NORAD.<sup>31</sup> Actually, he was more enthusiastic about the potential of sharing information with the Mexican Secretary of Telecommunications and Transportation – information that can be more useful to the United States because it can facilitate the exchange of passenger lists, aviation movements within Mexican air space, and transit routes of airplanes flying from Mexico to the United States. With this type of information, the United States can better anticipate possible risks to their national territory. In any case, Major Spinetta stated that at least some U.S.-Mexican collaboration exists.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Mexico is very far from really sharing institutional structures and information with the United States and Canada, or at least to the extent that United States shares intelligence with Britain or the European Union.

But with the election of Felipe Calderón in 2006, there has emerged a “new opportunity” for cooperation between Mexico, United States, and Canada on security issues.<sup>33</sup> “For the Pentagon, it’s an opportunity to work with Mexico’s armed forces as they start a gradual transition toward an external defense.”<sup>34</sup> It has to do with Calderón’s main priorities of government: public security, employment, and the fight against poverty. The security issue has to do with combating drug trafficking as the main threat to Mexican national security. Accordingly, Calderon’s government has sought to negotiate with the U.S. government for an aid package of technology, equipment, and training in combating drug trafficking. This “Plan Mexico” has become more pressing with the explosions of gas pipeline facilities in Mexico that were allegedly caused by guerrilla groups in July and September 2007. Both

governments have agreed that “this security cooperation partnership does not involve U.S. military troops, only money for certain kinds of equipment.”<sup>35</sup> However, the package does open a window to a long-held Pentagon aspiration of penetrating the Mexican military’s hermetically closed purchasing system.

Additionally, General Victor Renuart, U.S. Commander of NORAD and NORTHCOM, has pointed out two areas of common concern in regards to military-to-military relations with Mexico:

During the recent North American Leaders’ summit in Montebello, Canada, on August 20-21, President Bush emphasized that the U.S. and Mexico share joint responsibilities for dealing with the common objective of having less violence on both sides of the border in the fight against transnational organized crime and narcotics trafficking. Mexican President Felipe Calderón has identified the activities of the narco cartels as a threat to Mexico’s development and national security.<sup>36</sup>

As we can see, there is a clear convergence and consensus on a threat to both governments, one which is considered part of the Global War on Terror lead by Washington. Consequently, Mexican officials have accommodated themselves to one of the three main threats defined by Washington after 9/11: terrorism, natural disasters, and drug trafficking. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of a “common ground” between Mexico and the United States set forth by the Bush and Calderón governments to deepen bilateral cooperation, but on an asymmetrical basis. In other words, when the American Armed Forces are the most powerful on Earth and have been extended globally, certainly, Calderon’s negotiations fit nicely with Washington’s interests regarding arms sales and security systems to patrol the Mexican border against drug trafficking.

In this new venture, the Department of Defense and NORTHCOM are ready to respond to any Mexican requests for assistance, as General Renuart has noted, “given that President Calderón has directed his military to assist civilian law enforcement in cracking down on the cartels.”<sup>37</sup> In the case of the attacks on natural gas pipelines in central Mexico, General Renuart further notes the U.S. military is ready to assist because

[If such attacks are] occurring on a much broader scale, a force like the drug cartels or terrorists can try to hold a nation hostage because of that, then it has clearly a strategic impact...So we try to build exchanges, training opportunities, cooperation, discussion forums, to allow us to share ideas with the Mexican military and reach a common ground, a common understanding and a common view of how we can work together.<sup>38</sup>

The other area of exploration has to do with more traditional “theater security” cooperation, the General added, where

Mexicans are looking at ways to modernize their naval components, their air and surface defense of key infrastructure elements – the way they do force protection around critical infrastructure within the country. So there is potential for traditional foreign military sales, foreign military funding, education, training, theater security cooperation here.<sup>39</sup>

General Renuart is right in that the natural gas pipeline attacks have proved that the intelligence services in Mexico – civil and military – have been overwhelmed by hostile actions this year and their failure in preventing these attacks reflects a much more strategic, regional scenario if Mexican services are penetrated by organized crime or terrorists in an attempt to attack the United States through Mexico. Adding to this current internal situation and the security priorities of Calderon’s

government, it is clear a more homogeneous and compact vision within the cabinet, looking for improvement and more resources for their services from the Mexican Chamber of Deputies and the U.S. government, has not been seen since the establishment of the Joint U.S.-Mexico Commission of 1942.<sup>40</sup> (At least in terms of Mexico's approach to the United States on military matters).

Responding to the new threats, the secretary of defense in his speech before the Mexican Chamber of Deputies declared that the equipment of the Army and the Air Force is outdated and they need to change their radar system because they "only operate three hours a day" and the rest of the day do not know what really happens in Mexican skies.<sup>41</sup> In fact, he added that the "Merida Initiative" currently negotiated with Washington is "insufficient" for their needs.<sup>42</sup> For its part, the Ministry of the Navy has argued almost simultaneously that new boats, helicopters, aircraft, radar, and marine vehicles are needed to fulfill a new national and regional security role.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the Department of Justice has also declared that their aircraft system used in the war on drugs is really "old."<sup>44</sup> For practical purposes, and in order to close the cycle of this transition, the National Security Research Center (CISEN) has demonstrated the structural setbacks in policy prevention and preparation after the three explosions in central Mexico.<sup>45</sup> These dynamics and transformations lie at the heart of Mexico's political system, with security and sovereignty illustrating two crucial questions: (1) is Mexico in a vulnerable situation where internal and external threats can take advantage of its weaknesses, and (2) is this just the beginning of one on the most radical transformations of Mexico's national sovereignty, security, and independence?

## CONCLUSION

It remains to be seen what a more expeditious insertion of Mexico in the new North American security framework will imply for the future. For now, at the domestic level, Mexico is not prepared to respond to a terrorist attack along the U.S.-Mexico border. Nor is Mexico ready to establish a closer integration with the United States due to Mexico's multiple limitations in terms of doctrine, technology, resources, and political consensus on the one hand and, on the other, the lack of a master plan for national security conception, institutionalization, and implementation at the federal and regional levels to define Mexico's place in the world.

There are other obstacles that remain. Political corruption in Mexico negatively impacts the development of regional security cooperation with the United States and Canada. Cultural and linguistic differences present further challenges for Mexico and the United States as opposed to the Canada-U.S. relationship, where the two countries share a more similar cultural heritage and have a history of cooperation (NATO or NORAD are two prominent examples). Finally, the future of U.S.-Mexico relations has to proceed with a clear premise of mutual recognition, respect, and interdependence at all levels. It is fair to argue that without mutual respect and knowledge of our differences and convergences, little will be possible in terms of developing a truly democratic bilateral and regional security strategy conceived to protect the general public, natural resources, territory, institutions, national identity, and sovereignty of Mexico. In the long run, the only effective means of developing a platform of "mutual responsibility" requires frank discussion of what an effective regional security cooperation plan entails.

*Abelardo Rodríguez is professor of International Relations at the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico City and a member of Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, A.C. Rodríguez holds a PhD in International Studies from the University of*

*Miami, a master's in Foreign Service and Latin American Studies from Georgetown University and a bachelor degree in Political Science and Public Administration from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He has been visiting scholar at University California at Berkeley and professor at El Colegio de la Defensa and El Centro de Estudios Superiores de la Armada de México. Rodríguez is also the author of En las entrañas de Goliath, la política estadounidense y su relación con México (Aguilar, 2001), La Dinastía Bush y "el nuevo siglo norteamericanos" (Aguilar, 2003) and Seguridad democrática, una asignatura urgente, La relación de México con Estados Unidos (Taurus, 2008, forthcoming).*

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, Andres Manuel López Obrador, the leftist candidate, was the major contender to the National Action Party and currently he and his political allies represent the second political force in Congress throughout a coalition of political parties where they do not recognize Felipe Calderón as the "legitimate" president of Mexico. Mexicans will experience this problem of legitimacy at least until the year 2012, when a new presidential election will take place.

<sup>2</sup> Guadalupe Gonzalez, "The Mexican National Security in Transition," in John Bailey and Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *Strategy and Security in U.S.-Mexican Relations Beyond the Cold War* (San Diego, CA: University of California, 1996), 140.

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by President George W. Bush and President Vicente Fox of Mexico at Arrival Ceremony <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010905-2.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Vicente Fox, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo del Presidente Vicente Fox, 2000-2006*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> Vicente Fox, *Vicente Fox a los Pinos, Recuento Autobiográfico y Político* (Océano, México, 1999) and *Vicente Fox Propone* (Ediciones 2000, S.A. de C.V. 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Raúl Benítez Manaut, "Seguridad y Defensa en México, ¿De la Revolución a la globalización?" *Foreign Affairs en Español* 3, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Remarks by President George W. Bush and President Vicente Fox of Mexico at Arrival Ceremony <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010905-2.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Leiken, "Enchilada Lite: A post 9/11 Mexican Migration Agreement" (Center for Immigration Studies, 2002), <http://www.cis.org/articles/2002/leiken.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Carlos Ramírez, "México-Estados Unidos siguen indecisiones de Fox," *El Financiero*, 2002, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the author, Mexico City, August 12, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Pastor, "A North American Community: A modest Proposal to the Trilateral Commission," (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: November 1-2, 2002), <http://www.american.edu/ia/cnas/pdfs/PastorTrilateral.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Santiago Creel Miranda, "La migración y la seguridad entre México y Estados Unidos" *Foreign Affairs en Español ITAM*, 4, no. 2 (2004): 6.

<sup>13</sup> Author's interview with a former advisor to the Clinton administration, Washington D.C., January 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Delgado Alvarado, "Historia de un desencanto", en *Proceso* Núm. 1367 (12 de enero 2003, México D.F.): 12-16.

<sup>15</sup> Louis Nevaer, "After a Year of Zedillo, Mexico Adrift and Leaderless," *Pacific News Service* <http://www.pacificnews.org/jinn/stories/1.02/951121-mexico.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Author's interview with José Ángel Gurría, former Minister of Foreign Relations to the Zedillo administration, December 11, 2002, Mexico City.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Pastor, "North America: Three Nations, a Partnership, or a Community?" paper delivered to the conference on The European Union and Regional Integration: A Comparative Perspective and Lessons for the Americas, Miami European Union Center, April 8, 2005, Miami, USA.

- 
- <sup>18</sup> Special Briefing on the Unified Command Plan, Department of Defense, April 17, 2002 [http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/to4172002\\_to417sd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/to4172002_to417sd.html).
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1
- <sup>20</sup> *Perímetro de seguridad de América del Norte*, Nota de Análisis, Grupo Coppan, Agosto 5, 2003
- <sup>21</sup> U.S. Northern Command <http://northcom.mil>
- <sup>22</sup> Sergio Aguayo Quezada, a leading academic on national security affairs from El Colegio de México wrote that the Northcom's emblem including Mexico in its AOR is "offensive" for a real spirit of cooperation. *Reforma*, 08,29, 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> Jayson Sherman, "U.S., Mexico to Cooperate," *Defense News*, November 8, 2004, 6.
- <sup>24</sup> Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, *Prosperity Agenda*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050323-1.html>.
- <sup>25</sup> Decreto por el que se expide la ley de Seguridad Nacional y se reforma el Artículo 50 Bis de la Ley Orgánica del Poder Judicial de la Federación, February 1, 2005.
- <sup>26</sup> Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, 2007-2012, "Seguridad y Estado de Derecho," <http://pnd.calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/index.php?page=eje1>
- <sup>27</sup> An important exception is led by Alejandro Chanona, leader of Convergencia Democrática political party.
- <sup>28</sup> Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano, "El Comando Norte y sus dilemas en el 'nuevo' perímetro de seguridad de América del Norte" in Raúl Benítez Manaut, *Seguridad y Defensa en América del Norte: Nuevos Dilemas Geopolíticos* (Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, 2007, forthcoming).
- <sup>29</sup> Mercado Angélica, "El Comando Norte 'enamora' a Senadores Mexicanos," *Milenio*, March, 13, 2006, 5-10.
- <sup>30</sup> Senado de la República, Gaceta Parlamentaria, N.33 Año 2005, <http://www.senado.gob.mx/sgsp/gaceta/imprimir.php?sesion=2005/0>.
- <sup>31</sup> Major Spinetta Lawrence, USAF, "Ampliación de la Defensa del Espacio Aéreo Norteamericano (NORAD), una estrategia de participación para México" in Document created: June 6, 2005, *Air & Space Power Journal* - Español Segundo Trimestre 2005.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>33</sup> In fact, it is the outcome of the process inaugurated in 1995 during the historic visit of William Perry to Mexico after the bailout of 1995.
- <sup>34</sup> "New Security Challenges in the Western Hemisphere: Remarks before the Interamerican Dialogue," Stephen Johnson, [http://www.thedialogue.org/uploads/Andean/Johnson\\_IAD\\_Remarks\\_10-16-07.pdf](http://www.thedialogue.org/uploads/Andean/Johnson_IAD_Remarks_10-16-07.pdf).
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> "Top Gun: Gene Renuart Moves Smartly As Senior U.S. Domestic General; Extends Hand to Mexico," <http://www.ndu.edu/chds/docUploaded/RenuartTopGun.pdf>, 2.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> When Mexico was a military ally during World War II.
- <sup>41</sup> "Equipo y materiales del Ejército, obsoletos, advierte el general Galván," *La Jornada*, October 10, 2007, 3.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> "Requiere la Armada renovar barcos, helicópteros, aviones, radares y vehículos," *La Jornada*, October 12, 2007, 3 and 6.

---

<sup>44</sup> “La flota aérea de la PGR, ‘a punto de entrar en crisis’: Romero Apis,” *La Jornada*, October 18, 2007, 8.

<sup>45</sup> “Alertó el Cisen sobre amenazas a la seguridad nacional: SG al Congreso,” *La Jornada*, September 21, 2007, 4.