

# **Mexico's Security Dilemma\***

## **Between Nations, North America and Latin America: The Labyrinth of Solitude**

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With the attacks of September 11 the geopolitical and geo-economics of North America changed completely. In the 90s priorities were in consolidating NAFTA and in its being successful for the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Security was defined principally in guaranteeing commerce. Nevertheless, NAFTA does not include elements of cooperation in security and defense. Immediately after the attacks, the United States sought the immediate collaboration in homeland security from Canada and Mexico mainly to prevent terrorist from entering U.S. territory.

Since the signing of NAFTA, Mexico finds itself wavering between globalization and actively participating in the process of regionalization, and its isolationist stance and nationalism that sustained the political elite of the revolution to reproduce during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

International politics of Mexico are a reflection of this contradiction. Mexico fears the North, ignores the South, it rejects the wall of the North, but establishes barriers in the South. That is to say, it is neither of the North or of the South, because of this Latin America is another labyrinth of Mexican identity. Mexico, *culturally*, is a Latin American country but it does not undertake actions as a coherent state. It is affirmed that Mexico is strategically interdependent but at the same time this reality is not accepted and the country acts without consequence. The result is that it is neither Latin American nor North American. That is, *Mexico is disconnected in the world and in the hemisphere*. This is a *labyrinth of solitude*, as was described by Octavio Paz during the 1950s to distinguish the cultural prejudices and the identity of Mexicans. To be or not to be.

Mexico participates in globalization but at the same time evades it. It has established a strategic relationship with the United States at a commercial level but at the same time it fears it and in important sectors, it rejects the relationship. It postulates the continuance of nationalistic principles and says that they are immutable. This way, the *labyrinth of solitude* converts to the *labyrinth of insecurity*.

### ***The labyrinth of insecurity***

In terms of security, Mexican public opinion is completely divided over the topic of security and does not have faith in the government. The latest survey from the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations signals that despite nationalism, 53 percent of the population is willing to permit the participation of U.S. agents in collaborating with Mexican authorities in surveillance of the border, ports, and airports to combat terrorism (but Mexican leaders oppose this intervention by 68 percent).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Mexicans are divided in cooperation with the United States," *El Universal*, 7 November 2006.

\* This is the first draft of an English translation. It is provided by members of the INSS- 1  
Western Hemisphere Team.

Due to new security threats that have a simultaneous transnational and national “intermestic” character, Mexico’s labyrinth of solitude, in which the government actions are isolated from the world, does not resolve the nation’s security problems. On the contrary, it aggravates, as it does not recognize the *transnational* phenomena of security. All of the phenomena that affect Mexico’s security have transnational variables: narco-trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking of persons, the appearance of armed groups, and others.

In terms of defense this is reproduced in the same manner. Additionally, Mexico does not have conventional external enemies; the armed forces concentrate their missions internally, mainly their fight against narco-traffickers.<sup>2</sup> This way, the armed forces particularly the army refuses to participate in the international system of security, even when some international security problems requiring military participation are in the immediate geopolitical area of Mexico, as is the case of Haiti.<sup>3</sup> By not participating in the international and hemispheric security system, Mexico is at a diplomatic disadvantage, not only with its NAFTA partners but also in Latin America.

### ***Insecurity and democracy***

Within the reasons that explain this complicated labyrinth is the transition to democracy has not been reflected in simultaneous changes in security and defense institutions. Thus, military institutions remain as they operated during the PRI government of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- There is no Ministry of Civil Defense; there are no civilians in the construction of defense policy;
- There is no Joint Chief of Staff in the armed forces;
- Doctrine depends on international policy doctrine (there is no military doctrine for Mexico in external defense);
- The doctrine is only defensive and internal, the Mexican armed forces do not participate in sustained external missions only humanitarian missions (helping in natural disasters in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, including the support of the United States during September 2005 to help the country fight the humanitarian crisis following Hurricane Katrina);
- There is an administrative division in the organization of the armed forces that is not functional;
- The army controls the armed forces;
- The navy is independent (it is a separate Ministry);
- Not reforming the armed forces leaves them to continue being internal political figures of security and responsible for multiple policing and intelligence functions that should be conducted by professional civilian institutions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Laurie Freeman and Jorge Luis Sierra “Mexico: the Militarization Trap”, in Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin (editors) *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America. The Impact of U.S. Policy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, and London, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See Raúl Benítez Manaut “Latin America: Debates over Security and International Military Action”, in *International Security. European-South American Dialogue*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Raul Benitez-Manaut *Mexico and New Challenges of Hemispheric Security*, Woodrow Wilson Center Report on the Americas No.11, Washington, 2004.

The most important backing to domestic security of the country is the formation of the “Federal Forces of Support” of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP, Spanish acronym). This reform has been pending since the 1990s which was the time in which the majority of countries reformed their armed forces, their doctrine, civilian ministries of defense were formed, white books were written, and unprecedented Latin American involvement unfolded in the international system, participation that saw Latin American countries in UN peace operations.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Mexican rejection of regionalization and globalization of security**

The European paradigm for cooperative security is transmitted to South America without problems but not in North America. In the hemisphere almost all mechanisms of integration derive from accords stemming from modalities and principles of government forms (democracy and respect for human rights as a premise); opening of borders for commerce; common positions in international forums (even this premise has had grave difficulties in concentrating itself in these last years); and major communication and cooperation in terms of security and defense. This is observed in MERCOSUR, Central America, and the Caribbean.

In two regions of the hemisphere, North America and the Andean countries, for different reasons, cooperation in security and defense terms does not advance or advancement is limited. In Andean countries, the grave crisis in governability in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia,<sup>6</sup> like the radical government changes in Venezuela and Bolivia, in addition to the Colombian conflict, cooperation in defense and security is practically paralyzed. Even in the Andes, it can be observed, one country cooperates thoroughly with the United States, like Colombia,<sup>7</sup> against another, like Venezuela, who at the very least uses aggressive anti-imperialist talk.<sup>8</sup>

In North America, there does exist cooperation between Canada and the United States with Mexico, this is a system of agreements that make cooperative topics operable, topic by topic and case by case. This happens through Smart Border Agreements.<sup>9</sup> It is a necessary cooperation but it is at a low intensity so as to not arouse the suspicion of nationalist.

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<sup>5</sup> See RESDAL Comparative Atlas on Latin American Defense, RESDAL, Buenos Aires, 2005 ([www.resdal.org](http://www.resdal.org)).

<sup>6</sup> Scott Mainwaring, Ana Maria Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro (editors) *The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> WOLA “Blueprint for a New Colombia Policy,” Washington, 2005, [www.wola.org/Colombia/blueprint\\_new\\_colombia.0305.pdf](http://www.wola.org/Colombia/blueprint_new_colombia.0305.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See Carlos A. Romero “The United States and Venezuela: From a Special Relationship to Wary Neighbors,” in Jennifer L. McCoy and David Myers (editors) *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Between Canada and the United States the signed agreement in December 2001 has 30 points, nevertheless this is an accord that synthesizes dispersed cooperation that is being realized since before September 11, 2001. With Mexico this model between Canada and the United States was used and was signed in March 2002. Nevertheless, the efficacy and accomplishments of the agreements, from the Mexican side, has resource (human and technological) and policy problems. For example, Mexico does not accept the presence of customs or immigration agents in the airports.

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The sub-regional and regional integration process in the Western Hemisphere overall in regards to free trade, in theory, has political, cultural, diplomatic, security and defense components that together add to economic and commercial integration. This is what is called the “paradigm of hemispheric security,” that is similar to a puzzle in which the pieces of cooperation are added slowly.<sup>10</sup> To this type of arrangement, Mexico contributes little to its construction and even on some occasions, such as OAS debates on the hemisphere, it is an obstacle.<sup>11</sup> Mexico is considered one of the most isolated countries in terms of security and defense. Because of this, defense cooperation, the development of mutual confidence, and participation in the international security systems of nations like Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and even countries that supplement their armed forces through foreign policy such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, are more advanced than in Mexico. The United States and Canada are at a higher level having a more evolved defense and security system since their early concept of democracy. In the same way, development of military doctrine in many countries in the Western Hemisphere countries has advanced, but not in Mexico.

### *Conservative obstacle and bi-national problems*

In the United States, there is a prevalence of conservative and unilateral visions for the war on terrorism. This is rejected by Mexican diplomacy and public opinion. In other words, the term “preemptive action” is rejected in international settings. This is what led to the great differences between Mexico and the United States in the UN during 2002-2003, when Mexico was part of the UN Security Council.<sup>12</sup>

Another conflictive factor with the United States is the link of immigration and security established after the September 11th attacks of 2001, expressed through decisions such as building a wall along the border. This complicates cooperation with Mexico.<sup>13</sup> Mexico wants the United States to find a concept of security not only based on the application of law, but to recognize that bi-national labor markets exist, and Mexican citizens should not be seen as a security problem.

As such, there are four elements in both countries that make cooperation difficult:

- Mexico’s political crisis in 2006
- The difficulty of demonstrating success in the war on drugs
- The persistence of nationalists in sectors important to Mexican popular opinion
- The persistence of the conservatives in the US political elite and public opinion

First, in December 2006, Vicente Fox ends his term. There is a very profound political crisis since the election of July 2, 2006. The second political strength of the country, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), does not recognize the triumph of Felipe Calderon.

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<sup>10</sup> See Joseph S. Tulchin, Raul Benitez Manaut and Rut Diamint (editors) *The Puzzle. Conforming hemispheric security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Prometeo Libros, Buenos Aires, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> This was analyzed in detail by Raul Benitez Manaut, *Mexico and the New Colleagues on Hemispheric Security*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Loretta Bondi, *Beyond the Border and Across the Atlantic. Mexico’s Foreign and Security Policy post September 11<sup>th</sup>*, Center for Transatlantic Relations, SAIS, Washington, D.C., 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Rudolph *National Security and Immigration. Policy Development in the United States and Western Europe Since 1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006.

This brings into question the type of political participation the left is engaging in: within the legal and institutional framework, or not, creating mobilizations in the streets and promoting ungovernable circumstances. This is a factor that debilitates cooperation, since Calderon is seen as incapable of maintaining stability within the state. On top of that, there is a very profound political crisis in Oaxaca and a re emergence of leftist guerrillas.

The second factor is the war on drugs. There are reports indicating that 2006 has been the year with the most death and violence in the war on drugs. In 2005, 1,543 deaths were linked to narco-trafficking (in September of 2006 the death toll figure was almost at 1,500 people), and cartels have the greatest combat capabilities as well as military equipment at their disposal. Additionally they are implementing torture methods and assassinations that have only been seen in Colombia. Additionally, in some cases, there is talk of “military superiority.” They recruit cells that are ex-combatants from the special forces of the Mexican army and there have also been discoveries of Guatemalan ex-militaries known as Kaibiles. Moreover, these cartels are operating in the Mexico/United States border region, affecting the security of the border.<sup>14</sup> There are four routes of entry for drugs into Mexico: 1) aerial, landing in Peten, Guatemala and entering Mexico across the land border between Mexico/Guatemala and Mexico/Belize; 2) by the Pacific, maritime way, from Colombia, toward the coasts of Oaxaca and Guerrero; 3) by air, from South America to Cancun; and 4) by air and naval means toward the peninsula of Yucatan, from the coasts of Venezuela, and using the small islands of the Caribbean. From here they are distributed toward the 10 main points of the United States/Mexico border, mainly to the borders of Baja California and California, and towards Texas from Coahuila and Tamaulipas. Similarly, the principal Mexican cartels are that of the Gulf (headed by Osiel Purple) and that of Tijuana (headed by Benjamín Arellano). Likewise there is a confederation of middle cartels called the "Golden Triangle".<sup>15</sup> This has generated the increase of violence in Mexico, through the increase in small associates of the cartels (distributors), the distribution of influential zones, and the search for consumers in Mexico.

Third, Mexican nationalists distrust the United States, they do not recognize the changes in the international system of security, they do not accept the transnational character of many new threats – organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, and maras- and they reject the participation of Mexico in the international system of security. Within the nationalist sector, there are ties to two political parties –the PRI and the PRD- and parts of the federal government, such as the armed forces and the foreign service. They are promoters of expanding infinitely the *labyrinth of solitude* (labyrinth of solitude), since the world is dangerous for Mexico. But this, at the same time, creates a labyrinth of security. The nationalists maintain that the identity crisis of foreign policy can be surpassed presenting the emersion of Mexico by means of diplomatic diversification, and also commercial theory.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, realistic approaches do exist which maintain that relations with the United States and Canada should be transformed, given that strong commercial links should also be reflected in diplomatic matters and security, which deepens ties in North America and gives

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<sup>14</sup> “The House Homeland Security oversight subcommittee report,” Washington, October 17, 2006. Cited in Strategic Forecasting Inc. *Drug Cartels: The Growing Violence in Mexico*, Austin, October 2006 ([www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com))

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp.7-8.

<sup>16</sup> See Jorge Eduardo Navarrete (coord.), *La reconstrucción de la política exterior de México: principios, ámbitos, acciones*, CEICH-UNAM, México, 2006.

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way to the construction of a tri-national community.<sup>17</sup> Both are approaches to surpass solitude, except they are going about it in different ways.

Finally, due to the September 11th attacks, the powerful neighbor to the North went to war. We can not neglect this reality, and consider the war global, without borders, and requires the cooperation (almost unconditionally) of all the countries of the world. The first component of this war is the offensive: the attack on Islamic terrorism and the countries that are supporting it. The second component is the defensive: create a defense to protect the country (homeland security).<sup>18</sup>

Mexico is needed for US defense. Cooperating on homeland security became the principal equation in the security relationship between Mexico and the United States. In 2005 a new tri-national accord was signed, Alliance for the Security and Prosperity of North America (ASPAN), marking present efforts that seek to integrate the matters of security and defense, incorporating social and economic elements. This has met fierce debate, due to frictions between integrationist and nationalist postures. This is a problem for the security of Mexico's northern border and the United States' southern border. Nevertheless, the weakest flank of the North American borders is Mexico's border with Central America.

### ***Migration and the north south vulnerability***

The great poverty of agrarian regions in Central America and Mexico has become a security problem. But the poor are not a security problem: poverty and its causes are. The isolationist speeches promote the bond between migration and security, which has filtered from north to south. The United States transmits its isolationist- protective speech which Mexico then takes up in its politics toward Central America. The migrations cause frictions between the governments of South America and Central America with Mexico, and at the same time, between Mexico and United States.

Since the eighties there has been talk of the country's vulnerability to the south. In those days it was because of the probability that the armed movements of Central America would be replicated in Mexico. Subsequently, in the ninety, the Zapatista crisis, despite having internal origins and causes very different from those of the countries to the south of Mexico, verified this hypothesis. The southern Mexican border is an open border, with little Mexican governmental control, where mafias of human traffickers are prominent, governmental corruption exists in low level officials of sectors responsible for security. This corruption is historic, and is linked to associations with Guatemalan officials. This Mexico-Guatemala relationship gives way in the limits of Tapachula and Hidalgo in Mexico and Tecun Uman in Guatemala. In the forest zone of Petén and the State of Tabasco (for example, in the new border post in El Ceibo) and also in the border Mexico shares with Belize.

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<sup>17</sup> Rafael Fernandez de Castro y Erika Ruiz Sandoval (coords.) Mexico's International Agenda 2006-2012, Mexico, Ariel, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> See Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies. Inside America's War on Terror*, Free Press, New York, 2004 and Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism. Understanding the New Security Environment*, McGraw-Hill Company, 2004.

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Since the eighties, the southern border of Mexico were considered a national security matter due to the armed conflicts in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. In those years there were two main problems: the increase in human trafficking and the increase in weapon and drug trafficking. In the nineties, Zapatista guerrillas appeared in Chiapas, which led to a new variable, an increase in the size of Mexican military forces. Nevertheless, human, weapon and drug trafficking was not reduced. Since the start of the 21st century, illegal trafficking of migrants has increased due to the great economic crisis of Central America, the increase of crime, the emergence of "maras", and new threats are continuously surfacing. The leader of the U.S. Southern Command recently affirmed that an important part in the transportation of drugs from Colombia to United States, is carried out through the air, landing in Petén, Guatemala, and regions of the Mexican Caribbean, the state of Quintana Roo. General Craddock indicated:

“The first example is Guatemala, where we recently visited the Laguna del Tigre National Park area in the Peten region along the border with Mexico. This protected national park is largely unpopulated and, because it is a natural reserve without human infrastructure, it has come to constitute an ungoverned space. The lack of government presence has made this border region an ideal trans-shipment point for drug and other illicit traffickers moving their contraband north, almost always through Mexico. If you fly over this region, an incredible number of clandestine airstrips are visible all the way to the horizon. What we saw there was startling: planes using these airstrips to offload drugs and other cargo for ground transport across the Mexican border.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the Mexican political elite’s greatest weaknesses is its lack of realism, which was clearly manifested in 2001, when President Vicente Fox, recently elected, struck a deal with the United States to sign an important migratory agreement, referred to as "the complete enchilada". According to Fox’s plans, the treaty would include shared management of the border’s oversight and security, even questions of documentation and amnesty, as well as a chapter on the rights of the Mexican immigrants. But after September 11th negotiations froze, and contact with the Mexican government was reduced simply to "consultations," diminishing the possibility that Fox’s position would be taken into account. In other words, in the United States the debate over immigration, now viewed in terms of security, was conceived as an internal debate, mainly in the federal Congress and in state congresses and governments. The diplomatic failure which Mexico faced in negotiations with the United States on the wall and a 2005 amnesty, forced the government to approach other Latin-American governments with similar migratory problems.

The government of Mexico has signed numerous agreements of cooperation with Guatemala and Belize, similar to those signed with the United States. New security concerns are with the illegal trafficking of people with "restricted nationalities," mainly from the Middle East and Asia to avoid the passage of radical Islamic terrorist groups, although within Latin America, Colombians are considered to have a restricted nationality; the trafficking of drugs and weapons; and the presence of organized crime, mainly youth gangs or *maras*.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> John Craddock and Barbara R. Fick “The Americas in the 21th Century. The Challenge of Governance and Security,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 42, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2006, p.12.

<sup>20</sup> The OAS organized a meeting with the governor of Chiapas “Meeting on transnational juvenile gangs: characteristics, importance, and public policy,” in Tapachula, June 16-17, 2005. This meeting was a form to

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weakness of security institutions in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize do not permit complete success in achieving the objective of bringing security and control to the border. Because of this, the southern border of NAFTA is one of the most vulnerable points of North America in regards to security.

### ***Mexico: National Security Terrorism and Intelligence***

In Mexico, national security is undertaken in a traditional form. One of the greatest problems facing the country is that they do not have a doctrine of national security, despite the new law that was approved by the Senate in December of 2004.<sup>21</sup> It required that national security to be undertaken in a more “reactive,” rather than preventative, form that responds to problems only when they are transformed into challenges to the Mexican state. In addition, there is scarce coordination among the federal agencies responsible for national security: the armed forces, attorney general's office of the country, intelligence services like CISEN and those responsible for the war on drug trafficking, the Secretary of Public Security and the Preventive Federal Police, the Office of the secretary of Government and the National Institute of Migration, among others. This lack of coordination adds to the dynamic of the relationship; at times it can be positive and in others it can bring conflict between the federal government and the state.<sup>22</sup> To all the previously mentioned should be added similar problems in Mexico's relationships with other countries of Central America, mainly with Guatemala.<sup>23</sup>

This lack of coordination responds to Mexico's concept of security, which was designed to continue features established in the post-revolution years (1920-1940). There has not been administrative or conceptual reforms that are required to adapt the doctrines, concepts and politics of security to address the challenges of the Post-Cold War and the 21st century era. Since the expansion of the globalization and sub-regionalization and the redefinition of the hemispherical and international security, the traditional concept of borders among States has faded. The new concept of "intermestic security" -this is that security and defense are now national and international phenomena at the same time- has taken root. The threat to security is no longer communism. Today the challenges are terrorism, organized crime, trafficking of weapons, trafficking of people, environmental phenomena, and above all the incapacity of the state structures to confront them.

Suddenly, the attacks on September 11 in the United States introduced as priority the topic of the terrorism in the bi-lateral agenda, and cooperation to battle terrorism became an absolute priority. In Mexico, a military plan immediately unfolded for the protection of the oil rigs in the Bay of Campeche by the Mexican marines. All Mexican strategic installations

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establish agreements between governors in confronting the gang problem in Central America and Southern Mexico.

<sup>21</sup> Senate of the Republic, December 10, 2004, “Of the United Commissions of Government; and of Legislative Studies, the one that contains project of decree by the one that the Law of National Security is sent off and the article is reformed 50 Twice of the constitutional law of the Judicial Power of the Confederacy”, Mexico, December 11, 2005

<sup>22</sup> Seeing Raúl Benítez Manaut, “National Security. Uncoordinated Intelligence”, Focus-Reform, January 23, 2005, pp. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Manuel Angel Castle “The Mexico-Guatemala Border: New Control on Trans-border Migrations in View of Recent Integration Schemes?” North Border, Vol. 15, January-June 2003, Tijuana, Mexico.

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were protected, mainly energy, with priority in the northern and southern borders (the most important generators of energy of Mexico are found in the south, particularly in Chiapas). There has been collaboration on a fast air traffic information exchange, which has helped to protect the north border of Mexico and south U.S. border at critical points (Tijuana-San Diego; Juárez-El Paso; Nuevo Laredo-Laredo) in response to the requests of the Americans to control the trafficking of goods and people. Unofficially, there has been a wealth of information exchanged on foreign travelers at the migratory level. Cooperation has been intense with U.S. law enforcement agencies (FBI, DEA, etc.).

One of the programs of cooperation that was implemented almost immediately was the airports security and border personnel training programs in Mexico by the FBI. At present, it can be affirmed that all who cooperate in Mexican public security, migration, justice and intelligence have participated in said programs of training.

The Mexican intelligence services have weaknesses and strengths. Their operating structure, designed for the Cold War against communism, was under the organization plan of a then authoritarian Mexican state. The intelligence services still are divided into soldiers and civilians and track the movements of opposition personnel and guerrillas. There was a clear division of labor: the soldiers carried out the rural counter-insurgency, and the civilians the urban one. Besides, the method of operating also was traditional: by means of "informing." In addition, corruption was used with infiltration a method. The methods continue. The intelligence services do not have high technology. They apply very traditional doctrines to obtain information, using means of networks that report on the movements of people, bus and airline ticket purchases, hotel reservations, etc.<sup>24</sup> The intelligence services employ these tactics against drug trafficking and also against international terrorism. Furthermore, in the same way there is cooperation with the United States and the governments of Central America and Colombia, through exchange of some information.

In Mexico, as much in the north as in the south this is a reality. There are the phenomena of unregulated migration, trans-border criminal bands, and arms trafficking with police, customs agents and migratory officials limited in their ability to control these flows from Guatemala and Belize into Mexico. This also is true in the interior of Mexico in the states of Chiapas and in smaller measure of Tabasco, Campeche and Quintana, as well as along Mexico's northern border. Thus, the north borders and the south of Mexico are diffuse boundaries between what is legal and what is real. Illegal trafficking of merchandise and people as well as other criminal activities are out of control. The federal and state governments have little effective capacity to achieve effective control. At the end of 2005 and start of 2006, in northern cities of Mexico, there was an increase in confrontations between different bands of drug-traffickers, the confusions of drug-traffickers wearing military uniforms, and the border conflicts between Mexico and the United States. Along

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<sup>24</sup>The Mexican intelligence services are divided into the ones that they developed as the armed forces, and the civilians, that are headlined by the Center of Investigation and National Security (CISEN). The four different strategic intelligence services for the security are: those of military origin (second section of the greater states of the armed forces), judicial (the ones that exist in the attorney general's office of the Republic, the politicians (CISEN) and those of public security. Among them they collaborate indirectly or directly in the war on terrorism. For an analysis of the main intelligence service, the CISEN, see in Sergio Aguayo, "A history of the intelligence services in Mexico," Grijalbo, Mexico, 2001.

the south border, though they did not experience clashes among bands of drug-traffickers, the condition of the forest and the corruption make the border a line that is almost imaginary.

### *The porous South Border*

In the case of the Guatemala-Mexico border, there is an additional factor to these difficulties for an efficient frontier checkpoint: incapacity of the different governmental agencies of both countries to control and "to legalize" the border, corruption of officials, lack of technology, inadequate human resources, and, on many occasions, the impossibility to distinguish between governmental officials and members of the organized crime groups. This allows the southern border of Mexico to "overflow".<sup>25</sup> In Guatemala, additionally, the incapacity of the state adds to a parallel structure of hidden powers between those civil and military officials that blamed themselves for the repression in their country and their bonds with Central American organized crime. The phenomenon of hidden powers is a true challenge for the Guatemalan government. These secret organizations have reoriented their activities toward the crimes of human trafficking, weapons, drugs, contraband. They even have bonds with the leaderships of the now famous youth gang, "crystal balls."<sup>26</sup>

In the southern part of Mexico is where the most serious indices of underdevelopment of the country can be found, in respect to the social-economic level of life of the populations, as a result of institutional delay (the way institutions of the state operate). Besides, there are situations of post-conflict that aggravate the existing situation. In Guatemala, hardly any of the native communities displaced during counter-insurgency operations have been restored since the civil war ended (300 thousand natives were displaced of which 45 thousand moved to Mexico in the 1980s). In Mexico, in spite of the difference of the conflict in Chiapas (January 1994), a situation of political polarization has occurred. The increased presence of the armed forces is meant to dissuade the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) as well as protect the increasingly porous border with Guatemala. The establishment of a Zapatista "clear zone" coincides with the border. It is very difficult for state and federal authorities to control this area. In addition, organized crime, including gangs, continues to increase in the region of the Petén Guatemala spilling across the border.<sup>27</sup>

In 2001 the Office of the Secretary of Government, through the National Institute of Migration, designed the Plan South. Its purpose is "*to strengthen the surveillance and control of the migratory flows among the isthmus of Tehuantepec to the South Border.*"<sup>28</sup> These efforts returned to top priority after the attacks on September 11 in the United States. The government of Mexico began to use protection devices for its strategic installations, many of which are in the southern border of the country. For example, to defend the Campeche, for the first time in the history of Mexico, the government established a zone of exclusion for naval and air navigation. The protection of the south border was seen as

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<sup>25</sup> Alain Basail Rodriguez (coordinating). "Overflowing Borders: Trials on the South Border of Mexico." Juan Pablos, University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas, Mexico, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Peacock and Adriana Beltrán hidden Powers in the Guatemala post conflict. "Illegal armed groups and the forces behind them," Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C., 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Win Savenije. "The Crystal Ball Salvatrucha and the 18<sup>th</sup> St. Neighborhood," *Foreign Affairs in Spanish*, Vol. 4, Not. 2, April-June of 2004.

<sup>28</sup> INM, South Plan Government Secretary, Mexico, July 5, 2001.

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necessary to prevent entrance of possible Islamic terrorists originating from countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

***Conclusions: The challenge of the security and the defense***

So much in the north as in the south, the three governments (United States, Mexico and Guatemala) have tried to establish mechanisms to keep a porous border from being used to move illegal immigrants, drugs, contraband and now terrorists. The challenges are multiple. The borders are open, and they cannot be close. The south border of Mexico is considered one of the main points to try to stop the south-north illegal immigration.<sup>29</sup> It would be the "first filter" of security for North America. The Mexican migratory politics may be considered among the "harsher" of the world.<sup>30</sup> Because of this, the matter is the lack of control of the borders more than the laws that control them.

Because it is not modern and upgraded, the northern Guatemalan border and the Mexican southern border is more vulnerable. This is also due to natural conditions, the thickness of the forest, the lack of communication and the lack of human resources in both countries to protect the rivers, as well as institutional factors. Corruption also abounds with bonds between criminal organizations and smaller officials on both sides. Surpassing both problems is difficult.

The south border of Mexico had been considered a matter of national security for Mexico in two recent occasions: when insurgent and contra insurgent activities expanded in Guatemala (1980-1994); and when the EZLN appeared and the subsequent years after the conflict (1994-2000). It gradually diminished as the level of tension in Chiapas decreased and peace accords were signed in Guatemala in 1996.

Nevertheless, after September 11, two phenomena appeared that again elevated the worries of security on the south border: 1) the requirements of the U.S. to consider the Mexican border a weak point, what obliged both countries to build a cooperative relationship with new security, Mexico-Guatemala; and 2) the expansion of the tri-national Guatemalan, Salvadorian and Honduran gangs, and the control and penetration that has carried into Mexican areas close to the Pacific coast, such as the railroad route and the city of Tapachula, and then go into the Mexican interior. Recent crime reports indicate that they are present in more than 15 Mexican states. This returns the southern border to a matter of "national security", but with one problematic difference. To ensure government control, there must be effective new intelligence activity directed toward the organized crime in cooperation with Guatemalan authorities and of other Central American nations.

The two agreements of security that enforced intelligent borders between Mexico and the United States was signed in March of 2002 and the ASPEN, can also be enforced at the

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<sup>29</sup> John A. Cope "A Prescription for Protecting the Southern Approach", Joint Force Quarterly, No. 42, 3 quarter 2006.

<sup>30</sup> With respect to a comment on a total "in-coherence" of the Mexican migratory authorities. The Mexican government constantly demands the U.S. to just deal with undocumented Mexicans, while human rights groups protest for the rights undocumented peoples captured in Mexico. Even in the jails undocumented people that are in Mexico produces clashes among migrant of different countries. An example of the strict migratory politics of Mexico is notable toward illegal Chinese that approach the Mexican coasts in Baja California.

\* This is the first draft of an English translation. It is provided by members of the INSS- 11 Western Hemisphere Team.

Mexico-Guatemala border, as to try "to computerize" the crossings.<sup>31</sup> It is necessary to indicate that these new problems of frontier security put in risk the theory of the opening of the borders that theorist have favored known as globalization.

Finally, in spite of the nationalism in Mexico, and the resistance of the Secretary of the National Defense to enlarge the cooperation in defense of the United States and in the system of international security, one must have present that in recent years the military cooperation has been successful, and has not been a negative factor to the sovereignty of Mexico. Above all there has been cooperation for the war on terrorism –in matter of intelligence-, and the training of the Special Forces of the army, air force and armed forces of Mexico –that are used mainly against the drug trafficking. Also, a positive point was the temporary income of the Mexican troops to U.S. territory in September of 2005 to help the victims of the hurricane Katrina, and the successful Mexican military presence in humanitarian missions. These elements transform little by little the isolationist military doctrine of Mexico. Similarly, the Mexico marines have enlarged coastal cooperation with United States. There is also a possibility for contribution within North Command and the U.S. army.

Another element that has opened a window of opportunity is the change of government in Mexico and the change in balance of power in the United States in favor of the Democratic Party in the recent elections. Mexico expects a change in the U.S. immigration policy, which dissociates itself with the security elements in hopes of generating a climate of confidence. Finally it is required, in matter of defense, to increase mutual confidence to its maximum, so that negative factors between both countries disappear or are reduced.

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<sup>31</sup> David A. Shirk in "NAFTA+Plus? U.S.-Mexican Security Relations After the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks", presentation for the conference "Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico", Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, May 15-17, 2003.