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SOCIAL APPROACH, AMLO'S NEW STRATEGY TO THE SECURITY PROBLEM IN MEXICO

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JCSP 45

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT***SOCIAL APPROACH, AMLO'S NEW STRATEGY TO THE SECURITY PROBLEM
IN MEXICO**

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SOCIAL APPROACH, AMLO'S NEW STRATEGY TO THE SECURITY PROBLEM IN MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

On December 10, 2006, the newly appointed Mexican President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (FCH) addressed a message to the nation, in which he highlighted a series of objectives to be achieved by his government and would be embodied in the National Plan of Development (NDP) 2007-2012.

Among them was the restoration of the rule of law and security of Mexicans, with this purpose, sought to retake control of the territories seized by organized crime, especially territories encountering the most violent manifestation of this phenomenon, Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)¹. At the end of his government, FCH's strategy against organized crime was harshly criticized by civil society and opposition politicians², mainly because of the use of military forces in police activities and for not being able to reduce the rates of violence³.

Upon election in 2012, President Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) also proposed a series of national goals, including the program *Mexico in Peace*⁴, in which he intended to end the wave of violence that he had inherited from the previous government through a change in strategies. The basis of his strategy was the creation of a new security body called the National Gendarmerie, the strengthening of the intelligence service, reform of

¹ Mexico, Federal Executive Power. "National Development Plan 2007-2012". Last accessed 20 April 2019. http://pnd.calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/pdf/PND_2007-2012.pdf

² Oyarbide, César. "The failure of a strategy: a critique of the war against drug trafficking in Mexico, its justifications and effects". Last accessed 20 April 2019. <http://nuso.org/articulo/el-fracaso-de-una-estrategia-una-critica-a-la-guerra-contra-el-narcotrafico-en-mexico-sus-justificaciones-y-efectos/>

³ Castañeda, Jorge. Aguilar, Rubén. "The war against drugs, the great failure of Calderón". Last accessed 20 April 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/322831/la-guerra-antinarco-el-gran-fracaso-de-calderon>

⁴ Mexico, Federal Executive Power. "National Development Plan 2013-2018". Last accessed 20 April 2019. <http://www.cofemer.gob.mx/documentos/marcojuridico/rev2016/PND%202013-2018.pdf>

the police, and better coordination among security agencies. These reforms were implemented; however, EPN maintained the soldier's presence in patrolling the streets.

At the end of its mandate, in its Sixth Government Report, EPN stated that some of the objectives in the security area had not been met, and there were even indications that some statistics had worsened, such as the number of homicides⁵.

Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) was elected and assumed the presidency of Mexico on December 1, 2018. During his campaign and documented in the Project of Nation 2018-2024, AMLO promised peace and hope to his voters through a change in security strategy.⁶ His plan was based mainly on the prevention of crime, and on withdrawing the armed forces (FFAA) from public security tasks.

In AMLO's recent NDP 2019-2024, he aims to change the security paradigm by addressing a comprehensive strategy in order to combat insecurity at its origin. He seeks a greater social approach that will move away from national military action against the DTOs as a means to reduce the levels of violence.⁷

The analysis of the security strategies established in the NDPs and the results obtained by the last two presidents of Mexico make it clear that the strategies to reduce violence in the country through the frontal combat against the drug cartels did not yield the desired fruits. They failed because they did not address the causes of the problem. AMLO, during his presidential campaign, proposed to solve the problem by addressing the political, social and economic causes of the problem integrally. This approach

⁵ Mexico, Presidency of the Republic. "Sixth Government Report". Last accessed 03 May 2019. http://cdn.presidencia.gob.mx/sextoinforme/informe/6_IG_RESUMEN_EJECUTIVO.pdf

⁶ MORENA. Nations Project 2018-2024. Last accessed 03 May 2019. <http://morenabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Plan-de-Nacion-de-Morena.pdf>

⁷ Mexico, Presidency of the Republic. "National Development Plan 2018-2024". Last accessed 03 May 2019. <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

allowed him to change the mindset on the use of force against the DTOs, which in itself is the primary generator of violence in the country.

This approach represents the main change in AMLO's strategy to reduce the problem of insecurity in Mexico. However, this situation has generated many questions. In this work, I will argue that Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's national security strategy to reduce violence within Mexico is a truly novel and distinct approach to those of his predecessors.

To explain the problem and be able to generate a response, the origins and roots of the DTOs in Mexico will be briefly discussed, and then the strategies presented by past presidents to combat violence by the Mexican government will be explored. Finally, in response to the thesis question, arguments and opposing opinions will be presented, and the results of this investigation will be expressed in the conclusion.

SHORT HISTORY OF DRUGS IN NORTH AMERICA AND THEIR MEXICAN ROOTS

The production, processing and transport of drugs in North America is not something new in our time. There is a history of drug production and consumption since pre-Hispanic and colonial times where the use of "Peyote" became a common practice in the field of medicine and ceremonial acts.⁸

By the year 1805, morphine derived from opium was considered a miracle drug. In the Mexican-American War of 1846, the use of marijuana was common among combatants. In the United States Civil War, doctors on both sides prescribed morphine

⁸ Lopez Betancourt, Eduardo. "History of drugs in Mexico". Last accessed 12 April 2019. <https://libros-revistas-derecho.vlex.es/vid/historia-drogas-mexico-406261922>.

and other drugs, not only to treat pain but also other diseases such as malaria, dysentery and diarrhea. Morphine addiction after the war was known as ‘army disease.’⁹

In 1906 the Chinese Government led a campaign against opium itself that was supported by the United States Government who would subsequently push for the international opium convention in 1909. The conferences in Shanghai and The Hague focused on the suppression of opiates and the limitation of narcotics for medical use. This antecedent gave rise to the efforts of the United States (US) to control the international narcotics traffic that continues to this day.¹⁰

In Mexico during the Revolutionary Era, soldiers extended the use of marijuana throughout the country, and it was not until 1926 that the Mexican government prohibited the cultivation and trade of marijuana. Between 1920 and the beginning of 1930, the prohibition of alcohol in the US promoted the emergence and consolidation of organized crime in Mexico. During this consolidation, organized crime acquired the necessary experience to expand into the drug trafficking business in the early 1940s.¹¹ By the end of the 1930s, the Mexican Government ordered the army to destroy marijuana and poppy fields, while in the US the Federal Bureau of Narcotics was created.

During World War II, Japan took control of the opium plantations in Asia. This situation forced the US to look for alternative sources of opium to produce morphine. Mexico was a legal supplier of opium; however, it also opened the door to illegal heroin trafficking.¹² By the end of the war, the US resumed its opium trade with Asia. Troops

⁹ Grayson, George W. “*Mexico’s struggle with Drugs and Thugs*”. Foreign Policy Association No.331. New York, NY. (2009), 10.

¹⁰ Willoughby, W.W. “Opium as an International Problem”. Last accessed 12 April 2019. <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/e1920/willoughby.htm>

¹¹ Grayson, George W. “*Mexico’s struggle with Drugs and Thugs*”. Foreign Policy Association No.331. New York, NY. (2009), 14.

¹² *Ibid*, 15.

returning from the Second World War increased the overall demand for drugs and in Mexico marijuana production began on a large scale.

Between 1947 and 1952 the government in Washington pressed for the regulation of exports of controlled substances to the US.¹³ The Mexican Government created the Federal Security Directorate which was in charge of combating the narcotics trafficking, but who in turn, became a mediator between the traffickers and the government.¹⁴

When President Richard M. Nixon (1969-74) was serving, it was discovered that US veterans of the Vietnam conflict (1959-1975) had a deepening dependency on marijuana and heroin.¹⁵ The report shown to the president pointed to Mexico as the primary source of heroin and marijuana in North America and as such a critical element on the road to heroin addiction.¹⁶ He initiated a series of initiatives to fight this illicit trade.

In 1970, President Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act whose actions were the basis for the War on Drugs. Following this, in 1973, the US Congress created the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) with the responsibility of combating drug trafficking. Between 1972 and 1976, the Mexican DTO's controlled three-quarters of the heroin market in the US, in addition to supplying the US demand for marijuana.

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush appointed the Pentagon as the only agency for the detection and monitoring of drug shipments to the US through the National Defense Act. Likewise, a campaign of economic support, and military and police assistance began to stop the cocaine trade targeting its origins in South America (Peru,

¹³ Grayson, George W. "*Mexico's struggle with Drugs and Thugs*". Foreign Policy Association No.331. New York, NY. (2009), 16.

¹⁴ Ibid, 16.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁶ Ibid, 17.

Ecuador Colombia).¹⁷ This fact caused the Mexican cartels to migrate from transporters to producers of the drugs to be sold in the US.¹⁸

In 1993, US President Bill Clinton began a national campaign against drug abuse and the violence that it produced. This action encourages drug producing countries to fight against the bands of traffickers and producers in their respective countries.¹⁹ In Mexico, former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was pleased with Washington's proposal in order not to block the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994).²⁰

An escalation of violence began in 2002 within Mexico among drug cartels that sought to dominate drug trafficking routes to the US. So in 2006, when President FCH came to power, he set among his objectives the recovery of the rule of law in Mexico. This situation was his highest priority, for which he commenced direct combat against the DTOs.²¹

The current situation of violence caused by drug trafficking makes it clear that none of the strategies carried out in the past has put a definitive halt to the production, transportation and consumption of drugs in the North American region.

EXECUTION OF STRATEGIES

Felipe Calderon Hinojosa

In December 2006, just 11 days after taking office, President FCH announced his government's intention to fight organized crime directly. He sought to reduce violence

¹⁷ Grayson, George W. “*Mexico’s struggle with Drugs and Thugs*”. Foreign Policy Association No.331. New York, NY. (2009), 29.

¹⁸ Ibid, 29.

¹⁹ Ibid, 31.

²⁰ Ibid, 32.

²¹ Lee, Brianna; Danielle Renwick. “Mexico’s Drug War”. Council on Foreign Relations. Last accessed 14 April 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/search?keyword=Brianna%20%20Lee>

related to drug trafficking, the consumption of drugs among the population, the impersonation of government officials, and the penetration of national institutions by the DTOs.

To achieve the above and making use of his presidential powers, he launched Mexico's version of the *War on Drugs*, calling it the *National Crusade against Crime*.²² This act allowed the Federal Police, and the Armed Forces (FFAA) to act, with the latter acting under a complex legal framework for functions of public security.²³

Under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Security Council and the National Public Security System coordinated actions against the DTOs. The Mexican Army, being the institution with the most significant number of elements (approximately 215,000), led the land operations, followed by the Navy (65,000) and finally the Federal Police (56,000).²⁴

The Armed Forces carried out essential tasks of the security strategy, exercised police functions, took command of the police, and exercised special operations against the DTOs.²⁵ These actions can be summarized as capture or elimination of the leaders of criminal organizations. Although they were tactical successes, it was, in fact, an operational failure, as these initiatives generated power struggles within the DTOs which consequently increased violence and death in the streets.

The significant rate of apprehension and the confiscation of arms and drugs were the measures of success of the government in this strategy. However, the increased

²² Grayson, George W. "*The impact of president Felipe Calderon's war on drugs on the armed forces: The prospects for Mexico's militarization and bilateral relations*". Strategic Studies Institute. (2013).

²³ Mexico, CNDHDF. "Militarization of public security". Last accessed 20 April 2019. https://cdhdf.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/dfensor_08_2011.pdf

²⁴ Montero, Juan Carlos. "The strategy against organized crime in Mexico: analysis of public policy design". Last accessed 05 May 2019. <http://perfilesla.flacso.edu.mx/index.php/perfilesla/article/view/115>

²⁵ Mexico, Federal Executive Power. "National Development Plan 2007-2012". Last accessed 20 April 2019. http://pnd.calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/pdf/PND_2007-2012.pdf

violence did not go unnoticed by the opposition political parties in Congress and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) supporting the defence of human rights. They harshly criticized the increase in violent deaths in the country.²⁶

The results obtained in terms of security at the end of the government of President FCH were negative. Statistics showed an increase in homicides and a marked sense of insecurity in society resulting in 112,332 registered deaths.²⁷

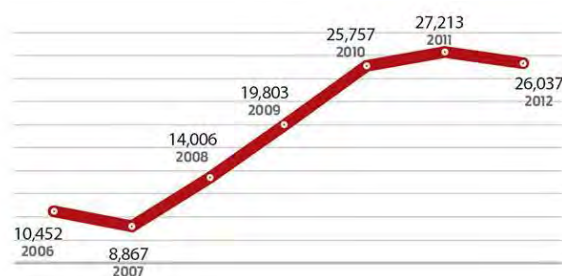


Figure 1. homicide statistics during FCH's six-year term

Enrique Peña Nieto

In its NDP, the government of President EPN (2012-2018) stated that in order to meet its security objectives it would place greater emphasis on planning, prevention and inter-institutional coordination for the protection of the population, thus moving away from an open war against the DTOs. One of the pillars within the institutional transformation of its strategy would be the creation of a National Gendarmerie with which, territorial control would be strengthened in areas with weaker institutions. However, it would keep the Armed Forces in public security as long as the state police were consolidating.²⁸

²⁶ Carrasco Araizaga, Jorge. "The military bible of the war of Calderón". Last accessed 18 April 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/377034/la-biblia-militar-de-la-guerra-de-calderon>

²⁷ México, National Institute of Statistic and Geography. "Deaths by homicide". Last accessed 18 April 2019. https://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/olap/consulta/general_ver4/MDXQueryDatos.asp?#Regreso&c=

²⁸ Ramirez, Carlos. Political Indicator. "Security strategy of President Enrique Peña Nieto". Last accessed 20 April 2019. <http://www.indicadorpolitico.mx/images/pdfs/cuadernos/estrategia-seguridad.pdf>

By the middle of its mandate, the National Gendarmerie stalled, never reaching its numbers of planned elements. As well, the internal security law that would establish the legal framework for the functions of the Armed Forces in public security activities did not see the public light after being declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Justice.²⁹

However, the proposed strategy did achieve increased intelligence and operational coordination among security agencies, but it did not manage to diminish the rates of violence in the country. The Armed Forces continued executing police functions and operations against the leaders of the DTOs. According to the official data of the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics, the homicides in 2017 were 120,473 deaths, surpassing those reached during the presidency of President Calderon.³⁰

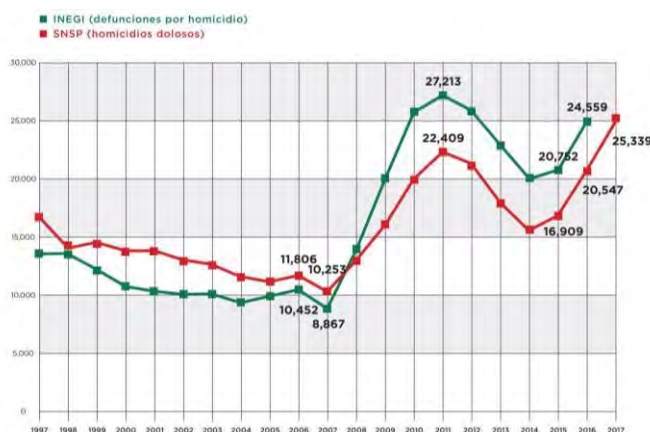


Figure 2. Homicide statistics during the period 1997-2017.

A situation that turned out to be a constant for both presidents was that in the presence of military and police personnel in the regions affected by organized crime there was an increase in the number of homicides. It is assumed that before the arrest or death

²⁹ Angel, Arturo. "Court invalidates Security Law for the risk involved in turning military into police" Last accessed 20 April 2019. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/11/corte-ley-seguridad-interior/>

³⁰ México, National Institute of Statistic and Geography. "Deaths by homicide". Last accessed 20 April 2019. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/app/indicadores/?t=0200003000000000&ag=00#divFV6300000264>

of the leaders of the DTOs, power gaps were created within the organizations, and internal struggles for power or territories were the reason for the increase in violence.³¹

HOW IS AMLO'S SECURITY STRATEGY DIFFERENT?

On May 1, 2019, AMLO presented his NDP. Like its predecessors, it expresses in its plan its national objectives, strategies and the priorities that will receive focus during the period of its mandate. Also, it will be the document of record for the entire federal public administration.

The NDP 2019-2024 integrates a series of topics that integrally lead to improve living conditions and thus contribute to the reduction of the rates of violence in the country.³² Addressing specifically the issue of security, the number one item on its agenda is Politics and Government, which includes fighting corruption, recovering the rule of law and changing the security paradigm.³³

In this last point, the reformulation of the fight against drugs is defined as the construction of peace, articulation of national security, public security and peace, reorientation of the Armed Forces, and finally the establishment of the National Guard (NG).³⁴

Days before the publication of the NDP, AMLO said that in six months it would be able to reduce the levels of violence. He assured Mexico, that with three actions

³¹ Flannery, Nathaniel. *“Calderon’s War”*. Journal of International Affairs. New York. (2013), 186.

³² Mexico, Presidency of the Republic. “National Development Plan 2018-2024”. Last accessed 03 May 2019. <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

³³ Ibid, 18.

³⁴ Ibid, 23.

security in the country could be guaranteed; reinforcing social programs, eradicating government corruption and by deploying the NG.³⁵

First, the fight against government corruption is given primacy. Through its eradication, crimes that public officials are complicit in will be reduced.

Second, the reformulation of the fight against drugs presents one of the most significant changes in the field of security. Considering that prohibitionist policies are the causes of violence and the escalation of the public security crisis, it proposes the reorientation of resources currently allocated to combat trafficking and applies them to the comprehensive care of those suffering from addiction; in order to rehabilitate them and reintegrate them into society.³⁶

Third, entrepreneurship in the construction of peace. When faced with the impossibility of defeating the various criminal activities exclusively using police and military means, it proposes to adopt models of transitional justice that guarantee the rights of the victims. At the same time, it allows for the disarmament and detention of offenders while respecting their rights. This strategy further supports the fulfillment of the four axioms of transitional justice: truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-repetition for Mexican Citizens.

Lastly, the NG is established as a permanent institution under the police that represents the main instrument of the federal executive in the prevention of crime, the preservation of public security and the fight against criminal activity in the country.

³⁵ Castillo, Elia. "In 6 months will decrease insecurity, estimates AMLO". Last accessed 03 May 2019. <https://www.milenio.com/politica/amlo-en-6-meses-disminuir-inseguridad>

³⁶ Mexico, Presidency of the Republic. "National Development Plan 2018-2024". Last accessed 03 May 2019. <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

Francisco Rivas, director of the National Citizen Observatory (NCO), has criticized AMLO's security strategy as repetitive when referring to NG.³⁷ He states that the security problems will not be resolved because they used the same Armed Forces to shape it and to combat violence as the two previous presidents did.³⁸ In effect, the NG represents a point of comparison with past strategies, as would be the case of the National Gendarmerie proposed by EPN; however, although initially formed from the Armed Forces they will not be trained like regular troops. They are composed of elements of the Federal, Military and Naval Police with police training and not military tactics.³⁹

On the other hand, specialists, opinion leaders and members of civil society warn of an eventual militarization of the country through the broad deployment planned for the NG, just as FCH and EPN did when deploying to the Armed Forces.⁴⁰ Given this, it is essential to mention that the constitutional reforms on NG authorized by Congress specify the characteristics and scope of this new public security organization, under these circumstances, the configuration of the NG supports the differentiation of this new strategy.⁴¹

³⁷ México. National Citizen Observatory. Last accessed 20 April 2019. <http://onc.org.mx/>

³⁸ Arista, Lydia. AMLO's security strategy is the same: Francisco Rivas. Last accessed 20 April 2019. <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/La-estrategia-de-seguridad-de-AMLO-es-la-misma-Francisco-Rivas-20190420-0009.html>

³⁹ Mexico, Presidency of the Republic. "National Development Plan 2018-2024". Last accessed 04 May 2019. <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

⁴⁰ Semple, Kirk; Villegas, Paulina. "Mexico Approves 60,000-Strong National Guard. Critics Call It More of the Same". Last accessed 04 May 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/world/americas/mexico-amlo-national-guard.html>

⁴¹ México. Congress of the Union. DOF. "Decree by which various provisions of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States are reformed, added and repealed, in matters of National Guard". Last accessed 04 May 2019. https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5555126&fecha=26/03/2019

CONCLUSION

The historical analysis of drug trafficking in North America, specifically between the US and Mexico, has made it clear that this is the oldest cross-border security problem. The various historic strategies were undertaken to prevent illegal drug consumption, transfer and production on both sides of the border have proved unsatisfactory. We can affirm that the poor results obtained in the attempt to contain drug trafficking have unleashed a severe public health and safety problem on both sides of the border.

It was demonstrated that the strategies of the last two Mexican presidents, in which they decided to physically confront the DTO through the use of public and military force, were counterproductive, with a high cost of human lives, high insecurity sense within the society and severe political consequences for his respective parties. The result of this affirmation was manifested politically in the presidential elections of July 2018, when then-candidate AMLO proposed a different way of combating insecurity in the country.

As argued through these points, AMLO's security strategy sets it apart from its predecessors. His approach to not considering a violent confrontation with the DTOs, placing great emphasis on the fight against corruption, support for the victims of addictions and the deployment of the NG in preventive police actions will be the basis of his future success.

On the other hand, it is crucial to keep in mind the reason why the previous strategies failed to meet their security objectives. For this reason, it is necessary to look to the future and propose the means of control, as well as the measures of effectiveness with

which this strategy will be evaluated, and which will have to be formally reflected in its first government report on September 1, 2019.

In the meantime, the risk of failure would be noticed if the objectives set out in the strategy's axes were not dealt with in a balanced manner. One of them and possibly the most complicated one will be the social factor since it depends in large part on the social programs and the economic support that the government can provide in support of the strategy. Therefore, if the objectives of national economic growth that would directly benefit Mexican society are not met, the government will not be able to balance efforts positively in favour of security.

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