



Mexico's Southern Border Issues and Their Implications for National Security

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INTRODUCCION

1. The Mexican State, mainly the institutions responsible for controlling the migratory flow of Central Americans crossing Mexico's Southern Border, has not achieved comprehensive actions to reduce drug trafficking, the passage of undocumented migrants, and other elements that cause insecurity.¹ The security issue is addressed in the National Development Plan (PND) 2019-2024. Regarding the "paradigm shift in security."²

2. The concept analyzed in this paper is related to the lack of security on the southern border, which is why it is pertinent to mention a reflection made by Dr. Vizarratea, referring to: "The globalization in which we are immersed, product and exchange of the natural conformation of resources, of the intention of national powers in struggle, has forced to narrow borders." (Vizarratea, 2013, p. 157).³

3. Due to its geographic location and wealth of natural resources, Mexico's southern border is considered a region of great importance for the country's development.⁴ However, in contrast, the southern border states have the highest poverty rates, with little political attention, inequality, unemployment, marginalization, having a low human development index (HDI)⁵. These factors have allowed the proliferation of illegality, informality, and a diverse set of problems that impact the states that make up the region.

4. National security is affected by organized crime due to the collateral damage of violence and deterioration of the social fabric at the national level. Castillejos considers the impact on youth to be essential and refers to the following: "Drug trafficking should be considered a national security problem that puts the State itself at risk, as it focuses on damaging the health of young people and children, and also generates violent crimes of the common order due to the purchase of narcotics" (Castillejos Escobar; Castillejos Cervantes, 2002, p. 53).

¹ Crisisrroup. "La Frontera Sur de Mexico: seguridad, violencia y migracion en la era de Trump". <https://www.crisisgroup.org/es/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/66-mexicos-southern-border-security-violence-and-migration-trump-era>

² Gobierno de Mexico. "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2018-2024". <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

³ Dr. Emilio Vizarratea is a professor at CESNAV (Centro Superior de Estudios Navales) and has published articles on the Mexican Political System, State Theory, Planning and Development, National Security, among others.

⁴ Proyectos Mexico. "oportunidades" <https://www.proyectosmexico.gob.mx/por-que-invertir-en-mexico/ubicacion-ideal/#territorio>

⁵ PNUD, Mexico. "Indice de Desarrollo Humano". http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/work/models/SEDESOL/Resource/139/1/images/IDH_EF_presentacion_04032015_VF%20Rodolfo.pdf

5. Immigration translates into human mobility, which is observed nationally and internationally, generated as a symptom of social, economic, and security dissatisfaction in the places of origin.⁶ Nowadays, this mobility of people has become broader and more complex since the traditional migratory flows have notoriously changed their customs and routes due to their affectations. Despite maintaining its permanence, this phenomenon cannot be explained with the conventional concept of migration.

6. The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States resulted in the tightening of border control by U.S. border security forces and the construction of a wall parallel to the border along almost the entire length of the border. In recent years, the wall has had repercussions that have exacerbated problems on the Southern Border due to the dispute over the control of territories and routes by the differently organized crime cartels for illicit activities such as human smuggling and trafficking.⁷

7. Organized crime in the world tends to evolve; it began its activities essentially with the trafficking of substances prohibited by most countries' laws. As time went by and new cartels appeared, and parallel to the constant movement of international migratory groups, organized crime included human trafficking. When controlled by crime, this activity increased the cost of moving people, resulting in significant economic gains for this criminal group. This activity benefited from the little or no presence of the INM (National Migration Institute) in the Southern Border, which according to the Migration Law, is considered solely responsible for controlling immigrants, not allowing any authority to interact with them unless there is a crime.⁸

8. The interaction of immigrants with organized crime, in most cases, begins at the Southern Border, in other cases, it begins in the transcontinental countries of origin, where they use transnational organized crime to be taken to the U.S., in the book (CEAMEG, p. 25) states that "The Southern Border of Mexico, lives the effects of immigration dynamics in conditions of great vulnerability, in the presence of organized crime and gangs," a problem that to date has been increasing due to the insecurity in Central America, caused by the violence of the Maras against the general population.

9. Organized crime uses the profits generated by human smuggling and human trafficking to corrupt authorities of the three levels of government⁹. On many occasions,

⁶ Miriam Quiroa. "Inmigracion". <https://economipedia.com/definiciones/inmigracion.html>

⁷ Crisisrroup. "La Frontera Sur de Mexico: seguridad, violencia y migracion en la era de Trump". <https://www.crisisgroup.org/es/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/66-mexicos-southern-border-security-violence-and-migration-trump-era>

⁸ Gobierno de la Republica. "Ley de Migracion". https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LMigra_200521.pdf

⁹ El Heraldo de Chiapas. "Corrupcion dentro del INM". <https://www.elheraldodechiapas.com.mx/local/blanco-urbina-denuncia-corrupcion-dentro-de-inm-7884730.html>

they use immigrants as distractions to block the Armed Forces' operations. The dynamics of immigration should be considered a generator of vulnerabilities. Among others is the transmission of pandemics and epidemics, which can be from their places of origin or in the safe houses where they are crowded when an organized crime has kidnapped them massively, under extremely unsanitary conditions.

HYPOTHESIS

10. An integrated effort of the Federal, State, and Municipal Government Institutions will allow us to control and provide security at the border.

NATIONAL SECURITY IN MEXICO

11. The concept of National Security (NS) has been evolving. There is already a National Security Law and a definition of this. According to the National Public Security Strategy (DOF 16/05/19) and the National Development Plan (DOF 17/07/19), the Mexican Government understands national security as an indispensable condition to guarantee national integrity and sovereignty, free from threats the State, in search of building lasting and fruitful peace. This document clarifies the importance of the issue at a strategic level and the consequences that may arise if antagonisms are not addressed on time.¹⁰

12. The Mexican State is currently immersed in a problem that has severely affected national development in all its aspects, with particular repercussions in the MSB (Mexico's southern border), which is made up of some of the poorest states in the country. The political situation that has affected the MSB since the beginning of the current six-year term also affects the MSB due to the migratory dynamics and the lack of political agreements to address human trafficking and smuggling, insecurity, drug trafficking, among others.¹¹

13. On the other hand, the severe international economic crisis, which affects the Mexican State due to globalization and commercial dependence on the United States of America, has not allowed the current government to comply with the goals outlined in its PND (National Development Plan).¹² In the case of the region under study, it has been impossible to inject economic resources to generate jobs and create the necessary infrastructure for the control and care of migrants to reduce the antagonisms that occur in this area.

¹⁰ Gobierno de Mexico. "Seguridad Nacional". <https://www.gob.mx/cni/documentos/conoce-que-es-la-seguridad-nacional>

¹¹ Lidia Arista. "Muro en la frontera Sur de Mexico pone a migrantes en la mira del crimen". <https://politica.expansion.mx/mexico/2021/09/13/operativo-en-la-frontera-sur-de-mexico-pone-a-migrantes-en-la-mira-del-crimen>

¹² Gobierno de Mexico. "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2018-2024". <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PLAN-NACIONAL-DE-DESARROLLO-2019-2024.pdf>

14. The insecurity on the southern border causes the weakening of national power. This affects economic development due to the lack of investment, especially foreign investment; social development due to the lack of jobs and the increase of organized crime organizations; political development due to the current inability to establish debate and consensus on security issues; and finally, the military due to its direct participation in public security functions.

Vulnerability of the Southern Border of Mexico

15. The following describes the problems that arise in the MSB due to migration, highlighting the vulnerability of this border area and then explaining how each of the antagonisms encountered affects the SN.

16. The increase in the flow of undocumented people from Central American countries migrating to the northern border of Mexico and the United States of America in search of the American dream through the southern border of our country has had an impact on the security of this zone, with the simultaneous development of human smuggling and trafficking organizations and criminal gangs, leading to an increase in drug and arms trafficking and the expansion of transnational illicit networks with the participation of foreigners.¹³

17. The lack of legal protection of these migrants due to the lack of immigration documents, and the lack of infrastructure and resources of the authorities to control these flows, increases the vulnerability, especially of women and children, due to possible violations of their rights in terms of dignified and fair treatment with essential services, attention in the correct process of securing, accommodation and repatriation, associated with the corruption of these authorities who commit abuses and extortion; it is worth mentioning that they are also easy prey for criminal groups, who commit robbery, kidnapping, rape, and extortion, among others.

18. In terms of bridges and controlled points of entry, the lack of a more robust state migration policy, coupled with limited material and human resources, results in a border with enormous porosity, making this border area of Mexico a nerve center for the authorities of the National Migration Institute.

19. There are more than 45 vehicular border crossings and more than 300 informal crosswalks on the Mexico-Guatemala border¹⁴, which makes it difficult to control these areas due to the impossibility of keeping them under surveillance. The municipalities of Tuxtla Chico, Metapa de Domínguez, Frontera Hidalgo, Suchiate, and Tapachula, in the

¹³ ONU. "Migración 2021". <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/12/1501972>

¹⁴ Isain Mandujano. "La Frontera Sur....por donde todo pasa". <https://www.inm.gob.mx/gobmx/word/wp-content/plugins/galerias/includes/archivos/pdf/06062112.pdf>

State of Chiapas, form a hub for the trafficking of illegal immigrants, women, and minors, merchandise, weapons, and narcotics, activities that are carried out constantly in the face of the scarce presence of federal and state authorities.



Figure 1: Informal crosswalks MSB
SOURCE: INM (National Migration Institute)

20. Migratory flows, mostly from Central American countries, have grown exponentially. The MSB is today a multinational migratory corridor. On this border, the risks and vulnerability of migrants have ceased to be occasional and unconnected practices and have become coordinated and standardized acts.

Human Trafficking

21. The significant vulnerability of the undocumented migrant population due to their status as foreigners and often victims of human trafficking is particularly evident in the MSB (with Guatemala). It has been identified that some of the polleros (people who cross migrants) belong to the "zetas" group, who extort money from migrants, rob them of their property, and sometimes even murder them.

22. According to Angeles Cruz and Martha Rojas ECOSUR (2003), the undocumented migrants most at risk are women who, having crossed the border voluntarily or because of trafficking, are tricked and forced to work in bars and brothels. Likewise, when they travel alone, they face sexual harassment; when working in the fields, industry, and services, they suffer physical and emotional harm, among others, from their fellow travelers and the smugglers.

23. Regarding human trafficking, Tapachula stands out, identified in 2000 by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF-UN) ¹⁵as the second city in the world after Hong Kong, where child prostitution and sexual abuse of minors are high. Other

¹⁵ UNICEF. "Violencia contra niños y niñas en México".
<https://www.unicef.org/mexico/media/1731/file/UNICEF%20PanoramaEstadistico.pdf>

municipalities with a growing trend in cases of human trafficking are: Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Comitán, Huixtla, Mazatlán, Cacahoatán and Ciudad Hidalgo. It is worth mentioning that most of these people are undocumented migrants.

24. Hernández Evangelina (2009). In its 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report, the U.S. State Department defines Mexico as a country of origin, transit, and destination of trafficked persons, mainly illegal migrants. It considers that the authorities are not attacking the crime and warns that corruption is a serious concern, especially among local law enforcement personnel and the National Migration Institute. These authorities accept bribes and discourage reporting or ignore the fact that child prostitution in brothels and other sex trade sites is a symptom of the criminal human trafficking industry.¹⁶

Drug cartels.

25. The National Development Plan 2007-2012 establishes the Rule of Law and Security as its first guiding principle¹⁷. It describes organized crime and states that no state in Mexico should be allowed to be held hostage by drug trafficking, organized crime, or delinquency. One of the most violent manifestations of organized crime is represented by the drug trafficking cartels, which ceased to be drug transporters to the United States of America to become leaders of these operations through a positioning strategy

26. These criminal groups have stopped considering Mexico as a transit country, seeking to transform it into a consumer country. Drug trafficking generates insecurity and violence, degrades the social fabric, damages people's integrity, and endangers the physical and mental health of Mexico's most valuable asset: children and young people¹⁸. As a manifestation of organized crime, drug trafficking challenges the State and becomes a severe threat to national security.

27. The drug trafficking organizations of the "Tijuana," "Sinaloa" and "Golfo-Zetas" cartels, as a fundamental part of organized crime, are engaged in frontal combat with the federal government. They have increased their presence in this geostrategic zone, not only trafficking drugs, but also arms and undocumented migrants.¹⁹ As a result of this, the current situation of the MSB and the facilities that the porosity of the MSB allows its members to enter the neighboring country of Guatemala when Mexican authorities pursue them.

¹⁶ Evangelina Hernandez. "Trata de personas moderniza la esclavitud".

<https://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/166064.html>

¹⁷ Gobierno de la Republica. "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo".

<https://www.cefp.gob.mx/intr/edocumentos/pdf/cefp/cefp0962007.pdf>

¹⁸ Guilles Bataillon. "Narcotrafico y Corrupcion". <https://nuso.org/articulo/narcotrafico-y-corrupcion-las-formas-de-la-violencia-en-mexico-en-el-siglo-xxi/>

¹⁹ Julio Lopez. "Cartel de Jalisco levanta alertas en la frontera entre Mexico y Guatemala".

<https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/cartel-jalisco-levanta-alertas-frontera-guatemala-mexico/>

28. On the other hand, drug trafficking in the MSB is taking advantage of undocumented migrants, who are driven by human traffickers (polleros) to transport drugs, weapons, and ammunition into the interior of the country, which directly impacts the SN. The National Security Law considers drug trafficking as a threat to the security of the Mexican State.



Figure 2: Geographical distribution of crimes against migrants

SOURCE: Strauss Center, Texas University

National Security Impact

29. Currently, the traffic of undocumented migrants crossing the MSB is a three-pronged problem:²⁰

- The unregulated increase in the population caused by those who arrive and settle in this zone.
- The associated crimes favored by those who continue to the northern border.
- The traffic of illegal merchandise (drugs and weapons).

30. All of this causes insecurity in this zone, organized crime with more members, corruption of the authorities, and affects national sovereignty and the rule of law.

31. Although all these problems are contemplated in the National Risk Agenda since they undermine the security of society, scare away private investment, and affect human development and social cohesion. Therefore, more economic resources must be allocated

²⁰ The John Merck Fund. "La crisis de los derechos humanos en la frontera Sur de Mexico". https://biblioteca.cejamerica.org/bitstream/handle/2015/2371/crisisdhh_mexico.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

to increase the number of police officers, provide them with adequate training, and increase the number of prisons; they are all public security problems. Its relationship with drug trafficking is currently considered a threat to the SN.²¹

32. For example, organized crime forces part of the national budget to be diverted to areas other than development (housing, health, education, food). This provokes the need for more elements and better equipment for the Armed Forces, allocating more economic resources from the federation.²²

33. The corruption of the authorities weakens the PN, creating a state of uncertainty in society, conformism, and indifference, affecting the development of the border zone due to the lack of credibility in the authorities.

34. Finally, the establishment of undocumented migrants in the border zone, and the consequent occupation of spaces, affect sources of employment, national development, increased poverty, and society due to a lack of identity.²³

CONCLUSIONS

35. The primary threat to homeland security is organized crime. This threat increases when organized crime interacts with immigrants who attempt to cross the southern border illegally and those who become stranded in the southern part of the country.

36. Despite having ample natural resources and potential wealth, the states on the southern border occupy the last places in human development and the first places in the poverty index. This causes a favorable environment for the generation of illicit activities coupled with the lack of application of current policies that reduce regional insecurity.

37. The crossing of undocumented migrants across the southern border is an economic-social phenomenon resulting from the lack of social stability, lack of economic resources, insufficient sound public policies, unemployment, and political conflicts in the states bordering southern Mexico.

38. The porosity of the border is due to the scarce controls, where there are more than a hundred informal land and sea crossings, which facilitate the infiltration of all types of transnational organized crime.

²¹ Gerardo Rodriguez. "Agenda de Riesgos Mexico 2021".

<https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/opinion/2020/12/21/agenda-de-riesgos-mexico-2021-237572.html>

²² Adam Isacson, Maureen Meyer y Hannah Smith. "El Control aumentado en la frontera sur de Mexico".

<https://imumi.org/documentos/El-control-aumentado-en-la-frontera-sur-de-Mexico.pdf>

²³ Natalia Armijo. "Frontera Sur de Mexico".

<https://www.casade.org/PublicacionesCasade/MigracionySeguridad/cap2.pdf>

39. Another type of actors affecting border control and, therefore, harmful to society are the authorities co-opted by organized crime to operate with impunity and, through corruption, allow them to have a free path to continue committing crimes without restrictions.

40. The southern border is an area of growing trends of violence linked to organized crime, as there is a constant flow of undocumented migrants, drugs, and weapons due to border porosity, the indifference of migration authorities, and economic deterioration in the region.

41. The different programs implemented by the federal and state governments have not been expected to reduce poverty and promote development, which places many border municipalities in Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, and Quintana Roo in a situation of poverty and extreme poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

42. Evaluate the migration policy between Mexico and the Central American countries, modifying those points that will result in a better migration system with a short, medium, and long-term scope.

43. Create effective coordination mechanisms between state and local security institutions involved in migration control at Mexico's southern border, focused mainly on combating organized crime.

44. Enrich and update the National Security Law in such a way that it confers:

- a. Legal certainty to the armed institutions in their delicate work of combating traditional and new threats to national security,
- b. Conditions to generate a defense policy and an adequate national security system, which involves the participation of the three levels of government, public and private institutions, and civil society,
- c. Certainty regarding allocating a defense budget (which corresponds to a fixed percentage of the national GDP, embodied in the Constitution). The budget must not be affected by current circumstances or government interests to provide adequate economic resources for the performance of the high responsibilities assigned to the Armed Forces as part of the power of the State.

45. Carry out campaigns and establish mechanisms to combat corruption among all the personnel of the different agencies and bodies of the Federal Public Administration who are located on the southern border of Mexico.

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