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The employment of Armed Forces in the fight against organized crime: the Mexican case

El empleo de las Fuerzas Armadas en el combate al crimen organizado: el caso mexicano

Abstract: International security studies have received a considerable impulse from the ideas of the Copenhagen School. One the School's key concepts is the idea of the "securitization" of a variety of threats to the state and, as a matter of fact, drug trafficking, due to its scope and potential for compromising the state order, is undergoing a process of securitization in various regions of the world. Mexico is one of the countries that has suffered most from the action of organized crime linked to drug trafficking and has deployed its Armed Forces in order to answer to this threat. Thus, this study's general goal is to analyze the Mexican state's use of Armed Forces in the fight against organized crime. Its intermediate objectives are: (a) assessing the Armed Forces' involvement in the fight against organized crime from the perspective of the theme's securitization; (b) analyzing the role of drug trafficking as damaging to the Mexican social and political order; c) studying the historical background of this use of the Armed Forces, in the Mexican case. The study concludes with a discussion on the relevance, to the Mexican case, of the concept of securitization.

Keywords: Securitization. Armed Forces. Drug trafficking. Mexico. Copenhagen School.

Resumen: Los Estudios de Seguridad Internacional recibieron un gran impulso con las ideas que surgieron en el ámbito de la Escuela de Copenhague. Se subraya, en ese sentido, el desarrollo del concepto de "titulización" de los más distintos temas que se constituyan en una amenaza al Estado. En ese sentido, la cuestión del narcotráfico, debido a su alcance y potencial de comprometimiento de la orden estatal, pasa por un proceso de titulización en diversas regiones del mundo. México es uno de los países que más sufre con la acción del crimen organizado que está conectado al narcotráfico y encontró en el empleo de sus Fuerzas Armadas una respuesta a esa amenaza. De esa manera, el presente estudio tiene el objetivo general de analizar el empleo de las Fuerzas Armadas Mexicanas en el combate al crimen organizado. Además de eso, presenta los objetivos intermedios de (a) analizar el proceso de involucramiento de las Fuerzas Armadas en el combate al crimen organizado bajo la óptica de la titulización del tema, (b) analizar el papel del tráfico de estupefacientes como comprometedor del ordenamiento social y político mexicano y (c) estudiar los antecedentes históricos de ese empleo en el caso mexicano. Por fin, el estudio concluye sobre la pertinencia de los conceptos de titulización en el caso mexicano.

Palabras-clave: Titulización. Fuerzas Armadas. Narcotráfico. México. Escuela de Copenhague.

Pedro Augusto Da Cas Porto
Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil
padcporto@hotmail.com

Luiz Fernando Coradini
Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil
coradini.luiz@eb.mil.br

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1 Introduction

Closely linked to international drug trafficking, organized crime in Mexico is a complex problem, with profound impacts on the country's political, economic, psychosocial, and health structures. Generally speaking, Mexico's situation is not different from that of other Latin American states. However, the Mexican case has special characteristics, due to its position as a "neighbor" to the world's largest illicit drug market, the United States of America.

The vastness of the US–Mexico land border serves as an incentive for drug-related activities, be it drug production or the use of Mexican territory as a transit area for drugs produced in other regions. This reality has favored the formation of a complex organized crime network, which compromises the Mexican state power and exponentially raises the country's crime rates. Another consequence is that Mexico is directly influenced by US anti-drug policies.

Positioned in a reasonably stable region, with no imminent external threats to its sovereignty, it was not long before the Mexican state began viewing its Armed Forces as an essential tool in the combat against organized crime. This happened precisely when police structures failed to respond as they were expected to. Much more than a political decision in sync with the Latin American tradition of using the military to deal with domestic affairs, this fact should be placed within a much broader framework, defined by the increasing securitization of issues previously outside the scope of national defense structures, as explained by the authors of the Copenhagen School. Gradually, the internal deployment of military forces ceased to be exceptional and merely supportive of the action of other agencies, becoming the Mexican state's principal instrument in the fight against organized crime.

Thus, this article seeks to answer the following research problem: how did the process of involvement of the Mexican Armed Forces (AFs)—and particularly the Army—in the fight against organized crime develop? To solve this problem, our general research objective was an analysis of the engagement of the Mexican AFs in the fight against organized crime.

As necessary steps for the correct understanding of this phenomenon, the following intermediate objectives were established: to analyze the AFs' involvement in the fight against organized crime from the perspective of the theme's securitization; to analyze the role of drug trafficking as a danger to the Mexican social and political order; to study the historical antecedents of this use of the AFs, in Mexico's case.

Such analysis is considered timely, and also necessary to foster interest in this theme within the Brazilian academic environment. In fact, research on the topic gains relevance as the parallels between Mexico and Brazil—where we are witnesses to an increasing use of the military in the fight against organized crime—become more and more evident. The study of the Mexican case may contain useful information to be used in researches aimed at substantiating the formulation of Brazilian public policies to address the issue of drug trafficking and the use of the AFs against it, provided that the differences between the Mexican and the Brazilian contexts are duly observed.

Thus, this paper's initial section is devoted to discussing the securitization of the fight against drug trafficking, analyzed in light of the Copenhagen School's ideas. The following two sections are dedicated to the analysis of this securitization process in the concrete case of

Mexico, providing a brief historical summary based on the analysis of official documentation published by the Mexican government and a revision of the bibliography on the phenomenon. The division of our analysis into two sections is based on the timeframe of Felipe Calderón's coming to power. The rationale for this choice is that, according to the authors, the beginning of Calderón's government was the apex of the securitization of drug trafficking in Mexico. Finally, the last section presents the study's conclusions, seeking to confront the Mexican process and the ideas of the Copenhagen School.

2 Securitization of the fight against drug trafficking

Early studies on what became known as the Copenhagen School[1] date back to the 1980s. These studies emerged as a critique of the realist model, typical of the Cold War period. The Copenhagen School sought to propose a third way situated between the alternatives of realist militarism and human security studies (MARTINEZ; LYRA, 2015). Its research focuses on the need for security studies to broaden their scope beyond military aspects, also incorporating threats originating from the political, economic, environmental and social areas (TANNO, 2003). Such a broadening of the subject of security came as a response to Europe's own security issues.

The development of the Copenhagen School's line of thought is deeply linked to the evolution of the concept of "security," which, in the words of Buzan, Waever and Wilde (1998, p. 23), has acquired the following definition:

> "Security" is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization.

Buzan states that security studies should investigate threats from various sectors, while keeping the state as the main analytical unit. This statement is associated with the school's initial phase of development, still linked to some realist paradigms (TANNO, 2003). Despite receiving criticism from his own Copenhagen School peers, Buzan retained the centrality of state in security issues, a clear link to realist logic.

Within Copenhagen School's prevailing mode of thought, any issue arising from the public domain can be answered in a "nonpoliticized," "politicized" or "securitized" way. In short, a nonpoliticized public issue is one that "the state does not deal with and is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision" (BUZAN, WAEVER, WILDE, 1998, p. 23) Politicized issues, on the other hand, involve the elaboration of public policies that require decision-making on the part of the state, together with proper allocation of resources. Securitized issues are those the state answers to by the adoption of emergency measures, justified by the allegation of existential threats, and solved with actions outside the normal bounds of political procedures (BUZAN; WAEVER; WILDE, 1998).

A problem is securitized when its relevance is considered sufficient to promote significant political effects. According to Buzan, Waever and Wilde (1998, p. 23), securitization

1 The name is a reference to the *Copenhagen Peace Research Institute*.

is the result of a "speech act." This act is not interesting as a sign referring to something real, since "it is the utterance [of the problem] itself that is the act." A "successful securitization thus has three components (or steps); existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules" (1998, p. 26). However, this process does not depend solely on the action of its agents. For it to occur, a problem must be recognized socially as a security threat. This allows for the intersubjective sharing of meanings among those responsible for formulating and implementing an agenda (TANNO, 2003).

Thus, the securitization process is based on the formulation of a discourse centered on the necessity of facing a serious threat, a supreme emergency. On that basis, this discourse is shared among different actors. To counter the new threat, extraordinary measures are presented. These may contradict previously defined rules, or establish new limits for the applicability of state instruments. This conceptual framework serves as a basis for analyzing the securitization of drug trafficking.

Historically speaking, the "War on Drugs" can be placed at the end of the Cold War, with the restructuring of regional order in Latin America. Crossing borders, this phenomenon encompasses non-state and transnational actors, threatening governments and the region's equilibrium. In this sense, it constitutes an internal and external danger to countries (LAMMERHIRT; REMONDEAU, 2015).

As part of the world's periphery, Latin American countries are the most affected by drug trafficking. The conflicts imposed by this issue on international political relations confer it with a significance that rivals that of the twentieth century's ideological conflicts. The complexity of the drug trafficking problem has an even greater repercussion in times of globalization (SANTANA, 1999). Discussing the role played by Latin America in the international drug market, Santana (1999, p. 101, our translation) states that:

> In the later years of the twentieth century, Latin America and other peripheral regions feature prominently in the international division of crops and products linked to illicit drug trafficking. These countries are major drug suppliers to developed-nation markets.

Thus, Latin America has become an illicit drugs supplier not only to the US market, but also to Europe. Drug cultivation, production and trafficking have reached a scale that has allowed the formation of powerful international criminal organizations (SANTANA, 1999). Mexico, with its proximity to the US, has become one of the preferred locations for the growth of organized crime linked to drug trafficking. This was accentuated by the dismantling of the large Colombian cartels (MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

Meanwhile, the end of the Cold War brought doubts regarding the new roles of the military in peripheral countries. The end of the struggle against Communism and the defense of the "Western world" raised questions concerning the military forces' attributions in the new order (SANTOS, 2004). In countries with fragile state structures, it was not long before the armed forces started being perceived as an immediate response to new threats. This process can be observed in several Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Brazil, and of course Mexico.

3 Antecedents of the fight against drug trafficking in Mexico

To analyze the antecedents of the use of the Mexican AFs to combat drug trafficking, we reviewed several *informes de gobierno*[2]. This allowed us to study the Mexican state's official discourse on the matter, as purported by its head of state. It is noteworthy that the Mexican Constitution (MÉXICO, 1917) predicts the AFs' use for purposes of 'internal security' and 'external defense'[3]. However, it provides no in-depth definition of these concepts. According to Mendoza Cortés (2016), the civil-military pact—which put an end to the post-Mexican Revolution rebellions and consolidated the subordination of the barracks to the civil government—and the principle of nonintervention in external conflicts dispelled any urgency from the debate about the domestic functions of the Mexican Armed Forces. However, the absence of this debate did not prevent the military from gradually becoming involved in the fight against drug trafficking.

According to Valencia (1992) and Castro (2017), from 1948 to 1970 the focus of state action was combating poppy and marijuana plantations. This offensive was led by the Attorney General's Office (PGR), with the participation of the Army merely as an auxiliary element. Thus, this period sees the beginning of the Mexican AFs' use in the fight against drugs. Such a model—in which the PGR is the main actor, and the AFs act as a supporting element—will be a constant throughout the second half of the twentieth century, despite variations in the degree of military involvement.

Until 1955, the government reports contain repeated mentions of the use of the military forces only in support of the PGR. In 1955, President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1953–1958[4]) highlights the efficiency of the PGR's work against illicit drug trafficking, treating the campaign as permanent. He praises the Army for its work on agricultural pests, the opening of vicinal paths, and other actions. This of course is a reiteration of his support for the repressive action carried out by the PGR, the main actor in the combat against drug trafficking.

According to Carvente Contreras (2014), activities related to drug trafficking in Mexico increased from the 1960s, which in turn led to an increase in PGR interventions. In 1966, the Canador Plan was implemented[5]. It had the participation of the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (National Defense Secretariat), joined by the Army and the Attorney General's Office (RODRÍGUEZ BUCIO, 2016). Throughout the campaign, each operation employed a 2500

2 "*Informe de Gobierno*" (government report) is an accountability exercise by the President of the Republic to the Honorable Congress of the Union. It reports on the effort made by the Federal Public Administration to make Mexico a Society of Rights, beginning a new and more fruitful stage in the country's development. It is held annually, and determined by Articles 69 of the Mexican Political Constitution and 6 of the Planning Act (MÉXICO, 2015).

3 Article 89. The powers and obligations of the President are the following: IV. To preserve national security, in the terms of the respective law, and to dispose of the entire permanent Armed Forces, that is, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force for the internal security and external defense of the Federation.

4 Authors' notes: It is worth pointing out that each new government usually assumes power on December 1st. For readability's sake, however, this paper will disregard the first month of each government. Strictly speaking, the correct range of dates would be December 1, 1970 to December 1, 1976. That period, for instance, will be notated as "1971 to 1976."

5 The Mexican government's Canador Plan predicted that the Attorney General's Office (PGR) would coordinate the employment of public security agents, together with members of the Armed Forces, in the combat against the planting of marijuana and poppy. It was established in 1966, during the administration of President Gustavo Diáz Ordaz. The plan remained operational for the next two decades; only the name of each operation, or "Task Force," was changed (VALENCIA, 1992).

to 3000-strong force (CARVENTE CONTRERAS, 2014). Since then, the participation of the Mexican Army in interventions against drug trafficking has become recurrent in Mexico (CASTILLO GARCÍA, 2010; VALENCIA, 1992).

During President José López Portillo's administration (1977–1982), the Condor Task Force,[6] also known as Operation Condor, was implemented (CARVENTE CONTRERAS, 2014; CASTILLO GARCÍA, 2010), lasting 10 years. In this mission, each intervention had a force of 2,500 Mexican Army personnel, 250 federal police officers, members of the Navy, members of the state police, and members of the municipal police. Condor was a milestone in the diversification of institutions involved in the combat against drug trafficking.

From 1977 to 1978, these actions led Mexico to lose its post as the main producer of marijuana and poppy, especially in the Durango, Chihuahua and Sinaloa areas. As a side effect, there was an exponential increase in settler migration to the country's urban centers, with serious social consequences, such as increased poverty and violence in the cities of Sinaloa and Durango (CARVENTE CONTRERAS, 2014). Moreover, drug trafficking activities also went through a process of relocation. The most emblematic example is the change in drug trafficker Félix Gallardo's operational territory. His activities were transferred to Guadalajara, where he developed his criminal activities in the early 1980s. This led to a more robust cocaine trafficking dynamic, now targeting the US (CASTRO, 2017).

In addition to the destruction of plantations, during this period the AFs began to carry out interception actions, such as: 1) aircraft interception; 2) interception of illicit domestic shipments; and 3) activities in the country's ports, in order to intervene in sea routes. This range of activities led the Army to expand its operations throughout the national territory (CASTILLO GARCÍA, 2010). In addition, Contreras Velasco (2010) points out that the increased state repression led to another side effect, known as "Cartelization."[7] Many small producers ceased to engage with narcotics due to the increased risk; this indirectly benefited the more belligerent producers who were able to organize and confront the security forces. In the mid-1980s, new cultivation techniques in hard-to-reach regions—together with corruption in various government sectors, as well as economic fragility—led to a larger marijuana acreage than before the beginning of Operation Condor, launched in 1977 (CONTRERAS VELASCO, 2010).

6 The Condor *Task Force* is often confused with the homonymous operation; 'Task Force' referred only to the employed personnel. *Operation* Condor regards the tactical actions executed by the Task Force. It was restricted to the mountainous zone of the states of *Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Durango.* It was divided into two phases. During the first, the eradication of opium was prioritized. The second phase included the destruction of clandestine plantations and runways and the dismantling of illicit laboratories. According to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the operation had difficulties concerning ground access and air support, as well as limited intelligence and communication skills (MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

7 A phenomenon in which greater government rigidity against a particular illicit practice, in this case the planting of prohibited products (marijuana and poppy), causes small "farmers" to give up the activity for fear of being arrested. The "businessmen" who, despite the risk, maintain the activity, do so because they believe they have enough strength to fight government repression. They become stronger because they occupy the void left by the "small farmers," increasing their profits. Thus, their criminal organizations grow, generating the cartels (TORO, 1995 apud CONTRERAS VELASCO, 2010).

President Miguel de la Madrid's mandate (1983–1988) is marked by a more forceful speech against illicit drugs. The 1984 government report (MÉXICO, 1984) cites drug trafficking and drug addiction as one of the world's most critical problems. However, 1985 witnesses an international incident that had a significant influence on Mexico's anti-drug policy. An American agent, Enrique Camareña, is captured and killed by the Guadalajara Cartel, led by Rafael Caro Quintero. This generated international pressure for Mexico to increase its crack down on cartels (QUESADA, 2013). This pressure is clearly reflected on the subsequent reports by the Mexican President. In 1985 (MÉXICO, 1985), he determines that the fight against drug trafficking is to become energetic and effective. For the first time, the importance of facing corruption in the fight against organized crime is mentioned. This incident brought political consequences that led the Mexican government to perceive drug trafficking as a threat to national security, in alignment with Ronald Reagan's *National Security Decision Directive 221* (MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

The 1986 report mentions the increase in operations throughout the national territory (as compared to the beginning of the government). According to Madrid (MÉXICO, 1986), at first the Army and the Air Force only carried out one national operation per year (Operation Condor), together with the application of the Canador Plan. In 1986, however, there were 18 operations across the country. The report also complains about international pressure, which deemed the government's actions insufficient.

In 1987, the government report refers to the Army more often, with suggestions to the effect that it has been modernized and would now be able to deploy in any part of the country, increasing its participation in the fight against drug trafficking. Here, the issue of cocaine trafficking appears for the first time in a government report, with Mexico recognizing its position as a transit country for the product. Moreover, the report stresses that drug trafficking is an international offense and, also unprecedented, cites the problem of growing domestic demand (MÉXICO, 1987).

In the 1988 report, in addition to the usual praise of the Army and the PGR for their commitment, there is a note on how the Army has been forced to make adjustments to its organization and procedures, as a demonstration of the AFs' efforts to respond to the challenge posed by the cartels. Furthermore, regarding the international arena, the report marks the transition from a defensive stance into an offensive one, noting that Mexican actions and efforts in the fight against drugs were not being reciprocated by similar organisms in other countries (MÉXICO, 1988).

From 1989 to 1994, the Mexican government was led by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Gortari's government reports (MÉXICO, 2006a), like those of his predecessor, are quite rich in information, aiming to demonstrate that Mexico had continued its fight against drug trafficking, and pointing to the increasing importance of military deployment in this fight. In his first report, Gortari mentions that Mexico's daily deployment involved a military force of 14,000. Among other considerations, the president praises the work of the Mexican AFs, while also carrying out important reflections on the phenomenon. These reflections have contributed to the broadening and intensification of research on the subject in Mexico. According to López-González (2008), this period witnesses the militarization of the PGR, with military personnel being assigned to the organism's main leadership positions.

The PGR remained an instrumental agency for the fight against drugs, but its senior staff was subjected to a growing process of militarization.

The 1990 government report presents a continuation of the ideas of the previous report. An attempt is made to analyze the phenomenon from a broader point of view, stimulating the participation of all Mexican society in the debate. In this sense, there is a perception that the security and defense forces alone could not solve the problem: all of society had to be involved. For the first time, national unity was proposed as necessary in the fight against the narco threat.

In the 1993 and 1994 government reports there is another interesting development: a call for international society to help solve the Mexican problem—given the international character it had assumed—without undermining its territorial sovereignty. The government also points out that, despite the arrest of many drug traffickers, the problem has persisted in Mexico— which is explained by the large profit provided by this type of crime.

From 1996, the Mexican government seeks to strengthen inter-institutional relations, with a restructuring of the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*[8] (SEDENA) to combat drug trafficking (CARVENTE CONTRERAS, 2014). Between 1995 and 1998, an average of 22,000 military personnel per operation are deployed.

Ernesto Zedillo's (1995 to 2000) government reports have a more general character, as they avoid delving into the issue of drug trafficking. However, the increasing violence of the cartels led the president to pronounce that drug trafficking was society's main enemy and the most serious threat to national security, health and public tranquility. Zedillo also highlights the responsibility of other countries to combat drug trafficking and mentions that drug trafficking is corrupting society, citing the punctual irregularities committed by Army personnel, which, he states, had been properly addressed (MÉXICO, 2006b).

In 1998, the Mexican government creates eleven Regional Coordination Groups[9] and thirty-one Local Coordination Groups. Composed of elements from various government agencies, these groups carried out the *sellamiento* operations (interceptions and closing of passages) in the northern and southern borders of the country. They also operated in Baja California, the Sea of Cortés, the Yucatán Peninsula, the Pacific coastlines, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. During this period, the PGR remained the highest authority in the fight against drugs (MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

From 2001, military operations to combat drug trafficking continued to focus on the eradication and prevention of production; on land, sea and air interception; on demand prevention and control; on inter-institutional cooperation, and on international cooperation. In the same year, the average Army force dedicated to these operations increased from 22 thousand to 30 thousand men (CARVENTE CONTRERAS, 2014; MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

8 The *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, or SEDENA, is the counterpart to the Brazilian Ministry of Defense (in the Brazilian government structure). However, only the Mexican Army and Air Force are under the SEDENA, with the Navy linked to another secretariat.

9 The Coordination Groups, both Regional and Local, had as their main objective to bring together under one environment all sectors of public power with responsibilities in the fight against drug trafficking, centralizing the planning of local and regional operations (MENDOZA CORTÉS, 2016).

However, despite the efforts of the Mexican state, the cartels increased their power and influence. This is evidenced by the very increase in military personnel involved in anti-drug operations. With the problem reaching an unprecedented dimension, President Felipe Calderón recognized it as Mexico's main challenge, in a statement shortly after taking office in December 2006 (CASTRO, 2017).

4 As forças armadas mexicanas no combate ao narcotráfico no século XXI

Mendoza Cortés (2016) provides an overview of the growing external pressure regarding the issue of drug trafficking in Mexico. With the start of the US-led "War on Terror," criminal organizations like the Mexican "Zetas" came to be seen as potential threats to US national security, due to the possibility of their employment by terrorist groups such as *Al Qaeda*. Meanwhile, Astorga and Shirk (2010) point to an increase in drug-related violence, with 20,000 murders attributed to criminal organizations in the 2001 to 2009 period.

Felipe Calderón's presidency, a milestone for the engagement of the Mexican AFs in the fight against drug trafficking, takes place in this context. At the behest of the president, the *Directiva para el combate integral al narcotráfico 2007–2012* (Directive for a comprehensive fight against drug trafficking, 2007–2012) is drafted. This directive served as a guideline for SEDENA's and the Mexican Army's actions during the following years. Therefore, as early as 2007, according to the *Primer Informe de Labores*[10] (MÉXICO, 2007), there is an exponential increase in the forces mobilized by the Mexican Army, reaching 45,000 military personnel per month. This contingent was aimed at undermining the economic base of traffickers, inhibiting the use of the national territory for illicit practices and assisting other authorities in dismantling organized crime.

According to Mendoza Cortés (2016), the lack of a comprehensive anti-drug policy and an incorruptible civilian structure to address the problem had led to increased military involvement, culminating in the latter being delegated the exclusive responsibility for eradicating trafficking, made effective in 2006 by Calderón. The approval of the military in the eyes of public opinion, in contrast to the negative image of the police forces, contributed greatly to this decision (ASTORGA; SHIRK, 2010). This can be seen as the moment in which the AFs, and particularly the Army, assumed the leading role in the fight against drug trafficking in Mexico.

Another relevant feature of this period is SEDENA's implementation of *descentralización del mando* (Decentralization of command). This consisted in giving more autonomy to each military authority in its area of operations. Individual military authorities were thus able to perform activities outside of central control, avoiding the duplication of efforts and allowing each to act according to the characteristics and demands of a particular area (MÉXICO, 2007). In order to undermine the traffickers' economic base, the Army continued to be employed for the destruction of plantations (marijuana and poppy) in various joint operations, such as Michoacán I and II, Sierra Madre I and II, Nuevo León - Tamaulipas, Tijuana, Guerrero, Caribe 07, as well as several permanent joint operations alongside the Air Force, such as Jalisco and Oaxaca (MÉXICO, 2007).

10 The *Informes de Labores* are predicted in the articles 93 of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico and 23 of the Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration. The SEDENA leadership presents the Union Congress with a report of the actions carried out during the last year, usually on the first of September. The *Informes* seek accountability and transparency as key components for trust in institutions (MÉXICO, 2013a, our translation).

In order to inhibit the use of the national territory for illicit activities, according to the *Primer Informe de Labores* (MÉXICO, 2007) the Army began to be employed at fixed and mobile roadblocks: surveilling areas linked to drug trafficking. To this end, mixed-operation bases were established in the states of Sinaloa, Michoacán, Veracruz, Campeche, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. These bases were placed in areas with more recurrent criminality.

The following years witness a continued tendency of Armed Forces leadership in the fight against drug trafficking. According the *Informes de Labores*, SEDENA acquired new equipment, such as molecular detectors, radars and aerial spraying equipment. During this period, the US provided significant financial aid to the Mexican government, in the *Iniciativa Mérida* (Mérida Initiative). Thus, between 2008 and 2015, around 1.5 billion dollars were donated. The money was used mainly to purchase equipment and train troops for the Mexican AFs and the police (ROSEN; ZEPEDA, 2016). This demonstrates the US government's deep fear that the violence practiced by Mexican groups would overflow into its territory.

Enrique Peña Nieto (2013–2018) vowed to preserve this scenario of massive AF employment (CASTAÑEDA, 2013), as can be seen in the SEDENA's *Informes de Labores* released during his mandate. From the *Primer Informe* (MEXICO, 2013a) one can infer that the country is deeply immersed in an environment of ravenous violence. The report points to factional fighting as the main cause of this situation, mentioning its effects, such as kidnappings, extortion, executions, and attacks against the authorities.

Another milestone is the implementation of the "Mexico in Peace" National Goal, a part of the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013–2018* (National Development Plan, 2013–2018) (MÉXICO, 2013b). It was comprised of the following activities: 1) Eradication of stimulant-drug crops; 2) Interception of shipments; 3) Establishment of an Integral Air Surveillance System; and 4) Operations to reduce violence.

The eradication of stimulants was conducted in the same way as in the previous period, using helicopters for aerial spraying of plantations and manual destruction by army troops. In 2013 alone, eleven operations of the kind were performed. The novelty here was the increasing use of technology, such as the SEDENA Geospatial Management System, which facilitated the location of illicit crops.

Interceptions were also done using the previously existing methods, such as blockades on major highways, sniffer dogs and advanced technology. The *Primer Informe* (MÉXICO, 2013a) reports the optimization of blockades, with the reduction of fixed posts and the increasing in mobile posts. This changed the dynamics of anti-drug trafficking actions at the local level.

An important adaptation made by the Mexican Army during this period was the creation of the Military Police Brigades. Eight new brigades were established throughout the national territory. At first, its members practiced common specialties, gradually adapting towards the registration of their new qualification as anti-narco brigadiers. This marked the formation of the first specialized members of the new military brigades. The point was for these military personnel to be employed in counter-narcotics activities, freeing the rest of the army for other actions, related to their primary purpose of homeland defense (ELLIS, 2018).

In any case, this period sees the consolidation of a discourse favorable to the use of the Mexican AFs to combat drug trafficking. Even the available organizational structures and material resources went through adaptations, promoting the displacement of most Mexican military personnel to actions related to internal security, not external defense. More than maintaining a policy of involving military personnel in the crackdown on drug trafficking, the Calderón government turned the Mexican AFs, and especially the Army, into the real driving forces of the "War on Drugs," instituted during his mandate. The Calderón government was also responsible for creating the legal framework to support these military actions, with the publication of the new *Ley de Seguridad Interior* (Law of Internal Security) (MÉXICO, 2017). The law established hitherto non-existent parameters for the employment of federal troops, and also conceptualized the notion of Homeland Security[11].

5 Conclusion

This article attempted to present the process by which the Mexican AFs transitioned to an active leadership in the fight against drug trafficking, from their previously secondary role. It also sought to analyze the securitization of societal issues based on the concepts proposed by the authors of the Copenhagen School. This section attempts to confront the actual Mexican process and the conceptual premise of securitization, as applied to the Mexican fight against drug trafficking.

First, it is important to highlight that there are key points where the Mexican case deviates from the model proposed by Buzan, Waever and Wilde (1998). One only needs to realize that the employment of the AFs against the production and cultivation of drugs is not a recent phenomenon in Mexico: it has a long history, dating back to the post-World War II period. Thus, it would be incorrect to assume that Calderón's solution of formalizing the AFs' role as the main actor in the fight against drugs was entirely unprecedented.

It is important to highlight that the AFs' commitment to domestic affairs is a characteristic of the formation and development of Latin American states. Throughout history, Latin American armies have been, on numerous occasions, committed to concepts such as Homeland Security, the Guarantee of Law and Order, the preservation of public order, and the preservation of territorial integrity, among others. Thus, historically and regionally speaking, the Mexican Army's current commitment to fighting drugs is nothing new.

However, such deviations are not extraneous to the securitization scenarios proposed by the Copenhagen School. The securitization model predicts that existential threats to national security may vary in regards to their themes, and also in time and space. A topic such as drug trafficking can be viewed as a security threat in one country but not in another. It may also be

11 Article 2. Internal Security is the condition provided by the Mexican State that enables to safeguard the permanence and continuity of its government and institutions orders, as well as national development, by maintaining the constitutional order, the Rule of Law and the democratic governance in the whole national territory. It includes the set of organs, procedures and actions destined for those purposes, respecting human rights throughout the national territory, as well as to provide assistance and protection to federal entities and municipalities, against risks and threats that compromise or affect national security in the terms of this Law (MÉXICO, 2017, our translation).

part of a country's security agenda at any given time, and then leave it at another time. The theme may be securitized on one occasion and return to the political sphere on another. That is, the same theme can undergo processes of securitization and desecuritization, according to space and time (BUZAN; WAEVER; WILDE, 1998). In this sense, two moments of increased military engagement in the Mexican war on drugs can be identified: the 1980s (Miguel de la Madrid government) and especially the first decade of the 21st century (Felipe Calderón government). During both, external pressures, particularly from the US government, played a decisive role in the choice of increasing the AFs' involvement.

Thus, although the militarization of the drug war in Mexico is a decade-old phenomenon, it was considerably accelerated by the Calderón administration (ASTORGA; SHIRK, 2010), during which the Army effectively took point. In analyzing this perspective, it is clear that the theme of organized crime linked to drug trafficking is used recurrently by official discourse throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and constantly regarded as a "threat" to the Mexican state. The increasing involvement of the military forces in the fight against drug trafficking was based on this discourse. Such a repeated "speech act" reaches new heights in Felipe Calderón's term, when the engagement of the AFs is again openly and willingly presented as a solution to the compromise of public security in the country. This takes place during a time of increasing external pressure. Mendoza Cortés (2016) states that this process reflects the evolution of the drug issue from a public health problem to a national security one. However, in addition to securitizing the issue, the Calderón government turned the military forces into the leading forces in the repression against the narco threat, also promoting the adaptation of military organizational structures, together with changes in doctrine and equipment. In the words of Mendoza Cortés (2016, p. 46, our translation):

> The unilateral declaration of the "War on Drugs" by President Calderón ... without prior diagnosis and no heed to legislative protocols, in the midst of a legitimacy crisis ... conferred Mexico's internal security with a belligerent connotation, under the triad criminalization/violence/militarization.

Although the recurrent use of the AFs in subsidiary activities and domestic affairs is commonplace in the historical process of Latin American countries, the Mexican case is hyperbolic. Even if the military had been present in the fight against drug trafficking since the second half of the twentieth century, their protagonism was punctual, occurring in response to the rise in crime rates or to internal and external political pressures, especially since the 1990s. The Calderón government was the apex of this process.

In addition, consideration must be given to the US role in the elaboration of Mexico's drug policy. López-González (2008) highlights the important contribution of international pressures to the increase of military engagement in the fight against drugs. According to the author, the Mexican government has historically been constrained by the different US approaches to drug control. Thus, the US was an important actor in the process of securitizing drug trafficking. This

becomes particularly evident when analyzing the impact of George W. Bush's drug policy on the ordering of high-impact anti-drug actions by President Calderón.

Finally, it is worth asking whether this phenomenon is a confirmation of the notion that, in peripheral countries, military forces *must* take on secondary missions, such as border security and anti-drug trafficking operations. Thus, it would not be outside the realm of possibility to see this process as the confirmation of Jacques Perruchon de Brochard's Block Theory, in which external security becomes an attribution of the bloc's leading nation (in this case the US).

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