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## The Militarization of Mexico



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Militarization, now institutionalized in the Constitution and in practice, extended for the next six years and quite possibly forever, is not just the latest bone of contention between political parties. It is an issue that has profound implications for Mexican society, democracy, security, gender equality and human rights. It has to be analyzed within the framework of these considerations, beyond the false and hypocritical positions of the political parties.

On September 9, the Senate approved the president's proposal for the National Guard to move from civilian command (nominally) in the Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection, to form part of the Ministry of Defense (SEDENA). SEDENA is now responsible for its operation, administration, training and deployment in national territory. It was already published in the Official Gazette.

The second part, the extension of the mandate of the Armed Forces to participate in public security tasks until the year 2028, will be law this week, after the Senate approved the proposal on Tuesday and it passes with modifications to the Chamber of Deputies.

What is at stake, beyond who won and who lost in the political arena?

To analyze it, first we must discard the pure hypocrisy of the PAN and PRI members who started, and sustained, this model of war for more than a bloody decade. Also from the NGOs

in the United States such as WOLA and Human Rights Watch that now criticize the model and that, at the time, endorsed the Merida Initiative in the US Congress, which is the economic and geopolitical support of the model of the “war against the drugs”.

There are several fundamental reasons, and not only opportunistic ones, to oppose the reforms:

1. It is a model that generates violence and does not ensure public safety. As the president himself has said, violence against violence generates more violence. Military training follows the logic of domination, elimination of the enemy and brute force, which can work on a battlefield, but not in a community or a city in front of fellow countrymen. Crime cannot be annihilated because it is an expression of the fissures and perversions inherent in society itself. It reproduces itself to the extent that its root causes are not addressed. It is a contradiction to speak of programs that recognize the causes and at the same time dedicate the greatest resources to the armed confrontation.

No wonder it doesn't work. The correlation between the number of troops deployed in national territory and the number of intentional homicides is undeniable. In this six-year term, homicides continue at the same level, extremely high, as during Peña Nieto's term and femicides continue to rise. There is no evidence of success with the use of the armed forces and there are many cases of probable complicity and corruption, cases that often go uninvestigated and unprosecuted.

2. It leads to serious human rights violations, which go unpunished. The violation of human rights by the Armed Forces does not stop: extrajudicial executions, the rapes of Inés and Valentina, thousands of disappearances attributable to them, Tlatlaya, Petatlán, Chiapas, their action in repressing migrants subordinated to the policy of USA, the new evidence in the Ayotzinapa case that came out the same day as the presidential proposal, and the most recent case of the death of little Heidi Pérez by Navy bullets. Although the number of complaints has decreased under the sensible policy of avoiding confrontations, the problem is structural. The lack of transparency and accountability among the Armed Forces makes it difficult to clarify the crimes they commit, in a country that already has an impunity rate of over 95 percent.

3. The abandonment of the purpose of transitioning from military security to civil public security: One of the modifications to approve the presence of the Armed Forces in the streets until 2028 was to increase funding for state and municipal police. More than resolving the situation of abandonment, it highlights it.

There are no real plans to train the police even though there are new models of close policing and citizen participation that have shown effectiveness. If we trust that we can train the GN to do police tasks in just a few months before being fired, why can't we train the police? Low wages and corrupt chains of command are an invitation to corruption yet little, if anything, is done to remedy the situation.

There is a consensus among human rights organizations not to use the armed forces in public security tasks. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights established it before the Mexican government in the case of Rosendo Radilla, who disappeared in 1974, and has reiterated it. See the responses from human rights organizations regarding the current changes:

*CIDH*: “The justification for these modifications emphasizes that only a structure such as Sedena, with its territorial deployment, operational structure, and military discipline, is capable of dealing with the context of violence. Such foundation is insufficient by itself in the face of the risks that militarization entails for the respect and guarantee of human rights.”

*Nada Al-Nashif*, Acting United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: “It is a setback for public security based on human rights... The reforms effectively leave Mexico without a civilian police force at the federal level, further cementing the already prominent role of the Armed Forces in public security...”

Amnesty International: “...an atrocious act that puts the guarantee of human rights in Mexico at risk”

4. Creates a disproportionate power of the Armed Forces: It drew attention when Secretary General Luis Crescencio Sandoval referred to the “military sector” as if it were an autonomous force with its own interests in Mexican society. With the GN, the active military in the country reaches 500,000, placing Mexico in ninth place in the world and the largest in Latin America, according to the Global Fire Power 2022 report. In addition, it has a record budget in history. of Mexico, and has expanded its economic power with the management of infrastructure megaprojects (which not coincidentally face strong local and national opposition), ports and airports and now they are talking about their own airline. (And tourism.)

5. Disregards the alternatives: The policy of military control marginalizes other much more effective strategies. Address the roots of the problem of organized crime in the country with support for young people to study and find support, etc. it is still important, however, it is insufficient. More resources and efforts must go to attack the financial structures of crime, the control of arms trafficking and cash that enter the country does not advance despite the binational rhetoric, while the arms companies enrich themselves with the emphasis on war.

6. It generates violence against resistance and human rights defenders: The new Global Witness report reveals that Mexico has the second place in the world in murders of human rights defenders. The use of the Armed Forces against social movements and those in defense of the land and territories is remarkable after the history of the country. In addition, inequalities and discrimination deepen, since the repression is concentrated in certain areas and against certain identities –indigenous, Afro-descendants, women, the LGBT+ community and migrants.

7. Tightens patriarchal control: Militarization is accompanied by the expansion of militarism—a culture of intimidation and male violence. It permeates not only direct relations

between the Armed Forces and civil society, but also interpersonal and community relations. The NGO Intersecta reports that before the drug war in Mexico and militarization, only 2 out of 10 femicides were committed with the use of weapons. Now they are the majority—6 out of 10. Femicides are increasing in the context of this militaristic culture and greater access to weapons (SEDENA, the only agency authorized to sell firearms, “loses” thousands of weapons a year, a figure that has grown exponentially with the increased importation of weapons in the war against organized crime).

War is an exemplary patriarchal model—it promulgates the idea of protection by force, rather than co-responsibility and collective protection. It exalts the role of the military-state instead of the community. It reinforces the idea of a defenseless society and an all-powerful military while further eroding the damaged social fabric.

Organized crime does the same, with similar patriarchal structures—hierarchical, violent, sexist, and misogynistic. Being subject to one or the other is a very big risk for gender equality and for women’s safety.

To oppose militarization, with information and arguments, is not paying for an opposition that only seeks to attack the president and his party at any cost. Neither is it denigrating the legitimate role of the Armed Forces and its members (although the dream is of a society in which they can earn a living peacefully), nor is it sabotaging the authority of the president. It is the civil act of defending democracy, which is weakened in the context of the disproportionate power of the Armed Forces.

This fight in Mexico, today more than ever, is an obligation and part of a healthy citizen process to build peace and the society that we all year.

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