The Military, Political Power, and Police Relations in Mexico City

by
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Mexico City has recently achieved the reputation of being one of the most dangerous cities in the world. The main causes of the rising crime figures and impunity of recent years include deteriorating social and economic conditions, ineffective and corrupt police forces (Victoria Zepeda, 1994: 25), the inability of the attorney general to handle the number of criminal cases (Victoria Zepeda, 1999: 8), and the archaic methods and procedures of the judiciary system.

The success of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, founder of the left-wing Partido Revolucionario Democrático (Revolutionary Democratic party—PRD) and chief of government of the Federal District since December 1997, in reducing crime has been limited, although efforts have included the replacement of several top-level police commanders[1] and have been combined with federal policies and public safety resources. Some kinds of crime have indeed been reduced—in November 1997, 640 cars were stolen daily compared with 174 in December 1998. Other kinds of crime, such as bank robberies, however, have doubled (*La Jornada*, December 23, 1998; January 4, 1999).

Political liberalization and the salience of internal security issues in Mexico have undermined the position of civilians in relation to their military counterparts, producing an intense struggle for power in areas with no military tradition. This process is taking place in connection with the breakdown of the hegemonic party system and the traditional practices of patronage, the emergence of new political forces that participate in decision making, and the inability of civilians to consolidate their hold on political institutions and to solve problems under the new conditions of political competence. In this context, the militarization of Mexico City's police force is evidence of a changing and uneasy relationship between civilians and the military.

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Up to now, political relations between civilians and the military have been ruled by written and unwritten precepts established since the 1940s (Camp, 1984: 26) and owed their stability in part to the existence of an apparatus that functioned as a channel for political participation. Military participation in politics was facilitated by the existence of a hegemonic party through which political positions and resources were distributed, always with the understanding that their political participation was personal and not institutional. However, the increasing political competence of various parties and groups has altered the mechanisms of political control of politics and institutions that the ruling party had consolidated. In this context, without a change in the balance of assigned responsibilities and the release of more resources to the military, the subordination of the armed forces to civilian authorities was no longer effective. The historic cohesion that the Mexican army had shown was called into question when a number of army officers joined the PRD.

The temporary militarization of the local police force in Mexico City during 1996 and 1997 is only one example of the roles army officers are requesting in exchange for their continuing support of the ruling party within the changing regime. However, this experience made it evident that military intervention in areas of civilian control is no easy task, both because of public concern over abuses and increasing corruption on the part of the military and because nonmilitary groups resist the intervention of the military in their areas of power as intensifying the problems they are supposed to solve.

Military intervention in nonmilitary areas has had more costs than benefits. The army's failure to manage crime in Mexico City, increasing corruption at high and middle levels, and unrest within its rank and file due to a rigid system of discipline and control that allows "the secretary of defense to manage and decide every single military trial and indictment" (*Proceso*, January 17, 1999) have weakened its internal cohesion. Complaints about human and civil rights violations within the military have produced recommendations from organizations such as the Human Rights Committee of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Mexican National Commission of Human Rights.[2] Several of these violations were made public by a group composed of 52 middle- and low-level military officers led by Lt. Col. Bacilio Gómez. Five of these officers were imprisoned, and their leader went into hiding, eventually being apprehended and jailed in March 1999. Gen. Francisco Gallardo has spent more than five years in prison for having proposed the creation of an ombudsman within the army. Beyond the consequences of all these elements for public safety, they constitute evidence of a larger problem characterized by an ongoing disintegration of state institutions of which various groups such as the military are trying to take advantage. Besides the militarization of

Mexico City's police, the military's participation in actions against drug trafficking has constituted its main task and source of funds, training, and equipment but has also contributed to increasing corruption because of the huge amounts of money coming from drug traffickers (Fazio, 1996: 68).

This article begins with a description of the militarization of the police in Mexico City and its structural and political consequences for both the police and the military, addressing issues such as the relationship between U.S. agencies and Mexican military and police institutions and the competition for political power between police and military commands. It goes on to discuss the increasing participation of the military in areas formerly off-limits and whether this can be permitted in the process of building a new regime in Mexico.

THE POLICE AND THE MILITARY IN MEXICO CITY

Important efforts have been made to reorganize and reform the Mexico City police force. However, after painful experiments with military, police, and civilian commands, public safety remains the weakest and most vulnerable aspect of every local administration. The economic crisis of 1994 had produced high levels of unemployment and inflation, loss of real value of salaries, and stagnant production. The assassinations of prominent persons in 1994, kidnappings of bankers and business people (and later of ordinary people), and the emergence of guerrilla groups in several states had made the situation even worse. Public unrest increased as crime did, creating a feeling of frustration, insecurity, and the need for new solutions.

The Mexico City police force had a reputation (publicly acknowledged by successive chiefs of police) for being extremely corrupt, undisciplined, and technically impoverished. In the late 1970s and early 1980s it was marked by networks of corruption involving its middle- and high-level chiefs (Victoria Zepeda, 1994: 17). Crime and the police have constituted a complex chain of power relations that not only influence assaults and control the introduction of drugs and illegal merchandise into the city but also control the resources that the government uses to address and prevent crime (Victoria Zepeda, 1994). The local government, with the authorization of the federal government, had considered calling in the military to take control of the police force and reduce crime just as it had been called in with regard to drug trafficking. Some groups in the ruling party and the government had supported this position, along with some generals, one of whom asserted that his people wanted order, and with the military they would have it (quoted in *El Universal*, June 21, 1996). Within the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional

Revolutionary party—PRI) there were some who supported this policy as they supported all the president's decisions but also some who had traditionally maintained a hard line on issues of public safety. In fact, militarizing the police in an election year created doubts within opposition groups not only about the efficacy of the decision but about the manipulation of public safety policies and figures under the command of army officers. The PRI's leader in the Chamber of Deputies and the president of the Deputies Commission of Defense, a PRI member, asserted that it was necessary because of civilians' inability to control crime (*La Jornada*, June 25, 1996). Other groups justified the presence of the military by claiming that public insecurity had reached levels that made intervention necessary (*El Universal*, December 26, 1996). Television networks supported the decision by showing opinion polls in which most of those interviewed approved of the militarization of the police "if that was the solution to public safety" (*24 Horas*, June 12, 1996).

The military had already taken over police forces in several states, including Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Yucatán, and Chiapas (*La Jornada*, March 3, 1997). In addition, several retired and active army officers had been chiefs of police in Mexico City. These experiments had shown that military and police activities have very different goals; while the military is trained to confront and destroy its enemy, the police seek to preserve life and property by preventing crime (Ortiz Ortiz, 1998: 45).

On June 8, 1996, city authorities headed by Oscar Espinoza Villarreal, a prominent member of the PRI and mentioned as a possible presidential candidate, made the decision to militarize the local police. Gen. Enrique Salgado Cordero, an active member of the Mexican army, was appointed chief of police. "A new era for the force" was announced (*Proceso*, September 28, 1997), to be characterized by a complete reorganization of police structures and a reduction of corruption and consequently of crime. Another army officer, Gen. Luis Roberto Gutiérrez Flores, had already been appointed chief of the judicial police, a force under the direction of the attorney general responsible for charging and prosecuting criminals and gathering evidence for trials.

Disagreement emerged over the government's intentions because it was unclear under what conditions the military would intervene. Opposition parties, human rights organizations, and members of the police force expressed dissatisfaction with the idea (*El Universal*, June 21, 1996; interview with a police officer, March 24, 1998). Some army officers were said to disagree as well, claiming that the army was not trained for police work, while the imprisoned General Gallardo said that it was a mistake to turn over control of the police to army officers (*La Jornada*, June 26, 1996). Several other academic and civil groups argued that democratization was at risk with the intervention of the military (*El Universal*, June 18, 1996). Opposition to the

appointment of army officers to the command of the police force provoked a lawsuit that eventually reached the Supreme Court, arguing that the military could not legally engage in police activities. However, the Supreme Court decided in March 1996 that the law and the constitution were not violated when the army was used for public safety purposes (*El Universal*, June 18, 1996).[3]

At that time, Mexico City's police force had 35,215 members, of whom 21,637 were devoted to public safety and the rest to administration. Salgado appointed army officers to more than 150 high- and mid-level positions in the police force, and a whole division of policemen, almost 5,000 people, was replaced by the same number of members of the military police while the former received training in military cadres.[4] Local deputies, members of the PRD, reported that there were more military officers dispersed in various police areas than the number originally revealed (*El Universal*, May 13, 1997).

A parenthesis must be inserted with regard to the problem of training. Controversy has arisen about the role that police and military institutions and U.S. military schools have played in shaping Mexican military and police tactics and minds. On one hand, we have U.S policy makers' views on the desirability of links among Latin American armies for the implementation of U.S. policies, now shifting from combating communism and guerrillas to fighting drug trafficking. On the other hand, there are the objectives and needs of the Latin American armies and police institutions and the concessions they must make in order to be included in U.S. training programs.

The rationale for the U.S. military and training aid programs was based in the anticommunist sentiment of the cold war. At the end of the cold war this rationale was replaced by the U.S international drug war. For instance, U.S. Representative Bob Barr explained his support for continuing funding for the School of the Americas (SOA)[5] by saying, "The cold war may be over, but the war against narcotics traffickers is not" (quoted in Brophy and Zirnite, 1997). U.S. training has been considered a way to influence intelligence and security in Mexican institutions (see, e.g., Aguayo and Bailey, 1997; Fazio, 1996, 1997), based on anti-drug-traffic strategies. Most of the training given to Mexican officers is related to these issues but also to antiguerrilla tactics.[6] In this sense, the training given to military and police personnel is based on the same grounds. At the same time, the discovery of high levels of corruption in Mexican army and police intelligence institutions has allowed U.S. policy makers to introduce more Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) units into Mexico and to reorganize corrupt Mexican institutions, mirroring U.S. antidrug and police organizations (Fazio, 1997: 14). More U.S. influence has allowed for covert investigations and reorienting of local policies for fighting drug traffic.

One of the main problems of U.S. training in Latin American armies and police forces is precisely the failure to induce and teach respect for human rights.[7] Although human rights issues have been included in SOA courses, this does not necessarily increase respect for them. It has been reported that as recently as 1991 the SOA was still using manuals advocating torture and murder of political opponents (Zirnite, 1997: 17). The training organized by military officers within the police force of Mexico City necessarily included a military view of public safety (interview with a police officer, March 24, 1998). To what extent a specific conception of human rights was introduced to police trainees is not easy to grasp from the training manuals, but it is true that complaints of police brutality increased after militarization.

Although a police school had existed for years, a professional level had been created in it only a year before Salgado's appointment. It was estimated that it would take more than 15 years to produce a professional police force (*La Jornada*, February 2, 1998). Elite groups in the police are now trained in military schools or by professionals brought from the United States, Israel, and South America (*El Universal*, January 1, 1998).

In March 1997, several police divisions were moved from one precinct to another without previous notice, creating dissension in the ranks over what was seen as "authoritarianism and lack of democracy in decision making within the institution" (*La Jornada*, March 20, 1997). Police officers were extremely reluctant to obey chiefs drawn from the army, arguing that army officers did not understand that a police force did not operate with the same logic as the army and tried to impose military discipline on an organization that had no military objectives (interview with a former member of the police force, November 18, 1998). Fights between military personnel and elite police units were reported, as was the arrest of members of the police by the military police (*El Universal*, November 21, 1997). There was a reason for the decision to move the police divisions: the hope of disrupting the network of corruption. A police officer assigned to a specific area may develop illegal practices such as selling protection to local criminals and businesses. Car, truck, and bus drivers also may become "clients" of police officers. When someone violates a traffic law and is caught, no ticket is issued if the driver is willing to give the officer some money, usually less than the amount of the fine, which is shared with middle- and high-level officials. This practice, known as the *entre*, is very widespread among the police in several states around Mexico in addition to Mexico City (interview with a former member of the police force, November 18, 1998; Victoria Zepeda, 1994: 8).

The "brotherhood," an organization of commanders that has power and influence within the police force, emerged under the leadership of Alfonso Durazo during the late 1970s and early 1980s and was strengthened by

Santiago Tapia Aceves during the early 1990s. Precinct chiefs would meet weekly to talk about police problems, and eventually these meetings became parties in which a feeling of brotherhood was developed through the sharing of experiences in corrupt practices (interview with a former member of the police force, November 25, 1998). Thus, police chiefs organized and strengthened all the ways in which money could flow from the streets into their pockets. This brotherhood managed to secure most positions of command at all levels of the police and then to control the distribution of police resources to those who would produce more income and greater stability in these practices. In the early 1990s it was reported that police officers were suffering from unjustified arrests if they refused to participate in corrupt practices (Victoria Zepeda, 1994: 37). Currently, according to the fired director of regions Almada Gallardo, the brotherhood operates as an invisible organization within the police force. In fact, there is little evidence of its existence except for the networks of corruption and impunity (interview with a former police officer, January 4, 1999). Even the new civil authorities have said that no such organization exists within the police force (*Crónica*, January 30, 1998). The brotherhood nevertheless works as a complex chain of protection and corruption that guarantees impunity and the overall functioning and governance of the institution (*Crónica*, January 23, 1998).

In 1994 almost 130 members of this brotherhood were fired or retired by David Garay, then chief of police, but various positions were left untouched. The brotherhood was able to remain at all levels, particularly the middle ones, where there is more competition for money and political power and where most decisions are made. Salgado, Debernardi, and the new chief of police, Gertz Manero, a civilian, appointed former members of the police force who had been formally charged with corruption and investigated for various crimes and sometimes even removed from their positions (*Reforma*, January 13, 1999). For instance, the new chief of the 6th precinct—the one who accused Almada Gallardo of ineffectiveness—had been jailed in 1988 for robbery.

General Salgado himself recognized that little had changed since he took command of the Mexico City police (*El Universal*, September 3, 1997). It remained an extremely corrupt institution characterized by lack of discipline, lack of training, and mishandling of police resources. Although there had been a slight reduction in crime, from 102,502 crimes between January and July 1996 to 98,804 between January and July 1997, the daily average had remained between 700 and 800, with up to 1,000 daily on weekends. Banks had been robbed at a rate of one every three days, with more than 150 banks robbed in 1997. In 1998, 207 banks were robbed, but the daily average of crimes had dropped to 400 from 500 (*La Jornada*, December 23, 1998).

Internally, the police force has several deficiencies, the most important being that it is not a professional career. Members of the police force receive only a few months' training, and no sense of loyalty and accountability is developed among them. Salaries are among the lowest in the city, and part of their pay has to be shared with their superiors (interview with a former police officer, January 5, 1999) and used to buy uniforms and the guns and equipment they use. As with the military, the police force suffers from a lack of equipment and armament that makes it vulnerable to better-armed criminals (interview with a police officer, March 24, 1998).

Struggles for power between army and police commanders added an element of inefficiency to police brutality and corruption. According to the National Commission of Human Rights, from October 1996 to August 1997 there were 878 complaints against the police and 494 against the judicial police for human and civil rights violations. The best-reported case of police brutality and corruption was the Buenos Aires affair, described below.

One of the main complaints against General Salgado was the introduction of police raids in neighborhoods that were classified as "highly dangerous." Several hundred police officers would be sent without prior notice to three or four neighborhoods every day. Everyone there would be subjected to searches for guns, knives, and drugs, and several buildings and houses would be searched for stolen merchandise, drugs, and criminals.

The neighborhood of Buenos Aires is known as a place where any car part can be found for a price well below those of established vendors. The origin of these parts is dubious, and most of them have been stolen from nearby neighborhoods. Several streets are almost impassable because of the likelihood of being assaulted there. A videotape broadcast by the Azteca television network showed robbers in Buenos Aires threatening a driver with a gun, violently taking his car, and later bribing local police officers. The broadcast served to increase police presence temporarily, but it also reduced citizens' confidence in the police.[8] A member of the police force (in fact originally a soldier) had been killed in this neighborhood in March 1997, and police raids had increased immediately afterward.

There was no clear explanation for the raid of September 8, 1997. It was argued alternately that the raid would serve as an example to criminals, that it had been scheduled, and (as General Salgado said without conviction) that it was undertaken in pursuit of criminals who had just robbed a citizen who was also a police officer (*La Jornada*, September 10, 1997). Several elite groups participated in this raid: the Zorros, the Jaguares, the motorcycle division, several rapid-response units, and the antiriot police. The testimony of eyewitnesses is contradictory. According to investigations and the official version, police officers were shot at first by strategically placed shooters located on

the roofs of the buildings; one officer died. Police officers responded by shooting, intimidating, and arresting people. Six suspects were apprehended by the police, but they never were presented to the attorney general or to any other authority. Miguel Angel Leal, Daniel Colín Enciso, Iván Mora, Carlos Alberto López, Romeo Peralta, and Román Morales remained missing for several days. A few hours after the raid, General Salgado asserted that nothing had happened and even that no police units had participated. General Gutiérrez said that no judicial police had been involved (radio interviews, September 8, 1997). Later it was reported that only 40 antiriot officers had been sent. These contradictory stories produced frustration and anger among the public.

The day after the raid, three bodies were found hidden in Tláhuac, several miles from Buenos Aires, showing evidence of torture and execution with guns reserved for police and army use. Some days later it was demonstrated that they were three of the six suspects arrested by the police on September 8, 1997. Almost a week later, on the side of El Ajusco mountain in the south of the city almost 20 miles from where the raid took place, the three missing bodies were found, some of them in parts. Everything indicated that the police had killed them, but why, and who gave the order? Several days after the raid, more than 20 police officers (none of them soldiers) were arrested and charged with murder. The heads of the units involved, army officers, were arrested and similarly charged.

Whether the police units were under orders from a superior was not clear. Study of the official reports and the trial testimony suggests that General Salgado and his military colleagues had not been informed by the police commanders about the specifics of the raid and the arrests. Was the raid a previously scheduled action by the police? If it was, the top leadership seemed not to have been aware of it. Who carried it out? According to police officers, no action can be taken without the knowledge and approval of the chief of police (interview, December 18, 1998). It is doubtful that Salgado was unaware of what was going on.

General Salgado left the police force on December 4, 1997, and returned to a position in the army. The role of the army in the police force was questioned on the grounds that the police are not supposed to kill those who violate the law but are expected to deliver them to the civil authorities. Mexican soldiers' indifference to human rights also was stressed as one of the main obstacles to the military's crime-fighting role. Tensions between police officers and soldiers and lack of coordination between the police force and the judicial police prevented the militarized police from reducing crime as had been anticipated. The army was subject to strong criticism, and internal networks of corruption such as the brotherhood were strengthened.

As has been mentioned, there was disagreement among the police rank and file about the presence of the military in positions of command (interview, March 5, 1998). It was clear that police officers were reluctant to obey particular orders given by military chiefs and sometimes even blocked actions that threatened their areas of influence. Also, the internal networks of corruption were strong enough to survive the initial attempts to destroy them (*El Universal*, June 21, 1996). A number of police chiefs were unwilling to give up the power, money, and influence they had accumulated over the years. Finally, the military did not know how crime worked and how corruption was organized within the police, so it was relatively easy for police members to avoid being monitored by army officers (interview, March 24, 1998).

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT WITH MILITARY PARTICIPATION

Cárdenas's first speech as mayor was addressed to the police through the police radio system. He pledged his support for policies aiming to reduce crime in exchange for more resources in the immediate future. Although he had repeatedly said that there would be no military men on the police force, he appointed a retired army officer, Lt. Col. Rodolfo Debernardi, chief of police, defending his appointment by pointing out that Debernardi was retired. Debernardi had also worked under Javier Coello Trejo, an obscure person accused of having established links between drug dealers and the attorney general's office while he was in charge of prosecuting the dealers. However, Debernardi claimed that he had never received a cent from corrupt practices. Eleven career policemen, 7 army officers (6 of them retired), 12 engineers, 13 lawyers, 4 public accountants, and a manager made up Debernardi's management team. He said that he would reduce crime figures within three months by adding 1,000 police cars to the 4,000 existing and by implementing a model used by the New York police department under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. The main goal, besides reducing crime, was to remove all the groups that denigrated and corrupted the institution.

Despite criticism, Debernardi remained for more than a year in that position. In mid-1998 he was forced to resign after having said that the person capable of solving the problem of insecurity in Mexico City had not yet been born. Crime statistics had not improved (although crime had not increased significantly) and corruption had not been eliminated. Of the 130 persons fired by Garay, at least half were back in key positions. One of them, the chief of motorcycle police, Joel Francisco Cue Sarquís, was back deciding on strategies to combat crime in one of the more profitable posts of the force

(*La Crónica*, March 6, 1998). He was recently accused of having sent only 30 officers instead of the 120 officers requested to protect the president and some foreign dignitaries.

Alejandro Gertz Manero, the civilian appointed after Debernardi's removal, has implemented new tactics for fighting corruption within the police force. In November 1998, shortly after his appointment, crime increased 20 percent over the preceding month. Several police officers identified with the brotherhood have been retired, and the military-like administrative organization created by Salgado has been dismantled.

Cárdenas's public safety policies depend to a large extent on federal funds to finance the police. However, in January 1999 Mexico City's attorney general, Samuel del Villar, and the federal secretary of governance, Francisco Labastida, were blaming each other with regard to the allocation of funds to implement crime-fighting plans for 1999. It was possible that the salaries of police officers would not be increased because of the shortage of funds approved by Congress. The reorganization and reform of the police would have to wait for better times.

Mexico City's police force remains a controversial institution. It seems that it does not matter whether the chief of police is military or civilian; police officers and corrupt organizations have shown the ability to adapt to either. It also seems that for the police it does not matter if the chief of government is or is not democratically elected; corrupt practices are not abandoned under any kind of government. Higher salaries and better treatment could serve as a temporary motivation for reducing corruption. A major reorganization of the police force is needed in terms of replacing organizations and police officers with more rational means of control and professional, better-paid officers at all levels.

MILITARY AND POLICE POWER RELATIONS

Currently, the Mexican army has almost 175,000 active members. Most of them are involved in fighting the drug traffic, containing guerrilla groups in the countryside, participating in police forces, and conducting activities classified by the government as social service. Army officers, retired and active, have continued to be appointed to political positions at all levels of government. Many of these positions, however, now involve an institutional commitment rather than simply a personal one.

Increasingly, the Mexican army has served as a tool of repression against social and popular movements. Its involvement in areas that are not part of its legal domain and expertise can be divided into five types of activities. The

first is characterized by the repression of middle-class movements. In 1946 the army repressed citizens in León, Guanajuato, who were protesting electoral fraud; the outcome was 20 dead and 30 wounded. In 1949 soldiers killed several students at the Universidad Nicolaíta in Michoacán. In 1956 they occupied the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute—IPN) in Mexico City. In 1958 and 1959 they actively repressed the movement of rail and postal workers. In 1960 they occupied the Escuela Normal de Maestros (National Teaching Training School). In 1961 and 1963 they dissolved social movements against local caciques in San Luis Potosí. In 1966 they again occupied the Universidad Nicolaíta. In 1967 they took the Universidad de Sonora by force and broke a local strike (*Proceso*, September 14, 1994). The army's participation in the massacre of students from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National University of Mexico—UNAM) and the IPN in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968, some days before the Olympic Games, is well known.[9] Although it is not clear whether the military acted on its own or whether the various police units began the shooting, this event made clear that its participation could jeopardize its goals. As recently as 1996, 1997, and 1998, military officers were debating with politicians about their actions in 1968 in an effort to repair their image (*Nexos*, June 1998).

The use of the army to repress middle-class movements reflects the idea that soldiers are not middle-class but rural lower-class. "An army of the people," as several generals have called it (*Proceso*, September 24, 1994), will protect not the interests of a particular class or group but those of the nation as a whole. However, there has been a change in the class composition of the army in recent years (Camp, 1984) characterized by the inclusion of officers of urban working-class origin who tend to advance over rural and peasant populations whenever necessary.

A second type of military involvement in politics is characterized by the repression of rural movements, particularly rural guerrilla and peasant movements, during the 1970s, when the army became more specialized in fighting small, dispersed groups. Thus, the army was used against the groups of Rubén Jaramillo in Morelos in 1962. On September 23, 1965, it was attacked in its own barracks in Chihuahua (*Nexos*, June 1998). All of the attackers were killed and reported to have been robbers, but they were part of an urban guerrilla band that was later known as the Twenty-third of September League in remembrance of the date. During the early and mid-1970s the army was active in pursuing and fighting the guerrillas under Génaro Vásquez and Lucio Cabañas in Guerrero. Human rights were widely violated. The army justifies its interventions in such events by referring to the Second National Defense Plan,[10] which assigns it the task of fighting internal threats to stability, political power, and state institutions (see the Code for the Armed

Forces, in which the plans are detailed). Under the plan almost any political protest or action can be understood as a threat to institutions or established political power.

A third type of military intervention began during the late 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s. During this time the army was used during elections and postelection conflicts. On one hand, army units were sent to polling places to preserve order and to protect the integrity of the process. On the other hand, the army allegedly sent soldiers to serve as vote promoters for the PRI and to participate in electoral fraud (*Proceso*, September 24, 1994). Finally, the army was used to intimidate those who protested electoral fraud in order to inhibit postelection conflict. Army presence increased during the federal elections of 1982, 1985, and particularly 1988 and 1991. Local elections in Chihuahua in 1985, in Michoacán in 1989 and 1992, and in Guerrero in 1990 were marked by the presence of military troops.

A fourth type of military involvement has been evident since the mid-1980s and the 1990s. Army battalions and, increasingly, army officers have been involved in fighting drug trafficking. Most of the army divisions in the country are fighting drug production, transport, and distribution. A reorganization of the army for this purpose has been promoted during the past few years, merging territorial military zones and creating new ones in accordance with the changing strategies of the drug traffickers. Often, however, the military and the police accuse each other of selling protection to drug-trafficking organizations, stealing the drugs they confiscate, and notifying drug dealers about actions that are about to be launched against them.

A fifth type of military intervention in nonmilitary matters is known as the Third National Defense Plan. It was created to provide disaster relief after the flooding of the Panuco River in 1966, and relief continues to be its main goal. However, once the military arrives in a community in need where conflict is intense, it undertakes reconnaissance, develops strategies imagining specific enemies, and conducts exercises. When the Chichonal volcano became active in Chiapas in early 1982, the army intensified its presence in the zone, lending help to people in need while at the same time looking for "lawbreakers." After it had established several positions there its commanders reported that there was no evidence of guerrilla activities in that or any other nearby state and that its attention was mainly directed toward the southern border. These kinds of actions are mainly carried out in rural areas where they are difficult for citizens and independent human rights organizations to monitor.

Chiapas was struck by the uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation—EZLN) in January 1994. Having first applied the Second National Defense Plan, the army shifted its strategy to the Third National Defense Plan, according to army officers, to

help the affected people and promote peace talks between the government and the guerrillas. However, human rights violations reached high levels and accusations against the army increased. Almost 100 complaints were heard during the first five days of the hostilities. Some even argued that in its actions against the EZLN the army had violated its own codes of behavior (*Proceso*, September 24, 1994). "Discipline must be strong, but with reason," a military code reads. "Unnecessary violence . . . is forbidden and subject to punishment," another part of the code reads. In Guerrero, the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Army—EPR), a small guerrilla band that traces it origins to the teaching of Génaro Vásquez and Lucio Cabañas, has made serious inroads since 1995. Here, too, the army has been charged with intimidating whole communities, kidnapping people who choose not to cooperate, and violating other civil and human rights. The incidence of human rights violations by the army has remained a difficult and unpleasant problem for the military and the president and has attracted international attention.

As a result, the army has become reluctant to continue serving as a repressive tool for the civilian authorities. Some voices within the army, such as that of Gen. José Francisco Gallardo, have even claimed that the "violation of human rights by military men within and outside the army may threaten various elements of national security" (*Proceso*, September 24, 1994). The violation of human rights by the military distorts its relations with those it is supposed to protect, as the cases of Tlalixcoyan in Veracruz, Baborigame and Mesa de la Guitarra in Chihuahua, and several places in Chiapas exemplify.

MONEY AND CORRUPTION

The main problem that the army faces in this connection, however, is not the charges of violation of human rights but the increasing corruption that has flooded the institution as a result of its intervention in areas where civilians had proved ineffective precisely because of their involvement in corrupt practices. In one important case, Gen. Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, head of the National Center for Drug Control, was accused of protecting the drug trafficker Amado Carrillo Fuentes, leader the of the Juárez drug cartel. He was arrested by a select group of military officers, including Secretary of Defense Cervantes, and held up to the media and the high command as the worst example of an army officer who committed treason by protecting criminals.

Gutiérrez Rebollo had imprisoned several drug traffickers, but most of them were from cartels other than the one in Juárez. A few days before his arrest, he had been the object of the attentions of Barry McCaffrey, head of

the U.S. antidrug efforts in the area, who reported that Gutiérrez had an excellent reputation. The general had been in charge of a military zone centered in Guadalajara and including several states. No military officer had ever been tried by a civilian court. His case showed the extent to which the drug traffic had affected political institutions and the military itself. Investigation revealed that at least 34 high-level army officers were involved in drug activities (Fazio, 1997: 30). Although the secretary of defense argued that they were all retired, several of them were demonstrated to be still on active duty.

At the time of Gutiérrez Rebollo's arrest, two other generals were accused of protecting cartels opposed to the one led by Amado Carrillo. It is said that Gutiérrez Rebollo had received confidential information about CIA and DEA operations in Mexico, along with other secret information, putting covert or special investigations at risk. The case caused the CIA and the DEA to reformulate their relationship with Mexican institutions combating the drug traffic. In fact, the Mexican government was under so much pressure from the U.S. agencies that it was obliged to reformulate its policies for fighting drug trafficking and the institutions that dealt with those issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Various functions and areas within the Mexican political system have gradually become militarized. On one hand, this may have a destabilizing effect on the political system because civilians may miscalculate the real participation of the army in politics. On the other hand, it may open the army to public scrutiny and debate. The relation between the army and the state is experiencing profound change. Army officers have assumed roles that may produce a change in the way in which they have considered their participation in nonmilitary affairs and its limits. The reorganization of police forces is an attractive goal for a number of army officers, and the recently announced creation of a national police force will surely involve the participation of army officers.

NOTES

1. On January 6, 1999, Chief of Police Alejandro Gertz Manero dismissed the five regional directors of the police and the general director of regions (*Reforma*, January 7, 1999), alleging ineffectiveness and low productivity. Ramón Almada Gallardo, the fired general director, said that Gertz Manero was not a member of the police force and did not know what was really going on there (*Proceso*, January 11, 1999).

2. Although 30 percent of the complaints presented to the commission have come from military personnel, it has refused to appoint a special supervisor of human rights within the army.

3. This new conception of what the police should be and do caused controversy among the police, who pointed out that police officers were trained with different objectives and tactics from the military (interview with police officer, March 24, 1998).

4. A police officer told me that, claiming better training and an administrative reorganization, military men were illegally enlisted in regular police divisions.

5. The School of the Americas (SOA) is a major training ground for Latin American troops, offering an 11-week course that provides instruction in various kinds of military operations and a 4-week basic course for those working on counterdrug operations.

6. In 1996 more than 300 Mexican soldiers had been trained, and the Pentagon planned to train 1,500 by 1999 (Fazio, 1997: 15).

7. Since 1978 the International Military Education and Training Program has been one of the main U.S. funding sources for training the personnel of Latin American armies. Recently it has included attempts to "increase training related to defense-resource management and civil-military relations as well as human rights" (Brophy and Zirnite, 1997: 3).

8. Several other videos showed police officers receiving stolen goods from burglars in other areas of the city.

9. Cárdenas has recently taken a favorable position with regard to the military on the issue of Tlatelolco, asserting that the military acted in self-defense (*La Jornada*, September 29, 1998).

10. The First National Defense Plan was designed as a strategy against external threats after World War II.

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