Chapter 11. The Southern Border of Mexico in the Age of Globalization

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CHAPTER 11

THE SOUTHERN BORDER OF MEXICO
IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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translated into English by Bruno Dupeyron

"Mexico, from Chiapas to the Rio Bravo and Tijuana, has become a broad vertical border that forms a cross of thorns and shame with the US one. Our passage to the North is a path that runs between the uniform Mexican minefield and the tenderness of the Mexican ‘tortilla.’" —Honduran migrant quoted in Cuarto Poder (2005c).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century a renewed interest in the southern Mexican border can be observed. This interest is due, on one hand, to the rise of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN) and, on the other hand, to US President George W. Bush’s concern for the security of his country. Another aspect is the importance of the Mexico-Guatemala-Belize borderland as the link between northern Mexico and Central America, an area with huge potential in strategic resources, the use of which could revitalize the integration process in the Americas and improve US economic competitiveness in the context of globalization. Although the concept of globalization is not discussed in this chapter, its premise is that there is a dialect of inclusion and exclusion in backward regions, as in southern Mexico and Central America (see Villafuerte 2002).

In this regard, the US government’s desire to make progress on the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was indicated by its haste to reach agreements with countries in Central America and its intense efforts to have the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) ratified by Congress. Negotiations on the North American
Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took almost three years, but those on CAFTA were concluded within one year. The ratification of CAFTA reinforced the FTAA project to the extent that US influence now extends from Canada to Nicaragua, and, with the bilateral negotiation of a free trade agreement with Panama, will soon extend beyond Central America, possibly to include Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Since 2003 the United States has negotiated free trade agreements with the latter three countries. This negotiation process began a cycle in which the northern border of Mexico was stretched into the South, and the South, with all its unresolved economic and sociopolitical problems, became integrated with the North.

The interests of the US administration in having CAFTA ratified quickly were twofold: to increase control over a key space for US national security purposes; and to advance the FTAA project, which includes, among other priorities, energy integration, in which southern Mexico would have a significant role.

The first step in this direction was taken by Mexican President Vicente Fox the day before the Fourth Summit of the Americas, in Mar del Plata, Argentina, on November 4–5, 2005, when he announced an energy-integration process between Mexico and Central America within the framework of the Plan Puebla Panamá. Subsequently, given that the Sistema de Interconexión Eléctrica para América Central (Electric Networking System for Latin America) was then under development, the idea of building a gas pipeline between Mexico and Panama received renewed interest, as did the proposal to build a refinery, in a still unspecified Central American country, that could process between 250,000 and 300,000 barrels of crude oil per day, both of which were important elements in the creation of a pipeline network. Indeed, this strengthened the energy integration proposal, which was scheduled to begin, following technical and financial approval, in early 2006. According to the Mexican government’s proposal, it was a matter of integrating three markets: the electricity market, the oil market, and the natural gas market. The estimated global cost of the project was between US$ 7 billion and 9 billion, with the largest investment expected to be in the construction of the refinery. Its original cost was calculated at $US 3.125 billion, but the Panamanian deputy minister of commerce, Manuel José Paredes, indicated that costs could reach $US 4 billion (El Financiero 2005c). As a result the southern Mexican border was transformed into a point of interest for the Mexican and US
governments, international organizations such as the World Bank, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world.

The development of so-called biological corridors, free trade agreements, financial flows, and telecommunication networks has tended to produce a more complex southern Mexico. Moreover, it should be emphasized that, after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the southern border has come to play a significant role in restraining the trafficking of drugs and the flow of Central American migrants to the United States, both of which are considered national security threats by the White House.

Although experts on migration (for example, Massey et al. 1991/1987) have identified a variety of influences on migratory dynamics and processes, they have emphasized structural changes affecting both communities of origin and communities of destination. The adjustment and productivity requirements of the current economic restructuring process have resulted in modified labour markets, increased unemployment rates, and lower wages (Mármore 2002). From this perspective contemporary international migration is modified by economic articulations in the context of a growing globalization of production (Canales 2002). Recent studies (Maier 2003; Burke 2004) have provided data on the increase in migration of nuclear indigenous families from southern Mexico, including Chiapas, to the northern regions of the country, the United States, and Canada. Elizabeth Maier (2003, 121) concludes that

the Mexican indigenous diaspora at present extends from Alaska across Canada, New York State, Oregon, Washington State, Texas, Wyoming, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, and California to Florida, diversifying the cultural and geographic landscapes of urban centres and agricultural labour markets across the country.

As a result migratory activities in the South, including Central America, have become part of the new relationship between the North and the South and increasingly relevant in the context of international security.

Within this framework, the most important new law, signed by President Bush during the third week of October 2005, was undoubtedly the Homeland Security Appropriations Act 2006 (White House 2005). Basically, this law was aimed at increasing US control over illegal
migrants and creating more secure US borders. The act comprised two strategies, one aimed at non-Mexican migrants and the other at Mexican migrants. In general it was about strengthening internal security and border control. As President Bush stated in a radio address about the act (Bush 2005),

The Bill I signed includes [US]$ 7.5 billion that will help us address the problem of illegal immigration in two important ways. First, it provides more than [US]$ 2.3 billion for the Border Patrol so we can keep more illegal immigrants from getting into the country in the first place. These funds will help us hire a thousand new border patrol agents, improve our technology and intelligence, expand and improve Border Patrol stations, and install and improve fencing, lighting, vehicle barriers, and roads along our border areas.

Second, this Bill also provides [US]$ 3.7 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, so we can find and return the illegal immigrants who are entering our country. With these funds, we can expand the holding capacity of our detention facilities by ten percent. This will allow us to hold more non-Mexican illegal immigrants while we process them through a program we call “expedited removal.” This will make the process faster and more efficient. Putting more non-Mexican illegal immigrants through expedited removal is crucial to sending back people who have come here illegally.

In addition, on December 16, 2005, the US House of Representatives approved Bill HR4437, also then known as the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. This bill was intended to authorize the construction of more than 1,000 kilometres of fence along the southern borders of California, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. In the event, after considerable debate and amendment, and in the face of large-scale protests, the bill was enacted as the Secure Fence Act in October 2006 (White House 2006). Because no appropriation has been made for it in the US budget, it is unlikely that the fence will ever be built.

This chapter analyzes the importance of Mexico’s southern border as an area involved both in the energy-integration process between Mexico–Central America and in the making of US national security policy. Three topics are raised, all of which contribute to explanations for, and empirical evidence about, the geoeconomic and geopolitical
significance of this cross-border space, as well as issues of concern to
the United States.

The first concerns the remodelling of the southern border, emphasizing recent changes in border crossings and the presence of multinational corporations. The key relationship with Central America, without which it would be impossible to understand the importance of the border, is also examined.

The second topic is the southern border as observed from the US perspective. Here the emphasis is on the nature of the Third Border Initiative, which, although it appears to be an economic support and cooperation program with Central American and Caribbean countries, is actually a strategy to watch over and control the territories of those countries in the interest of US national security.

The third topic is an analysis of three issues that are key points on the US agenda and that, while they are not necessarily linked to each other, are nonetheless closely tied to poverty and social exclusion: migrants, youth gangs, and guerrillas. Poverty and social exclusion are indicated by the fact that from 1990 to 2001 the proportion of the population whose income was equivalent to two US dollars a day reached 37.4 percent in Guatemala, 45 percent in El Salvador, 44.4 percent in Honduras, and 94.4 percent in Nicaragua, figures that are comparable to those registered for African countries such as Namibia, Botswana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2004).

A reflection on the complexity of the southern Mexican cross-border space, and the contradictions between US interests and Mexican government policies to solve the problems emerging in the region, concludes the chapter. With reference to Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly’s model of border studies and security, it is suggested that market forces, local culture, and local political clout are the defining features of the Mexico–Guatemala border, and that they clearly undermine the policy activities of governments.

THE REMODELLING OF MEXICO’S SOUTHERN BORDER

In the current era of globalization the rationale for borders has evolved quickly, although they remain substantial features of nation-states. Drawing on Heilbroner (1990/1985), who considers both the social environment and the institutions configuring our behaviour
and relationships, as well as the logic of a model of configurational change generated by its own structure, one can conclude that borders are moving due to the need to accumulate capital but at the same time maintain their essence as barriers in limiting processes. In some cases borders have evolved from being internal to being external; in others they have become more flexible; in still others they have become more rigid, as in the case of the United States. On November 28, 2005, President Bush declared at the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base,

[Homeland Security] Secretary [Michael] Chertoff recently used the authority granted by the Congress to order the completion of a fourteen-mile barrier near San Diego . . . Our actions to integrate manpower, technology and infrastructure are getting results. And one of the best examples of success is the Arizona Border Control Initiative, which the government launched in 2004. In the first year of this initiative agents in Arizona apprehended nearly 500,000 illegal immigrants, a 42-percent increase over the previous year.

Although the Berlin Wall collapsed, a fence is currently being built between Israel and the Palestinian territories. Thus we are far from thinking that borders tend to be diluted in the global age.

In contrast, Monteforte (1997, 14) alludes to the “mobile frontier” in the relationship between Mexico and Guatemala when he discusses the problem of setting limits: “Throughout the history of treaties and conventions with Mexico, there are various criteria defining what is considered the border zone or border region. It has never been firmly established, and we are inclined to think that it is not necessary to do so.” The porosity and the mobility of such borders depend on policies and agreements between states, as in the European Union (Cairo 2003, 32):

The state borders of the world, which arose from [the Peace of] Westphalia [in 1648], were basically conceived as “walls” that separated the territories under the sovereignty of states. The obstacles to the movement of people and goods were part of the logic of clearly establishing the interior and the exterior of the state. Today, not only are we seeing a spectacular increase in cross-border trade, but also borderlands are perceived more as potential areas of exchange than as peripheral zones or spaces of fortification and state defence . . .
although the dividing line remains, or may even be reinforced in the external parts of the integrated region, as the case of the European Union attests.

Mexico's southern borderland, like any geographic region, does not exist independently from human beings. It is a social building block that acquires its meaning in a broader historical context. In the era of globalization such spatial constructions basically follow a market perspective, so that there is no direct correlation between the southern border and its corresponding identity. In this context it is possible to say that the reactions to such megaprojects as the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) are responses to the logic "in which the official representations of space and its contents are called into question" (Cairo 2003, 43).

The PPP was announced by Mexican President Vicente Fox during a ceremony at his official residence, Los Pinos, on February 21, 2001. Present at the ceremony, apart from some advisers to Fox's cabinet, were the foreign ministers of Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize, and the presidents of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Secretario de Integración Centroamericana (Central American Integration Secretariat), and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. The PPP is a megaproject promoted by President Fox as a significant contribution to the Central American integration process. It covers a territory of 1,026,117 square kilometres and a total population of approximately sixty-five million in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche, Tabasco, Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Veracruz, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Puebla, as well as the Central American countries of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

During the final moments of the PPP presentation Florencio Salazar, coordinator of the plan, stated (Villafuerte 2004, 153),

The presidential initiative expresses a profound vision in proposing to connect the South-South-East [of Mexico] with Central America; it is an essential measure pursued by the eight governments in this broad Meso-American region in order to take joint advantage of our potentialities, and to optimize the South-South-East and Central American strategic spaces within the process of globalization.

"Counterhegemonic" forces could not stop the process of globalization, still less advance the construction of an alternative. On
August 9, 2003, during a ceremony to celebrate the creation of the caracoles, the EZLN's organs of local political coordination, the EZLN announced its Plan La Realidad–Tijuana, also called Plan Reali–Ti. This plan, formulated in opposition to the PPP, proclaimed seven goals, including respect for the autonomy and independence of social organizations, the promotion of self-governance and self-management across the whole national territory, and the use of rebellion and of civil and peaceful resistance against "bad" government measures and "bad" political parties (Ramírez 2003). However, neither Plan Reali–Ti nor the Plebeian Alternatives to the Plan Puebla Panamá (Bartra et al. 2001), proposed by a group of intellectuals, has had any impact on broad sectors of Mexican society.

To date studies of the southern Mexican border have not focused on the processes that tend to restructure the cross-border space. As a result there is currently neither a specific definition nor an exact demarcation of the southern border. Rather, the cross-border element in most studies is attributed to the conventional legal borderline between Mexico and the Central American countries of Belize and Guatemala. That borderline, which extends for 1,138 kilometres, is characterized by Mexican municipalities in close contact with similar towns in the two Central American countries (Ciudad Hidalgo, Cacahotán, and Tapachula in Chiapas; Tenosique in Tabasco; and Othon P. Blanco in Quintana Roo). Each of these towns is the site of an intense exchange of legal and illegal goods and of persons, culture, family relations, and so on. The majority of these flows occur from Central America to Mexico, and only to a lesser extent from Mexico to Central America. This is the most visible, measurable, and verifiable part of the process: an intense but tolerable trade flow that happens every day on the banks of the Rio Suchiate, which divides Mexico and Guatemala, and involves the crossing of day-labourers to the coffee plantations in the Soconusco and Sierra Madre regions of Chiapas, and to the banana and sugar-cane plantations in the towns of Suchiate and Huixtla.

It is not possible to understand the dynamics of Mexico's southern border without considering Central America and reopening the Mexico–Central America debate. Moreover, the debate must be linked to the broader context of global integration initiatives, such as NAFTA. Nieman (2000) was correct when he argued that the regional aspect cannot be analyzed in isolation, even if he had to separate it out to meet the needs of his study (which is precisely the goal of this chapter).
In this chapter, then, the southern border refers to a vast territory that integrates five Mexican states—Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Yucatán—that share not only common features but also significant differences in various fields. These five states shape the immense region of the southern borderland, which covers 238,904 square kilometres, or 12.2 percent of Mexican territory, and is thus comparable in size to the entire land surface of the United Kingdom, or the land areas of Belgium, Austria, and Greece together. In the context of globalization this territory is being redefined according to its relationship with the global market, as demonstrated by the fact that the whole of the region is being promoted by TELCEL, the most important mobile phone company in Mexico, as “TELCEL territory.” TELCEL uses the advertising slogan “All Mexico is TELCEL territory” as a metaphor for its globalization strategy. Various multinational companies, such as Chiquita Banana, Halliburton, and Flour Daniel, also have a presence in the region, the latter two having contracts for oil wells in Campeche, Chiapas, and Tabasco, while textile maquiladoras, such as the Calkini Short Company or Transtextil International, are present in Campeche and Chiapas.

THE SOUTHERN BORDER’S MOST VISIBLE SPACE

Spaces become visible to the wider world insofar as they are sites of newsworthy phenomena: wars, natural disasters, important discoveries of strategic resources, the construction of tourist attraction centres, and so on. In this sense the southern border of Mexico is no exception. During the past few years this cross-border space has not been visible to the rest of Mexico since no major events have occurred there, its population density compared to that of the centre of the country is relatively low, and there is no dispute over its natural resources.

Chiapas is the most visible of the states in the southern border region. Its proximity to regions of important demographic mobility in Guatemala has made it a key state and a link with the rest of Mexico and Central America. The state of Chiapas is immensely complex, economically, socially, and politically, and its complexity is compounded by the presence of the EZLN. At the same time it is one of the most rural and marginalized states in Mexico.

Quintana Roo is also a visible entity, but that is not particularly due to border crossings, even though they are significant. Its visibility is
due to its natural attractions, its international centre for mass tourism, Cancún, and, until recently, its drug trafficking.

In order to provide some insight into the number of documented crossings of the Mexico–Guatemala border, table 11.1 illustrates the dynamics of the four major border crossings. It is interesting to note that for each Guatemalan who enters Guatemala three others leave, indicating the importance of Mexico as a space of landing, entry, and crossing for Guatemalan migrants. In a later section of this chapter there is a discussion of the Central American transmigrants who cross the border to work in the agricultural plantations of Soconusco. Their status as legal migrants is valid for one year and is regulated by the use of the Forma Migratoria para Visitantes Agrícolas (Migratory Form for Agricultural Visitors).

Table 11.1: Arrivals and Departures at Major Guatemalan Border Crossings with Mexico, June to December 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Border crossings</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Departures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guatemalans</td>
<td>Aliens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Carmen</td>
<td>7,418</td>
<td>18,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tecún Umán</td>
<td>13,181</td>
<td>12,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mesilla</td>
<td>2,074</td>
<td>15,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracias a Dios</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22,921</td>
<td>47,610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


About thirty-six border crossings have been identified along the dividing line between Mexico and Guatemala, but until 2002 only four were officially recognized. Since May 2003 another four have become part of the regulated border-crossing system, so that there are now eight in all: (1) Ciudad Hidalgo, México–Tecún Umán, Guatemala, across the Puente Dr. Rodolfo Robles; (2) Ciudad Hidalgo–Tecún Umán across the Puente Ing. Luis Cabrera; (3) Talismán, México–El Carmen, Guatemala, across the Puente Talismán; (4) Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, México–La Mesilla, Guatemala; (5) Carmen Xhan, México–Gracias a Dios, Guatemala;
The Southern Border of Mexico

(6) Nuevo Orizaba, México-Ingenieros, Guatemala; 7) Frontera Corozal, México-Bethel, Guatemala; and (8) El Ceibo, México-El Ceibo, Guatemala (Campuzano 2004, 185). Of the four new crossings the one at El Ceibo has the greatest potential to become more important in the immediate future, as "it is the point of entry into the state of Tabasco and the Department of Petén" (Campuzano 2004, 185), a strategic area for tourists visiting Palenque, Chiapas-Tikal, and Petén, and travelling on to the Yucatán Peninsula. Currently underpopulated, the area became a crossing space for Central American migrants travelling to the United States due to the presence of immigration officers and, more recently, youth gangs, at the traditional border crossings at El Carmen and Tecún Umán.

THE THIRD US BORDER: A VITAL SPACE FOR US SECURITY AND GEOECONOMICS?

In the context of globalization, spaces acquire new meanings. Cross-border territories in particular have reached new dimensions with hegemonic projects such as the US Initiative for the Americas, launched in 1990. Beginning with this initiative, the United States has engaged in a process of building a "new spirit of the border," throughout which institutions oriented toward globalization have been notoriously evident—in particular, the World Bank, the Organization of American States, and the Inter-American Development Bank. The initial attempt to integrate Latin America ended in crisis, but new attempts at integration have arisen, with a focus on a renewed interest in free trade and the goal of protecting the sovereignty of consumers. The newest feature of these attempts is the relationship between small and big economies—between South and North—and the most recent and most significant illustration of this approach was the approval of a free trade agreement between the United States, the member states of CAFTA, and the Dominican Republic.

The Initiative for the Americas project was converted by former US president Bill Clinton into the project for the FTAA (as mentioned earlier), an umbrella agreement that covers US strategic issues. It not only addresses the question of free trade but also includes important social, political, cultural, and military aspects. The current draft of the FTAA (the third) illustrates the dimension of the project and the broad scope of topics that is involved.
In this context the security of Mexico's southern border remains a topic of the utmost concern for the US government, largely due to the border's high level of porosity and weak institutions, and the lack of coordination among them, as demonstrated by the proliferation of illegal groups in the region. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, significantly increased US interest in the security of this border and (as noted earlier) President Bush subsequently authorized the accelerated negotiation of CAFTA in order to achieve greater US hegemony in Central America. Likewise, according to Benítez (2005, 2),

a complete reform of the national security system occurred in the United States in order to react to the terrorist threat. There are two axes in this doctrinal revolution: "homeland security" and "pre-emptive action." Both are intimately linked, but the priority of the first is the defence of the territory and the US population, and implies a whole bureaucratic reorganization, while the second is oriented toward external political actions: diplomatic, military, economic cooperation, intelligence actions, and so on.

The events of September 11, 2001, represented a point of inflexion in the conception of borders, a circumstance that involved the forgotten southern border. One goal of US border-security policy was the control of illegal migrants. According to Ramos (2004, 157),

Among recent antecedents the Security Initiative on the Border that started in June 1998 should be emphasized as a contribution to better securing the border with Mexico. The Initiative had four components: prevention, search and rescue, identification and follow-up, as well as registration of illegal migrants. Subsequently, in June 2001, both administrations signed the Action Plan for Cooperation on Border Security, which included, among other measures, a policy of deterrent migration in areas considered as high risk, such as the border of Tijuana-San Diego. However, since September 2001, the core of US policy has consisted of associating illegal migrants with terrorism and national security.

One consequence of the events, according to Tirado (2005, 12) was

the *de facto* slippage of the US southern border [to run], not at the Río Bravo but at the Río Suchiate. The Mexican government has
implemented effective policies in order to fulfill the US requirements, with the premise that they share the same national security interests for their borders, in particular for the southern one.

In the context of the events of 9/11 new initiatives that represent continuity have emerged as two faces of the same coin: geoeconomics and geopolitics. An example of this is the Third Border Initiative. While he was US secretary of state, Colin Powell (2002) explained why this initiative was so important:

While world attention has focused intensely on Central and South Asia in recent months, neither President Bush nor his administration has lost sight of our commitment to America's "Third Border," which connects us to our neighbors in the Caribbean. In fact, the events of September 11, with their devastating economic effect in the region and the loss of Caribbean nationals, have increased our concern for the countries of the Caribbean.

Powell went on to discuss this issue in more detail:

As I made clear to my Caribbean colleagues, US government programs address the full range of problems in the region, but our pre-eminent goals are the expansion of free trade as the most effective way to bring about economic recovery, development and stability, and the promotion of democracy and the rule of law. The Bush administration's Third Border Initiative (TBI) seeks to broaden our engagement with the Caribbean based on recommendations by the region's leaders on the areas most critical to their economic and social development. The initiative is centered on economic capacity-building and on leveraging public/private partnerships to help meet the pressing needs of the region.

The Third Border Initiative appeared in Powell's speech as a basic economic initiative and was presented as an extension of the Caribbean Basin (or Cuenca del Caribe) Initiative, launched nearly twenty years before. The new programs would "build on the substantial gains made in the region" through that initiative, which the Central American countries had already benefited from and which were institutionalized when CAFTA came into force. Powell also pointed out that the most
outstanding component in the new initiative was security, and in particular, "It will help Caribbean authorities enhance the safety and security of their airports, which are vital for maintaining a flourishing tourist industry."

The southern border of Mexico, along with the Caribbean, was transformed into a strategic space for the operation of security programs. In fact, according to Benítez (2005),

in 2001 the [Mexican] Secretary of the Interior, through the National Migration Institute, designed the Plan Sur (Southern Plan), with the aim of "strengthening vigilance and control of migratory flows between the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Southern Border."

However, by far the most complete proposal regarding the southern border was found in the "smart border" agreements signed by Colin Powell and Jorge Castañeda in March 2002. Simultaneously the proposal for creating a North American Command was announced, including the defence of borders and deployment of troops in border zones when considered necessary (see Ramos 2004, 160).

The initiative on smart borders, which, in the opinion of Robert B. Bonner, a member of the US Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, is aimed at reinventing the border in order to preserve the US and North American economy, is composed of twenty-two points and is a major part of the US strategy on homeland security (see Ramos 2004, 161).

NATIONAL SECURITY IN MEXICO AND ON THE SOUTHERN BORDER

In the 1980s the phenomenon of displaced persons, arising from the civil war in Guatemala, took the Mexican state by surprise. In the early twenty-first century, once again, the Mexican government has had to face uncertainty about security issues because of the increasing flow of migrants from Central America, the enduring presence of the EZLN, and the tightening of US security measures following the events of 9/11. Indeed, US pressure on Mexico to control borders and criminal activities has led to questions about the Mexican government's capacity to deal with these possible "national security threats." Salazar (2002, 85) has pointed out that "when an issue is included in the national security strategies of a country it means that the state has failed and that previous attempts to solve problems have not worked."
Table 11.2: Components of the Mexico–US Smart Border Agreement, March 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secure Infrastructure</th>
<th>Secure Flow of People</th>
<th>Secure Flow of Goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term planning</td>
<td>Pre-cleared travellers</td>
<td>Public/private-sector cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief of bottlenecks</td>
<td>Advanced passenger information</td>
<td>Electronic exchange of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure protection</td>
<td>NAFTA travel</td>
<td>Secure in-transit shipments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonization of port-of-entry operations</td>
<td>Safe borders and deterrence of alien smuggling</td>
<td>Technology-sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration projects</td>
<td>Visa policy consultations</td>
<td>Secure railways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-border cooperation</td>
<td>Joint training</td>
<td>Combating fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing projects at the border</td>
<td>Compatible databases</td>
<td>Interdiction of contraband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screening of third-country nationals</td>
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There are two basic reasons why this has occurred. The first arose from the international context. The old concept of national security, sustained by Cold War assumptions and the consequential preservation of vital spaces, changed substantially. The new scenario was based on the global dilemma of security and insecurity. National security appeared to be linked to global conditions and, as a result, new threats to national security have arisen. The second reason relates to the substantial difference between developed and underdeveloped countries. The former, such as the United States, suffer from their intervention in Third World countries, whereas the latter must deal with challenges that are inseparable from their backward conditions. Villagra (2003, 138) has depicted this situation well:
In the past few years it has been considered more and more important that the security threats faced by Latin American and Caribbean countries no longer stem from external military threats, but from new and complex phenomena that have been generally designated as “new threats” or “new challenges” to security. In this category have been included very different issues, such as drug trafficking, organized crime, gun traffic, terrorism, illegal migration, extreme poverty, damage to the environment, economic instability, corruption, democratic ungovernability, and so on.

A consideration of this list of “new threats” may lead to the conclusion that, except for terrorism, all of these threats are present on Mexico’s southern border. In the face of the poor demarcation of the Mexican border, weak institutions, and the lack of financial resources, the threats have intensified. On both the Central American and Mexican sides of the border, flows of illegal migrants to the United States, drug trafficking, and the proliferation of youth gangs have increased significantly due to the lack of border-security policies. The management of security issues by the military and the police has also not helped to solve the problems. For example, recent measures taken by Honduras and El Salvador to put an end to youth gangs at the border merely caused the gangs to spread to other countries such as Mexico, especially along its southern border.

**Mexico’s New National Security Policy**

On December 9, 2004, the Mexican House of Representatives adopted the Ley de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Act) by a majority. The new law had been presented to the Senate on October 30, 2003, where it was approved (sixty-eight votes for, twelve against, and two abstentions) on April 15, 2004, and then referred to the House of Representatives for the purpose of study and reporting. This process produced several amendments, with an emphasis on two areas in particular: the transformation of the National Security Cabinet into the National Security Council and details of the concept of “national security.” These modifications were accepted by the Senate because they enriched and clarified the original proposal, and, in response to some critical comments, they centred on regulating the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Investigation and National Security Centre, or CISEN). As reported in the Senate on December 14 (Ley de Seguridad Nacional 2004),
Although this law entered into force eight months ago, the Bicameral Commission on Matters of National Security ignores the actions of the federal executive power, so as to avoid the presence and crossing of groups or persons related to terrorism. Article 56 stipulates that "policies and actions related to National Security will be subject to control and assessment by the Federal Legislative Power, through a Bicameral Commission including three Senators and three Congressmen." Among the powers of the Bicameral Commission (Article 58) the following should be emphasized: (1) approval of the report mentioned in Article 58: "in the month during which the ordinary session of the Congress begins the Technical Secretariat of the Council shall deliver a general report on the activities implemented during the previous six months"; (2) approval of general reports on the implementation of directives, given in writing by the Executive Secretary to the General Director of CISEN; (3) approval of cooperation agreements initiated by the CISEN and actions that are implemented on the basis of such Agreements.

Moreover, there were serious limitations in the original conception of the act, such as the lack of any definition of basic concepts such as "national security" or "the national interest," or of any detailed distinction between national security issues and public security issues.

The first three articles of the National Security Act are central, as they define the objective and the concept of, and the responsibility for, the national security policy. Article 1 specifies that the aim of the act is "to provide the basis for integration and action coordinated with the institutions and authorities in charge of the preservation of national security, within their usual range of powers." Article 2 outlines the responsibility of the head of the Federal Executive in determining this policy. Article 3 defines the national security concept as "actions intended in an immediate and direct way to maintain the integrity, stability, and permanence of the Mexican state."

Articles 4 and 5 are also important, as they complement the first three. Article 4 provides that "national security is governed by the principles of legality, responsibility, the protection of fundamental human, individual, and social rights, confidentiality, loyalty, transparency, efficiency, coordination, and cooperation." Article 5 defines twelve threats to national security. For example, the first refers
to "acts of espionage, sabotage, terrorism, rebellion, genocide, and treason against the United States of Mexico within its national territory," while the tenth concerns "any form of financing of terrorist actions and organizations."

The general concept of national security used within this act frequently does not adequately define matters of public security such as organized crime, which does not automatically result in a threat to national security, nor does it specify how to define "terrorist organizations" or "acts of rebellion." In addition, there is no consideration of the effects of issues such as poverty, economic development, or the use of natural resources, all of which present potential threats to national stability. In this sense Salazar (2002, 81) stresses that

in Mexico the concept of national security is an unclear, controversial and politicized term. Controversy results from its use during the Cold War in order to weaken democratic processes, to support military governments, and to facilitate foreign interference in internal affairs.

Moreover, Salazar argues, national security was not a topic of debate in Mexico and, apart from the security and intelligence institutions, it was a mystery to the rest of society.

The lack of clear and detailed definitions allows the Federal Executive and the National Security Council to interpret issues such as gun trafficking, drug trafficking, transnational youth gangs, trafficking of people, and the presence of armed groups such as the EZLN in such a way that declarations from high-level officials and members of the legislature are often to the effect that youth gangs, for example, are a national security issue. These views also extend to a number of debates on science and technology, which, according to some scholars, should be considered as national security issues as well.

Recently the CISEN confirmed the existence of five armed groups in Mexico that "could affect social peace and national security," although it did not include the EZLN among them. The five groups are the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Army) and its four splinter groups: the Partido Democrático Popular Revolucionario (Democratic Popular Revolutionary Party); the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente (Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army); the Ejército Villista Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Villistan
Revolutionary Army); and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Armed Forces). This list differs from that presented in a report by the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (National Defence Secretariat, or SEDENA) on the existence of armed groups and their features, which concluded that there are eight such groups, this time including the EZLN, "with at least four of them having a probable presence in Chiapas and Guerrero, although there is evidence of some presence in the Mexico Valley" (El Universal 2005).

Timing, however, is very important in the typology of threats to national security. For example, the emergence of the Zapatista guerrillas was initially depicted as a national security issue, but twelve years later public authorities do not have the same perspective. The issue is no longer considered to be related to the structural state of the country, although the actions of the Zapatistas may lead to a destabilization process that could challenge the strength of Mexican state institutions.

Security Cooperation Between Mexico and Central American States
Significantly, a bilateral Grupo de Alto Nivel sobre Seguridad Fronteriza (High-Level Group on Border Security, or GANSEF) began to operate as early as October 2002. According to Campuzano (2004, 186),

The group operates at the level of the ministries of the interior in both countries, Mexico and Guatemala, but also includes technical meetings and working groups on (a) migration, human rights and border issues; (b) international terrorism; (c) organized crime and legal cooperation; (d) public security; and (e) customs.

To date GANSEF has had a number of achievements based on recommendations from the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, which was established in Guatemala City in 1999 by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States. For example, in January 2004 the Working Group on International Terrorism "studied the creation of a general 'protocol for coordinated security operations at formal and informal border crossings between Mexico and Guatemala,' which would include a bilateral framework for early response to terrorism" (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Guatemala 2004, 2). Likewise, progress has also been made by the Working Group on Public Security:
The Guatemalan Ministry of the Interior has worked on a plan named Fuerza de Tarea (Task Force), which is intended to eradicate illegal activity on the Guatemala–Mexico border, including the smuggling of guns, people and other goods, organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and crimes related to the environment and tourism, so as to "establish a mechanism for reinforcing the relationship between GANSEF, drug control groups and public security activities by federal entities along the border."

Then, on June 28, 2005, the governments of Mexico and Belize signed an agreement on border and security cooperation as a basis for collaboration on border vigilance and supervision. Vicente Fox, then President of Mexico, declared that with this agreement Mexico had sealed and shielded its three borders with the United States, Guatemala, and Belize against organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, and the smuggling of guns and people. The agreement covered five areas: migration, customs, public security, the power of attorney, and international terrorism. According to President Fox, "All of these have the same purpose: secure borders, and the flexible and rapid transition of goods and persons across them" (El Financiero 2005a).

The southern border of Mexico has received little attention from local, state or federal institutions. In Guatemala, Belize, and beyond there is a significant lack of financial and material resources for responding to basic social problems and to those derived from organized crime. Thus, the border space is a fertile ground for the operation of illegal groups. Recently a local newspaper (Cuarto Poder 2005a) noted that military intelligence reports reveal that the southern border region, especially the state of Chiapas, is becoming more relevant to the operations and expansion plans of drug barons, since it is propitious for the transport and storage of drugs. These reports refer to the proven existence of competition within the Cartel del Golfo ["Golf Cartel"] between Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Osiel Cárdenas, with his "Zetas," [a group of "hitmen"] for the control of this strategic Central American cocaine crossing point.

In 2005 a report from the Mexican Procuraduría General de la República (Office of the Attorney General, or PGR) on the drug-trafficking situation asserted (Sánchez 2005, 20) that
the Zetas have a presence in 13 states of the country, in which small cells have been created. Today the Cartel del Golfo and its armed wing of *sicarios* [contract killers] are present in Tamaulipas, Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Campeche, Sinaloa, Jalisco, Veracruz, Chiapas, Querétaro, and Tabasco.

The PGR's officials have not yet agreed on what to do about the presence of the Zetas. When Attorney General Daniel Cabeza de Vaca was asked whether it was possible for the Zetas to come to some agreement with the Agencia Federal de Investigaciones (Federal Agency of Investigations, or AFI) or the army, his answer was unambiguous: “First, I want to make it clear that we do not have any indication of more Zetas. We know that there are *sicarios* in the organized crime scene, that some people, unfortunately, are hired to kill, and that these people are trained, but the Zetas are dead or in jail” (Ríos 2005, 8). However, Santiago Vasconcelos, an assistant prosecutor in the PGR, noted (Sanchez 2005, 21) that

> this group of *sicarios* will keep on operating for Osiel [Cárdenas]. They continue, but the trend is that little by little they are getting out of Osiel’s cartel, because there is no strong leadership. The leader is incarcerated and, because of that, we have witnessed an attempt to free him.

Because of concern that the Cartel del Golfo might be looking for new locations along the southern border, Antonio Cadena Méndez, the regional head of the AFI in Tamaulipas, was transferred to Chiapas on July 22, 2005. The Office of the Public Prosecutor in Chiapas pointed out that there was no evidence to confirm the presence of any drug cartel or of hired assassins from the Zetas, and police authorities confirmed that they had not been overwhelmed by any increase in crime. However, the launch of the México Seguro (Secure Mexico) program, which was created originally for the states of northern Mexico, went ahead in Chiapas as well. Between January and August 2005 a significant number of homicides occurred in the Soconusco, the most dynamic region on the southern border, although the public prosecutor’s office accepted only nineteen of those as violent homicides. In the last week of August three people were killed on one day alone: two of them were travelling with their family in a van with a licence plate from Frontera Tamaulipas but originating from Frontera Hidalgo, a border town
close to Guatemala, and the third was found beheaded in the town of Mapastepec, very close to the border.

Various human rights organizations have pointed to the rising levels of violence in Chiapas, in particular in the areas closest to the border with Guatemala. Some estimates suggest that about 400 women were murdered violently in 2004, ten times more than in Ciudad Juárez. Jaime Javier Aguirre Martínez, president of the organization Masculinity and Politics, reported that “the levels of violence in Chiapas are similar to those in Jalisco, Guerrero, the State of Mexico, and the Federal District [of Mexico City]” (Cuarto Poder 2005b).

Previously, the US ambassador to Mexico, Tony García, had accused the Mexican government of failing in the war against violence and drug trafficking along Mexico’s northern border, which had caused Janet Napolitano, governor of Arizona, and Bill Richardson, governor of New Mexico, to declare a state of emergency. The situation on the southern border was addressed at the forty-fourth Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between Mexico and the United States in Newport, Rhode Island, where US legislators reportedly told the Mexican representatives that Mexico had lost control of its southern border. Indeed, US concerns about security on Mexico’s southern border were raised at every forum or meeting that addressed bilateral issues. On September 8, 2005, during the annual conference of attorneys from the ten states that border Mexico, held in Phoenix, Arizona, Governor Napolitano urged the Mexican government to contain the flow of illegal migrants and reinforce the fight against the smuggling of human beings on its border with Guatemala: “I would like to see them restrain the flow of illegal immigration, the origin of which is located in the south of Mexico. I think they could do more on that border” (El Financiero 2005b).

The situation in Guatemala is of equal concern. The border regions of Guatemala are points of departure and arrival not only for Mexico but also for the rest of Central America. The high porosity of Guatemala’s shared borders with Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras has created an ideal area for the transit of people, weapons, and drugs. Many migrants from the South and beyond believe that arriving in Guatemala means that they have reached the “Guatemalan Dream,” as it is then possible to cross Mexican territory into the United States.

As a border country with a high level of institutional weakness, Guatemala is open to the proliferation of organized crime, in particular drug trafficking. Manuel de Jesús Xitumul Ismalej, head of intelligence
with Guatemala's anti-drug squad, recently pointed out the existence of vast marijuana and poppy plantations in the municipalities of El Petén and San Marcos, which are adjacent to the states of Chiapas and Tabasco. At the same time the Guatemalan Servicio de Análisis e Información Antinarcóticos (Anti-drug Analysis and Information Service, or SAIA) proclaimed the existence of Quitacargas groups, composed of police agents, judges, and public prosecutors and devoted to halting the arrival of drugs and money by air, land, or sea from Colombia, Panama, and Mexico. The SAIA noted a case in June 2005 when members of a Colombian drug gang transporting 2,000 kilograms of cocaine were detained by authorities in the Pacific Ocean, had their load confiscated, and were then killed (Prensa Libre 2005). According to the SAIA, drug dealers pay peasants to sow poppy and marijuana seeds in the municipalities of Sololá, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, and Huehuetenango (the latter two bordering the Mexican state of Chiapas). This is a very profitable business for the peasants, since they can earn US$ 1,800 for one hectare of poppies compared to only about US$ 150 for a hectare of tomatoes.

As of September 15, 2003, Guatemala was no longer on the list of countries not complying with US-imposed goals for drug trafficking. However, in September 2005 the US government decided that Guatemala was once again to be regarded as non-compliant, because it believed that Guatemala had failed to meet its goals: no major drug dealers had been detained, and no new laws against organized crime and for the improvement of civilian intelligence had been approved. The US government went ahead with this despite the fact that in 2005 the Guatemalan government had confiscated 2,500 kilograms of cocaine, 8,747 grams of crack cocaine, 102 vehicles, and 123 guns (Prensa Libre 2005).

MIGRANTS, TRANSNATIONAL GANGS, AND GUERRILLAS

On January 11, 1991, a new cycle started for Central America when a summit of the Mexican and Central American presidents took place in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital of the state of Chiapas. This meeting was key to defining a strategy for relations between Mexico and the countries of Central America. After its substantial participation in the Nicaraguan peace process, Mexico looked on Central America with
renewed interest, taking into account the Initiative for the Americas announced by US President George H. W. Bush in 1996. The Tuxtla summit resulted in, among other decisions, the formation of a high-level Mexican–Central American commission to conduct a feasibility analysis for the creation of a free trade area by December 31, 1996.

By January 1991 the end of the civil wars in both El Salvador and Guatemala was very close. After twelve years of armed conflict that had caused more than 75,000 deaths, El Salvador was about to finalize an agreement with the Farabundo Martí Front, which subsequently resulted in the signing of the Chapultepec Agreements in January 1992. In Guatemala the Framework Agreement on Democratization in the Search for Peace by Political Means was signed in July 1991 in the municipality of Querétaro, Mexico, and in December 1991, the Framework Agreement for the Reactivation of the Negotiation Process between the government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) was signed in Mexico City. Five years later, on December 4, 1996, an agreement on a definitive ceasefire was signed. These and other agreements signed between 1991 and 1996 culminated on December 29, 1996, in the signing of the Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera (Firm and Durable Peace Agreement), ending thirty years of armed conflict in Guatemala.

Parallel to the peace process, negotiations for free trade, according to neoliberal and US logic, were implemented to fight against poverty and tyranny. The first issue faced by the Central American countries was their inability, due to their lack of political cooperation, to negotiate, as a bloc, a free trade agreement with Mexico. Ten years later, in the CAFTA negotiations, they still could not achieve this, despite the United States having imposed it as a condition of the negotiation process. This weakness of the Central American countries has been useful to both Mexico and the United States. The preconditions imposed by the United States on Mexico during the NAFTA negotiations were imposed by Mexico on the Central American countries, and the United States used the same approach with Central America in the recent negotiations. This asymmetry reoccurs whenever governments of small economies are forced to accept that they have a great deal at stake, but it also allows them to keep the few concessions they currently enjoy.

Since the signing of the peace agreements in El Salvador and Guatemala, emigration from Central America has evolved from forced displacement, caused by conditions of conflict and labour-related issues...
beyond Mexico's southern border, to predominantly transnational migration. This shift has been a matter of concern because trade integration policies that seek to guarantee the free flow of goods and services are in direct contrast with the stricter physical and legal barriers that have been imposed on the free movement of people. Yet, despite the fact that the various free trade agreements that have been signed do not include sections on migration and, moreover, that borders have become more rigid in restraining migratory flows, migration has rapidly increased. Although the designers of the free trade agreements, viewing matters from the neoliberal theoretical perspective, have claimed that these agreements would result in local and regional economic growth, and, consequently, enhanced opportunities for work, a greatly accelerated migratory flow to the United States has been observed. Just as Mexico has experienced during twelve years of NAFTA, the Central American free trade agreements will lead, sooner rather than later, to national industries being replaced by transnational industries, which, in turn, will result in the elimination of thousands of local jobs.

**Migrants and Agricultural Day-labourers**

A steady flow of Central American migrants into the Mexican border states, in particular Chiapas, began during the 1960s and 1970s. The growth of coffee plantations, an economic activity demanding a large workforce especially at harvest time, generated an extended labour market. The influx of workers from regions in Mexico other than Chiapas, such as Los Altos, which is located on the edge of the southern border's coffee zone, was not enough to stop the hiring of Guatemalan workers. There are two main reasons why, little by little, temporary workers from the Guatemalan Altiplano have replaced Mexican day-labourers: first, the opening up of new development opportunities and thus new job opportunities in other states along the southern border, especially the Cancún tourist region; and, second, the conditions of poverty and conflict in Guatemala.

In effect the plantation economy in the zone closest to the Guatemalan border generated interdependence, in that a significant part of the accumulation of capital could not be realized without the presence of Guatemalan temporary workers. In more recent years the influx of labour in the form of a migratory population has spread to banana, sugar cane, and mango plantations, while in urban zones, primarily in the town of Tapachula, a growing demand for domestic workers has been reported, although there has also been a decrease in the influx of
### Table 11.3: Inflows of Legal Temporary Farm Workers into Chiapas, 1990–2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>71,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>92,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>74,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>78,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>76,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>67,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>66,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>60,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>49,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>64,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>69,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>42,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>39,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>46,318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This trend can also be explained by reference to two recent developments. The first is linked to the crisis in international coffee prices, which started in 1989: plantation owners were sometimes unable to cover even their production costs, which in turn affected the pay and conditions of their workforce. The second relates to the deepening global crisis in agriculture, which affects Mexico’s southern border region as much as other parts of Central America and has resulted in many migrants heading to the United States in the hope of achieving better working conditions. It is also possible that a significant part of the labour arrangements related to agricultural activities in the coffee zone and elsewhere on the southern border takes place on the black market, without the mediation of contractors and without the necessary immigration processes.

**Migratory Flows**

Mexico’s southern border has thus experienced a significant increase in migratory flows following the ending of the armed conflicts in Central America, against the background of structural-adjustment policies and free trade agreements, as well as natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the crisis in international coffee prices. The economic vulnerability of the region, which is due to the fact that its export base composed solely of agricultural products, has generated a constant growth in the numbers of migrants from Central America passing
through to enter the United States.

Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Migración (National Migration Institute, or INM) has estimated that approximately two million illegal migrants cross the southern border annually, which must be a conservative estimate considering that the number of arrests exceeds 200,000 a year. In addition, there are numerous agricultural day-labourers who cross the border either legally or illegally, as well as visitors who cross daily and at weekends in order to shop in the city of Tapachula and in towns closer to the border. According to the Mexican Centro de Estudios Migratorios (2005),

Illegal or irregular crossings are essentially composed of Guatemalans who cross the border in order to work temporarily in the state of Chiapas and, to a smaller extent, in the state of Quintana Roo, as well as those who stay in Mexican territory in order to go to the United States, the large majority being Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans. The majority of these, if detected, are taken into custody by migration authorities, detained, and sent back home.

According to the INM, the majority of the migrants who cross the Mexico-Guatemala border come from the Triángulo del Norte (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador). This region has also had a problem with youth gangs, known in Central American slang as maras. The governments of El Salvador and Honduras have implemented laws to eliminate these gangs, but to little effect. The laws were not severe enough and the governments failed to create structural policies that would address the origins of this phenomenon. Indeed, none of the Central American countries has yet to develop a program that attends to or offers alternatives to young people excluded from the labour market and the education sector.

In 2000 the Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council) (2000, 2) reported that

in 1980 the number of displaced persons exceeded 10,000 and in 1990 it increased to over 100,000 a year, with a similar figure until 1999, compared to a total record of 123,680 persons sent back, according to data from the INM. Almost all deportations made in these past years related to migrants from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, who
Table 11.4: Detentions of Central Americans in Mexico, 2001-04 (Numbers and %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detentions</td>
<td>144,346</td>
<td>131,546</td>
<td>179,374</td>
<td>204,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by selected</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>67,522</td>
<td>67,336</td>
<td>86,023</td>
<td>94,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>40,105</td>
<td>41,801</td>
<td>61,900</td>
<td>72,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>35,007</td>
<td>20,800</td>
<td>29,301</td>
<td>34,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>2,150</td>
<td>2,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detentions</td>
<td>80,022</td>
<td>60,695</td>
<td>73,136</td>
<td>91,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Chiapas</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total numbers</td>
<td>150,530</td>
<td>138,961</td>
<td>187,614</td>
<td>215,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>detained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


represented 97 percent of deported persons in 1999.

As table 11.4 shows, the number of arrests of Central Americans in Mexican territory increased by 43.3 percent between 2001 and 2004, while the fact that a large proportion of the detentions took place in the state of Chiapas is a further indication of its importance as an entry point to the United States for illegal migrants. Another interesting phenomenon revealed by the official figures is the increase in the number of Hondurans who were arrested, by 81.2 percent. In contrast, the number of Guatemalans who were arrested increased by only 39.8 percent.

The substantial increase in the migratory flow from Honduras in recent years reflects the poor economic and social conditions in the country, conditions that do not guarantee a promising future to its population. According to the United Nations Development Program (see Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2004),
Honduras has one of the highest levels of poverty in Central America. Poverty affects almost 72 percent of Hondurans and 53 percent live in extreme poverty. The situation is even more critical in rural areas, where the poverty rate is slightly below 78 percent and the extreme poverty rate is 70.4 percent. As of 2003 Honduras also had one of the lowest average incomes per capita in the region, US$ 909 a year, surpassed only by Nicaragua’s, at less than $US 500 a year. As for the distribution of wealth in Honduras, the 53 percent of the population who live in extreme poverty receive less than 12 percent of the national income, whereas the 10 percent of the population who are the richest control more than 36 percent of the income generated in the country.

A significant increase in the maquiladora industry in Honduras since the early 1990s has not been sufficient to reverse the economic and social situation. In 1993 more than 33,000 workers were employed in the maquiladora industry. Preliminary figures showed that ten years later the industry employed 114,237 people, an increase of 243 percent, and generated 6.5 percent of Honduras’s gross domestic product, constituted 35.5 percent of its manufacturing industry, produced 15 percent of all government revenues, and represented 30 percent of the industrial workforce.

Youth Gangs
In the context of national security in Mexico and its southern border region in particular, a significant and disturbing trend is undoubtedly the recent emergence of the transnational youth gangs (maras), in particular, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS) and the Mara 18 (M-18). The activities of the MS have caused particular concern in Central America, Mexico, and the United States. These gangs are an outgrowth of the political and military conflicts in Central America. In the 1970s groups such as the Mao Mao, the Piojo, the Gallo, and the Chancleta were formed in El Salvador, and the subsequent Salvadoran migration to the United States generated a proliferation of cells that were influenced by similar US gangs, such as the Pachucos and the Chulos.

There are no detailed statistics on the number of gang members, but in an interview with this author in 2005, Oscar E. Bonilla, El Salvador’s public security adviser, estimated that there were then 4,000 active members of Maras in Canada, 20,000 in the United States, 3,000 in Mexicali and Mexico City, 15,000 in Guatemala, 30,000 in Honduras, 22,000 in El Salvador, and 4,000 in Nicaragua. As noted earlier, anti-
mara legislation in El Salvador and Honduras has failed to reduce the gangs' activities and growth, since they are extremely adaptable to new circumstances.

A report on gang activity in El Salvador, presented by the Salvadoran Police Intelligence Unit at an international anti-gang conference held in San Salvador from February 21 to 23, 2005, revealed that 219 members of the MS and 137 mara members in general carried at least one weapon each in 2004. The authors of this report, which was shared with US security agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), maintained that 48.9 percent of all homicides in El Salvador were committed by gang members, and it noted the seizure of 356 weapons, 303 of which were short calibre and the rest AK-47 rifles, shotguns, and submachine guns (Diario El Mundo 2005). An increase in gang assassinations was also revealed in this report. During January 2005 alone the Salvadoran police reported 138 gang-related homicides: seventy-nine people were killed by the MS and eleven of its members were assassinated, while the M-18 killed thirty-seven people and three of its members were assassinated.

One of the most significant findings of this conference was that El Salvador was the Latin American headquarters for the fight against the maras. Consequently the Salvadoran police and US officials agreed to set up a cooperative relationship in order to exchange information on maras operating in both countries. The first example of this cooperative effort occurred when US police officers and FBI agents participated as observers in an anti-maras operation in the San Salvador area, which includes the towns of Apopa, San Marcos, Soyopango, Ciudad Delgado, and San Salvador (Prensa Gráfica 2005a). Two attacks occurred in Apopa, for example, between August 7 and 13, 2004: a group of businessmen travelling in a truck were attacked and then four young people in a video arcade in Santa Teresa las Flores were assassinated. In March 2005 the US government donated $US 52,000 worth of bullet-proof vests and $US 25,000 worth of other equipment to the Salvadoran police force (Prensa Gráfica 2005a).

The presence of youth gangs in Mexican territory is an obvious reality. Tirado (2005) reports that

According to data from the CISEN . . ., maras groups were detected in 21 entities of the country . . . Chiapas is the natural and original centre of their operations in Mexico. According to statistics from the Chiapas
Secretary of Public Security, as of last February [2005] their presence had been detected in 21 towns both along the border and in urban areas (mainly in Tuxtla, Tapachula, and Suchiate). These numbers provoked a permanent emergency situation for the federal and local authorities, as well as the implementation of a very severe policy in order to contain maras operations: between 2002 and January 2004 831 pandilleros [gang members] were arrested.

In the Soconusco region, the most dynamic on the southern border, these gangs operate in a more visible way. The recent rise of the mara phenomenon in the Soconusco region is intimately linked to the social exclusion of significant parts of the population, particularly young people, in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The activities of the MS and the M-18 are centred in the border cities close to Guatemala, especially in the town of Tapachula.

Political actors and civil society have expressed concern about the presence of youth gangs in the state of Chiapas, but an incident in the city of Tapachula raised the alarm about the increasing presence of maras in the region. On November 20, 2004, only two days after Santiago Creel, minister of the interior, announced at a press conference that Mexico's southern border would be reinforced in strategic areas, including migration control and the presence of the military (Cuarto Poder 2004a, B22), a fight took place between the MS and the M-18. For at least six years just such an event had been anticipated by the border region's population, particularly those living in Tapachula. The news quickly spread at the national level, and both print and electronic media widely disseminated news about the conflict, which had occurred during the annual celebrations of the anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. The day after Creel's declaration Chiapas Senator Arely Madrid Tovilla declared that national security measures must be doubled in the region (Cuarto Poder 2004a, B19):

It would be very serious to deny what is happening on the southern border, since appropriate measures would not be taken to strengthen national security. One does not need to be an expert to know that Chiapas has a border with another nation. It is very important, and that is why appropriate measures must be taken.

On November 26, a large demonstration of up to 7,000 people,
according to the local press, marched through the streets of Tapachula to protest against the maras. Banners carried by the demonstrators read, “Death Penalty for the Mares,” “Security in Schools,” “We Demand an End to Insecurity in the Region of Tapachula,” “We Want Peace in the Schools,” and “Burn All the Maras Salvatruchas, as they are Killed and Burned in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala” (Cuarto Poder 2004b, B8).

The federal government’s response to the mara violence that erupted on November 20 was to mount a police operation Acero II (Steel II), in which 1,200 federal, state, and municipal agents were sent to safeguard the border region from Suchiate to Mapastepec, with the assistance of 670 patrols and three helicopters. According to the attorney general of Chiapas, Steel II was a permanent operation that had been in effect since 2003 and the measures implemented after the conflict represented the biggest orchestrated operation so far in the fight against the maras on the southern border. In addition to these efforts, Attorney General Mariano Herrán Salvati disclosed that Operation Costa would be implemented in twenty-six towns in the Costa, Soconusco, Fronteriza, and Sierra regions, in coordination with the Federal Preventative Police, the AFI, the INM, Chiapas’s own investigation agency, and the municipal police (Cuarto Poder 2004b, B12).

International cooperation to deal with the maras has since moved forward. On September 7–8, 2005, an international plan for simultaneous operations, the first and to date the biggest operation of its kind, was implemented simultaneously in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. Some 6,400 police officers participated in the operation and arrested 660 members of maras: 237 in El Salvador, 162 in Honduras, 98 in Guatemala, 90 in Mexico, and 73 in the United States. The operations in El Salvador were part of a project known as Mano Dura (Hard Hand), which has been started by the government in mid-2003 that had already resulted in more than 20,000 arrests (Prensa Gráfica 2005b). In Mexico the operation was called Escudo Comunitario (Community Shield). Over 1,500 state and municipal police officers participated in the operation, which was conducted in the towns of Tuzantán, Villa Comaltitlán, Tapachula, Huixtla, Cacahuatán, Suchiate, Unión Juárez, and Tuxtla Chico, all of which are situated in the Soconusco region of Chiapas, a border space that clearly suffers from the effects of the economic and social problems in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. In recent years the Soconusco region and its
urban centre, Tapachula, the economic centre of Chiapas, have been transformed into a place of arrival for hundreds of migrants hoping to reach the United States.

Guerrillas and Militarization
The year 1994 represented a turning point in security policy along the southern border of Mexico. On January 1 that year, the Mexican people awoke to hear news of the armed uprising of the EZLN (the “Zapatistas”), news that spread around the world in a matter of hours. As Villafuerte and Montero (2005, 14) explain,

The uprising of the [EZLN] consisted of simultaneously taking control of the administrative centres in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas, towns where the Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle was widely disseminated. It asked “international organizations, including the Red Cross, to monitor and regulate our fight, so that our efforts are carried out while still protecting our civilian population. We declare that now and always we are subject to the Geneva Conventions in forming the EZLN as the fighting arm of our liberation struggle.” The EZLN also took control of a radio station, EXOCH, in Ocosingo and broadcast messages to the population of Chiapas all day long.

The federal government, through the Ministry of the Interior, issued a statement asking the rebels to lay down their arms, while recognizing the serious historical backwardness of the region. The bishops of the three Chiapas dioceses condemned the rising but said that it should be interpreted as a warning about the danger of abandoning marginalized groups.

On January 2, there was still a lot of confusion and little news. The EZLN had left the central square of San Cristóbal in order to go to Rancho Nuevo, general headquarters of Military Zone 31, where heavy fighting with the Mexican Army took place. Clashes were restricted to the town of Ocosingo and the Army announced that the central square had been reconquered. The official casualties on the second day of clashes [were] up to 50.

The first response of the Mexican government to the armed uprising of the EZLN was to deploy military force. The deployment of troops from
various parts of the country to Chiapas was obvious in the first twelve
days of the armed conflict, and during the remainder of 1994 there was
an impressive movement of military forces, mainly to the border zone
with Guatemala.

Today (early 2007) the presence of the Mexican army in Chiapas is
still very evident, not only in sheer numbers but also in the constant
patrolling of roads and rural paths in Chiapas. As the Centro de Analisis
Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas (2004, 3–4) reported:

The official arguments for the operations of the Mexican Army in the
zone are mixed: the flow of illegal migrants, drug trafficking, traffic in
weapons and high-value timber, the social attention paid to poverty
and natural disasters, organized crime, and so on, all justified by the
Act Establishing the Basis of Coordination for the National Public
Security System [approved November 21, 1995], which includes the
Army and the Navy in these actions.

No exact figures are available on the number of military personnel
deployed to Chiapas during the years of increased tensions and
disputes, but some human rights organizations have estimated that
the numbers have fluctuated between 40,000 and 70,000 (Contralinea
Chiapas 2006, 16–18). In 2003 the Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las
Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en México (Office of the
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico 2003,
156) estimated smaller numbers, but expressed concern about their
activities:

There is speculation about the number of soldiers in the zone, and
the SEDENA [reports] that there are at present 15,000 soldiers in
Military Region 7. The presence of camps and military bases close to
the indigenous communities, as well as military patrols and blockades
on the roads, contributes to a climate favourable to provocations and
friction with the civilian population.

What is certain is that the Zapatista uprising has compelled the
federal government to substantially increase the number of military
zones in Chiapas. In this regard José Luis Sierra (2003, 139) observed,

The Chiapas conflict also had a major impact on military arrangements
in the territory [of Chiapas]. With the objective of improving the coordination and movement of troops, the Mexican Army and Air Force changed their territorial structures through the creation of military zones and air bases around the region of conflict in Chiapas. These changes consisted of creating two military zones, the 38th in Tenosique, Tabasco, and the 39th in Ocosingo, Chiapas, as well as two Air Force bases in Copalar and Altamirano. Five years after the uprising Military Region 7 still consists of five military zones: the 30th in Villahermosa, Tabasco; the 31st in Rancho Nuevo, Chiapas; the 36th in Tapachula; and the zones of Tenosique and Ocosingo.

With the increase in the number of military zones the main section of the border strip between Mexico and Guatemala has remained under military control. This includes the most frequented points, such as in the zone of Tapachula, as well as points in zones such as Tenosique, which had previously seen few people and goods cross the border but which has undoubtedly been quickly transformed into a very important crossing zone due to its location adjacent to the Petén region of Guatemala.

Thus it is possible to assert that the armed uprising of the EZLN has been a factor in the redefinition of the southern border in geopolitical terms. The vulnerability of this territory has been revealed, as well as the role it can play in terms of national security. The continued presence of Mexican armed forces in the borderland fulfills several functions, including control not only of the movements of the EZLN but also of drug trafficking and of flows of illegal migrants from Central America. The likely resurgence of armed groups in Guatemala, and the possibility of renewed guerrilla activity in Chiapas and other Mexican states along the southern border, the strengthening of drug cartels in the region, and the US government's demands that Mexico increase security on its southern border all indicate that the Mexican army will remain in this region.

CONCLUSION

Mexico's southern border is the most complex and the weakest link in its relations with the countries of Central America. Its problems are particularly associated with the movement toward globalization in the Americas. To date the Mexican state has been unable to respond
to the region's most critical issues, such as poverty and the lack of employment, especially for young people. Consequently since 1994 the demands of the EZLN have taken a heavy toll on every government in the region. The lack of solutions has produced other problems that were previously perceived as less significant, such as international migration from Central America and from the region itself, drug trafficking, transnational youth gangs, and the smuggling of human beings. Parts of the borderlands of Guatemala and Mexico are now in the hands of revolutionary groups and criminal networks that the Mexican state has been unable to undermine.

This chapter has emphasized that market forces, local culture, and local political clout are clearly challenging the policy activities of the Mexican government. This is also an important contribution to the application of Brunet-Jailly's model of border security.

As Sepulveda (2002, 12) has noted, “The first duty of any state is to protect its citizens and to defend its national territory, since they are essential elements of its national security.” However, there are indications that the security measures implemented by Mexico on its southern border respond more to US than to Mexican interests. Although the concept of “security” has a military connotation that must be complemented by a political agenda, security policies have so far been aimed neither at the most vulnerable groups in Mexican society nor at increasing the strength of institutions. The lack of economic policies for people living in the border region is also evident, which is why there are no opportunities for stable and well-paid jobs.

In this context migrants who cross Mexico's southern border from Central America are viewed in the same way as Mexicans trying to cross the Mexico-US border: as a security threat. However, as González (2002, 229) has pointed out, “The migrants are not the cause of the threat, but the effect of a global process that has convulsed economic stability, the concept of traditional identity, and the asymmetric distribution of development opportunities.” Clearly, it is important to consider the spheres of security and development as related issues without subordinating the development agenda to security goals.

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