



## Revista Política y Estrategia N° 130 (2017)

Editada por: **Academia Nacional de Estudios Políticos y Estratégicos (ANEPE) Chile.**

Lugar de edición: Santiago, Chile

Dirección web: <http://www.politicayestrategia.cl>

ISSN versión digital: 0719-8027

ISSN versión Impresa: 0716-7415

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26797/rpye.v0i130>

Para citar este artículo / To cite this article: Pion-Berlin, David : “*The military and internal security operations in Latin America*”

Revista Política y Estrategia N° 130, 2017 pp. 101-123

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26797/rpye.v0i130.131>

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## THE MILITARY AND INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA<sup>∞</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*The nature of 21st century threats to internal security require, in certain situations, the introduction of the armed forces. Can the military be used effectively, and in ways that are consistent with standards of humane conduct, and that will minimize collateral damage? It very much depends on the precise nature of the operation. It is important to know whether an operation coincides with a military's professional skills and preferences. The probability of operational success and civilian protection is enhanced when the operation is congruent with military capabilities, where soldiers can confine themselves to military-like operations and not engage in police work.*

**Key words:** *Military; internal security; human security; military missions; military counter-narcotic operations; police missions.*

## LOS MILITARES Y OPERACIONES DE SEGURIDAD INTERNA EN AMERICA LATINA

### RESUMEN

*La naturaleza de las amenazas del siglo 21 a la seguridad interna requiere, en determinadas situaciones, la introducción de las fuerzas armadas. ¿Se pueden utilizar los militares, con eficacia y en una manera que sea compatible con las normas de conducta humana, y que reducirá al mínimo los daños colaterales? Depende mucho de la naturaleza precisa de la operación. Es importante saber si una operación coincide con las habilidades y preferencias profesionales de un militar. La probabilidad de éxito de las operaciones y protección*

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<sup>∞</sup> Fecha de recepción: 160817 - Fecha de aceptación: 251017.

*civil se ve reforzada cuando la operación es congruente con las capacidades militares, donde los soldados pueden limitarse a las operaciones militares y no están involucrados en el trabajo policial.*

**Palabras clave:** *Militares; seguridad interna; seguridad humana; misiones militares; operaciones militares contra- narcóticos; misiones policiales.*

## INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, there has been widespread reluctance to involve the armed forces in internal security operations. Memories of how the military conducted themselves when in power remind political leaders of the risks of introducing troops to fight drug trafficking, and other forms of organized crime. Specifically, they fret that the military will not be able to restrain their use of force, and that innocent civilians might get harmed in the process. For this reason, some nations have amended constitutions or passed laws restricting the use of military force within national borders. And yet, most of the nations of the region continue to allow for some form of military utilization under certain conditions. Even Argentina, the country thought to have erected the highest hurdles, does allow for armed forces internal deployment in exceptional circumstances, when normal internal security forces are overwhelmed, and when ordered in by the president under constitutional state of siege provisions. Guaranteeing the internal order is now a constitutional provision in ten Latin American nations<sup>1</sup>. 94 percent of Latin American countries regularly perform activities related to public security which involved the armed forces to one extent or another. These include counter drug trafficking, urban patrols, border patrol, and security at large events. 76 percent of militaries possess regular programs for combatting drug trafficking or organized crime<sup>2</sup>.

The fact is, many countries with serious internal security threats realize they have no choice; they must call on the military to assist in defeating organized crime, especially when police forces are overwhelmed, incapable or unwilling to do the job themselves. There can be no blanket prohibition on military internal security missions because that would leave powerful criminal elements to operate unimpeded, and place citizens at risk. Does introducing the armed forces pose an unacceptable risk to these countries? Not necessarily, according to this study. It very much depends on the precise nature of the operation. It is important to know whether an operation coincides with a military's profile: its purpose, structure, training, and professional standards. The probability of mission success is

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<sup>1</sup> RED DE SEGURIDAD Y DEFENSA DE AMÉRICA LATINA. Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and the Caribbean [Accessed 10 february 2016]. Available at: <http://www.resdal.org/>, p.41. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibíd.* p.81.

enhanced when it is congruent with military capabilities. Mission failure becomes more likely when the gap widens between what the military is being asked to do, and what it can and wants to do. That gap widens considerably when soldiers are asked to be policemen. It is very hard for militaries to make the mental and physical adjustments necessary to perform law enforcement, not to mention the fact that policing is also a professionally undesirable task for soldiers.

Soldiers must do soldiering, not policing. But at the same time, they must respect rules of engagement intended to prevent collateral damage. Those rules are based on internationally recognized codes of conduct for security forces operating within their own borders, especially within densely populated areas. We will review what some of the guiding principles for military action are, and how some countries have incorporated these into manuals for the use of force. We will then argue that it is possible for militaries to follow those guiding principles, if they are assigned missions that are fully compatible with their abilities. References will be made to Mexico, and its counter-drug war. It will be observed how the introduction of the Mexican armed forces into internal security operations has not posed a uniform risk to civilians. To the contrary, soldiers can perform duties and minimize collateral damage under the right conditions.

## **THE BROADER SECURITY THREATS AND MILITARY INVOLVEMENT**

There has been over the last two decades, a conceptual shift. The notion of security and security threats has broadened, and so one might expect the military role in internal security has expanded as well. Issues that were once outside the realm of security have been brought inside. These may not constitute security threats in themselves, but may have implications for security. Natural disasters, environmental degradation, undocumented immigration, even extreme poverty are often portrayed as events or processes that could, if left unattended, materialize into security threats, even crises. Second, criminal activities are increasingly coordinated, large in scope, and transnational or cross-border in nature. If criminal organizations regularly cross over territorial limits, then a security challenge may be neither purely domestic nor external; it could be both. That in turn could blur the line between defense and public security spheres. For example, drugs, human trafficking, contraband, and arms smuggling, are activities that take place across borders, and have repeatedly been priority items on the agenda at the bi-annual Defense Ministerials 1995-2014<sup>3</sup>.

If the concept of security has widened, and the line between domestic and external has blurred, should the military role be expanded? Should it take on as-

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<sup>3</sup> CONFERENCIAS DE MINISTROS DE DEFENSA DE LAS AMÉRICAS. Declarations for Each Conference, 1995-2014. [Accessed on: 3 february 2016]. Available at: <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/docminist.asp>

signments that have some police characteristics? These have been central questions in Latin America for some time. There are several strong arguments against involving the military in internal security missions. First, it has been argued that military immersion in security operations within densely populated zones has been linked to human rights violations, including illegal arrests and detentions, and excessive use of force. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Latin American public was often the victim of military abuse of power. Always under the pretext of defending national security, armies would routinely resort to excessive force within their national borders against perceived enemies of the regime, while innocent civilians would inevitably be caught in the dragnet. Even after the transition to democracy in the mid to late 1980's, militaries earned notoriety for transgressing the law and for failure to observe human rights standards, when operating within the borders. Scholars maintain that so long as Latin American militaries are directed toward internal security operations, they will do so not only at the expense of citizens' rights, but at the expense of civilian control as well<sup>4</sup>. Democratic governments have an obvious interest in avoiding military entanglements that could result in the loss of or harm to innocent lives. So too do soldiers who will not want to be blamed for injuries or fatalities.

Second, militaries are normally socialized into the use of maximum force, not restraint<sup>5</sup>. When faced with a formidable foe, militaries instinctively do two things. Defensively, they hunker down in heavily guarded, fortified bases and thickly plated armored vehicles and uniforms. When they do emerge from their fortresses, they resort to uninhibited explosive force against the "enemy," to subdue it enough to shield their own units from counterattack. It is an exercise in shifting back and forth between isolation and annihilation. This creates a stark separation between soldier and public which has the disadvantage of dulling the military's sensitivities to situations requiring calibrated, gradational and deferred violence. In short, militaries have a difficult time striking the balance between force protection and target protection. Hence, one would think that internal security deployments would inevitably invite trouble because militaries resist being compelled to abide by principles of restraint, which are thought to interfere with combat readiness.

Third, scholars have contended that militaries that turn inward become distracted from professional, defense related tasks. They get pulled away from

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<sup>4</sup> STEPAN, Al. "The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion". In: LOWENTHAL, Abraham and FITCH, J. Samuel. (ed.) *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986. pp.134-150; DESCH, Michael C. *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> LUTTERBECK, Derek. "Between Police and Military: The New Security Agenda and the Rise of Gendarmeries", *Cooperation and Conflict* 39 (1): 45-68, 2004.; MCDAVID, H. "Transformation vs. Amalgamation", *Security and Defense Studies Review* 7, 3, 2007. [Accessed on 20 January 2016]. Available at: <<http://www.ndu.edu/chds/>>.

warfare training and pulled into other pursuits that harm their professionalism by undercutting their combat readiness, and implicating them in domestic political conflicts. They should instead be entirely focused on external threats so that they be preoccupied with matters of combat readiness<sup>6</sup>.

Asking whether the armed forces should be immersed in internal security issues is the wrong question because it is too simplistic. It glosses over important distinctions regarding security risks to state and society. The need to involve the military, along with the potential risks associated with it, are sure to vary, because internal security itself is multi-dimensional, as are the threats to it. Before addressing the specific risks, let us first define some terms.

A noted Argentine civil-military and legal scholar has defined internal security as the 'security conceived within the state, related to the protected exercise of individual rights of the person, his life and belongings and the preservation of rule of law'<sup>7</sup>. That this definition focuses so much on the individual, is a reflection of broad changes in global thinking about security over the last two decades. In the past, security considerations would usually trump the protection of individuals, allowing governments to threaten or deny individual security for the sake of fending off larger perils to the nation<sup>8</sup>. This was certainly true in Latin America, where doctrines of national security justified all sorts of violations of civil liberties in the name of preserving order and stability. In the contemporary period, this trade-off is no longer permissible. International norms have elevated the stature of human security, tying the very sovereign powers of states to their obligations to protect citizen well-being. The ultimate goal of security policy is the safeguarding of individuals, according to the United Nations<sup>9</sup>. Thus, there is a connection between internal and human security.

At the same time, this definition may be too centered on the individual because indeed, internal security refers also to a condition where property, institutions and governments are rendered secure from threats as well. When a nation faces the gravest of threats—up to and including those of an existential nature--then internal security intersects with national security. When national security is at risk, a country's vital institutions and interests are at stake, not just individuals. This most familiar connotation refers to the safeguarding of the state--its institutions, rulers, and government--and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation itself.

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<sup>6</sup> See DESCH, Michael C. *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> UGARTE, José M. *Los conceptos jurídicos y políticos de la seguridad y la defensa*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, p.6. 2003.

<sup>8</sup> MACFARLANE, S. Neil and KHONG, Yuen Foong. *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 2006.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp.164–201.

Those concerned with safeguarding human security, meaning the rights and liberties of individuals, might conclude that military involvement in internal security is never warranted. After all, threats to individuals often originated from the State itself, relying on its main coercive agent, the armed forces. Citizens need to be protected from politically motivated abuses perpetrated by the state: repression, torture, unlawful detention, and other forms of ill-treatment. If the military had been involved in state sanctioned human rights abuses in the past, what is to prevent it from repeating those abuses in the present?

The problem is that paradoxically, while citizens need protection from the State, they also need protection by the State, because only the State can deliver the security needed in the face of 21st century threats. Among the new security threats facing some Latin America are what I would term mid-level challengers, situated between full scale guerrilla organizations at the high end, and common criminals at the low end<sup>10</sup>. Normally, to fight an insurgency, the state must respond with military-led, counter-insurgency campaigns featuring heavily armed regiment or battalion sized units. Conversely, to contend with ordinary criminals, the state send its police forces out to deter and investigate. It is in the middle where responses get more complicated. In that middle ground are situated the Drug Trafficking Organizations or DTOs (Sinaloa, Zetas, New Generation Jalisco Cartel of Mexico), Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO's) and criminal gangs (Las Maratruchas of Central America). DTO's for example, are dangerous, sprawling conglomerates whose operations span multiple provinces and countries. Some can boast security forces that rival host country militaries in size and lethality. Thus, they can pose a formidable threat to the state, enough to warrant company or sometimes battalion-sized, military responses. Others may be smaller and less lethal, but still a real challenge for municipal or state police forces, who may request assistance from the military. These mid-level organizations operate in and around densely populated areas, and compete with each other for control over illicit markets, drugs, trafficking routes, arms, contraband and neighborhoods.

With these points in mind, it is clear that the security of individuals is threatened by mid-level challengers, and that human security cannot be achieved without intervention by the state, and in particular, intervention by the armed forces. As one author states, "The state is most apt at protecting human security because of a combination of capability, will, knowledge and admissibility in international forums such as the U.N."<sup>11</sup>. Only states can marshal the forces required to sub-

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<sup>10</sup> The following section borrows from PION-BERLIN, David, and TRINKUNAS, Harold. Latin America's Growing Security Gap, *Journal of Democracy*, 22, (1): 39-53, 2011, and PION-BERLIN, David. Neither Military Nor Police: Facing Heterodox Security Challengers and Filling the Security Gap in Democratic Latin America. *Democracy and Security* 6, (2):109-127, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> TADJBAKSHI, Shahrbanou, and CHENOY, Anuradha M. *Human Security: Concepts and Implications*. London: Routledge Press, p.168, 2007.

due midlevel challengers that threaten human security. Not just any state security force can cope. When it comes to countering crime, it is the police that are on the front lines, in most societies. But it has become apparent in recent years that police are no match for mid-level challengers. Outgunned, outnumbered and outmaneuvered by sophisticated and lethal criminal organizations, police have not been able to offer citizens the protection they need. On the contrary, they have often been complicit in criminal behavior, succumbing to bribery or intimidation.

Even as large, organized criminal elements may make it unsafe for citizens to conduct their daily lives-- intentionally or unintentionally exposing them to violence in public spaces, extorting protection money for the right of safe passage or the price of conducting business-- they also present a challenge to the viability of governments. They so consume the state with attending to the threat that they drain resources away from vital social programs; they thwart the delivery of needed services; they blockade key transportation arteries into major cities causing supply shortages, or they even create ungovernable spaces, where the state cannot penetrate. This may undermine the credibility of public institutions and call into question the governing capacity of those in office<sup>12</sup>. When the threat looms that large, it becomes a national security issue, and it may justify a military or military-like response.

Thus, when human and national security are under siege, governments may conclude that some form of military intervention-- either alongside of police forces or alone—may be essential. There can be no blanket prohibition on military internal security missions because that would leave powerful criminal elements to operate unimpeded, and place citizens at risk. In the case of Mexico for example, Raul Benítez Manuat says this:

“...those who are critical of Mexico’s strategy of using its armed forces and call for their removal from fighting organized crime propose an untenable solution because of the police forces’ weakness and the absence of an alternative security agency that could replace the military”<sup>13</sup>.

The question becomes, how then can governments use the military to protect human security without undermining it? Mid-range security challengers elevate the stakes considerably, because they compel more deadly or numerically massive responses than police are normally capable of, and yet at the same time, warrant a greater degree of discretion and circumspection than armies are normally accustomed to. Lethality must be tempered with restraint, since operations

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<sup>12</sup> PION-BERLIN, David and TRINKUNAS, Harold. Latin America’s Growing Security Gap. *Journal of Democracy*, 22 (1): 39-53, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> BENITEZ, Manuat, Raúl. Mexico-Colombia: U.S. Assistance and the Fight Against Organized Crime. In: Cynthia Arnson, “et al”. *One Goal, Two Struggles: Confronting Crime and Violence in Mexico and Colombia*, Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas, #32, p.61, 2014.

are likely to occur within population centers and can easily place innocent civilians at risk, but also because human security now enjoys elevated stature. This is the delicate balancing act that Latin American countries must achieve. Are militaries a solution, or are they part of the problem? Can they conduct for example, counter-narcotic operations while minimizing harm to the civilian population, or will they inevitably trample on the rights of citizens, or inadvertently inflict collateral damage?

## **DISAGGREGATING THE SECURITY THREAT**

The short answer is, it depends. It depends on what specific kind of operation we are speaking of. Answering this question demands that we disaggregate the internal security challenges facing some nations of Latin America. In fact, we need to disaggregate the counter-narcotic operations themselves, because they are not all the same, and the risks they pose to civilians will vary. It is not just the fact that challengers are located in the middle realm. We also need to know what specific operations are required to confront them? Where do those operations take place? And importantly, what skills and assets are called upon to do the job? Does a military response mean conducting military – styled operations, or does it mean conducting police-styled work: patrol, search and seizure, house arrests, detention?

There is a geographical dimension to security responses. Population centers are not always at risk when challengers appear on the scene. It depends to what extent insurgents, criminals, and state security forces interface with the public, and how they interface with the public. Generally speaking, activities that take place in rural or remote regions pose fewer problems for non-combatants. In many of the drug producing countries, cultivation of illicit crops occurs almost entirely in rural areas that are sparsely populated. When crops are destroyed manually, it means the introduction of armed soldiers into poppy or marijuana farms that may or may not be heavily guarded. Where confrontations do occur between state security forces and narco-traffickers, who themselves have gotten in the business of cultivation or who are simply offering protection to farmers—there is a probability that non-combatants and non-criminals will be caught in the crossfire, but that probability is low, because these encounters occur in sparsely populated areas.

Drug interception poses a somewhat different and varied set of risks. Some exit points are along the coast, and naval and coast guard units can pursue speed boats or subs in open waters, avoiding contact with civilian populations, and minimizing risks. But many escape routes are on land, where the risks of drug interceptions hinge on where entry and exit points are located, how many there are, and how much of a nation's territory is traversed by traffickers to get from point A to point B. Military checkpoints along highways in more sparsely populated areas will not pose the same degree of risk as those within cities. Borderland operations

in rural areas should also pose fewer problems, but where criminal organizations are transporting narcotics across metropolitan border areas, risks could be higher.

Within urban areas, it might be hypothesized that all military counter-drug operations are risky—too risky, because of the proximity of civilians. But this is not so, and it depends on the nature of the operation and how it is conducted. The military, it will be argued, has a different mind-set regarding police-like urban operations than it does operations that more closely conform to limited combat. It is the difference between activities which it cannot square with its organizational essence, its customary training and conditioning, from those it can. Those distinctions have a bearing on how observant the military can be of international and national standards of conduct in pursuing criminal suspects. Those standards, to be detailed below, involve precautionary measures intended to reduce the chances for excessive force, and collateral damage; that guide the military in minimizing hazards to the public even as it inflicts harm on the culpable. To the extent that the military can conduct itself in a matter befitting soldiers trained in urban combat operations, rather than being forced into policing activities for which it has limited abilities, then it becomes more likely it can observe standards. To understand this, we have to return to the earlier subject of distinctions between police and military missions.

## **POLICE VS. MILITARY MISSIONS**

It is one thing to say that the line between the domestic and the external has blurred; it is another thing to say that actual police work and military tasks have meshed. Some scholars do maintain that both the military and police have crossed the line, with police becoming more militarized and soldiers becoming more police-like. P. Andreas and R. Price state: “The distinction between law enforcement and military missions breaks down, too; military tasks become increasingly domesticated and civilianized, and policing tasks become increasingly internationalized and militarized”<sup>14</sup>. Heiduk agrees, and contends there is no real separation, just a continuum. Police can take on military roles as one moves through the continuum, and the military have taken on more functions related to law enforcement<sup>15</sup>.

But B.K. Greener-Barcham maintains that a blurring of domestic and international security spheres, does not automatically conflate police and military roles. While acknowledging that the expansion of the security concept may run the risk of “militarizing” it as well, he finds that in case of New Zealand, and the Solomon

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<sup>14</sup> ANDREAS, Peter and PRICE, Richard. From War Fighting to Crime Fighting: Transforming the American National Security State, *International Studies Review* 3(3):52, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> HEIDUK, Felix. “Rethinking Police-building”, *Cooperation and Conflict* 50 (1): 69-86, 2015.

Islands, police and military roles were distinct and supportive<sup>16</sup>. Safeguarding a division of labor between police and military conduct, actually helped the overall security effort. In this particular case, the police took the lead, actually assigning the armed forces its tasks. The armed forces created a more secure environment in which the police could operate. While there were problems of communication, and questions about what it meant for military to give way to police commanders, generally division of labor worked well. Thus even with an expanded concept of security, and a transnational, cross-border reality to security, it is possible to maintain a division of labor between military and police activity.

Greener-Barcham's observations are important, because they leave open the possibility that the military could participate in internal security operations while confined to tasks that fit more comfortably with soldiering. This might mean avoiding the undesirable situation of forcing the military into policing roles they are ill-suited for and would rather avoid. Asking the military to convert to police-like tasks is a tough sell. Conditioned by years of training and indoctrination, soldiers seek and destroy an enemy, they don't protect and serve a citizenry. And they may resent being thrown into roles they consider to be professionally unrewarding, even demeaning.

The fact is, there is a limit to which militaries can "stretch" beyond their conventional roles to undertake policing assignments. Morris Janowitz, one of the pioneers in sociological research on the armed forces, was cognizant of the need to "limit military goals to feasible and attainable objectives"<sup>17</sup>. In particular, he worried that soldiers might not take to constabulary or police-like roles easily since they think of those assignments as having less prestige and honor. These are simply undesirable tasks, because they are perceived to be professionally demeaning. They are also difficult tasks, requiring the soldiers to make mental adjustments from the aggressive war-fighting practices they are accustomed to, to the less more unfamiliar, controlled peacetime practices of law enforcement. Charles Dunlap agrees that the conversion is difficult and if made, could potentially harm the military's combat readiness, because constabulary soldiers will not be able to easily revert back to war-fighting roles, having lost their combative edge<sup>18</sup>. Others contend that such a re-orientation is ultimately too far a stretch to pull off successfully, and should be avoided<sup>19</sup>. While soldiers will perform constabulary

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<sup>16</sup> GREENER-BARCHAM, B.K. Crossing the Green or Blue Line? Exploring the Military-Police Divide", *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18 (1): 90-112, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> JANOWITZ, Morris. *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, p.43, 1960.

<sup>18</sup> DUNLAP, Charles. *The Police-ization of the Military*. *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*. 27: 217-232, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> ZIMMERMAN, Doron. *Between Minimum Force and Maximum Violence*. *Connections: the Quarterly Journal* 4 (1): 43-60, 2005; BAYLEY, David. *Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2001.

roles if asked, by large margins they admit that it necessitates additional training, and that re-orienting themselves to these assignments is hard<sup>20</sup>.

Some militaries can make the conversion. They have the ability to adapt to new and difficult circumstances. When handed set of unfamiliar if not daunting tasks, they will reorganize their forces, incorporate new technologies and undergo new training regimens; they will be ready for the undertaking, even if it means undertaking law enforcement duties. Militaries that rise to the challenge have re-invented themselves, and are prepared to confront new realities.

But other militaries cannot operate out of their comfort zone. Adaptation is hard, and resistance to change is strong<sup>21</sup>. This is the case with most Latin American militaries, which are conservative organizations prone to falling back on familiar routines rather than discovering novel responses to problems. They bring to those missions the organizational resources, capacities and skills already in place. By and large, they are not great innovators, able to retrain, re-learn and adapt to new, unfamiliar circumstances. It usually takes strong-willed civilian leaders to push for reforms, and in Latin America that is a rarity. Most politicians from the region prefer to leave well enough alone, and hope that the military can somehow adjust itself to new circumstances. But generally, militaries make few self-adjustments, plunging ahead into missions equipped with what they already know. If asked to conduct operations that require that they re-invent themselves, or strain to be something they are not, they will usually comply, but will not perform competently. They may resent their assignments, believing their time would be better spent preparing for combat<sup>22</sup>. They may make their compliance contingent on government concessions or side payments. In short, they may not fully cooperate with their political overseers.

What matters is how large the gap is between the mission at hand and the capacity of the military<sup>23</sup>. And secondly, and of equal importance, how large is the gap between the mission and the desirability of the tasks that must be performed? There has to be a fit between the nature of the mission, and the pre-existing skill sets, training and customary practices of the military. But there also has to be a congruence between what soldiers are called upon to do and what they prefer

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<sup>20</sup> REED, B.J. and SEGAL, D.R. The Impact of Multiple Deployments on Soldiers' Peacekeeping Attitudes, Morale, and Retention. *Armed Forces & Society*, 27 (1):57-78, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> ROSEN, Steven P. *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Surveys of peacekeepers from a variety of countries who are deployed to non-combat, policing operations find that they will do the job, but with reservations. They question just how appropriate it is and whether it is good for their careers in the long run. By large margins, peacekeepers have found the work to be boring. REED AND SEGAL, Op. Cit.; MICHAEL, K. and BEN-ARI, E. Contemporary Peace Support Operations: the Primacy of the Military and Internal Contradictions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 37 (4): 657-679, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> For this concept of role-professional compatibility gap, see PION-BERLIN, David. Cumprimento de missões militar na América Latina. *Vária História* 28 (48): 627-643, 2013.

doing, as professionals. If not, then there are role-compatibility gaps. In police work, we find a toxic blend of the two gaps. If soldiers are asked to perform police functions, such as patrols, house searches, arrests and detention, they are in a double predicament. They are neither prepared for these operations, nor do they consider them to be consistent with their professional calling. Not only have they not trained for such assignments, but they also consider such assignments to be professionally unrewarding, if not demeaning. We would predict less mission success in these situations, as well as greater risks to citizens at large. For these reasons it is important to specify what kind of internal security operations are being referred to, and what kinds of professional skills and training need be summoned to undertake it.

## **RULES ON THE USE OF FORCE**

The main problem for the military of some Latin American countries is abiding by principles of restraint, and learning new rules of engagement that they are uncomfortable with. The military's problem, when there is one, is overreaction. This is a result of ingrained behavior. Militaries are socialized into the use of maximum force. Conditioned by years of rigorous training and indoctrination, they are hard wired to react in ways that are, as many have observed inappropriate and at odds with police functioning<sup>24</sup>. Deploying army units in anticrime or antidrug operations in densely populated zones—alone or often alongside police units—is often inviting trouble because militaries resist being compelled to abide by the principles of restraint and minimum force, because they are thought to interfere with combat effectiveness. But restraint, caution, and circumspection are almost always demanded of security forces operating in densely populated zones, if they are going to conduct themselves appropriately, and humanely.

Whether the military ends up operating in support of the police or alone, it has to contend with an environment that is quite distinct from a conventional battlefield. Mid-level challengers, such as drug trafficking organizations among other transnational criminal organizations, and gangs often operate in urban areas, blending into the civilian population around them. They also come heavily armed, and it is that combination of lethality and proximity to unarmed, civilians that poses a problem for security forces. Even when they make their presence known, they are not easy targets, since thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of innocent civilians are situated but a stone's throw away. There are similarities between the challenges a military faces on a counter-drug trafficking mission, and those faced

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<sup>24</sup> This training is called Continually Reinforced Functional Discipline (CRFD). See MCDAVID, *Loc. Cit.* David Bayley argues the military will contaminate community policing because it is trained to take orders from above rather than responding to citizen appeals; because it does not know how to use restrained force; it lacks mediation skills, and does not give soldiers powers of discretion. BAYLEY, *Op. Cit.* pp. 38-39.

during urban combat against terrorists, insurgents or paramilitary forces. The U.S. Army Field Manual for Urban Operations acknowledges the difficulties of fighting in cities:

“Of all the environments in which to conduct operations, the urban environment confronts Army commanders with a combination of difficulties rarely found elsewhere. Its distinct characteristics result from an intricate topography and high population density. The topography’s complexity stems from the man-made features and supporting infrastructure superimposed on the natural terrain. Hundreds, thousands, or millions of civilians may be near or intermingled with soldiers—friendly and enemy. This second factor, and the human dimension it represents, is potentially the most important and perplexing for commanders and their staffs to understand and evaluate”<sup>25</sup>.

Restrictions on use of force are built into international human rights and humanitarian law, UN codes of behavior<sup>26</sup>, and national decrees and regulations. A number of Latin American countries have written manuals on the use of force within their borders. These manuals often borrow language and principles from international treaties. For example, for lethal operations in densely populated areas, there are widely agreed upon rules of behavior:

- Necessity (or indispensability): a determination has to be made that no other remedy other than force can be used to achieve a legitimate military objective.
- Rationality: A related principle that says other non-violent measures have already been used without success, leading to the conclusion that force is necessary. This poses a challenge to militaries that are accustomed to resorting first to explosive force. The notion that the military must, like police, explore other less lethal options first is one that would require considerable reprogramming, and considerable restraint.
- Proportionality: This is the use of a certain level and intensity of force determined by the challenge posed by an adversary; that amount of force needed to subdue the adversary or achieve a military objective, but no more than that. Proportional force is also difficult. Militaries are accustomed to using maximum force, which often compensates for the prospect that not enough force has been used to vanquish the enemy. Thus, overkill is com-

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<sup>25</sup> UNITED STATES ARMY. U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-06 Urban Operations, pp. 2-1, 2006. [Accessed on 28 January 2016.]. Available at: <[http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR\\_pubs/dr\\_a/pdf/fm3\\_06.pdf](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_06.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement stipulates that force be used with restraint and ‘only when strictly necessary’. UNITED NATIONS. The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement. General Assembly Resolution 34/169, 17 december 1979. [Accessed on 14 January 2015]. Available at: <<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instreet/i1ccleo.htm>>.

mon. But proportional force assumes that the military, in the heat of battle, can quickly recalibrate, so that it knows its objectives have been achieved and thus immediately suspends operations or reduces its explosive force. This is quite a challenge as well.

- Distinction (or discrimination): this is the demand that an adversary be clearly identified, separated from civilians and that force only be directed at him, and that innocent civilians not be put at risk. *This is perhaps the most critical component. The military has to be reasonably certain that a target is the enemy, in order to avoid collateral damage. Second it must be able to separate the target from the surrounding population in order to not inadvertently inflict damage on the innocent.*

There are now at least four Latin American countries that have manuals on the use of military force internally: Ecuador, Peru, Mexico and Bolivia. Each of these embody principles first set out by the U.N. and International Law, calling for military to use force as last resort, to explore non-violent options, to use only that minimum level of force to achieve objectives, and to distinguish between and separate, the enemy and the innocent.

For example, Ecuador's law on military operations does not let soldiers "off the hook" even when they are responding to serious, internal security threats<sup>27</sup>. It says that the individual rights and liberties of citizens are paramount, and the security forces must assure those rights and liberties are protected. Under a state of exception, as ordered by the president, the military's obligation to protect citizens is not relaxed. In responding to organized crime, the armed forces should abide by principles of necessity, proportion, and rationality, along with legality, temporality, territoriality and reasonableness<sup>28</sup>. Soldiers are accompanied by legal aides to assure that human rights abuses don't take place.

Peru<sup>29</sup> has its own rules for employing military force in national territory. The military is obligated to follow international humanitarian and human rights norms when engaged in counter-narcotic, counter-terror operations, either alone or in support of the police (articles 4,5). Article 7 specifies that the military must adhere to principles of distinction (separating hostile elements from those who are

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<sup>27</sup> MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA NACIONAL DE ECUADOR. Manual de Derecho en las Operaciones Militares, Primera Edición. Quito: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 2014. [Accessed on 24 January 2016]. Available at: <[http://www.coed.mil.ec/archivos\\_coed/MANUAL%20DE%20DERECHO%20EN%20LAS%20OPERACIONES%20MILITARES.pdf](http://www.coed.mil.ec/archivos_coed/MANUAL%20DE%20DERECHO%20EN%20LAS%20OPERACIONES%20MILITARES.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> The military can resort to force internally only when all other measures to achieve objectives prove insufficient and force is justifiable in relation to the legitimate objective sought. See Ecuador, Manual de Derecho, Op. Cit. pp. 34, 40.

<sup>29</sup> DECRETO LEGISLATIVO N° 1095. "Reglas de empleo y uso de la fuerza por parte de las fuerzas armadas en el territorio nacional", Perú, 2010. [Accessed on 11 February 2016]. Available at: <[https://www.unifr.ch/ddp1/derechopenal/legislacion/l\\_20100907\\_01.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/ddp1/derechopenal/legislacion/l_20100907_01.pdf)>.

not), limitation (disallows coercive methods that would cause unnecessary suffering), necessity (must justify force as essential to obtaining a legitimate military objective or advantage), and proportionality (prohibits an operation if it is anticipated it will cause civilian casualties that are excessive in relation to a concrete military advantage). Article 18 stipulates that security forces must first resort to non-lethal approaches, and then scale up their responses only if necessary. These incremental measures are to first establish a presence, then visual contact, followed by verbal communication. If these don't suffice then physical control, non-lethal actions and then finally lethal measures. All of these rules must be incorporated into the military's instruction and training.

Mexico subscribes to similar principles, of indispensability (necessity), opportunity (discrimination), rationality, proportionality and legality. Like Peru, it insists on a graduated scale of measures from non-violent to violent, and also specifies what constitutes improper use of force<sup>30</sup>. And finally, Bolivia's manual for the use of force was written in the aftermath of indigenous uprisings against government policies on natural gas which resulted in bloodshed<sup>31</sup>. When internal conflicts take place, the manual allows for the introduction of the armed forces where police have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of violence, after negotiations with the opposition have failed. The principles of force limitation are the same: necessity, proportionality, rationality and discrimination. Presidential instructions to the armed forces must be detailed and in writing, so that if things go wrong, some of the political and legal burdens are thrown back on the government.

These are stiff requirements for military action. They demand circumspection, and an aptitude for calibrated response, always contemplating the alternatives to maximum, unrestrained violence. Even if the military are not engaged in policing, they still have to abide by these rules of engagement. The question is under what conditions would the military be able to comply with these constraints? Here, we argue that there must be a fundamental military nature to the mission; it cannot be so completely divorced from what the military is trained to do, and wants to do. Conversely, police like operations will be the hardest, because of a fundamental disconnect between military professionalism and the role. To make the point we will consider the differences between military police patrols vs. high value targeted operations (HVTOs)—those conducted against the leaders of drug syndicates. We will draw on the Mexican case as an example.

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<sup>30</sup> SECRETARÍA DE LA DEFENSA NACIONAL, MÉXICO. Manual del uso de la fuerza, de aplicación común a las tres Fuerzas Armadas. México City: SEDENA, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Bolivia. Manual del Uso de la Fuerza en Conflictos Internos. 2005. [Accessed on 12 february 2016]. Available at: <http://www.lexivox.org/>

## **THE MEXICAN CASE: MILITARY POLICE PATROLS VS. HIGH VALUE TARGETED OPERATIONS (HVTOS)**

Police patrols are those operations where army and navy units engage in city-wide crime sweeps. Officers, split into groups of two or three, patrol block by block either alone or alongside of the police in search of lower level criminal suspects. These operations may involve house to house searches, questioning occupants, seizing possessions, making arrests and detaining and interrogating suspects. High value targeted operations are military-styled engagements, designed to capture or kill known, high profile, drug trafficking leaders. They rely on formed units, and pursue with precision, individuals already identified as criminal suspects.

On the one hand, there are similarities between the two kinds of operations. First and foremost, they take place mostly in cities. Cartel members, whether high or low level operators, can and do blend into the population. Even when they make their presence known, they are not easy targets, since thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of innocent civilians are situated close by. Second, because of the urban geography, soldiers are operating in close quarters, and in proximity to places of residence and business. Third, they come heavily armed, and the chances that innocent civilians could be inadvertently harmed are ever present. This is especially so since cartel leaders are surrounded by men equipped with an arsenal of high powered rifles, submachine guns, even grenades. That means the military must come equally prepared, and the lethality of the confrontation could get quickly out of hand, jeopardizing all those in the immediate area. Fourth, soldiers make direct, intentional contact with the public. In the days leading up to an assault, they may be gathering information from neighbors. The day of the assault, they may have to request that residents quickly vacate their homes, and then direct them to secure places where they are kept under guard. If public contact is, as has been suggested, a huge risk factor for the armed forces, if soldiers have difficulties acclimating themselves to an environment where they must calmly and patiently interact with the population, then certainly high value targeted operations should be prone to serious missteps.

On the other hand, the differences with urban patrols are sizeable, and those differences help explain how targeted operations can be carried out with substantially less risk to the unarmed population than can police patrols. When military personnel are asked to do law enforcement work in urban patrols designed to hunt for criminal elements, they have to make difficult, unrewarding behavioral adjustments that ultimately prove counter-productive. In police patrols, the military (army and navy) is often sent out in small teams, paired up with policemen in search of lower-level criminals or operating on their own. They rarely come prepared with solid intelligence, relying instead on anonymous tips. Gener-

ally they do not have a lot of information to go on, and so they often are not sure who are reliable suspects and who are innocent. And yet, they are under pressure from their superiors to produce results. They are given powers of search, seizure and arrest, but not given adequate training in how to use those powers cautiously and prudently. In the face of uncertainty, under pressure to find criminals, and with inadequate training, they are quick to accuse, assault and apprehend arbitrarily, without evidence or warrants. Rather than taking the time to find credible leads, they lump all those within proximity to the target as hostile suspects. That perception leads to callous militarized crime sweeps that fail to make careful distinctions that might have saved lives. The military, in other words, respond poorly, rashly, violently, and inevitably end up violating rules of necessity, rationality, proportionality and discrimination.

Moreover, the Mexican army and navy do not immediately turn suspects over to the police for further questioning, because the police are often complicit with criminal elements. The military do not trust the police to do their jobs. Thus they prefer to hold onto the suspects, hauling them off to a military installation for detention and questioning<sup>32</sup>. But without experience in methods of humane interrogation, and anxious to extract confessions, they resort to excesses, such as torture and other forms of cruel treatment. Sometimes, those suspects would never resurface, their names filed under 'disappeared.' These scenarios match many others in terms of chosen methods of operation, suggesting that the abuse was not the work of renegade officers but rather sanctioned by higher ups, as part of an authorized operation<sup>33</sup>.

By contrast, the military appear to be able to conduct high value targeted operations more effectively and humanely. First of all, identification of suspects is easier in high value target operations. Cartel leaders are public figures. While they may move in the shadows, they would not have climbed to the top of their organizations in complete obscurity. Their names are known, and at times, so are their faces. There may or may not be photographic evidence, but the army and navy almost always know who they are looking for. The military on HVTOs do not have to subject drug leaders to questioning in order to determine whether they do in fact warrant suspicion and arrest. They are going after cartel leaders who are presumed and usually proven criminals. They have often served time, they have criminal track records, and if not, they have notorious reputations. They are commonly thought to having sanctioned countless murders and massacres, and indeed, would not have risen to the top of their syndicates without having done so.

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<sup>32</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. Mexico's Disappeared: The Enduring Cost of a Crisis Ignored. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013. [Accessed on 2 february 2016]. Available at: <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/02/20/>>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus there is little doubt about their culpability, and that easily earns them the label 'enemy.' This is key, because it resonates with the armed forces *raison d'être*; they are trained to hunt down enemy forces. And because they can pinpoint the target, they can also make a clear separation between the 'bad guys' and the 'good guys', following the rule of discrimination. In short, targeted high value operations of this sort can be designed and framed in ways which fit more comfortably with missions soldiers are cut out for.

If the military knows who it is they are after, finding out where they are is a more complicated challenge. Obviously, the most wanted have been adept at avoiding detection and capture for some time, which compels careful intelligence gathering and reconnaissance work on the part of the security forces and agencies. Intercepting cell phone communications, wiretapping phone lines, finding informants, and then studying the movements and habits of a criminal are all part of a long, methodical, sometimes painstaking process of discovery. Thus, it is almost always the case that dramatic kingpin captures and assassinations have been preceded by weeks if not months of careful planning, enabling the armed forces to ultimately pin-point their target. Drug lord assaults can, in other words, carefully discriminate between violent offenders of interest, and non-violent bystanders, placing them in stark contrast to the indiscriminate and ad-hoc, military police-like patrols.

The armed forces normally pursue drug leaders within cohesive units. They have trained together, and now they can operate together. This is in contrast to police patrols where soldiers may have to split up from their units into teams of 2 or 3. The units that pursue cartel leaders are normally designed and specially trained for purposes of that kind<sup>34</sup>. The Mexican navy, for example, has deployed a marine infantry and parachutist battalion created in 1992 as an elite force held in reserve for high impact counter-narcotic expeditions. They have also deployed special forces that go by the names of Fuerzas Especiales del Golfo (FESGO) and Fuerzas Especiales del Pacífico (FESPA). Formed in 2001, they have been specifically trained in urban combat, building assaults, and closed, indoor confrontations. In addition, thousands of Mexican soldiers have trained in the United States. Between 2006 and 2014, over 16,000 Mexican troops completed counter-narcotics programs at U.S. military institutions, second only to Colombia<sup>35</sup>. Among the courses taken were asymmetrical conflict, counter-drug operations,

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<sup>34</sup> INFANTERÍA de Marina. La Elite de las FFAA Mexicanas and FES. Defensa.com, 2013. [Accessed on 24 January 2016]. Available at: <[http://www.defensa.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10173](http://www.defensa.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10173)>.

<sup>35</sup> SECURITY ASSISTANCE MONITOR, 2014. [Accessed on: 25 January 2016]. Available at: <[http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/trainee/country/2006/2014/is\\_drug/Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean](http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/trainee/country/2006/2014/is_drug/Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean)>.

urban operations, and counter intelligence<sup>36</sup>. Much of the training was overseen by the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), which insists that it adheres to human rights standards. According to law, it must. The 1997 Leahy amendment demands that foreign soldiers they associate with not be involved in any human rights abuses<sup>37</sup>. By contrast, army and navy personnel sent on joint patrols with the police were not specialized, nor adequately trained. I do not know of any program that has trained the Mexican military in pure police tactics.

Why do these differences between police patrols and HVTOs matter? Soldiers should, in theory, be able to better observe the international rules regarding use of force. The military can treat a high value target operation as if it was a military mission. Mindful of who they are going after, the military forces assigned to targeted drug lords can direct their explosive force at the enemy—the crime leader, not his neighbors. They have no need to treat those in the vicinity as hostile or suspicious; they are neither. They can pin point their target and in that manner avoid a “dirty” operation that in advertently places others in harm’s way. In other words, in making the mental and physical separation between the enemy and the innocent, they can abide by the international principle of discrimination. Second, based on actual intelligence, not rumors and hearsay, they have identified the culpable party, and thus can move in to make the arrest with great confidence. They can call for the drug lord’s arrest, and if he abides, can conduct the operation without any resort to violence. Oftentimes, that occurs because of the element of surprise. The cartel leader is caught off guard, without his enforcers at his side<sup>38</sup>. When violence is used, the principle of necessity can be followed. The military will use force only after calling for the cartel leader’s surrender. Should he refuse and instead take up arms, then the military can respond accordingly.

Preliminary empirical inquiries indicate that in Mexico, the distinction between police patrols and high value targeted operations matters in terms of protecting the lives of innocent civilians. There have been countless complaints registered with the Mexican National Commission on Human Rights against armed forces personnel since 2006. A small percentage of these complaints have been thoroughly investigated by the Commission, which then issues reports. Based on a reading of a sample of those reports, it is evident that in each and every case, human rights violations occur during military patrols or check points. There is

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<sup>36</sup> CONROY, B. “US Military Training of Mexican Security Forces Continues,” *The Narcosphere*, 2014, december 3. [Accessed on 18 january 2016]. Retrieved from <<http://narcosphere.narconews.com/notebook/bill-conroy/2014/12/us-military-s-training-mexican-security-forces-continues-human-rights->>.

<sup>37</sup> Security Assistance Monitor, 2014. [Accessed on: 25 january 2016]. Available at: <[http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/trainee/country/2006/2014/is\\_drug/Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean](http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/trainee/country/2006/2014/is_drug/Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean)>.

<sup>38</sup> In fact based on my own analysis of 77 HVTOs conducted in Mexico between 2007-2012, 70 (90%) resulted in criminal apprehensions without death, and only 7 (10%) resulted in the killing of the cartel leaders or his sicarios. See PION-BERLIN, David. *A Tale of Two Missions: Mexican Military Police Patrols vs. High Value Targeted Operations*. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2016 forthcoming.

no indication that abuses occurred during HVTOs<sup>39</sup>. To the contrary, based on a review of newspaper accounts of HVTO's there does not seem to be any civilian casualties that occurred during those operations<sup>40</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

This article has asserted that there are occasions when countries must call upon the armed forces to deploy inside their borders. When mid-level challengers threaten security, police are often unable to respond effectively. It may take the armed forces to step in to assist in eliminating or containing the threat. When they do, they must follow rules of engagement designed to minimize harm to civilian, non-criminal populations. Can they comply? This study has argued in the affirmative, if they can search for criminals within the framework of a military-like operation. There must be compatibility between the demands of the operation and the military's skill set, and its professional inclinations. If, on the other hand, soldiers are forced to do policing, they have a more difficult time coping, and may break with standards of conduct designed to protect civilians. Hence, the difference between policing and soldiering is the difference between operations that cannot be reconciled with desirable professional practices, standards and proclivities, from those that can.

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<sup>39</sup> COMISIÓN NACIONAL DE LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS. Recomendaciones. [Accessed on: 8 february 2016]. Available at: <<http://www.cndh.org.mx/Recomendaciones>>.

<sup>40</sup> A full accounting of this empirical research will become available in PION-BERLIN, Loc. Cit.

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