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**The Mexican army, 1940–1982: The country comes first**

**Wager, Stephen Joseph, Ph.D.**

**Stanford University, 1992**

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THE MEXICAN ARMY, 1940-1982: THE COUNTRY COMES FIRST

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES

OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

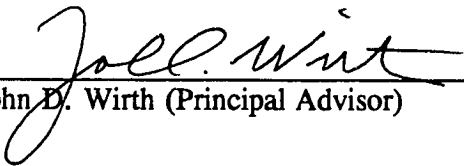
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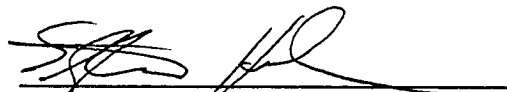
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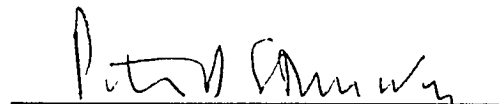
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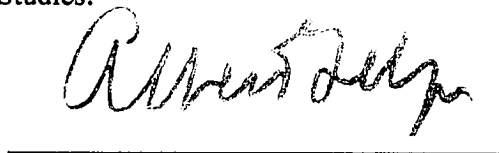
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## ABSTRACT

Since 1940, the military in Latin America has been involved more with politics than with its traditional military role of defending the nation against external threats. The Mexican military has been one of the few exceptions to this rule. By Latin American standards, the Mexican army has been quite tame and completely subordinate to the legitimately elected civilian authorities.

This study examines the evolution of the Mexican army since 1940, by focusing on the internal dynamics that have affected its development up through 1982. This work identifies and defines a unique military ideology as the singular most important factor in the Mexican army's evolution during the second half of the Twentieth Century.

This study begins with a brief overview of the army's structure, organization, personnel, legal foundations, and distinguishing characteristics. It then analyzes the army's ideology, which has set this institution apart from its regional counterparts, and how that ideology is inculcated in the officer corps. This work then examines the roots of this military creed as they evolved during the 1920s and 1930s. During the 1940s, the Mexican army saw its political influence decline precipitously due in large part to Mexico's preparation for and participation in World War II. After the war, the army performed two principal roles, civic action and crisis management. The nature of these roles has changed very little through the years, although the emphasis placed on these functions has varied at times. The student movement in 1968 marked the most



significant crisis the army faced since the 1920s. Its reaction to the turmoil in 1968, and the changes wrought by the army's response are analyzed in detail.

The roles played by the Secretary of National Defense and the President of the Republic as the military and civilian leaders of the army and their overall contributions to the army's development are also covered extensively. This study concludes that the army's unique military creed, more than any other factor, has influenced the army to remain loyal to the civilian government and has prevented Mexico from being victimized by the militarism that has plagued most of the region since 1940.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am fortunate to have received the support of many individuals and institutions during the researching and writing of this dissertation. I thank my advisor, John Wirth, for encouraging me to undertake this project despite a long hiatus from academe. I am also appreciative of his careful reading of my thesis and of his incisive comments on how to improve upon it. I thank Samuel Amaral, Frederick Bowser and Stephen Haber for being exceptional teachers and for offering encouragement and suggestions on how to complete the project. I am especially grateful to John Johnson for his friendship, for his sage advice on the dissertation process, and for sparking my interest in the Latin American military.

In the United States and Mexico, I have many friends who have often provided a sounding board for my ideas on the Mexican military. I am fortunate to have been privy to our many hours of conversation, which I found to be both constructive and enjoyable. David Ronfeldt, Rod Camp, Ed Williams, Mike Dziedzic, José Thiago Cintra, Lorenzo Meyer, Sergio Aguayo, Alicia Hernández and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez comprise this select group of experts on the Mexican military.

While conducting my research in Mexico, the *Colegio de México* provided my academic affiliation and the unrestricted use of its library, where among other important documents I found the most complete set of the *Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea*

*Mexicanos*. The cooperation I received from the school's faculty and staff was exceptional. I also thank the staff at the *Archivo General de la Nación*, especially Eutiquio Franco Huerta and Mario Torrano, for the invaluable support they provided me. I am indebted to Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez and José Luis Piñeyro for their frank and insightful comments about my research. I owe special thanks to Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez for allowing me access to the newspaper archive at the *Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos*, which saved me many long hours of hard work. Pedro Espinosa, Alejandro Cortino and Jaime Guardarama assisted me in my research in a variety of ways, and I am eternally grateful for their support. A special thanks goes to Luis Echeverría Alvarez who openly discussed his views on the Mexican military with me, and who graciously granted me complete access to his personal archives and library.

I owe a special debt to many Mexican army officers, whose names I cannot mention, but who have been very helpful and forthright with me through the years. I thank these and the other officers, with whom I shared many long hours at the *Escuela Superior de Guerra*, for providing me with insights on the Mexican army I never would have obtained otherwise. A number of other Mexicans, who have asked to remain anonymous, accorded me candid interviews that enhanced the quality of my dissertation considerably. To these and countless other friends in Mexico who contributed to this project in many different ways, I express my sincerest gratitude.

My research in Mexico was supported by the U.S. Army, the U.S. Military Academy and two grants from the Center for Latin American Studies at Stanford

University. This dissertation could not have been completed without the generous support of those organizations.

At Stanford, I thank the entire staff at the Center for Latin American Studies for their invaluable support. Special thanks goes to Jutta Mohr and Nora Lundin for their kindness and vital administrative support. I also thank Terry Karl for providing me with highly coveted office space and an excellent work environment. Rigoberto Ocampo and Steve Levitsky have been ideal office mates, and I thank them for their help and support.

I am especially indebted to my fellow colleagues, Anne Hanley, Seth Meisel, Mauricio Tenorio and Daryle Williams. They have been good friends and have always been supportive of my work. Mauricio and Daryle have been especially helpful in educating me on the many uses of the common laptop computer, thereby enabling me to fulfill the technical requirements of this project. I also thank Mauricio for his help in identifying important sources of information in Mexico City.

Many staff members at Green Library have helped me secure important information, and I thank them all for their much needed help and conscientious demeanor.

I thank my children, Melissa and Clinton, for being understanding of my work and for realizing that any neglect I may have shown them during this project was not on purpose.

Finally, I accept full responsibility for any errors in fact and judgement found herein.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The history of the Mexican army after 1940 has generally been overlooked by historians. With the exception of a short work by Mexican historian Jorge Alberto Lozoya, no in-depth studies about the evolution of the Mexican army since 1940 have been written.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, this fact seems odd because so much of twentieth-century Mexico owes its existence and development to the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, and in which the Mexican army played a critical role. Army generals held the

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<sup>1</sup>Jorge Alberto Lozoya, El Ejército Mexicano, 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Jornadas 65, 1984). Lozoya's work also covers the pre-1940 history of the Mexican army, but the classic work on the Mexican army in the post-Revolution years to 1940 is Edwin Lieuwen's Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968). Two books written by Mexican social scientists along with Lozoya's book provide most of what is known about the Mexican army in the post-1940 era from the Mexican perspective. These works are Guillermo Boils' Los Militares y la Política en México, 1915-1974 (Mexico City: Ediciones El Caballito, 1975) and José Luis Piñeyro's Ejército y Sociedad en México: Pasado y Presente (Puebla: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1985). Unfortunately, no one in the United States has written a sequel to Lieuwen's book which would logically describe the evolution of the Mexican army after 1940. However, a number of works have been written which describe certain aspects and characteristics of the Mexican military. These include David F. Ronfeldt's seminal monograph, "The Mexican Army and Political Order Since 1940," in Armies and Politics in Latin America, ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1976) as well as his larger and more recent work, David F. Ronfeldt, ed., The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1984). Two other works which provide very useful information on the Mexican army include Lyle N. McAlister, Anthony P. Maingot, and Robert P. Potash, eds., The Military in Latin American Sociopolitical Evolution: Four Case Studies (Washington, D.C.: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1970), and Stephen J. Wager's contribution to Robert Wesson, ed., The Latin American Military Institution (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986). But as noted above, these works tend to be descriptive and topical, addressing the Mexican military at a specific point in time rather than focusing on its evolution over time.



principal leadership positions in that movement. In one sense, the Mexican army actually forged the institutions that emerged from the Revolution. And more importantly, the Mexican army has continued to defend and guarantee the security of those institutions to the present day, fending off some minor challenges in the process.

Viewing this situation from a much broader perspective, the Mexican army was certainly the most influential institution in Mexican history up through the 1930s. The noted Mexican sociologist, Pablo González Casanova, has made a discerning observation concerning the prominence of the Mexican army in the country's history. He wrote that, in 1958, the military had held power for 93 out of the 137 years of Mexico's existence as a nation.<sup>2</sup> Military leaders such as Venustiano Carranza, Alvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Lázaro Cárdenas del Río laid the foundations for a political system, unique to Latin America, in terms of its durability and flexibility. This system has preserved general economic, political, and social stability in Mexico since the 1940s.

However, most experts agree that since the late 1930s, the army had been gradually eased out of political power. The removal of the military as a sector of the nation's official party, in late 1940, highlighted that demise. In fact, statistics on the military budget, political positions held by military officers, and the relatively slow growth in size of the armed forces since the 1940s readily confirm this conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Pablo González Casanova, Democracy in Mexico, trans. by Danielle Salti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) : 37.

<sup>3</sup>Franklin D. Margiotta's, "Civilian Control and the Mexican Military: Changing Patterns of Political Influence," in Civilian Control of the Military, ed. Claude E. Welch, Jr. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976) : 213-253, provides a well researched analysis of these indicators of waning political influence on the part of the military. Roderic A. Camp's Mexico's Leaders: Their Education and Recruitment (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980) and Peter H. Smith's Labyrinths of Power (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) provide specific data on military officers serving in political

Why did the army generals relinquish political power to civilian leaders? A myriad of works written about the origins and characteristics of the Mexican political system offer a wide range of explanations. Some of the more prominent and generally accepted explanations include the mystique of the Revolution which suggests that the revolutionary fervor still lives in Mexico. According to that theory, the spirit of the Revolution has been preserved by a government that works diligently to satisfy the goals of the Revolution, and army leaders have subordinated themselves to civilian rule in order to help achieve those lofty objectives. Frank Brandenburg popularized the idea of a broad but cohesive "revolutionary family," headed by the President, that had military representation and served as a kind of ruling elite. Other explanations centered around the idea that political institutionalization ensued under the auspices of a dominant official political party and an imposing presidency. And finally, the least flattering interpretation argued that powerful military had been coopted by the ruling elite, and voluntarily submitted to this new civilian leadership in return for lucrative rewards.<sup>4</sup>

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positions since the 1940s. James W. Wilkie's The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) offers a useful analysis of military budgetary trends in the post-1940 era. Perhaps the most specific budgetary information can be found in an official Mexican army publication entitled Evolución del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea 1860-1976, Vol. II, Colección del Oficial de Estado Mayor Mexicano (Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, undated) : 125-129. Hereafter cited as Evolución. This publication reaches a similar conclusion about the declining influence of the Mexican army (see page 169). Francisco Javier Martínez Navarro, "El militarismo en América Latina: el caso de México," (Thesis for licenciado in Ciencias Políticas y Administración Pública, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico, D.F., 1980) : 406 reaches the same general conclusion. Martínez Navarro is a graduate of the Heroico Colegio Militar (HCM), Mexico's equivalent to West Point, and his thesis provides some useful insights on selected technical aspects of the Mexican army.

<sup>4</sup>Margiotta, pp. 216-218, skillfully summarizes these different explanations. In addition to those works cited above, excellent background information can be gleaned from the following works: Frank Brandenburg, The Making of Modern Mexico (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Howard F. Cline, Mexico: Revolution to Evolution 1940-1960 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Daniel Cosío Villegas, El Sistema Político Mexicano (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A., 1974) and La

While these different analyses all possess some degree of validity, none focus on the internal dynamics of the military institution, the chief contribution of this dissertation. The transfer of political power to a civilian elite in the 1930s could not have been accomplished without a consensus to do so by the army itself. To date, no one has satisfactorily explained how this consensus was ultimately achieved, or more importantly, how it was maintained after 1940. With regard to the downgrading of the military's influence in politics, the most critical question that remains to be answered is not so much why the army gave up political power but rather why it never reentered the political arena after 1946 (the date the last military president in Mexico completed his term). To sufficiently answer this last question, one must also ask what influenced the army to evolve the way it has since 1940? In more specific terms, why did the military budget decrease substantially through the 1940s and 1950s, and then level off at a very small percentage of the federal budget thereafter? Military expenditures, as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have remained at approximately 0.7 percent from 1960 to 1982. The significance of this figure is that it is the lowest of the Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, which has only a national police force.<sup>5</sup> After 1940, why did the army develop principally as an internal security force

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Sucesión Presidencial (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A., 1975); Pablo González Casanova, op. cit.; Roger D. Hansen, The Politics of Mexican Development (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Susan Kaufman Purcell, The Mexican Profit-Sharing Decision: Politics in an Authoritarian Regime (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Martin C. Needler, Politics and Society in Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971) and Mexican Politics (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982); L. Vincent Padgett, The Mexican Political System (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966) and Robert E. Scott, Mexican Government in Transition, rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 1984-1985 (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1984) : 122-123.

performing a predominantly civic action mission and generally lacking in sophisticated equipment? To sum up, why did the army fail to play a major role in political-decision making when most of its Latin American counterparts were doing just that after the 1940s?

Many historians, including Frederick C. Turner, identify efficacious political and economic decision-making by the government as the driving force behind the limitation of military power.<sup>6</sup> A Mexican observer offered as a possible rationale the army's inability to function as a political instrument of its leaders.<sup>7</sup> Samuel E. Finer, one of the principal architects of the field of civil-military relations, said Mexico's collective adherence to the principle of civilian supremacy is the reason why the military does not intervene in politics.<sup>8</sup> How an army subordinates itself to that principle remains unclear. David Ronfeldt, a research analyst for the Rand Corporation and a leading authority on the Mexican military, has described the military as being "more visibly active as an instrument and symbol of the state's authority and, behind the scenes, as an information-gatherer for policymakers."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the Mexican military, and the army in particular, is part of the political system and responsive to its demands. Yet, the army

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<sup>6</sup>Frederick C. Turner, "Mexico: las causas de la limitación militar," *Aportes*, No. 6, Octubre 1967 : 59.

<sup>7</sup>Arturo González Cosío. *Ensayos Escogidos, Historia, Sociedad y Política de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1981) : 205.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, 2nd rev. ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988) : 20-53.

<sup>9</sup>David Ronfeldt, "The Modern Mexican Military: Implications for Mexico's Stability and Security," Rand publication N-2288-FF/RC (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1985) : 19.

remains a tightly-knit corporate body quite capable of generating its own internal dynamics.

Although arguments such as these convey a good deal of credibility, they tend to rely solely on external influences and downplay the influences at work within the institution. While external factors, especially the machinations of the political system, cannot be ignored when examining the evolution of the Mexican army, I argue that the determining factor in the army's development emanates from within the institution itself. There exists within the army an ideology that gives impetus to this important institution and that enables it to retain its elevated status in the face of its rapidly declining political influence.

The tendency to rely on exogenous factors, especially the influence of the political system, to explain the evolution of the Mexican army is understandable. The literature available on the political system and its unique characteristics is extensive. The tendency by almost everyone to overlook the primacy of internal dynamics is also understandable. The general dearth of information on this fundamental institution is just the first of many difficulties encountered in trying to research the Mexican army. Mexican researchers such as Guillermo Boils, Jorge Alberto Lozoya, and Adolfo Aguilar Zinser have openly discussed the problems in gathering information about the Mexican army. The Mexican army does not relish the idea of being examined by outsiders. As a result, Mexican historians and other social scientists have been discouraged from studying the army. In Mexican circles, the topic is generally considered taboo, resulting in little available information about the army. As Lozoya specifically points out, memoirs by key military

leaders are virtually nonexistent, and, while personal interviews with army members can prove to be excellent sources of information, the interviewees often tend to be less than candid.<sup>10</sup>

Lyle N. McAlister pointed out some of the pitfalls involved with conducting research on the military in Latin America, and many his examples related directly to the Mexican army. For example, the armed forces tend to classify even their routine activities as highly sensitive and subject to security restrictions. Additionally, at times military officers experience difficulties in distinguishing between scholarly research and espionage. In the course of interviews or during informal conversations, military officers may opt to speak candidly, provided the information they furnish not be published. Thus, the researcher may ultimately possess information he can never disseminate.<sup>11</sup>

In writing specifically about Mexico, David Ronfeldt and an unidentified Western military attaché have stated that the Mexican army is probably the most "hermetic" military institution in Latin America. For most researchers, the institution has remained a mystery, shrouded in secrecy. Knowledge about the Mexican army continues to be sparse and is often subject to rumors and speculation. There exists no running record of its activities and official military records and archives remain classified to the extent

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<sup>10</sup>Boils : 16-18; Lozoya : 11-14; and Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, "Civil Relations in Mexico," in The Military and Democracy, eds. Louis W. Goodman, Johanna S.R. Mendelson and Juan Rial (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990) : 219. I spoke with José Luis Piñeyro in March 1988, and he discussed the difficulties he encountered in researching his book. He indicated how military officials were generally uncooperative and refused him access to the archive of the National Defense Secretariat. After the book was published, he solicited informal opinions from a few military officers, but they simply declined to comment on the book, even though some had actually read it.

<sup>11</sup>L.N. McAlister, "Recent Research and Writings on the Role of the Military in Latin America," Latin American Research Review, Vol. II, No. 1, 1966 : 31-33.

that they preclude access by other than top-level military and government officials. For example, a high-level Mexican politician claimed that it was impossible for him to know what was going on inside the army.<sup>12</sup> During a press interview in January 1980, Secretary of National Defense, General Félix Galván López, declined to give the strength of the army. He said he could not provide that information for security reasons.<sup>13</sup> His response seemed odd given the fact that numerous military journals and almanacs had already published those figures. Factors such as these have continued to discourage historical analyses of the Mexican army in the post-1940 era.<sup>14</sup> As to the overall quality of the literature on the Mexican military, William Stanley Ackroyd, who recently completed a doctoral dissertation on civil-military relations in Mexico, provides this somewhat pessimistic but accurate assessment, "...the literature on the Mexican military

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<sup>12</sup>Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order Since 1940" : 7 and Alan Riding, "Mexican Army, Amid Rumors, Insists It Steers Clear of Politics," New York Times, 5 February 1974. The manner in which military information is treated with extreme sensitivity can be pointed out by the following anecdote. A U.S. official told me he had found a journal article by Palmira Olguín Pérez, "Los Militares en México Bibliografía Introductoria," Revista Mexicana de Sociología, 1978 : 453-490, which provided an extensive bibliography on sources containing information on the Mexican army. The listing also included information as to what archive or library contained the particular source. The U.S. official noted that a few sources were only available in the National Defense Secretariat archive and even fewer of those were classified sensitive. He subsequently asked a Mexican army major who had been a friend to borrow a specific book dealing with the curriculum at the Heroico Colegio Militar (HCM), the Mexican army military academy, from the National Defense archive to compare the curriculum with that used by the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The Mexican officer initially saw no harm in lending the U.S. official the books, but he later told him that when he went to the archive he was denied access to that material, even though it was not considered classified and did not appear in the least way sensitive or compromising.

<sup>13</sup>Sadot Fabila Alva, "Miembros de las Fuerzas Armadas acudieron a felicitar al Presidente," El Día, 3 January 1980 : 3.

<sup>14</sup>David C. Bailey, "Revisionism and the Recent Historiography of the Mexican Revolution," Hispanic American Historical Review, 58 (February 1978) : 63-65 provides a brief summary of the restrictions on archival research in Mexico. This information can be useful since certain information about the army can be gleaned from archives other than the National Defense archive.

is noticeably lacking. With few exceptions studies on the Mexican military have their basis in intelligent speculation, secondary sources, and just plain wishful thinking."<sup>15</sup>

Given these obstacles to researching the Mexican army, my initial approach was to concentrate on how the military played a politically functional role since 1940, capitalizing on the ample information available on the Mexican political system. However, subsequent study indicated that performing a politically functional role does not adequately explain how the army evolved as an institution since 1940. What were the internal dynamics? In seeking an explanation, I came to realize that the key variable in the civil-military equation in Mexico still appeared to be missing. What encouraged the military to continue to serve a politically functional role for the government but at the same time avoid becoming enmeshed in political decision-making? Why did the army remain relatively apolitical in its development?<sup>16</sup> An official army publication hinted at a possible explanation when it credited General Joaquín Amaro, the Secretary of War and Navy under Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), with gradually creating the spirit and mysticism that made the Mexican army the most apolitical in Latin America.<sup>17</sup> That

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<sup>15</sup>William Stanley Ackroyd, "Descendants of the Revolution: Civil-Military Relations in Mexico" (Ph.D Dissertation, The University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, 1988) : 38.

<sup>16</sup>I initially pursued the idea of examining how the army has played a politically functional role since 1940 after a discussion with Jorge Alberto Lozoya in September 1989. At that time, we both agreed it might be a viable approach. Guillermo Boils expresses a similar point of view in his book (p. 101). It is interesting to note that, at least since the 1940s, the army began to perceive itself as being "apolitical." For example, in the June 1946 edition of the Revista del Ejército, the editorial reminds its readers that the best approach to upcoming elections is for the army to continue with its principles of remaining aloof from political frays.

<sup>17</sup>Jesús León Toral et al., El Ejército Mexicano (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1979) : 479. Hereafter cited as Toral.



spirit was gradually transformed into a unique army ideology that gave direction to the collective institution.

A review of the military-related documentation in the Mexican presidential archives, along with the information in numerous official army publications, including editions of the monthly Mexican army magazine (*Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*), as well as a multitude of speeches and declarations by top-level army officials revealed the existence of, and the strict adherence to, a Mexican army ideology or military culture which indirectly established a set of rules, values, and accepted behavior for all members of the Mexican army. The distinguished civil-military relations expert Samuel P. Huntington would probably refer to this phenomenon as the "military mind" - the attitudes, values, and views of the military man.<sup>18</sup> Here, in short, is one of the world's great military creeds, ranking with the codes of the Prussian and Imperial Japanese Armies, but much understudied and neglected by historians.

In the case of the Mexican army, this ideology cannot be readily defined in concrete terms or concepts. In one sense, this ideology or military culture might be considered somewhat abstract or illusory. No book or service manual has been written which intelligibly describes or outlines this ideology. The formulation of this ideology owes itself to many different factors from which it has drawn on over the years since the end of the Revolution. This military ideology had its roots in the 1920s and became consolidated and fairly well established by the late 1940s. Since that time, it has been legitimized and accepted as an established creed, or what Huntington might call a

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<sup>18</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1957) : 59-62.

professional military ethic, by generations of army officers and troops.<sup>19</sup> This ideology or military culture has been manifest in the mission and daily activities of the Mexican army. It has long played a substantial role in the military educational system, and its basic tenets have been revered in public speeches and press releases by high-ranking army officers. The upshot of this is that through the years, the major principles of this ideology have permeated most official Mexican army publications.

Articulating the Mexican army ideology is a difficult task. Some Mexican army officers consider *lealtad institucional* or institutional loyalty as an appropriate short definition of this ideology or professional military ethic.<sup>20</sup> In terms of a motto, it might best be explained as *la patria es primero*, translated appropriately as "the country comes first." The term *patria* translates a little more strongly than country and is closely akin to the Germanic concept of "the fatherland." That motto has been etched in the base of the large flagpole standing in front of the National Defense Headquarters building in Mexico City. Vicente Guerrero, the famous nineteenth-century revolutionary, used those words in response to his father's request that he abandon the revolutionary cause and accept a payoff from the Spanish tyrants. That motto has served as an inspiration to

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<sup>19</sup>See Huntington : 62-64 for an explanation of the professional military ethic.

<sup>20</sup>The editorial in the April, May and June 1952 edition of the *Revista del Ejército*, entitled Loyalty to Our Institutions, clearly states the significance of institutional loyalty for the Mexican army, referring to it as "the most valiant essence of the army." The importance of institutional loyalty to the Mexican army might also be gleaned from the fact that a book containing assorted quotes from speeches made by General Félix Galván López, Secretary of Defense from 1976-1982, has fourteen pages of selected quotes on institutional loyalty. See Asociación del Heroico Colegio Militar, *Pensamiento y Voz del General Félix Galván López* (Mexico, City: Asociación del Heroico Colegio Militar, 1981) : 57-70. Hereafter cited as AHCM.

Mexican soldiers for many years.<sup>21</sup> For example, the inside cover of the September 1958 edition of the monthly army magazine listed as the sole mission of the army "to serve Mexico," and "the country comes first" as the only motto. The annual September edition has always commemorated the independence of Mexico placing special emphasis on themes of loyalty and patriotism.<sup>22</sup>

For the most part, scholars studying the Mexican army in the post-1940 period have given only superficial attention to the subject of military ideology. Despite that general neglect, a number of analysts have at least acknowledged the existence of a distinctive Mexican military mind. Lyle N. McAlister came closest to the mark when he wrote, "universal military values are given a particularly Mexican flavor, by associating them with glorious episodes in the nation's and army's past....the officer is constantly reminded that he is a member of a corporate body which by virtue of its peculiar and essential social function possesses an extensive degree of self-regulatory power, a mechanism for self-perpetuation, and a monopoly of a set of specialized and complex skills."<sup>23</sup> Ramiro G. Bautista, himself a graduate of the Heroic Military College (HCM), in his law thesis wrote about the creation of an ideology based on the "philosophy of the Mexican Revolution, emphasizing concepts such as loyalty, honor and

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<sup>21</sup>This motto tends to be a recurring theme in the editorials of the *Revista del Ejército* (after 1972 renamed *Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*) especially in selected August editions commemorating the death of Vicente Guerrero. See the August editions of 1948, 1957, 1960 and 1975. The original words of Guerrero were "my country comes first." This was later modified to "the country comes first."

<sup>22</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, September 1958 : 1.

<sup>23</sup>McAlister et al. : 230-231.

sacrifice..."<sup>24</sup> The National Defense Secretariat's official history of the Mexican army tells of selected generals during the 1920s and 1930s who devoted all their efforts toward developing new generations of army officers who had a clear concept of honor and loyalty to the legally constituted institutions.<sup>25</sup> General Joaquín Amaro is a case in point. Finally, expressing a point of view most attuned to my thesis, Frederick C. Turner asserted that a military moral philosophy was the most important element in providing the military with new direction after the Revolution.<sup>26</sup> To summarize, these authors recognized the existence of a Mexican army ideology, but they did not fully conceptualize that ideology or analyze the full extent of its influence on the evolution of the Mexican army after 1940.

The significance of ideology for a professional military is, of course, well established in the literature on the military. Samuel Huntington in particular offers a sound case for the importance of ideology for the military.<sup>27</sup> Amos Perlmutter, a student of Huntington and an expert on civil-military relations, has demonstrated that corporate rules and ideology have greater importance than expertise and responsibility, two other characteristics Huntington used to describe a professional soldier.<sup>28</sup> These findings also

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<sup>24</sup>Ramiro G. Bautista Rosas, "EL EJERCITO EN EL MEXICO ACTUAL--MISION Y PERSPECTIVA," (Thesis for Licenciado en Derecho, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico, D.F., 1976) : 99.

<sup>25</sup>Toral : 469.

<sup>26</sup>Turner : 65. Unfortunately, Turner fails to elaborate as to the content of that military moral philosophy.

<sup>27</sup>Huntington : 59-79.

<sup>28</sup>Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) : 9-15.

lend support to Turner's contention, stated above, that a military moral philosophy gave the military new direction and impetus after the Revolution. Once the importance of ideology is established, one can begin to access the internal dynamics that have been so important in the military's modern role.

It is thus simplistic to argue, as many have, that a uniquely designed political system and its monetary rewards tamed the Mexican army in the aftermath of the Revolution. In fact, to say that those factors represented the principal influences in the evolution of the Mexican army after 1940 is quite misleading. While it was obviously the goal of the civilian-controlled political system to keep the army out of the political arena, there existed a corresponding interest within the army to ensure the non-intervention pattern continued. A *sui generis* military ideology most significantly influenced that corresponding interest and played a major role in giving direction to the army as it evolved since 1940.

This dissertation will trace the evolution of the Mexican army after 1940, paying special attention to the effect that ideology has had on the institution's development. In addition to studying the origins, content, propagation, and conservation of this military ideology, other facets of the Mexican army will also be examined. These include the army's organization and leadership, its different roles--focusing on civic action and crisis management--over the years, its education system, the significance of the Secretary of Defense as the principal guardian of the army, and the relations that exist between the army and the political system, especially the President of the Republic.

The year 1940 marks the watershed for the modern Mexican army. The *caudillo*, or strongman, period in Mexican history ended with the election of Manuel Avila Camacho as President of the Republic. Saturnino Cedillo, the last army general to openly rebel against the government, was killed in January 1939 by army troops loyal to the government. Disgruntled over the presidential election results of July 1940, losing candidate General Juan Andreu Almazán and some of his supporters threatened to rebel, but the threat quickly petered out. Lázaro Cárdenas, who relinquished presidential power on 1 December 1940, transformed the government from a *caudillo* to an institutional style.<sup>29</sup> Avila Camacho helped to solidify the institutionalization process by removing the military as a sector of the official party almost immediately upon taking office. He justified removing the military sector from the official party in his 1 September 1941, State of the Union Address when he said that "party politics and political passion are incompatible with the important duties of the army and navy."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the advent of World War II played a key role in further diverting the army's attention away from politics to the more traditional responsibilities of protecting the country against external threats. These developments suggest that a new phase in the evolution of the Mexican army commenced when Avila Camacho took office in December 1940.

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<sup>29</sup>Miguel Alemán Valdés, Miguel Alemán Contesta (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1975) : 1-3; Arnaldo Córdova, La formación del poder político en México (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, S.A., 1972) : 54-54 and Jorge Alberto Lozoya, "EL PROCESO DE DESPOLITIZACION DEL EJERCITO MEXICANO" (Thesis for Licenciado en Relaciones Internacionales, El Colegio de México, Mexico, D.F., 1966) : 54-55.

<sup>30</sup>Lozoya, "DESPOLITIZACION" : 66-67 and Toral : 511.

Significantly, most historical analyses give little attention to the history of the Mexican army after 1940. Edwin Lieuwen and Jorge Alberto Lozoya authored the principal works which covered the period from the Revolution up through 1940. The National Defense Secretariat's official history also does a good job of describing the army's pre-1940 history. In fact, little remains to be said about that period due primarily to the noteworthy efforts of Lieuwen and Lozoya, although the historiography of that era still lacks good biographies on some of the period's more prominent military leaders. After 1940, the few available analyses tend to be rather nondescript, and the major developments experienced by the army since that time become blurred and their significance simply overlooked.<sup>31</sup>

It seemed appropriate to end this dissertation at 1982, because it left enough time to digest and to evaluate critically that which had been written about the military prior to that date. The José López Portillo administration ended in late 1982, and since so much of Mexico's history is governed by the *sexenio* or six-year administration, 1982 presented a logical termination date. Finally, the Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado administration which began in December 1982 signaled a number of changes for the military, such as a structural reorganization and a role shift which placed greater emphasis on drug eradication.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>As noted above, both the Lozoya and Toral books provide coverage of the Mexican army's history, but the quality of that coverage drops off considerably in both works for the post-1946 period.

<sup>32</sup>During the de la Madrid administration, the army initiated a structural reorganization that would not be completed by the end of his term. Additionally, considerably more army resources were being earmarked for the national anti-narcotics campaign, and the army's traditional civic action programs would suffer as a result of the resource reallocation. Still, not enough time has passed to judge the effects of these changes on both the army and society.

The dissertation is organized thematically, rather than chronologically. Chapter Two presents a general characterization of the Mexican army by focusing on its organization and structure and some of the distinguishing features that set it apart from its Latin American counterparts. The chapter also discusses the army's mission, its legal foundations and the background and qualifications of the officers and the troops.

A Mexican army ideology is the subject of Chapter Three which examines the predominant values and attitudes which influence the direction of the army and the behavior of its members. In particular, the six components--revolutionary heritage, institutional loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism and apoliticism--which comprise the core of the army's ideology are identified and defined. The chapter also reviews the effects the Mexican Revolution and other key historical episodes have had on the formulation of that military ideology, and culminates with an explanation of how the military education system has played a major role in inculcating its students with the requisite values and norms adopted by the Mexican army. Military schools reinforce the professional military ethic at different levels of an officer's career, and this chapter pays particular attention to the *Heroico Colegio Militar* and the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG) because of the significance those two schools have for the development of the upwardly mobile Mexican army officer.

Chapter Four provides historical background on the 1920s and 1930s, two decades critical in the development of the modern Mexican army. The prevailing army ideology has its roots in the 1920s. While a number of army generals cultivated the development of this ideology, none had a greater influence than General Joaquín Amaro, who did



more to establish a disciplined and modern officer corps from his positions as Secretary of War and Navy and Director of Military Education than any of his contemporaries. The 1930s proved important because the depoliticization of the army, or what Adolfo Aguilar Zinser refers to as the demilitarization of politics, accelerated under the leadership of President Lázaro Cárdenas, a former Revolutionary general.<sup>33</sup> As institutions began to take precedence over individuals, and as the military's role in politics diminished, it became evident that the future political aspirations of individual army officers would have to be channeled through the official party in order to be successful. Furthermore, the image of an "apolitical" military started to gain wider acceptance throughout the army and became part of the still evolving army ideology.

The war and immediate post-war years were the formative ones for *the Ejército Nacional* or National Army. Chapter Five examines the role President Avila Camacho had in promoting unity on the national level and within the army. Lázaro Cárdenas resurfaced as the Secretary of Defense and continued to oversee the demilitarization of Mexican politics from that new post. Support for the allied cause gave rise to both a martial and nationalist spirit with the latter eventually representing a key element of the army's ideology. This period also marked the first and last formal military alliance with the United States. The historically important transition from a military to a civilian president occurred, and with that change, virtually guaranteed that no military man would

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<sup>33</sup>In his insightful chapter on civil-military relations, Aguilar Zinser opts to use the "demilitarization of politics" rather than the "depoliticization of the army" in describing the gradual removal of the military from politics. His phrase seems to be a more accurate depiction of what actually transpires. Given the nature of the Mexican predominantly one-party system, it would be difficult to argue that the army becomes completely depoliticized.

ever regain the presidency. As a retired Mexican army general brusquely remarked, "it was Camacho who took the army out of politics."<sup>34</sup>

Miguel Alemán Valdés, the first civilian president to serve a full term in office since the Revolution, introduced major changes in the leadership structure of the army, demonstrating a preference for the modern, school-trained officer who supported his policies as opposed to the often undisciplined revolutionary officer. The modernization of the army kept pace with the overall modernization taking place throughout the nation. It was during the Alemán administration that the army experienced its last substantive structural changes until the late 1960s. By 1952, the Mexican government had rejected a request from the United States for a formal military alliance, thereby initiating a long-standing policy of distancing itself from the U.S. military and reinforcing Mexican nationalism, a key element of the army's ideology.

Chapter Six traces the role of the Mexican army since 1940. Despite what some authors have written, the role of the army had not changed significantly during this period. Even before 1940, the army had devoted most of its effort towards civic action and crisis management. Army leaders have traditionally employed elements of the army's ideology in public speeches to justify the army's role in society. Through the years, the army has stated a distinct preference for civic action over crisis management. The former has clearly enhanced the popular image of the army by reinforcing its patriotic objective of serving Mexico and the Mexican people. This chapter examines the many civic action tasks the army has performed since 1940, focusing on how this role

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<sup>34</sup>Interview, January 1991.

has been constantly modified and reformed to serve the specific needs of the country and its citizens, especially those in the country's more isolated regions.

In addition to the emphasis on civic action, the army has responded faithfully to governmental requests for assistance in combating challenges to the system's hegemony. When the army has reacted, it has maintained its professional standards. For the most part, it has acted in accordance with the tenets of the Constitution and the requirements of the army's organic law which closely conform to the army's ideological principles of discipline and responsibility to the nation's institutions.<sup>35</sup> This chapter examines the army's role in some of the more prominent national crises in the post-1940 era. The army's involvement in quelling the student movement in 1968 receives special attention because of the long-range institutional effects that action had on the army. Finally, this chapter looks at the subtle struggle on the part of army leaders to remain devoted primarily to civic action despite pressure from the government to engage, at times, in more controversial activities, such as suppressing student and worker demonstrations and removing peasant squatters from privately owned agricultural lands.

The President of Mexico and his Secretary of National Defense (SECDEF) embody the civilian and military leadership of the army. The centrality of the presidency is a recognized characteristic of the Mexican political system. The SECDEF holds a corresponding role within the army. In that capacity, the SECDEF serves as the overseer of the army and its traditions as well as the principal exponent of the institution's ideology. Chapter Seven examines the position of SECDEF, and the

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<sup>35</sup>The army's organic law sets the legal parameters for its actions and those of its members based on directives outlined in the Constitution of 1917. The law is explained in greater detail in Chapter Two.

qualifications needed by an officer to achieve that post. This chapter also reviews the relationship and interaction that takes place between the President of the Republic and his SECDEF. Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution establishes the President of the Republic as Commander-in-Chief of the Mexican armed forces. Since the aftermath of the Revolution, there has always existed a close personal relationship between the President and the Mexican army. An astute Mexican political analyst took that relationship one step further when he opined that the army's loyalty to the institutions actually translated into loyalty to the President.<sup>36</sup> This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the sensitive issue of corruption within the army to include the causes and the extent of the corruption. Because these two leaders exert authoritarian control over the army, corruption within the ranks reflects directly on both leaders.

Chapter Seven provides the background necessary for a clear understanding of the case studies presented in the next chapter. Chapter Eight analyzes the programs and contributions of each president and SECDEF as they pertain to the army's development since 1952. These case studies pay particular attention to the various military programs that dovetail the presidential programs of a particular administration and to the military legislation enacted during each *sexenio*. The techniques used by each SECDEF to nurture and reinforce the army's ideology are also reviewed. Included in this discussion is a secondary theme that focuses on the transfer of the army's leadership from the more narrow-minded Revolutionary generals to the more modern and professionally educated officers.

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with José Luis Piñeyro in January 1991.

An ex-President of Mexico once remarked that the overall program of a new president takes into account the country's most pressing needs.<sup>37</sup> Since the Revolution, each new president has paid particular attention to the needs of the army, and at the outset of each administration, the president usually outlines what he hopes to contribute to the armed forces. For its part, the army often becomes beholden to a particular president. But in reality, a mutually dependent relationship develops between the army and the president. The president attends military ceremonies and often heaps praise on those loyal servants of the country. Most importantly, each president carefully nurtures and reinforces the military ideology which demands loyalty and allegiance to the legitimately elected government. Chapter Eight captures the essence of this phenomenon as it pertains to each administration.

In conclusion, the Mexican army has developed an ideology or unique military culture which has clearly defined its place in the system which emerged from the violence and bloodshed of the Mexican Revolution--a system whose very foundations owe their existence to the prominent military leaders of the time. This singular system was able to curb the army's role in politics, but not without the cooperation and compliance of the army itself. We now turn to a close look at the organization, structure, and general characteristics of the army, the first step in studying the evolution of the Mexican army.

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<sup>37</sup>Alemán Valdés : 19.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Basic Characteristics of the Mexican Army**

Studies on Latin American militaries often delve into their subject without first providing a clear understanding of the particular institution's organization and structure. Lost sight of is the basic fact that the military, in this case the army, encompasses much more than a particular high-level military school, where professional officers formulate strategic doctrine, or the small coterie of officers who make the major decisions for the military and sometimes for the country in general. A knowledge of some of the more technical aspects of a military institution can provide useful insight into the many nuances of that organization.

Understanding the organization and structure of a specific army can be critical to fully comprehend its development and evolution. Consider, for example, something as basic as the chain of command and the table of organization and equipment (TOE). How an army is structured goes a long way in determining how it reacts to certain situations. The structure can also reveal the true sources of power within the institution. An explanation of the relationship that exists between officers and their superiors and between officers and the troops can reveal critical details about the internal dynamics of the institution.

Throughout Latin America, history has illustrated that no single military officer holds more importance than the collective institution. This precept definitely pertains to the Mexican army. The fact that the general organization, command structure and size of the Mexican army experienced little substantive change from 1940 to 1982 is most significant when it comes to evaluating the evolutionary process of the Mexican army during this period. Having analyzed the organization and command structure of the Mexican army, this chapter then focuses on some of the key characteristics of the institution, those that tend to distinguish it from counterpart armies in Latin America. Finally, the chapter describes in detail the Mexican army's mission and the constitutional limitations that have been imposed on the army.<sup>1</sup>

#### General Organization and Command Structure

Although the focus here is on the Mexican army, a few words need to be said about the other services within the Mexican armed forces, which in 1982 numbered approximately 120,000 personnel. The army represented the dominant service, comprising about seventy-five percent of the total military forces in Mexico. The navy and air force represented about nineteen and six percent respectively of that total force. Since 1940, budget allocations have corresponded, for the most part, to the strength percentage of each service, with the navy receiving slightly more than its share. The air

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the information used in this chapter has been extracted from some two earlier works I had published. See my contribution to Wesson, op. cit., and Stephen J. Wager, "Basic Characteristics of the Modern Mexican Military," in David F. Ronfeldt, ed., The Modern Mexican Military, op. cit. : 87-105. I have attempted to treat some of the subjects here in a little more depth than I did in the previous works. The research conducted for this dissertation uncovered some additional information about many of these subjects.

force budget comprises part of the overall army budget, for reasons that will become evident below.<sup>2</sup>

The Mexican military's organization as it stood in 1982 can trace its historical roots to the 1930s. During that time, there existed a Secretariat of War and Navy, which supervised the armed forces. In October 1937, then President Lázaro Cárdenas published a decree becoming effective on 1 November 1937, that replaced what had been considered an obsolete Secretariat of War and Navy with a more professional Secretariat of National Defense (SDN).<sup>3</sup> By 1939, President Cárdenas ordered naval functions removed from the SDN, and on April 1, 1941, President Manuel Avila Camacho formalized this new arrangement with the creation of the Secretariat of the Navy. In 1944, Camacho upgraded the Bureau of Military Aviation to the Mexican Air Force. Despite that change, the control of the Mexican Air Force has remained under the jurisdiction of the SDN. Up to the present, this basic organization remained unchanged.<sup>4</sup>

In the opinion of Tomás Sánchez Hernández, a former Revolutionary general and army Chief of Staff under Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958), the organization of the Mexican armed forces was well-suited to the country's defense requirements. The general had

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<sup>2</sup>John Paxton, ed., The Statesman's Yearbook 1982-1983 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) : 857-858; and DMS, DMS Market Intelligence Report (Greenwich: DMS, Inc., 1982) : 2.

<sup>3</sup>Diario Oficial #1, 1 November 1937. The Diario Oficial corresponds to the U.S. Congressional Record. It publishes all the laws and presidential decrees and some of the regulations that pertain to the army. The antiquated Secretariat of War and Navy had been functioning with the same general structure since the 1821. See Martínez Navarro : 335-336.

<sup>4</sup>Lieuwen : 120; Martínez Navarro : 336-337; McAlister et. al. : 213; Revista del Ejército, January 1982 : 26 and Toral : 485.



learned about the theory of National Defense Council formation and the formulation of a doctrine of war at the French Command and General Staff College. After a long career with experience in both high-level military and civilian positions, he concluded that neither a National Defense Council nor a doctrine of war were needed for the armed forces to fulfill their missions as outlined in the Constitution.<sup>5</sup> Through the years, army leaders have shown general satisfaction with the army's structure and have not lobbied to create a National Defense Council. However, in the late 1960s, Secretary of National Defense (SECDEF) Marcelino García Barragán directed his staff to begin developing a specific doctrine of war for Mexico. In subsequent years, this new doctrine appeared in a loosely conceptualized form in the army's strategy manuals. Rather than endorse a definite doctrine of war, these manuals presented a number of ideas that would be applicable in a Mexican wartime scenario.<sup>6</sup>

Cárdenas' military reforms left the armed forces without a secretary of defense who could exercise control over all three services. Instead, control of the armed forces has remained divided. The SECDEF commands the army and air force while the Secretary of Navy manages the navy and a modest marine corps. Both secretaries possess-cabinet officer status and are handpicked by the president whom they represent as heads of their respective services. Since the end of the Mexican Revolution, military officers have

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<sup>5</sup>This and other recommendations came in the form of a book dedication by retired General Sánchez Hernández to presidential candidate Luis Echeverría Alvarez in May 1970. The general's seven page book dedication was found in a book he wrote, Nociones de Estrategia, which I found in ex-President Echeverría's private library.

<sup>6</sup>See Escuela Superior de Guerra, Nociones de Estrategia, Vols. 1 and 2 (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1987).

always held these positions. The SECDEF, by virtue of the size of the forces he commands, has always been considerably more influential than the Secretary of the Navy even though their cabinet positions are technically considered to be of equal status. Both officers have highly centralized decision-making powers within their services, an issue discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

The separation of powers described above makes the Mexican armed forces somewhat unique when compared to their regional counterparts that retain either one defense secretary or a supreme military council to control all services. In 1970, General Tomás Sánchez Hernández, the seasoned Revolutionary general, recommended that Mexico organize a true National Defense Secretariat supported by a General Staff and three discrete Secretaries for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. His recommendation was never implemented, although the SDN has occasionally proposed variations of that idea which, if implemented, would have created a true Secretary of National Defense or Chairman of a Joint Chiefs of Staff, thus unifying the forces under the command of one officer.<sup>7</sup> Political leaders have quickly dismissed such proposed reforms as being unnecessary.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>General Sánchez Hernández's comments were found in his book dedication to presidential candidate Echeverría cited above.

<sup>8</sup>Rumors circulated in 1981 to the effect that SECDEF Félix Galván López had made such a proposal to President José López Portillo. When the SECDEF found no support for his proposal outside of military circles, he quickly dropped the idea. Normally, this kind of reform has been broached by the SECDEF who, because of the size of the forces he commands, envisions himself as the designated Chairman or Military Commander of all the armed forces. He has always been at a distinct disadvantage in debating these reforms because the SECNAV would always side with the political leaders since he valued his force's independent status and budget, both of which would probably disappear under a unified arrangement.

From a political perspective, however, the traditional military command structure serves a useful political purpose in that it dilutes the power of both defense ministers (National Defense and Navy), and prevents either from becoming too powerful and possibly challenging the civil government at some future time.<sup>9</sup> The SECDEF exercises control over the army at the national level. At the state and local levels, the SECDEF, with the approval of the president, appoints military zone commanders to manage military affairs as representatives of the SDN. From 1924 through the 1960s, the army had been organized into 33 military zones. The military zones served as the major subordinate commands of the SDN and the general staff (*estado mayor*). By 1982, the number of military zones had increased by only two. The military zone boundaries correspond closely with the individual state boundaries. The additional zones are the Federal District (D.F.) and the states of Guerrero and Veracruz, traditionally the most troublesome states, which have two and three military zones respectively.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1920s, several regional caudillos served as military zone commanders and remained quite independent of the Secretariat of War and Navy. On a number of occasions, their disagreements with the central government resulted in large-scale military rebellions. For example, Generals Arnulfo Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano revolted in 1927, and they were followed two years later by General Gonzalo Escobar, who led some disgruntled generals against the federal government. A number of zone

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<sup>9</sup>Thomas E. Weil, ed., Area Handbook for Mexico (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975) : 351-356.

<sup>10</sup>Wager : 91. In 1983, the SDN created the 36th Military Zone in Tapachula, Chiapas, giving Chiapas, a troublesome state which borders on Guatemala, two military zones.

commanders also doubled as state governors during that era, and it was not uncommon for the federal legislature to substitute a civilian governor with the military zone commander in times of crisis. In short, some of these military zone commanders could wield substantial military and political power in the immediate post-Revolution period.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1930s, the importance of these zone commanders was in decline. Their diminished influence can be attributed in part to the policy of zone commander rotation implemented by political leaders. Consequently, a military zone commander seldom commanded a military zone for more than three years, thus denying army generals sufficient time to build and cultivate a political power base within their respective states. That measure complemented an earlier SDN reform that increased the number of military zones from 24 to 33, thereby reducing the number of troops any one zone commander could command.<sup>12</sup>

Since 1940, zone commanders have been instructed to cooperate with state authorities, especially the governor. In many cases, the zone commander has been called upon to aid the state governor in enforcing federal policies at the state level. Jorge Alberto Lozoya has asserted that zone commanders still play an important role in the political structure of the country since their forces guarantee the *pacto federal* (federal pact) in the states. But Lozoya carefully emphasized that the responsibilities of the zone

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<sup>11</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 95-104 and Lozoya, Ejército : 105-107.

<sup>12</sup>Edwin Lieuwen, Arms and Politics in Latin America (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1961) : 119; Martin C. Needler, "Problems in the Evaluation of the Mexican Political System," in Contemporary Mexico, eds. James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer and Edna Monzón de Wilkie (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1976) : 343; Boils : 112-113; Lozoya, Ejército : 105-107; Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order," : 8-10 and Weil : 353.

commander in providing support in times of crisis or in mediating conflicts within the state are inherent in the position and not dependent on the individual personality of the zone commander. Lozoya concluded that the military zone commander has gradually evolved into an operative arm of presidential policies and attributed this phenomenon to the country's highly centralized political system rather than any influence on the part of the army.<sup>13</sup>

The army's involvement, albeit infrequent, with political issues at the state level has led some observers to view the Mexican army as a quasi-political force. However, as one Mexican political scientist points out, the so-called "politicization" of the military is a misnomer since neither the army nor any of its members participate directly in making major government decisions.<sup>14</sup> In those cases where the army intervenes at the state level, the military commanders are simply complying with the orders given to them by the civil authorities. Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez, who has studied the Mexican army in the post-1930s period, points out that during the 1940s and 1950s army officers were often the only ones who could be politically effective in some of the country's more rugged regions, and so by design, some officers were given gubernatorial posts by the ruling elite.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>These views were expressed to me by Lozoya in an interview in September 1989. Roger Hansen, Edwin Lieuwen and Lyle McAlister have reached the same general conclusions regarding the zone commanders. See Hansen : 158; Lieuwen, Arms : 119 and McAlister et al. : 243.

<sup>14</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 222.

<sup>15</sup>Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez, "Los militares en la década de los cincuenta," Revista Mexicana de Sociología 3 (July-September 1988) : 281-285.

Since the Mexican Revolution, the army has maintained two principal types of combat units, infantry battalions and cavalry regiments. In 1982, the former outnumbered the latter by almost four to one. Those units form the core of the combat power of the modern Mexican army. The cavalry regiments traditionally depended on horses for transport, but, during the 1970s, were converted to motorized units. The old Revolutionary General Sánchez Hernández offered presidential candidate Luis Echeverría some advice on the structure of Mexican army units. The general wrote that the army did not need to organize division-size units. Instead, he believed that the existing battalions and regiments sufficed to meet the needs of both the army and the country. The army did create four divisions during World War II, but those units were used to train and control conscripts entering the service in large numbers because of the war; they were never organized tactically for combat. The divisions were disbanded after the war and have never been reestablished.<sup>16</sup>

Each military zone has a number of combat units--infantry battalions, cavalry regiments, or a mix of the two--assigned to it. Those units in turn have responsibility for specific sectors within the zone. There does not seem to be a specific policy or formula for assigning combat units to a particular military, although a review of the army force structure produced the following observations. Almost all the military zones contained at least two combat units. Additionally, the population density of a particular zone seemed to be a determining factor in the number of units assigned; the larger the civilian population, the greater number of army units allocated to the military zone. As

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<sup>16</sup>General Sánchez Hernández's assessment is found in his book dedication to presidential candidate Echeverría cited above.

a result, the country's more populous states normally have the larger military populations. The military zone commander holds complete jurisdiction over these units and is responsible to the SDN for their activities.<sup>17</sup>

In 1951, President Miguel Alemán Valdés reformed the military territorial division, adding another echelon of command. A presidential decree dated 20 February 1951 stated that current military territorial divisions were arbitrary and satisfied neither strategic nor tactical necessities. In order to provide a more rational distribution of forces, the decree divided the country into nine military regions with each region having jurisdiction over at least two of the 33 military zones. The decree further proclaimed that the SECDEF had the authority to augment or decrease the size of the military regions by adding or subtracting military zones. The decree took effect on 3 April 1951, the day it was published in the *Diario Oficial*. Later that year, a new decree created the X Military Region.<sup>18</sup>

These military regions have had a strange history. Their prominence within the command structure gradually diminished after their inauguration. In fact, the military regions were deactivated from 1952-1960 with the military territorial division reverting to the military zone structure once again. It appears that each SECDEF employed the military regions in a different fashion, some relying on them heavily and other ministers virtually neglecting them. For the most part, the military regions have been used to

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<sup>17</sup>This information was gleaned from numerous discussions with Mexican army officers while I was a student at the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* in 1980-1981 and later as the assistant U.S. army attaché in Mexico City from 1985 to 1988.

<sup>18</sup>Diario Oficial #28, 3 April 1951 and #41, 19 February 1952.

centralize administrative and logistical management within the military zones. It simply proved easier to deal with ten entities, as opposed to 33 and later 35 separate commands, with regard to administrative and logistical matters. Normally, the SECDEF appointed the senior military zone commander within a region as the military region commander. Thus, based on seniority, the system rewarded a senior zone commander with the additional responsibilities and perquisites of a region commander. However, the operational control of the troops still rested with the individual military zones, and therefore, the military regions did not notably detract from the importance of the military zones.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Five Echelons of the Mexican Army

Having described the general organization and command structure, it now seems appropriate to discuss the different levels of the army. Jorge Alberto Lozoya first described in detail three levels or "echelons" within the army. They include the volunteer active forces, the obligatory military service, and the rural defense corps.<sup>20</sup> To make this description more precise, two other "echelons" should be added to the three above, the Presidential Guards and the reserve forces.

The first level of Mexican army forces can be classified as the regular army or active duty forces. The officers, non-commissioned officers (sergeants), and enlisted personnel (the troops) who comprise these forces have entered the army voluntarily, serve full-time

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<sup>19</sup> Evolución :142. These observations were also based on personal experience and numerous discussions with senior Mexican army officers during 1985-1988.

<sup>20</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 103-105.



and receive a salary and the accompanying benefits. These individuals staff the various headquarters and fill the combat units subordinate to the military zones.<sup>21</sup>

A second level, also comprised of active forces, consists of the Presidential General Staff (*Estado Mayor Presidencial*) and the Presidential Guards (*Cuerpo de Guardias Presidenciales*). In December 1941, Presidential Camacho announced that the international situation necessitated greater coordination with the different ministries or secretariats involved with military activities. To fulfill that need, Camacho converted the presidential adjutancy into the Presidential General Staff (EMP) to ensure adequate coordination among the President, the SDN, the Navy Secretariat, and other government ministries. A formal decree, placed in effect on 12 January 1942, tasked the EMP to prepare the country for war in accordance with the directives of the president. As a complement to the EMP, the Presidential Guards were created on 27 February 1947, with two infantry battalions, a company of assault troops, and a transportation battalion. By 1982, the Presidential Guards had grown into a self-supporting infantry brigade. Although the EMP and the Presidential Guards rely on the SDN for administrative support, they take their orders directly from the president and have a clearly defined mission of guaranteeing the security of the president, his residence, and connecting

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

installations.<sup>22</sup> In that sense, these units can be considered as separate from the regular army and a second echelon of active forces.

Some observers have described the Presidential Guards as an elite unit, but the description is not altogether accurate. The officers and enlisted personnel who comprise this unit have been recruited from the same personnel pool as other active duty soldiers. Many of the officers initially recruited into the Presidential Guards or the EMP spend almost their entire careers there. As officers rise in rank, there is a pyramid effect which drives some of them out of this unit on account of the decreasing number of positions for higher ranking officers. Those departing have the option of being reassigned to a regular army unit or retiring from active service. Officers on the EMP or in the Presidential Guards become highly qualified in an administrative capacity and in providing security and escort services. They are not elitist in a strict military sense because their positions do not call for the regular exercising of basic military skills. In many cases, those skills actually deteriorate as an officer moves up through the chain of command.

On account of its proximity to the President, the EMP and the Presidential Guards collectively exhibit the guise of a quasi-political force. However, this description is not accurate because the officers assigned to those entities assist the president, his staff, and cabinet ministers in a purely administrative way. These officers do not make political

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<sup>22</sup>Archivo General de la Nación, Presidential Archives of Manuel Avila Camacho, file 545.21/49. Hereafter, the presidential archives will be cited as AGN with the president's last name and the appropriate file number. Roderic A. Camp, Generals in the Palacio, the Military in Modern Mexico (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) : Chapter 3 (Hereafter cited as Camp, Generals in the Palacio); Gloria Fuentes, El Ejército Mexicano (Mexico City; Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., 1983) : 127-128; "Paso Revista el Primer Mandatario al Cuerpo de Guardias Presidenciales," El Nacional, 27 January 1977 : 1; Martínez Navarro : 358; Toral : 510 and Wager : 92.

decisions. They are primarily responsible for the security of the president and other top-level political officials.<sup>23</sup>

Members of the National Military Service (SMN), formerly known as Obligatory Military Service (SMO), make up the third level of army forces. The origin of the SMN dates back to 1940. Given the impending threat of war, the Mexican Congress passed the Law of Military Service on 11 August 1940. The law obliged all males eighteen years of age to receive military training and serve on active duty for one year. After the completion of their service, these conscripts remain in the first reserve until age 30, the second reserve until age 40, and the national guard until age 45. Congress never formed a national guard, so the last requirement was eventually eliminated.<sup>24</sup>

Not until 13 August 1942, did a presidential decree actually implement the Law of Military Service. By early 1943, the first contingent of trainees were incorporated into new units. The end of World War II brought further changes to the system. The SDN dissolved the special SMN divisional units and replaced them with one SMN regiment per military zone. Additionally, the training concept of the SMN changed. Members of the SMN no longer had to serve a year of active duty. Instead, they reported to a military unit near their residence for training on 38 Sundays for one year. Upon completion of their training, these youths transitioned into the reserves. By 1978, the population explosion in Mexico forced another restructuring of the system.

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<sup>23</sup>The information on the EMP and the Presidential Guards was obtained through many long informal discussions with army officers who served with one of those units at some point in their careers.

<sup>24</sup>Pedro Pereyra González, "PUEBLO Y EJERCITO," (Thesis for Licenciado en Derecho, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1963) : 106; AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/45; Diario Oficial #19, 11 September 1940; Evolución : 141 and Fuentes : 126.

Subsequently, the SDN developed a lottery system by which, over 50 percent of those eligible were exempted from the Sunday training sessions and moved directly to the reserves. The type of training the SMN members received also changed from standard military training to a more civic action-oriented training, allowing them to make a more valuable contribution to the public, and in some cases, to enhance their civilian job skills.<sup>25</sup>

The rural defense corps or *defensas rurales* comprise a fourth level of army forces. The rural defense corps can be characterized as a *sui generis* organization of the Mexican army. Not to be confused with the *rurales*, which terrorized the countryside during the *Porfiriato*, this group has its roots in the Mexican Revolution. Better known as the *Defensas Sociales*, groups of peasants fought against the private armies of land barons during 1917-1925. In 1926, these armed groups supported the government in its conflict with the Catholic Church known as the Cristero Revolt. With the government's victory in 1929, President Emilio Portes Gil issued a decree integrating those elements into the army as the Rural Defense Corps.<sup>26</sup>

Members of *ejidos* (state-owned agricultural units with usufruct rights) and small agricultural communities from the ages of 18 to 50 voluntarily enlist in the rural defense corps. The *rurales*, as they are commonly called, are organized into cavalry and infantry

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<sup>25</sup>"La Conscripción Será no Sólo Castrense Sino Social: F. Galván," *El Sol*, 24 March 1977 : 12; AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/119; Lozoya, *Ejército* : 104-105; Toral : 497 and Wager : 92. Lozoya suggests that the government and the SDN have an ulterior motive for continuing the SMN. Lozoya claims that the SMN has a political function since it allows for control and classification of the male population. See Lozoya, "DESPOLITIZACION" : 80-81.

<sup>26</sup>Lozoya, *Ejército* : 110-111.

units commanded by active-duty army officers who have the responsibility for training these units. The rural defense units remain stationary in their communities. Although the SDN does issue rifles to unit members, they receive no remuneration or other forms of compensation for their participation. However, their positions do provide them with a certain degree of prestige within their communities. Members renew their membership every three years. In 1940, the rurales had an estimated strength of 60,000. Thirty years later the size of the force had grown to 120,000. The principal mission of the rural defense corps is to maintain order in the rural areas. Other tasks include combating outlaws, cattle thieves, and narcotics traffickers. They also participate in literacy and reforestation campaigns and serve as valuable sources of intelligence information for the SDN. Overall this rural defense system has allowed for tight control by the government, through the army, of the nation's peasant population.<sup>27</sup>

The reserves make up the final echelon of army forces. The 1940 Law of Military Service provides the legal basis for this element of the army. Over the years, its structure has experienced few changes. All Mexican males 19 years and older as well as those professional military legally separated from the service join the members of the SMN in the first reserve. The former remain in the first reserve until they reach thirty years of age. The latter remain as long as they can physically perform their duties. Individuals who have completed their time in the first reserve move into the second reserve, where they serve until their 45th birthday. The president can partially or totally

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<sup>27</sup>"Empleo y Actuación de los Cuerpos de Defensas Rurales," *Revista del Ejército*, February 1973 : 44-46; Susan Eckstein, *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and the Urban Poor in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) : 35; Bautista Rosas : 61; Lozoya, *Ejército* : 112-115 and Wager : 92-93.

mobilize the reserves in case of war or serious internal disorder. Due to the general tranquility that has characterized the country since 1940, the Mexican reserves have never been mobilized.<sup>28</sup>

### Officers and Troops

Officers form the leadership core of the active forces. British historian R.A. Humphreys described this phenomenon rather succinctly when he wrote "(i)ts rank and file count for little. They are there to obey. But its officers form a class apart, a professional class, with professional loyalties. And they are possessed of force."<sup>29</sup> In Mexico, entry into this elite group is relatively open. A Mexican youth can become an officer by successfully completing what the Mexican army calls a formation school. Over 90 percent of army officers receive their commissions from one of these schools. The Heroic Military College (HCM), which is Mexico's equivalent to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, holds the title of the army's foremost officer formation school. The vast majority of Mexico's army officers have graduated from the HCM. Other formation schools produce military doctors, engineers, and ordnance and communications officers. To be admitted to any of these formation schools, an applicant must be a Mexican citizen by birth, be single and between the ages of 16 and 21, have a secondary

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<sup>28</sup>SDN General Staff, "El Ejército y Fuerza Aerea Mexicanos," unpublished briefing, 1986 : 7-9; AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/119 and Diario Oficial #19, 11 September 1940.

<sup>29</sup>R.A. Humphreys, "The Caudillo Tradition," in Michael Howard, ed. Soldiers and Governments (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957) : 162.

school diploma, meet certain height requirements, and pass a battery of cultural, psychological, and physical entrance examinations.<sup>30</sup>

In broad terms, officer candidates have been drawn predominantly from the middle and lower levels of the middle class since the 1940s. The most thorough study of the socioeconomic origins of the Mexican officer corps came from a Mexican social scientist, Javier Romero, in the 1950s. His study focused on the 1953, 1954 and 1955 classes of the HCM, and his findings determined that 27 percent of incoming cadets had working class backgrounds and about 68 percent had come from the lower middle class. William S. Ackroyd's more recent but less scientific survey shows that by the 1980s as many as 70 percent of army officers could be drawn from the lower classes.<sup>31</sup> This differs from some of the more advanced militaries in Latin America. Alfred Stepan has researched the Brazilian military extensively, and his findings show that in the 1960s, almost 80 percent of the cadets at the Brazilian military academy had middle class backgrounds, weighing more toward the upper brackets of that economic class.<sup>32</sup> Other sources have identified socioeconomic recruitment trends similar to those in Brazil in both Argentina

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<sup>30</sup>McAlister et al. : 218; Wager : 95-96 and Wesson : 21-23. More detailed information on the military education system will be provided in the next chapter.

<sup>31</sup>Javier Romero, Aspectos psicobiométricos y sociales de una muestra de la juventud mexicana (Mexico City: Dirección de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1956) : 48-50; Roderic A. Camp, "Generals and Politicians in Mexico: A Preliminary Comparison," in The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment, David Ronfeldt ed. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1984) : 113-115 (Hereafter cited as Camp, "Generals and Politicians") and Ackroyd : 148-156. Ackroyd provides a nice summary of the social origins of the Mexican army officer corps, perhaps the best summary that has been written in recent years, although it is not nearly as thorough as Romero's. Javier Romero's excellent study has never been replicated, most likely because the army had grown extremely sensitive about their activities and personnel by the late 1960s. Access to the type of data used in Romero's study is simply not feasible given present security restrictions on the kinds of information that had been available to Romero in the 1950s.

<sup>32</sup>Alfred Stepan, The Military in Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) : 30-43.

and Chile.<sup>33</sup> These findings may help to explain why the South American militaries are considerably more politically active than the Mexican military. The former come from more politically active sectors of the population.

Traditionally, social mobility has been a major consideration for embarking on a military career. After all, a military career offers a fully subsidized university-level education, a guaranteed job after graduation, and opportunities for career advancement at regular intervals.<sup>34</sup> In discussing motives, a Mexican army officer argued that the majority of cadets at the HCM sought a military career because it offered an alternative "to the poverty they have grown up with."<sup>35</sup> In the 1960s, an expanding economy had opened up more employment opportunities for middle-class youths. Consequently, a greater number of potential officers were being recruited from the lower levels of the middle class and the urban working class since the 1960s. In light of Ackroyd's findings mentioned above--that as much as 70 percent of new entrants into the HCM may be drawn from the lower social groups--the so-called "escape from poverty" stands as a cogent reason for pursuing a military career.

As noted above, troops enlisting in the army do so on a voluntary basis. Recruitment takes place at the local level. Individual military zones and their respective subordinate units recruit within their geographical areas. For the most part, this recruiting system

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<sup>33</sup>John J. Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) : 250-252 and José Nun,

<sup>34</sup>McAlister et. al. : 218-221 and Wesson : 21-22.

<sup>35</sup>Daniel Mora, "Profile of the Mexican Company Grade Officer," unpublished paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Conference on Latin American Studies, February 1984, Tucson, AZ. Mora is a U.S. army officer who served as an exchange student at the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* during 1981-1982. See also McAlister et. al. : 221-222 and Coterie : 21.



has changed very little since the 1940s. Basic recruits sign a contract which obliges them to serve for a period of three years. Recruits must be between 18 and 30 years of age and Mexican citizens. While recruits should have at least a primary education, that requirement can also be waived since new recruits will be taught how to read and write in the army if they do not already possess those skills. Basic recruits come predominantly from rural lower class backgrounds, although the numbers drawn from the urban working class have been rising steadily since the 1970s. As with many officer candidates, these recruits view the army as an opportunity for upward social mobility. For many indigent youths, the army offers three balanced meals and a steady although modest salary for the first time in their lives. In addition, the benefits offered enlisted personnel can exceed fifty percent of their basic salary.<sup>36</sup>

No formal recruiting program exists for noncommissioned officers (NCOs). An enlisted soldier who performs well can be promoted to the rank of sergeant if he enlists for a second tour of duty. Once an enlisted soldier attains the rank of sergeant, he usually decides to remain on active duty until he becomes eligible for retirement and the accompanying pension. The primary responsibility of NCOs entails molding recruits into soldiers. NCOs avail themselves to the same benefits as the enlisted soldiers. However, an NCO has greater opportunities for advanced training. Those NCOs who

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<sup>36</sup>Alfonso Corona del Rosal, *La Guerra, El Imperialismo, El Ejército Mexicano* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1988) : 261 (Hereafter cited as Corona del Rosal, *La Guerra*); Pereyra González : 109-110; Wager : 93-94 and Coterie : 2-3.

have demonstrated potential have the chance to enroll in a special one-year course at the HCM which leads to commissioning as a second lieutenant.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican army had the undesirable reputation of being extremely top heavy, a direct effect of the Mexican Revolution. Since that period, the army has made major improvements in that area. For example, in 1936 the army had 38,473 troops and 781 generals, a ratio of one general for every 49 soldiers. But constant reforms aimed at thinning the top ranks gradually began to pay dividends. By 1975, the army's troop strength had grown to 72,478, but the number of general officers had dropped to 386, for a much more reasonable ratio of 1:188.<sup>38</sup> By comparison, in 1974 the U.S. Army had 480 generals for a force of 783,518 which translated into a general to soldier ratio of 1:1,632, indicating that the Mexican army was still rather top-heavy.<sup>39</sup> By the 1980s, the number of authorized generals in the Mexican army had leveled off at approximately 250. This occurred in large part because of the forced retirement of many elder generals during the Echeverría administration (1970-1976). That reform of the upper echelon of the army's command structure helped to make the Mexican army a more professional force without really affecting the influence of the officer corps within the army.

As noted above, the army had an estimated strength of 90,000 men in 1982. A brief analysis on how the army had come to reach that figure since the 1940s can offer some

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<sup>37</sup>Wager : 94-95 and Coterie : 3.

<sup>38</sup>McAlister et. al. : 234 and Revista del Ejército, January 1982 : 30.

<sup>39</sup>"How Mexico Has Avoided Military Coups," Christian Science Monitor, 13 May 74 : 3.

insight as to how the army evolved over the years. Table 2-1 depicts the growth of the Mexican army since 1940 and also illustrates its proportion to the overall Mexican population.

The figures presented in the table indicate that the growth of the army has been extremely modest when compared to the increase of the civilian population over the same period. In actuality, the army's growth has not kept pace with that of Mexican society, although an attempt to close the widening gap was made during the 1970s. From 1940-1982, the Mexican population almost quadrupled while the size of the army did not even double. Thus, the civilian population growth outdistanced the army's growth by roughly 200 percent. From those figures, one can infer about the army's political and budgetary influence over this period; both were modest, indeed. Some social scientists who have studied the Latin American military argue that austere defense budgets indicate a high degree of civilian control over the military and a low level of autonomy on the part of the military.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>José Luis Piñeyro, "The Modernization of the Mexican Armed Forces," in Democracy Under Siege, ed. Augusto Varas (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) : 123 and Augusto Varas, "Military Autonomy and Democracy in Latin America," in Democracy Under Siege, ed. Augusto Varas (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) : 6-8.

TABLE 2-1

Growth of the Mexican Army in Proportion to the Population

Year	Army Strength	Population (In Millions)	Ratio
1940	50,000	19.6	1 : 393
1950	50,000	25.7	1 : 515
1960	55,000	34.2	1 : 684
1970	64,000	52.0	1 : 812
1976	87,000	60.0	1 : 685
1982	90,000	72.2	1 : 802

SOURCE: Fuentes : 273 and McAlister et al. : 205.

The Legal Foundations of the Mexican Army

The new government that came to power after the Mexican Revolution built a solid legal foundation for its legitimacy and that of the Mexican army which would support it. Two documents represent the legal basis of the Mexican army, the Constitution of 1917 and the Organic Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force (*Ley Orgánica del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*).<sup>41</sup> The army's mission has generally remained the same since the publication of the 1926 organic law. The army's mission has been legally established

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<sup>41</sup>The organic law which General Joaquín Amaro introduced in 1926 applied to both the army and navy and remained in effect until a new organic law for the army and air force was implemented in 1971. The navy established its own organic law shortly thereafter.

and cannot be considered unique to a particular SECDEF or President for that matter. The Constitution of 1917 establishes the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and places certain restrictions on the army which aim at curbing the army's influence. The organic law serves as the legal *raison d'être* of the army and defines the army mission in precise terms. Because of the significance these documents bear for the army, their content, as it relates to the army, needs to be examined below.

The first article of the Constitution which addresses the military is Article 13. Although this article outlaws *fueros* in general, it does make allowances for a *fuero* or special privilege for the armed forces. This article sanctions military tribunals to judge crimes and offenses against military discipline. However, the article does stipulate that the jurisdiction of these military courts cannot be extended to civilians.<sup>42</sup> One expert on military affairs opines that the military *fuero* does not really grant the army any special privilege, but instead, plays a critical role in ensuring that discipline does not break down within the army.<sup>43</sup>

Article 26 of the Constitution states that in peacetime no member of the army can demand lodging in a private home against the wishes of its owner. Only in times of war can army members demand lodging, food and other benefits from the civilian population.

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<sup>42</sup>Secretaría de Gobernación, Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Mexico City, 1988) : 28. Hereafter cited as Constitución. Alfonso Corona del Rosal, Moral Militar y Civismo, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Talleres Gráfico de la Nación, 1949) : 223-224 (Hereafter cited as Corona del Rosal, Moral); Corona del Rosal, La Guerra : 253-254 and Martínez Navarro : 342.

<sup>43</sup>Corona del Rosal, Guerra : 253-254.

This article protects the inviolability of an individual's home while also establishing the parameters for martial law.<sup>44</sup>

Article 32 establishes certain prerequisites for joining the army. In that regard, no foreigner can serve in the army during peacetime. In order to join the army, an individual must be Mexican by birth, at least 18 years of age and leading an honest life.<sup>45</sup>

Articles 55 and 58 set the requirements for Congressional deputies and senators respectively. One of those requirements stipulates that a candidate for either of those offices must not have been on active duty in the army for at least 90 days prior to the election.<sup>46</sup> A similar requirement for presidential candidates is found in Article 82 which states a candidate must not be on active duty for at least six months prior to the election.<sup>47</sup> The normal procedure for an army officer seeking deputy or senatorial position consists of asking for a leave of absence (referred to as *licencia* by Mexican officers) for the time they campaign and serve in office.<sup>48</sup> Since 1940, this practice has

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<sup>44</sup>Constitución: 38 and Coronal del Rosal, Moral : 224-225.

<sup>45</sup>Constitución : 38 and Corona del Rosal, Moral : 224-225.

<sup>46</sup>Constitución : 70-72 and José Jesús García Segura, "El ejército, el militar y la política" (Thesis for licenciado in Derecho, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1961) : 75-77.

<sup>47</sup>Constitución : 100.

<sup>48</sup>There exists three types of leaves of absence for army officers, limited, unlimited, and special. The limited leave of absence is for less than six months and normally granted for reasons of health. The unlimited leave of absence allows an individual to leave active service for an indefinite period. The Secretary of Defense is the approving authority for this type of leave of absence. Individuals running for political office or selected to serve in other government positions must petition for a special leave of absence. The organic law of the army and air force outlines the specifications of each type of leave of absence. See also García Segura : 69.

not been uncommon since the army has been granted a small number of Congressional seats over the years. Those positions have provided symbolic representation of the army's place in the overall system engendered by the Revolution, and the exact number of these elective posts is decided on by the Central Executive Committee (CEN) of the official party. As Roderic A. Camp illustrates, these positions have declined steadily since the late 1940s to a point where, by 1976, the army, in his words, "essentially had disappeared from the political scene." He notes that in 1982 four active duty and two retired army officers were Congressional deputies.<sup>49</sup> Given these trends of declining official military participation in politics, it is not surprising that the last officer to run for President was General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán in 1927.

Congressional authority, as outlined in section XIV of Article 73, includes the power to raise and sustain an army and to regulate its organization and duties. Section XII of that article grants Congress the power to declare war based on the information provided to it by the executive branch. Article 76 lists the exclusive responsibilities of the Senate. Those senatorial responsibilities include ratifying the list of colonels and above who have been nominated for promotion by the President. The Senate also provides authorization for Mexican troops to leave the country and for foreign troops to pass through or over Mexican territory.<sup>50</sup> These two articles give the Congress considerable control over the army specifically, and the armed forces in general. As Lozoya has pointed out, the Constitutional Congress which met in Querétaro in 1916 had a principal goal of curbing

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<sup>49</sup>Camp, Generals in the Palacio : Chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup>Constitución : 88-89 and 95-96; Corona del Rosal, Moral : 226-227 and Martínez Navarro : 346-348.

militarism and guaranteeing a future apolitical role for the armed forces.<sup>51</sup> Articles 55 and 58 have contributed substantially toward achieving that goal.

Article 89 which covers the authority and responsibilities of the President also plays a major role in placing controls on the military. Arturo González Cosío, an experienced politician and academician, suggests that the military faculties of the President can be divided into two categories. The first category tends to be purely administrative and encompasses clauses IV and V of Article 89. These clauses empower the President to nominate officers in the rank of lieutenant colonel and above for promotion with Senate approval and lower ranking officers in accordance with existing laws which do not require Senate confirmation. The requirement of Senate approval for senior officer promotions curbs the president's power somewhat by precluding the arbitrary selection of high ranking officers whose loyalty may lie only with the President and not the institutions. The second and more important category of responsibilities can be referred to as political-military. Clause VI authorizes the President to command the armed forces to ensure the internal security and external defense of the nation. With Congressional approval, Clause VIII allows the President to declare war in the name of the United Mexican States.<sup>52</sup> This article clearly establishes the President of Mexico as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

General Alfonso Corona del Rosal, who became the Mexican army's most qualified and highest ranking politician in the post-1950 era, attaches a special importance to

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<sup>51</sup>Lozoya, "DESPOLITIZACION" : 41-42.

<sup>52</sup>Constitución : 103-104; González Cosío : 215 and Martínez Navarro : 350-352.



Clause VI of Article 89. According to Corona del Rosal, that clause gives the President a certain preeminence within the Mexican political system because the authority to dispose of the armed forces as he deems appropriate technically converts the army into an instrument of the executive branch of the government.<sup>53</sup> This is one of a number of clauses in the Constitution that help to establish the centrality of the Presidency, a distinguishing characteristic of the Mexican political system. With the power of the armed forces at his disposal, the President clearly holds an advantage over the legislative and judicial branches. This clause gives him the authority to decide on the disposition of the armed forces throughout the Republic and to take actual command of the armed forces for a particular military campaign or operation. Nonetheless, Mexican Presidents since 1940 have delegated the latter two responsibilities to the SECDEF and SECNAV.

The final two articles of the Constitution which apply to the army are numbers 129 and 132. The first further restricts military power by determining that in peacetime the army can only perform functions which have a direct relationship to the military discipline. In the past, government leaders have preferred to interpret this article very loosely in order to allow the army to perform a substantial civic action role. For example, the construction of bridges and secondary roads in some of the country's isolated areas has been interpreted as having the military purpose of establishing control in those outlying regions. The article also states that military headquarters can only be located in castles, forts or warehouses that depend directly on the government and that

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<sup>53</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 228.

are removed from population centers. Article 132 dictates that all military installations come under the jurisdiction of the federal government.<sup>54</sup>

A second document which establishes legal parameters for the army is the *Ley Orgánica del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*, commonly known as the organic law. According to one Mexican army officer, "(t)he organic law is the fundamental base of the life of the military institution."<sup>55</sup> Another army officer has described the Organic Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force as "...the foundation upon which the organization and structure of our army rests, giving it the general bases for its organization as well as constituting and determining its purposes."<sup>56</sup> The organic law was first published in 1926 as the cornerstone of the military reforms initiated by then Secretary of War and Navy General Joaquín Amaro Domínguez. Through this law, Amaro sought to restructure an army which had been totally lacking in organization and professionalism.<sup>57</sup>

The first article of the Organic Law of the National Army and Navy, dated March 15, 1926, concisely defined the mission of the army as "to defend the integrity and independence of the fatherland, to maintain the rule of the Constitution and its laws and to conserve internal order."<sup>58</sup> That mission remained in effect, although it had been modified informally within the SDN, for 45 years until the publication of a new organic

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<sup>54</sup>Constitución : 160 and 163.

<sup>55</sup>Corona del Rosal, Guerra : 260.

<sup>56</sup>Martínez Navarro : 354.

<sup>57</sup>Evolución : 141-142 and Toral : 479.

<sup>58</sup>Ley orgánica del ejército y armada nacionales, 15 March 1926.

law on March 16, 1971. For the most part, maintaining internal order has been the army's primary mission since 1940 despite being listed as the third priority in the organic law of 1926. The SDN officially recognized this reordering of priorities by simply switching the first and third missions in one of its official publications in 1952, thereby leaving the conservation of internal order as the number one priority.<sup>59</sup> As Martin Needler has suggested, this shifting of priorities seemed quite rational given Mexico's geopolitical situation:

"for Mexico a military defense against a United States would scarcely be possible; against one from Guatemala it would be hardly necessary. And apart from the questions of capabilities, not even the most thorough of military contingency planners could believe for a moment that either neighbor does in fact plan an armed attack."<sup>60</sup>

One might add the U.S. supplying de facto strategic defense for Mexico as additional justification for the change.

A new organic law published in 1971 formally changed the army's mission and shuffled priorities in the process. The new mission statement read:

1. To defend the integrity, independence and sovereignty of the nation;
2. To guarantee internal security and

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<sup>59</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 119-120; Margiotta : 222 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 118.

<sup>60</sup>Needler : 341.

3. To aid the civilian population and cooperate with its authorities in the case of public necessities and lend help in social works and in everything that contributes to the progress of the country in conformity with the orders given in that respect."<sup>61</sup>

The new organic law replaced the mission of maintaining the Constitution and its laws with that of providing assistance to the civilian population. In reality, the army had been performing this civic action mission as far back as the 1920s. With the publication of the 1971 organic law, the army legally acknowledged that mission. As will be seen in Chapter Six, the army devotes the least amount of its resources toward its first mission of territorial defense, most likely for the same reasons Needler elaborated on above. Laying aside the specific importance of each mission, all three have been consistently recognized, justified and reinforced by means of a unique army ideology. The army's mission has been folded into that ideology and corresponds to the values represented by that ideology, as will be discussed below.

#### Other Distinguishing Characteristics

Having discussed in detail the organization, structure, personnel, legal foundations and missions of the Mexican army, a few words need to be said about some of the traits which tend to distinguish the institution from those of its regional counterparts, i.e., the extremely centralized power of the SECDEF and the heavy reliance on personal relations and discreet alliances among officers. During the course of its existence, most

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<sup>61</sup>Ley Orgánica del Ejército y Fuerza Aerea Mexicanos, 18 March 1971 and Bautista Rosas : 171-175. A subsequent organic law was published on December 8, 1986. That edition separated the third mission into two distinct missions and added a fifth mission of maintaining order and aiding the civilian population in the case of a natural disaster.

institutions develop their own personality, and the Mexican army is no exception. A few characteristics have come to play a prominent role within the army. Analyzing some of these characteristics will not only help provide some insight into the army's ideology but will also aid in clarifying the evolution of the army as it unfolds in subsequent chapters.

In some ways, the characteristics of the Mexican army resemble those of the political system. Both institutions tend to have a somewhat authoritarian nature. They also place special emphasis on loyalty and interpersonal relations (*personalismo*), and the use of *camarillas* or cliques. While the first two factors are not uncommon among Latin American militaries, the *camarilla* is unique to the Mexican army. Peter Smith defines the *camarilla* as a factional group "bound by loyalty to an individual leader (or *gallo*, cock) who is expected to award patronage in return for their support."<sup>62</sup> In the army, the *gallo* is normally a general whose career is on the rise. Junior officers line up behind this rising star and pledge their loyalty to him in hope that they can follow him to the highest levels of command. The bond formed between the leader and the members of his *camarilla* tends to be more personalistic than ideological since there is little ideological variance within the officer ranks. The *camarilla* members are concerned primarily with improving their present status, and that concern binds the group together. Officers do not openly publicize their support of a particular leader even though most of their peers know with whom they are allied. Officers are expected to show unwavering loyalty to the SECDEF, and to declare allegiance openly to another officer would violate the principle of loyalty. These officers demonstrate staunch loyalty to the SECDEF, but

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<sup>62</sup>Smith : 50.

given their positions within the army, their *gallo* is better situated to compensate them.<sup>63</sup>

It naturally follows from the above that power within the army is highly centralized, and the emphasis at all levels is on hierarchy. The SECDEF wields absolute power, and little happens without his expressed approval. At subordinate levels, that power is transmitted to the local commanders, but only to the extent that it is condoned by the SECDEF. The accepted pattern of behavior requires officers to follow orders explicitly and avoid the exercising of individual initiative.<sup>64</sup> This philosophy can be observed at the company level up through the military zone command level. The SECDEF maintains strict control over his military zone commanders and his general staff. All significant army activities come under his direct purview and are subject to his approval. There is relatively little delegation of authority at any level of command. In short, prudent officers adhere strictly to the demands of the high command.<sup>65</sup>

Within the Mexican army, loyalty tends to intermingle with *personalismo*. Personal relationships in the upper echelons of the army hierarchy possess considerable significance. Personal contacts often prove more important from a professional point of view than does technical competence. The extreme reliance on friendship and personal relations remains commonplace throughout the Mexican military. Many officers are tied

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<sup>63</sup>Camp, Mexico's Leaders, provides a good explanation of these features as they pertain to the political system. See pages 15-38. Smith : 50-52 offers a good description of the *camarilla*. For additional information on the *camarilla* see Richard R. Fagen and William S. Tuohy, Politics and Privilege in a Mexican City (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972) : 23-26.

<sup>64</sup>Wager : 90-91.

<sup>65</sup>Boils : 27.

to each other by *compadrazgo* or godfather relationships. Consequently, when an officer has been selected to a key position, he immediately maneuvers to have his *compadres* and other trusted associates fill subordinate positions. It is not uncommon for officers to seek *compadrazgo* relations with senior officers or peers whose careers they perceive to be on a fast track hoping the relationship will pay dividends in the future. The prevalence of *personalismo* relates directly to the *camarilla* system, and many of the individuals comprising a *camarilla* are often *compadres* also.<sup>66</sup>

High-ranking officers seek out subordinates who have worked for them before and demonstrated a high degree of loyalty. A former army general emphasized that a new SECDEF usually cleans house at the top echelons of command and brings in a new team of subordinates whose loyalty has been unquestioned over the years.<sup>67</sup> Unlike some of the Central American armies where loyalties have been formed strictly according to military academy generations or classes called *tandas*, the Mexican system is less restricted. The relationships established with one's classmates at the *Heroico Colegio Militar* (HCM) normally do not endure an entire career. New friendships and alliances are made when officers graduate from the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG) or the *Colegio de Defensa Nacional* (CDN). In countries like El Salvador and Honduras, the military academy classes are considerably smaller, and there is no advanced military

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<sup>66</sup>These views had been expressed by two retired general officers during interviews in 1990 and 1991. I have also been made aware of these relationships through personal experience with numerous Mexican army officers. A newspaper article confirmed these observations when it described complaints by younger officers who claimed many generals were over the legal age limit and promotions in the Mexican army were based on *compadrazgo*. See Gabriel Parra, "Inconformidad en el Ejército con el Sistema de Ascensos," *Ovaciones*, 19 June 1972 : 1.

<sup>67</sup>Interview, July 1990.

schooling where an officer can establish new allegiances with officers not in his same year group.<sup>68</sup>

The officer promotion system also encourages the cementing of new alliances between officers, because in a given class from the HCM only a small percentage will achieve the rank of colonel and above. Since 1936, promotions through lieutenant colonel have been determined principally through success on professional examinations. Many officers remain as captains or majors for their entire careers because either they decline to take the promotion test or they fail the examination needed for the next higher grade. Consequently, the utility of these less progressive officers diminishes in the eyes of the upwardly mobile officers who look to establish ties with other progressive officers who could be valuable contacts in the future. Promotions to the ranks of colonel and above are voted on by a board of officers and are subject to the approval of the SECDEF, the President and the Senatè. At that level, personal relations and loyalty play critical roles in the promotion process. In sum, the *personalismo* which permeates all of Mexican society has proven to be an element of paramount importance in the relationship between the President and his SECDEF. A president does not always select the best qualified general for the position of SECDEF, but rather the one with whom he feels most comfortable.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Interviews, August and September 1989.

<sup>69</sup>Boils : 108; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 114; McAlister et al. : 233-234 and Wager : 90-91. This view about the most competent general not necessarily being chosen as SECDEF was also expressed to me by a senior Mexican army officer during an interview in 1989.



A high ranking official of the Gustavo Díaz Ordaz administration (1964-1970) told an interesting anecdote about the value of loyalty in the SECDEF selection process. Díaz Ordaz chose General Marcelino García Barragán as his SECDEF in 1964. In one sense, the selection came as a surprise because General García Barragán has been ostracized somewhat as a result of his staunch support for the political opposition headed by General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán in 1952. When queried about his choice for SECDEF, Díaz Ordaz told his subordinate that he had been assured that General García Barragán was completely loyal. He based his selection extensively on that loyalty.<sup>70</sup>

Frederick Turner traces the importance of loyalty back to the Mexican Revolution. Turner contends that given the unorthodox manner in which the Revolution was fought, loyalty held much more value than discipline and conventional training.<sup>71</sup> Studies produced on the Mexican political system have also shown loyalty to be a highly important trait in traditional Mexican political culture.

The characteristic which most distinguishes the Mexican army from the majority of its counterparts relates mainly to attitudes about politics. Mexico remains the only Latin American country where the military has not directly intervened in politics since 1945. The perception that gradually evolved among army officers was that political ambitions did not enhance military careers. Since 1940, the army had gradually come to the realization that its best course of action with regard to politics was to remain on the periphery of political decision making. The Mexican army has voluntarily accepted the

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<sup>70</sup>Interview, January 1991.

<sup>71</sup>Turner : 63.

laws of the Constitution of 1917 as the legitimate source of authority, and army leaders have chosen to respect the political decisions made by the country's civilian leaders. The military's good standing within the political system has been contingent on its adherence to two basic precepts: military force does not provide an acceptable means of furthering the goals of the Revolution, and the maintenance of political power does not depend on the support of the armed forces.<sup>72</sup>

Numerous factors have contributed to the adoption of this quasi-apolitical mentality among army officers. Some of the more prominent reasons include the institutionalization of Mexican politics, the taming of the Revolutionary generals and the development of a military ideology which encouraged professionalism and abstention from politics. Unlike other Latin American militaries, the Mexican military has been under civilian control since the end of the Revolution, and its proximity to the U.S. has obviated the need for continuous modernization and the large budgets that normally accompany that process. As a result, the emphasis in Mexico has been on the continuity of a unique political system. Since 1934, the duly elected president in Mexico has served out his full term in office. This peaceful transfer of power has become a precious tradition and a source of pride for both the army and the Mexican civilian population.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, available data clearly depicts a trend of declining military influence in politics. The number of political offices held by military personnel have declined

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<sup>72</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 222.

<sup>73</sup>Hansen : 156-163; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 109-112 and 121; McAlister et al. : 201-207; Smith : 93 and Coterie : ix.

steadily since the Cárdenas period. Prior to 1964, an army officer always served as the head of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico's ruling party. That position traditionally represented the military's importance to the so-called "Revolutionary family." Since 1964, the position has been held by a civilian, and it appears unlikely that it will revert back to military control. An informed army colonel asserted that army officers holding political positions enjoyed little prestige among military professionals. Instead, army officers tended to view those positions as a form of symbolic recognition for the army's contributions to the Revolution, lacking in any substantive political significance, and ultimately removing those who hold them from the army mainstream and the opportunity to compete with their peers for the army's more choice assignments.<sup>74</sup>

When scholars first started writing about the military in Latin America in the 1960s, it was obvious to them that the Mexican military no longer wielded a major influence in politics. As Edwin Lieuwen asserted "...today the armed forces are virtually out of politics."<sup>75</sup> Lieuwen also remarked that individuals in the military surrender their political rights since they are not permitted to voice their opinions on political matters in public.<sup>76</sup> A few years later, Howard F. Cline described the Mexican army as a

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<sup>74</sup>Boils: 181; Camp, Generals in the Palacio : Chapter 3; McAlister et. al. : 237-241; Margiotta 232-242 and Smith : 121. These sources supply ample empirical data to support their conclusions of declining military influence in national politics.

<sup>75</sup>Lieuwen, Arms : 101.

<sup>76</sup>Lieuwen, Arms : 118.

disciplined force and a stabilizing influence in the country.<sup>77</sup> John J. Johnson, a noted historian writing in 1964, added that militarism was a negligible force in Mexican politics.<sup>78</sup> It is true that in their day-to-day activities high-ranking army officers simply did not involve themselves with major political issues. Instead, their attention remained focused on their strictly military duties. However, recent research has revealed what I call a quasi-political role, and this merits attention, not to refute earlier views, but rather to provide a more nuanced view of their actual political role and behavior.

In capitalizing on Roderic A. Camp's research, a decline in military officers joining political elites can be easily traced from the Cárdenas to the Echeverría administrations. According to Camp's findings, only seven men (two being presidents) who succeeded in becoming part of the small Revolutionary family, which he classified as 102 elites holding four or more high-level positions between 1935 and 1975, had military careers. During that same period, only 14 percent of all political elites had military careers. Camp concludes that "the military no longer serves as prime recruiter for men with political ambitions, nor does it provide an alternate for those unlikely to pass through more typical careers."<sup>79</sup>

To sum up, the military influence in politics has been a principal theme of all works on the Mexican military written since 1970 (with the exception of the Mexican army's

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<sup>77</sup>Howard F. Cline, Mexico: Revolution to Evolution 1940-1960 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) : 176.

<sup>78</sup>John J. Johnson, The Military and Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) : 102.

<sup>79</sup>Camp, Mexico's Leaders : 57. Camp's forthcoming book, Generals in the Palacio, the Military in Modern Mexico, offers a thorough analysis of the Mexican military's influence in politics since the 1930s and really leaves little else to be said on that subject.

official history). Those works all seemed to have reached the general conclusion that military participation in politics has diminished tremendously since the Cárdenas years to the extent that by 1982, the army's participation had minimal significance. A few of those authors still believe, however, that the army retains the latent potential to become a political actor again in the future. It is precisely that potential, lingering below the surface, which gives the army a quasi-political character. The boundary between the military sector and the political arena is a very fine line that the military may infrequently cross over. In 1958, John J. Johnson wrote that the army "through its ability to interfere in politics, particularly on the state level, continues to retain a significant, if at times inconspicuous, share in Mexican politics."<sup>80</sup> In 1982, the Mexican army still possessed that "ability to interfere in politics," even though it remained highly unlikely that it would ever decide to utilize it.

#### A Final Note

In describing the army's organization and structure, this chapter attempted to show how the institution has matured since 1940. From the facts presented above, one can deduce that the army experienced modest growth during the period 1940-1982. In many respects, the army's growth failed to keep pace with that of Mexican society in general. Nevertheless, the modest reforms that have taken place within the Mexican army since 1940 have allowed it to continue performing its designated missions of guaranteeing the

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<sup>80</sup>John J. Johnson, Political Change in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958): 135.

nation's sovereignty, preserving internal security and providing aid to the civilian population.

As the institution evolved, it developed some unique characteristics which have become part of a standard modus operandi that has not changed significantly over the years. As will become more apparent below, the army's development has generally conformed to an army ideology which has also become standardized since the 1940s.

Having provided a general description of the Mexican army, to include some of its more salient features, and in consonance with the central theme of this dissertation, attention can now be directed toward defining and analyzing the army's ideology which has played a major role in the army's evolution since 1940.

## Chapter Three

### The Mexican Army's Ideology

Upon assuming the presidency in December 1982, Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado referred to Mexico's armed forces as "fundamental institutions, of proven loyalty and patriotism, efficient and indisputably professional. Of profound popular origin, with strict adherence to the judicial order and definite nationalistic and revolutionary conviction..."<sup>1</sup> With those words, the president captured the essence of the Mexican army's ideology better than any other public statement about the army since 1940. When top civilian and military officials have praised the army in their speeches, they have normally highlighted just one or two of the attributes that represent the principal components of the army's ideology. De la Madrid's words, on the other hand, touched on all the cardinal features of the Mexican army's ideology.

Surprisingly, a formal declaration of the ideological principles of the Mexican army does not exist. In fact, it is doubtful any such document has ever been written. This

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<sup>1</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, December 1982 : 2. ...instituciones fundamentales, de probada lealtad y patriotismo, eficiencia e indiscutible profesionalismo. De profunda raíz popular, con apego irrestricto al orden jurídico y decidida convicción nacionalista y revolucionaria...

absence probably relates most directly to the substance of the actual ideology rather than to a general unwillingness on the part of army members to undertake such a project. In addition, the army's ideology has incorporated various concepts and principles that at times tend to overlap, thereby making them difficult to define with precision. General Alfonso Corona del Rosal has perhaps come closer than anyone else to describing the army's ideology in his book *Moral Militar y Civismo*, used extensively at the *Heroico Colegio Militar* (HCM) since the 1940s. Yet he has professed difficulty in defining one element of that ideology, namely, discipline. He argued that it is a very complex concept and difficult to define accurately because everyone has formed his own ideas about discipline. Moreover, the general contended that discipline can be defined differently according to the particular environment in which it is used. He cited the example of how military discipline differs from that which is employed by the head of a family.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprising then, the fact that its parts cannot be easily interpreted would, at first glance, indicate a lack of coherence with the ideology as a whole. Despite this impediment, a conscientious attempt will be made to clarify the army's ideology and define its integral parts. Army leaders and top political officials have relied on selected features of the ideology to justify the army's missions and activities to the Mexican people. As a result, it has a certain ad hoc quality.

This interpretive dilemma might be better understood by analyzing a similar problem with the ideology of the Mexican Revolution. The so-called Revolutionary mystique comprises a critical element of the army's ideology, but that Revolutionary creed has

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<sup>2</sup>Corona del Rosal, *Moral* : 60-61.



been defined in relatively abstract terms and has been subjected to varying interpretations contingent on the circumstances for which it is being used. Robert E. Scott, in his detailed study of the Mexican government, wrote that "Mexico had no Marx to supply a theoretical, rational, and systematic model for its Revolution. And somehow history failed to produce any single dominant personality who could perform this service by centering the revolutionary doctrine in himself and his beliefs over a long period of time."<sup>3</sup> Scott added that even among the more objective Mexican scholars, there exists no single, unequivocal understanding as to the meaning of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>4</sup> Lyle N. McAlister, a noted historian, has voiced a similar appraisal. He argued that the Revolutionary mystique was not "a concisely bound philosophical system." Instead, the Revolutionary ideology has maintained a certain degree of flexibility which draws heavily on past historical events to legitimize current policies and programs.<sup>5</sup> Peter Smith, in his popular book on Mexican political elites, characterized the ideology of the Mexican Revolution as being eclectic, elastic and pragmatic.<sup>6</sup> One could make the same observation about certain features of the Mexican army's ideology.

Mexican military ideology does not consist of a set of uniform and concise concepts. Yet, certain values and concepts clearly have a special significance for the institution. The principal components of the Mexican army's ideology can be identified as a

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<sup>3</sup>Scott : 98.

<sup>4</sup>Scott : 99.

<sup>5</sup>McAlister et al. : 197-198.

<sup>6</sup>Smith : 52.

revolutionary heritage, loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism, and apoliticism. Elementary explanations of these concepts have emerged in army publications, public declarations and speeches by both military and political leaders. Other values exist within the ideology, but they either have less notoriety or are reflected in these six components. For example, the Mexican army's concept of honor has often been associated with loyalty, while the principle of duty has been mentioned in the same vein as discipline.

The six principal components--revolutionary heritage, loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism, and apoliticism--have qualified in part because of their longevity and general acceptance within military circles. These concepts, as they relate to the army's ideology, had their roots in the late 1920s and 1930s and evolved to the point where they became well recognized by the end of the Alemán administration (1952). Thereafter, they experienced universal acceptance within the army, and political leaders couched their praise for the army in terms of these ideological values.

Yet, few army or political leaders have ever addressed this ideology in its entirety, relying instead on one or two elements at a time. Normally, emphasis falls on a specific value or concept, based on the circumstances at hand. For example, during times of crisis government leaders most often emphasize the army's loyalty to the government's institutions, and elections usually evoke proclamations about the army's apolitical nature. When needing the army's support for an undesirable mission, political leaders have been known to praise the army's discipline and patriotism. The justification this ideology provides for the army's overall activities, policies, programs, and development represents

its most valuable contribution to the army. In one sense, this ideology serves as an institutional guide, which always provides direction to army leaders and offers a *raison d'être* for most of their decisions.

Each separate component of this ideology is defined below. While it may be difficult to rank each attribute according to its importance because of the random fashion in which these different elements have been employed, an attempt has been made to do so by relying principally on the frequency with which each concept has been utilized by leading military and political leaders through the years. Since the 1940s, these concepts have been solidified, and collectively they comprise a Mexican army ideology that has attained a degree of public recognition and acceptance over the years.

### The Revolutionary Heritage

Because of the importance the Mexican Revolution has had for Mexican society in general, it is not surprising that a Revolutionary heritage would be considered the foremost component of the army ideology. While it is difficult to ascertain unequivocally the reasons why the military evolved in the manner it did during the twentieth century, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 certainly has been a prime contributing factor.

It should not come as a surprise that this concept of a revolutionary heritage has been very loosely defined since it associates directly with the equally undefined overall ideology of the Mexican Revolution. As Robert E. Scott has judiciously observed, "...there is no integrated and official ideology of the Mexican Revolution that is accepted

by all Mexicans at all times."<sup>7</sup> Within the Mexican army, this same judgment is valid. When discussing the Revolution as it pertains to the army ideology, its meaning, although vague, comes closest to representing social justice, liberty, and a Mexican recipe for political democracy. Considerable importance befalls the popular origins of the army, which the mantle of revolutionary heritage also clothes.

In November 1979, then SECDEF General Félix Galván López stated that the army did not fear socialism, communism, or any other ideology because the Mexican army was subject to the ideology of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Not unexpectedly, Galván López did not elaborate as to the specific content of that ideology. On another occasion, he said that the armed forces not only were subordinate to the executive branch, but also had an "absolute ideological identification with the principles of the Mexican Revolution."<sup>9</sup> With regard to the army's revolutionary conviction, he stated that the army practiced it in an invariable manner and that "its faith in the principles, postulates and norms of the Mexican Revolution will never abate."<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, much has been written about the Mexican Revolution being dead. However, for the Mexican army the Revolution is still very much alive, and members of the army ostensibly strive to achieve the goals of the Revolution such as nationalism, political liberalism, racial and religious tolerance, and social justice. To think or even

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<sup>7</sup>Scott : 101.

<sup>8</sup>"La Función de las Fuerzas Armadas Está en los Cuarteles y no en la Política," El Nacional, 28 November 1979 : 4.

<sup>9</sup>AHCM : 35.

<sup>10</sup>AHCM : 51.

suggest that the government is working toward anything but these goals would be unacceptable behavior on the part of an officer. Army officers believe that the ideological doctrine of the Mexican Revolution continues to direct the actions of the government, and official army publications make that assertion clearly.<sup>11</sup> As custodians of the national traditions, soldiers pay homage to the Revolution's creed just as political leaders do.

Lyle N. McAlister noted that in "revolutionary doctrine the army is regarded as the prime forger of the revolution and as a popular institution attuned to the national ethos."<sup>12</sup> An army general who served as a senator explained the army's popular origins by saying that the army emerged from a counterrevolution by Mexican society in response to a coup by a dictator (General Victoriano Huerta). The senator added that the strength of the armed forces was the strength of the people.<sup>13</sup> For his part, President Adolfo López Mateos referred to the army as the "revolutionary bulwark," and described it as a "genuine product of the people, of the aspirations and social movements that made the Revolution..."<sup>14</sup> Another President, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, proclaimed that the army was born of the entrails of the people and nourished itself from the same

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<sup>11</sup>See for example, Nociones de Estrategia, Vol. 2 : 209.

<sup>12</sup>McAlister et al. : 236.

<sup>13</sup>Javier Zamora, "La fuerza del Ejército es la fuerza del pueblo, se asienta en el Senado," El Día, 5 April 1978 : 1.

<sup>14</sup>Revista del Ejército, September 1960 : 1.

people.<sup>15</sup> More recently, President José López Portillo declared that the Mexican army continued to sustain itself "without distancing itself from the popular nerve."<sup>16</sup>

Army leaders have remained especially conscious of the institution's popular origins. The Mexican army's official history concludes that the army is a "genuinely popular product" as a result of the revolutionary movement that began in 1910.<sup>17</sup> The leaders of the Revolutionary army never aligned themselves with the wealthy land-owning class, but rather directly opposed that class.<sup>18</sup> And while some military leaders of the Revolution had middle-class backgrounds, the majority come from the lower class. The enduring emphasis on the army's popular origins reinforces the idea that the Mexican army is not a caste, but a representative of all classes, especially the popular ones. As a subsequent chapter will show, these popular origins impel the army to perform various services for the country's poorest classes.

The revolutionary heritage obligates the army to support the Constitution of 1917 and its legitimately elected government. In his influential book, General Coronel del Rosal wrote that the army was a genuinely revolutionary product, whose duty rested "in giving firm and decisive support to the government." Or, in other words, the army "is the support, the sustenance of the State born of the Revolution."<sup>19</sup> This support manifests itself in many ways, especially in the army's adherence to the laws of the Constitution

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<sup>15</sup>Revista del Ejército, February 1969 : 48.

<sup>16</sup>"El Ejército Mexicano se sostiene sin apartarse del nervio popular," El Día, 19 February 1982 : 3.

<sup>17</sup>Toral : 532.

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, Political Change : 107.

<sup>19</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 37 and 220.

of 1917.<sup>20</sup> For example, the Mexican Constitution established a clear separation between church and state and broke the power of the Catholic Church. To reinforce that law, a presidential decree, dated 17 November 1943, prohibited the use of military uniforms at religious ceremonies.<sup>21</sup> Almost thirty years later, SECDEF General Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, disturbed at having seen officers at religious acts in uniform, publicly reminded the officer corps of the 1943 decree prohibiting such behavior.<sup>22</sup> Through the years, the army has publicly displayed its support of the Constitution. Until 1971, one of the army's three official missions was to maintain the inviolability of the Constitution and its laws. Although no longer upheld officially as a mission, the Constitution remains for the army a bedrock of the nation's revolutionary heritage.

The revolutionary heritage also affects the way army officers perceive themselves. In general, army officers see themselves as "guardians of the Revolution," who assiduously contribute to the fulfillment of the Revolution's goals.<sup>23</sup> The January 1953 edition of the *Revista del Ejército* included an article entitled, "An Army of the People for the People," which simply listed newspaper clippings covering the assorted services performed by the army to assist the population. Below some photographs of soldiers performing their civic action tasks appeared the slogan "to serve the people is to serve Mexico."<sup>24</sup> A later edition of the army magazine editorialized that the election of a new

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<sup>20</sup>Wesson : 129.

<sup>21</sup>AGN, Camacho, 545.22/301.

<sup>22</sup>"Prohiben a los Militares Usar Uniforme en Actos Religiosos," *El Sol*, 2 January 1973 : 2.

<sup>23</sup>Wesson : 128.

<sup>24</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, January 1953 : 18-19.

president in December 1958 heralded a new stage in government, but that this change had little effect on the army which simply continued its revolutionary work.<sup>25</sup> Almost twenty years later, SECDEF General Cuenca Díaz characterized his organization as an army of peace, which served the institutions and the Mexican people.<sup>26</sup> While serving in his last year as president, José López Portillo praised the army's "spirit of service in the most noble social causes of the country."<sup>27</sup>

Army leaders often draw on this revolutionary heritage because, among other things, it distinguishes their institution from those of their counterparts in Latin America. On numerous occasions, Mexican officers have compared their army with others in Latin America, and have remarked that the Mexican army is different from counterpart militaries because Mexico had a social revolution in the early twentieth century. According to these officers, that revolution produced a new and more equitable society and a set of foreign policy principles for dealing fairly with other nations.<sup>28</sup> The latter obviated the need for a large military force because Mexico never anticipated facing a hostile enemy force. In this instance, the revolutionary heritage has meshed with another ideological value, namely, nationalism. Since nationalism implies the repudiation of

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<sup>25</sup>Revista del Ejército, December 1958 : 1-2.

<sup>26</sup>Presidencia de la Republica, El Gobierno Mexicano, No. 62, January 1976 : 237. Hereafter cited as Gobierno Mexicano, volume number and month.

<sup>27</sup>"La modernización de las fuerzas armadas reforzó la soberanía nacional, afirmó José López Portillo," UnoMásUno, 5 January 1982 : 2.

<sup>28</sup>See Aguilar Zinser : 225-227 and Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 118-119 for a short explanation of Mexico's foreign policy principles.



everything foreign and an unabashed pride and support for everything "Mexican," the special reverence army officers hold for the Revolutionary creed is certainly natural.

In domestic terms, the Revolutionary creed has long been the banner for continued power, and through the years has become ingrained in the Mexican army mentality.<sup>29</sup> As one SECDEF declared, "the Mexican army will be a fortress, a bastion and the last foxhole of the Mexican Revolution."<sup>30</sup> A graduate of the HCM believes that the army will continue carrying the torch of the Mexican Revolution in the future. The army seems to relish the role of conserving national and military traditions. In that regard, HCM alumni believe that future generations of Mexican army officers will continue to be formed within the "philosophy of the Mexican Revolution."<sup>31</sup>

In short, no one can deny the special importance the Mexican Revolution holds for the army. One final illustration that highlights this point is the unique status given to the surviving Revolutionary generals. In the midst of a major reform aimed at thinning considerably the general officers' ranks in 1972, the SECDEF announced that the changes would not affect the Revolutionary generals since they comprised a special category.<sup>32</sup> That meant Revolutionary generals would remain on active duty for pay purposes while younger generals, who did not fight in the Revolution, faced mandatory retirement. Thus, even though these generals were old and incapable of serving in an

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<sup>29</sup>Wager : 88 and Wilkie : 39.

<sup>30</sup>Jesús M. Lozano, "Ajena a Extremos Fanatistas, la Ruta de México: Galván," Excélsior, 3 September 1978 : 1.

<sup>31</sup>Bautista Rosas : 186.

<sup>32</sup>Jesús M. Lozano, "Retiro de los Generales que Pasen de 65 Años Este Sexenio: Cuenca D.," Excélsior, 31 May 72 : 22.

official capacity, their service in the Revolution held a special symbolic value, which the army refused to degrade through retirement from active service.

### Loyalty

Loyalty represents a second major component of the Mexican army's ideology. The previous chapter discussed personal loyalty as a characteristic of the Mexican army officer corps. The loyalty constantly alluded to by both military and political leaders is institutional loyalty, which plays a critical role in the army's ideology. The concept translates into loyal support for the Constitution and the political institutions that it helped to conceive. The army has been committed to upholding the institutions since the 1930s. In other words, the army has persisted in backing the decisions of the legitimately elected government. Through the years, political leaders in particular have accentuated the value of this institutional loyalty. In a September 1941 speech to military zone commanders and other top-level army officials, President Avila Camacho said the loyalty to the institutions and a spirit of social service had made the army the most legitimate pride of the Mexican people as well as the most secure hope for democracy.<sup>33</sup> More than twenty years later, presidential candidate Díaz Ordaz lauded the army when he reminded the public that the army's loyalty to the institutions created by the people is exemplary and constant.<sup>34</sup> Díaz Ordaz's successor, Luis Echeverría Alvarez, in extending a 1972 New Year's greeting to top army leaders at the presidential residence, reminded those in

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<sup>33</sup>AGN, Camacho, 708.1/9.

<sup>34</sup>Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Ideario de su Candidato Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Tomo III (Mexico City, 1964) : 489.

attendance that the army's loyalty toward the "democratic institutions" was highly significant.<sup>35</sup> Within army circles, a high value has been placed on institutional loyalty. The official history of the Mexican army reports that a fundamental characteristic of the army has been its "loyalty to the institutions and governments emanating from the Revolution of 1910."<sup>36</sup> A frequently cited quote that captures the significance of this characteristic came from SECDEF Galván López in July 1977. He said "(t)he valor of a soldier, his will to conquer and his spirit of sacrifice will serve him little if he does not have as a principle and goal, institutional loyalty."<sup>37</sup> During the graduation ceremony at the HCM in February 1966, SECDEF García Barragán stated "(o)ur duty is loyalty, discipline and honor. Loyalty to the constituted government and to the Mexican Revolution made with the blood, effort and sacrifice of the Mexican people."<sup>38</sup> Three short months before Díaz Ordaz turned over the presidency to his successor, an army magazine editorial declared that the army, as an institution, would continue being "the loyal support of the national institutions."<sup>39</sup>

José Luis Piñeyro, one of the few Mexicans who has studied the Mexican military extensively, has argued that since the Revolution, a "political-ideological nexus" has been formed to develop a military doctrine that fosters institutional over personal loyalty.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>"Altamente Significativa Para el Régimen la Lealtad del Ejército," El Sol, 3 January 1972 : 2.

<sup>36</sup>Toral : 533.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1966 : 7.

<sup>39</sup>Revista del Ejército, September 1970 : 3.

<sup>40</sup>Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 128 (Note 2).

Army policies support Piñeyro's argument. Army personnel receive ample instruction on the importance of institutional loyalty. In the army's manual on military ethics, a soldier's responsibility to the institutions is defined explicitly. The manual states, "above all a soldier should never forget the loyalty he owes to the national institutions."<sup>41</sup> This guide also advises all military personnel that their first imperative is "to be loyal to the government on which they depend."<sup>42</sup> The army's regulation on military duties orders a soldier to place the nation's sovereignty, institutional loyalty, and the honor of the army before any personal interest.<sup>43</sup> The regulation on military duties extracted that directive almost verbatim from the first article of the Law of Discipline of the Army and Navy published on 15 March 1926.<sup>44</sup> In short, graduates of the HCM have been carefully instructed on the importance of practicing institutional loyalty by the time they begin their military careers. And this indoctrination does not end with graduation from the HCM. Throughout their careers, officers receive constant reinforcement of this principle in the performance of normal military duties.

The *Revista del Ejército* has long served as the intellectual organ of the Mexican army. Among its objectives, the magazine lists enlightening its readers on the technical aspects of military issues, following the progress of the institution, raising the cultural

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<sup>41</sup>Corona del Rosal, *Moral* : 37.

<sup>42</sup>Corona del Rosal, *Moral* : 221.

<sup>43</sup>Corona del Rosal, *Guerra* : 254-255.

<sup>44</sup>Ley de Disciplina del Ejército y Armada Nacionales, Mexico City, 15 March 1926.

levels of its readers, and interpreting the decisions of the army's leaders.<sup>45</sup> Since the 1940s, the *Revista del Ejército* has consistently treated loyalty as an exalted virtue. William S. Ackroyd surveyed the content of the magazine's articles over a three-year period and found that about sixteen percent of the articles had institutional loyalty as their theme.<sup>46</sup> A review of editions of the *Revista del Ejército* from 1940 to 1982 shows that Ackroyd's findings on loyalty have held steady during this time period also. According to the army magazine, loyalty has always existed "as a basic structure in the tradition of our army...it is the defense of right against illegality."<sup>47</sup> Another editorial referred to loyalty as "a small word of seven letters that encompasses the most beautiful and majestic that one can give for the Patria and only an analysis of its synonyms of fidelity, honesty, probity, rectitude, candor, performance and gentlemanly behavior can illustrate the complete idea of its great significance."<sup>48</sup> As can be gleaned from the above, official army sources refer to loyalty in hallowed terms and include a number of lofty synonyms in its concept of loyalty. The elasticity of the concept gives army leaders the additional flexibility needed to justify army actions in different situations.

Like the army's revolutionary heritage, loyalty also has a strong historical foundation. In fact, February has been deemed loyalty month within the army. On 9 February 1913, eighteen cadets, including the father of ex-President José López Portillo,

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<sup>45</sup>Revista del Ejército, April 1942 : 2-3. After November 1972, the name of the magazine is changed to Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aerea Mexicanos. Despite this minor change, it will continue to be cited as Revista del Ejército below.

<sup>46</sup>Ackroyd : 124.

<sup>47</sup>Revista del Ejército, April 1974 : 5.

<sup>48</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1980 : 3.

escorted President Francisco I. Madero from Chapultepec Castle to the National Palace. That episode in Mexican history was called the *Marcha de la Lealtad* or the Loyalty March, and it gave the HCM an inimitable prestige within Mexico's historical annals. Other cadets replicated that demonstration of loyalty in 1920 when they escorted a fleeing Venustiano Carranza on a train from Mexico City to Veracruz.<sup>49</sup> Army officials host a ceremony commemorating the Loyalty March every 9 February at Chapultepec Castle. The president and selected members of his cabinet have always attended the event, with one member of the group normally delivering a speech exhorting the army's continued loyalty to the institutions.<sup>50</sup>

Through the years, both the government and the army have rewarded those who have labored long and hard to guarantee that institutional loyalty. All the ex-Secretaries of National Defense have remained on active duty, after completing their terms, as advisors to the new SECDEF. Aside from the obvious financial benefits, the advisory position ensures an ex-SECDEF of invitations to major army events and provides them with a sense of belonging as a reward for their devoted service and unwavering loyalty. At a breakfast hosted by the army for the president after his State of the Union address in September 1967, Generals Urquiza, Limón and Olachea Avilés, the SECDEFs under Avila Camacho, Alemán and López Mateos, attended as honored guests.<sup>51</sup> During the

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<sup>49</sup>Revista del Ejército, February 1979 : 7-9 and Toral : 533. Carranza was eventually killed by Obregón's forces, but the cadets remained loyal to the president until his death, because he was after all their Commander-in-Chief.

<sup>50</sup>The ceremony receives extensive press coverage every year, detailing those in attendance and the significant parts of the keynote speech. See Revista del Ejército, February 1972 : 13-14 and February 1975 : 1-2.

<sup>51</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 34, September 1967 : 166.

president's 1973 New Year's greeting for high-ranking army officials at the presidential residence, General Limón attended as a special guest in his capacity as advisor to the SECDEF.<sup>52</sup> General Pablo Macías Valenzuela, SECDEF under Avila Camacho before being replaced by Lázaro Cárdenas at the outbreak of World War II, received the Belisario Dominguez medal, a national award given in recognition of loyalty to the institutions, more than thirty years after relinquishing his post.<sup>53</sup> Army officers constantly see institutional loyalty being rewarded, and those rewards provide additional incentives for the continued support of that ideal.

Since the late 1930s, the army's loyalty has been implicit in its submission to civilian power. Military leaders have constantly declared their loyalty to the legitimately elected government and have never challenged that government after the unsuccessful rebellions of the 1920s.<sup>54</sup> As Piñeyro has noted, "(s)ince 1935 the Defense Ministry has not officially leveled a single criticism against the incumbent President or the ruling party."<sup>55</sup> When army leaders have made official declarations, they have always, as the government's principal spokesmen, supported the government's position or that of the president.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Cesar Silva Rojas, "Convivió el President con el Ejército," La Prensa, 3 January 1973 : 3.

<sup>53</sup>Aquiles Fuentes, "Honra a México el Actual Ejército de los Jovenes Profesionistas Militares," El Día, 8 October 1973 : 1.

<sup>54</sup>Boils : 170; Lozoya, Ejército : 103-104 and Martínez Navarro : 390-391.

<sup>55</sup>Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 126.

<sup>56</sup>Pablo González Casanova, Los Militares Y La Política En América Latina (Mexico City: Océano, 1988) : 69-71 and Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 123.

During the 1920s, the army's image had been blemished because of a predilection for personal loyalty over institutional loyalty. As a result of the reforms initiated by General Joaquín Amaro in the late 1920s, the army's loyalty gradually transitioned from the Revolutionary generals and *caudillos* to the institutions created by the Constitution of 1917. And this now-cherished institutional loyalty eventually became an integral part of the army's ideology.

Despite the importance attributed to institutional loyalty, personal loyalty to one's superior continues to play a critical role in an officer's career development. Many studies dealing with the structure of Mexican society have pointed out a general Mexican affinity for the individual over the institution. Most Mexicans feel more comfortable dealing with a person than with an organization. Army officers are no different, and as a subsequent chapter will discuss in greater detail, the collective institution of the armed forces expresses its loyalty to the presidency, while individual officers perceive their loyalty as being an individual commitment to a particular president. The same relationship exists between an officer and his superiors, who expect unquestioned loyalty from their subordinates. When the SECDEF pledges the army's complete loyalty to the system born of the Revolution, he expects that same kind of loyalty from the officer corps. Early in their careers, officers learn that personal loyalties can often pay dividends beyond those that the institution provides.<sup>57</sup> Because of this self-interest, loyalty overlaps with discipline, since the manner in which an officer carries out the

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<sup>57</sup>Hansen : 218-221 offers a useful analysis of loyalty as it pertains to the Mexican political system.



orders and directives of a superior can often express the degree of loyalty he has for his commander.

### Discipline

Discipline, as a virtue comprising part of the army's ideology, probably receives the least amount of publicity. However, within the army discipline holds the most significance since it pertains directly to the maintenance of the institution's integrity. In a January 1941 speech to recent graduates of the HCM, President Avila Camacho said the army responds to its essential function, which he called its discipline. The president also declared that the life of a soldier is "hierarchy and discipline."<sup>58</sup> Army officers probably attach more value to this attribute than to any other. Without discipline, the army would clearly lack order, unity, and solidarity, those characteristics that have made the army such a reliable institution since the 1940s.

General Corona del Rosal has argued that discipline constitutes the soul and the fundamental base of the army. He added that discipline exists within the army when its members follow the legal norms and ethics that govern the institution.<sup>59</sup> For Corona del Rosal and the many officers who have been weaned on the principles of his book, discipline can be explained as "the absolute obedience of the laws, regulations and superiors."<sup>60</sup> Ackroyd gives a definition proffered by army officers he interviewed,

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<sup>58</sup>AGN, Camacho, 708.1/1 and Revista del Ejército, January, February, March, April 1941 : 11.

<sup>59</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 61-62.

<sup>60</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 63.

which describe discipline as the "unquestioning personal adherence to the orders of a superior officer, deference to superior officers, and, in general, respect for the hierarchy of command."<sup>61</sup> Unlike some of the other components of the army's ideology, discipline can be explained in more objective terms and does not rely heavily on abstract concepts. This last point might account in part for its wide acceptance within the ranks.

Official army publications provide their share of definitions and opinions on discipline. An editorial in the *Revista del Ejército* attached great importance to "the small details" in characterizing discipline. The editorial went on to say that a good army had to have a solid disciplinary base, and that the high command had to be alert to ensure that a high level of discipline was maintained within the service.<sup>62</sup> An admissions manual for the HCM sets forth a definition of discipline on one of its first pages--"(d)iscipline is the norm to which the military must subject its conduct; it has as its foundation obedience and a high concept of honor, justice and morality and includes the faithful and precise fulfillment of those duties prescribed by military laws and regulations."<sup>63</sup> That definition comes directly from Article 3 of the army's Law of Discipline, which has been in effect since 1926, indicating that this concept has been standardized within the army since the 1920s.<sup>64</sup> In searching for a more concise

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<sup>61</sup>Ackroyd : 107.

<sup>62</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, July 1950 : 1-3.

<sup>63</sup>Heroico Colegio Militar, *Instructivo de Admisión, 1980-1981* (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1980) : 5.

<sup>64</sup>Ley de Disciplina del Ejército y Armada Nacionales, March 15, 1926.

definition, an article in the army magazine stated that "when given an order, a soldier should just follow it and never question why the order was given."<sup>65</sup>

An indication of the seriousness with which the army treats discipline rests in the harshness of the penalties applied for violations of discipline. Under military law, the death penalty exists as punishment for any act that threatens the integrity of the nation or the unity of the army.<sup>66</sup> In August 1973, the Supreme Court of Military Justice decreed the death penalty for a soldier convicted of killing a lieutenant during a military payroll robbery. The court declared that it wanted the execution to serve as an example to other soldiers of the army's internal discipline.<sup>67</sup> A few years later, a high-level military judicial official said that because of the important role the army plays in society, its mission must be carried out in the strictest fashion. For that reason alone, the death penalty would remain in the military code of justice.<sup>68</sup> And in announcing a general revision of the military penal code, SECDEF Galván López adamantly stated that despite the reform, the death penalty would remain in force.<sup>69</sup> The existence of a military death penalty is especially significant because there is no civil capital punishment in Mexico, leading one to conclude that military personnel face harsher standards than their civilian counterparts.

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<sup>65</sup>"La Disciplina Moderna," Revista del Ejército, June 1971 : 55.

<sup>66</sup>Corona del Rosal, Guerra : 256.

<sup>67</sup>"Decretan la Pena Capital a un Soldado," El Heraldo, 15 August 1973 : 19.

<sup>68</sup>"La Pena de Muerte Permanecerá en el Código Militar: Rico Schroeder," El Día, 18 February 1978 : 7.

<sup>69</sup>Ernesto Ochoa Cespedes, "A Norteamérica le Conviene mas Nuestra Amistad," Novedades, 27 January 1981 : 1.

Examples of lesser forms of punishment for violations of the disciplinary code have also been publicized. Shortly after turning over the presidency to López Mateos, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines announced that U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower planned to visit him in Mexico. In response to the announcement, General Adolfo León Ossorio, a prestigious revolutionary general, published an open letter suggesting that it was inappropriate for the president of the United States to visit with an ex-president of Mexico. Instead, the correct course of action would be for President Eisenhower to meet with President López Mateos. Through his actions, General León Ossorio breached military discipline by publicly voicing an opinion on political issues, and his punishment came in the form of a reassignment out of the capital to the Revillagigedo Islands, which in those days were practically uninhabited.<sup>70</sup>

Another interesting case involving a violation of the army's disciplinary code occurred twenty years later. In March 1972, a group of student officers at the Military School of Engineering sent a letter to *Excélsior*, the leading Mexico City newspaper, complaining of perceived injustices at the school. The complaints centered on low salaries, graduation with only the rank of lieutenant, and flawed assignment procedures, which resulted in graduates not always being assigned to engineering jobs. A short time after the letter appeared in the newspaper, the wives of those officers complained to the federal district (D.F.) attorney general's office that their husbands were being held incommunicado at Military Camp No. 1 (*Campo Militar No. 1*), the large army base in the center of Mexico City. The attorney general told the women that he lacked

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<sup>70</sup>Bautista Rosas : 97-98.

jurisdiction in military matters and suggested that they contact the SECDEF directly. Their action was publicized in *Excélsior* and prompted a public denial from General Cuenca Díaz, the SECDEF at the time, that the twenty engineering students were being held as prisoners in *Campo Militar No. 1*. Cuenca Díaz responded to the allegations by saying that any lack of discipline within the ranks must be punished in an appropriate manner. He added that the students had simply been restricted to the base on account of their lack of discipline indicated by their failure to go through the proper channels in voicing their complaints. The SECDEF then announced that their complaints were being investigated by the proper military authorities in accordance with official military procedures.<sup>71</sup>

The two incidents discussed above do not mean to imply that the Mexican army has experienced excessive disciplinary problems. To the contrary, such problems seldom occur, and for the most part, problems of a disciplinary nature never reach the public eye because they are quietly resolved within the institution itself. The vast majority of army officers follow the disciplinary code, which has been taught in a thorough manner. For example, in a cursory poll taken by a Mexico City newspaper concerning the army's involvement in politics, a number of high ranking officers responded to the questions, but only on the condition that they remain anonymous. They explained to the pollster that military discipline prevented them from publicly expressing personal opinions on

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<sup>71</sup>Carlos Borbolla, "20 Ingenieros Militares, Detenidos, Denuncian sus Esposas," *Excélsior*, 21 March 1972 : 4; "Niega la Defensa que Esten Presos Viente Ingenieros," *La Prensa*, 22 March 1972 : 3 and Jesús M. Lozano, "Los Ingenieros Cometieron Falta: Cuenca," *Excélsior*, 24 March 1972 : 1.

political issues.<sup>72</sup> These officers did not want their views to be misconstrued as officially representative of the Mexican army, because only the SECDEF has the authority to state the army's official position on a given issue.

As with the concept of loyalty, there exists the less formal interpretation of military discipline. In the Mexican army, an officer is empowered to make decisions by virtue of the position he holds. Each officer quickly learns what authority his position gives him, and what decisionmaking is the prerogative of the commander. Unlike their counterparts in the U.S. army, Mexican officers seldom take individual initiative because it is considered an infringement upon the commander's authority to act independently of his order. Violating this principle would compromise the subordinate's loyalty for his superior. In this case, it would call into question the discipline of the subordinate. Officers have learned that discipline, like loyalty, can furnish rewards, and in that way, those values overlap. An officer who can be counted on to execute orders with the strictest discipline will rise swiftly through the ranks.

To summarize, through the years, the army has come to be recognized for its discipline. In one sense, military discipline has been translated as dependability. The ruling elite in Mexico has learned from experience that the army, more than any other national organization, can be counted on to carry out an order and follow the directives of the civilian authorities. Discipline has also come to mean obedience to the President of the Republic, who serves as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Since the 1940s, army leaders have adopted the policy that a disciplined army can best accomplish

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<sup>72</sup>"No es Militarismo el que Algunos Generales Lleguen a Gobernadores," *Excélsior*, 20 February 1978 : 8.

its mission. For that reason, the Mexican army has placed considerable emphasis on enforcing discipline within its ranks. One senior officer commented that discipline is implanted in an officer's value system during his training as a cadet at the HCM. A potential officer quickly learns that discipline is the attribute most valued among army officers.<sup>73</sup> As such, discipline has become an integral part of the army's creed, and perhaps exerts the most influence on the behavior patterns of Mexican army officers.

### Patriotism

Patriotism is often perceived as a romantic element of the army's ideology. To a certain extent, patriotism justifies the army's existence, because within the army's ideology, patriotism has been almost always tied directly to historical events and to the heroes who participated in those events. Given the prominent role played by the army in Mexican history, there exist numerous episodes from which to draw this patriotic heritage. Since the primary mission of any soldier is to be prepared to fight and die in the defense of his country, patriotism is more often associated with the military than with any other Mexican institution. The willingness of a soldier to sacrifice his life for his country, by nature makes him patriotic. President Avila Camacho made that point clear in January 1941 when he said "the soldier constitutes the most complete representation of patriotism."<sup>74</sup> The president also reminded graduating cadets from the Military College that they had been trained not only to love their country but also to defend it on

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<sup>73</sup>Interview, March 1991.

<sup>74</sup>Revista del Ejército, January, February, March, April 1941 : 11.

the front lines.<sup>75</sup> One might attempt to conceptualize patriotism by reviewing the army's principal source on military ethics, *Moral Militar y Civismo*, which says that it is the duty of every soldier to develop his patriotism, also known as love of country. The idea of *patria* constitutes one of the most powerful sentiments that impels a soldier to fulfill his duties, and a true patriot loves his country and pursues the welfare of his fellow compatriots. In fact, military life functions within an environment of total personal disinterest and patriotism.<sup>76</sup> The first article of the army's Law of Discipline reminds a soldier of the potential cost of his patriotism when it directs him to fulfill his duty until "the sacrifice."<sup>77</sup> The term "sacrifice" in that context means death.

Alan Knight, a British historian known for his work on the Mexican Revolution, provides a useful definition of Mexican patriotism, defining it as "an effective allegiance to the national entity 'Mexico,' and involves the defense of Mexican territory, sovereignty, and autonomy."<sup>78</sup> The frequent commemoration of important historical events keeps the spirit of patriotism alive within the Mexican army, and bears out Knight's definition. The HCM has a special significance because it has long served as the institution that has formed future patriots. In Mexican history, the *Niños Heroes* or child heroes have long held a revered position. One lieutenant and five cadets died defending Chapultepec Castle against the invading U.S. forces on 13 September 1847.

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<sup>75</sup>Revista del Ejército, January, February, March, April 1941 : 9.

<sup>76</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 14, 86-87.

<sup>77</sup>Ley de Disciplina del Ejército y Armada Nacionales, 15 March 1926 and Revista del Ejército, July 1950 : 1-3.

<sup>78</sup>Alan Knight, U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940, Monograph Series, 28 (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987) : 31.



Their heroism represented the consummate expression of patriotism. In 1966, SECDEF García Barragán referred to the *Niños Heroes* as an "example of the glorious tradition of heroism, sacrifice and honor..." These heroes showed the Mexican people how to honor the nation and die for the honor of their country.<sup>79</sup> The HCM has made sure that the ultimate sacrifice of those heroes will never be forgotten. On the first Thursday of each month, the director of the HCM reads the names of the *Niños Heroes* to the assembled corps of cadets. After each name is read, the cadets fervently respond in unison with the words "he died for his country."<sup>80</sup> On a national level, the president also presides over the commemoration of the *Niños Heroes* at their monument in Chapultepec Park, with a cadet from the HCM giving the keynote speech. That 13 September ceremony initiates a three-day celebration, known as the *fiestas patrias*, which culminates with a large military parade passing in review before the president in front of the national palace. The festivities always receive extensive press coverage and serve as a great source of pride for all members of the armed forces.<sup>81</sup>

The Battle of Puebla in 1862 comprises another key element of the army's patriotic lore. Once again, patriotic Mexican soldiers fought against foreign invaders, and under the astute generalship of Ignacio Zaragoza, the Mexican army emerged victorious over

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<sup>79</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1966 : 4.

<sup>80</sup>McAlister et al. : 230. In the past, I had discussions with army officers about this ceremony at the HCM. Aside from evoking feelings of patriotism, it also serves to engender a nationalist spirit among the cadets, and that spirit is tinged somewhat with anti-U.S. sentiments.

<sup>81</sup>See for example Revista del Ejército, September 1945 : 1-5 and September 1966 : 1-3. See also Jesús de León Toral, "Chapultepec, Caso Heroico Sin Precedentes en la historia," Revista del Ejército, September 1975 : 35-37.

the French soldiers. Every year, the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, also referred to as *Cinco de Mayo* (5th of May), provides a forum for the members of the National Military Service (SMN) to swear their allegiance to the Mexican flag, promising to defend it with their lives. The President of Mexico participates directly in the ceremony by raising the flag either in the Plaza of the Constitution in Mexico City or by traveling to Puebla for the commemoration.<sup>82</sup> The *Revista del Ejército* has traditionally devoted its May editorial to the legacy of the Battle of Puebla and to the merits of pledging allegiance to the flag.<sup>83</sup>

Historical personages who have become synonymous with patriotism in army circles include Father Hidalgo y Costilla and Benito Juárez. According to one publication, Hidalgo is the so-called Father of Mexican Independence, and he attained the status of patriot by liberating the Mexican people from the slavery of an intolerable foreign rule.<sup>84</sup> Benito Juárez has remained the country's foremost patriot in the eyes of the Mexican army. Although somewhat ironic because of his non-military background, the army has long admired Juárez as the ideal patriot. He exemplified the principles of justice, liberty, and equality. He also placed a high value on mutual respect between nations. According to army sources, Juárez played a vital role in helping to forge modern Mexico, after he so gallantly fought to free the country from the yoke of foreign

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<sup>82</sup>McAlister et al. : 231. Every year numerous press clippings cover the ceremony and the key sections of the speeches given by military and political officials.

<sup>83</sup>See for example the May editorials in the 1947, 1954, 1962, 1976 and 1978 editions of the *Revista del Ejército*. The entire edition of May 1962 is devoted to the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Puebla.

<sup>84</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, September 1948 : 1-3.

control. Juárez also possessed a prophetic vision as to the direction Mexico needed to take for a brighter future.<sup>85</sup>

Since the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican military has not had many opportunities to demonstrate its patriotism by fighting a foreign enemy. The most recent case of celebrated patriotism dates back to 1945. The 201st Air Squadron made up the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (FAEM), the country's contribution to the allied cause during World War II. The squadron saw action in the Far East beginning in June 1945 and returned to a hero's welcome in Mexico City in November 1945. The sacrifices of the unit members have been celebrated officially every year since the unit's return, and army leaders continue to describe these patriots of the 201st Air Squadron as genuine products of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>86</sup>

To summarize, the army has incorporated many examples of patriotic service into its ideology. More than any other Mexican institution, the army has continued to preserve and pay homage to these rich traditions. The names and deeds of men such as Juárez, Hidalgo, Guerrero, and the *Niños Heroes* will never be forgotten by the members of the armed forces. Since 1940, the Mexican military has become the institution most recognized for its patriotism, and actually considers itself to be the repository of these

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<sup>85</sup>See *Revista del Ejército* editorials for June 1958, April 1964, March 1965, March 1971, March 1974, March 1977, March 1979 and March 1982. In 1972, the 100th anniversary of Juárez's death, Juárez was the magazine's theme for the entire year. In March 1988, a mid-level Mexican bureaucrat, who had had some limited contact with the Mexican army over the years, suggested that the army praised the accomplishments of Juárez because of his heavily Indian background. Given the fact that army members come from predominantly Indian and mestizo backgrounds, Juárez provides a psychologically acceptable hero who makes soldiers feel comfortable about their backgrounds.

<sup>86</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, November 1945 : 1-2 and November 1946 : 1-2. See also Toral : 498-502 for the specific history of this unit. The exploits of this unit will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter because it did provide symbolic importance for Mexico during the war.

valued traditions.<sup>87</sup> In December 1970, President Luis Echeverría remarked that patriotism had the highest expression within the armed forces.<sup>88</sup> Two years later, when asked his opinion of the Mexican soldier, Echeverría answered by saying the Mexican soldier displayed "exemplary patriotism."<sup>89</sup>

### Nationalism

The inclusion of nationalism as an integral part of the army's ideology should not come as a surprise. John Johnson, one of the pioneers in the study of the military in Latin America, wrote that during the second half of the nineteenth century nationalism became the ideology on which the military grew. Nationalism justified the existence of standing armies and the professionalization of those armies.<sup>90</sup> S.F. Finer expressed a similar opinion when he wrote that nationalism resulted in the army becoming a symbol of nationhood.<sup>91</sup>

Defined in simple terms, nationalism is the rejection, direct or implied, of foreign influences. Those influences can exist in many forms, but the two principal kinds are economic and cultural, the former being especially significant in Mexico at the time of

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<sup>87</sup>Toral : 533. During a March 1991 interview with Ramiro Bautista Rosas, a graduate of the HCM, Bautista emphasized importance the army attached to preserving these patriotic traditions. He suggested that the army obtained a special kind of nourishment from these traditions. For that reason, the army tends to focus excessively on glorious events and purposely ignore the negative aspects of Mexican history.

<sup>88</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, December 1970 : 39.

<sup>89</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 15, February 1972 : 316.

<sup>90</sup>Johnson, Military and Society : 62-70.

<sup>91</sup>Finer : 187-222.

the Mexican Revolution. In Mexico, the influence of nationalism emerged later than in most of her Latin American counterparts. Mexico did not experience a modicum of stability in the 1800s until after 1880, with the consolidation of the dictatorial rule of Porfirio Díaz. The Mexican Revolution in 1910 ignited a new spirit of nationalism in many parts of the country, and the slogan of "Mexico for the Mexicans" became a rallying cry for patriotic Mexicans. The Constitution of 1917 fortified this nascent nationalism by adopting strong measures to prevent foreign influence and control in post-Revolution Mexico.<sup>92</sup> At that time, the realization that Mexico's major social revolution made her unique in Latin America began to take a firm hold on society. Reforms within the army in the 1920s encouraged a strong nationalist spirit. John J. Johnson observed that as an army grew more institutionalized and professional, there was a corresponding tendency for it to become more nationalistic.<sup>93</sup> By the late 1920s, the Mexican army was clearly moving in such a direction. Given the high degree of influence exerted by army leaders during this period, Eric Nordlinger's contention that military officers most often perceive of themselves as leading nationalists would have been applicable in the Mexican case.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Knight : 53-55. For example, Article 27 of the new Constitution declared that subsoil rights were part of the national domain, and that the government had the right to expropriate those rights for the public interest.

<sup>93</sup>Johnson, Military and Society : 140. Alfred C. Stepan makes a similar observation about this growing nationalist spirit within the Mexican army when he reminds his readers that a military elite founded the ruling political party in 1929. See Alfred C. Stepan, The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) : 91.

<sup>94</sup>Eric A. Nordlinger, Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977) : 65-66.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, a deliberate plan had been established to build a nationalist army not subject to foreign influences. World War II interrupted those plans briefly, but since 1952, that nationalistic approach has remained intact. Mexico's independent foreign policy, her policies of self-determination and non-intervention and the rigid defensive posture adopted by the Mexican armed forces have helped to nudge the army down a predominantly nationalist path.<sup>95</sup>

The vast amount of blood spilled during the Revolution caused Mexican society to develop a strong antipathy towards militarism. The Constitution of 1917 legally curtailed the army's meddling in politics and influenced army leaders to implement a unique and exclusively defensive philosophy with regard to military doctrine and strategy. In the second chapter of his book, General Corona del Rosal stated explicitly that Mexico has never been an aggressor nation, and for that reason, the Mexican army has been organized for strictly defensive purposes.<sup>96</sup> Official army publications have justified and reinforced the army's defensive posture.<sup>97</sup> That philosophy fortified nationalist tendencies within the army because it eliminated the need for extensive relations with foreign militaries that might look to extend their influence to the Mexican army through military training programs and equipment sales.

Like the Mexican brand of patriotism, Mexican nationalism has frequently been identified with a lingering anti-Yankee sentiment which has strong historical roots dating

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<sup>95</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 223-225 and Wager : 100-102.

<sup>96</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 14-15 and González Casanova, Los Militares : 69.

<sup>97</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1958 : 1-2 and Toral : 532-533.

back to the mid-nineteenth century. Alan Riding, who had many years of experience in Mexico as a foreign correspondent, referred to that feeling as "the simmering xenophobia of Mexico's military establishment."<sup>98</sup> For many years, these anti-U.S. feelings helped to nurture this burgeoning nationalism. Such a development should come as no surprise. After all, the defeats at the hands of U.S. invaders contributed substantially to the impugning of the Mexican army's reputation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That unpleasant history has made the military both suspicious and wary of its neighbor to the north. Two Mexican historians have suggested that "Mexican nationalism in the Twentieth Century was founded on the struggle against its northern neighbor..."<sup>99</sup> This attitude of distrust manifested itself in the rejection of a formal military alliance with the United States in 1952. Since that time, the Mexicans have rejected every suggestion of a formal military agreement with the U.S., a subject discussed more thoroughly in a later chapter. In fact, Mexico and Cuba are the only Latin American countries that have never hosted a U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).<sup>100</sup> Perhaps the most telling example of this distrust comes from an

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<sup>98</sup>Alan Riding, Distant Neighbors (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) : 92.

<sup>99</sup>Josefina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer, The United States and Mexico (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) : 158. In 1981, the unpleasant military experience with the U.S. was still an emotionally charged issue. As a student at the ESG in 1981, I was asked to leave a military history class which was about to discuss the Mexican-American War of 1847. The army colonel instructing the class said he wanted to avoid having any animosity directed towards me by my fellow classmates. The colonel explained that emotions might get out of control during the discussion of certain aspects of the war. Actually, anti-American sentiment should be seen as a natural phenomenon given the country's unpleasant historical relationship with the U.S. From their days in grammar school, Mexican officers learn about the unfair treatment their nation received from their northern neighbor.

<sup>100</sup>Boils : 162-164; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 144-146; Piñeyro, Ejército : 77; Weil : 374-375 and Wesson : 72-73.

*Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG) manual on strategy, which states that the immeasurable economic, military, and cultural power and potential of the United States have strongly influenced the development of Mexico's pacifist posture. The manual goes on to describe the U.S. as a hegemonic power that has conquered almost the entire continent by means of heavy investments, loans, unimpeded access to resources in many Latin American countries, and the operation of multinational corporations. From a military perspective, the United States has greater control over her security zone, which encompasses Mexico, than ever before.<sup>101</sup>

The Mexican army has consistently refused foreign military aid. As far back as 1932, the first director of the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG), Major Luis Alamillo Flores, took special care to choose only Mexican instructors at the newly opened ESG in order to avoid any foreign influences in the school.<sup>102</sup> In 1973, while the Mexican army fought against guerrilla factions in the state of Guerrero, SECDEF Cuenca Díaz declared in public that Mexico had not received offers of assistance or advice from the United States or other foreign countries. More importantly, he stated emphatically that if ever such an offer was made, Mexico would decline.<sup>103</sup> A few years later, General and Senator Gracilano Alpuche Pinzón announced that the Mexican army had never depended on the military advice or services of the United States or other foreign

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<sup>101</sup>Nociones de Estrategia, Vol. 2 : 209.

<sup>102</sup>Toral : 476-478.

<sup>103</sup>"Ninguna Oferta Externa Para Combatir a Grupos Armados: Cuenca Díaz," Excélsior, 28 April 1973 : 1.



countries. The general did clarify his statement by saying that some officers had gone to the United States and Europe for technical training.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike those of many other Latin American countries, the Mexican military has not been the recipient of strong ideological influences from the United States. While U.S. military doctrine has had some influence in Mexico over the years, it has always been modified and adapted to specific Mexican needs. Mexican army officials have seldom accepted U.S. military doctrine and strategy at face value.<sup>105</sup> While relying more on the United States than any other country for training support and military equipment, the army has still managed to maintain a modest but diversified foreign training program. The government made a conscious decision during the 1950s to reduce external influences within the military and has not deviated from that policy.<sup>106</sup>

Informally, not all army officers have favored the government's decision to deemphasize military technology. Many officers yearn for more modernized equipment even though they realize it is not in the army's future. In the long run, these officers begrudgingly accept the Mexican government's policy on military development. Through the years, official Mexican army delegations have visited U.S. army installations and have expressed amazement over the technologically advanced military equipment employed by the U.S. armed forces. While their professional status would lead most Mexican army officers to covet that equipment, they all realize that their strategic

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<sup>104</sup>Joaquín Roura Quiñones, "No es Desorbitado el Crecimiento de Nuestro Ejército," El Heraldo, 20 February 1978 : 1.

<sup>105</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 134-136 and Wesson : 128-130.

<sup>106</sup>Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 115-118 and Wager : 101.

concerns are quite different from those of the United States, and that the Mexican army realistically has no need for such advanced military equipment. And although some Mexican officers may respect and admire the military prowess of their U.S. counterparts, they are careful not to manifest that admiration publicly, because in official military and political circles the U.S. is viewed as the major threat to Mexico, as one might have surmised from the ESG strategy manual cited above.<sup>107</sup>

In short, the nationalist spirit within the Mexican army has come to signify a firm attachment to everything Mexican and a general independence from foreign influences. The army's distinctly defensive posture and its guarded distance from the U.S. military nourish the nationalist impulses within the army. Pablo González Casanova, the distinguished Mexican sociologist, has written that the mortar that cements the unity of the Mexican army is a nationalist ideology that has not been destroyed by the Interamerican system or institutions.<sup>108</sup> And Alan Riding sees the army as a "stronghold of nationalism, and as such less vulnerable to outside manipulation."<sup>109</sup> The Mexican army has long demonstrated a commitment to Mexican nationalism, and SECDEF Galván López echoed the sentiments of his fellow officers in 1982 when he exclaimed to his U.S. hosts that "our country has confidence in the nationalist path."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>These observations were made based on extensive personal contact with a wide range of Mexican army officers during 1980-1991.

<sup>108</sup>González Casanova, Los Militares : 69.

<sup>109</sup>Riding : 92.

<sup>110</sup>Jesús Lozano, "Nos Daña el Mercantilismo Injusto Dice Galván a EU," Excélsior, 16 July 1982 : 1.

## Apoliticism

Apoliticism is the cornerstone of the army's ideology that has gained the most notoriety in recent years. Since 1968, most of the attention that had been directed toward the Mexican army concerned its influence in politics. Sensing that the political system had begun to falter after the student demonstrations in 1968, many analysts of Mexican affairs assumed the army would take a more active role in governing the country. However, many of these analysts failed to realize that army leaders have traditionally professed a strong ideological commitment to keeping the army apolitical. Some of the works cited in the previous chapter, especially the Camp manuscript, would seem to confirm empirically the army's apolitical status. However, these statistics do not explain the influence of ideological reinforcement with regard to the army's proclivity to remain relatively apolitical. Army leaders began to drift away gradually from the political scene after political power became "civilianized" as a result of the creation of the monolithic *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), which later becomes the PRI. Since the late 1920s, apoliticism slowly became accepted behavior among those younger and more professional army officers who were seeking to advance their military careers. After the first civilian president served out his full term for the first time since the Revolution (1946-1952), there has not been even a remote attempt by the army to take control of the government.

At this point, a brief definition of "apolitical" is needed to clarify what has become a very amorphous concept. "Apolitical," as it applies to the military, means the army has no major influence in political decisionmaking. That the PRI has been in power

since 1929 confuses the issue slightly because of the army's close working relationship with this omnipotent political system. Nonetheless, it can be reasonably argued that the army is not a major political actor in Mexico. The army fulfills its mission as outlined in the Constitution of 1917 and its organic law. Until 1971, that mission included protecting the inviolability of the Constitution and its laws. The Constitution subordinates the army to the legitimately elected government, and under those circumstances, the army complies with the orders and directives of the government. The army does not make political policy; the civilian authorities have that responsibility. Although the army retains the potential of becoming a political actor, it has never exercised that option since turning over the political power to the civilian politicians.

In taking this argument one step further, some analysts contend that it is too simplistic to define apoliticism by saying that the army is political if it runs the government, and apolitical if it does not.<sup>111</sup> That argument has validity, but few social scientists would agree that politics can be judged in terms of black and white. The characterization of "apolitical" is a perfect example. Whether or not the Mexican army is apolitical is really a question of to what degree is it apolitical, or political as some might prefer. I argue that, despite performing what David Ronfeldt calls "residual political roles," the Mexican army is predominantly apolitical because it follows orders instead of giving them. However, on account of the army's involvement in "residual

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<sup>111</sup>Michael J. Dziedzic, "Mexico" in The Defense Policies of Nations, eds. Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) : 554-557 and Martin Needler, Politics and Society in Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971) : 65-72.

political roles," some analysts see the Mexican army as a quasi-political force, precisely because a very fine line exists between what is political and what is not.

The perceptions of an institution's leaders should also enter into the determination of whether or not that organization is apolitical or political. In the case of Mexico, army leaders have been more than willing to acknowledge the characterization of their institution as apolitical. The army's official history describes the army as apolitical. The publication credits General Joaquín Amaro with "little by little creating the spirit, the mysticism that made the Mexican army the most apolitical of the Americas."<sup>112</sup> This apolitical posture has been promoted through the years by the *Revista del Ejército*. For example, in the month prior to the 1946 presidential elections, the magazine's editorial reminded its readers of the need for the army to sustain its principles of non-intervention in politics, since that path had led to a rebirth of peace in the country. A soldier's duty has been and must continue to be to place the country first.<sup>113</sup> In the 1960s, the *Revista del Ejército* championed the motto of "Militar sí, militarista, nunca" (military yes, militaristic, never).

In July 1963, SECDEF Agustín Olachea Avilés indicated that a soldier should express his preference for a political candidate only through the secret ballot. He also declared that no member of the army should publicly make known his political preferences or engage in political proselitization.<sup>114</sup> The theme of an apolitical army

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<sup>112</sup>Toral : 479.

<sup>113</sup>Revista del Ejército, June 1946 : 1-3.

<sup>114</sup>Revista del Ejército, July 1963 : 1-2.

rang clear in the August 1964 editorial, which followed the peaceful presidential elections in July 1964 and recognized the army as "an impartial institution." It elaborated further by asserting that the army "does not express opinions in political matters, but only complies with the dispositions of the government which in accord with the democratic norms of our people offers guarantees--on an equal basis--to all political parties and to all the citizenry..."<sup>115</sup>

Army laws and regulations have established definitive guidelines with regard to political behavior by army members. Simply stated, these rules prohibit intervention in national politics by the army and its members. Article 17 of the army's Law of Discipline, which has been in effect since 1926, strictly prohibits any soldier on active duty from interfering directly or indirectly in political affairs.<sup>116</sup> Article 31 of the General Regulation of Military Duties states that all military personnel have the right to express their ideas in books and articles, as long as they do not address the topics of politics and religion, or affect the morale, discipline, or individual rights of a third person.<sup>117</sup> Article 42 of that same regulation establishes a provision for an individual to leave military service voluntarily if he is not in agreement with the political orientation of the government. However, the article also stipulates that no service member can

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<sup>115</sup>Revista del Ejército, August 1964 : 1-2. McAlister translated a larger portion of this editorial, and I found his translation accurate so I used part of it. (See McAlister et. al. : 235.

<sup>116</sup>Ley de Disciplina del Ejército y Armada Nacionales, 15 March 1926.

<sup>117</sup>García Segura : 78.

openly criticize the government while on active duty.<sup>118</sup> In sum, army laws and regulations have reinforced the army apolitical status over the years.

Reinforcement of the army's apolitical posture has also come from other sources. Army leaders have avidly defined and defended the army's position with regard to politics on numerous occasions. In April 1972, SECDEF Cuenca Díaz publicly proclaimed that the army is apolitical, and that because of its mission of guaranteeing internal order, the army should not voice an opinion or take action on political issues.<sup>119</sup> Cuenca Díaz never retracted his position, and towards the end of his term, he answered a question about his possible candidacy for the governorship of Baja California Norte by saying that the law prohibited him from "making politics" while he served as an active member of the army. If he had any political plans, he would discuss them after he finished his term as SECDEF.<sup>120</sup>

General Corona del Rosal, after completing a term as president of the PRI and mayor of the federal district, announced during a press interview that the best path for the army to pursue was that which supported the revolutionary institutions. He stated that the army is an institution that logically should be removed from politics. The army has always sustained other institutions and tried to make reality out of the principles of the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, any army participation in politics would have negative

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<sup>118</sup>Corona del Rosal, Moral : 230-231.

<sup>119</sup>Salvador González Mercado, "El Ejército es Apolítico: Cuenca Díaz," La Prensa, 27 April 1972 : 15.

<sup>120</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 61, January 1976 : 239.

ramifications. History, he went on to say, has shown that apoliticism is the best road for the Mexican army.<sup>121</sup>

General Galván López, Cuenca Díaz's successor, left no doubt as to where he stood with regard to the army's participation in politics. In February 1979, he stated that the army fulfills its missions as directed by the Constitution, but "in no way does it participate or endeavor to participate in political decisions."<sup>122</sup> On another occasion he clarified his position by asserting that soldiers have been trained to be effective military men and not politicians. Soldiers do not seek political positions; they defend the institutions.<sup>123</sup> As to the extent of his commitment to an apolitical military, Galván López affirmed that "neither from outside nor from inside will they be able to alter the solid maturity of our military institution, we do not make politics..."<sup>124</sup> During a trip to the state of Veracruz with President López Portillo, Galván López declared that the army as an institution does not participate in political campaigns. He made this statement in response to a question about the designation of General Alpuche Pinzón as gubernatorial candidate for the state of Yucatan.<sup>125</sup> The SECDEF recognized the right of a member of the army to run for political office, provided he had been granted a leave of absence from active service. However, under no circumstances would the army

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<sup>121</sup>Julio Pomar, "El Mejor Camino Para el Ejército es el de la Lealtad a las Instituciones," El Día, 10 December 1973 : 3.

<sup>122</sup>AHCM : 194.

<sup>123</sup>Isais Colunga, "El Ejército, Apolítico: Galván," El Sol, 6 March 1980 : 1.

<sup>124</sup>AHCM : 57.

<sup>125</sup>"El Ejército ajeno a campañas políticas, reitera Galván L.," El Día, 23 August 1981 : 3.



actively campaign on his behalf. Army leaders like Galván have maintained a strict policy of non-involvement with political affairs since the late 1930s. The perception of the army as an apolitical institution has become ingrained in the army's ideology through them.

Even without these varying methods of encouraging apolitical behavior within the officer corps, Mexican army officers would be disinclined towards participating in political activities. Most officers are too busy trying to advance in their military careers to find the time for an avocation in politics. Within the Mexican army, political positions have not been career-enhancing; if anything, the opposite is true. A Mexican officer can simply not balance a military and political career; he must do one or the other. Many informal conversations with Mexican army officers have determined that those officers do not feel technically qualified to govern. Most of their training has dealt with purely military subjects, and they would not know how to balance a budget or satisfy social demands. There exists a general perception among officers that politics is a messy and difficult business best left in the hands of civilian politicians. The political failures of many of their Latin American counterparts have not given Mexican officers any reason to alter their present stance.

Given the wave of military governments which engulfed the Latin American republics in the 1960s and 1970s, the continuously diminishing involvement in politics must be considered the most remarkable trend in the Mexican army since 1940.<sup>126</sup> The fact that army leaders have openly supported this apolitical posture appears equally remarkable.

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<sup>126</sup>Wesson : 161.

José Luis Piñeyro sums up this phenomenon succinctly when he writes that one of the cardinal rules of the Mexican political game is that "military leaders do not publicly express their opinions about the economic, political and social problems of the country."<sup>127</sup>

### Inculcating the Army Ideology

An analysis of military ideology is incomplete without some discussion of how that ideology is implanted in members of the officer corps. The military education system, the army's principal socialization agent, has primary responsibility. Military education plays a critical role within the Mexican armed forces. Through the years, political leaders have readily acknowledged and supported the influence of military education. Mexican presidents have given their total support to military education programs and publicly demonstrate this favored status by personally presiding over the opening and closing of the military education cycle every year. The sage Revolutionary general, Tomás Sánchez Hernández, once wrote that the three most critical factors for a well-constituted military are organization, armament, and education. The Heroic Military College (HCM), which General Sánchez Hernández called "the glorious institution," provides future army officers with their principal military educational experience. At the military academy, a cadet is inculcated with the major military values or, in other words, the ideological baggage he will carry with him throughout his military career. For most career officers, subsequent levels or tiers of military training further reinforce those

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<sup>127</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 136.

ideological values. In most cases, whether or not an officer graduates from a particular school or course often depends more on his devotion and commitment to specific values such as loyalty, discipline, and nationalism than on his grasp of the subjects presented in the course. In fact, one study of the army's education system contends that selection for advanced levels of training are based on demonstrated loyalty to the system.<sup>128</sup>

In broad terms, the Mexican army has a three-tier education for officers. The first tier consists of the officer formation school, of which the Heroic Military College is the foremost one. Other officer formation schools include the Military Communications School, the War Matériel School, the Military Medical School, and the Military Engineering School. Upon graduation from any of these schools, a cadet receives his commission as a second lieutenant in the active army. Graduates of the latter two formation schools obtain higher ranks because those schools offer a six-year program instead of the normal four.<sup>129</sup> Approximately 95 percent of the Mexican army officer corps receive their commissions from one of these formation schools. While both the Medical and Engineering Schools have considerable academic prestige, the HCM holds the most cultural significance because of its rich tradition of honor, loyalty, and sacrifice.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Ackroyd : 241.

<sup>129</sup>Toral : 512-518 and Wesson : 23.

<sup>130</sup>For example, numerous editorials in the *Revista del Ejército* describe the HCM in almost reverent terms. Among other lofty praises, the HCM has been often referred to as the crib of illustrious soldiers, heroes and defenders of the institutions. For a sampling, see the editorials in the July-September 1952, April 1957, April 1966, and February 1970 editions of the magazine.

A number of HCM graduates have spoken at length about the significance of the HCM for a Mexican army officer, and the values a cadet learns during his training there. A former army general described the education process by saying that the army cleanses the minds of the cadets and inculcates them with the desired military ideological values. The army receives the cadets at the impressionable age of sixteen and tells them that they represent the values of the Mexican Revolution, and that they are the loyal servants of the Mexican people. For the young cadet, an aura of romanticism surrounds this entire process.<sup>131</sup> An army lieutenant colonel called his alma mater the "bearer of army traditions." He emphasized that the HCM had no specific political or ideological orientation but only taught cadets to respect their country and its institutions. He stated that the HCM does not teach political values, but rather, instills tradition and discipline in the cadets. This officer spoke of a central program of studies at the HCM that focused heavily on the nation's struggle for independence and the Mexican Revolution, for the purpose of providing cadets with a historical analysis and a better understanding of their country.<sup>132</sup> Such a curriculum reinforces the military ideology.

Another officer discussed the importance of the alliances formed with other classmates at the HCM, which can later contribute to upward mobility in the early stages

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<sup>131</sup>Interview, April 1991. The general's comments call to mind a similar assessment made by a professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1906. "At the period of adolescence, when character is plastic and impulse wayward, before the stereotype has set, control and constraint are the essential forces for impressing permanent form upon young manhood. If the material can be removed from contaminating impurities, fused in the furnace of hard work, and kept in its mold until it has set, the best has been done that education can do for character, provided the mold is a noble one." As cited in John P. Lovell, "The Professional Socialization of the West Point Cadet," in *The New Military*, ed. Morris Janowitz (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964) : 119.

<sup>132</sup>Interview, March 1991.

of an officer's career. One classmate can often help another establish valuable military contacts at the outset of his career. These friendships remain quite strong at least until an officer attends the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG), the second tier of military education. Here the officer forms new alliances with his classmates who, like him, are upwardly mobile and seeking new contacts to help advance their careers. The chosen few who are selected for attendance at the top echelon of military education, the Colegio de Defensa Nacional (CDN), have been identified as the future rulers of the army, and they form new allegiances during their one year of training at the CDN in the hope of guaranteeing their selection for the army's top command positions.<sup>133</sup> For an idea of the exclusive status of these latter two tiers of military education, one study estimated that only seven percent of the officer corps graduate from the ESG and an even smaller 1.5 percent from the CDN.<sup>134</sup>

The limited source material available on the Mexican army's education system concurs that a primary purpose of the system is to instill cadets and officers with key military values. As far back as the 1940s, an official U.S. source reported that two of the five objectives of training in the Mexican army were "the development of discipline" and "the inculcation of loyalty to the government."<sup>135</sup> Other sources have noted how cadets at HCM are trained to understand the concepts of honor, patriotism, discipline,

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<sup>133</sup>Interview, September 1989.

<sup>134</sup>Ackroyd : 123.

<sup>135</sup>Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files. Mexico: Internal Affairs, 1940-1949. Part I. Political, Governmental, and National Defense Affairs. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1984) : 812.24/8-3065, Chapter V : 55. Hereafter cited as USSDCF.

sacrifice, institutional loyalty and a revolutionary heritage. The HCM has in fact been the bearer of those and similar traditions for more than 150 years. In the late 1940s, General Luis Alamillo Flores, the HCM Director, adopted the motto of *Por el honor de México* (for the honor of Mexico) for the HCM.<sup>136</sup>

The HCM has been very successful through the years in implanting these values in the minds of the cadets. While at the HCM, cadets labor in an environment of order, discipline, and work. They confront a rigidly controlled environment that breaks down individualism and develops institutional conformity. In a seven-day week, cadets are under the direct supervision of the staff and faculty for about eighty percent of the time. There is very little formal indoctrination per se; the instruction is purely tactical, technical, and physical. The implantation of values occurs more subtly through frequent ceremonies commemorating important military traditions. Cadets pay respect to the flag daily, and to the *Niños Heroes* weekly.<sup>137</sup> Mere survival at the HCM mandates that cadets adopt specific patterns of accepted behavior.

A major contributing factor to the inculcation of specific military values in cadets is the curriculum at the HCM. The subjects taught at the HCM have virtually no political content or orientation. The classes presented relate directly to pure military issues. In

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<sup>136</sup>Tomás Sánchez Hernández and Miguel A. Sánchez Lamego, Historia de una Institución Gloriosa El Heroico Colegio Militar 1823-1970 (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1970) : 178-179 and 270-271; Ackroyd : 111-113; Bautista Rosas : 168; Corona del Rosal, La Guerra : 261-262 and Revista del Ejército, November-December 1974 : 1-2.

<sup>137</sup>Heroico Colegio Militar, Informe de Actividades 1954-1955 (Mexico City, 1955) : 15-19; Ackroyd : 129-130; Interview, March 1991 and Sánchez Hernández and Sánchez Lamego : 272-273. For information on a typical day at the HCM, see "Un día en el Heroico Colegio Militar," Revista del Ejército, September 1981 : 58-71.

1947, General Alamillo Flores, the Director of the HCM, introduced the *bachillerato* program into the curriculum. That program aimed at broadening the cultural horizons of the cadets by providing humanities and social science courses. The *bachillerato* equates to a standard high school curriculum in the United States and is the normal civilian high school program in Mexico. Students need the *bachillerato* as a prerequisite for admittance into a university. This had been a laudatory innovation on the part of General Alamillo Flores, but the program was dropped the following year when a new director took over. As a result, the HCM continued with a heavy concentration of military subjects. Table 3-1 outlines the curriculum at the HCM as it existed in 1952. With the exception of mathematics and English in the first year, mathematics, chemistry and English in the second year, and psychology and physics in the final year, all courses covered purely military subjects, and even subjects such as math and physics were at least indirectly related to the military profession.<sup>138</sup> This kind of curriculum is conducive to learning the desirable military virtues that the army leadership hoped to instill in the cadets. The HCM divided its school year into two parts, the first for intensive instruction and the second for practical application of what had been learned previously.<sup>139</sup> The cadets studied military subjects, and then had the opportunity to apply what they had learned in the way they would be expected to after graduation.

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<sup>138</sup>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Historia del Heroico Colegio Militar de México, Vol. 3 (Mexico City: Offset Multicolor, S.A., 1973) : 49-58 (Hereafter cited as SDN, Historia del HCM) and Ackroyd : 114-119.

<sup>139</sup>Sánchez Hernández and Sánchez Lamego : 231-235.

TABLE 3-1

1952 Curriculum at Heroic Military College

FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR
Infantry Instruction	Specific Branch Instruction	Specific Branch Instruction
Weapons Firing	Branch Tactics	General Tactics
Military Laws and Regulations	Terrain Analysis	Military Topography
Military Ethics	Organization and Tactics of Small Units	Military Bridges
Sketching	Military Laws and Regulations	Mines and Chemical Warfare
Military Hygiene	Communications	Geography and Military History
Mathematics	Mathematics	Logic and Psychology
Spanish	Chemistry	Physics
English	English	Driver's Training
Horseback Riding	Physical Education	Physical Education
Physical Education	Horseback Riding (Cavalry Only)	Horseback Riding (Cavalry Only)

SOURCE: SDN, Historia del HCM : 56.

This basic curriculum continued with minor changes until the late 1960s. The one noteworthy change came in 1959 when the HCM incorporated the "Philosophic Doctrine of the Mexican Revolution" into the curriculum. That addition sought to educate the cadets on the nation's social problems and explain what the various governments of the Revolution had done to resolve those problems. This new program also aimed at



providing cadets with a thorough understanding of their revolutionary roots and heritage. In 1964, the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma Mexicana* (UNAM), Mexico's national university reformed its *bachillerato* program, and in 1966, the HCM decided once again to adopt the program. This new program aimed at raising both the technical and cultural levels of instruction at the HCM and providing a better quality education for army officers. The *bachillerato* program added another year onto the HCM and left graduates of the HCM qualified for entrance into the national universities if the opportunity arose at some point in their careers.<sup>140</sup>

Despite the addition of the *bachillerato* and another year of school, the overall military orientation of the HCM program changed only slightly. Sociology was added to the first year of classes, and the third year expanded the math and Mexican history courses and provided an introduction to the other social sciences. The fourth and final year added a second course in both physics and social sciences and new classes on world literature, the anatomy, theories of law, and world history.<sup>141</sup> According to one analysis, the orientation of the curriculum at the HCM remained very Mexican and nationalistic. By the 1970s, only ten to thirteen percent of the courses were devoted to the social sciences and only four to five percent of the classes covered the broad subject of politics. The course content in no way served as a catalyst for further interest in political subject matter. In fact, the opposite was true; the course materials discouraged

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<sup>140</sup>Fuentes : 155-156; *Revista del Ejército*, July 1966 : 1-2; Sánchez Hernández and Sánchez Lamego : 179-184 and SDN, *Historia del HCM* : 119-121.

<sup>141</sup>Wesson : 22-23; Sánchez Hernández and Sánchez Lamego : 236-237 and 270-271 and SDN, *Historia del HCM* 119-122.

such pursuits. Military education severely limited the amount of political knowledge available to the students, choosing instead to focus on critical values such as discipline and institutional loyalty.<sup>142</sup>

The above analysis of the HCM curriculum helps to explain how most officers espouse a generally apolitical attitude during their military careers. Politics is seldom discussed during the military education process. Another factor that has a bearing on the apolitical character of the Mexican army concerns the socioeconomic backgrounds of the officers. As noted in the previous chapter, officers' social backgrounds are normally those of the lower part of the middle class and the upper section of the lower class. For the most part, those social classes tend not to be politically active, and so, when many cadets enter the HCM, the political passivity mind-set has already been cultivated at a very elementary level.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, what a cadet is taught at the HCM does not normally stimulate any personal conflicts, because the cadet is not being asked to change his way of thinking about politics.

Military education after the HCM basically reinforces the values learned at the HCM. After attending a six-month branch specialization course, officers holding the rank of captain or major can apply for acceptance into the second level of military education, the Command and General Staff Course, at the ESG. The purpose of the ESG is prepare officers for high-level command and staff positions in the army. Like the HCM,

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<sup>142</sup>Ackroyd : 118-122.

<sup>143</sup>Interview, September 1989. In this interview, a Mexican army officer discussed the general social homogeneity of the officer corps and also confirmed that few of their families had ever been politically active either in support or against the government.

potential candidates have to pass a battery of tests to guarantee acceptance. The ESG is an important step in an officer's career, because successful completion of the course usually guarantees that he will eventually be promoted to at least the rank of colonel later in his career. Probably less than 20 percent of the general officers in the Mexican army after 1980 did not graduate from the ESG. ESG graduates have long been considered the elite of the Mexican army officer corps. Graduates of the course receive a bachelor's degree in military administration recognized by the UNAM.<sup>144</sup>

A subsequent chapter provides additional background and details about the ESG. At this point, the school's curriculum and teaching methods are the principal concerns. In 1932, General Joaquín Amaro, the Director of Military Education, decided that Mexican army officers needed some advanced military training, and so he formed a Mexican Command and General Staff College based in part on the information he had collected from similar schools operating in the United States and Europe. The general curriculum in 1932 consisted of advanced military studies of a tactical and strategic order, general military studies of a technical nature, foreign language training, and physical training. The first group of studies covered general staff studies, geography, military history, planning fortifications, notions of strategy, naval tactics, foreign armies, and chemical warfare. The second group of subjects included classes on sociology, general politics, mobilization, and military, civilian, and international law. The three-year course focused

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<sup>144</sup>Much of the information on the ESG is based on personal observations made during my attendance at the school and on many conversations with Mexican officers who had graduated from the ESG over the period of 1980-1991. See Corona del Rosal, *La Guerra* : 261-262 and Fuentes : 158 and 221-226 for additional background information on the ESG.

on small unit training in the first year, moving progressively to the army's largest units and most of the technical subjects in the third year.<sup>145</sup>

Similarities exist between the course content of the HCM and the ESG. During the first two years, approximately 75 percent of the curriculum focuses on general tactics with six and five percent concentrating on general strategy and other subjects that have some socio-political content. In the third year, that latter classification of subjects increases to 30 percent.<sup>146</sup> These percentages can be deceptive because every subject taught at the ESG has an underlying nationalistic orientation. For example, all instruction on strategy is tied strictly to the Mexican reality. The instruction stresses unconventional warfare (*guerra irregular*) not only because an internal threat to Mexican security would take that shape, but because an external threat, although a remote possibility, would require both the Mexican army and the civilian population to employ those kinds of defensive measures. Students at the ESG learn quickly that there exists only one solution to each problem - the school solution, which can also be called the "Mexican" solution. ESG takes on the guise of an endurance course where officers work long hours and make many personal sacrifices in order to make the grade. Revolutionary heritage, patriotism, and nationalism are emphasized to a lesser degree at the ESG because most officers already have a strong grounding in those values. ESG focuses heavily on insuring that each officer is adequately trained and committed to discipline,

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<sup>145</sup>Luis Alamillo Flores, MEMORIAS del Gral. Luis Alamillo Flores (Mexico City: Editorial Extemporaneos, S.A., 1976) : 427-433 (Hereafter cited as Alamillo, Memorias) and Escuela Superior de Guerra, Manual de Organización (Mexico City, 1982) : 11-23 (Hereafter cited as ESG, Manual).

<sup>146</sup>Ackroyd : 119-122.

loyalty, and apoliticism. A solid grasp of the subject matter presented in the classroom is secondary to the ability to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to those values.

The highest tier of military education consists of the National Defense College or CDN. The inaugural class began in 1981, but little information has been released to the public about the CDN. However, it is known that a board of senior officers headed by the SECDEF selects officers at the rank of colonel and above to attend the one-year course. The selectees are expected to become the future leaders of the Mexican army and make the key decisions affecting the defense and security of Mexico. General Galván López, the SECDEF who directed the creation of the CDN, described the school as a "formative institution in which a commander can learn more about Mexico and her institutions, better understand external factors which interest or serve our country, know the army and its basic functions better."<sup>147</sup> The CDN also aims at educating top-level commanders on what the various social sectors of the population demand, merit, and need as well as how to satisfy these needs with greater efficiency. The course is designed to expand the knowledge future commanders possess about Mexican society, politics, the economy, and historical evolution so that these leaders can develop a sound strategy and military philosophy for Mexico.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Colegio de Defensa Nacional, Manual de Organización (Mexico City, 1982) : 11 (Hereafter cited as CDN, Manual) and Interview, September 1989.

<sup>148</sup>"El Colegio de Defensa Nacional," Revista del Ejército, September 1981 : 7-8 and CDN, Manual : 12-13.

According to one source, the CDN would conduct courses dealing with national defense, military intelligence, and specialized studies.<sup>149</sup> Another source revealed that students would prepare analytic studies of both the domestic and international situations, analyses of different types of military strategy, and reports on the administration of national resources.<sup>150</sup> It is assumed that the material presented in the course will stress the official government positions on these issues as a means of justifying past government decisions and winning army support for future policies. It is not clear how the traditional military values are reinforced, although the process is considerably less rigid than the one at the ESG, simply because these high-ranking officers have already demonstrated their loyalty and commitment to the system.

#### A Final Note

This analysis of the army's ideology does not profess to be all-encompassing. For example, other values that have attained a certain prestige within the army, such as honor and duty, have not been addressed because they have been subsumed by one of the six principal components of the ideology at one time or another. Instead, this analysis has attempted to describe and explain the core element of that ideology. The six values discussed herein have been recognized and accepted by army members principally because of their longevity and the reinforcement they have received from army leaders. Different features of this ideology have also received recognition, although to a lesser

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<sup>149</sup>"El Colegio de Defensa Nacional," Revista del Ejército, September 1981 : 8.

<sup>150</sup>CDN, Manual : 47-55.

degree, from political leaders and the public. But more importantly, this ideology has had a major continuing influence on the manner in which the army has evolved since 1940.

These values have been inculcated in officers and enlisted men alike during the professional socialization process that takes place in the military schools and on the job in individual units. This ideology has become more conceptualized over the years, and army leaders from all generations have followed it religiously. In 1967, Brigadier General Galván López, who would become SECDEF in 1976, stated that the strength of the armed forces does not rest on material elements. He clarified his comment and provided some insight on the importance of ideology within the army when he added "(w)e, the generations that have the honor to succeed the creators of this army, want to emulate the virtues that they forged: their loyalty, their revolutionary conscience, their disinterest and their love of country and we will completely fulfill our mission if upon transferring the positions of responsibility to the officers that succeed us when the hour of relief arrives, we also transmit these same virtues."<sup>151</sup>

These words illustrate the significance of those values for both the army, as an institution, and its members as individuals. While the army's ideology has not been written down in a concise format readily available to all service members, based on the words and speeches from General Galván López and other army leaders, most army officers remain extremely conscious of these values and the standards that they represent.

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<sup>151</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 34, September 1967 : 168-169.

In most cases, officers look to one or more of these values as justification for their daily military activities.

Having defined the specific elements of the army's ideology, the dissertation turns, now, to examine the events of the 1920s and 1930s that helped to plant the seeds of this ideology. Those decades proved critical to the development of the modern Mexican army. In the post-Revolutionary period, the national army faced many trials and tribulations which it survived, principally as a result of the perseverance and conviction of a few key army generals. Their accomplishments and contributions to the formation of the modern Mexican army's ideology provide the grist for the next chapter.



## Chapter Four

### Planting the Seeds of an Army Ideology: 1920-1940

As noted earlier, the army's political influence as an institution had begun to decline precipitously by 1940. The depoliticization of the military, or what more accurately might be referred to as the "demilitarization of Mexican politics," proved to be a long and tedious process. It did not occur suddenly or magically with the removal of the military sector from the country's official *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana* (PRM). Instead, a confluence of factors over the course of almost twenty years contributed to the accomplishment of that goal most cherished by the nation's political leaders. More importantly for the purpose of this study, the process of demilitarizing Mexican politics helped to cultivate the roots of a nascent army ideology that would ensure the army remain relatively aloof from political decisionmaking. This ideology would also guide the army's subsequent evolution.

At times, the process of removing the military from politics succumbed to brutal and often violent methods. However, certain values and principles, such as adherence to the goals of the Revolution, institutional loyalty, and overall discipline, were used to justify

these dubious means. This chapter focuses on the demilitarization of Mexican politics during the 1920s and 1930s, how that process gave birth to an army ideology that would play a critical role in guiding the army's future development, and chronicles the major contributions made by key military leaders of the era.

While the Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) proved to be the pivotal administration in carrying out the depoliticization process, Generals Obregón, Calles, and Amaro also played key roles in reforming the Revolutionary army and establishing the foundations for its eventual nonpolitical orientation.<sup>1</sup> One graduate of the HCM referred to Obregón, Calles and Cárdenas as "the pillars on which the modern army was constructed."<sup>2</sup>

General Joaquín Amaro, in his capacity as Secretary of War under Presidents Calles and Emilio Portes Gil, made an especially important contribution by working from within the bowels of the institution to establish high standards of discipline and loyalty within the officer corps, especially among the junior officers who would provide the future leadership of the Mexican army. Most official army publications recognize Amaro as the "creator of the modern Mexican army."

Before resuming the story, a definition of both depoliticization and demilitarization of politics seems in order since a substantial part of this chapter revolves around these concepts. The depoliticization of the military occurs when the military as an institution no longer exerts broad influence on political decisionmaking. Pablo González Casanova,

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<sup>1</sup>Guillermo Boils also concurs on the Cárdenas administration's key role in depoliticizing the Mexican army. See Boils : 66-69.

<sup>2</sup>Martínez Navarro : 425.

the noted Mexican sociologist, describes it as the absence of the "organized threat of a political force imposing its own conditions by coercion."<sup>3</sup> Although the Mexican military still retains the potential to coerce, military coercion in politics has long been rejected as socially acceptable behavior. In order to understand the Mexican case, a distinction has to be made between individuals and institutions. In the case of Mexico, military presidents proved very influential, but presidents such as Cárdenas and Avila Camacho exerted their influence through the political system and not through the institution of the armed forces. Mexico, then, has met the criteria for a depoliticized military.

Samuel P. Huntington, the distinguished political scientist, described this phenomenon when he wrote that the Mexican military stayed out of politics after the 1930s, and "Mexico became one of the few Latin American countries possessing some form of institutional immunity to military coups d'état."<sup>4</sup> Huntington credited the founding of the official party with the civilianizing of Mexico's politics because the new party established the boundaries for the country's political activities by confining them to the party's structure.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the very useful analyses of Huntington and González Casanova, some grey areas still remain in the general relation between the Mexican military and politics. For example, depoliticization does not necessarily mean the army has been totally detached

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<sup>3</sup>González Casanova : 37.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press) : 256.

<sup>5</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 319-320.

from politics. The army has long been an integral part of this predominantly one party system that the Mexican Revolution sired. Because the army has continued to provide critical support to that system since the end of the Revolution, it still retains some linkage, albeit indirect, to Mexican politics. Or as David Ronfeldt, a leading authority on the Mexican military, has written, "...the military must be considered an important pillar in Mexico's state architecture."<sup>6</sup> Thus, in the case of the Mexican army, the term "depoliticization" appears to be at least a mild exaggeration since the army retains a quasi-political status.

For the purpose of this study, the demilitarization of politics seems to more accurately depict what transpired between 1920 and 1940. Prior to 1940, army generals played a major role in managing day-to-day political affairs; some worked openly and others more discreetly behind the scenes. With the inauguration of Manuel Avila Camacho in December 1940, the government began to take on a more civilianist orientation, with civilian politicians gradually displacing military politicians. Army generals could no longer wield the influence they had grown accustomed to in the 1920s and 1930s. This transition became complete under the leadership of Miguel Alemán, who incorporated many university-trained civilians into key government positions and rejuvenated the army officer corps to a large extent by promoting younger officers who had been trained to be loyal to the institutions. More significantly, he forced into retirement many older generals who still retained political ambitions. While the difference between depoliticized and demilitarized might be considered slight, the

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<sup>6</sup>Ronfeldt, "The Modern Mexican Military: Implications for Mexico's Stability and Security," : 1.

distinction should be made because the army still represents a leading pillar of the system. As such, it would be difficult to argue that the army ever became totally depoliticized. However, it can be shown that the government did become demilitarized after 1940.

Placing the subtleties of these definitions aside, the army experiences of the 1920s and 1930s, many of them unpleasant for certain members of the institution, did provide a solid foundation for a military ideology that would be consolidated in future years. This ideology soon helped to reverse the traditional army mindset, in which individual political aspirations took precedence over institutional loyalty. A number of army generals played a critical role in reforming the army and establishing more professional standards during the twenty years that followed the Revolution. The efforts of those military leaders contributed significantly to the formation of a new army ideology that would play a critical role in the development of the Mexican army in the post-1940 era. This chapter chronicles the contributions of those leaders, all of whom are officially recognized today as heroes of the Revolution.

### Obregón Battles the Caudillos

When General Alvaro Obregón rode into Mexico City in the spring of 1920, Mexico witnessed the beginning of what would come to be called the Sonoran dynasty. Obregón, arguably the Mexican army's most brilliant tactician, had been a middle-class chickpea farmer from the northwestern state of Sonora before he took up arms to fight in the Revolution. He and his hand-picked presidential successor, General Plutarco Elías

Calles, a former school teacher also from Sonora, would rule Mexico with an authoritarian hand from 1920 until 1935 when President Lázaro Cárdenas sent the latter, his former mentor, into exile.<sup>7</sup>

Powerful in their own right, Obregón and Calles were centralizers who acted decisively against the regional *caudillismo*, which had plagued Mexico in the aftermath of the Revolution.<sup>8</sup> After the interim presidency of Adolfo de la Huerta, from May to November 1920, Obregón became president on 1 December 1920. He immediately recognized that in order to establish peace and stability, he had to rid the country of its politically ambitious *caudillos*. In the 1920s, arms served as the principal means of consolidating power. After all, the vast majority of army generals could simply be classified as "armed citizens." Obregón had eliminated Carranza by force of arms and soon realized that he had to act quickly to control his opposition lest the same fate befall him. By the time he became president, all the *Carrancista* generals had been eliminated or placed on the federal payroll, where they could be controlled by the brutal but effective Secretary of War, General Francisco Serrano. When Obregón could not be assured of a particular general's loyalty, he forced him to retire.<sup>9</sup>

In eliminating the opposition, Obregón opted to move cautiously. He sought to bring some semblance of order to the multifarious army by cutting its size in half. In 1921,

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<sup>7</sup>Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *A la sombra de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1990) : 90-92; Steven E. Sanderson, *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) : 74-78 and Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* : 57-62.

<sup>8</sup>Córdova : 50-51.

<sup>9</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 221; Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* : 57-67; Lozoya, "DESPOLITIZACION" : 43-44; McAlister et al. : 201-202 and Toral : 469-470.

the army had a strength of approximately 100,000 personnel. On 15 March of that same year, Obregón issued a decree which called for a fifty percent reduction in the army's size by 31 March 1922, a goal he did meet on schedule.<sup>10</sup> Obregón softened the blow for the affected veterans by offering them different forms of compensation, such as the establishment of military agricultural colonies, which gave veterans the opportunity to farm their own land. The government also continued to pay the soldiers for a period of two years after their retirement. With no guarantees that these benefits would satisfy the veterans, the government sponsored the development of assorted labor and peasant groups which served in part to counterbalance the army's strength.<sup>11</sup> This was the traditional *pan o palo* or the bread or stick approach, with the compensation programs providing the main incentives for cooperation, and the worker groups presenting a more coercive strategy. Either way, the government hoped to win the support of both the active and retired military.

Ramiro Bautista Rosas has pointed out another interesting result of this reform process. He contends that Obregón's reforms, along with some of those undertaken by Carranza earlier, worked to give the national army a more traditionalist or rightist orientation. Carranza and Obregón purged the army of the leftist Villista and Zapatista elements, leaving the army with a more conservative bent. Bautista Rosas also suggests

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<sup>10</sup>Evolución : 125; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 67-68 and Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 45. Bautista Rosas writes that the army had around 70,000 individuals in 1923, a higher figure than both Lieuwen and Lozoya, but still a considerable reduction from the 1921 figure (54).

<sup>11</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 67-68 and Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 45-46.

that this new National Army had a diminished revolutionary zeal on account of the elimination of these more radical factions from the army.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of loyalty remained tenuous and continued as a major preoccupation of Obregón despite the more conservative hue within the army. Obregón's perception of loyalty had been jaded somewhat by past experiences. He acknowledged the importance of loyalty, and believed it could be bought much more easily than it could be cultivated. Obregón had a favorite adage that said no general could resist a *cañonazo* or salvo of fifty thousand *pesos*. Consequently, Obregón often paid dearly for the loyalty of his top generals. One well-known anecdote relates how his Secretary of War, General Serrano, once submitted a voucher for eighty thousand *pesos* to be paid by the government. The amount equaled one night's gambling debts, and Obregón promptly authorized payment. To enhance their financial status, some generals were granted permission to run gambling houses and brothels while others received government contracts. These policies encouraged many Revolutionary generals to leave the military profession for that of the entrepreneur. Corruption ultimately served as the glue that held political alliances together.<sup>13</sup> The activities of many of these millionaire generals have been well documented.<sup>14</sup> In many instances, Obregón had to pay high premiums for continued loyalty. He readily recognized that loyalty would have to be a cornerstone for the future

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<sup>12</sup>Bautista Rosas : 40, 48-50.

<sup>13</sup>Boils : 40; Bautista Rosas : 40-41, 46-47; Hansen : 158 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 64-65.

<sup>14</sup>Bautista Rosas : 46; Hansen : 158-160 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 90-92.



development of the Mexican army if the country held any hope of preventing a recurrence of the militarism that had plagued it for the greater part of its history.

While Obregón had been forced to purchase the loyalty of his generals, he decided the best approach to take with junior officers was to teach loyalty in the army schools. In 1920, Obregón had the General Staff School converted into the *Colegio Militar* (the military college). The following year a new program of instruction was implemented, and better trained instructors were added to the faculty. Some of the new instructors traveled to France, Spain, Germany and the United States to learn about modern military techniques and developments. Both army and political leaders sought to institutionalize and professionalize the Mexican army. In the military college, potential officers quickly learned that successful military careers depended heavily on the willingness to demonstrate institutional loyalty, a cardinal feature of the army's evolving ideology.<sup>15</sup>

In an effort to divert the army's attention from political activity, Obregón ordered the formation of nineteen special work battalions. These units worked on assorted civic action projects such as roadbuilding, irrigation works, and repairing railroads and telegraph lines.<sup>16</sup> Through these activities, Obregón hoped to change the army's image and to have the army establish a closer working relationship with the Mexican people. More importantly, activities such as these served to remind the army of its revolutionary commitment to help the Mexican populace and to build a better Mexico. New recruits

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<sup>15</sup>Virginia Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. XIX (April 1941) : 613; Bautista Rosas : 54; Fuentes : 153-154; Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* : 71 and Sanderson : 87.

<sup>16</sup>Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* : 72.

would be indoctrinated with this revolutionary heritage, which encouraged the support of the legitimate government brought to power by the Constitution of 1917. Through policies such as these, Obregón initiated the noteworthy legacy of civic action that the Mexican army has carried with it up through the latter part of the twentieth century.

The major threat to the Obregón administration occurred in December 1923 in the form of a large rebellion by dissident army forces. About one-third of all active-duty generals (102), 20 percent of the officers, and 40 percent of the troops supported the rebels.<sup>17</sup> This rebellion broke out when Obregón selected Calles as his designated successor. A number of generals, senior to Calles, felt they were more deserving of the presidency and took up arms to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with Obregón's decision. Government forces with the help of volunteer workers defeated the rebel forces in a little more than three months. Of greater significance, the government's victory served to demonstrate that it could exercise military control over the country's more remote regions, thereby weakening considerably the traditional influence of the regional *caudillos*. The resulting purge of the officer ranks left many younger officers who readily declared their loyalty to the President and the government, and not to the individual *caudillos*. Obregón followed up his triumph with some additional reforms within the army. He reorganized the military territorial division, increasing the number of military zones from 24 to 33, thereby reducing the size of the forces any one general could command. Additionally, he introduced a policy of rotating zone commanders on a regular basis to preclude their developing strong power bases in a particular area of the

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<sup>17</sup>Bautista Rosas : 54; Huntington, Political Order : 319 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 75-76.

country and to bring about the depersonalization of the relationship between zone commanders and their troops.<sup>18</sup> Obregón's rigid and sometimes brutal policies had begun to pay dividends. Many officers preferred to close ranks rather than face the threat of death by a firing squad. With the rebellion squelched and Calles' candidacy secure, Obregón's task of professionalizing the army would soon be taken up in earnest by his hand-picked successor, General Plutarco Elías Calles.

### Calles and His Army Watchdog

As the new president, Calles continued many of Obregón's programs that aimed at consolidating control of the central government. Calles had Obregón's support until the latter's assassination in 1928. After 1928, Calles pulled the strings of three puppet presidents who substituted for Obregón and rotated through the presidency until 1934, when Calles's designated successor, General Lázaro Cárdenas, became President of Mexico.

Like his predecessor, Calles did not have an easy time with the opposition. Calles had to put down rebellions initiated by disgruntled army elements in 1927 and 1929. In defeating these insurrections, Calles had the support of an inner circle of generals, the principal ones being Amaro, Cárdenas, Juan Andreu Almazán, and Saturnino Cedillo.

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<sup>18</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 98-100; Bautista Rosas : 54-55; Hansen : 160-161; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 72-78; Lozoya, Ejército : 54-55; McAlister et al. : 202 and Prewitt : 613.

The last rebellion completed the purge of all the army's disloyal elements and marked the last time army forces would seriously challenge the government.<sup>19</sup>

Given Mexico's no re-election policy, Calles had to give up the presidency in 1928. He also had to take certain precautions to ensure his puppet presidents remained in power. Like Obregón, Calles had to secure the continued loyalty of selected army generals. Calles solved this problem by simply buying their loyalty. He provided his loyal supporters with the wherewithal to become successful businessmen. Calles adopted a wise policy of cooptation, as could be deduced from the millionaire generals that comprised his coterie. Many Revolutionary generals grew more preoccupied with their business transactions than with their military interests. Quite a few of those generals had gained possession of large tracts of land in the wake of the Revolution, and those acquisitions brought a new entrepreneurial status to some of the more renowned and powerful leaders of the Revolution. After having coopted these powerful military leaders, Calles spent the remainder of his tenure as *Jefe Máximo* working to de-emphasize *personalismo* and instill a sense of loyalty among the members of the army.<sup>20</sup>

For the most part, Calles was successful: he broke the power of the military *caudillos*, and the army became an institution that could be counted on to provide firm support to the government and the institutions born of the Revolution. In sum, *caudillismo* had given way to *presidencialismo*, or the predominance of the executive

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<sup>19</sup>Alejandra Lajous, Los orígenes del partido único en México, 3rd. ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985) : 53-63.

<sup>20</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 107-112; Córdova : 50-52; Hansen : 161-162; Lajous : 41; Lieuwen, Arms : 110; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 95-109; Lozoya, Ejército : 57-58 and Piñeyro : 44-45.

branch in all facets of government.<sup>21</sup> Ex-president Portes Gil viewed the turbulent years of the Calles administration as an opportunity to rid the Revolutionary family of undesirable elements and for the army to prove itself a worthy guardian of the institutions.<sup>22</sup> Analyzing the period from a political perspective, the office of the presidency gradually supplanted the army at the pinnacle of political power.

Calles brought significantly more control and order to the political arena with his founding of the all-embracing *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR).<sup>23</sup> This political innovation allowed the nascent political system to incorporate many new social groups, and this strength-in-numbers philosophy helped to shield it from a dwindling number of disruptive forces. Samuel P. Huntington referred to Calles' accomplishment as "the most striking example of political institution-building by generals..." By creating the PNR, Calles was in effect able to institutionalize the Revolution.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the start of the 1929 rebellion had coincided with the PNR's Constitutional Convention. Calles had founded the party on 1 December 1928, the day he relinquished the presidency. Calles had conceived of the idea of an official party so that military and non-military groups could channel their political interests into a manageable forum. The PNR aimed to unify

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<sup>21</sup>Bautista Rosas : 55 and Lajous : 9 and 23-25.

<sup>22</sup>Bautista Rosas : 56.

<sup>23</sup>Boils : 65-66; Lajous : 24-25 and 86-87 and Piñeyro : 51-52. José Vasconcelos, a noted educator and opposition politician during the 1920s, offers an interesting analysis about the founding of the PNR. Vasconcelos claims that it was not Calles' idea to create the PNR but rather the ideal of U.S. ambassador Dwight Morrow. According to Vasconcelos, Morrow advised Calles that the best way to conserve political power was through the organization of an official political party. See José Vasconcelos, *La Flama. Los de Arriba en la Revolución* (Mexico City: Cia. Editorial Continental S.A., 5/a reimpression, 1968) : 107-110.

<sup>24</sup>Huntington, *Political Order* : 255-256.

diverse forces and articulate the diverse interests of the party's principal supporters--workers, peasants, and bureaucrats. As it evolved, the official party acquired an institutional existence apart from the military that had founded it. Lozoya astutely noted that the PNR was not created for the government to gain power but rather to maintain it. Calles and other political leaders voted against active military participation in politics, and for that reason did not create a military sector in the party. Moreover, these same leaders hoped the three organized sectors of the party would help to further offset the army's influence in politics. Calles in particular believed the army should remain on the periphery of politics because more substantive involvement would ultimately divide the military.<sup>25</sup> By the time Cárdenas became president, Calles had achieved most of his political objectives, but the success was due in part to the ability of the reform-minded Secretary of War, General Joaquín Amaro, to control the army and guarantee its support of the government.

On the strictly military front, major strides to professionalize the army were made during the Calles period. Responsibility for this progress goes primarily to his Secretary of War, but Calles deserves some credit for making such a wise selection. While Calles set about putting the nation's political affairs in order, he gave Amaro free reign as Secretary of War to discipline and professionalize the army, which Amaro did with an iron fist, as described in detail below. Amaro held the position of Secretary of War and Navy from 27 July 1925 to 2 March 1929. After Calles himself took over from 3 March to 21 May 1929 to direct the government troops against the rebel forces, Amaro resumed

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<sup>25</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 257 and 318; Lajous : 25-27 and Lozoya, Ejército : 59-62.

his duties as Secretary of War on 22 May, and he remained in that position until 15 October 1931. After that time, he continued to make his presence felt as Director of the Military College and Director General of Military Education from 1 December 1931 to 15 December 1935. Having fallen into disfavor with Cárdenas because of his close ties to Calles, Amaro virtually remained "frozen" without an assignment until Avila Camacho became President, at which time he began to serve again in high level positions.<sup>26</sup>

The Mexican army's official history describes General Joaquín Amaro as a "typical product of the Revolution." The book goes on to say that Amaro might in fact be the individual most representative of the Revolution. A mestizo peasant with strong Indian features and very humble beginnings, Amaro came from a small village in the central state of Zacatecas to join the Revolution as a basic recruit in February 1911. He worked his way up through the ranks until he attained the rank of general. Eventually he became one of the individuals most responsible for the institutionalization and professionalization of the new national army.<sup>27</sup> In his well-known study of the Mexican political system, Frank Brandenburg aptly labeled him "the watchdog of the army."<sup>28</sup>

Within the Mexican army, Amaro has long been recognized as a true hero of the Revolution. At the same time, his reputation and feats have not been overlooked within political circles. Army officials and key political representatives commemorate his death

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<sup>26</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 85-86 and McAlister et al. : 202. The dates of Amaro's service record were furnished by Kiosco Cultural Banejército, General Joaquín Amaro Domínguez (1889-1952) (Exposición Gráfica con motivo del XXXVIII Aniversario de su Fallecimiento, 1990).

<sup>27</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 53-54 and Toral : 470 and 479.

<sup>28</sup>Brandenburg : 66.

every year in an official ceremony on 15 March. The army magazine and other official army publications frequently remind their readers of his remarkable accomplishments. For example, an editorial in the army magazine described the new army that emerged from the Revolution as "an amalgam of the boldness of Pancho Villa and the military genius of Obregón that was placed in the organizing hands of Amaro who created the model of today's army."<sup>29</sup> Another editorial posthumously praised Amaro for having imbued the "new" Mexican army with a high degree of moral responsibility.<sup>30</sup> Amaro has been described as both a "revolutionary who embraced the cause of the people" and an "idealist who transformed a people in arms into a professional army." Amaro saw the need to make the army the true defender of the people, and he set out to do this by creating a military education system that could convert the raw recruit into a professional soldier. His work on military education inspired the motto *saber más para servir mejor* (learn more to serve better).<sup>31</sup> Edwin Lieuwen, who readily acknowledged the significance of Amaro in the professionalization of the Mexican army, characterized him as a "brilliant organizer and a stern disciplinarian."<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Amaro had the ability and determination to impose discipline on the army, a vital necessity during his era. Discipline proved to be the principal element responsible for the

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<sup>29</sup>Revista del Ejército, December 1960 : 1-2.

<sup>30</sup>Revista del Ejército, November 1958 : 1-2.

<sup>31</sup>Revista del Ejército, March 1962 : 1-2.

<sup>32</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 86.



institutionalization of the government, and that attribute would have a similar effect on the army.<sup>33</sup>

A former director of the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG), the Mexican army's command and general staff college that adopted the motto *saber más para servir mejor*, recalled many compelling stories about Amaro's strict disciplinary measures. When the ESG first opened in April 1932, Amaro personally attended many of the classes as an observer, bearing a riding crop that he used freely and without compunction on the less attentive students. The former director also related how Amaro had taken that same riding crop to a number of senior officers who had seen fit to enter his office at Defense Headquarters without an appointment or without Amaro's explicit permission. It should be duly noted that most of those "horsewhipped" generals had been of a much larger physical stature than Amaro.<sup>34</sup> Stories such as these led one general eulogizing Amaro to declare audacity as one of his chief attributes.<sup>35</sup> In rendering a personal opinion, the former director of the ESG stated emphatically that Joaquín Amaro contributed more than any other individual to transforming the Mexican army into the modern institution it has come to be known as today. Over the past decade, a number of Mexican officers have voiced similar opinions and unanimously recognized Amaro as the "forger" of the modern Mexican army.<sup>36</sup> The Spanish translation of forger is *forjador*, which literally

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<sup>33</sup>Lajous : 8-9.

<sup>34</sup>Interview, July 1990.

<sup>35</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, March 1980 : 43-44.

<sup>36</sup>Informal discussions with numerous Mexican army officers during 1980-1981 and 1985-1988. In particular, the accomplishments of Amaro have become legend at the ESG. Given the importance of Amaro in the professionalization and development of the Mexican army, it is surprising that no biography

means a blacksmith or someone who hammers and molds metal into a particular shape or form. That definition appropriately describes Amaro's contributions to the Mexican army. A government official who served in the Cárdenas administration proffered additional insight on Amaro's role as architect of the modern Mexican army. He described the federal army (*Ejército Federal*) under Porfirio Díaz as being old, foreign-trained, and lacking a conceptualization of Mexico as a nation. The *Ejército Federal* also had a parallel force in the *guardias rurales* who maintained order in the Porfirian countryside. However, the Revolutionary army (*Ejército Revolucionario*) deposed the decaying federal army in 1913 and brought the Revolution to its conclusion. The Revolutionary army barely seemed an improvement over its predecessor. Its members had no formal military training, and many of those belonging to the new Revolutionary army had come from the dregs of society.

General Amaro formed the national army (*Ejército Nacional*) in the post-Revolution period. Revolutionary generals like Amaro, who possessed a greater sense of maturity as a result of their experiences during the Revolution, led this new professionally trained army. In his capacity as creator of this modern institution, Amaro worked hard to insure that new generations of officers not only demonstrated a high degree of competency, but that they had also been inculcated with a strong sense of loyalty to the institutions and with the discipline necessary to sustain that loyalty.<sup>37</sup>

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of Amaro's life exists.

<sup>37</sup>Interview, May 1991.

Drawing from his experiences in the Revolution and the more recent rebellion of 1923, Amaro formulated a strategy to professionalize the army that concentrated principally on the junior officers. Amaro believed the best approach for dealing with some of the more powerful Revolutionary generals was to avoid direct conflict with them. Where possible, he worked to circumvent some of the more politicized army generals. Amaro apparently believed that few of the generals who had political aspirations could be reformed. The conditions which existed in the army when he took over as Secretary of War readily confirmed his initial impression. Amaro saw a general lack of discipline within the ranks, and he found little unity and organization in an army whose members did not even wear the same uniforms. Those conditions convinced him that the best course of action was to reform the army from the bottom up, and he devised a strategy which focused on the army's future leaders. General Amaro directed his efforts toward making professional military leaders out of those individuals who were entering or who had just graduated from the *Colegio Militar*.<sup>38</sup>

In Amaro's mind, the individual, human element represented the army's most vital asset. Amaro felt that since they played such a critical role in the army, individual soldiers should occupy the majority of the army's attention, with equipment or matériel issues being relegated to second place. In order to fully develop these vital resources, Amaro planned to turn raw recruits into professional officers and soldiers by means of

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<sup>38</sup>Juan N. Chavarri, *El Heroico Colegio Militar en la Historia de México* (Mexico City: Libro Mex Editores, 1960) : 283; Lajous : 130-134 and Lieuwen, *Arms* : 111-112.

an extensive and effective military education system, which emphasized discipline, loyalty, and technical competence.<sup>39</sup>

While Amaro's educational reforms would have a lasting influence on the army's future development, his revitalization of the army's legal infrastructure had a more immediate impact on the institution. One expert on this period has gone so far as to state that this legislative reform comprised Amaro's foremost contribution to the Mexican army.<sup>40</sup> There was an urgent need for such reform at the time because military laws had not been changed or modified since the *Porfiriato* (1877-1911).

Amaro wasted little time in forming a Technical Commission in late 1924 to write new laws and regulations and to study other possible legal innovations for the army. In 1925, the commission began writing the Organic Law of the Army. When Amaro became Secretary of War and Navy later that year, he gave new impetus to the commission, which resulted in the publication of four major military laws in 1926. These new laws provided the Mexican army with a solid legal foundation and made the army more cohesive from a legal point of view.<sup>41</sup>

These new laws included the Organic Law of the Army and Navy, discussed in Chapter Two, the Law of Promotions, the Law of Retirements and Pensions, and the Law of Discipline. The first two laws remained in effect without major modifications until 1971, and the 1926 Law of Discipline has yet to experience major changes. In

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<sup>39</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 319; Interview, July 1990 and Toral : 471.

<sup>40</sup>Arnaldo Córdova, La ideología de la revolución mexicana (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1973) : 371.

<sup>41</sup>Evolución : 139-141; Lajous : 147; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 86-88 and McAlister et al. : 201-202.

general, these new laws tended to have an institutionalizing effect on the army because they weakened the influence of high level commanders by creating a set of policies and standards that centralized military power in the hands of the Secretary of War, who reported directly to the President of the Republic. An August 1932 regulation that prohibited senior officers from serving more than two years in any assignment helped to reinforce the Secretary of War's control over his subordinate generals. Moreover, Amaro demanded strict conformity to these laws by all service members, officers and enlisted men alike.<sup>42</sup>

By regulating and standardizing the army's mission, promotions, and compensation, military *caudillos* saw their traditional influence erode and pass to the collective institution of the army. As a result of these laws, the collective institution, not individual leaders, now dictated the army's norms and standards.<sup>43</sup> These laws left no doubt as to whom a soldier owed his responsibilities, and Article One of the Law of Discipline provided a good illustration. That article stated that "(m)ilitary service requires that a soldier fulfill his duty until the ultimate sacrifice, placing the sovereignty of the Nation, loyalty to the institutions and the honor of the army and navy before all personal interests."<sup>44</sup> In one sense, these new laws also helped to provide a quasi-legal basis for the army's nascent ideology.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Boils 64.

<sup>44</sup>Ley de Disciplina del Ejército y Armada Nacionales, 15 March 1926. The phrase "ultimate sacrifice" in the article signifies death.

Military laws dictated certain forms of behavior as well as a specific type of allegiance to the nation, the institutions of the Revolution, and the army itself.

Apart from his contributions to the army's legal infrastructure, Amaro has primarily been recognized within army circles for his complete remaking of the military education system. In fact, many of his achievements in this field have attained legendary status within the historical annals of the army. Amaro had hoped to use military education as his principal tool in constructing a professional army. Although Amaro's concept of professionalization included technical competence, he seemed more preoccupied with converting the students' loyalty from the regional *caudillos* to institutions of the government that had emerged from the Revolution. In Amaro's scheme, training in technical competence took a back seat to imparting institutional loyalty and discipline to military students and the future leaders of the Mexican army.

Shortly after being appointed Secretary of War, Amaro took direct aim at the army's most important educational institution, the Military College (*Colegio Militar*). He closed the school on 1 October 1925 to make needed physical renovations as well as modifications to the staff and curriculum. In short, the college underwent a thorough overhaul.<sup>45</sup> At the reopening ceremony on 24 July 1926, Amaro remarked to the college's staff and faculty that "the President hopes that the Military College under your command will produce military perfection, the guarantee of the Army and the security

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<sup>45</sup>*Evolución* : 50-52; Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* : 92-93 and Sánchez Hernández and Sánchez Lamego : 171-172 and 227-228.

of the triumph of the Revolution."<sup>46</sup> The refurbished Military College emphasized discipline and loyalty to the legally constituted government as well as modern technical military training.

Other notable innovations included Amaro's work to expand officer recruitment to the national level, thereby overcoming regional biases that had helped to create personal loyalties to regional *caudillos* instead of the national institutions. Amaro also initiated a program whereby intelligent and loyal junior officers would be sent to the U.S. and Europe for training on state-of-the-art military equipment and techniques. Upon their return, these enlightened officers would often serve as advisors to Amaro, freely recommending improvements for the Mexican military schools.<sup>47</sup>

After turning over his cabinet position to Calles in 1931, Amaro intensified his efforts at improving military education. The crowning of this hard work came in April 1932 with the founding of the ESG, the Mexican army's command and general staff college. At the ESG, army officers demonstrating the potential for working on the general staff received three years of specialized training to prepare them for those elite staff positions. The ESG continued as the highest level of military education until the founding of the Colegio de Defensa Nacional in 1981. Amaro appointed Major Luis Alamillo Flores, who had attended the French army command and staff college, as the

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<sup>46</sup>Evolución : 52. Amaro's exact words were: *Espera el señor Presidente que el Colegio Militar a cargo de ustedes, sea de donde surja la perfección militar, la garantía del Ejército y la seguridad del triunfo de la Revolución.*

<sup>47</sup>Alicia Hernández Chávez, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1934-1940: La Mecánica Cardenista, Vol. 16 (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1976) : 19-20; Evolución : 52; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 92-93; Toral : 482 and Turner : 59-60.

school's first director. Amaro took the new innovation very seriously as demonstrated by the fact that he required a number of Revolutionary generals who lacked formal military training to attend some of the classes at the ESG.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to regulating military training, Amaro made a number of sizeable contributions that accelerated the process of professionalization within the army and the subordination of the army to the central government. He sent military attaches to the United States, and European and South American countries in an effort to stay abreast of military trends and advancements. Amaro brought about the standardization of military equipment beginning with the remodeling of the old arms factory in Mexico City. He facilitated the diffusion of professional and cultural information and Revolutionary ideology through a series of army publications directed at both officers and enlisted men. He brought about a general rise in the standards of living and hygiene throughout the army but particularly within the enlisted ranks. To further distance the army from the political arena, Amaro ensured that the army devoted an increasingly larger percentage of its resources toward public works, especially the construction and repair of roads. Amaro's policy of assigning loyal officers to combat units where reliability was questionable also tended to be politically motivated as were his recurring demands that general officers either give up politics or resign from the army. Although he could not force some of the more powerful generals to give up politics, he did

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<sup>48</sup>Evolución : 56-57; Lieuwen, Arms : 111; Prewitt : 613-614; Toral : 476-483 and Interview, July 1990.



successfully impose his will on a sizeable number of lower- ranking officers who had previously shown an inclination toward meddling in politics.<sup>49</sup>

Arturo Sánchez Gutiérrez, a Mexican political scientist and research analyst, has suggested that Amaro's professionalization program did not really depoliticize those Revolutionary generals who had long been intimately involved in the country's political process.<sup>50</sup> As noted above, Amaro probably did not intend for his reforms to accomplish that goal. Instead, the professionalization reforms aimed to discourage participation in politics by younger officers and troops. Thus, these reforms were viewed as an investment in the apolitical development of the future leadership of the army. By training these future leaders in internal discipline and institutional loyalty, the political influence of the army as an institution would gradually diminish. A number of Revolutionary generals would continue to pursue political careers but they would only be able to exert influence as individuals and could no longer depend on the military institution to support their individual political causes. The army gradually acquired a somewhat apolitical posture in the sense that it did not participate collectively or officially in political decisionmaking even though selected Revolutionary generals continued to wield varying degrees of political influence. Amaro's contributions to the development of the modern Mexican army will never be replicated. By enforcing the loyalty and discipline he so fiercely advocated, General Amaro proved he could accomplish the herculean task of initiating the modernization of the Mexican army.

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<sup>49</sup>Boils : 62-64; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 88-90 and 110; Toral : 479-482 and Turner : 59.

<sup>50</sup>Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez, "Los militares en la década de los cincuenta" Revista Mexicana de Sociología, July-September 1988 : 271-273.

Given the prevailing situation at the time, it remains doubtful any other general could have performed this mission so effectively.

Both Calles and Amaro would disappear from the scene by 1935, the former permanently and the latter temporarily. Despite the sudden demise of its leader, the Calles era made large strides in establishing the basic tenets of a new army ideology. Amaro introduced and later reinforced a number of these principles, especially the revolutionary heritage, institutional loyalty, and discipline. The conclusion of Calles' rule coincided with the virtual collapse of *caudillismo*, an advanced program of professionalization for the army, an expansion of communications throughout the country and an increase in the power of the federal government. Many top military leaders gravitated toward private business. Together these developments gradually forced the armed forces into a position directly subordinate to the federal government after 1935.<sup>51</sup>

Viewing the latter half of the *Maximato* from a different perspective, one analyst saw the period of 1929-1935 as one of transition, as the military began to adapt to its new role of supporting the central government instead of lining up as a ready replacement.<sup>52</sup> In more crass terms, ambitious generals calculated the "richer they got the more they had to lose in an unsuccessful revolt."<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the natural aging process caused some of these Revolutionary generals to lose their youthful vigor and bellicose spirits.

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<sup>51</sup>Boils : 49-50; Córdova, La formación : 51-52 and Lajous : 8-9.

<sup>52</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 62.

<sup>53</sup>Hansen : 161.

Bequeathed this legacy by Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas would continue the civilianization program initiated in the 1920s and would eventually eliminate his former mentor from the national scene in the process.

### Tightening the Leash on the Tiger

Historians have written extensively about the political influence of military leaders during the Mexican Revolution and in the immediate post-Revolution period. *Huertistas*, *Villistas*, *Carranzcistas*, *Obregonistas*, and *Callistas* at one time or another comprised the more influential military groups. On the eve of his exile from Mexico in May 1911, Porfirio Díaz Mori remarked that Francisco I. Madero had "unleashed a wild tiger," and the defeated dictator speculated that Madero would be unable to tame the beast. Díaz's analogy of course referred to the Mexican masses. When Lázaro Cárdenas became President of Mexico on December 1, 1934, he confronted a dilemma similar to that of Madero. However, Cárdenas' problems came from a different source. Cárdenas' first order of business as President of the Republic entailed tightening the leash Amaro had put on a wild tiger better known as the Mexican army. Cárdenas chose to employ some of the techniques he had learned from his predecessors and also added some control measures of his own in the process. For the most part, Cárdenas would not drastically alter the "spoils system" because he too preferred to pay off his opposition whenever possible. Although Cárdenas had been an integral part of the Calles system, he readily acknowledged that he would have to find some new allies if he were to be his own man. Cárdenas would seek out these allies as a counterweight to Calles' influence, and he

would then move to isolate what he perceived to be his two principal threats, Generals Amaro and Almazán. The latter would not be sufficiently isolated until his unsuccessful run for the presidency in 1940.

As Minister of War under President Abelardo Rodríguez, Cárdenas began to cultivate the support of the army's junior officers and enlisted personnel as well as that of labor and peasant groups. A week before his inauguration as President, he directed a radio address to the army expressing his respect and affection for the armed forces. He assured the army that it would hold a privileged position in the federal government's future programs, and he exhorted all soldiers to preserve the fruits of the Mexican Revolution, emphasizing the Revolutionary mystique that was fast becoming a critical element of the army's new ideology. He also called for complete and professional dedication to their military duties, which was the president-elect's way of appealing for institutional loyalty from the country's most physically powerful institution.<sup>54</sup> Cárdenas continued these and similar strategies after he became President. On Soldier's Day in June 1935, he made a speech that was directed principally at the enlisted soldier, whom he called the central nerve of the national army. He reminded all military personnel of the close relationship that existed between the military and the vital interests of the country, Mexican society and the law. He said that the old army, which had tried to ruin the Revolution, was dead, and that the new national army had been built through the unselfish efforts of its members. Cárdenas concluded his speech by thanking the army

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<sup>54</sup>Dale Reynolds, ed., U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Mexico 1919-1941 (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, Inc., 1984) : G-2 Report: *Loyalty of the Army*, November 27, 1934. Hereafter cited as USMIR.

for helping to consolidate the many gains of the Revolution.<sup>55</sup> On other occasions, Cárdenas encouraged members of the army to cultivate an image as defenders of the goals of the Revolution and the government that came to represent the Revolution. He also tried to promote cooperation between the army and the popular sectors by having both groups participate in joint public works programs and by tasking army officers to train the labor and peasant militias.<sup>56</sup>

President Cárdenas also sought to solidify his support among the army's leaders. On 5 September 1935, he invited nineteen military zone commanders, who had been in Mexico City for the opening of the second session of the 36th Congress, to an informal dinner at Chapultepec Castle. According to one report, Cárdenas showed extreme cordiality toward all the officers present and said he considered each officer present as "peculiarly his own kind." He further related that the "problems of one were the problems of all." Not surprisingly, the report went on to say both Generals Amaro and Almazán were absent.<sup>57</sup>

The appeals for support, especially those made to the lower classes, upset Calles considerably. In response to Cárdenas' actions, Calles posed a direct challenge by making a "patriotic declaration" against Cárdenas' programs. Cárdenas answered Calles' challenge by firing the Calles loyalists in his cabinet. The urban workers demonstrated their solidarity for Cárdenas, and Cárdenas himself sought to appease other generals who

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<sup>55</sup>Mensaje al Soldado de Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas, Junio 1935: 3-7.

<sup>56</sup>Nora Hamilton, The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) : 132-133.

<sup>57</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: President Cárdenas and the Army, September 6, 1935.

had previously been loyal to Calles. He granted General Saturnino Cedillo more authority by naming him Minister of Agriculture, and he provided the troublesome but influential Almazán with more business contracts. Fearing the loss of their economic benefits, most of the *Callista* generals decided not to oppose Cárdenas. Having removed Calles from the scene, Cárdenas now stood ready to isolate Amaro, who remained a loyal supporter of Calles while still commanding a strong following within the army.<sup>58</sup>

Cárdenas began to antagonize Amaro at the beginning of his term, when he appointed a board of twenty officers to examine the qualifications of the graduating members of the first class of the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG). Cárdenas took this action against the express wishes of Amaro, who was the Director of Military Education. Cárdenas' ulterior motive aimed at testing the loyalty of the graduating officers. Three officers did not pass the board's test, infuriating Amaro.<sup>59</sup> Almost a year later, reports began to circulate that Amaro, who had been gaining stature because of his staunch anti-Communist beliefs, was sick or in "retirement." According to the U.S. military attaché in Mexico City, these reports had no foundation. The military hierarchy had simply forced Amaro to maintain a very low profile.<sup>60</sup> Amaro basically found himself at the disposition of the Secretary of War, which meant he held no specific position, although

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<sup>58</sup>Jesús Flores Romero, Lázaro Cárdenas: Biografía de un Gran Mexicano (Mexico City: B. Costa-Amic Editor, 1971) : 66-71; Brandenburg : 77-78; Hamilton : 255 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 116-121.

<sup>59</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: Commissioned Officers: General of Division, Joaquín Amaro, January 29, 1935.

<sup>60</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: Stability of the Present Administration, January 28, 1936.

he did draw his pay.<sup>61</sup> Edwin Lieuwen believed that Amaro's major shortcoming consisted of his unwavering allegiance to Calles, whom he welcomed back from his self-imposed exile in December 1935.<sup>62</sup>

By September 1936, new rumors had begun to circulate about Amaro's plans to overthrow the government. Most of these rumors were confined to army circles, but Cárdenas took no chances. He reassigned Lieutenant Colonel Luis Alamillo, the Director of the ESG and reputedly "Amaro's brains," to the military attaché office in Paris. In spite of this behind-the-scenes maneuvering, the U.S. military attaché dispelled most of these rumors as unfounded. Expressing what seemed to be a more realistic interpretation of the overall situation, he stated that Cárdenas was more firmly entrenched in power than a casual observer might presume. The attaché also expressed his doubts about any sizeable military faction rebelling, since the opponents of the administration remained divided, and no single opposition leader had the temerity to commit the first overt act of rebellion.<sup>63</sup> As time passed, Amaro gradually lost influence in the army, while

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<sup>61</sup>José Luis Piñeyro accurately explains this process of being at the disposition or the *disponibilidad* of the Secretary of Defense. The process can also be referred to as frozen or *congelado*. This is simply a method by which Defense Ministry demonstrates its dissatisfaction with one of its members. It is also considered a form of punishment. The officer who is frozen performs no useful function although he does collect his pay. Normally, the SECDEF determines when the officer will return to regular duty. See José Luis Piñeyro, "Presencia política militar nacional y en el Distrito Federal: propuestas de análisis," in D.F. Gobierno y Sociedad Civil, ed. Pablo González Casanova (Mexico City: Ediciones El Caballito, S.A., 1987) : 65. Hereafter cited as Piñeyro, "Presencia política militar."

<sup>62</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 117.

<sup>63</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: Stability of the Present Administration, September 11, 1936.

Cárdenas grew confident enough to begin dismissing or reassigning army officers as he gauged their individual loyalty to the government.<sup>64</sup>

Having removed the more pressing threats to his government, Cárdenas resumed the professionalization reforms his predecessors had initiated. In 1936, the army implemented formal promotion examinations for officers below the rank of lieutenant colonel. In conjunction with these examinations, the army set up a special education center to provide formal military training for those officers who had not been trained at the Military College or any other formal military school. Officers had the option of satisfactorily completing the training or retiring. Age ceilings for each rank had also been introduced to free up promotion opportunities for younger officers, although the army exempted Revolutionary generals from this new criterion, given their hallowed reputation in Mexico's recent history. Additionally the army passed a new retirement law that offered aging generals strong incentives to retire. The law also legally reduced career lengths from 35 to 25 years. Cárdenas also directed the enactment of various reforms that enhanced the benefits of enlisted soldiers. These included the establishment of a savings fund with contributions from the federal government via the Treasury Ministry, a life insurance policy, an increase in the number of schools for military dependents, and expanded military medical facilities.<sup>65</sup> These benefits served to remind army members that loyal service would be rewarded handsomely, and they represented

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<sup>64</sup>Brandenburg : 80-81.

<sup>65</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/45; Brandenburg : 80-81; Evolución : 111; Hamilton : 132; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 118-121; Lozoya, Ejército : 80; McAlister et al. : 206-207; Prewitt : 614 and USMIR, G-2 Report: Commissioned Officers. Executive Order Favoring Retirement, August 8, 1935 and G-2 Report: Resume of Political-Military Situation in Mexico as of May 17, 1938.



a commitment to the armed forces from the new system that was emerging in the aftermath of the Revolution. By introducing programs such as these, Cárdenas and the political elite were increasing the stakes for preserving the system that many of the army's Revolutionary leaders had helped to build.

The President's efforts did not go unnoticed. One report had a junior officer saying that Cárdenas had done more for the army than any other president during the last fifteen years.<sup>66</sup> Improvements in military installations and facilities continued non-stop throughout the Cárdenas years. In his New Years Day address to the nation on January 1, 1939, the President mentioned the extensive military construction programs taking place on many of the army's installations, as well as the Central Military Hospital being constructed in Mexico City, which would be completed by 1940. Cárdenas also worked hard to loosen the ties between the Revolutionary generals, the enlisted troops and other officers. He took the rudimentary zone commander rotation system one step further by reassigning zone commanders more frequently. For example, one May 1938 account reported that 18 of the 33 zone commanders had been reassigned during the past year.<sup>67</sup> Traditionally more than 40 percent of the army units has been concentrated either in Mexico City or in close proximity to the capital. The general disposition of forces therefore provided the President with a significant military contingent with which to react to any political threat, especially in the provinces. It is probably safe to suggest that

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<sup>66</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: *Loyalty of the Army to the Government and Constituted Authority*, June 1, 1937.

<sup>67</sup>Lázaro Cárdenas, *Mensaje de Año Nuevo, 1939* and G-2 Report: *Resume of the Political-Military Situation in Mexico as of May 17, 1938*.

Cárdenas tested the loyalty of all the unit commanders in that cluster of forces surrounding the capital.

As mentioned briefly above, Cárdenas also sought allies outside military circles. More specifically, Cárdenas cultivated the support of the workers and peasants. He encouraged the formal organization of workers and peasants into the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (CTM) and the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC) respectively to serve as what Edwin Lieuwen referred to as "civilian counterpoises" against the army. The CTM emerged in February 1936 and the CNC in August 1938. With the CTM under the trustworthy leadership of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Cárdenas virtually eliminated Calles' labor federation, the *Confederación Regional Obrera* (CROM). The army immediately grew suspicious of the CTM and its communist-sympathizing leader, Lombardo Toledano, and some army leaders grew fearful of the proposed workers' militias he attempted to organize in 1937. The army quickly learned of the strength of Cárdenas' new ally when more than 100,000 workers marched into the capital as a show of support for the government on Labor Day (1 May) 1938. Eventually, both the labor and agrarian sectors provided a more than ample counterbalance to some of the army's more ambitious generals.<sup>68</sup> Policies such as these served as a warning to career officers that loyalty to the central government would be the most prudent path to follow for career advancement.

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<sup>68</sup>Edwin Lieuwen, "Depoliticization of the Mexican Revolutionary Army, 1915-1940," in The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment, ed. David Ronfeldt (La Jolla: Center for U.S. Mexican Studies, 1984) : 55-57; Luis Medina, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1940-1952: Del Cardenismo al Avilacamachismo, Vol. 18 (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1978) : 20-23; Boils : 66-67; González Casanova : 37-38 and Hansen : 94. Some junior army officers obviously became even more committed to Cárdenas' philosophy when they began training the workers' militias.

The last major challenge to the Cárdenas government came from a former ally, General Saturnino Cedillo. Cedillo resigned from his cabinet post as Agriculture Minister over a disagreement with Cárdenas in August 1937, and returned to his home state of San Luis Potosí as military zone commander. Less than a year later, Cedillo openly rebelled against the government when he refused reassignment to the military zone in Michoacán. An initial report from a foreign observer suggesting that Cedillo could field a force of 15,000 troops and perhaps count on support from army units in the states of Sonora and Nuevo León proved overly optimistic.<sup>69</sup> Loyal army troops led in the field by General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, who had been selected to replace Cedillo, promptly put down the revolt. Army forces eventually found and killed Cedillo in January 1939. (At the time, a future Secretary of Defense, Félix Galván López was a lieutenant serving in the 35th Cavalry Regiment, one of the loyal units which fought against Cedillo.)<sup>70</sup> According to some contemporary reports, Cedillo was backed by foreign companies that had engaged in a last ditch effort to recuperate their losses, but this seems highly improbable. While the reasons for Cedillo's revolt still remain somewhat unclear, the more reasonable explanation is that the rift was caused by a personal disagreement with Cárdenas rather than some form of foreign intrigue.

Cárdenas' reaction to the Cedillo rebellion proved to be the most interesting facet of the incident. In June 1938, Cárdenas went to the city of San Luis Potosí and gave a

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<sup>69</sup>Toral : 486 and USMIR, G-2 Report: Resume of Political-Military Situation in Mexico as of October 20, 1937.

<sup>70</sup>Luis Suárez, Cárdenas: Retrato Inédito (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1987) : 169-172 and Toral : 486-487.

speech condemning what he described as opposition forces that had demonstrated indifference toward the poverty and misery of the Mexican people. The President exhibited his political dexterity by closing the speech with a special show of gratitude for the Mexican army, whose members had responded with loyalty and in an exemplary fashion to the challenge confronting the government. He also thanked the army for continuing to defend the social agenda of the Revolution. The President returned to San Luis Potosí eleven months later, in the aftermath of Cedillo's defeat, and once again received a warm welcome.<sup>71</sup> The Cedillo episode merited special attention because it represented the ineffectiveness of individual generals against the core of the national army. Cedillo proved to be the last of the military *caciques*, and the suppression of his uprising illustrated that institutional loyalty now formed an integral part of a nascent army ideology. Army officers were learning from experience that it was much more advantageous to work within the ruling system than to be considered its enemy.

Although it is difficult to cite one specific reason, 1939 seemed to be a key year for Cárdenas. By that year, Cárdenas appeared to have consolidated his power by dint of the system engendered by the Revolution and by the reforms he introduced into that system. This favorable turn of events can be attributed to the defeat of Cedillo, and perhaps also to the unifying effect of the impending threat of a major international conflict. For whatever reason, President Cárdenas found himself firmly in control in 1939.

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<sup>71</sup>Lázaro Cárdenas, Mensaje a la Nación, dirigido el 4 de junio 1938, desde la ciudad de San Luis Potosí : 1-4; Boils : 71; Hernández Chávez : 20; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 126-127; Lozoya, Ejército : 34-35 and Suárez : 169-172.

The chances for a rebellion or an uprising against the federal government seemed quite remote in 1939. A reasoned, and as it happened, accurate assessment by U.S. observers showed that a revolution in Mexico was unlikely because the large majority of peasants and laborers would side with the government in any future conflict. There also existed sufficient doubt on the part of potentially rebelling military leaders as to whether or not their soldiers would follow their lead in a move against the Cárdenas government. As the report noted, "(y)ounger officers and the common soldiers have been indoctrinated to a considerable extent with radical ideas," an orientation distinct from that of their superiors. The appraisal went on to mention the presence of 5,000 well-trained Spanish refugees in the country, who would readily support the Cárdenas government, which had so openly received them. Finally, the government had put down the 1929 and 1938 rebellions with relative ease, and there was no reason to believe it could not do so again.<sup>72</sup> The actions of high ranking army officers supported the U.S. assessment.

In September 1939, top army leaders asked General Francisco Mújica, the Minister of Economy and a recognized communist sympathizer, to invite the President to a luncheon with the zone commanders. The invitation seemed to symbolize a new understanding and empathy between the generals and Cárdenas. At the luncheon, Cárdenas urged the leaders to vote in the upcoming elections and work with the *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana* (PRM), which he founded in December 1937, to preserve the Revolutionary government. With the outbreak of World War II in Europe, the generals realized that public opinion heavily favored the Cárdenas government, and that they could

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<sup>72</sup>USMIR, War Department Memorandum: Mexico, August 16, 1939.

best serve their own interests by falling in line behind the President.<sup>73</sup> The country's improving economic situation further convinced these generals that their most profitable course of action was in working with the government instead of trying to compete with it. The overall situation in Mexico now made institutional loyalty increasingly easy to accept for most army leaders. While some generals might have yearned for some of the perquisites of the Calles era, they no longer wielded enough influence to reinstate those policies, and in any case, Cárdenas could be generous with subsidies in his own right. Moreover, many of the Revolutionary generals had grown too old to consider fighting as a viable option to restore those benefits.

Frank Brandenburg and Alicia Hernández Chávez have argued that since selected generals were serving in governorships and party positions, the army had not been removed from politics.<sup>74</sup> Seemingly, they failed to see the point that those generals, precisely because they held those positions, comprised part of the formal governmental system and not the military apparatus. Recalling a section in Chapter Two, army personnel seeking political office must obtain a leave of absence from active duty before accepting such a position. In this way, those individuals transferred temporarily from the military to the political sector, where the government bureaucracy controlled and disciplined them. These so-called "political generals" could no longer be considered mavericks with large contingents backing them. The army, as an institution, supported the collective government, not individual generals who held political positions. Thus

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<sup>73</sup>USMIR, G-2 Report: Political Influences Affecting Army Policy, September 12, 1939.

<sup>74</sup>Brandenburg : 93-94 and Hernández Chávez : 20.

generals serving in political positions could no longer act unilaterally against the government because without the support of the troops they were powerless. The influence of these generals had come full cycle since the Revolution. The end of an era had arrived because the individual general had become ineffective against the collective core of the military institution and a political system that had the former's undivided support. At the same time, a new military ideology had been taking root that gave new strength to the military, and this new set of military values helped to make the army stronger than any single member who might have been inclined to utilize the armed forces for his own personal interests.

#### The Truth About the Official Party's Military Sector

As noted in Chapter One, many studies on Mexico refer to the disbanding of the military sector in the official party in 1940 as the benchmark for the depoliticization of the military or the demilitarization of Mexican politics. In fact, civilianization of the government arrived earlier with the formal incorporation of the military into the party structure in 1937, at which time the army could no longer claim such a dominant position in Mexican politics. As a sector of the official party, the military found itself obligated to cooperate with three other sectors, and any conflicts between the party sectors would have to be resolved according to party rules.<sup>75</sup> That new development placed the army in a position of being only one-fourth of the political equation. In fact, President Cárdenas, who was responsible for creating the military sector, made that specific point

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<sup>75</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 318.

when he said "(w)e did not put the army in politics. It was already there. In fact it had been dominating the situation, and we did well to reduce its influence to one out of four."<sup>76</sup> Huntington concurred with Cárdenas' evaluation when he wrote that the "sectoral organization of the party also tended to strengthen the central leadership by reducing the influence of local bosses and regional *caudillos*."<sup>77</sup>

Pablo González Casanova wrote that the military's inclusion into the official party served to increase governmental control over the military, while simultaneously enforcing a kind of political discipline on the army. González Casanova and other analysts generally agree that the military sector proved weak from the outset and most likely served Cárdenas' purpose of politically debilitating the army as an institution.<sup>78</sup> Although each sector had an equal number of representatives within the party structure, the supporters of the labor and peasant sectors far outnumbered those of the military and popular sectors. The labor sector had 1,250,000 supporters; the peasant sector counted on 2,500,000; while the military and popular sectors had approximately 55,000 each.<sup>79</sup> In reality, the official party had been converted into one of the most solid bases of the post-Revolutionary presidency by 1936, with more than four million members.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 125.

<sup>77</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 318.

<sup>78</sup>Brandenburg : 91-94; González Casanova : 37-38; Hansen :94 and Huntington, Political Order : 317-320.

<sup>79</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 125.

<sup>80</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 174-175.



Therefore, it appeared that the president and not the army benefitted most from the new party organization. As Huntington noted in his study of the Mexican political system:

"The creation of the revolutionary party in 1929 was followed during the 1930s by both the centralization of power necessary for the promotion of social reform and the expansion of power involved in broadening the identification of people with the political system. The key man in this process was Cárdenas who institutionalized the party, *centralized power in the presidency*, inaugurated social reforms and broadened political participation."<sup>81</sup>

While it appears Cárdenas could have run the risk of revitalizing military interest in politics, he seems to have carefully planned this delicate political maneuver with the help of the Secretary of War Manuel Avila Camacho and the leading labor leader, Vicente Lombardo Toledano. There can be no doubt Cárdenas counted on the labor and peasant sectors to provide an adequate counterweight to the military.<sup>82</sup>

Past precedents mandated that this political reform had to be undertaken with considerable caution. When the PNR was established in 1929, some thought had been given to providing the military with a formal position within the new party. However, the Constitutional Convention of 1917 had declared its opposition to military participation in politics, so Calles opted to exclude the military from the formal party structure. Those historical precedents presented Cárdenas and his two collaborators with some theoretical and ideological obstacles to overcome. Nevertheless, Avila Camacho and Lombardo Toledano composed a document which addressed those theoretical difficulties and proposed a justification, albeit weak, for military participation in the political

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<sup>81</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 322. Italics added.

<sup>82</sup>Boils : 67-69 and Lozoya, Ejército : 66-67.

process. This proposal drew on the principles of the Constitution of 1917, which gave members of the armed forces the right to vote. After negotiating the theoretical roadblock, albeit not very convincingly, Cárdenas moved to officially designate a military sector. While the general consensus opposed military participation in politics, the political exigencies of the moment mandated military support of and close affiliation with the government. The government had to confront a series of threats both internally from the burgeoning fascist Sinarquist movement and externally from the foreign-owned petroleum companies. President Cárdenas wanted to incorporate the military into what he called the "union and solidarity pact" in an effort to bolster the strength of the federal government represented by the PRM.<sup>83</sup> The military would be the President's trump card, which he could use to coerce support for his policies, and guarantee the integrity of the Constitution in the process. This innovation also permitted politically ambitious army officers to develop their political aspirations safely within the confines of the official party and not in opposition to it.

As a group, the military did not seem too enthralled with its incorporation into the party. For the past twenty years, many officers had been inculcated with the principles of non-participation in politics. Now they were being asked to contradict these precepts. Forty military delegates had to be chosen, one from each of the 33 military zones, one from each of the two naval zones, and five from the Defense Ministry. It has been

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<sup>83</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 123-130 and Lozoya, Ejército : 65-71. Lozoya interviewed Lombardo Toledano personally so his account of the theoretical justification for the creation of a military sector is probably the most accurate.

suggested that Cárdenas had been able to influence the selection of military representatives through the collaboration of his SECDEF, General Avila Camacho.<sup>84</sup>

In a short time, a number of the newly chosen representatives grew wary of the entire process fearing their new assignments would adversely affect their military careers. Subsequent history would seem to justify these fears since political positions have never significantly enhanced an officer's military career. Since 1970, the experience has served as an actual detriment to one's ascension to the highest ranks of the military.<sup>85</sup>

The perplexing rules of military participation within the party proved to be another drawback for the army. For example, Article 4 of the party's Constituent Pact stated that members of the armed forces formed part of the political apparatus in their role as citizens. As such, they did not represent the nation's military institution, which would continue to function separately from political issues. This specific article played a useful role in establishing the foundation for a policy of apoliticism, which would eventually become an integral part of the army's ideology. Article 56 gave members of the military sector the right to serve as candidates for any popularly elected position, but only through one of the other three sectors. By requiring military candidates for public office to be nominated by one of the other three sectors, Article 63 placed further restraints on

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<sup>84</sup>Hamilton : 242; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 125-126; Lozoya, Ejército : 71-72 and Toral : 511.

<sup>85</sup>Lozoya makes an interesting point about the 36 military representatives to the PRM's Constituent Assembly. He notes that 15 of the 36 representatives went on to occupy positions of political importance. Two officers, General Heriberto Jara and Captain Alfonso Corona del Rosal, would go on to serve as presidents of the official party. However, only General Marcelino García Barragán would attain the position of Secretary of National Defense. Although Jara and Corona del Rosal both acquired considerable political influence because of their political positions, neither obtained commensurate influence within the army precisely because of their political status (Lozoya, Ejército : 72-73). McAlister et al. : 237 makes a similar point about the failure of "political" officers to attain a distinguished "military" career.

the army's participation in the political process, thereby demonstrating a definite preference for an apolitical orientation on the part of the army. Article 71 called for military-sector representatives to vote within the popular-sector assembly for internal party positions. Other restraints included the absence of military representation on the state regional councils. In addition, Avila Camacho and certain political leaders began to encourage junior officers to seek representation in the other three sectors, thereby setting the stage for conflicting interests among military representatives serving in different sectors. All these special qualifications precluded the military sector from having its own personality, and military delegates remained confused and frustrated with the entire process.<sup>86</sup> The military's brief foray into politics proved unsuccessful from a political point of view. The party's structure and *modus operandi* clearly restricted the options of the military sector. It soon became evident that the army as an institution did not benefit in a major way from the new party structure, although some military representatives did have the opportunity to further their own personal interests.

In the short run, Cárdenas' reform of the party had served its purpose. By 1939, he had weathered the political storm. The party's trial by fire occurred when six military candidates sought the party's nomination for President of the Republic, and General Avila Camacho eventually won with the support of the three non-military sectors. Within a month after he took office, President Avila Camacho disbanded the military sector in the

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<sup>86</sup>Lozoya, *Ejército* : 75-76 and Scott : 134.

PRM, proclaiming politics were incompatible with essential military duties and responsibilities.<sup>87</sup>

It should now be apparent why the dismantling of the military sector cannot be considered, in and of itself, as the equivalent of depoliticizing the Mexican military or demilitarizing Mexican politics. Realistically, it would be difficult to associate any one incident with the depoliticization of the army. Instead, a confluence of factors over the course of almost twenty years contributed significantly to the accomplishment of that goal most cherished by the nation's political leaders. More importantly for the purpose of this study, the process of demilitarizing Mexican politics helped to cultivate the roots of a nascent army ideology that ensured the army would remain relatively aloof from political decisionmaking. This ideology would also lend solid direction to the army's evolution after 1940.

At times, the process of removing the military from politics succumbed to brutal and often violent methods. However, certain values and principles, such as adherence to the goals of the Revolution, institutional loyalty, and overall discipline were used to justify the means of achieving that end. Those values helped give birth to an army ideology that would play a critical role in guiding the army into the second half of the twentieth century. The 1930s witnessed the rapid growth of nationalism, and that phenomenon gave the nation a greater sense of identity. Mexico felt more independent, having weakened considerably its economic and cultural linkage with Europe.<sup>88</sup> These

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<sup>87</sup>Hansen : 99-100; Huntington, Political Order : 320; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 129-130; Lozoya, Ejército : 79-80 and Scott : 162.

<sup>88</sup>Zoraida Vázquez and Meyer : 144.

nationalistic influences carried over into the army and had the effect of transforming the army into an ally of the government instead of a leading competitor. The army finally had begun to feel a sense of oneness with the system molded by the sacrifices of the Revolution, and it began to accept the fact that it was a major cog in that system. That breakthrough eventually contributed to the crucial institutionalization of political stability in post-1940 Mexico.

Looking at the Cárdenas period in retrospect, rumors and threats of military intervention in the government were greatly exaggerated. This judgment is bolstered by examining the content of U.S. intelligence reports covering that period. If the Mexican military had been considered a real threat to the political system, one would expect that the activities of the Mexican army would have been a prime topic of discussion in many of these reports. To the contrary, U.S. intelligence reports seldom mentioned the Mexican army and discussed their activities even less so. Instead, U.S. concerns, as reported by U.S. State Department representatives, centered principally on the expropriation of U.S. oil interests and the issue of just compensation. Other issues of mutual concern included consultations regarding joint defense measures, private claims settlements, water use of the Colorado and Rio Grande Rivers, and agreements on exporting strategic materials.<sup>89</sup> Since his inauguration, Cárdenas seemed to have had the support of the major portion of the army, as would his successor Manuel Avila

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<sup>89</sup>These issues of common interest were determined by a review of the Foreign Relations of the United States volumes from 1938-1942. A career politician who served with the Ministry of Foreign Relations during the Cárdenas administration asserted that Cárdenas' rule had never been seriously threatened by forces outside the system or by the armed forces. Most of the rumors that circulated suggesting the opposite was true had no real substance. This official expressed these views in an interview in May 1991.

Camacho. By the time Avila Camacho was inaugurated, individual generals seemed reluctant to oppose the system, most likely because of the difficulty encountered in mustering adequate support for such a confrontation.

### A Final Note

The 1920s and 1930s represented a critical period in the development of a modern Mexican army in the post-Revolutionary period. Through the efforts of distinguished military leaders such as Obregón, Calles, Amaro, and Cárdenas, a new generation of more professionalized officers began their army careers convinced of the importance of revolutionary commitment, institutional loyalty, and discipline, and committed to the future advancement of Mexico and the Mexican army. Although Revolutionary generals would still control the army's top leadership positions for many years to come, the army had begun its transition to a better organized, and more professional and loyal force primarily through the efforts of those new post-Revolutionary generations of army officers who, unlike most of their superiors, had the benefit of a formal military education.

This metamorphosis did not result solely from the efforts of these younger officers. The new generations of army officers received support in their endeavors from different sources. On the one hand, political leaders, many of whom had served in the army, encouraged the army's professionalization program as well as its gradual exit from politics. That support should not come as a total surprise since most of those political leaders had been forced to give up civilian careers and enter military service as a result

of the Mexican Revolution. Their desires for a civilian government appeared quite natural in retrospect. On the other hand, the general populace hungered for peace and stability. Given the country's bloody history, an anti-militarist posture offered the best hope for the nation's future.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the traditional arguments about Mexico's growing political and economic stability providing the needed support to Mexico's burgeoning civilianist system, some observers have offered interesting hypotheses about how the growing complexity of Mexican society had slowly forced the old-style political system to lose its effectiveness. The legacy of Westernization (competing interests, economic specialization, and mass communications systems) simply made the reliance on force and personalistic control to govern a bankrupt strategy.<sup>91</sup>

Strong leadership inside the army together with encouragement from a new breed of political leaders caused the armed forces to abandon their activist role in politics. Lyle McAlister presented a useful summation of the period. He claimed that "by the end of the Cárdenas administration the basis of the modern Mexican military establishment had been established ...discipline had been established in the bulk of the officer corps; a modern system of service schools was in operation and was turning out a new generation of officers..."<sup>92</sup> In explaining the somewhat unscrupulous backgrounds of the *defensas*

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<sup>90</sup>Walker : 89-91 offers a brief synopsis of this anti-military bias in Mexican society.

<sup>91</sup>Huntington, Political Order : 318-319 and Scott : 105-108. In Huntington's words, Mexican politics became a "system of institutionalized bargaining and compromise with the party framework" that had replaced "the earlier praetorian politics of open conflict and violence."

<sup>92</sup>McAlister et al. : 207.



*rurales* who roamed the Porfirian countryside in the late nineteenth century, historian Paul Vanderwood suggested, in his seminal work on that subject, that who better can catch a thief than another thief. A similar analogy could be drawn in analyzing the accomplishments of Lázaro Cárdenas. Who could have better broken the political power of the Revolutionary generals than a member of their own fraternity? As a former Mexican president astutely observed, under Lázaro Cárdenas the Mexican government transitioned from the *caudillo* to a more institutional solution.<sup>93</sup>

In the process, Cárdenas paved the way for a relatively smooth transition to the administration of his successor, former Secretary of War, Manuel Avila Camacho. The new President, with the help of World War II, accelerated the professionalization of the army. The progress achieved in that area enabled Avila Camacho to deliver the *coup de grace* to any vaunted political aspirations that individual army generals might have had by selecting a civilian politician, Miguel Alemán Valdés, to succeed him as President of Mexico. The selection of Alemán put an end to the string of military presidents who had governed Mexico since the Revolution.

The Cárdenas administration proved critical in the development of the post-Revolution army. He rid the army of its troublesome caudillos and brought some degree of uniformity to the institution. Cárdenas brought to fruition most of the reforms Amaro had initiated during the Calles era. More importantly, he left the army relatively free of the internal dissention that characterized the army during the 1920s and early 1930s. His presidency helped to pave the way for the professional reforms undertaken by the

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<sup>93</sup>Alemán Valdés : 3.

army in preparation for World War II. If the Cárdenas years were critical to the development of the modern Mexican army, then the administrations of Avila Camacho and Alemán represent the formative years of the army's evolution.

## Chapter Five

### The Modern Mexican Army's Formative Years: 1940-1952

The presidential administrations or *sexenios*, as they are referred to in Mexico, of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946) and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952) comprised the formative years the development of the Mexican army. Under the auspices of these two presidents, the role of the army became more clearly defined and earned general acceptance in both military and civilian circles. The same can be said for the army's ideology, which found additional conceptualization and universal acceptance during this period. Avila Camacho completed many of the army reforms introduced by General Joaquín Amaro and President Lázaro Cárdenas. Miguel Alemán followed in his predecessor's footsteps by reforming the army's hierarchy and by introducing a more professional officer into the army's upper echelons. By 1952, the Mexican army completed its transition from an undisciplined and politically mettlesome force in the 1920s to a professional and fairly well trained institution focused on defending the national sovereignty and the Constitution.

This twelve-year period is also interesting in its own right, because of the impact of World War II. For example, an editorial from the *Excelsior* newspaper proclaimed that World War II had produced a deep transformation in the Mexican army. Younger

officers who had been professionally trained in the HCM and ESG stood in the ranks next to the older Revolutionary generals. These younger and more professional officer cemented the passing of the troublesome military *caudillos*. The new and modern military equipment obtained from the U.S. helped to transform the army materially as well as spiritually. This new and modern army had fast become respectable and remained above politics.<sup>1</sup>

President Avila Camacho remained in the forefront of promoting change within the army. In a speech at the opening and closing of classes at the ESG on July 2, 1945, the President stated that the war had prevented the implementation of certain reforms that had become necessary at that time. The time had come to favor the younger elements who actually stood behind the aging Revolutionary generals, and he proposed retiring over 400 general officers. The image of the *caudillo* no longer held import within the Mexican army. Most military leaders had since committed to honoring the Constitution and serving their country.<sup>2</sup>

The Avila Camacho and Alemán *sexenios* had the cumulative effect of making the Mexican army more professional and disciplined and of establishing the image of a loyal and prestigious institution firmly committed to the defense of the country.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the economic growth brought about by the Second World War strengthened the

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<sup>1</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 550/107. Although this editorial had no date on it, it is estimated to have been written in late 1943 or the first week of 1944.

<sup>2</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 708.1/1.

<sup>3</sup>Sánchez Gutierrez : 13.

power of the state helping it to consummate the subordination of the military to civilian authorities by the end of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Under Alemán, generational changes within the army leadership became more pronounced with many Revolutionary generals fading into the background. Not surprisingly, the political sectors reflected similar leadership changes.<sup>5</sup> The shift to a modern capitalist economy caused some facets of the state's Revolutionary ideology, specifically democracy and social justice, to lose some of their impact. Yet nationalism, with its distinctive anti-U.S. tint, adequately filled the void and remained the government's principal source of legitimacy. The nationalist influence within the army became evident when the army began distancing itself from the U.S. military, an abrupt change from the close relationship that existed during the war years.<sup>6</sup>

A closer look at both of these administrations sheds more light on the prominence they held in the evolution of the Mexican army since 1940. This chapter provides more detailed coverage of the Avila Camacho presidency than the Alemán administration because of the significance of World War II in the development of both the modern Mexican army and its ideology. In purely military terms, the Camacho years proved to be the Mexican army's finest hour.

### Manuel Avila Camacho: The Civilian Sporting a Military Uniform

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<sup>4</sup>Boils : 76-77 and Piñeyro, Ejército y Sociedad : 61.

<sup>5</sup>Boils : 79 and Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 72-73.

<sup>6</sup>Boils : 80 and 160 and Zoraida Vázquez and Meyer : 155-156.

When Manuel Avila Camacho became President of Mexico on December 1, 1940, he did so with the support of a relatively depoliticized army, and his keen political skills helped him to avoid the praetorianism that characterized the Revolutionary and immediate post-Revolutionary years in Mexico. In terms of military politics, Avila Camacho's presidency was a transitional administration. The Mexican historian Luis Medina described Camacho as *un civil habilitado de militar*, that is, a civilian trained as a soldier.<sup>7</sup> Avila Camacho came between Cárdenas, who was a soldier trained as a soldier, and Miguel Alemán, who was a civilian trained as a politician. In some respects, Alemán's administration also had its transitional features. Avila Camacho consolidated many of the military reforms started by his predecessors, and Miguel Alemán completed those that remained. More importantly, Alemán's civilian status symbolized the complete subordination of the army to the civilian government.

Avila Camacho did not gain the presidency without overcoming some obstacles. As a political leader, Avila Camacho lacked the dynamic personality of his mentor and predecessor, Lázaro Cárdenas. John Gunther, a noted U.S. journalist who interviewed Avila Camacho, wrote he was "about as colorful as a slab of halibut." But in the same breath, Gunther characterized him as steady, cautious and efficient. To this journalist, Mexico needed just such a man, because he represented stability, responsibility, and hard work.<sup>8</sup> Avila Camacho did not have an especially distinguished military career, although he did serve as Cárdenas' chief of staff when Cárdenas was governor of the state of

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<sup>39</sup>Manuel Avila Camacho, "Mensaje al Consejo Supremo de la Defensa Nacional," (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Divulgación Popular, 1942) : 5-16.

Michoacán in 1924. Along the way, Avila Camacho picked up the nickname of "the unknown soldier." In fact, his candidacy encountered some resistance from old Revolutionary generals who resented the fact that he had not been a general officer during the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these minor faults, Cárdenas appointed Avila Camacho Secretary of War in October 1935.<sup>10</sup> Avila Camacho wisely used his new position to cultivate some important contacts within the official party, but his candidacy was not considered a foregone conclusion at the time. The support he had from both Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano, Mexico's chief labor leader, counted heavily in his quest to become President of Mexico.

Avila Camacho had been a close friend of Cárdenas, but it seemed to many contemporaries that Cárdenas preferred General Francisco J. Mújica. Mújica, ten years senior to the President, served Communications and Public Works Minister. More importantly, he advised Cárdenas on many key political issues and seemed more attuned ideologically to the President. Cárdenas, however, recognized that Mújica had been too much of an extremist to be an acceptable candidate. Within certain army circles, for example, Mújica had been classified as a communist sympathizer. Thus, the president and his most potent labor leader, Lombardo Toledano, turned to the more centrist candidate, Avila Camacho. During his tenure as SECDEF, Avila Camacho worked hard

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<sup>9</sup>Gunther : 481 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 132.

<sup>10</sup>Armando Ruiz Massieu and Efraín Flores Maldonado, Gabinetes Presidenciales (Mexico City: Costa-Amic Editores, S.A., 1988) : 192. Avila Camacho held the position of Secretary of War and Navy from October 18, 1935 until October 31, 1937 and then Secretary of the National Defense from November 1, 1937 until January 31, 1939.

to modernize the army and promote programs that increased both military salaries and benefits. Consequently, most army leaders also favored Avila Camacho. Only selected revolutionary generals who had fought as generals during the Revolution preferred Mújica for the presidency. Ultimately, Avila Camacho's candidacy precluded what some politicians feared would be a military split from the government.<sup>11</sup>

President Cárdenas sensed the growing political ambitions of his cabinet members and asked both Avila Camacho and Mújica to resign their positions on 19 January 1938. Another Revolutionary general, Joaquín Amaro, had met with Cárdenas a few days earlier to announce his intentions to campaign for the presidency. Amaro asked the president for the official party's nomination, promising to sever all ties with Calles. Cárdenas listened to the general plead his case, and then told him he personally would not support any candidate, which effectively closed the door on Amaro's aspirations.

After obtaining his leave of absence (*licencia*) from the army, Avila Camacho formally declared his candidacy, intent on unifying his disparate support with a conciliatory platform. Avila Camacho soon became known as the candidate of "national unity." His main competition came from the millionaire General Juan Andreu Almazán. Almazán had supported Cárdenas against both Calles and Cedillo, and as senior ranking officer in the army, Almazán felt he deserved the official party's nomination. But as a

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<sup>11</sup>Boils : 73; Hamilton : 256-262; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 132 and Suárez : 172-173. An interview with a mid-level bureaucrat who served in the Foreign Ministry during the Cárdenas administration determined that Cárdenas fully realized that Mújica was too radical to be a viable presidential candidate. To fortify his argument, the bureaucrat noted that Cárdenas had begun to reduce land distribution by late 1938 to ease opposition from within the official party (Interview, May 1991). Medina, Vol. 18, Chapters 1 and 2 provide excellent background and detail on the strictly political aspects of the 1940 presidential campaign.



rightist, Almazán stood on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from Cárdenas, which soon forced him to run as the candidate of an opposition party, the *Partido Revolucionario para Unidad Nacional* (PRUN). The senior general counted on the support of the country's more conservative and business-oriented sectors.<sup>12</sup>

Six generals announced their candidacy with only three surviving the preliminaries and making it to the general elections. The three included Avila Camacho, Almazán and Rafael Sánchez Tapia, who had resigned his position as commander of the 1st Military Zone, headquartered in the federal district. The limited support for Amaro and Mújica had dissipated quickly in the throes of the campaign, with the latter reincorporating himself into the army as the commander of the 21st Military Zone in Michoacán. By the summer of 1939, Avila Camacho was the clear winner in the race to succeed Cárdenas. Cárdenas helped Avila Camacho's cause by distancing himself from the other generals, and by directing the reassignment of a number of officers loyal to Almazán away from the northern state of Nuevo León, Almazán's power base.<sup>13</sup>

By early 1940, the purge of pro-Almazán officers had been completed to the general satisfaction of both Cárdenas and Avila Camacho.<sup>14</sup> In March 1940, the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey reported that a major in the Mexican army who knew Almazán very well told a consulate official that there would be no uprising in support of Almazán.

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<sup>12</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 183; Bautista Rosas : 68-70; Gunther : 482; Hamilton : 257-263; Medina : 48-81 and Suárez : 173. Alex Saragoza's The Monterrey Elite and the Mexican State, 1880-1940 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988) provides some good insight into Almazán's campaign and the kind of groups that supported him.

<sup>13</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 129-135; Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 65; Medina, Vol. 18 : 48-71 and USSDCF, 812.00 M.I.D./138.

<sup>14</sup>USSDCF, 812.00 Revolutions/486.

According to the Mexican officer, the army's junior officers considered themselves professional officers who would have nothing to gain by taking part in a rebellion. Although certain revolutionary generals might favor such a course of action, they would not have the support of their junior officers and enlisted men who would remain loyal to the government. The army major added that General Almazán had no intention of resorting to arms to win the election, despite reports to the contrary. The officer also believed that the principal advantage Avila Camacho held over Almazán was the backing of a very effective vote getting organization.<sup>15</sup> The following month a report from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) echoed similar observations. The report declared that "practically every General in the Mexican army will 'stick' to President Cárdenas and his candidate, General Manuel Avila Camacho." The report also indicated that spies for the Avila Camacho forces had been reporting the names of disloyal battalion commanders to high ranking army leaders for appropriate action. The F.B.I.'s report further noted that the Avila Camacho forces would be able to control the elections.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, a confidential U.S. intelligence report submitted in early June 1940 stated that three cavalry regiments had been transferred to the northern states of Chihuahua and San Luis Potosí for the purpose of strengthening the government forces around Almazán's strongholds.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>USSDCF, 812.00 Nuevo Leon/217.

<sup>16</sup>USSDCF, 812.00 Revolutions/506.

<sup>17</sup>USSDCF, 812.00 O.N.I./3.

A later U.S. intelligence report stated that, except for a few trouble spots, the national elections occurred in comparative tranquility with indications that the Almazán supporters would accept the results peacefully.<sup>18</sup> The official results showed Avila Camacho the clear-cut winner with 2,265,199 votes to Almazán's 128,574. Sánchez Tapia finished a very distant third with 9,840 votes. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, promptly recommended high level representation at Avila Camacho's inauguration.

Although rumors of possible demonstrations in favor of Almazán began to surface in September, most Mexicans were by that time convinced that no Mexican government could endure successfully without the support of the U.S., which openly backed Cárdenas and his designated successor. U.S. officials had rationalized that an Almazán victory might disrupt the institutional stability that had been gradually established since the Revolution, not to mention the key U.S. objective of settling the oil dispute. Without U.S. backing, General Almazán had a lot to lose, so he returned peacefully from his self-imposed exile to attend the presidential inauguration along with the high-level U.S. delegation represented by Vice-President Henry Wallace. Almazán's fate was further sealed when the 34 generals, who had taken leaves of absence to support him, returned to active service by November 1940.<sup>19</sup> As for other possible support for Almazán, a 1 December 1940 letter from General Matías Ramos Santos, commander of the military zone in Toluca, to the new President stated that most of those individuals in his area of

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<sup>18</sup>USSDCF, 812.00 O.N.I./5.

<sup>19</sup>Hamilton : 264-267; Medina, Vol. 18 : 124-130; Prewitt : 615 and USSDCF, 812.00 O.N.I./8.

jurisdiction who had supported Almazán had since abandoned that cause and supported the government.<sup>20</sup>

The 1940 election results demonstrated that those individuals, who operated outside the official political arena, could not garner enough support to mount a credible opposition to the legitimately constituted government. Even though Revolutionary generals still played an active role in Mexico's political life, the institution of the army acted in unison to support the legally elected government. As Ramiro G. Bautista Rosas noted, the army actively participated in the presidential election of 1940 without jeopardizing its internal cohesion. Those army members who backed opposition candidates displayed discipline and a progressive attitude by reintegrating themselves into active service after the election results had been announced.<sup>21</sup> The presidential campaign thus highlighted certain features of the army's ideology, in particular, its institutional loyalty. The comments made by the army major in Nuevo León offered a perfect illustration of that loyalty. Finally, the army performed in a generally apolitical fashion during the 1940 electoral campaign by subordinating itself to civilian control and by supporting the legitimate government against potential threats and unrest.

### The Army Under Avila Camacho

Avila Camacho's term was filled with change for the Mexican army. The international scene was such that changes within the army occurred at an accelerated

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<sup>20</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 559.1/4.

<sup>21</sup>Bautista Rosas : 66-67.

pace. The long list of military necessities required to prepare Mexico for World War II left little time for individual generals to mingle in politics. Avila Camacho took the professionalization programs, initiated by General Amaro and continued by President Cárdenas, one step further. He also followed Cárdenas' policy of easing army officers out of politics. In a politically astute move, Avila Camacho appointed Cárdenas as SECDEF in September 1942 to help complete the transition.

#### A. National Unification.

Much of the historiography of the period suggests that Avila Camacho brought an end to the attempts by his predecessor to build a "Mexican socialism," although it is by now well established that Cárdenas created the basis of modern capitalism in Mexico. De-emphasis on socialist rhetoric had its positive effects; it brought an end to much of the extremism that had divided the different sectors of the country. Avila Camacho reached the presidency under the banner of national unity and immediately sought to back that platform. He took office with a well planned strategy to achieve that unity and concentrated heavily on the army in the process.

Based on reports from various sources, Avila Camacho consolidated his power rather quickly. He met with ex-presidents Rodríguez and Portes Gil and obtained their full support; General Amaro also offered his services. General Roberto Fiero, the Chief of the Air Force, stated that the army was 99 percent loyal to the President. He further warned that any radical elements which attempted to act against the President would be completely eliminated.<sup>22</sup> Another sample of the army's support came at a luncheon

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<sup>22</sup>USMIR, Military Attaché Report: Political Issues and Problems, 21 February 1941 and G-2 Report: Stability of the Government, 28 February 1941.

given in the President's honor by the military zone commanders in early September 1941. The speaker thanked the President for the concern he had shown for the welfare of the army, and then declared unconditional support for the new army reforms the President was proposing. The speech concluded with an expression of total respect, loyal friendship, and sincere admiration for the President.<sup>23</sup> Finally, a report from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City cited Avila Camacho's ability to bridge rival political groups and interests.<sup>24</sup>

Avila Camacho's efforts to bring about national unity began by reducing tensions within the army. He moved quickly in this direction with the appointment of General Pablo Macías Valenzuela as SECDEF. Although considered a personal friend of the President, the selection of Macías was more of a concession to the veteran Revolutionary generals. The new SECDEF had considerable combat experience and had aided government troops in putting down rebel uprisings in 1923 and 1929. Macías also had ample experience as a military zone commander prior to becoming SECDEF.<sup>25</sup>

In a more significant move, Avila Camacho issued an order directing all military personnel to refrain from participating in political action organizations. He later

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<sup>23</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 135.2/206.

<sup>24</sup>USSDCF, 812.001 Camacho, Manuel A./171.

<sup>25</sup>Roderic A. Camp, Mexican Political Biographies 1935-1981, 2nd ed. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1982) : 181-182. Hereafter cited as Camp, Political Biographies. Rod Camp also provided information on Macías and the subsequent SECDEFs from his personal biographical data base on Mexican officials.

formalized that order in an official decree on 3 December 1945.<sup>26</sup> With the war approaching, the President wanted a non-politicized army. Moreover, he had to convince the U.S. leaders, who wanted to establish bases on Mexican soil, that Mexico had a professional army capable of defending its own territory. Notwithstanding, Avila Camacho had always maintained the firm belief that the army's mission should be to defend the nation's institutions and remain subordinate to civilian authorities.<sup>27</sup>

The President moved swiftly to reassert his control over the armed forces and prepare the country for war. A Presidential decree established the Presidential General Staff or *Estado Mayor Presidencial* (EMP) to prepare and organize the nation's defense as well as to assure the unity of command. The President believed the time was propitious for implementing a greater coordination between the Office of the Presidency and those secretariats involved in preparing the country for war. Article 3 of the implementing decree stated that the EMP would depend directly on the presidency and would be charged with preparing the nation militarily, economically, legally, and morally for war in accordance with the directives dictated by the President. The establishment of the EMP facilitated the exercise of the President's authority over the army.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 66-70. See pp. 140-144 for the actual decree. See also Alfonso Corona del Rosal, "El Presidente Manuel Avila Camacho, Revolucionario y Estadista," Speech made on 13 October 1971 at a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the death of Manuel Avila Camacho (Mexico City: Ediciones Mexicanas, A.C., November 1971). Hereafter cited as Corona del Rosal Speech.

<sup>27</sup>Corona del Rosal Speech and Sánchez Gutierrez : 275-276.

<sup>28</sup>Luis Alamillo Flores, "La Nación en la Segunda Guerra Mundial," in Seis Años de Actividad Nacional, ed. Manuel Avila Camacho (Mexico City: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1946) : 85 (Hereafter cited as Alamillo Flores, "La Nación."); AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.21/49 and Diario Oficial #9, 12 January 1942.

Among other administrative change in 1942, which gave the President and the EMP more influence over the army, was the creation in February of a new army Technical Commission (*Comisión Técnica*) to replace the outmoded Military Technical Directorate (*Dirección Técnica Militar*). This new commission took charge of assorted duties such as developing regulations, formulating programs of instruction, preparing promotion examinations, handling military legal matters, maintaining pertinent statistical records, and composing special military briefings for the President. The new Technical Commission depended administratively on the SDN and operationally on the EMP, yet another indication of the President's growing control over military activities.

Late that year, the army decided to scrap the recently formed Technical Commission, but this was also consistent with presidential policy. It then modified the General Staff of the Secretary of Defense, converting that staff into the General Staff of the Secretariat of Defense (EMDN). Army leaders expanded the new EMDN and divided up the responsibilities of the defunct Technical Commission between the EMDN and the EMP. The EMDN and EMP were staffed primarily with graduates of the Superior War College (ESG), the army's command and general staff school founded by General Amaro in 1932.<sup>29</sup> As a result of these reforms, more professional, disciplined, and loyal officers began to occupy key positions on the army's two most important staffs. The placing of younger and more professional officers into the more critical positions within the army would continue at an even faster pace during the Alemán *sexenio*.

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<sup>29</sup>Othón León, "Las Fuerzas Armadas de México," in *Seis Años de Actividad Nacional*, ed. Manuel Avila Camacho (Mexico City: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1946) : 529-535; AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/69; *Evolución* : 69 and 144; Diario Oficial #38, 16 February 1943 and Toral : 494.



Other developments included the introduction of a new program of military education for the country's youth and a new military territorial reorganization. On the first point, a Presidential decree on 2 March 1942 organized the Public Education Service (*El Servicio de Educación Pública*), which provided instruction to the student population on how to defend the country. The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) headed up the program but collaborated closely with the EMP, the SDN, and the Secretariat of the Navy. A few months later the responsibility of coordinating military instruction for civilians passed directly to the SDN.<sup>30</sup> This program brought the army closer to the Mexican public, fulfilling one of the goals Avila Camacho had set at the outset of his administration.

The impending war also produced some modifications in the army's territorial organization. Less than a month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Avila Camacho directed a reorganization of the military zone system in order to upgrade coastal defenses in Mexico. The President named his former mentor, Lázaro Cárdenas, Commander of the Pacific Military Region (*Región Militar del Pacífico*) on 2 January 1942. The newly appointed commander had 12 military zones and two naval zones under his jurisdiction. A few months later, the army created two additional military regions for the Gulf of Mexico and Isthmus of Tehuantepec regions. Two old Revolutionary heroes, Generals Abelardo L. Rodríguez and Joaquín Amaro, took command of those regions, which had their headquarters in the cities of Veracruz and

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<sup>30</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/119 and Diario Oficial #19, 22 July 1942. Although the SDN had overall responsibility for the program, the EMP formulated the directives applicable to the program.

Ciudad Ixtepec, Oaxaca.<sup>31</sup> The creation of these new military regions unified the operational command of the active forces in the critical coastal areas and intensified the military instruction of these same forces.<sup>32</sup> By naming these important generals to lead the new military regions, the President promoted more unity in preparation for possible involvement in a world conflict.

Although the Mexican public had displayed a general reluctance to join the war, the sinking of two Mexican oil tankers, the *Portrero del Llano* and the *Faja de Oro*, by German submarines on 13 and 21 May 1942, left Mexico no alternative but to formally enter the war on the Allied side. President Avila Camacho obtained authorization from the Congress to declare war on the Axis powers which he did on 1 June. The President, in a typically patriotic fashion, justified Mexico's entrance into the war by asserting that the true Mexican never had any problem in choosing between a glorious death or living in slavery.<sup>33</sup> The formal declaration of war delivered an even greater sense of urgency to the Mexican army. Both the President and the SECDEF had to act quickly to prepare the country for potential hostilities. The declaration of war brought a surge of patriotism and nationalism to the army, two attributes the army would cultivate and build on in future years.

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<sup>31</sup>Blanca Torres, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1940-1952: México en la segunda guerra mundial, Vol. 19 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1984) : 111-113; Sánchez Gutierrez : 275-276; Suárez : 182-183 and Toral : 490-494.

<sup>32</sup>Leon : 535-536.

<sup>33</sup>Leon : 525; Toral : 495-496 and Torres : 81-106.

Mexico took immediate action to mobilize her human resources. On 3 August 1942, a Presidential decree activated the Law of Military Service (*Ley del Servicio Militar*), passed in September 1940. The program engendered by that law became known as national military service (SMN). All males eighteen years and older had to enlist for one year of active service and then pass through the first and second reserves, serving in the latter during the ages of 30 to 40. The SMN law established a lottery system to satisfy the quotas needed for active service.<sup>34</sup> According to one source writing at the time, the government wanted the SMN to serve two purposes. First, the conscripted force would create a trained reserve that could, if needed, combat subversive elements in the country. Secondly, the SMN training would instill in Mexico's youth "a clear conception of its duty to the nation." Increasing the size of the army had the added benefit of creating more opportunities for the more professional junior officers.<sup>35</sup> President Avila Camacho declared, in a September 1941 speech to military zone commanders, that the SMN had to be preceded by an intense educational program that emphasized patriotism, nationalism, self-confidence, and physical and cultural training.<sup>36</sup> The Public Education Service had achieved those objectives, thereby easing the way for the initiation of the SMN. A decree establishing a civil defense program within Mexico quickly followed the activation of the national military service. This program called for the coordination of

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<sup>34</sup>"Servicio Militar Nacional," *Revista del Ejército*, March 1982 : 4-13; Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 94-95; AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.22/119; Diario Oficial #9, 11 September 1940; Toral : 496-497 and Torres : 109, 136-137.

<sup>35</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 550/44-20-8 and Prewitt : 618-619.

<sup>36</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 708.1/9.

military and civilian activities to minimize the effects of potential enemy aggression against civilians. The Mexican people favorably received the civil defense program and openly expressed a desire to participate. The government rescinded the civil defense decree after the war in September 1945.<sup>37</sup>

The most important apparatus created to coordinate the war effort was the Supreme Council for National Defense (*Consejo Supremo de la Defensa Nacional*). The September 1942 law creating this council abolished an earlier decree of 19 August 1940 which Cárdenas used to set up the groundwork for the council. This high level organization aimed to maintain harmony and cooperation between the diverse agencies of the government and the private sector that had a major interest in collective security. The President presided directly over this council which had individual representatives for the legislative and judicial powers. Other groups such as urban and rural workers, farmers, professionals, merchants and industrialist also had representation. The Chief of the EMP presided over the council as its secretary and coordinated the activities of the three sections, the military, the economic, and the educational.<sup>38</sup>

In an austere ceremony at the Presidential Palace on the evening of 24 September 1942, President Avila Camacho read a message concerning the creation of the Supreme Council for National Defense. He justified its creation by saying that national defense can be considered a condition as permanent as life itself. The President warned that a nation should not wait until bullets fly before it organizes a defense. The President told

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<sup>37</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 550/44-20-8 and Torres : 109-110.

<sup>38</sup>Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 84-85; AGN, Avila Camacho, 550/44-20-8; Diario Oficial #9, 11 September 1940; Diario Oficial #19, 23 September 1942 and Torres : 110.

the assembled group that the immediate task at hand demanded working with intensity and producing with efficacy. He cautioned that an effective national defense had to be an integral defense, which not only took into account military defense but also included agricultural, economic, commercial, financial, and judicial defense measures. The President found time to praise the army in his speech, calling it a genuinely popular institution comprised of disciplined men not subject to the whims of a dictator.<sup>39</sup> He further displayed his confidence and trust in the army during by designating the Chief of the Presidential Staff as the council's secretary and principal coordinator.

In one sense, Avila Camacho's drive for national unification culminated in September 1942 as a result of the changes he made in the army. The most significant move occurred on 1 September 1942 when he formally appointed ex-president Cárdenas as SECDEF.<sup>40</sup> The President had offered the position to Cárdenas on 22 May 1942 when Mexico's entrance into the war seemed inevitable, but Cárdenas declined the offer. By September, the gravity of the national situation dictated that Cárdenas assume a more assertive role at the national level. The selection of Cárdenas as SECDEF had profound political significance from both an external and domestic point of view, and the move guaranteed that the army would adhere to the nationalistic proclivities of its new leader.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Manuel Avila Camacho, "Mensaje al Consejo Supremo de la Defensa Nacional," (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Divulgación Popular, 1942) : 5-16.

<sup>40</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 95 and Ruiz Massieu and Flores Maldonado : 196. There seems to be some confusion over the exact date of Cárdenas' appointment because Torres (p. 124) cites 9 September and Suárez (p. 186) cites 11 September. However, information extracted from official sources use 1 September.

<sup>41</sup>Torres : 124-125.

Cárdenas replaced the Revolutionary veteran, General Macías. Demonstrating both the loyalty and discipline that was becoming accepted practice within the army, General Macías graciously accepted his demotion. At a banquet given in his honor on 18 September 1942, the general acknowledged congratulations on his being named commander of the Pacific Military Region (R.M.P.) and declared he would accomplish his new mission to the fullest.<sup>42</sup> The ex-SECDEF received more than adequate compensation for his institutional loyalty. From 1945-1950, he served as governor in his home state of Sinaloa. After his term as governor, he returned to active duty as commander of the 1st Military Zone in Mexico City, the army's most prestigious zone. He served out the remainder of a lengthy military career as Director of Military Pensions from 1957-1970. The culmination of his illustrious career came in 1973, when he received the Belisario Domínguez award, a prominent national award given for distinguished public service.<sup>43</sup> The case of General Macías illustrated how many of the Revolutionary officers had begun to ally themselves with the official "system" that the Revolution had bequeathed to the Mexican people. *Caudillo* rule no longer held weight within the army. Loyalty to the institutions and to the president, in particular, assured military leaders of ample rewards.

A well-publicized luncheon at the Officers' Club on 11 September 1942 gave the President the opportunity to address more than 200 generals on the enormous responsibility facing the army. Avila Camacho described the army as both an author and

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<sup>42</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 710.1/101-74.

<sup>43</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 544.2/24 and Camp, Political Biographies : 181-182.

product of the Revolution, representing a synthesis of youth and maturity. He then called for solidarity within the army, so that the nation would continue to place its trust in that loyal institution. All the living ex-presidents attended, and their presence demonstrated unity at the highest political levels. By this time, Avila Camacho had made peace with the disgruntled generals who had been slighted or ostracized in the past. Calles had been welcomed back into the official party; Amaro had been appointed commander of one of the three new military regions, and Mújica had been named commander of the military zone in Baja California.<sup>44</sup> The traditional military parade on 16 September 1942 also had national unity as a theme, and all the ex-presidents had front-row seats. For the public, the parade provided a bird's eye view of the progress made in the army's modernization program. Former president Abelardo Rodríguez, who had been named president of the Committee of National Unification and still retained considerable political influence, helped the Chief of the Presidential Staff organize the parade.<sup>45</sup>

The push for national unification was now complete. In almost two years since his inauguration, the President had brought the army on line with his policies. By bringing alienated generals back into the mainstream, Avila Camacho appeased the still influential group of Revolutionary veterans. The President had few problems with junior officers, a group that expressed great admiration for him. This group especially respected his

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<sup>44</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 708.1/9 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 275-277.

<sup>45</sup>Torres : 130.

fairmindedness and his conciliatory attitude.<sup>46</sup> An example of that attitude came in July 1944. When an army captain attempted to lead a regiment of conscripts in revolt against the government during the early part of Avila Camacho's term, the army apprehended him, tried him for his crime, and sentenced him to death. A few days before the execution, the President commuted the death sentence, and instead, expelled the officer from the army. This beneficent and merciful act earned the President even more respect from the officer corps.<sup>47</sup> Finally, he continued to earn the collective support of the army by attending to the material needs of army members in much the same way he did while serving as SECDEF, by raising salaries and by authorizing the purchase of new equipment.<sup>48</sup>

#### B. Accelerated Reorganization.

While serving as commander of the R.M.P., ex-president Cárdenas became the driving force behind the army's reorganization and the nation's general defense plan. His position gave him the authority to enter into direct negotiations with U.S. military representatives over the joint defense of Mexico's west coast, identified as the region most vulnerable to a possible Japanese attack. The SMN law, originally conceived during the Cárdenas administration, provided the cornerstone of the nation's overall mobilization process, bringing on board the human resources needed to establish a credible defense. In short, Cárdenas had been deeply involved with the army's

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<sup>46</sup>Corona del Rosal Speech and Gunther : 486-488.

<sup>47</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 549.44/732 and Revista del Ejército, July 1944 : 3.

<sup>48</sup>Corona del Rosal Speech; Hamilton : 256-257 and Lieuwen, Arms : 118.



mobilization and reorganization since the early stages of the Avila Camacho administration.

The pace of the army's modernization and reorganization picked up considerably after Cárdenas took over as SECDEF. The President approved the army's general reorganization plan, submitted by General Cárdenas, on 9 November 1942. Army leaders began to implement the three-phase plan in January 1943. The first stage called for the creation of three infantry divisions, the first comprised of volunteers and the latter two made up of the first group of conscripts enrolled under the SMN law. These new divisions existed exclusively for training purposes. The army added a new motormechanized brigade, equipped principally with modern vehicles obtained from the United States, as part of the reorganization plan. Some coastal artillery and anti-aircraft batteries and a radar company were also added to the existing inventory. The reorganization plan introduced 30 regional guard units to perform rural police and escort duties previously accomplished by active army units. To ensure unity of command within the armed forces, the President placed the Mexican navy under operational control of the army in September 1942, an arrangement that endured until the end of the war.<sup>49</sup> The navy had only become an independent Secretariat in January 1941, and the army had still maintained some degree of control over the navy through the Secretary of the Navy,

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<sup>49</sup>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Memoria de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional Septiembre de 1943-Agosto de 1944 (Mexico City: Taller Autográfico, 1944) : 17-19. Hereafter cited as SDN Memoria with the pertinent year, for example, SDN Memorias 1943-44; Fuentes : 182; Leon : 532-536; Torres : 110 and 137; "La Nueva Organización de la Defensa Nacional," Revista del Ejército, August and September 1942 : 2-4 and "La Reorganización del Ejército y la Educación Militar del Pueblo," Revista del Ejército, October, November and December 1942 : 2-4.

General Heriberto Jara Corona, a well known Revolutionary general and a former president of the PRM.

The second phase of the army's reorganization plan led to the creation of the 4th Infantry Division, which like the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions was comprised of conscripts. In this phase of the modernization plan, the motormechanized brigade was equipped with a group of medium size combat vehicles manufactured in the United States. In the final phase of the reorganization, the recently formed 4th Infantry Division was deactivated, and its personnel were divided between the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions. With the elimination of a Japanese military threat, the three military regions charged with coastal defense were disbanded in April 1944, their primary mission having been assumed by the new training divisions and other assorted commissions and committees. The territorial division reverted back to the traditional military zone organization with the SDN having direct control over each zone. Army leaders gave the military zones the job of training those SMN members under their zonal jurisdiction who had not been called to active duty.<sup>50</sup>

Although not directly related to the formal reorganization plan, other changes occurred during this time frame which contributed to the increased professionalization of the Mexican army. The army gained considerable prestige in January 1943 when it opened the Central Military Hospital (Hospital Militar Central) in Lomas de Sotelo, a suburb of Mexico City. The hospital had over 2000 beds and had the largest capacity

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<sup>50</sup>Leon : 533-536; SDN Memorias, 1943-44 : 23-24 and Toral : 498 and 507.

of any hospital in the country at the time.<sup>51</sup> A concerted effort had been made to upgrade the food services within the army , from both an organizational and nutritional standpoint since early 1943.<sup>52</sup> Military life insurance for all soldiers was introduced in May 1943, bringing to fruition a project initiated in 1937.<sup>53</sup> The army high command changed the army's promotion system in November 1943. For the first time, army leaders established a 50 percent promotion rate and identified competency, in lieu of seniority, as the principal criterion for promotions.<sup>54</sup> Finally, an across the board pay raise came in November 1943, followed a few days later by the implementation of a "special pay" regulation authorizing additional remuneration for army members serving in key positions, or possessing special qualifications. Examples of individuals eligible for this additional compensation included graduates of the ESG, military engineers, pilots, equestrian instructors, and designated commanders. The new regulation also provided for cost of living adjustments, representational funds, and special pay for temporary duty performed away from one's home base.<sup>55</sup>

The Mexican army's reorganization during the throes of World War II has been described by official sources as the most complete and the most radical that the army had

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<sup>51</sup>León : 539; Toral : 497 and "La Nueva Organización en la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Revista del Ejército, August and September 1942 : 2-4.

<sup>52</sup>SDN Memorias 1943-44 : 17.

<sup>53</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.2/30.

<sup>54</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1944 : 3.

<sup>55</sup>Diario oficial #26, 1 December 1943 and #31, 7 December 1943.

ever experienced.<sup>56</sup> Major army units underwent radical transformations in their structures, armament, equipment, and training. The creation of new entities such as the SMN and the Regional Guards had been unprecedented moves. The word change best characterized what occurred in the Mexican army during World War II. Nothing much happened structurally or organizationally within the Mexican army after World War II until the early 1970s. For example, the motormechanized brigade formed during the war years remained as the only significant motorized unit in the inventory until the 1970s. The major changes in military aviation (discussed below) also remained virtually in tact until the 1970s.

A further solidification and acceptance of a military ideology accompanied those changes. The evolving ideology preached professionalism with a distinct nationalistic hue, and emphasized other values such as institutional loyalty and discipline. The war experience had a positive effect ideologically on the Mexican army, and in some respects, this ideology that had begun to mature during World War II would continue to have a major impact on the Mexican army up through the 1980s.

### Forging An Alliance with the United States

In addition to his leadership during the turmoil of World War II, President Avila Camacho might best be remembered for having established a quasi-formal military alliance with the U.S. for the first and only time in the nation's history. The

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<sup>56</sup>Tomás Sánchez Hernández, "Transformación del Ejército," Revista del Ejército, November 1943 : 4-8; "La Reorganización del Ejército," Revista del Ejército, January-April 1943 : 1-5; Revista del Ejército, January 1944 : 3 and Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 101-102.

professionalization and modernization of the Mexican army, to some extent, can be linked to military agreements entered into with the U.S. Much can be written about the many details of the Mexican-U.S. alliance that existed during World War II, but the main focus here will be directed toward the key aspects of that alliance, and how the wartime military relationship helped to set the tone for the future relations between the two militaries. At the same time, certain episodes in the relationship served to reinforce the Mexican nationalism that was already an integral part of the army's ideology. In fact, nationalism influenced many of the decisions high-level army leaders made during the war years. Lázaro Cárdenas, in particular, kept the nationalist fervor at a high pitch, and assiduously repelled what he saw were U.S. attempts to impinge on Mexico's sovereignty. While, Avila Camacho told a U.S. journalist in the first year of his presidency that it was his ambition "to make relations between the U.S. and Mexico better than they have ever been before...",<sup>57</sup> his former mentor and new SECDEF did not share this same perspective. Military relations between both countries entered a difficult period at the beginning of 1942. Cárdenas had just been appointed commander of the R.M.P., and he insisted on defending Mexico sovereignty to the fullest despite persistent attempts by the United States to participate directly in the defense of Mexico's west coast.

Cárdenas became incensed in early January 1942 when he learned that a contingent of about 30 U.S. army soldiers had crossed over the border into Mexico in search of possible clandestine Japanese bases, air strips, and fuel depots. This group had been

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<sup>57</sup>Gunther : 485.

authorized by the Mexican government to conduct a geological survey in Mexico, yet Cárdenas felt the group had exceeded its bounds, and he called for its immediate withdrawal. After an unfriendly verbal exchange with the U.S. forces, the R.M.P., following presidential orders, set up permanent liaison with the Fourth U.S. Army headquartered at the Presidio of San Francisco under the command of General John L. DeWitt. Cárdenas had a cordial meeting with DeWitt in the Mexican border city of Tijuana on 20 January 1942, where they discussed a number of pressing issues concerning mutual defense of Mexico's west coast, including sites for U.S.-equipped radar stations. However, the talks broke off without a formal agreement because the U.S. delegation insisted on direct U.S. participation in defense operations along the Mexican coasts. Cárdenas adamantly adhered to his policy of defending Mexico with Mexicans and of not permitting foreign troops on Mexican soil. President Avila Camacho formally concurred with Cárdenas' policy a short time later. Cárdenas sent his Chief of Staff, Colonel Luis Alamillo Flores, to San Francisco to reiterate that policy to General DeWitt and his staff.<sup>58</sup>

Cárdenas later reinforced the Mexican position by making public declarations to the effect that, although an attack against Mexico by Japan was theoretically possible, such

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<sup>58</sup>Luis Alamillo Flores, *Memorias*, (Mexico City: Editorial Extemporáneos, S.A., 1976) : 552-558; Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Western Hemisphere. The Framework of Hemisphere Defense, United States Army in World War II Series* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1960) : 356-358; Toral : 494; Torres : 115-116 and Suárez : 183-184. As Cárdenas' Chief of Staff, Colonel Alamillo had substantive insight on the Mexican way of thinking with regard to defense issues. Although his memoirs are written with a strong nationalistic tone, the book does provide useful information and background on the army leaders involved in the negotiations, and the problems they encountered in trying to work out an acceptable agreement with the U.S. The book does have a major drawback; it does not use dates so the reader can become disoriented at times and must rely on other sources for the dates of specific incidents. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, Alamillo's book provides a better understanding of the Mexican problems and mindset during the negotiations with the U.S. than any other.

a possibility remained extremely remote. In spite of the suspicion that existed on both sides, Mexico and the United States signed a plan of collaboration, for the defense of the western coastal areas of both nations, on 20 March 1942. This plan reviewed methods of exchanging information, setting up radar stations, building airfields, and the conditions under which the armed forces of one country could operate on the territory of the other. The issue of control of the airfields persisted as a source of contention between both parties. In spite of Mexican objections, the United States insisted on managing both the radar stations and the airfields built with U.S. support. Cárdenas met with DeWitt again on 24 March 1942 to discuss each side's role in the construction of the airfields and radar stations. Cárdenas obtained a commitment to allow the Mexicans to run the radars with the help of a small contingent of U.S. technicians at each station to transmit pertinent data back to the U.S. Despite this commitment, Mexico still seemed reluctant to grant formal permission for the radar stations, but DeWitt continued to press for the sites.<sup>59</sup>

This radar question and other issues that arose during the war would eventually be resolved by the Joint Mexican-U.S. Defense Commission (JMUSDC), constituted on 12 January 1942 after more than a year of negotiations.<sup>60</sup> Military talks between Mexico and the United States began under the terms of the Declaration of Reciprocal Assistance and Cooperation for Defense of nations of the Americas adopted at the Havana

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<sup>59</sup>Alamillo Flores, Memorias :562-565; Conn and Fairchild : 361-362 and Torres : 116-119.

<sup>60</sup>The Mexican acronym for the JMUSDC is CMEUDC (Comisión México-Estados Unidos de Defensa Conjunta). A presidential decree of 24 February 1942 activated the Mexican section of the joint commission.

Conference on 30 July 1940. Despite the urgency expressed by the Americans, the commission took time in developing because Mexico did not express much enthusiasm for supporting the United States against the Axis powers at the outset of the war, and because Mexico used the talks as a bargaining chip to resolve the oil dispute dating back to 1938. Two Mexican historians suggested this reaction was to be expected since "Mexican nationalism of the twentieth century was founded on the struggle against its northern neighbor..."<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the country's top leaders recognized the need for immediate cooperation with the U.S. even if the majority of the Mexican population did not. Consequently, these leaders agreed to the creation of the JMUSDC with its mission of studying common defense problems, evaluating current defense plans, and proposing joint defense measures. This commission facilitated military relations between both countries and remains the one formal apparatus from the World War II alliance that has survived to the present.<sup>62</sup>

Once the JMUSDC went into operation, it helped to resolve the radar issue in April 1942, by recommending radar stations be created in Mexico. General DeWitt sought authorization to set up the stations with U.S. personnel while the required number of Mexicans received training on the radar systems. Cárdenas obtained presidential approval for a plan to train army officers to handle the radars. The army identified 18 officers with some capability in English along with 22 students from the Advanced

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<sup>61</sup>Zoraida Vázquez and Meyer : 158.

<sup>62</sup>John D. Wirth, Oxford Companion to the Second World War, forthcoming; Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 91-92; Conn and Fairchild : 337-344; Evolución : 162-163; Lozoya, Ejército : 90-92; Prewitt : 620; Torres : 126-127 and Zoraida Vázquez : 157-158.



School of Electric Mechanical Engineers (E.S.I.M.E.) whom they virtually drafted into service to make up for the shortfall in qualified personnel. The radar students went to Fort Rosenkrans, California for the needed radar training.<sup>63</sup> This episode illustrated the Mexican leaders' preoccupation with nationalism and their determination to show the United States that Mexico could defend her territory with her own armed forces.

The U.S. army set up three radar stations in Mexico between June and July 1942, and the Mexican forces took control of them in August. One U.S. officer and five enlisted men continued to work at each station for the purpose of processing information for use by the U.S.<sup>64</sup> The negotiations for the radar stations had been long and drawn out, but in the end, Cárdenas obtained the control he sought over the radar sites. The difficulty in establishing radar stations in Mexico gradually caused the United States to lose interest in building airfields and sending troops south of the border, which in any case was less pressing after the tide of the war turned at Midway.<sup>65</sup>

The JMUSDC made its most important contribution in managing the Lend-Lease Program between Mexico and the U.S. Thus, when the commission had its first meeting on 18 March 1942, the major topic of discussion concerned a lend-lease agreement. Throughout Latin America, the military wanted badly to upgrade their equipment, and Mexico was no exception. An attempt to procure credits through the Eximbank met with delays, given the probability of a lend-lease agreement, and that agreement did

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<sup>63</sup>Alamillo Flores, Memorias : 568-573.

<sup>64</sup>Conn and Fairchild : 358-359; Torres : 119-121 and Zoraida Vázquez and Meyer : 158-159.

<sup>65</sup>Conn and Fairchild : 349.

materialize on 27 March 1942. Mexico received a \$10 million credit of which she agreed to pay 48 percent with specified annual payments extending from 1 July 1943 to 1 July 1948. In return for this credit, Mexico agreed to make military equipment and information available to the United States, if the United States determined a valid need for such material, and if the request did not adversely affect the Mexican economy. The agreement prohibited Mexico from transferring any equipment or defense information provided by the United States to a third country. When U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared the defense of Mexico to be of vital interest to the national security of the U.S. on 6 May 1942, it paved the way for greater cooperation on the part of the U.S. section of the JMUSDC. The two countries signed a new lend-lease agreement under the same conditions for \$40 million almost a year later. Mexico had to pay back only 33 percent of the cost of the equipment under the revised accord.<sup>66</sup> The Lend-Lease Program made a significant contribution to the Mexican army's modernization program, and the army and air force retained much of the equipment, obtained through the program, in their inventories until the 1970s.

The JMUSDC contributed to the joint defense in other areas. It facilitated the installation of direct telephone lines at key headquarters in Mexico, the exchange of

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<sup>66</sup>U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States 1942, Vol. VI, The American Republics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963) : 485-488; U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States 1943, Vol. VI, The American Republics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965) : 397-402. Hereafter cited as U.S. Foreign Relations with the pertinent year and volume. See also Tomás Sánchez Hernández, "Transformación del Ejército," Revista del Ejército, November 1943 : 4-8; Alamillo, "La Nación" : 92-93; Conn and Fairchild : 354-355 and Torres : 127-128, 142-143.

political and military information, cryptographic liaison with the United States, Europe and Africa, and aerial photography of Mexico's west coast.

When it appeared Mexican-U.S. military cooperation would soon become a reality, President Avila Camacho ordered a study to ascertain what types of military factories Mexico needed. The JMUSDC drew on this study to justify the construction of a munitions factory in Mexico City which could produce munitions in calibers ranging from 7mm to 155mm. Work on the factory began in December 1943, but by 1951, the Mexican Ambassador to the United States was seeking \$600,000 in military credits to finish the project. The U.S. State Department action officer favorably endorsed the request, and the factory was eventually completed.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout the many rounds of JMUSDC talks, the Mexican delegation jealously guarded Mexican sovereignty and strictly adhered to its instructions to brook no compromise on the issue of defending Mexico exclusively with Mexican forces. That stance, so staunchly defended by General Cárdenas, ultimately precluded the signing of a formal collaboration plan between because the two sides could never decide on who would command a joint force in the case of an enemy attack. In early 1944, U.S. representatives abandoned their interest in formalizing such a plan when the war in Europe turned in favor of the Allies.

Lázaro Cárdenas had a direct bearing on the consolidation of a nationalist posture within the Mexican army. Mexico adopted a strong nationalist stance on numerous occasions during his presidency, the expropriation of foreign oil interest being the most

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<sup>67</sup>Alamillo, "La Nación" : 91-93; Conn and Fairchild : 355; Evolución : 164; Torres : 140-142; U.S. Foreign Relations 1951, Vol. II : 1481-1484 and USSDCF, 812.24/9-1145.

notable. Cárdenas continued to exhibit this aggressive nationalism in his role as SECDEF. U.S. officials frequently perceived intransigence or a reluctance to cooperate on Cárdenas' part, in discussions about presumed vital security interests. Although the ex-president's attitude manifested a general dislike for the United States, Cárdenas himself would later disagree with these perceptions. In fact, he had shown an interest in cooperating militarily with the United States since the latter years of his presidency. One historian noted that Cárdenas had been adamant in demanding that any form of military cooperation directly benefit the Mexican army as well as upgrade the country's defense. It would be wrong to say that Cárdenas did not want to cooperate with the United States. He simply sought to ensure that collaboration occurred under the conditions set by Mexico.<sup>68</sup> A Cárdenas biographer insisted that Cárdenas harbored anti-imperialist sentiments but not antipathy toward the United States, disliking only certain U.S. leaders whose conduct he disapproved of. For example, he blacklisted President Harry S. Truman on account of Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.<sup>69</sup> Mexico would never submit to any U.S. demand that in the remotest way could be interpreted as a breach of national sovereignty. Cárdenas' dealings with the U.S. during World War II taught a lesson in nationalism to old and young officers alike. This nationalist spirit became totally ingrained in the minds of Mexican army officers in

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<sup>68</sup>Torres : 138-142. Conn and Fairchild (334-335 and 360), in what is considered the U.S. Army's official history of World War II, write that U.S. military representatives believed that Cárdenas was accessible and willing to cooperate with the U.S. military on joint defense issues.

<sup>69</sup>Suárez : 183-186.

the years following World War II. The rigid discipline that had come to characterize the army precluded any straying from that nationalist path.

In the later war years, Mexican leaders also realized they had to offer more than a simple promise of an adequate national defense if they wanted continued U.S. support for the army's modernization program.<sup>70</sup> The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force, known in Mexico as the *Fuerza Aerea Expedicionaria Mexicana* (FAEM), represented Mexico's active participation and commitment to the Allied cause and a living symbol of the patriotism that Mexicans, in general, supported wholeheartedly.

#### The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (FAEM)

The creation of the FAEM had considerable ideological importance for Mexico. While the FAEM in fact made only a very minor contribution to the Allied war effort, the 201st Air Squadron, which made up the FAEM, possessed great symbolic value for Mexico as a nation. The FAEM brought Mexico respectability in the eyes of the international community and helped to justify Mexico's participation in the many international conferences that would ultimately decide the fate of the post-World War II world. Mexico's contribution to the Allied cause gave Mexico added prestige within the region. Only one other nation, Brazil, sent troops to fight overseas with the Allies. Brazil captured the lion's share of lend-lease support to Latin America because of its

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<sup>70</sup>Torres : 142-144.

pivotal role in the defense of the Atlantic and its support for the North African campaign.<sup>71</sup>

In military terms, the FAEM symbolized the Mexican army's rapid maturation process since the beginning of the war. By fighting along side the "big powers," the Mexican army justified its modernization and professionalization programs. As a military force, the Mexican army had come of age for the first time since the end of the Mexican Revolution. The FAEM embodied the first and last collective patriotic manifestation since the Revolutionary experiences of the early twentieth century. This patriotic act has not been forgotten by the army; it is commemorated annually in an official SDN ceremony.

The issue of direct Mexican participation in the conflict proved extremely sensitive, especially since President Avila Camacho had publicly declared that no Mexican troops would be sent to the front. This situation had strong political overtones. Any suggestion that Mexican forces might fight abroad would have raised fear and hysteria over the possibility of mass conscription. In retrospect, it appeared that President Avila Camacho and other top level military leaders had never thoroughly dismissed the idea of direct Mexican participation in the Allied cause.

Behind-the-scenes maneuvering to obtain an active commitment from the Mexican army began as early as September 1942. After the 1942 Independence Day military parade, the Mexican President told U.S. ambassador George Messersmith that a number of army generals had expressed a desire to participate in combat. The ambassador was

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<sup>71</sup>Wirth, *op. cit.*

skeptical, and he advised Washington that the parade had not mobilized popular support, despite the addition of new U.S.-manufactured mechanized vehicles to the Mexican army's inventory. That situation and the new SECDEF's reluctance to commit troops to combat made remote the prospect of direct Mexican participation. Mexican leaders, however, appeared more receptive to the idea of pledging a Mexican force as the war began to favor the Allies in late 1943. A number of Mexican generals anxiously awaited an opportunity to commit Mexico, and even Cárdenas seemed to have changed his mind. He indicated that Mexico finally had the proper equipment and training to reinforce the Allies, if called upon to do so. After U.S. Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall visited Mexico for the Independence Day celebrations in September 1943, he sent a memorandum to President Roosevelt relating the positive nature of his visit. Roosevelt responded by encouraging Marshall to find a way to obtain Mexican participation, if only symbolically.<sup>72</sup>

Avila Camacho himself introduced new initiatives to promote Mexican participation. In closing a conference for generals at the ESG in November 1943, he declared that the Mexican army would go where duty called. He announced to the Mexican Senate, a few weeks later, that he would send Mexican troops abroad, if the Allies requested them. Avila Camacho formalized his proposal when he told high ranking officers, assembled at a Mexican air force banquet on 8 March 1944, that the time had come for Mexico to participate actively in the war. The President suggested Mexico could best be represented by an aviation unit. The army had to be the service chosen to represent

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<sup>72</sup>Torres : 142-146.

Mexico given its size and importance. An aviation unit from the army offered the most viable option. An air force squadron, a relatively small unit, could be easily trained and could create the most damage with the least amount of blood spilled. In addition, army aviation had been receiving new equipment from the United States since 1942.<sup>73</sup> A Mexican historian credits U.S. Ambassador Messersmith with the idea of having an air force squadron represent the Mexican army in the fighting. Messersmith presented this idea to President Roosevelt in January 1944, and the U.S. President promptly ordered the U.S. Air Force staff to make the necessary arrangements to begin training the Mexican squadron by 1 July 1944.<sup>74</sup>

The high level of confidentiality and the behind-the-scenes discussions between the Mexican president, his foreign relations minister, and the U.S. ambassador indicated that Avila Camacho had taken on military cooperation with the U.S. as his own special project. A letter written by the U.S. ambassador to a high level U.S. Air Force official in January 1945 shed some light on the extent of Avila Camacho's diplomatic maneuvering. Ambassador Messersmith elaborated on how, at the outset of the preliminary talks over the issue of direct Mexican military participation, only President Avila Camacho, his foreign minister, President Roosevelt, the U.S. Secretary of State, and himself had been privy to the content of the discussions. While President Avila Camacho told Messersmith that Mexican participation would boost morale at home and

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<sup>73</sup>Enrique Sandoval Castarrica, Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1946) : 20-23; Evolución : 89 and Torres : 146-147. Sandoval Castarrica's work is considered the official history of the FAEM, and is by far the most comprehensive work on the subject. Yet this book has not been widely distributed and access to it is limited.

<sup>74</sup>Torres : 146-147.



improve Mexican-U.S. relations, he felt total secrecy was needed to successfully carry out the project. Such a plan would preclude opposition elements from interfering with or sabotaging the project. As it turned out, public opinion had been favorably influenced to the point where the necessary coordination could be carried out through normal military channels.<sup>75</sup>

General William E. Hall of the U.S. Air Force met with Mexican SECDEF Cárdenas in Cuernavaca, a resort town south of Mexico City, to iron out the last minute details on 10 June 1944. By July 1944, the Mexican army had formed an air force regiment, along the lines of a comparable U.S. unit by July 1944. The new regiment had three squadrons, the 201st, the 202nd and the 203rd. The Mexican plan called for the 201st Squadron to go to the United States for training on P-47s with the other two squadrons remaining behind in a support role. President Avila Camacho received the 201st Squadron on 16 July 1944, and five days later, officially bid the unit farewell as it boarded the train en route for its first phase of training at Randolph Field in Texas where the squadron arrived on 25 July. In his farewell speech, the President told unit members that they need not worry about their families, since the army would guarantee their welfare. From Randolph Field, the 201st Air Force Squadron moved to an air force base in Pocatello, Idaho on 25 September, and then moved to Major's Field in Greenville, Texas for its final phase of training commencing in late November. On 27 December 1944, an order from the National Defense Secretariat designated the unit as the 201st

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<sup>75</sup>USSDCF, Reel 14, frames 207-209. Mexican army leaders had been preparing for the possibility of sending a contingent of forces abroad, and the final decision came as only a mild surprise. President Avila Camacho had stated that any Mexican unit sent abroad would be commanded by a Mexican officer and would fight under the Mexican flag, a concession the Allies honored. See Sandoval Castarrica : 19-20.

Squadron of the FAEM, effective 1 January 1945. General Alamillo, who had since been promoted and reassigned as military attaché in Washington, received notification that the 201st Squadron would be sent to the Southeast Pacific theater after it completed its training. Both countries signed a formal agreement on 15 January 1945 detailing such items as command arrangements, administration, equipment and a formula for covering expenses.<sup>76</sup>

The 201st Squadron completed its training on 19 February 1945. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, General Francisco L. Urquiza, went to Texas to officially register the unit and present the unit standard. By this time, the Mexican people stood firmly behind the 201st Squadron. Letters and telegrams showed substantive popular support for Mexico's main contribution to the Allied effort. Congress sent a message to the National Defense Secretariat expressing its respect and admiration for the members of the FAEM. Newspaper editorials also came out in support of Mexico's direct participation in the war, a distinct change from their position six months earlier.<sup>77</sup>

On 27 December 1944, President Avila Camacho requested authorization from the Senate, in accordance with the Constitution, to send troops outside of Mexico for the duration of the war. The FAEM only had to await deployment instructions. The orders came on 14 March 1945, directing the squadron to Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg,

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<sup>76</sup>Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 96; Conn and Fairchild : 355-356; Evolución : 89-90; Sandoval Castarrica : 23-170; Toral : 498 and Torres : 147-150.

<sup>77</sup>Sandoval Castarrica : 194-204 and USSDCF, 812.20/3-1545.

California, and then to San Francisco on 27 March 1945 where it boarded a ship for the 33-day voyage to the Philippines. The unit arrived in Luzón on 30 April.<sup>78</sup>

The 201st Air Squadron gained only limited combat experience. It engaged in combat activity between 1 June and 10 July 1945 and operated with an average strength of 32 pilots and 17 P-47 aircraft. The squadron flew a total of 50 missions and 293 sorties during this period and suffered nine casualties, five in combat and four during the intensive training period.<sup>79</sup>

The FAEM departed the Philippines on 22 October 1945 for San Francisco, California where they disembarked and headed for Mexico by rail. The unit members arrived to a hero's welcome in Mexico City on 18 November 1945. When the war ended, the FAEM no longer had a purpose, and Presidential decree 1760 dated 23 November 1945 deactivated the unit effective 1 December 1945. The 201st Air Squadron remained intact, but its control reverted to the Department of Military Aviation. Another presidential decree directed that its unit flag remain on permanent display in the Hall of Flags at the National Museum of History.<sup>80</sup> The last page of its official history succinctly described the FAEM and its contribution as having been a "modest force that, with minimal cost in blood and money, in a short time period

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<sup>78</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 161.1/81; Evolución : 89-90 and Sandoval Castarrica : 205-225.

<sup>79</sup>The casualty figures listed come from USSDCF, 812.20/11-2145. Different sources have provided different figures. While the exact numbers may be difficult to ascertain, as a percentage, 20 percent seems closest to the mark. See also Evolución : 91; Sandoval Castarrica : 518 and Toral : 500.

<sup>80</sup>Evolución : 90-91; Sandoval Castarrica : 542-545 and USSDCF, 812.20/11-2145.

undertook a visible activity on the Pacific front, making the voice of Mexico a reality in the defense of human liberties on the side of the United Nations."<sup>81</sup>

In the overall context of World War II, Mexico's political decision to send a combat unit to support the Allied cause clearly overshadowed the modest military achievements of that unit. The real value of the FAEM rested, in part, on the recognition Mexico received within the international community. In that regard, the U.S. Army's official history of World War II referred to the FAEM as the "true measure of the co-operation that began in 1941."<sup>82</sup> The FAEM also had major symbolic importance on the home front where it represented the growing maturity of both the army and the nation. It also symbolized, at least implicitly, the national unification Avila Camacho had established as a goal at the beginning of his presidency. The performance of the FAEM was said to have rejuvenated the country's Revolutionary heritage; the Revolutionary army had once again sacrificed the lives of its brave soldiers for the security and welfare of Mexico.

The FAEM's return to Mexico city sparked celebrations all along the route. The unit's activities received considerable press coverage, and political leaders made much fanfare over the congratulatory letters the squadron received from U.S. President Harry S. Truman and Generals George C. Marshall and Douglas MacArthur. Truman wrote that Mexico's splendid contribution in the Pacific theater sustained her admirable tradition of weighing in on the side of democracy. The U.S. President also awarded

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<sup>81</sup>Sandoval Castarrica : 545.

<sup>82</sup>Conn and Fairchild : 363.

Colonel Antonio Cárdenas Rodríguez, the FAEM commander, the U.S. armed forces Legion of Merit for his brave service.<sup>83</sup>

The Mexican people felt very proud of their country and their armed forces, the latter having brought recent notoriety to Mexico. More than 270,000 Mexicans had fought with the armies of the democratic countries during World War II. The large majority had served with the U.S. armed forces, and more than ten percent of those had been awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in combat, a clear sign of valor on the part of those Mexican soldiers.<sup>84</sup> Many became U.S. citizens, which underscored the close social connections between the two peoples forged during World War II.

The mood of the country upon the FAEM's return showed the nation had truly come together. On the day Cárdenas resigned as SECDEF, despite having opposed sending Mexican troops outside the country, he wrote in his diary that direct Mexican participation in the war had brought respectability to Mexico and provided an exemplar of patriotism and dignity.<sup>85</sup> It has been written that Avila Camacho perceived of the nation as a depository of Mexico's historical legacy. Avila Camacho opposed the concept of history as something recent and replete with successes. He believed each short period of history required a renovation of the ideals of the Revolution. The Mexican president envisioned history as a legacy or a treasure whose individual items of

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<sup>83</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 161.1/81; Sandoval Castarrica : 513-541 and 587-588 and Toral : 502.

<sup>84</sup>Lars Schoultz, National Security and United States Policy Toward Latin America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) : 175; Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 88 and Wirth, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup>Torres : 150.

value have been accumulated as a result of the nation's struggle down through the years.<sup>86</sup> In the past, the army had always been at the center of the nation's struggles as evidenced by the FAEM's participation in World War II. The FAEM added to the value of Mexico's treasure chest by reviving the Revolutionary ideals of patriotism and valor. As noted in Chapter Three, the army had long considered itself as the repository of historical tradition, and by the war's end, the FAEM had become another tradition to be revered. In this way, the FAEM revitalized the nation's Revolutionary mystique.

A discussion of the FAEM would be incomplete without some comparison with the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) that fought with the Allies in Italy, and later had a prominent influence on Brazil's development. Although Brazil and Mexico sent forces abroad to fight for the Allied cause, the long range effects these expeditionary forces had on their countries were quite different. Perhaps more importantly, the comparison illustrates why Mexico did not become more closely allied with the U.S. in the post-war period, even though the foundation for closer relations had apparently been laid during the war years.

In the Brazilian case, the FEB consisted of a 25,000-man combat division, the only ground force sent by a Latin American country, and a sizeable one at that. The FEB saw heavy combat in Italy and suffered close to 3000 casualties. Its combat actions included receiving the surrender of a German division. The officers of the FEB worked closely with their U.S. counterparts and witnessed first hand the failures of the authoritarian governments of fascist Germany and Italy in the face of American organization and

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<sup>86</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 191-192.

efficiency. The close integration of Brazilian and U.S. forces fostered warm personal ties between the officers of both militaries resulting in part from the extensive cooperation that became the norm. The Joint Brazil-U.S. Defense Commission encouraged active cooperation and led to high-level exchanges on security issues and substantial matériel support by the U.S.<sup>87</sup>

Combat experience served as a powerful agent of socialization, establishing permanent bonds among the Brazilian officers. Using the U.S. military war colleges as models and relying on U.S. military advisors for guidance, Brazilian army leaders created their own Superior War College (*Escola Superior de Guerra*) for the purpose of formulating a new doctrine of national security and development. It came as little surprise that the artillery commander of the FEB became the school's first commandant in 1950. The training at the new war college and the respect and recognition gained from the FEB experience encouraged political leaders to bring key army officers into the political arena to resolve disputes fairly. When the country's political situation grew too chaotic, the country turned to the military for a solution. General H.A. Castello Branco, a FEB veteran and a friend of the United States, took over the presidency in 1964 and placed many of his FEB officers in key government positions.<sup>88</sup>

By contrast, the Mexican experience evolved in a very different manner. Like Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas, Mexicans showed marked concern for their

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<sup>87</sup>Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) : 87, 128-129 and 242. This is a well written and researched book that points out other differences between the Brazilian and Mexican armed forces not directly related to their World War II experiences. See also Schoultz : 175.

<sup>88</sup>Stepan, *The Military in Politics* : 117, 174-175, 216-217 and 239-252.

sovereignty, but remained wary of military cooperation with the powerful neighbor to the north. Mexico's contribution to the Allied cause, an air squadron, was much smaller than the Brazilian force, which also included combat air units, and subsequently did not generate a high degree of contact or integration with their U.S. allies. In addition, the Mexican air force had been considered a stepchild of the army, much smaller in size and thoroughly subordinate to army directives. Although the FAEM had great symbolic value and rejuvenated the nation's patriotic spirit, it did not have any high ranking officers who could hope to become influential army leaders. The FAEM had become an important part of Mexican military tradition, but on a lesser scale than it would have been, had it been a straight army unit. The political situation in Mexico was also vastly different from Brazil's during the war years. The nation had come together, and Mexicans lived in a politically stable environment. Perhaps most importantly, Mexico had an aggressive and fairly well-defined nationalism and revolutionary ideology which had matured with relative success in the post-Revolution years. Given the underlying anti-U.S. sentiment that helped to sustain a strong nationalist spirit, it should have come as no surprise that, although military assistance from the U.S. was desirable, the limits of such cooperation remained very restrictive. Due in part to the limited U.S. influence within the Mexican armed forces, the military ideology that continued to evolve since the late 1920s became uniquely Mexican with strong nationalist overtones adhering to a specific creed which would endure well into the future.

The end of the war brought changes in the command structure of the army. Cárdenas resigned as SECDEF, effective 31 August 1945. Having been denied his first



attempt to resign on 23 October 1944, Cárdenas was permitted to turn over his post to General Francisco L. Urquiza, the deputy SECDEF, on 31 August 1945.<sup>89</sup> General Urquiza had ample military experience from the Revolution, and had been the Secretary of War and Navy on 7 May 1920 when then President Venustiano Carranza abandoned Mexico City to escape General Obregón's pursuing forces. Urquiza found himself ostracized from the army during the Obregón and Calles years, but Cárdenas and Avila Camacho revived his military career, and he was appointed deputy SECDEF in August 1942. When he proceeded to demonstrate exceptional discipline and loyalty, the President chose him to serve out Cárdenas' term.<sup>90</sup> After the appointment of Urquiza, the President started to implement the 1936 Retirement Law that reduced career lengths from 35 to 25 years. Avila Camacho forced the retirement of approximately 550 generals and an equal number of colonels with this law, and thereby helped pave the way for a younger and more professional army.<sup>91</sup> The army edged ever further away from the political arena. The new SECDEF declared that politics were off limits to the army because the president had given the order. The SECDEF added that the principles regulating the army had dictated apolitical behavior, and by now, these principles had

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<sup>89</sup>Suárez : 186.

<sup>90</sup>Alfredo Díaz Escobar, El Prestigio y la Dignidad del Ejército Nacional (Mexico City: Ediciones del "COMITE NACIONAL DE ORIENTACION POLITICA," 1946) : 9-12; AGN, Avila Camacho, 702.11/209; Camp, Political Biographies : 304-305 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 47-55.

<sup>91</sup>Díaz Escobar : 26; Fuentes : 63 and Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 144.

already become major component parts of the modern Mexican army's ideology, laws, and regulations.<sup>92</sup>

World peace brought a new feeling of security to Mexico and coincided with the gearing up of a significant presidential campaign. The next presidential election in Mexico would allow a civilian to serve a full term as President of the Republic for the first time since the 1870s. The 1946 presidential election signaled the end of a long era of military presidents, and in some ways, symbolized the more extensive subordination of the military to the civilian authorities. World War II reaffirmed the institutionalization of the Mexican army and the army's alliance with the government. The Mexican army had clearly established itself as a willing and reliable partner in the overall system that emerged from the Revolution, and in turn, found itself firmly entrenched in a new role.

#### Miguel Alemán Introduces a New Era in Civil-Military Relations

If the Avila Camacho administration had special significance because of World War II, then it can be said that the Miguel Alemán presidency held special importance for Mexico because it initiated the long reign of civilian presidents in Mexico and the accompanying dominance of the political sector by civilians. Franklin Margiotta, who has studied the Mexican army's influence in politics, identified four phases, or categories, of government in twentieth-century Mexico. He labeled them as military, military-civil, civil-military and civil. The military phase commenced in 1913 with the

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<sup>92</sup>Díaz Escobar : 18.

overthrow of President Madero. The government transitioned to the military-civil phase in 1929 with the founding of the official party.<sup>93</sup> Alemán's election beckoned the start of the civil-military phase. Following this analysis, Alemán presided over the final phase, which was the natural evolution to an exclusively civil form of government. That government, novel in Mexico, finally emerged with the election of a civilian president and a civilian head of the ruling party in 1964. Prior to 1964, army generals had held the largely symbolic post of party president.

Miguel Alemán assumed office suspicious of certain military leaders, so he acted cautiously to avoid ruffling feathers. Alemán made it apparent from the beginning that he supported the army, and that he looked forward to improving conditions within the armed forces. Uncertain as to how the military would react to a civilian president, Alemán initially resigned himself to offering incentives to the army.

Alemán moved deftly to bolster the substantial power that had come to characterize the Mexican presidency, by improving the general lot of the military, and by gradually phasing out a number of uncooperative and aging Revolutionary generals, whom he replaced with younger and more professional officers who owed their allegiance to the government and himself. Professionalization of the army continued under the leadership of Alemán and his SECDEF, General Gilberto R. Limón Márquez, and that reform further diminished the army's political influence. Cooler military relations with the U.S. eventually became the norm under Alemán, solidifying his predecessor's policy in that regard, and establishing a precedent that future military and political would leave

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<sup>93</sup>Margiotta : 244-245.

unchanged. In the early 1950s, the end of a long and sometimes troublesome era in Mexican politics arrived when Alemán successfully confronted the last military challenge to the presidency by crushing the Henriquista movement, named for its leader General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán.

Alemán entered the 1946 presidential campaign with strong party credentials. Lombardo Toledano, Mexico's powerful labor leader, called Alemán a *cachorro de la revolución* (bear cub of the Revolution) when he advanced Alemán's candidacy in June 1945. This son of General Miguel Alemán González, a supporter of Obregón and Calles who was killed by Escobar rebels in 1929, had been educated as a lawyer and had worked closely with Cárdenas and Avila Camacho. He served under the former as Governor of Veracruz, and under the latter as Secretary of the Interior, which made him responsible for internal security and for the enforcement of the anti-fascist laws which were used to control dissent. During the campaign, Alemán faced little serious competition. The initial candidates all came from the official party, the PRM. That group included Ezequiel Padilla, the Foreign Relations Minister, Javier Rojo Gómez, the mayor of Mexico City, and General Henríquez Guzmán, the commander of the military zone in Jalisco. Rojo and Henríquez dropped out of the race almost immediately, citing the Revolutionary family's support of Alemán and party unity as their justification. Padilla had been a principal architect of the alliance with the U.S. during World War II, and because of that, found scant support among politicians. Neither Padilla nor any of the other opposition candidates had a party platform which offered a viable alternative to that of the PRM. The election results offered no surprises. Alemán won almost 78

percent of the popular vote, and Padilla finished a distant second with barely 19 percent of the vote. The remaining votes were divided among two insignificant military candidates, Generals Jesús Agustín Castro and Enrique Calderón.<sup>94</sup>

The ideological significance of Alemán's victory at the polls should not be overlooked. His election symbolized the institutionalization of *civilismo* in Mexico. *Civilismo* is not easily translated into English. The word is best defined as civilianism. *Civilismo* has had a close correlation with Mexico's history. Civilianism is the opposite of militarism. Militarism equated to dictatorship for many Mexicans, and it mattered little whether the dictatorship was civilian or military. Many Mexicans believed Lázaro Cárdenas broke the tradition of militarism in Mexico. With the Cárdenas presidency, dictatorship ceased to be an acceptable form of rule in Mexico. Dictatorship normally went hand in hand with *continuismo* which meant one leader, or *caudillo*, continued to exercise power by means of a surrogate president. A new and more positive trend referred to as *continuidad* or continuity emerged in its place during the Avila Camacho and Alemán administrations. Continuity depended largely on political stability, something Avila Camacho had passed on to his young civilian successor. Alemán's solidification of that trend had a positive psychological effect on the Mexican people. Alemán's civilian education and experience made him the consummate representation of civilianism and continuity.<sup>95</sup> The Mexican army willingly accepted this change in the

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<sup>94</sup>Felicitas López Portillo, "Las glorias del desarrollismo: el gobierno de Miguel Alemán" *Secuencia* 19 (January-April 1991) : 61-63 and 72-73; Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 213-214; AGN, Alemán Valdés, 544.1/15-2 and 544.1/1-3; Fuentes : 293-294 and Suárez : 190-192.

<sup>95</sup>Bernardo Ponce, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines: Ensayo Para Una Biografía Política (Mexico City: Biografías Ganesa, 1952) : 209-234.

political venue as a result of its institutionalization in the 1930s and the early 1940s. Civilianism came to signify apoliticism for the army, and apoliticism came to comprise an integral part of the ideology that would lead the Mexican army into the future. While discussing the evolution of the Mexican army since the 1940s, ex-President Luis Echeverría stated emphatically that the army's acceptance and defense of *civilismo* since the Alemán years has had a very significant effect on the political development of Mexico. The Mexican army allowed political power to become institutionalized under the auspices of civilian rulers.<sup>96</sup>

Although ex-Presidents Cárdenas and Avila Camacho had viewed Alemán's election as the realization of a long awaited dream, some aging Revolutionary generals felt the army had been slighted by the choice of a civilian president. Even though Alemán had general economic and political stability working in his favor, he still had to proceed cautiously because he was introducing a new generation of leaders into the upper levels of Mexican politics. These political novices, who made up the new Alemán team, had been characterized as young university-educated technicians and had an average age of 42.5 years.<sup>97</sup> This new group juxtaposed a sizeable band of Revolutionary generals in their late fifties and early sixties.<sup>98</sup> The politically adroit Alemán initially tried to win the support of that powerful and influential group, but it soon became clear that his ultimate goal was to cultivate alliances with a younger and more professional group of

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<sup>96</sup>Interview with Luis Echeverría Alvarez, 4 June 1991.

<sup>97</sup>Bautista Rosas : 70-71 and López Portillo : 69.

<sup>98</sup>Sánchez Gutierrez : 278-279.

officers as a means of diluting the influence of the Revolutionary generals. Alemán chose a comparatively young SECDEF to serve as his principal advisor on military issues. When he became SECDEF in December 1946, General Gilberto R. Limón was 51 years old.

Alemán selected Limón because of his demonstrated loyalty. Alemán knew Limón as a fellow member of Avila Camacho's inner circle. President of the Mexican Polo Association and a famous polo player, Limón had served in the prestigious position of Director of the Military College for most of Avila Camacho's administration and was also one of the President's most trusted military advisors.<sup>99</sup> When Urquiza became SECDEF in September 1945, Limón took his place as deputy SECDEF, perhaps at the request of Alemán who had launched his presidential campaign a few months earlier. One may speculate that Alemán had already decided on Limón as his SECDEF because he knew him well and had trusted him. A Mexican politician, who had met Limón in the 1940s, suggested that he fit the Alemán profile--relatively young, physically trim and well versed in the social graces. The politician attributed the last qualification to some training Limón had had in France.<sup>100</sup>

While Limón had more of a true military background than most of his contemporaries, it now mattered little that he lacked the political affiliations and experience many of his fellow generals claimed. Born in Alamos, Sonora in 1895, Limón fought under Obregón during the Revolution and later helped government forces

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<sup>99</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 170 and Gunther : 487.

<sup>100</sup>Interview, January 1991.

to put down rebellions in 1923, 1927, and 1929. He commanded the Presidential Guards for a few years, and from 1932-1934, he headed the Department of Military Manufacturing and Provisions. In this latter capacity, he was the driving force behind the inauguration of the National Gun Powder Factory in February 1934.<sup>101</sup> Unlike some of his contemporaries, General Limón had not overtly exhibited any political aspirations. One seasoned politician who had dealt personally with Limón described him as a professional soldier with good military bearing who was content to carry out directives issued to him by the President.<sup>102</sup> Thus it was no accident that Alemán chose this general to assist him in attending to the army's pressing while transitioning to a new generation of army leaders.

The official party's presidential candidate appealed to both the ideological and material sensitivities of the army. In his proposed *Programa de Gobierno*, Alemán outlined an ambitious plan for improvements within the army. He called the army "the support of the institutions of the people, of the revolutionary conquests, of the security and of the dignity of the nation."<sup>103</sup> The future president urged the army to continue its reorganization and promised salary increases and revisions in the laws governing promotions, pensions, and benefits to augment those benefits. His proposed program of government also encouraged special attention for hygiene and medical improvements within the armed forces. Some other notable military components of the program

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<sup>101</sup>Camp, *Political Biographies* : 170 and *Revista del Ejército*, February 1982 : 37.

<sup>102</sup>Interview, February 1991.

<sup>103</sup>Miguel Alemán Valdés, *Programa de Gobierno* (Mexico City: 1945) : 81-82.



included the establishment of military colonies for retired soldiers, a new integrated military educational system, and overall improvements in the training, housing, feeding and clothing of recruits.<sup>104</sup>

In his inaugural address on 1 December 1946, President Alemán expressed his views more succinctly while emphasizing the army's revolutionary tradition and the need to improve the economic conditions of the members of that loyal institution. He spoke of the army's proud tradition as guardian of institutional peace and restated his administration's commitment to increasing the benefits of all military personnel. He mentioned the creation of an army bank and substantial increases in the value of military life insurance as two proposals he had already been evaluating.<sup>105</sup>

All Mexican presidents in the post-Revolution era have recognized the army as the principal guarantor of political peace and of the institution of the presidency, and have depended on the army to perform that role. A retired Mexican army general noted that civilian presidents deemed the army an invaluable ally, because the army knew the country's problems better than any other institution. The general attributed that reality to what he called "the presence of a soldier in every corner of the Republic." The general also maintained that Alemán initially found himself in a tenuous position as the first elected civilian president since the Revolution. Alemán had fewer military contacts

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid. : 82-84.

<sup>105</sup>Congreso de la Unión, Los Presidentes de México Ante La Nación, 2d ed., Tomo IV (Mexico City: 1985) : 358. Hereafter the specific presidential speeches will be cited as Informe with the month and year of the speech and the page number in the volume.

and less experience in dealing with the army than his predecessors.<sup>106</sup> Yet, Alemán was by no means naive when it came to army affairs. He had had some contact with the army as the son of a Revolutionary general and as Interior Minister under Avila Camacho. Despite this experience, Alemán did exhibit some uncertainty and wariness about the army, and he readily acknowledged the importance of making good on his promises in order to bolster the army's confidence in him.

Alemán's contributions to the Mexican army fell into three categories--economic, institutional and symbolic. After he took office, Alemán worked to realize his many promises to the army. His first moves had political overtones. The new President had the Central Executive Committee (CEN) of the official party elect General Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada as President of the PRI on 5 December 1946. General Sánchez Taboada had been governor of the territory of Baja California del Norte from 1937 to 1944. He later organized Alemán's presidential campaign in the Federal District, using his influence at the highest army levels to obtain support when needed. His election as President of the PRI started a trend that had army generals serving as party presidents up through 1964.<sup>107</sup> One politician who has served in a number of high level political positions since the early 1970s opined that the party presidency was one of the more visible rewards given to the army for its ardent support of the government. Although

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<sup>106</sup>Interview, September 1989.

<sup>107</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 279-280 and Margiotta : 233-234.

largely symbolic, the position carried prestige which reflected directly on the army and offered another example of the government's subtle cooptation of the army.<sup>108</sup>

A review of other key political positions during the Alemán *sexenio* determined that army officers held 15 of 31 gubernatorial posts under Alemán. State governors wielded considerable influence within the Mexican political system. The officers who held those positions could exert substantial influence in both military and political circles at the state level.<sup>109</sup> Alemán felt he could count on the support of high ranking army officers, if they held a stake in the system. Political offices furnished the means of committing army officers to the system. When these officers served in political positions, they saw their influence within the army diminish because they were no longer working directly for the army, and younger officers readily moved up to take their places in the military hierarchy.

After he had resolved some of the politically sensitive issues, President Alemán directed his attention toward improving economic conditions within the army. In late December 1946, he fulfilled a campaign promise with a presidential decree creating the National Bank of the Army and Navy (*Banco Nacional del Ejército y la Armada*), to be funded in part by the Treasury Ministry. The decree's stipulations called for the bank to be administered by military personnel and to make credit available, at favorable rates, to members of the armed forces. In addition to performing normal banking functions, the new bank took control of military insurance policies previously managed by a

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<sup>108</sup>Interview, May 1991. This official left the PRI and joined the opposition in the late 1980s, so he tended to view the present political situation from a different perspective than the typical PRI supporter.

<sup>109</sup>Margiotta : 235-236.

separate office in the Defense Secretariat. Government subsidies ensured the permanent availability of low-cost credit to members of the armed forces. Alemán took special pride in his role in creating the bank which gave the military certain benefits some of their civilian counterparts had already been receiving.<sup>110</sup> Army members also attributed great importance to the establishment of this new financial institution. The bank's first manager declared at the inauguration ceremony that the Mexican Revolution paid the armed forces a huge debt those forces had contracted on the battlefield in fighting to help the Revolution survive. The payment of this debt translated into both a moral and material benefit for the nation as a whole.<sup>111</sup> The National Bank of the Army and Navy continued to grow after its inauguration and eventually established branch offices in all the military and naval zones. This military bank was, in the eyes of the army, Alemán's most popular innovation.

The military benefits did not end with the new bank. The armed forces received at least four pay raises during Alemán's six years in office.<sup>112</sup> In 1947, all officers obtained new uniforms, courtesy of the government. A year later the SDN obtained authorization from the presidency to add lawyers to the list of *técnicos*, thereby qualifying them for the special pay already paid to military engineers and pilots. The president later approved the creation of a new branch for general staff officers who also

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<sup>110</sup>Diario Oficial, 31 December 1946; *Evolución* : 111; Margiotta : 230 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 279-280.

<sup>111</sup>"Una Institución que Prestigia a México," *Revista del Ejército*, July 1947 : 1-3.

<sup>112</sup>The President announced the military pay raises in the *informes* of 1946, 1948, 1949 and 1952. In those years, it was not uncommon to avoid publicizing raises and other military budgetary information, so it would not come as a total surprise if the military had obtained more than the four raises announced.

received added compensation. Alemán fulfilled another campaign promise by reforming the Law of Retirements and Pensions to authorize military family members to receive benefits for four years after the death of the service member. Both military retirees and active members serving in Congressional positions had been petitioning the President since 1949 to make adjustments to the law, and Alemán responded by revising the law two years later. In late 1950, the President took pride in announcing a new Law of Military Life Insurance, abrogating the 1943 law and doubling the value of existing policies. The President credited his SECDEF and Treasury Secretary with helping to put the new law into effect. Finally, Alemán inaugurated the first official army housing area at *Campo Militar No. 1* in 1951 which provided housing for service members at moderate rents. Another military housing area located outside the confines of *Campo Militar No. 1* offered homes and apartments that could be purchased by army personnel with low-cost mortgages provided by the National Bank of the Army and Navy.<sup>113</sup>

In this way, Alemán established a pattern of army compensation that subsequent presidents followed. He constituted a modest benefit infrastructure for the armed forces, which could be expanded upon in the future. Frequent pay raises became the norm in future years. Succeeding presidents also adopted the practice of furnishing uniform allowances and upgrading insurance benefits as well as enhancing the perquisites accessible through the army bank. For reasons discussed below, the Mexican army did not require large quantities of sophisticated equipment to satisfy their defense needs.

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<sup>113</sup>Estado Mayor Presidencial, *Alemán y Ejército* (Mexico City: 1950) : 1-6 and 20-23; AGN, Alemán Valdés, 545.22/371, 556.61/7 and 601.1/84; *Informes*, September 1947-September 1952 and SDN *Memorias*, 1950-51 : 15.

Army members preferred to have their performance rewarded through benefit packages. Political leaders willingly obliged, and in that way, expressed their gratitude for the army's institutional loyalty. This arrangement satisfied both parties. The army received both vocal accolades and material benefits, and the government retained the army's support at a much lower cost than it would have had to have paid for sophisticated equipment.

While the gains made institutionally by the army continued to improve steadily since the 1930s, the most visible advancement made during the Alemán years came in the form of a new, large, and modern defense headquarters building adjacent to the new Central Military Hospital. The President inaugurated the new headquarters building with great fanfare on 5 December 1947, twenty-three months to the day after its construction had begun. Most high ranking officers and numerous top level government officials attended the ceremony that paid honor to the Mexican flag and that unveiled a plaque crediting Alemán for the building's completion. The large flagpole in front of the new army headquarters had the army's motto, *la patria es primero* (the country comes first), etched in its base.<sup>114</sup>

The last significant addition to the unit inventory prior to 1969, occurred under Alemán's tutelage. The army converted the 12th Mechanized Cavalry Regiment into the army's one pure mechanized unit with equipment purchased from the United States. The army also added four infantry battalions, one quartermaster battalion, the military police corps, and the Military Cartography Commission to its structure prior to 1953. In 1947,

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<sup>114</sup>Revista del Ejército, November-December 1947 : 5-11.

the army bought seven C-47 transport aircraft from the United States, substantially upgrading its maneuverability and ready reaction capabilities. The Alemán administration assiduously focused on improving all aspects of military education and believed the new *Escuela Militar de Clases*, a school for future sergeants, to be a major addition to the program. Other accomplishments included the internal reorganization of the SDN and a new territorial organization involving the creation of ten military regions, each maintaining responsibility over two or more military zones. The president had the National Military Service (SMN) divisions deactivated, and he thoroughly reorganized the SMN program introducing Sunday training sessions for the conscripts selected to participate.<sup>115</sup>

Alemán's efforts to revitalize the military industry have been recognized within army circles as one of his more noteworthy accomplishments. The Department of Military Industry (DIM) created by presidential decree on 16 April 1947 had many antecedents. The National Factory of Gunpowder was founded in 1838. President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada had the factory remodeled and re-equipped with modern machinery in the late 1870s, since the factory had been adversely affected by over thirty years of warfare in nineteenth-century Mexico. President Porfirio Díaz inaugurated a new gunpowder factory in the Mexico City suburb of Santa Fe in 1906. President Venustiano Carranza ordered the creation of the Department of Military Manufacturing and Provisions in 1916

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<sup>115</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 111/17972; Bautista Rosas : 95 and 146-147; Diario oficial, #39, 14 April 1948; Fuentes : 185; "Servicio Militar Nacional," *Revista del Ejército*, March 1982 : 4-13; *Revista del Ejército*, June 1947 : 1-3; *Revista del Ejército*, January, February and March 1951 : 1-2; Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, *Departamento de la Industria Militar, 1946-1952* (Mexico City, 1952) : 11-22; Sánchez Gutiérrez : 279-280 and Toral : 510.

for the purpose of producing the arms and munitions needed by the Revolutionary army. Carranza has been credited with having the foresight to realize the importance of a military industry. He declared that Mexico had to manufacture her own arms and munitions in order to prevent her internal affairs from being decided by those countries that furnished arms to Mexico. Because of Mexico's non-interventionist foreign policy, Carranza envisioned the country's demand for arms as being relatively modest. This previously independent department became subordinate to the SDN in 1920 and remained so until 1946.<sup>116</sup>

President Cárdenas renamed the department the Department of War Materials in 1935. Alemán changed the name again to Directorate of Military Industry on 1 January 1946 before he created the DIM to replace it a little more than a year later. The DIM came under the direct jurisdiction of the Office of the Presidency and no longer depended on the SDN. Alemán wanted the DIM to manufacture and repair the arms and munitions required to satisfy the needs of the armed forces, but he also charged the DIM with conducting scientific research for the constant improvement of Mexican war materials. Although staffed with army personnel, the DIM had responsibility for producing agricultural, chemical and medical equipment and machinery. Alemán invested heavily in the DIM throughout his administration. The new injection of funds helped to produce a new 7.62mm rifle, the Vargas model machinegun, the Obregón model pistol, hand grenades, and assorted mortar and artillery munitions. A new DIM headquarters

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<sup>116</sup>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Manual General de Organización del Departamento del Industria Militar, 1 November 1982 : 3-12. This document comprised part of the Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado archive (SDN, 07.03.00.00, C.1, Exp. 9). See also Evolución : 157-158 and Diario Oficial, 16 April 1947.



building and a modern testing laboratory highlighted the government's commitment to upgrade the nation's military industry.<sup>117</sup> The keen interest shown in the DIM had nationalist connotations. Mexico's first gun powder factory had survived, at least conceptually, the wars and conflicts of the nineteenth century. The underlying philosophy of the military industry had always been Mexicans producing to satisfy Mexican needs. That basic philosophy did not change over the years, and Alemán's efforts to expand the capabilities of this industry was a source of pride for the army, which basically ran the industry despite not having formal control over it.

Alemán worked hard to capitalize on military ideology and symbolism throughout his term. He attended all the major army ceremonies and celebrations. His presence at those official activities added a degree of prestige to the army by drawing public attention to these activities and by outwardly demonstrating the importance the government attached to the army. For example, President Alemán attended the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the ESG as the guest of honor. The event received wide press coverage, and the presence of ex-presidents Ortiz Rubio and Abelardo Rodríguez and the school's founder, General Amaro, gave the appearance of total unity between the government and the army. President Alemán appealed to the army ideological sensitivities by renaming the National Army (*Ejército Nacional*) the Mexican Army (*Ejército Mexicano*) on 29 September 1948 in recognition of the army's popular roots. He enacted legislation in 1950 to designate 19 February annually as *Día del Ejército* or

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<sup>117</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 545.22/50; Bautista Rosas : 95-96; Manuel General de Organización del Departamento de la Industria Militar : 12-15; Informes, 1947 : 376; 1948 : 393; 1949 : 419; 1950 : 443; 1951 : 470 and 1952 : 499 and USSDCF, 812.20/5-2147.

Army Day. The President chose that specific date to commemorate the day in 1913 when Venustiano Carranza rejected the legitimacy of the Huerta government and formed the Constitutionalist Army in an effort to restore Mexico's legitimate government. Alemán also had a prominent monument to the Niños Heroes built in Chapultepec Park as a lasting reminder of the army's patriotic traditions from the Mexican war onward, and it should be noted, as a symbol of the nation's military independence from the U.S.<sup>118</sup> That symbolic gesture reinforced ideological values within the army and elevated the army's stature in the eyes of the Mexican public. The *Niños Heroes* epitomized the Mexican army's definition of patriotism, and the new monument held singular import for members of the army. The President's presence and involvement in these army-related activities helped to identify the army as a major partner and contributor to the system forged by the many sacrifices of the Mexican Revolution.

President Alemán shrewdly exploited any opportunity to remind the army of the many benefits his government had provided for the welfare of both the institution and its members. The annual State of the Union address, known in Mexico as the *Informe Presidencial*, has traditionally provided the ideal medium for conveying information about those benefits to the army and the Mexican public. The Constitution of 1917 directs each president to present an annual *informe presidencial* to the Mexican Congress on the first day of September. By dint of this address, the president described the country's problems during the past year, and the actions his administration took to

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<sup>118</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 135.2/290; Diario Oficial #24, 29 September 1948; Diario Oficial #50, 28 April 1950 and López Portillo : 82.

resolve those problems. The army's importance to the system obliges the president to refer directly to military activities. These *informes* have no specific format. Each president decides on the style most suited to his capabilities.<sup>119</sup> Since the late 1930s, presidents have always addressed the contributions of the armed forces to the nation, and in each *informe*, they have reported on their own contributions to the military's well-being. Alemán utilized a more direct approach than those who followed him in office. In each presidential address, Alemán made specific mention of the activities of the military bank and the DIM, his two major contributions to the army. Subsequent presidents focused more on ideological considerations, emphasizing the army's popular origins, its institutional loyalty and its many sacrifices for the betterment of the nation.

In his detailed study of civil-military relations, Franklin Margiotta suggests that the president of Mexico dispensed psychological rewards to the military by means of his *informe*. The praise and benefits for the military announced in the speeches of Alemán and his successors served an important purpose of "reassuring the psyche of the officer corps."<sup>120</sup> The content of those annual addresses also demonstrated a public commitment to the armed forces by the Mexican government, and recognized the military as a key institutional pillar of the overall system. The emergence of civilian presidents in Mexico created the necessity to provide additional reassurance to the military that their interests would be safeguarded by the country's civilian leaders. Presidential *informes* helped to achieve that objective.

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<sup>119</sup>Lozoya, "DESPOLITICIZACION" : 146-149 and 158-167 and Margiotta : 218-219.

<sup>120</sup>Margiotta : 218.

The benefits and innovations that accrued to the army during his *sexenio* marked Alemán as a true friend of the army and convinced the growing number of professionally trained officers that values such as institutional loyalty, discipline, nationalism, and abstention from politics not only paid individual and collective dividends, but also gained civilian respect for the army. To his credit, Alemán accomplished this feat as the military's share of the federal budget decreased from fifteen percent in 1946 to eight percent in 1952.<sup>121</sup> The end of World War II obviated the need for additional military equipment and enabled the government to bring about these budget reductions with limited disagreement from military leaders.

#### Exerting Control Over the Army

Conforming to his policy of military renovation, President Miguel Alemán rejuvenated the officer ranks in spectacular fashion. Within the Mexican army, the large majority of generals with experience in the Revolution were very close to the mandatory retirement age, if they had not already retired. The first graduates of the post-1926 *Colegio Militar* had begun to reach the rank of colonel by 1945. Alemán and his SECDEF, General Limón, accelerated promotions among these military college graduates. This policy led to a gradual displacement of generals who had participated in the Revolution, and the substitution of younger officers who had been trained at the military college and the ESG. Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez, who has studied this period in

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<sup>121</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 145 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 280.

depth, cited the replacement of General Amaro as a military zone commander with an ESG graduate, and the appointment of General Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, another ESG graduate, to Deputy SECDEF, as prominent examples of this innovative policy. The appointment of a new Chief of the Presidential Staff (JEMP) from this new generation of non-Revolutionary officers represented the most striking example of Alemán's elimination of the customary practice of giving the highest positions within the army to the oldest generals. A mid-level bureaucrat, who had served in the Alemán government, stated emphatically that the President was truly committed to advancing career officers. Although the army kept many of these older generals on the payroll as a compromise, few had significant influence at the highest echelons of command.<sup>122</sup> Once Alemán made the decision to bring a new generation of officers into the upper levels of the army command, he had to give that group credibility and values that corresponded to its new role in society. The ideology that these officers had grown accustomed to since their training at the *Colegio Militar* prescribed the very same institutional loyalty and discipline that Alemán had been seeking in army leaders. Institutional loyalty signified a special loyalty to the presidency, and the rigid discipline preached in the army's schools translated into strict adherence to the president's directives and orders.

José Luis Piñeyro went so far as to call this new promotion policy the most significant change in the Mexican army after 1920. Others maintained that this rash of promotions had undermined morale and discipline within the army, while simultaneously strengthening the political system. If discontent did exist within the army command, it

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<sup>122</sup>Boils : 77-79; Interview, May 1991; Lozoya, *Ejército* : 83-84; Sánchez Gutierrez : 278-279; Toral : 512 and USSDCF, 812.24/8-3065, Chapter V : 54.

was not apparent to the public. The discipline many of the younger officers had absorbed guaranteed firm support for the president and his policies. The manner in which General Limón and General Piña, the JEMP, managed promotions gave rise to the army argot of *de que sabor* (what flavor), when asking which of these two generals had advanced the promotion of a specific officer.<sup>123</sup> This overall situation with respect to promotions caused considerable anxiety within the officer corps, because many generals now had to wait in line to fill the few available command positions. A Mexican army officer, who professed Mexican military history as an avocation, declared that the new promotion policies weakened the officer corps because they "cheapened the merchandise." A glut of generals preyed on any possible opportunity to gain some degree of power or influence.<sup>124</sup> Civilian leaders viewed this situation in a positive light, because it diminished the political influence of the army. Many high-ranking officers found themselves fighting for survival within the army leaving little time to contemplate political aspirations.

Despite the apparent disadvantages of these new tactics, top army leaders promoted Alemán's policies as official army policies. An editorial in the army magazine spoke of a complete transformation of the army that was designed to meet the needs of the country. The editorial mentioned that the Mexican army owed its lofty status to the Revolution and those brave officers who fought in the conflict. It added that younger officers have recognized the merits of those leaders who fought in the Revolution, and

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<sup>123</sup>Bautista Rosas : 95-96; Lozoya, *Ejército* : 83-84 and Piñeyro : 64-65 and 147.

<sup>124</sup>Interview, September 1989.

in turn, have come to embrace the new generation of officers as the legitimate heirs to those heroes of the Revolution. For that reason specifically, more harmony prevailed in the military than in any other sector of society. The SDN promised not to allow this concord to be altered for any reason.<sup>125</sup> A confidential assessment from the U.S. State Department described Alemán's policy as geared toward eliminating inefficient and incompetent officers from the army and making the army non-political in the process.<sup>126</sup>

All this does not necessarily mean that the army had been left totally bereft of political power. Generals still held key political positions in some of the wilder regions of the country such as Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, where only a military officer could successfully impose order and guarantee stability. These leaders remained loyal to the government because they could not realistically extend their influence to the national level, where the civilian leaders had become firmly entrenched. The remaining Revolutionary generals had two options available to them; they could work within the system or be eliminated. Alemán was not anxious to eliminate these political generals as long as they continued to serve a useful purpose. The president, after all, had time on his side. He did not anticipate any difficulty from the younger generations of officers because they had been taught to accept unequivocally the principal of apoliticism. Sánchez Gutierrez wrote that the Revolutionary generals serving in political positions were not really interested in running the government, but sought instead to collaborate

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<sup>125</sup>"CONCORDIA EN EL EJERCITO," Revista del Ejército, January 1947 : 1-3.

<sup>126</sup>USSDCF, 812.24/8-3065, Chapter V : 51.

with the government in the protection of the political rights and the economic advantages of the military sector.<sup>127</sup> Ultimately, the government had little to fear from this select group of officers. These political generals expressed their views as individuals and did not speak for the institution of the army which had explicitly acknowledged its subordination to civilian authority.

Subtle changes within the institution's structure also increased the president's influence over the army. According to an ex-JEMP, President Alemán created the Presidential Guards Corps in February 1947 as a counterbalance to some Revolutionary generals who harbored resentment for the young president. The 28th and 42nd Infantry Battalions, a transportation battalion, and a company of assault troops comprised this new unit, which the organic law designated as responsible for the security of the president, his residence, and connecting installations. Alemán also had the DIM placed under his direct jurisdiction, giving him control of critical military resources and supplies.<sup>128</sup> Civilian authorities took control of the army's fuel and food supplies, allowing the army to store fuel for only two weeks of normal operations and just a meager three-day mobilization supply.<sup>129</sup> Finally, the territorial reorganization into ten military regions, as opposed to 33 military zones in 1951, narrowed considerably the number of generals whose loyalty the President had to be assured of.

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<sup>127</sup>Sánchez Gutierrez : 281-285.

<sup>128</sup>"Pasó Revista el Primer Mandatario al Cuerpo de Guardias Presidenciales," El Nacional, 27 January 1977 : 1; Sánchez Gutierrez : 279-280; SDN Memorias, 1946-47 : 19; Toral : 510 and USSDCF : 812.20/5-2147.

<sup>129</sup>Alan Riding, Distant Neighbors (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) : 91.



When he served as President of the Republic, Avila Camacho had broadened the army's intelligence responsibilities by involving the army in counterespionage, counterintelligence, and intelligence collection activities. Miguel Alemán promptly reversed that trend when he became President. The demilitarizing of intelligence operations has long been considered a sensitive subject, about which virtually nothing has been written. A few knowledgeable individuals, however, did express a willingness to discuss the issue. Alemán initiated the formation of intelligence units at state levels. One source declared that certain young loyal army officers went to work directly for Alemán and helped to assemble the new civilian-managed intelligence apparatus. One of those loyal officers was Captain Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios who later left the army for a political career, becoming the Governor of Veracruz in 1986 and Interior Minister in 1988. A former Mexican politician credited Alemán with having the foresight to lessen the army's political influence by removing the army from intelligence operations. He believed Alemán gained the approval of army leaders by substituting increased economic benefits for the reduced intelligence role. The army recalled its military attachés from all overseas locations except London, Paris and Washington in early 1949. The relieved attachés had been performing intelligence collection functions at those foreign locations. The most significant measure taken by the Alemán administration proved to be the creation of the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) which reported directly to the Interior Minister and became the country's principal intelligence organization. That new intelligence organization began to immediately lessen the importance of the other intelligence organizations including the intelligence section of the

defense staff (G-2).<sup>130</sup> In other words, the creation of an official state intelligence apparatus meant that most intelligence collection responsibilities passed directly from the Mexican army to the state, represented by the Interior Ministry.

The limited military correspondence in the national archive also provided some indications that the government had begun to exert more control over army operations. One letter from the SDN attempted to secure permission for the Deputy SECDEF, General Cuenca Díaz, to be assigned as an attaché extraordinary to Argentina from July-September 1951. An assignment of that kind came with special remunerations and required the approval of the Treasury Department. The Treasury Department recommended disapproval, and the SDN did not appeal the decision.<sup>131</sup> Another example of this growing civilian control over the army involved a letter published in the newspaper by a member of the Cinemagraphic Workers' Union, asking President Alemán to prohibit members of the armed forces from participating in the filming of movies because their participation took away the livelihood of modest union members. The President responded by sending a mailgram to the National Defense and Navy Secretariats directing them to issue orders prohibiting such activities in the future.<sup>132</sup> Members of the armed forces did not relish the idea of losing the opportunity to make some extra money, but they followed the President's orders nonetheless. Finally,

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<sup>130</sup>James D. Rudolph, *Mexico: A Country Study*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985): 363; Bautista : 94; Interviews, September 1989, January 1991 and February 1991; Toral : 512 and USSDCF, 812.24/8-3065, Chapter V : 53.

<sup>131</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 111/21732.

<sup>132</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 523.3/29.

General Limón forwarded a draft Law of Promotions and Compensation to the president's office for approval in November 1950 in accordance with instructions he had received from President Alemán. The president's office returned the draft law less than three weeks later requesting further elaboration and modifications.<sup>133</sup> One might assume that such a proposal would have promptly received the president's signature, as a mere formality, during the 1920s and 1930s.

### Maintaining a Safe Distance from the U.S. Military

Whereas Lázaro Cárdenas worked to curb Avila Camacho's desires for a close military relationship with the United States, Mexican public opinion applied a similar constraint on Avila Camacho's successor. Miguel Alemán seemed intent on improving military relations with the United States at the outset of his administration as a means of furthering the army's professionalization and modernization. His policy towards communism certainly ingratiated him to the United States. Alemán had been quoted as saying that Mexico would fight communism with deeds and not words, during an interview in March 1949. The President of Mexico capitalized on the communist scare by labeling many of his opponents Communists.<sup>134</sup> On 3-7 March 1947, Harry S. Truman became the first U.S. president to visit Mexico City. Truman used his visit to return a number of Mexican unit standards that had been captured during the Mexican-American War one hundred years earlier. A report from the British Embassy in Mexico

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<sup>133</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 111/12200.

<sup>134</sup>López Portillo : 74 and Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 164-165.

City called Truman's visit an unqualified success. The United States reciprocated for the visit by inviting Alemán to Washington on 29 April-7 May 1947. These events contributed to the introduction of a more cordial tone in Mexican-U.S. relations.<sup>135</sup>

The Alemán administration had inherited a comparatively loose structure of hemispheric defense from the Avila Camacho years. The system had been successful from a Mexican standpoint because it had avoided entangling alliances. Mexico had a direct military link to the United States through her participation in the Lend-Lease Program, but the issue of Mexico's lend-lease payments created problems for both countries after World War II. Mexico attempted unsuccessfully to renegotiate her loan in 1947 before the United States recommended a new payment plan in 1948, which extended the payment schedule for the Mexican government. Some Mexican leaders had hoped the United States would reduce the principal of the loan, but the United States rejected such a proposal, although U.S. officials did agree to reduce some of the lend-lease debt by purchasing land for U.S. consulates in Mexico. The State Department had been clamoring that Mexico was the only Latin American nation that had not made a substantial repayment on its lend-lease loan, while Mexican leaders felt their contribution to the Allied cause had earned them a reduction in the loan principal.<sup>136</sup> A short time later, the Mexican government rejected a U.S. proposal for a guided missile range site over the Gulf of California and rescinded an earlier agreement allowing practice bombs

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<sup>135</sup>Great Britain. Foreign Office, General Correspondence: Political, Mexico, 1920-1952, Microfilm (London: Public Record Office, 1981) : 371/68002, 29 January 1948 (Hereafter cited as BFO with document number and date) and Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez 164-167.

<sup>136</sup>U.S. Foreign Relations 1947, Vol. XIII : 746-751 and 1948 : 628-637.

to be dropped in Mexican waters, perhaps as a means of voicing displeasure at the failure to renegotiate the lend-lease payments. Neither country seemed totally satisfied with the final lend-lease settlement signed in February 1951.<sup>137</sup>

The United States had been pushing for a bilateral treaty with Mexico since the end of World War II, having already obtained that kind of accord with a number of other Latin American countries. Under the Rio Treaty, the hemispheric defense structure in Latin America provided for the collective defense of the region. At the Pan-American conference in Chapultepec, Mexico in 1945, the United States and the Latin American nations had signed a resolution declaring that an attack against one member nation would be interpreted as an attack against all the signatories. The resolution also reaffirmed the Inter-American Defense Board, formed during the Rio Conference in 1942, as the hemispheric forum for studying defense issues. The member nations formalized the Act of Chapultepec for collective security two years later in Río de Janeiro by signing the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, commonly referred to as the Rio Treaty. Mexico had refused to sign a bilateral military aid treaty with the United States, declaring that the Organization of American States (O.A.S.) was the appropriate organization for resolving all hemispheric problems, including those of defense.<sup>138</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 provided the United States with another opportunity to propose a military pact with Mexico. Thomas Mann, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, met with Mexican Foreign

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<sup>137</sup>U.S. Foreign Relations 1948, Vol. IX : 645 and 1951 : 1474-1476.

<sup>138</sup>Boils : 147-149; *Evolución* : 159-162; Lozoya, *Ejército* :96-99; Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 167-168 and U.S. Foreign Relations 1952-1954, Vol. IV : 1327-1328.

Minister Manuel Tello in April 1951 to discuss the possibility of Mexico sending an army division to fight with the United Nations' forces in Korea. Mann told Tello that the United States could make up some of the Mexican forces' equipment deficiencies, assist in their training, help transport them to Korea, and sustain them in the field. Mann offered to negotiate the specific terms of reimbursement at a later date. The Mexican Foreign Minister responded by saying that public opinion would strongly oppose sending Mexican troops to fight outside of Mexico. Tello reminded the U.S. representatives that the government was preparing to launch a presidential campaign, and political leaders did not want to provide the opposition with free ammunition. Mexico's Foreign Minister also mentioned how Mexico's vote in the United Nations in favor of resisting aggression in Korea did not represent a commitment to furnish military forces, and how the previous U.S. Ambassador (Walter Thurston) had concurred with that assessment. The contents of a confidential memorandum from the U.S. representatives at the meeting indicated that the real issue was really an internal Mexican political problem that would not be easily resolved. The Mexican attitude toward furnishing troops for the war in Korea had not changed by July 1951, and the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico did not believe a change in the Mexican outlook would be forthcoming in the near future. The ambassador's prediction came true; the Alemán government did not send military forces to Korea, most likely because of the potential for adverse political fallout.<sup>139</sup>

The U.S. made one last attempt at securing a military aid treaty with Mexico in 1952. The Mutual Security Act had been passed in 1951 to allow Latin American

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<sup>139</sup>Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 165-166; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 148-152 and U.S. Foreign Relations 1951, Vol. II : 1476-1477.

nations to play a greater role in hemispheric defense. Under the provisions of this act, the U.S. provided military assistance to upgrade the defense posture in individual Latin American countries in return for access to needed strategic materials. The recipient nation also had to promise to limit trade with the Soviet bloc and "to participate in missions important to the defense of the Western Hemisphere." The U.S. offered to discuss a bilateral treaty in Mexico City in January 1952. Mexico accepted the invitation and commenced secret negotiations with the U.S. in early February. The stipulation of the Mutual Security Act that called for the possible use of Mexican forces in hemispheric defense proved to be the lone impediment. Mexican officials wanted to avoid all mention of using Mexican forces outside of Mexico in the press release announcing the discussions. The U.S. delegation deferred to the Mexican request, and a joint communique stated that the two countries had simply agreed to begin talks on a military aid accord.<sup>140</sup>

At the first meeting, the U.S. delegation presented its draft agreement and answered questions from the Mexican delegation. The Mexican Foreign Office representative, Oscar Rabasa, spoke of the constitutional and political difficulties inherent in employing Mexican forces outside of Mexico and refused to accept the U.S. position on that issue at a second meeting. At a third meeting, the Mexican delegation justified its position by arguing that Mexico was different from other Latin American countries, that the Mexican military industry had to be built up first, and that the JMUSDC provided an appropriate

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<sup>140</sup>Charles D. Corbett, The Latin American Military as a Socio-Political Force: Case Studies of Bolivia and Argentina (Coral Gables: Center for Advanced International Studies, The University of Miami, 1972) : vi; Lieuwen, Arms : 200-201; Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 166; Piñeyro, Ejército : 76-77 and U.S. Foreign Relations 1952-1954, Vol. IV : 1326-1327.

forum for addressing those and other defense issues. The U.S. representatives informed their counterparts that military grant aid could not be channelled through the JMUSDC. As a result, the negotiations reached a stalemate, and both sides agreed to suspend negotiations. Although the Mexican representatives placed most of the blame on constitutional restrictions, members of the U.S. delegation strongly believed the internal political situation in Mexico precluded reaching an agreement. Their assessment proved accurate in light of events at the national level. Political opposition forces demanded that the substance of the negotiations be made public, suggesting that the classified nature of the talks implied a disadvantaged position for Mexico. Candidates from opposition parties frequently accused Alemán of selling out to the U.S. In spite of this setback, the U.S. delegation recommended keeping the door open to future negotiations. The Mexican ambassador in Washington supported the U.S. position on future negotiations and suggested that the talks could be resumed after the presidential election in July 1952. Both sides agreed to suspend the negotiations gradually in order to avoid fanning the opposition's propaganda fires.<sup>141</sup>

Mexico and the United States never resumed negotiations. Alemán had bowed to political pressures and publicly rejected the U.S. offer, just as he had earlier refused to send Mexican troops to Korea. Alemán needed support for his economic programs from the more nationalist elements in the party. To gain that backing, he had to compromise some of his foreign policy goals, in particular, close relations with the United States. There also existed strong nationalist objections, both inside and outside of the armed

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<sup>141</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 76-77 and U.S. Foreign Relations 1952-1954, Vol. IV : 1327-1330.



forces, to an aid agreement with the United States because the stipulations of such an accord might conflict with the major Mexican foreign policy tenet of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations. These decisions set the tone for the future of Mexican-U.S. relations. Alemán made these decisions despite the objection of some military leaders who saw a military pact with the U.S. as a means of modernizing their military equipment. The future pattern of military relations with the U.S. had been clearly set by the end of the Alemán administration. Mexico would only procure military equipment from the U.S. through direct payment, or through a loan specifically requested by the Mexican government, as opposed to one offered by the United States. The Mexican military continued to adhere to that policy through the years and still follows it today.<sup>142</sup>

The experiences of the Mexican Revolution had convinced the Mexican public and a sizeable segment of the armed forces to accept military force only as the last resort for resolving problems. The anti-military attitude that emerged in the aftermath of the bloodletting of the Mexican Revolution could always be revived, and it served as a shield against U.S. interference in Mexico by means of military cooperation and agreements. Since the Revolution, Mexican leaders continued to emphasize economic issues more than military matters. Consequently, Mexico remained immune to the arms race ignited in many parts of the world by the onset of the Cold War.<sup>143</sup> In any case, Mexico could

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<sup>142</sup>Boils : 80 and 160; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 145; McAlister et al. : 232 and 242; Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 166 and Piñeyro, Ejército : 148-151.

<sup>143</sup>Lozoya, Ejército : 99-102.

rely on the United States for its strategic defense, an arrangement tacitly recognized by both countries.

An *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG) textbook on strategy listed a number of foreign policy precepts that have been accepted as official doctrine in both military and political circles. Three of these eleven principles pertained directly to the military. The first stated that no conquests gained by force or by armed intervention would be recognized by the Mexican government. Another precept demanded the peaceful resolution of conflicts between foreign nations, avoiding war in all its forms. The last dictated the abstention from all forms of military alliances. The text stressed that Mexico had no military treaty, alliance, or pact with any other country.<sup>144</sup> This doctrine had its origins in the Alemán years and has been universally accepted within the army. For many staunch nationalists both in and out of the military, the formalization of an independent development pattern for the army has been the greatest legacy of the Alemán administration. That development pattern has helped to nurture the spirit of nationalism within the Mexican army. Finally, the army's fierce ideological commitment to nationalism has prevented individual army leaders from deviating from that independent posture that has come to characterize the Mexican army.

#### The Army Demonstrates Its Loyalty: The Defeat of *Henriquismo*

*Henriquismo*, the political movement led by General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, had considerable bearing on the evolution of the Mexican army in the post-1950 era. José

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<sup>144</sup>Escuela Superior de Guerra, *Nociones de Estrategia*, Vol. 2 (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1987) : 207-208.

Luis Piñeyro, one of the few experts on *Henriquismo*, aptly described the movement as the army's "last test of discipline," because General Henríquez was the last military man to campaign actively for the presidency of Mexico.<sup>145</sup> The defeat of *Henriquismo* signaled the army's final retreat from the political limelight. The movement has often been misunderstood as a direct challenge by the army to the legitimately elected government of Mexico. This was not the case. The movement can be more accurately classified as a form of opposition from within the system. *Henriquismo* did not try to unite the army against the government. At no time did the military ever attempt to wrest power from the government. General Henríquez and his followers operated within the system. Although Henríquez espoused a 34-point revolutionary platform that promised to solve the major problems of all Mexican sectors, including the military, his program was not perceived as a true alternative to the PRI.<sup>146</sup> *Henriquismo* sought to reform the system, not to abolish it.

General Henríquez belonged to a group of Revolutionary generals that still harbored political ambitions, and by 1950, this class of general had become a dying breed. General Henríquez himself had been approaching the end of an illustrious military career by 1950. As a cadet at the *Colegio Militar*, he accompanied President Francisco I. Madero from Chapultepec Castle to the National Palace on the famed Loyalty March in February 1913. He joined the Revolution in 1914 as a second lieutenant, and later, played an instrumental role in restoring order in the state of Tabasco in 1935-1938, and

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<sup>145</sup>Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 65.

<sup>146</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 214; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 71 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 285-289.

in crushing the Cedillo revolt in 1938-1939. General Henríquez had also held some important military zone commands during his career. Although he lacked political experience, he did have an especially close friendship with ex-president Cárdenas. The friendship began in 1922 when the two first met in the southern state of Oaxaca. Henríquez impressed Cárdenas with his dynamism and command presence, so much so that Cárdenas used him as his military arm during his presidency. Henríquez had charisma and the respect of many fellow generals. He and some other Revolutionary generals had grown disillusioned with Alemán's youth movement and felt neglected in the wake of Alemán's policies aimed at reducing their influence within both the army and politics. These generals sought to regain some political recognition, to ensure respect for the principles of the Revolution, and to win more economic benefits for the army.<sup>147</sup>

A sage Mexican politician, who should remain nameless, declared in an interview that the politics of the 1940s and 1950s were still old-style politics, managed in secrecy and never confirmed in writing. This politician had worked as a principal organizer of the Henriquista movement and had experienced the movement firsthand. Based on his personal observations, he identified Lázaro Cárdenas as the principal catalyst behind the Henriquista movement.<sup>148</sup> The available literature on *Henriquismo* focuses mainly on the members of Henríquez's group and the government's reaction to the movement.

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<sup>147</sup>Juan José Rodríguez Prats, ADOLFO RUIZ CORTINES (Veracruz: Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, 1990) : 115; Camp, Political Biographies : 147; Piñeyro, Ejército : 66; Sánchez Gutierrez : 277-285 and Suárez : 200-201.

<sup>148</sup>Interview, February 1991.

Aside from some scattered suppositions, nothing substantive has been written about Henríquez's reasons for launching his campaign, or about the critical support he received from ex-political leaders such as Cárdenas.

Cárdenas' private secretary reported that Cárdenas wanted to promote Henríquez as a presidential candidate in 1946. Cárdenas had apparently solicited the opinions of numerous military zone commanders, and they had responded favorably to the idea. Cárdenas had urged Henríquez to make his intentions known to President Avila Camacho. Because he lacked political savvy, Henríquez did not ask for a leave of absence or explicitly state his intention to run for the presidency during an interview with Avila Camacho. Misinterpreting Henríquez's visit as a demonstration of support for his policies, Avila Camacho sent the general to represent him at the inauguration of Brazilian President Eurico Gaspar Dutra in 1945. Henríquez grew dismayed upon his return, when he heard that the president had chosen Miguel Alemán as the PRI's presidential candidate. He responded by announcing his own candidacy, independent of the PRI, which he renounced almost immediately after a heated discussion with the President.<sup>149</sup>

The relationship between Lázaro Cárdenas and Avila Camacho had an important bearing on the Henriquista movement. Some individuals have underestimated the friendship that existed between those two ex-presidents, who had been close friends since the 1920s. In 1950, rumors began circulating to the effect that President Alemán wanted to be re-elected or have his term extended. Cárdenas had been approached and was asked to support a constitutional amendment calling for either of the above reforms.

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<sup>149</sup>Interview, February 1991; Sánchez Gutierrez : 286 and Suárez : 194-200.

Cárdenas quickly became alarmed at the prospect of Alemán continuing in office beyond his designated term. As his presidency had worn on, Alemán had drifted further away from the political philosophies of his two predecessors. Avila Camacho reacted to the growing number of rumors by publishing an open letter against re-election in any form.<sup>150</sup> The actions taken by these two old friends suggested that they had decided to thwart any attempt by Alemán to remain in power. Cárdenas apparently believed that promoting Henríquez as a presidential candidate would be the best antidote for the spread of *Alemanismo*. Cárdenas first had to repair the rift between Henríquez and Avila Camacho to implement such a plan. After arranging a "surprise" encounter for the two at the riding stables on *Campo Militar No. 1*, Cárdenas invited Avila Camacho, Henríquez, and their wives to dinner at his home on Christmas Eve 1950. That evening the two ex-presidents urged Henríquez to run for president. A close advisor to Henríquez at the time suggested that the true objective of the Henríquez candidacy was to prevent the re-election of Alemán or the selection of Fernando Casas Alemán, as the official party's candidate. Casas Alemán, no relation to the President, had been serving as mayor of the federal district and had been cut from the same political cloth as Alemán.

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<sup>150</sup> Brandenburg : 3-7; Ponce : 240-244; Rodríguez Prats : 115-118; Sánchez Gutierrez : 285; Scott : 199-212 and Suárez : 193-196. Ponce suggested that Alemán tried to discourage such rumors by openly stating in his September 1950 *informe* that he had no intention of seeking re-election. Scott contended that Alemán sought to hold off speculation about a new presidential candidate by floating rumors about a possible re-election. Brandenburg discussed the differences and friction that existed between Cárdenas and Alemán.

Cárdenas and Avila Camacho felt Alemán would continue to pull the political strings with Casas Alemán serving as a political puppet.<sup>151</sup>

Cárdenas realized he needed the support of his old friend in order for the Henríquez candidacy to be successful, and Avila Camacho still had considerable support within the army. Most army leaders respected the many benefits the ex-president had secured for their institution. The Henríquez candidacy had potential, what with Cárdenas' management and Avila Camacho's ability to deliver the army's support. Cárdenas discouraged Henríquez from seeking the PRI's nomination. He told Henríquez that Alemán had sullied the prestige of the official party, and he urged the general to disassociate himself from the PRI. Consequently, Henríquez followers formed the Federation of the Parties of the Mexican People (FPPM). Even though Cárdenas helped to formulate Henríquez's platform and to write many of his speeches, he never publicly declared his support for Henríquez. Cárdenas' behavior seemed peculiar since most Mexicans viewed the Henriquista movement as being equivalent to the popularly rooted *Cardenismo*. Henríquez's program officially promoted universal and effective suffrage, equal rights for women, the moralization of public officials, the realization of workers' benefits, the abolition of state intervention in the economy, and an authentic division of power in the federal government. Many members of Cárdenas' immediate family

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<sup>151</sup>Interview, February 1991. The interviewee related that Mrs. Avila Camacho wore a topaz necklace which Henríquez had given her upon his return from Dutra's inauguration in 1945. Henríquez had presented the necklace to Avila Camacho's wife before he had found out that her husband had selected Miguel Alemán as his successor. Mrs. Avila Camacho wore the necklace to give the impression that her husband and General Henríquez had buried the hatchet. A retired army officer who had served during this period insisted that Cárdenas had still exercised considerable influence over Avila Camacho and that leverage made the rapprochement between Henríquez and Avila Camacho easier to achieve (Interview, July 1991). See also Scott : 251.

outwardly supported Henríquez, but in spite of that overt support from his family members, Cárdenas continued to assert that he carried nobody's flag. Many Revolutionary generals, who had had direct links to Cárdenas, jumped on the Henríquez bandwagon, despite their old leader's feigned neutrality.<sup>152</sup> That group included Generals Wenceslao Labra, Luis Alamillo Flores, Marcelino García Barragán, Vicente González, Edmundo Sánchez Cano, and Cándido Aguilar. The latter threw his support to Henríquez when the government did not recognize his opposition party as legitimate. General García Barragán, ex-governor of Jalisco and ex-director of the Military College, served as president of the FPPM. The presence of these generals on the side of Henríquez led the public to believe Henríquez had the complete support of Cárdenas. These developments made the official party's opposition much more formidable than that of six years earlier, when the PRI candidate ran virtually unopposed.<sup>153</sup>

A key member of the Henríquez camp emphasized that Cárdenas did not necessarily want to see Henríquez as president, but rather, he wanted Alemán to nominate a candidate who would govern independent of Alemán's policies or advice. Dámaso Cárdenas, the ex-president's brother and governor of Michoacán, had been pressing Alemán to nominate an acceptable candidate. His pressure paid dividends because Alemán followed the pattern established in the two previous administrations and chose

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<sup>152</sup>Manuel Guerra Leal, *La Grilla* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1978) : 38-39; Interview, February 1991; Rodríguez Prats : 116-117; Sánchez Gutierrez : 287 and Suárez : 197-199.

<sup>153</sup>Guerra Leal : 23-40; Interview, February 1991; Rodríguez Prats : 116 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 286-287.



his Interior Minister, Ruiz Cortines, as the PRI's presidential candidate.<sup>154</sup> Cárdenas and Avila Camacho quietly declared victory and dropped their support of Henríquez.<sup>155</sup> At that point, Henríquez no longer had a chance of being elected president. Cárdenas and Avila Camacho had both preached loyalty to the system, a system they themselves had helped to build. Once they sensed the threat to the system and the principles they espoused had been removed, the ex-presidents once again shifted all their weight behind the system. This reversal of fortune for Henríquez made him much more vulnerable to attacks from within the system.

Alemán called on the army to demonstrate its loyalty. When initial attempts to repress the opposition backfired, the PRI opted for a massive propaganda campaign. The extent of this campaign indicated that, at least initially, the PRI perceived the Henriquista movement to be a major challenge to its longevity. Although Henríquez had the backing of many Revolutionary generals, both active and retired, Alemán had won the loyalty of the large majority of army officers by 1951, and because of that loyalty, the army, as an

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<sup>154</sup>Ruiz Cortines interrupted the pattern of choosing the Interior Minister as the official party's presidential candidate. He chose Adolfo López Mateos who had been his Labor Minister. López Mateos resumed the traditional custom by selecting his Interior Minister, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, to succeed him. Díaz Ordaz followed suit by nominating his Interior Minister, Luis Echeverría Alvarez. This process made the most sense since the Interior Minister was normally the best informed cabinet official. Given his responsibility for internal security, the President depended upon him more than the other ministers. The Interior Minister generally had a good feel for the country's pulse and usually maintained good relations with the armed forces. During the Echeverría administration (1970-1976), economic problems moved to the forefront, and Echeverría broke the pattern by choosing his Treasury Minister to replace him. Probably because of Mexico's persisting economic difficulties, the next two Presidents were chosen from the Programs and Budgets Ministry.

<sup>155</sup>Interview, February 1991. Based on available source material, it seemed few individuals truly understood the extent of the support Cárdenas and Avila Camacho had provided to Henríquez. The general later felt betrayed by Cárdenas, and he severed his friendship with the ex-president after the election. See Suárez : 199-202 for the specific details of how Henríquez severed his friendship with Cárdenas. After 1953, the two never spoke to each other again.

institution, remained united during the 1952 presidential campaign. The situation in some ways resembled the Almazán candidacy twelve years earlier. A relatively small number of generals, who had already passed their prime, opposed the PRI candidate, but the generals, who held the key command positions, and the rank and file of the army supported Ruiz Cortines. The SDN championed its own in-house proselytization program, accentuating the institution's internal cohesiveness and purported apolitical nature. Institutional loyalty became a recurring theme in official army publications that subtly criticized the opposition for lacking that attribute. A number of prominent *Alemanista* officers spearheaded the propaganda campaign. They included General Limón, General Sánchez Taboada, president of the PRI, congressional leader Colonel Carlos Serrano, General Alfonso Corona del Rosal, head of the PRI in the federal district, and Generals Jacinto Treviño and Rafael Melgar, directors of pro-Ruiz Cortines organizations. As Piñeyro points out, these officers obtained their reward in the form of high-level positions under Ruiz Cortines.<sup>156</sup>

Alemán acted aggressively on other fronts. He organized the Legion of Honor (*Legión de Honor*) in 1951. This organization recognized the merits of the Revolutionary veterans to further promote a sense of unity and institutional loyalty within the army. Alemán brought some of these old soldiers back on active duty for the campaign and generously distributed medals for their past service. Many of these veterans accompanied Ruiz Cortines on his campaign trips to remind Mexicans of the revolutionary roots of the PRI candidate. The SECDEF ensured loyal officers held the

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<sup>156</sup>"Lealtad Institucional," *Revista del Ejército*, April-June 1952: 1-4 and Piñeyro, *Ejército*: 67-75 and 146-147.

critical command positions and moved additional troops to those cities that anticipated problems as the election drew near. The army hierarchy placed several officers, including the chief of police in the federal district, suspected of being disloyal under house arrest until after the election.<sup>157</sup> The newly formed and relatively efficient DFS maintained close tabs on the movement's leaders and suspected supporters.<sup>158</sup> The government's precautionary measures produced the desired results. Ruiz Cortines won almost 75 percent of the popular vote with about 16 percent going to Henríquez.<sup>159</sup> The percentage of votes cast by Henríquez supporters was the largest opposition total recognized by the government since 1924. Not surprisingly, many Henríquez followers protested the election results but to no avail. Cárdenas, Avila Camacho and General Limón supported the election results, so no ground swell of support for Henríquez would be forthcoming from the army. Cárdenas personally discouraged General García Barragán from taking up arms, by stressing that such an act of defiance had no chance of succeeding. The general heeded Cárdenas' advice, and the movement petered out. Henríquez himself dropped out of the movement, a few months after the election, in

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<sup>157</sup>BFO, 371-97540, 6 June 1952 and Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 67. The Legion of Honor became another in the long list of pro-government organizations. It brought veterans of the Revolution together for the purpose of supporting both SDN and government policies. It became common practice for the most recently retired SECDEF to serve as president of the organization. The Legion of Honor published a monthly journal that reiterated themes presented in the *Revista del Ejército* as well as the specific benefits available to veterans. The organization wielded absolutely no political influence, but it did indicate a general cohesiveness between the veterans and the active forces. The organization seemed to have died out by the late 1970s probably because most of the Revolutionary veterans had passed away by then.

<sup>158</sup>I found detailed reports carefully prepared by this new intelligence organization on the backgrounds and movements of those involved with the Henriquista movement in the presidential archives of the AGN. I actually stumbled on to these reports by happenstance in the Díaz Ordaz archives where they had been misfiled, perhaps on purpose.

<sup>159</sup>Pellicer de Brody and Reyna : 54.

order to free up his business interests that had been embargoed by the Treasury Ministry. The government officially dissolved the FPPM in 1954, and a last ditch effort to revive the movement in 1958 failed.<sup>160</sup>

Although the election results of 1952 sounded the death knell for the "political" generals, the government still preferred to move cautiously against that group. The government had time on their side given the advanced age of those generals. Ruiz Cortines would reconcile most of the outcasts by bringing them back into the system. To further solidify the loyalty of the younger generation of army officers, the government doubled the number of promotions in November 1952 from those of previous years. That measure allowed Ruiz Cortines to assume the presidency with the overwhelming confidence and satisfaction of the army's leaders. A close advisor to Henríquez believed the government had overreacted. He emphasized that Henríquez never sought to do away with the existing system of government. He only wanted to reform the system and bring it back on line with the goals of the Mexican Revolution. Henríquez's advisor felt that if Henríquez had been elected president, the only visible difference in the government would have been more generals serving in key governmental positions. He also maintained that the generals would have represented the Mexican people under those circumstances, and not the army.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Guerra Leal : 48-51; Interview, February 1991; Piñeyro, Ejército : 70-74; Rodríguez Prats : 139; Sánchez Gutierrez : 287-288 and Suárez : 202.

<sup>161</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 545.2/20; Interviews, February 1991 and July 1991; Piñeyro, Ejército : 71-74 and Sánchez Gutierrez : 289-292. A review of the SDN Memorias from 1947-1952 determined that the number of officer promotions in 1952 had more than doubled from those of previous years.

In retrospect, *Henriquismo* demonstrated that the army, as an institution, had become ideologically cohesive. The vast majority of the professionally trained officers fully embraced the cardinal features of an army ideology that had gained almost universal acceptance among all ranks. The army's response to the Henriquista movement highlighted its adherence to institutional loyalty, discipline, and its predilection for apoliticism. Henríquez's fate was graphic evidence that in post-war Mexico a professional officer's career did not allow room for political ambitions. Army leaders came to recognize the role of their institution as being that of a senior partner in the system, and charged with a clearly defined mission of guaranteeing the security and sovereignty of that all-encompassing system.

#### A Final Note

The years 1940-1952 turned out to be a watershed period for the Mexican army. World War II ushered in an era of profound change within the Mexican army. The imminent threat of world conflagration accelerated the army's professionalization process and encouraged military leaders to direct their attention to national defense and away from politics. The political system completed its transition to civilian rule during this period. As ex-president Luis Echeverría noted, the Mexican army emerged from the Alemán years thoroughly committed to *civilismo*. Echeverría intimated that the army's affirmation of civilianizing trends may have been the foremost development in Mexican politics in the post-Revolution period.<sup>162</sup> During this critical twelve-year period, the

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<sup>162</sup>Interview, June 1991.

army had the chance to utilize the cardinal features of its ideology, an ideology that buttressed the transition to civilian rule. The ideological cloistering of the army began to intensify with the inauguration of Avila Camacho, and passed its final loyalty test with the electoral defeat of General Henríquez Guzmán in 1952.

Arturo Sánchez Gutierrez adroitly described the evolution of the Mexican army during this period when he wrote:

"...from the early 1940s the professional military became loyal to the Government and that as an apparatus of the State it fulfilled its function of enforcing order when required by the Government to do so. Indeed, two more considerations can be added in order to support this point: one, the fact that the military extended its collaboration with the Government through the so-called Civic Action (working in the destruction of drug plantations, providing first aid in disaster areas, or taking part in the anti-pest campaigns in rural Mexico); and two, the military respect for Mexico's international defence policy, especially in 1952 when President Alemán did not agree to sign a military treaty with the United States..."<sup>163</sup>

The nationalist and patriotic spirit that the war years engendered in the Mexican army can best be illustrated with the words of the radical General Francisco J. Mújica. During the difficult negotiations with the United States over the establishment of radar stations in Mexico, Mújica staunchly opposed any action that would compromise Mexican sovereignty. Echoing the words of a fellow patriot from the Reform period, Mújica exclaimed "It is preferable to die with dignity than to live without honor."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>Sánchez Gutierrez : 292-293. The English translation of this passage was taken from a draft dissertation chapter Sánchez Gutierrez had provided me a copy of, and from which most of the article was drawn. The quote appears on page 39 of the draft chapter.

<sup>164</sup>Alamillo Flores, Memorias : 580.

Mújica served under a SECDEF who expressed the same sentiments. Lázaro Cárdenas preserved the national sovereignty to the maximum extent possible during the war, in spite of unrelenting pressure from a powerful neighbor to make concessions. Two Mexican historians correctly argue that Cárdenas "best personified Mexico's cautious reaction to the embrace of the colossus of the North."<sup>165</sup> On account of his steadfastness, Mexico did not cede any territory to the United States for military bases, nor did the government grant free access across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to U.S. forces. Mexico never extended to the United States the basing rights that nation had come to enjoy in many other Latin American countries during and after World War II.<sup>166</sup> This wartime policy played a prominent role in defining the limits of military cooperation with foreign powers in the post-World War II era. Consequently, the Mexican army has shunned military alliances and has adopted a strictly independent military stance that the institution's ideology supports wholeheartedly.

Finally, Avila Camacho's efforts to professionalize the army and Alemán's determination to institutionalize civilian power brought about a relationship that became the *status quo* between the government and the armed forces, continuing virtually uninterrupted until the quelling of the student movement in 1968.<sup>167</sup> The foundation of the army's ideology solidified substantially during this twelve-year period. The army's ideological values reinforced the civilian-led political institutions and provided

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<sup>165</sup>Conn and Fairchild : 360-362 and Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 159.

<sup>166</sup>Boils : 76; Fuentes : 62-63 and López Portillo : 64.

<sup>167</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 133-134.

members of the army scant opportunity to challenge the existing civil-military relationship after 1952. The military's role in the system, engendered by the Mexican Revolution, had become clearly delineated by 1952. Political and military leaders looked upon the army as an important pillar of the ruling system, the principal protector of that system, and the guarantor of the rights and privileges guaranteed by the Constitution of 1917. As such, the army deserved to share in the benefits created by the system of which it would remain an integral part.



## **Chapter Six**

### **The Role of the Mexican Army: 1940-1982**

This chapter examines the role of the Mexican army since 1940, focusing on the army's two principal missions during this period, which are civic action and crisis management. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the Mexican army became an integral part of the system, or the so-called "Revolutionary family" that has governed Mexico to the present day. The Mexican Constitution of 1917, which established and legitimized that system, remains in effect, and the formal mission of the army, as defined by that document and the army's organic law, has undergone only slight modifications. However, the actual military mission, as opposed to its formal role, has changed significantly over time. Chapter Two discussed the army's threefold mission: to defend the nation's sovereignty and independence, to enforce the Constitution and its laws, and to preserve internal order. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, however, the actual performance of that role has changed over time and in ways that underscore how differently this military has developed from its Latin American counterparts.

Mexican army officers have been educated and trained to respect revolutionary heritage, nationalism, and patriotism, and these values have tended to buttress the army's civic action role through the years. Civic action has been the preferred role of the

army's leadership because it has enhanced the army's image among the Mexican people. Political leaders, however, have felt compelled to call upon the army for assistance in infrequent but highly volatile crises, and since the 1940s, there has been a clever crafting of the military that has insured compliance with the directives of the ruling elite, no matter how unpleasant those directives might be. This situation has led to the army's participation in crisis management, which has almost always marred the army's reputation. But because it has remained an integral part of the ruling system, the army has been unable to extricate itself from that mission. Through the years, the juxtaposed roles of civic action and crisis management, have at times, to the chagrin of army leaders, have created significant changes in the army's image, with 1968 being the most salient example. In that year, soldiers were transformed from patriotic nation-builders to the butchers of Tlatelolco. Since the 1940s, there has been an underlying struggle within the army to remain focused on civic actions while political leaders attempt to divert their labor into crisis management.

Mexico's foreign policy, guided mainly by the principles of non-intervention, respect for self-determination, and general disdain for military solutions to international problems, has, with the exception of World War II, virtually eliminated foreign military involvement or membership in alliance systems. Not surprisingly, therefore, the army places its major emphasis on preserving internal security. Political and military leaders have long associated civic action with the conservation of internal security. The army had been performing its traditional role of civic action, or *labor social* as Mexicans refer to it, when World War II forced the army back into what the Constitution of 1917 had

assumed would be its principal role, namely, defending the nation against a foreign enemy. The execution of that task proved to be an aberration for the Mexican army, and political leaders favored the army's resumption of its civic action tasks after the war in hopes of distancing army members from politics.<sup>1</sup>

In addition civic action, the army has also been used to control internal crises, fortunately infrequent, which have been characterized by substantial public opposition to a state action or policy. Not surprisingly, the army has gained more notoriety for its part in bringing these crises under control than for its many achievements in the field of civic action. The term civic action requires no special explanation. David Ronfeldt adopted the phrase "residual political roles" in his 1973 monograph to describe the army's role as it pertained to conflict management.<sup>2</sup> Ronfeldt divided the residual political roles into four sub-categories. The approach employed below will be more simplistic, addressing what Ronfeldt labeled residual political roles as crisis management.

### The Mexican Army and Civic Action

The Mexican army has a rich tradition of rendering assistance to the civilian population, the foundations of which date back to the early 1920s. The army engaged

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<sup>1</sup>Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 101-102.

<sup>2</sup>Ronfeldt's residual political roles encompass four principal tasks: dismantling large scale anti-government protests or demonstrations, fighting narcotics production and trafficking, suppressing rural guerrilla movements and exercising control of the civilian population through firearms and munitions laws and other subtle techniques such as the control of customs posts which aim at taking weapons out of the hands of potential opponents of the government. These roles are normally adopted to respond to a crisis so they might be better classified collectively as crisis management. (See Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order Since 1940" : 294-298). Margiotta implies that the army as an institution retains residual political power because it performs these tasks, and because army officers still hold a limited number of political positions. See Margiotta : 245.

in such tasks as building roads, constructing irrigations works, and repairing railroad and telegraph lines. The 1926 organic law of the armed forces (*Ley Orgánica del Ejército y la Armada*) formally made civic action a part of the army's overall mission. Article 81 of the law provided for the use of military resources in the construction of communications networks and public works that had some correlation with the overall needs of the military.<sup>3</sup> President Cárdenas (1934-1940) assigned the army a definite role in *forjando la patria* (nation-building) in an attempt to depoliticize the army in the late 1930s, and he envisioned the army as an instrument for expanding the central government's control throughout Mexico's more isolated regions. As an added advantage for political leaders, civic action kept army leaders busy, leaving them little time to mingle in politics. The Mexican army became an army of workers that plowed fields and built roads, and its size and organization were regulated according to this mission.<sup>4</sup> By the 1940s, the formal adoption of this role had contributed substantially to the governing civilian coalition's ability to edge the army gradually out of the political limelight.

Mexico's revolution at the turn of the century has been unique to the region, and the army's revolutionary heritage has given legitimacy to its civic action mission. The army has labored, especially in the country's more remote areas, to bring to fruition the

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<sup>3</sup>Bruno Galindo Trejo, "Del Civismo en el Ejército," *Revista del Ejército*, September 1970 : 41-43; Boils : 127-129; McAlister et al. : 209-210; Prewitt : 613-616 and Weil : 360. The new organic law published in March 1971 made civic action one of the three formal missions of the Mexican army. See *Revista del Ejército*, January 1973 : 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Lyle N. McAlister, "The Military," in *Continuity and Change in Latin America*, ed. John J. Johnson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) : 136-142 (hereafter cited as McAlister, "The Military") and Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 81.

revolutionary principles of economic and social justice that many patriots sacrificed their lives for during the Mexican Revolution. Civic action programs have been the principal tools employed in the ongoing mission of maintaining internal peace.<sup>5</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Félix Galván López defined national security as "the maintenance of social, economic and political equilibrium guaranteed by the armed forces."<sup>6</sup> The essence of that definition has underlined the importance of civic action responsibilities within the army. The emphasis that has been placed on civic action has coincided neatly with the army's visibly nationalist philosophy. An integral part of the army's ideology, this philosophy enjoined the army to serve the Mexican people in those areas where help was most needed. Both army and political leaders have used the values of revolutionary heritage and nationalism to justify the performance of these technically non-military tasks.

Some analysts have suggested that civic action only took on significance with the Mexican army during the 1960s as a result of growing U.S. programs aimed at arresting growing communist and subversive influences in the region.<sup>7</sup> As noted above, the Mexican army had been involved with civic action as far back as the 1920s. The

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<sup>5</sup>Boils : 45-46.

<sup>6</sup>Roberto Vizcaíno, "La Seguridad del País, Fin Primordial del Estado," *Proceso*, September 22, 1980 : 6.

<sup>7</sup>Claude Heller, "Las Relaciones Militares Entre Los Estados Unidos y La América Latina: Un Intento de Evaluación," in *El Ejército Como Agente de Cambio Social*, ed. Claude Heller (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1979) : 118-138. Heller refrains from referring to Mexico directly, but addresses Latin America collectively so Mexico is presumed to be in that group. See also Boils : 37-38 and 129; Eckstein : 35-36; and Piñeyro : 90-94. Charles D. Corbett, *op.cit.*, discusses the process of how the Latin American militaries became involved in civic action during the 1960s (vii-x). McAlister's "The Military" offers useful background information on how the collective military in Latin America first became interested in civic action in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Mexican army's civic action contributions have been well-documented. A recurring theme in the presidential *informes* since the 1930s has been praise for the army's civic-action contributions.<sup>8</sup> A survey of SDN press releases reported in Mexico City's leading daily newspaper, *Excelsior*, for the year 1972 showed that only two of the twenty-three notes did not make direct mention of the army's civic action programs, a clear indication of the importance army and political leaders have attributed to that mission.<sup>9</sup> Editorials which have the army's civic-action programs as their central theme abound in the army's official magazine, *La Revista del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of a real external threat has facilitated the Mexican army's commitment to civic action, and the army's social role has evolved gradually since the 1920s, becoming dominant as the need for a strictly military role declined precipitously after World War II. A high-ranking politician from the Echeverría administration underscored, in an

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<sup>8</sup>Margiotta : 220-221. I have reviewed all sections of the Presidential *informes* as they pertain to the armed forces since 1940, and my findings coincide with those of Margiotta. During their *sexenios*, Mexican presidents have lavished praise on the army's *labor social*.

<sup>9</sup>Boils : 130. I reviewed the press clippings on the Mexican army from the major Mexico City newspapers for the period 1972-1982 and estimated that approximately 70 percent of the articles alluded either directly or indirectly to the army's civic action programs. I was fortunate to have access to the newspaper archives of the Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos (IMEP) which greatly facilitated my review of the pertinent news clippings.

<sup>10</sup>For example, see the editorials in the March 1946, January 1949, June 1950, January 1953, August 1956, August 1964, December 1967, July 1971, January 1973, July 1973, August 1973 and January 1982 editions of the *Revista del Ejército*. These editorials describe and praise the civic action programs of the army. After 1970, the army's magazine established a special section to report on the various activities performed by each military zone. The large majority of those activities fell into the category of civic action. There was also an increase on the number of individual articles dealing with civic action after 1970. This can probably be attributed to an attempt by the army to improve its image in the wake of the violence at Tlatelolco during the 1968 student demonstrations by publicizing those activities that increase the welfare of the general population. This is not to imply the army did not perform these functions extensively prior to 1970. They did devote considerable effort toward civic action. However, the army magazine tended to be more militarily oriented and carried articles of a strict military nature.

interview with the author, the significance of the army's civic action role after World War II. Instead of sustaining a static defense, he said, the army decided to adopt a more dynamic action to serve the Mexican people, or in his own words, "to preserve the peace." That decision has brought a good deal of prestige to the army in the post-World War II period.<sup>11</sup> The relatively small defense budgets resulting from the absence of an external menace and the implicit strategic defense by the United States has made the army's increasing focus on civic action a natural evolution.

There exists no easy way to determine the hierarchy of importance for these different civic-action tasks. Quite often different presidents and SECDEFs attach special significance to certain civic-action activities during their tenure in office. Some new tasks have been added to the list since the 1940s, while others have been modified or have taken on new importance. No one source has established an official list of the army's civic action tasks. Information about the army's civic-action programs has been gleaned from many diverse sources.<sup>12</sup> The most logical way of categorizing and describing these various programs is according to their longevity.

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<sup>11</sup>Interview, January 1991.

<sup>12</sup>The specific civic action functions included here have been compiled from many different sources. A review of the Revista del Ejército for the years 1940-1982 furnished ample data on the army's labor social. Numerous articles in the journal address that specific topic. One article in particular, "ENTREVISTA DE PRENSA AL C. GENERAL DE DIVISION D.E.M. HERMENEGILDO CUENCA DIAZ, SECRETARIA DE LA DEFENSA NACIONAL, POR EL SEÑOR DEMETRIO BOLAÑOS ESPINOSA, REDACTOR DE 'EL UNIVERSAL'," in the April 1974 edition of the Revista del Ejército provided an extensive list and description of the army civic action activities. Another official army publication, "Seis Años de Labor, 1970-1976" also proved helpful. Additionally, details on the army's civic action functions can also be found in Boils : 127-136; Evolución : 147-156; McAlister et. al. : 209-210; Piñeyro : 90-108 and Toral : 520-528. The press coverage of the army and its activities has focused heavily on the army's civic action contributions.

A. Repair and Construction of Roads and Schools. It has already been noted that the construction and repair of secondary roads and schools have been concerns of the Mexican army since the 1920s. The army had also participated in the construction of airports and railroads, during the 1920s and 1930s, and had assisted in stringing telegraph lines. By the 1940s, the army's engineering skills gradually became confined to building roads, schools, landing strips, and a small number of irrigation projects. One army general writing in the 1940s called the Mexican army "an army of builders" and a formidable resource working on behalf of the Mexican people.<sup>13</sup> Despite the preoccupation with World War II, the army still found time to devote to its construction activities. For example, the SDN *Memoria* covering the period September 1943-August 1944 cited numerous examples of specific units repairing roads, building landing strips, constructing schools, and implanting drainage systems. President Avila Camacho received a letter from the military zone commander in Oaxaca in September 1943 asking him to postpone a proposed visit because his troops had not yet completed repairing the major road leading into the area.<sup>14</sup> After World War II ended, political leaders looked upon the army to participate in what they had labeled "the national reconstruction," and the army soon found itself literally constructing roads, bridges, and other public works projects.<sup>15</sup> For example, a report from the 4th Military Zone in Hermosillo, Sonora

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<sup>13</sup>Othón León : 540-541.

<sup>14</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 559.1/29.

<sup>15</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1949 : 1-3. Various editions of the army magazine and the SDN Memorias are replete with specific examples of the army's contributions in construction and public works projects.



stated that 30 percent of the soldiers assigned to the zone had been put to work on building roads in 1946.<sup>16</sup>

Military zones have heavy earth-moving equipment, which aids in construction projects and in the removal of debris left by landslides brought on by inclement weather. By the 1960s, state and private contractors were awarded the major road-building contracts, and the army's efforts were soon confined to secondary roads and rural schools, where they remained focused into the 1980s. The refurbishing and restoration of rural schools has been accomplished with the coordination of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). These activities have been described frequently in the army magazine and the annual *SDN Memorias*.<sup>17</sup>

B. Literacy Training. Since the 1940s, the Mexican army has taken great pride in assuring that any individual associated with the institution is either literate or has the opportunity to become so. President Avila Camacho launched the National Campaign Against Illiteracy with a message to the nation on 21 August 1944. Improving education standards and eliminating illiteracy had been two of his choice projects, and he called upon the army for support of this program at the national level. The army responded with its own program aimed at assuring that all volunteers were literate prior to being assigned to a unit. The National Military Service (SMN) participants spent most of their

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<sup>16</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 515.1/385. See also Evolución : 148-151 for a sampling of the kind of projects army personnel participated in during the 1940s.

<sup>17</sup>Alamillo Flores, "La Nación" : 81; Prewitt : 613-616; Toral : 520 and selected articles in the Revista del Ejército from 1940-1982 and various SDN Memorias covering the same period. Presidential informes have also made specific mention of this program on frequent occasions. I also had the opportunity to discuss these activities with fellow students in the ESG in 1981. Those students had participated in these programs first hand and provided good insight into the technical aspects of the programs.

weekly training sessions in army-sponsored literacy centers, and the family members of both active duty army members and SMN personnel also had the opportunity to participate in the literacy instruction.<sup>18</sup> SDN Circular No.19, dated 23 July 1949, ordered army personnel to expand the literacy campaign to cover both military families and civilians. The army had responsibility for coordinating with the Education Secretariat. Each military zone had an officer assigned to the literacy campaign, who met with local political leaders and solicited their cooperation in setting up classes for literacy training.<sup>19</sup>

Literacy training remained an essential program of the army throughout the 1950s and obtained a boost in the 1960s when President Díaz Ordaz proclaimed he was fervently committed to the literacy campaign as the principal means of combating ignorance. General García Barragán, the SECDEF, announced his support of the president's program by opening the army's literacy centers to all civilians who wanted to learn how to read and write, especially the *campesinos* in the country's more isolated areas, and the army continued this liaison with the SEP throughout the 1970s. Members of the SMN and the rural defense corps went on to train other members of their communities as part of their national service, and army leaders supported President Luis Echeverría's literacy programs from 1970-1976.<sup>20</sup> The army's efforts in the overall

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<sup>18</sup>Medina, Vol. 18 : 385-386; SDN Memoria, 1946-1947 : 77-78; SDN Memoria, 1947-1948 : 69 and Revista del Ejército, August 1965 : 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>Revista del Ejército, July 1949 : 81.

<sup>20</sup>McAlister et.al. : 211; Manuel Levi Peza, "El Ejército Mexicano," Revista del Ejército, March 1971 : 21-22; Revista del Ejército, August 1965 : 1-2 and Revista del Ejército, January 1971 : 49. See Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, "Seis Años de Labor" (Mexico City: Taller Gráfico, 1976) : 209 for statistics on the number of individuals trained from 1971-1976.

drive to eradicate illiteracy paid dividends over the years. A newspaper article in May 1975 reported that the SDN sponsored 631 literacy centers throughout the country with over 10,000 students, both military and civilian.<sup>21</sup> By 1979, the number of literacy training centers sponsored by the SDN had been reduced to 76, and these centers trained only about 6,500 individuals, a more than 30 percent reduction over those trained in 1975.<sup>22</sup>

C. Reforestation and Extinguishing Forest Fires. The army has been contributing to the reforestation of the nation since the 1930s. It has also been the principal force responsible for fighting forest fires since that time. The former mission has traditionally received the most publicity. Official army publications have proudly reported how the army has cooperated with the Secretariat of Agriculture in reforesting different parts of the country.<sup>23</sup> For example, from 1948 to 1949 soldiers planted more than 70,000 trees throughout Mexico; this activity has been reported annually in the army's official report of achievements (*SDN Memorias*). Reforestation has also been noted at regular intervals in the army magazine, both specifically and collectively as part of the army overall civic-action mission.<sup>24</sup>

The army's reforestation program gained the most notoriety during the José López Portillo administration (1976-1982). President López Portillo sought to combat some of

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<sup>21</sup>"Campaña de Alfabetización del Ejército," *El Sol*, 22 May 1975 : 3.

<sup>22</sup>SDN *Informe*, 1979 : 24.

<sup>23</sup>Boils : 131 and SDN *Memoria*, 1946-47 : 98.

<sup>24</sup>See the SDN *Memorias* from 1950-1980 and specifically SDN *Memoria*, 1948-49 : 93. For an example of the kind of coverage this program has received in the army magazine, see *Revista del Ejército*, December 1967 : 1-2.

the nation's growing environmental problems by planting more trees, especially in and around the federal district. The president personally paid homage to the soldiers who had participated in Operation "4-M" and helped to plant more than five million trees in the federal district.<sup>25</sup> The army followed up its strong effort in 1979 with Operation "6-M", during which 2,700 soldiers planted more than six million trees in the federal district within a 33-day period. President López Portillo distributed medals to soldiers who had participated in the operation at a special ceremony on 25 August 1980.<sup>26</sup> The army's reforestation program reached its apex in 1982 when more than 11 million trees were planted in the federal district under the auspices of Operation "11-M-82."<sup>27</sup>

D. Campaigns Against Livestock Plagues and Epidemics. Given the predominantly rural make-up of Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s, agricultural and livestock activities held major importance throughout the country, since the majority of the Mexican population depended on those activities for their livelihood. The emergence of an animal-related epidemic or plague had disastrous economic effects on most of the population. The army had principal responsibility for vaccinating livestock and taking other forms of remedial action to prevent the spread of such epidemics. The army's first distinguished service in this area happened during the period February 1947-July 1951. A serious outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease originated in Veracruz in December 1946.

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<sup>25</sup>Roberto Guzmán B., "El Ejército ha Cumplido una Loable Tarea Reforestadora," Novedades, 19 August 1979 : 1; Revista del Ejército, August 1979 : 54 and SDN Informe, 1979 : 24.

<sup>26</sup>Revista del Ejército, July 1980 : 41-43 and Revista del Ejército, August 1980 : 36.

<sup>27</sup>Revista del Ejército, June 1982 : 3.

This affliction quickly spread to Mexico's central, southern, and western states. The United States promptly closed its border to livestock trade with Mexico while offering Mexico to help slaughter the infected cattle. The Mexican army reacted by forming a military headquarters to coordinate its effort in the national campaign against hoof-and-mouth disease in February 1947. This command center coordinated its efforts with those of the Agricultural Secretariat, and the army general staff prepared a regulation outlining the army's duties in the campaign. Specific army missions included establishing cordons around the contaminated areas, locating new flare-ups of the epidemic, taking custody of infected livestock, surveillance of railroad and decontamination stations, and constructing needed sanitary facilities. Military veterinarians vaccinated healthy animals, and other army personnel educated local farmers on preventive measures at their disposal.<sup>28</sup>

Army sources described the army's efforts in this campaign as indisputably the most important social contribution made by the army in many years. One editorial described the difficult task of educating Mexican farmers, many of whom preferred taking risks over losing prized cows.<sup>29</sup> Mexican and U.S. officials, based primarily on the recommendations of the latter, first adopted the method of slaughtering the infected cattle as the principal means of halting the epidemic. That approach led to accusations by

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<sup>28</sup>Vicente Ernesto Pérez Mendoza, "The Role of the Armed Forces in the Mexican Economy in the 1980s" (Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 1981) : 27; Bautista Rosas : 95; BFO, 371/68002, 29 January 1948 and SDN, Memoria 1946-47 : 16-19. Mexicans referred to this disease as *la fiebre aftosa*, and the British called foot-and-mouth disease.

<sup>29</sup>"EL EJERCITO EN LA LUCHA CONTRA LA FIBRE AFTOSA," Revista del Ejército, December 1949 : 1-3 and SDN Memoria, 1946-47 : 16.

many Mexicans that the epidemic was a plot concocted by the United States to benefit U.S. ranchers. The disease hit the small farmers and ranchers especially hard when U.S. and Mexican teams slaughtered approximately 168,000 head of cattle in less than a year. They received no compensation for their slaughtered cattle, and many began to hide their livestock from army inspectors. Some even fired upon army sanitation teams. As a result of this adverse reaction, the Mexican government petitioned for a new agreement with the United States that advocated attacking the pestilence by dint of vaccinations and quarantines. The United States acquiesced, and slaughtering became the last resort.<sup>30</sup>

The army had more than 12,000 soldiers involved during the height of the campaign. Contingents from 31 infantry battalions, twelve cavalry regiments, and one engineer battalion participated in the campaign full-time. The army set up four cordons throughout fifteen states and the federal district. Army leaders subsequently divided those cordons into 45 sectors to facilitate control. The army's participation decreased to approximately 3,036 men by April 1950, and the army's responsibilities were further reduced to inspecting livestock in designated areas after that date. The government declared an official end to the campaign on 1 July 1951 and paid tribute to the 66 soldiers who had given their lives in the campaign.<sup>31</sup>

The army has also waged war against the black fly. A black fly epidemic broke out in 1946 in the northeastern part of the country, and the following year the blight spread

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<sup>30</sup>BFO, 371/68002, 29 January 1948; Meyer and Zoraida Vázquez : 166 and SDN Memoria, 1946-47 : 97.

<sup>31</sup>BFO, 371/68002, 29 January 1948; SDN Memorias, 1946-47 : 97; 1947-48 : 83; 1949-50 : 13 and 113-115; 1950-51 : 113; 1951-52 : 15 and Toral : 510.

to the state of Puebla and Mexico state. The army again had to cordon off areas to prevent the infested agricultural products from being shipped to the United States. Soldiers contributed to stemming the epidemic by inspecting agricultural products and plants as well as farm vehicles transporting produce. However, the army's contribution was on a much smaller scale than the hoof-and-mouth disease campaign, with army participation dropping to just 66 soldiers as participating in 1951.<sup>32</sup>

The army had joined in a national campaign to rid Mexico of malaria during the 1950s and 1960s, but its efforts received scant attention in the press, perhaps because the government was embarrassed to admit the extent of the disease. The official SDN *Memorias* described the army's specific tasks in the crusade as work by army medical personnel in close coordination with the Health Ministry to treat individuals who had contracted the disease, and to search for new victims in outlying areas. Army officers managed the logistical operations of the campaign, planning the distribution of supplies from the federal district to the fourteen zones of operations that had been established throughout the country. The army controlled the movement of vehicles and personnel in and out of the affected zones in an effort to halt a further spread of the disease. Based on the data available in the official army reports, it seemed that the disease had been virtually arrested by the late 1960s.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>SDN *Memorias*, 1946-47 : 16 and 97; 1947-48 : 86; 1950-51 : 134.

<sup>33</sup>*Evolución* : 147 and SDN *Memorias*, 1958-59 : 27-28; 1959-60 : 25-26; 1960-61 : 27; 1962-1964 : 25; 1965-66 : 23 and 1967-68 : 33. The campaign against malaria is not mentioned again by official army sources after 1968.

The miracles of modern medicine have contributed greatly to the diminution of those diseases, and as a result, the army has worked on a much reduced scale assisting federal agencies in making livestock inspections and the appropriate vaccinations. More recently, the army helped to bring an outbreak of horse encephalitis under control in the states of Durango, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Zacatecas. The army established sanitary cordons within these states in the early 1970s and vaccinated more than 69,000 horses in an effort to halt the epidemic. Army leaders also donated more than one-thousand horses bred on army ranches to the affected populations as a form of compensation for their losses. In 1971, army troops worked closely with the Agricultural Secretariat to eliminate an outbreak of the black fly epidemic in the state of San Luis Potosí.<sup>34</sup>

E. Participation in the Antidrug Campaign. This specific task has historically been considered a civic action function. In more recent years, this activity has assumed political implications given the expanding severity of the problem, which has led to accusations of governmental corruption and has ruffled relations with the United States.

There has existed a general misconception that the Mexican army did not get involved in antidrug operations until the United States began to pressure the Mexico in the late 1960s. The opposite was true because the army had reported drug eradication activities in the state of Durango as early as May 1946.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. representative on the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the United Nations reported that an aerial survey

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<sup>34</sup>Pérez Mendoza : 27; Revista del Ejército, October 1971 : 63-64; "Seis Años de Labor" : 211 and Toral : 520.

<sup>35</sup>Revista del Ejército, May 1946 : 66-70.



of Mexico revealed opium poppy fields covering an area of about one-thousand square miles and identified the town of Bodiriguato, Sinaloa, as the focal point of that illegal activity. This town was located near the confluence of the three states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa, and the surrounding area had already become Mexico's major drug-producing zone. Other reports uncovered at least twelve clandestine drug processing laboratories in Mexico, and U.S. officials began to express concern about this menace.<sup>36</sup>

The U.S. Ambassador in Mexico received instructions from the State Department in October 1947 to urge the Mexican government to undertake every effort to prevent the cultivation of illegal drugs. U.S. Ambassador Walter Thurston advised the State Department two months later that he had learned that the Mexican Attorney General's Office had been planning an extensive program aimed at impeding the cultivation of poppy fields. Mexico did launch a major antidrug campaign in the northwestern part of the country in 1948. The program entailed occasional raids and search-and-destroy missions into the heavy drug-producing areas. Army personnel assisted agents from the Attorney General's Office in locating and eradicating the poppy fields, and this campaign has continued at different levels of intensity up to the present day.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>U.S. Foreign Relations 1947 : 836-837. The correct spelling of Bodiriguato is Badiriguato. In 1977, Badiriguato would become the location of the army's Operation *Cóndor* headquarters. *Cóndor* became the army's principal anti-drug operation and continues to this day.

<sup>37</sup>Richard B. Craig, "La Campaña Permanente, Mexico's Antidrug Campaign," Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 20 (May 1978) : 107-108 and U.S. Foreign Relations 1947 : 838-839.

Although virtually nothing has been written about the army's role in the anti-narcotics campaign during the 1950s and 1960s, the army did work with agents from the Attorney General's Office to locate and destroy drug crops in some of the more rugged regions in the country. Official army sources reported the destruction of drug crops and the apprehension of drug traffickers in the states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa during 1950. These same sources divulged that approximately 370 soldiers had been assigned full-time to locate and destroy drugs in the tri-state area of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa during the period from October 1950 to April 1951. The number of soldiers participating in the campaign dropped to 149 the following year. The activity reports seldom mentioned the quantity of drugs destroyed by the army, but accounts did show that the army had continued to cooperate in the campaign with the Attorney General's Office and the Narcotics Police from the Health Ministry throughout the 1950s.<sup>38</sup>

The army persevered in the antidrug campaign during the 1960s. Its operations seemed to have expanded slightly during that decade. The army conducted joint search-and-destroy missions with agents from the Attorney General's Office in eight different states and increased the surface area coverage from that of the previous decade.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>SDN Memorias, 1949-50 : 116; 1950-51 : 34; 1958-59 : 30.

<sup>39</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 40, March 1968 : 25-26. This source mentioned how President Díaz Ordaz attended a breakfast at the 10th Military Zone in Durango and received a briefing on two antidrug operations an infantry battalion assigned to the military zone had recently conducted; Revista del Ejército, July 1962 : 15 and SDN Memorias, 1960-61 : 28; 1962-64 : 26; 1965-66 : 24; 1966-67 : 33-34 and 1967-68 : 42.

Despite some gradual improvement, the overall intensity level of the campaign remained relatively low until the 1970s.

Mexico's "Permanent Campaign Against Drug Trafficking" picked up considerably towards the end of 1969 as a result of pressure from the United States. The United States implemented Operation Intercept along the U.S.-Mexican border in October 1969, ostensibly to pressure Mexico to devote more resources to the antidrug campaign. U.S. officials believed the drug problem in the United States had reached crisis proportions, and they placed considerable blame on Mexico as a major supplier of illegal drugs. Operation Intercept prohibited Mexican goods from entering the United States as a means of coercing Mexico to accept a policy of destroying drug crops by chemical means. That policy eventually proved counterproductive, but the U.S. pressure did seem to affect the amount of resources Mexico would later commit to the permanent antidrug campaign.<sup>40</sup> The new emphasis Mexican officials began to place on the antidrug campaign had a major effect on the army's participation in the campaign. Army leaders, on orders from the president, immediately assigned more troops to the war against drugs.

Army publications devoted considerable space to the military's efforts in the antidrug campaign. The press also started to give more coverage to the army's role.<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup>Samuel I. del Villar, "The Illicit U.S.-Mexico Drug Market: Failure of Policy and an Alternative," in Mexico and the United States: Managing the Relationship, ed. Riordan Roett (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988) : 196-201 and Craig : 109-112. President Díaz Ordaz expressed his indignation over Operation Intercept in his 1970 *informe*. See Informe V, 1970 : 167.

<sup>41</sup>See for example "Tres Narcotraficantes Abatidos en un Tirateo de 40 Minutos con el Ejército," El Sol, 21 November 1972 : 14; "Ejército y Armada Presentaron a LE sus Saludos de Año Nuevo," El Heraldo, 5 January 1975 : 1 and Miguel Moreno, "Totalmente Tranquilo el País: Cuenca Díaz," La Prensa, 14 February 1975 : 3. These are just a few of the press articles that mention the army's role in the national antidrug campaign. This role did not receive any press coverage prior to the 1970s.

army magazine described in detail the army's mission in the permanent campaign against drugs. Soldiers assigned to this campaign had responsibility for locating and destroying illegal drug crops and drug-processing laboratories as well as for apprehending planters and traffickers. A high-ranking army officer who experienced the acceleration of the army's antidrug activities first-hand in the early 1970s related how army members had to do virtually all the eradication. This officer emphasized how the Attorney General's agents encountered difficulties navigating the rugged terrain selected by the planters. Army sources soon described their mission in the antidrug campaign as a primary obligation because it involved safeguarding the health of the Mexican people. The surface area of crops destroyed increased dramatically in the 1970s as did the number of apprehensions for drug offenses.<sup>42</sup> General Cuenca Díaz, the SECDEF, reported that in April 1974 fifteen infantry battalions and five cavalry regiments, some 15,000 soldiers, were permanently involved in the antidrug campaign with the principal responsibility of cutting the illegal plants at their roots and then burning them. Army personnel also had the job of educating local *campesinos* as to the dangers of cultivating illegal drugs. The following year another ten battalion-size units had been added to the participating forces and the campaign had spread to thirteen states.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Interview, July 1990; "La campaña contra la siembra y tráfico de enervantes en las relaciones de México con los Estados Unidos de América," Revista del Ejército, August 1970 : 14-16 and SDN Memorias, 1969-70 : 52-56 and 1971-72 : 30-32.

<sup>43</sup>Craig : 112-116; "ENTREVISTA DE PRENSA AL C. GENERAL DE DIVISION D.E.M. HERMENEGILDO CUENCA DIAZ, SECRETARIO DE LA DEFENSA NACIONAL, POR EL SEÑOR DEMETRIO BOLAÑOS ESPINOSA, REDACTOR DE 'EL UNIVERSAL'," Revista del Ejército, April 1974 : 30-34 and Revista del Ejército, April 1975 : 53-55.

Operation *Cóndor* proved to be the army's most prominent contribution to the permanent antidrug campaign. The growth in the drug trade by the mid-1970s forced the army to take more definitive action against the drug growers and traffickers. Shortly after becoming SECDEF, General Galván López directed the general staff to formulate a plan aimed at significantly curtailing drug cultivation in Mexico. The general staff of the National Defense Secretariat subsequently developed *Plan Cóndor* to deploy troops to the country's heaviest drug producing area on a permanent basis. The army set up *Plan Cóndor* headquarters outside the town of Badiriguato, Sinaloa. The plan called for approximately 3,000 soldiers to locate and destroy marijuana and poppy plants in an area comprised of the confluence of the three states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa. The army task force that served in the region drew troops from all over the Republic. The first task force reported for duty on 16 January 1977. A new task force has replaced the previous one every six months up to the present day.<sup>44</sup>

The army hierarchy had established a *Plan Canador* in the early 1970s, which directed each military zone to conduct antidrug operations within the zone's area of responsibility in accordance with the extent of the threat in the area.<sup>45</sup> Drug cultivation occurred with greater frequency in the coastal states, and the military zones in those

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<sup>44</sup>Francisco Ortiz Pinchetti, "La Operación Cóndor, Letanía de Horrores," *Proceso*, 9 October 1978 : 6-8; *Revista del Ejército*, February 1977 : 61-62; "Campana Contra Enervantes," *Revista del Ejército*, May 1981 : 18-20. While assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City in 1985-1988, I received numerous briefings from the SDN concerning the army's antidrug campaign and both *Cóndor* and *Canador* were discussed extensively.

<sup>45</sup>*Evolución* : 153; "Destruyen Drogas por \$239,132 Millones," *El Sol* 16 December 1977 : 1; Piñeyro, "Presencia política militar" : 74 and "Seis Años de Labor" : 211.

states began to devote a substantial portion of their resources to drug eradication. The land-locked states tended to earmark less resources for the antidrug campaign and were able to focus more on other civic- action programs. Richard B. Craig, who has done considerable research on Mexico's antidrug campaign, has written about a number of problems the army has encountered in this campaign. Craig described an unfavorable ratio of soldiers to land surface. He also noted that the army lacked sufficient resources and equipment, especially helicopters, to do a thorough job. Craig acknowledged the presence of corruption among some of the zone commanders as well as some interagency friction. It seemed most military commanders resented being ordered about by what they perceived to be incompetent federal agents, and as the army became more involved with the antidrug campaign, this duty grew more unpopular among the officers. They viewed this mission as a no-win situation, which carried with it the potential of seriously disparaging the reputation of the army because of charges of corruption. In spite of these impediments, the army has posted considerable success in the campaign. The army's destruction statistics have been especially impressive and far outdistance the contributions made by any other federal agency.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Craig : 116-118. The SDN Memorias and other official army publications carry numerous graphs depicting the army's contribution to the eradication of drugs. For example, in 1973 the army destroyed 5,913 square *hectareas* of poppy plants and 3,286 square *hectareas* of marijuana plants. (See "Seis Años de Labor" : 221). Unfortunately, there are no other figures from other agencies to offer a basis of comparison. But just the size of the overall surface area seems impressive. A *hectare* is equivalent to about two and one-half acres. If friction did exist between the army and other federal agencies, it never became public. To the contrary, the Attorney General declared in November 1980 that the support received from the army in the antidrug campaign had been of the highest quality. See "Gonzalo Juárez García, "Reconocimiento al Ejército en su Lucha Contra el Narcotráfico," El Nacional, 21 November 1980 : 4.

TABLE 6-1

## Mexican Army Campaign Against Drugs

DRUG CROP DESTRUCTION	1975	1976	1977
<i>Poppy Seed</i>			
Number of Plots	11,559	2,033	24,728
Surface (in square hectares)	4,690	4,378	4,442
<i>Marijuana</i>			
Number of Plots	8,266	9,070	13,146
Surface (in square hectares)	2,633	2,393	3,788
<i>Arrests</i>			
Nationals	1,314	995	1,110
Foreigners	78	74	78

SOURCE: SDN, *Informe* : 43.

The antidrug campaign continued to command an increasing portion of the army's resources throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. The drug eradication role quickly became one of the army's most important functions (see Table 6-1). The army's responsibilities in this area expanded in 1969, when a campaign was begun to dissuade local farmers and villagers from cultivating and harvesting drugs. Army leaders worked diligently to educate the population on the deleterious effects of producing and consuming narcotics. The army also expanded its intelligence capabilities, relying heavily on the rural defense corps, in an attempt to identify and dismember the organizations involved in drug trafficking. This expanded role became more costly for the army in human lives.

By the late 1980s, more than 500 soldiers had lost their lives while participating in the antidrug campaign.<sup>47</sup> By 1980, army leaders placed the army's antidrug mission second only to that of disaster relief. Discussions with army officers revealed the unpopular nature of antidrug duty. Army leaders faced a dilemma in attacking this problem because, while they were under constant pressure from the United States to step up their efforts in the antidrug campaign, they were also exposed to bad publicity from allegations of corruption.

F. Disaster Relief. Disaster relief evolved into a highly visible public-service function of the army by the late 1960s. The army had actually been providing disaster relief throughout the post-Revolution period, but no formal assistance plan existed until 1966.<sup>48</sup> President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz ordered his SECDEF, General García Barragán, to devise a plan through which the army could provide assistance to the civilian population in cases of natural disasters. García Barragán in turn directed his general staff to formulate such a plan. The SECDEF presented the first draft of his staff's blueprint to President Díaz Ordaz in March 1966. The president subsequently approved *Plan DN-III-E*, which made the army the national coordinating agency for disaster relief. One indication of the special importance the army had begun to attach to its mission of disaster relief appeared in 1971 with the publication of the new *Ley Orgánica del Ejército*

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<sup>47</sup>Bruno Galindo Trejo, "Del Civismo en el Ejército," *Revista del Ejército*, September 1970 : 39-45 and Juan Arévalo Gardoqui, "The Permanent Campaign Against Drug Trafficking," speech to the Governor of Oaxaca and other state officials in Oaxaca by the Secretary of National Defense, August 1987. Translation provided by the U.S. Embassy, Mexico City.

<sup>48</sup>For some examples of army support to the population during disasters prior to 1966 see SDN *Memorias*, 1943-44 : 152-153; 1947-48 : 87; 1953-54 : 101-102; 1958-59 : 31; 1959-60 : 30-31; 1960-61 : 32 and 1962-1964 : 29. Disaster relief received considerably more coverage in the SDN *Memorias* after 1967 when it began to be mentioned as one of the army's principal contributions to society.



y *Fuerza Aérea*. The new edition of the 1926 law incorporated "to aid the civilian population and cooperate with civilian authorities in cases of public necessities" as one of the three general missions of the Mexican army.<sup>49</sup>

According to one Mexican officer, President Díaz Ordaz had been observing members of the Presidential Guards help some flood victims in 1966. The president asked his chief of staff if the army had traditionally furnished support to disaster victims. His chief of staff responded in the affirmative but indicated that no formal plan existed for providing such support. Shortly thereafter, as stated above, the president summoned his SECDEF and directed him to prepare a formal plan, which became *DN-III-E*.<sup>50</sup> *Plan DN-III-E* developed an echeloned organizational structure to provide support to disaster victims. The plan created a central aid group, military zone aid groups, sector aid groups, and sub-sector aid groups. This structure funneled disaster aid from the national level down to the local levels. Each military zone subsequently developed elaborate plans on how to react in the case of specific disasters. These plans included the recommended composition of special assistance teams (communications, food services, medical, rescue, etc.) and the necessary coordination required in the aftermath of a disaster. Once a disaster occurs, the army first concentrates on maintaining law and order, and then ensures the maintenance of adequate health standards. Army emergency assistance teams assess medical needs, treat casualties, purify and supply water, and

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<sup>49</sup>"Plan DN-III-E," *Revista del Ejército*, June 1966 : 5-18; "AUXILIO a la Población civil en casos de desastre," *Revista del Ejército*, May 1982 : 4-10; Boils : 131-132; *Evolución* : 152-153; Piñeyro, "Presencia política militar" : 72-74 and Toral : 522.

<sup>50</sup>Interview, July 1991.

dispense the necessary vaccinations and immunizations. Army leaders also provide for the minimum required level of food and shelter, prevent unlawful exploitation of area resources, and safeguard vital public works and monuments.<sup>51</sup>

Actions undertaken by the army during a volcano eruption in March 1982 illustrated the extent of army support during an emergency situation. The Chichonal volcano erupted in the southern state of Chiapas on 28 March causing considerable property damage and personal harm to the local residents. President José López Portillo placed his SECDEF, General Galván López, in charge of implementing *Plan DN-III-E*. General Galván López subsequently directed the military zone commanders in the immediate and nearby areas to maintain order and to provide food and shelter to the affected population. He also gave orders to conserve minimum health standards for the civilian populace in the surrounding areas. The situation stabilized by 14 April, by which time the army had already provided assistance to approximately 20,000 residents during the relief operations. The SDN sent medical teams to the area, conducted rescue operations, and secured and controlled livestock. Due the severity of the disaster, General Galván López directed the operation personally from an on-site location.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>SDN *Memoria*, 1978-79 : 25-26 and "AUXILIO a la Población civil en casos de desastre," *Revista del Ejército*, May 1982 : 6-10. Much of this information was also provided in various lesson plans at the ESG in 1980-81.

<sup>52</sup>"Erupción del Volcán Chichonal," *Revista del Ejército*, April 1982 : XXII-XXIX; Juan Danell Sánchez, "El Ejército pone en práctica el plan de emergencia DN-3," *El Día*, 30 March 1982 : 6; "Elogió JLP la Esforzada y Humanitaria Labor del Ejército en Zonas Dañadas por el Volcán Chichonal," *El Nacional*, 4 April 1982 : 8 and "Evacúa el Ejército a 60 mil Personas de las Zonas en Peligro por el Volcán Chichonal," *El Nacional*, 6 April 1982 : 6.

TABLE 6-2

*Plan DN-III-E*  
**Disaster Relief**  
 (Army Responses by Incident)

TYPE DISASTER	1975	1976	1977
Cyclones	2	6	1
Floods	6	16	--
Earthquakes	24	10	2
Fires	150	76	59
. . . Highway Accidents	121	81	18

SOURCE: SDN *Informe*, 1979 : 46.

The army's reaction to the Chichonal volcano eruption was a concrete example of the extensive support the army has customarily provided during natural disasters. The army has furnished disaster relief in many instances involving major accidents, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, explosions, and other types of disaster (see Table 6-2).<sup>53</sup> Government leaders have been quick to praise the army's contributions in this field because the army's efforts have helped to enhance the image of the government as a vital relief agency for its constituents. President López Portillo declared in a September 1978 speech that the army has been well recognized by the Mexican people

<sup>53</sup>SDN *Memoria*, 1971-72 : 28; *Revista del Ejército*, December 1967 : 1-2; *Revista del Ejército*, August 1973 : 1; *Revista del Ejército*, March 1978 : 63-64; *Revista del Ejército*, February 1980 : 70-73; "Felicitación al Ejército a JLP por su Posición en EU, la ONU y Panamá," *El Nacional*, 5 October 1979 : 1; Jesús Saldaña H., "La Situación es Delicada: Félix Galván López," *El Heraldo*, 22 February 1980 : 2; "El Ejército, Listo Para Auxiliar Damnificados por las Lluvias," *El Sol*, 20 June 1981 : 1 and "Plan de Emergencia del Ejército en Zonas Inundadas de Oaxaca y Veracruz," *Excelsior*, 16 July 1981 : 5. These articles provide just a small sampling of army participation in disaster relief operations. Countless examples of army support during annual flooding and other less common calamities have been cited in the press through the years.

for the extensive aid it has provided during natural disasters. The president recalled an incident from earlier in the year when the victims of a flood in Tijuana, Baja California Norte, demanded that the president send in the army to assist them. He noted that the people's request made him proud, and he found it difficult to believe that such a scenario could take place elsewhere in Latin America.<sup>54</sup> From a military standpoint, the army may have considered the implementation of *Plan DN-III-E* during the 1970s to be its most vital mission after defending the nation from an external threat. The army's contributions in the area of disaster relief would gradually become overshadowed by its expanded participation in the antidrug campaign in the 1980s.

G. Vigilance Against Rural Crime and Security Services. The army, more than any other institution, has enforced law and order in the countryside since the Revolution. The army had fought for many years to eliminate bandits, cattle rustlers, and horse thieves from rural Mexico. This particular role received a lot of attention in the 1940s and 1950s when it was not uncommon for small villages or municipalities to petition the president for military support to rid their areas of a specific group of outlaws.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the army was the only institution capable of preserving law and order in some of Mexico's more isolated areas during that period. Cattle rustling and horse stealing began to tail off in the 1960s, but small towns still sought support from the army against

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<sup>54</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, September 1978 : 3. Beginning in the 1970s, the army magazine added a section devoted to the activities undertaken within each military zone, and the activities of many different zones often involved some form of disaster relief.

<sup>55</sup>AGN, Alemán Valdés, 559.1/10, 559.1/23, 559.1/31 and 559.1/35; AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 559.1/14 and SDN *Memorias*, 1958-59 : 30 and 1959-60 : 30; 1960-61 : 28; 1962-64 : 26; 1965-66 : 24; 1966-67 : 34; 1967-68 : 42 and 1969-70 : 39. The SDN *Memorias* make no mention of combating cattle and horse thieves after 1970.

bandits and armed groups, especially in some of the southern states during the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> The army continued to recover stolen cattle until around 1970.

Mexican soldiers have traditionally provided security for both cargo and passengers on Mexico's railroads. Army security guards also accompanied pay agents from the Treasury Ministry and other government agencies who had to travel to outlying areas to pay employees or to make monetary collections for the government.<sup>57</sup>

By the 1970s, the army transitioned from these miscellaneous escort and security services to providing security for various state installations and facilities. Prior to that time, the army had been providing security for oil fields, sugar mills, and mines, and to a lesser extent, at major railroad and other government communications facilities, only when the workers at those installations went on strike.<sup>58</sup> With the advent of the 1970s, growing dissatisfaction with the government as a result of deteriorating conditions within Mexican society (as discussed below) gave rise to a number of dissident groups intent on manifesting their displeasure with government policies by sabotaging government installations. The discovery of large oil reserves off the Mexican shores in the later part of the 1970s presented the government with a more adequate justification for using the army as a security force. The oil fields had to be properly protected from hostile

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<sup>56</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 559.1/14; 559/3 and 559/9-12.

<sup>57</sup>"El Vasto Programa Abordado por la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional," *Revista del Ejército*, September-December 1941 :552-556; *Revista del Ejército*, March 1946 : 1-3; SDN *Memorias*, 1947-48 : 86; 1949-50 : 118; 1958-59 : 30; 1959-60 : 30; 1960-61 : 28.

<sup>58</sup>SDN *Memorias*, 1947-48; 1950-51 : 135 and 1959-60 : 30.

interests, the implication being that external sources represented the chief menace to this new and valuable commodity.

The official annual record of army activities alluded to the "discreet vigilance" of airports and selected banks as early as 1971.<sup>59</sup> Government officials had determined petroleum pipelines and installations to be of vital importance to Mexico's national security, and based on that assessment, these leaders passed on the security responsibilities of those facilities to the army in 1978. The SECDEF announced in 1978 that the army had been making a significant contribution to the country's development by protecting more than 45 percent of the installations belonging to the national petroleum monopoly (PEMEX), the Federal Electricity Commission, and the Agricultural Ministry. Army leaders later affirmed that the army had willingly accepted this new mission as another symbol of the army's institutional loyalty.<sup>60</sup> When President López Portillo nationalized the banks on 1 September 1982, he commissioned the army to furnish security for all the banks in the country except for those in the federal district. The federal district had adequate police forces to provide that security.<sup>61</sup>

By safeguarding these many government and public facilities, the army has helped the country to conserve scarce resources that at least indirectly benefit the Mexican people. Once again the services provided by the army have continued to focus on some

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<sup>59</sup>SDN Memoria, 1971-72 : 28.

<sup>60</sup>Fernando Meraz, "Vigilará el ejército los gasoductos," UnoMásUno, 7 November 1978 : 1; "Contribuye el Ejército al Desarrollo Protegiendo Instalaciones Vitales," El Nacional, 2 September 1980 : 4 and Irma Fuentes, "Compromiso del Ejército: Salvaguardar el Petróleo," Novedades, 28 February 1981 : 1.

<sup>61</sup>"El Ejército vigilará las instalaciones bancarias," El Día, 2 September 1982 : 3.

of the country's more isolated regions, where the government did not have the available resources to provide vital services to its constituents.

H. Assistance in Conducting National Censuses. This task has been seldom associated with the military, but the army has made a significant contribution in this area. Official army sources in the post-World War II era first mentioned this duty in 1950. During that year, 4,780 members of the army, 69 army vehicles, and three army planes helped to collect data for Mexico's Seventh General Population Census.<sup>62</sup> Soldiers continued to serve as census takers for each national census. Additionally, army leaders coordinated with the Industry and Commerce Ministry so that army members could help with the national economic censuses in 1961, 1967, 1971 and 1976.<sup>63</sup>

Census taking, while only a minor civic action role, has employed a fair amount of army resources at infrequent intervals. This task has given army members the opportunity to mingle with the local populace, and another opportunity to promote their image as servants of the people. Accomplishing this mission has also provided some of the future leaders of the army with a first hand look at the nation's more pressing socioeconomic problems.

I. Vigilance of the Nation's Highways and Main Roads. Army personnel have patrolled the nation's main communications arteries and tourist centers during vacation periods on an annual basis since the late 1950s, and these roving army patrols have engaged in multifaceted activities. All military zones have organized assistance and

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<sup>62</sup>Bautista Rosas : 95 and SDN Memoria, 1949-50 : 117-118.

<sup>63</sup>"Seis Años de Labor" : 243 and SDN Memorias, 1965-66 :25-26 and 1966-67 : 35.

security patrols for the two major holiday periods in Mexico, Christmas and Holy Week (*Semana Santa*). The patrols have monitored the roads and highways leading to the country's principal tourist sites during official vacation periods, rendering both mechanical and medical assistance to stranded tourists. The army presence has also upgraded general security along these well traveled communications networks. When the need arose, army personnel assisted local and federal authorities in administering to emergencies and major accidents on the highways during those peak travel periods.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1970s, the army became more involved in highway security and safety and received more publicity for its efforts. When General Cuenca Díaz became SECDEF, he expanded the army's participation in these activities. The SDN became a member of the Executive Interministerial Tourism Commission a few years later, and the army refined its assistance and security services even further. Army leaders established both fixed and mobile patrols at critical junctures along the nation's principal road networks, and special units were created to respond to serious accidents in and around the major tourist locations. Roving mechanical teams also patrolled the highways, while other patrols provided fuel and lubricants to needy travelers.<sup>65</sup>

Apparently, the army has been using less than ten percent of its active forces to make up security and assistance teams during Christmas and Holy Week vacation periods. One

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<sup>64</sup>*Evolución* : 152; *SDN Memorias*, 1958-59 : 32; 1959-60 : 32; 1962-64 : 29; 1965-66 : 25; 1966-67 : 35 and 1967-68 : 45; "Trasladarán a los Sábados el Servicio Militar Nacional," *El Sol*, 22 December 1978 : 1 and Nidia Marín, "Se Sustituye por Jóvenes a Viejos Generales: Galván," *El Universal*, 12 April 1979 : 7. The title of this last article seems somewhat misleading, as do a number of other newspaper article titles dealing with the Mexican army, but as is frequently the case, the SECDEF discusses a number of different issues during his interviews with the press. The newspaper then selects a title to the article based on the topic that appears to have the greatest appeal.

<sup>65</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, March 1978 : 59 and "Seis Años de Labor" : 212.



source claimed that more than 6,000 soldiers would be used during the spring vacation period in 1979.<sup>66</sup> While the army's contribution to vacation safety might have seemed relatively insignificant in terms of resources, the army presence on the nation's highways and at its major tourist locations did serve a vital purpose. These patrols made many Mexicans feel more secure, and ultimately, this had a positive effect on the nation's economy by providing a boost to tourism. If for no other reason, the army projected a favorable image because those soldiers on duty had to forego their own vacations for the benefit of Mexican vacationers.

J. Social Action Brigades. These special units first appeared on the scene in 1970. Army leaders organized social action brigades with the staff, faculty, and students of the army's medical, veterinarian, dental, and nursing schools, along with social workers and other individuals with special skills needed in the country's rural areas. At first these units offered basic services such as the distribution of food, medicine, and clothing.<sup>67</sup> The services furnished by these social action brigades grew more refined under the succeeding administration when General Cuenca Díaz (1970-1976) adopted special field maneuvers so the army could furnish its services to needy towns and villages. These brigades provided basic health care, vaccinations, sanitation facilities, family planning services, and personal hygiene orientations to the population residing in some of Mexico's more isolated areas. In particular, the military doctors, who were trained at the army's medical college, *Escuela Médico Militar*, supervised and provided a number

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<sup>66</sup>"Auxiliará el Ejército a los Vacacionistas," El Nacional, 12 April 1979 : 1.

<sup>67</sup>Bruno Galindo Trejo, "Del Civismo en el EJERCITO," Revista del Ejército, September 1970 : 42-43.

of vital services to the many marginal groups they visited while other soldiers repaired local roads and schools during these social action maneuvers.<sup>68</sup>

The army had boasted very impressive social action statistics during the Echeverría *sexenio* (1970-1976). For example, in 1974 the social action brigades administered 153,704 medical consultations, 166 surgical operations, 14,978 dental consultations, and 37,296 vaccinations.<sup>69</sup> Although the social action brigades did make a major contribution in extending critical and often scarce services to the country's more isolated areas, some of these social action maneuvers appeared to have an ulterior motive. More precisely, these special units focused a substantial portion of their efforts in the troublesome state of Guerrero from 1972-1975.<sup>70</sup> Guerrero had traditionally been a vexatious state and the home of numerous dissident movements. A fairly conspicuous guerrilla movement originated there in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The social action brigades focused primarily on Guerrero, where they sought to alleviate the socioeconomic malaise in the region. The social action maneuvers continued at a reduced scale after the guerrilla movement had been brought under control during the latter part of the 1970s.

K. Participation in National Development Programs. The Mexican government introduced a number of regional and national development programs in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Political leaders sought the support of the Mexican army to assist in

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<sup>68</sup>"Maniobras Militares de Paz y Beneficio Social," *Revista del Ejército*, February 1971 : 11-13; Boils : 109-110 and 133; Pérez Mendoza : 27; SDN *Memorias*, 1971-72 : 36 and 1973-74 : 21 and Toral : 520.

<sup>69</sup>"Seis Años de Labor" : 201.

<sup>70</sup>"Labor Social del Ejército en la Sierra de Guerrero," *La Prensa*, 12 December 1972 : 12 and "Seis Años de Labor" : 195-205.

administering some of these programs. The federal government created a pilot regional development program in May 1966 geared to improving the standard of living of the indigenous populations in the states of Durango and Jalisco. This plan took on the name *Plan Huicot* because it focused on the *huichole*, *cora*, and *tepehuane* tribes. *Plan Huicot* educated the indigenous population on proper diet, improved housing, taught communications skills, and properly titled land belonging to these tribes, and the army contributed individuals with communications and engineering skills to work in the program.<sup>71</sup>

President Echeverría established the National Commission of Arid Zones (*Comisión Nacional de Zonas Áridas*) in 1971 to raise the standard of living in the country's arid zones. The army began to contribute as a permanent member of the commission by distributing water, as part of a new *Plan Acuario*, to Mexico's arid regions and other areas affected by drought. The army distributed approximately 530,000,000 liters of water to needy populations during the first year of the plan with that figure doubled by 1979. The army's contribution to *Plan Acuario* consisted of 380 drivers for 179 water tankers with a capacity of 7,000 liters each. The army's efforts provided much needed relief for over three million Mexicans in more than 10,000 towns and villages in thirteen states throughout the Republic.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos, *Operación Huicot*, (Guadalajara: May 1966) : 7,17 and 179-185; Boils : 139 and SDN *Memoria*, 1971-72 : 30.

<sup>72</sup>Boils : 130-131; *Revista del Ejército*, June 1971 : 74-75; "Seis Años de Labor," : 213 and SDN *Memorias*, 1971-72 : 38; 1973-74 : 22 and 1978-79 : 25.

President Echeverría's wife, María Esther Zuno de Echeverría initiated a program in 1971 whereby she donated manual grain grinders to the wives of *campesinos* living in isolated areas without electricity. The president's wife called upon the nation's soldiers to deliver those vital household items to the country's outlying populations, and the army disbursed more than 360,000 grain grinders during the period from 1971 to 1975. The government also donated tractors to agricultural schools and clothes and sewing machines to needy individuals living in the country's rural areas. The army once again was enlisted to deliver the donations to secluded areas in different parts of the country.<sup>73</sup>

The Mexican army has utilized a wide range of resources in accomplishing many of its civic action tasks. The *defensas rurales* have been used in almost all the army's civic-action programs since the 1930s. Many of the communities in which members of the *defensas rurales* resided often benefitted from the army's civic action programs. The familiarity this auxiliary force had of some of the country's outlying areas helped to facilitate the various tasks of the regular forces.<sup>74</sup>

Army leaders began to reorient the training of National Military Service (SMN) personnel in the early 1970s. They placed new emphasis on training SMN recruits to assist in civic action programs. This new training gave these youths the opportunity to make a direct contribution to improving the standard of living of some of their own

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<sup>73</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, July 1973 : 1-2; "Seis Años de Labor," : 210; SDN *Memorias*, 1971-72 : 36-38; 1973-74 : 22 and Toral : 526.

<sup>74</sup>Israel Cuellar Layseca, "EMPLEO Y ACTUACION DE LOS CUERPOS DE DEFENSAS RURALES," *Revista del Ejército*, February 1973 : 44-46 and September 1970 : 44; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 91; SDN *Memoria*, 1978-79 : 30 and Weil : 354-355.

families and neighbors. The job training these youths received helped prepare them for their future in the national job market and also offered ideological reinforcement by demonstrating that their hard worked was helping to consolidate the goals of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>75</sup>

**TABLE 6-3**  
**Army Civic Action**

TASK	1975	1976	1977
Trees Planted (In Thousands)	4,523	8,925	9,775
Literacy Training (Individuals)	30,500	32,100	36,720
School Restorations	865	885	1,474
Water Distribution (In Thousands of Liters)	10,305	11,200	93,885
Grain Grinder Distribution (In Thousands)	29	--	--

SOURCE: SDN *Informe*, 1979 : 39.

The wide range of civic-action programs in which the Mexican army has participated would seem to reinforce the perception that the army has traditionally attached major importance to this role. Table 6-3 offers a sampling of the army's *labor social* during

<sup>75</sup>Boils : 136-139; Pérez Mendoza : 23; "Maniobras Militares de Paz y Beneficio Social," *Revista del Ejército*, February 1971 : 13 and January 1973 : 1-2 and SDN *Memoria*, 1973-74 : 59-60.

the three-year period covering the transition from the Echeverría to López Portillo administration. Detailed military budget information has been impossible to obtain. Budgetary data, except as a general percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have been treated as sensitive by military leaders. One source estimated that sixty percent of the military budget was allocated for the army's civic-action programs in the mid-1960s.<sup>76</sup> There have been no prominent changes in the army's mission prior to 1982 that would have altered this percentage significantly. It can be assumed however that some of the funds have been gradually drained off into the army's burgeoning antidrug campaign. That fiscal readjustment has led to a diminution of army involvement in such programs as schools and roads construction, the literacy campaign, disease control, and reforestation, especially after 1982.

Civic action has enabled the army to demonstrate its institutional loyalty and patriotism through the years by supplying critical services and assistance to Mexico's rural population. The army's contributions have clearly served the nation as a whole. The Mexican army has maintained a powerful presence among the Mexican people by aiding them in times of acute need, as in the case of natural disasters. The army's patriotic deeds have helped to promote the image of a benign and popular military serving the Mexican people. That image has coincided neatly with the army's revolutionary heritage and has served as positive reinforcement for the army. The army's revolutionary heritage has manifested itself through the army's many civic action programs. General Galván López, while serving as SECDEF in April 1981, said that

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<sup>76</sup>McAlister et. al. : 210 and Walker : 33.

"you do not fear the Revolution when you are part of it."<sup>77</sup> The army's civic action role has allowed the army to remain an integral part of the Revolution by giving it an opportunity to reaffirm its Revolutionary principles on a daily basis.

The army's efforts in civic action have been frequently recognized by political leaders including the president at the national level, and has captured the attention of foreign observers.<sup>78</sup> A journalist from Texas wrote in the early 1960s that the Mexican armed forces existed to serve the people. He then detailed the army's collaboration in large-scale civic- action projects dedicated to improving the standard of living of the Mexican people.<sup>79</sup> The Mexican army invited General William Westmoreland, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, to the 1972 Independence Day celebrations, and during a press interview, General Westmoreland stated he was very impressed with the quality of the Mexican army. He added in the same breath that he was especially intrigued by the Mexican army's unique civic- action role.<sup>80</sup>

The army's civic-action programs have served to highlight the social consciousness of the Mexican government, and simultaneously, have helped to alleviate potentially volatile socioeconomic tensions and have enhanced the country's internal security. The

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<sup>77</sup>"Información Nacional," Revista del Ejército, May 1981 : 38. Galván López's exact words were *no se puede temer a la Revolución, cuando se es parte de ella...*

<sup>78</sup>See "Mensaje del Presidente López Portillo a las Fuerzas Armadas de Nuestro País," El Nacional, 20 February 1980 : 6 for a sample of the kind of praise political leaders have heaped upon the army for its civic action contributions.

<sup>79</sup>"LAS FUERZAS ARMADAS DE MEXICO TRABAJAN PARA EL PUEBLO," Revista del Ejército, October 1962 : 3-5.

<sup>80</sup>Jorge Durán, "El Ejército Intensificará más su Labor Social: Echeverría," El Sol, 17 September 1972 : 1 and "Westmoreland Dijo Estar muy Impresionado de la Labor Social del Ejército Mexicano," Excélsior, 17 September 1972 : 4.

army's close affiliation with federal agencies in the performance of civic action has established the military as an important partner in the overall system that evolved from the Revolution. Civic-action activities and responsibilities have left little time for political adventurism on the army's part. The army's general temperance with regard to national politics has further reinforced its apolitical image.

When the army's exclusive attention has not been focused on the *labor social*, it most likely has been focused on managing crises that the government has not been able to control with its civilian law-enforcement forces. Although army leaders have preferred to avoid becoming entangled in such conflicts, because of their political nature, they have been forced at times to respond to the government requests for assistance. Political leaders have asked the army to exert itself in only a handful of crises. Since 1940 it can be argued that the army became inextricably entwined in only one major crisis, the student movement of 1968.

#### The Mexican Army and Crisis Management Prior to 1968

Every Mexican president since 1940 has encountered serious problems during his administration. Although these situations have seldom reached a critical stage, each president has had the confidence to call on the army for assistance in restoring order. With regard to the army's participation in some of these conflicts, the phrase crisis management may actually be a misnomer because Mexico's political leaders have ultimately managed the nation's crises. The principal issue here does concern so much the army's involvement in some of these problems, but rather the army's unwavering



support of any presidential request. The army's response to these appeals has illustrated its staunch loyalty to the institutions as well as its willing subordination to civilian authorities.

As we have seen, the gradual demilitarization of politics commencing in the 1930s did not completely exempt the army from politics. Although the army was no longer Mexico's predominant political actor by the 1940s, the new civilian political elite still felt compelled to call upon the army in helping to resolve political problems that had the potential of reaching crisis proportions. Mexico's entrance into World War II brought with it Avila Camacho's "national unity" and relative domestic tranquility. This solidarity began to erode as the 1946 presidential campaign started to heat up, and political violence erupted between Alemán and Padilla supporters in Cuernavaca, Morelos, in late December 1945. That confrontation portended a much more serious outbreak of violence in León, Guanajuato, on 2 January 1946, in which the army played a major role.<sup>81</sup>

On that day, protesters contesting the results of municipal elections clashed with army forces. A riot ensued, and soldiers opened fire on the protestors, killing approximately 40 of the protesters and wounding hundreds of others.<sup>82</sup> Two army colonels in charge of the forces at León gave the orders to fire on the crowd. Military authorities later arrested these two colonels and a number of soldiers to face court

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<sup>81</sup>Paul Kesaris, ed., O.S.S./State Department Intelligence and Research Reports XIV. Latin America: 1941-1961. (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America) : Reel I, Current U.S. Policy Toward Mexico, 20 February 1945, 3-4. Hereafter cited as O.S.S. Reports.

<sup>82</sup>These figures were taken from USSDCF, 812.20/1-1146. Mexican sources did not include any specific figures on the casualties.

martials for their actions. Official U.S. reports of the incident indicated that President Avila Camacho, with congressional approval, removed the state governor less than a week after the disastrous affair. Subsequent investigations by the SDN and a congressional commission blamed the mishap on the two colonels and not the troops. The Mexican press circulated articles on how the army had been strictly prohibited from intervening in political matters and on how the SECDEF had taken new measures to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future. The SDN circulated new orders to all military zone commanders requiring specific permission from the SDN before troops can be utilized in reestablishing public order.<sup>83</sup>

The army's overreaction in León deviated from its more recent history. An official U.S. report covering this serious episode stated that in recent years there had been "a very definite and successful attempt to remove the Army from politics."<sup>84</sup> Official army publications appearing after the incident indicated that army leaders felt the incident blemished the institution's image and sullied its honor. The SECDEF declared that the army had been a victim of calumny as a result of the León affair. He answered the army's detractors by asserting that the Mexican army was "a genuine product of the Revolution whose supreme ideal is democracy."<sup>85</sup> General Urquiza reiterated that the army had distanced itself from politics because the president had directed it to do so and

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<sup>83</sup>O.S.S. Reports, Current U.S. Policy Toward Mexico, 20 February 1945 : 4 and USSDCF, 812.20/1-1146.

<sup>84</sup>USSDCF, 812.20/1-1146.

<sup>85</sup>Díaz Escobar : 12-14. The Spanish version of the quotation as it appears on page 14 is *El Ejército Mexicano es un producto genuino de la Revolución, cuyo ideal supremo es la democracia.*

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<sup>85</sup>Díaz Escobar : 12-14. The Spanish version of the quotation as it appears on page 14 is *El Ejército Mexicano es un producto genuino de la Revolución, cuyo ideal supremo es la democracia.*

because its position with regard to politics had been clearly stated in both army law and the Constitution of 1917. The SECDEF believed it unfair to disparage the entire army on account of the actions of a few of its members. He promised that the guilty parties would be punished and suggested that political opportunists were afraid to attack the government directly and targeted the army instead.<sup>86</sup>

The army's official magazine, *Revista del Ejército*, not surprisingly adopted a position quite similar to that of the SECDEF. The editorial staff chose to dismiss the yellow press directed against the government as the work of reactionaries who wanted to impede the goals of the Revolution. One editorial declared it was a grave injustice to condemn the entire army for the misdeeds of a few of its members, and that the army remained zealously in favor of the Revolution, liberty, democracy, and the Mexican populace.<sup>87</sup> A subsequent editorial voiced resentment of the labeling of soldiers as assassins when those dedicated individuals were defending the legitimate institutions of the nation. The editorial reminded its readers that Mexico's soldiers have popular and humble origins and have committed to a life of sacrifice on behalf of the nation. If the Mexican people believed these slanderous attacks against the army, Mexico's enemies will have achieved their objective of rending *la unidad nacional* that President Avila Camacho had worked so diligently to institute.<sup>88</sup> When army leaders defended their institution against alleged wrongdoing, it referred to specific traits that had come to

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<sup>86</sup>Díaz Escobar : 18-25.

<sup>87</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1946 : 1-3.

<sup>88</sup>Revista del Ejército, March 1946 : 1-3.

characterize the army by 1946, such as a revolutionary heritage and a fervent loyalty to the institutions, as the justification for its actions. Army members had adopted a strong affinity for these virtues during the 1940s, and this ideology had begun to gain acceptance among the Mexican public during the same period.

The honeymoon between the Mexican people and their government brought on by the war ended abruptly with the inauguration of Miguel Alemán. Roderic Camp and others have observed that although the Mexican army had begun to lose its political influence by the 1940s, it still remained an important pillar upon which political leaders relied in times of trouble.<sup>89</sup> The new president tested the army's reliability almost immediately. Mexican workers agitated to reverse the austerity of the war years. The government had traditionally employed two strategies for dealing with labor, one cooptive and the other repressive. Alemán adopted the latter and used the army to impose the government's policies on the labor unions.<sup>90</sup> Alemán had recognized in his inaugural address to the nation the right of workers to strike, but at the same time, he stated that he would take harsh action against workers who acted unlawfully, and promptly proved true to his words. The oil workers' union challenged the young president less than three weeks after he had taken office, conducting a general work stoppage at the major refineries throughout the country on 19 December 1946, including the important Atzacotalco refinery in Mexico City. The president cracked down, resulting in the firing, and in some cases the incarceration, of the union leaders

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<sup>89</sup>Camp, Mexico's Leaders : 206.

<sup>90</sup>Bautista Rosas : 71 and Hansen : 114-115.

responsible. Alemán then dispatched army troops to secure the refineries and to maintain the fuel distribution levels throughout the country. The president broke the strike and imposed his own leaders on the union with the help of the army, and the army's presence precluded violent reprisals by the workers. At the same time, the army's backing allowed Alemán to emerge as a strong leader at the outset of his administration.<sup>91</sup>

This strategy of repressing worker movements continued throughout the Alemán *sexenio*, thereby enabling him to implement his policies aimed at hastening industrialization in Mexico. The confident president purged the labor unions of uncooperative leaders and called on the army to replace striking workers when the situation dictated such action. A strike by the dispatchers and telegraph operators of *Ferrocarriles Nacionales*, the state-run railroad monopoly, in December 1950, forced army leaders to station troops at various railway installations to provide security and to guarantee the continued operation of the trains until the strike could be favorably resolved. The army's contribution to sustaining railroad operations during the strike amounted to about 400 personnel.<sup>92</sup> The remainder of Alemán's term proved relatively uneventful as far as the army was concerned.

A noted Mexican historian remarked that army activity from 1952-1968 reflected that of the national political scene--nothing significant happened during this rather sterile period in Mexican history.<sup>93</sup> The Mexican army left the barracks infrequently during

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<sup>91</sup>BFO, 371/60938, 30 December 1946; Medina, Vol. 20 : 153 and Scott : 141-142 and 250.

<sup>92</sup>SDN *Memoria*, 1950-51 : 135.

<sup>93</sup>Interview, May 1991.

the Ruiz Cortines administration (1952-1958). President Ruiz Cortines did, however, call on the army to suppress a nascent student movement at the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) in 1956. The army occupied some of the school's facilities for almost two years after the student strikes had initially commenced. The president did place the army on alert on a few occasions as a back-up for police forces involved in dismantling labor disturbances. Despite the growing hardship created by the government's austere economic programs, President Ruiz Cortines proved adept at keeping the lid on a volatile railroad workers' movement, which picked up momentum as the 1958 presidential election approached. The relative domestic tranquility that had existed over the past six years diminished slightly as Ruiz Cortines prepared to turn the government over to López Mateos.<sup>94</sup>

One source described the railroad workers' movement as the most important movement since the 1935 mobilization of workers and *campesinos* under Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>95</sup> Another source portrayed the movement as the most serious challenge the government confronted during the López Mateos administration, even though it never represented a real danger to the system.<sup>96</sup> This movement epitomized the general discontent that had been growing among Mexican workers, and it had special significance because it energized other worker groups within the country. The movement also precipitated more extensive military involvement than any other worker mobilization

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<sup>94</sup>Boils : 81-82 and Piñeyro, Ejército : 83.

<sup>95</sup>Olga Pellicer de Brody y José Luis Reyna, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana 1952-1960: El afianzamiento de la estabilidad política, Vol. 22 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1978) : 157.

<sup>96</sup>Bautista Rosas : 100.

since 1940. The widespread unrest catapulted onto the national scene immediately prior to the July 1958 presidential election, a politically sensitive time in Mexico. The timing of the workers' demonstration against the government's economic policies gave the workers the initial advantage.

The antecedents of the railroad workers' movement date back to 1948 when rising inflation had begun to seriously diminish the buying power of a worker's salary. The government did little to respond to the workers' complaints, opting instead to ignore dissatisfaction and to suppress opposition to official government economic policies.<sup>97</sup> The year 1958 proved troublesome for the government, and out of necessity, political leaders kept the army very busy that year. Discontent had been gestating underground among the railroad workers since 1954 over the rejection of proposed salary increases by the national railroad enterprise. The audacity of the railroad workers encouraged oil workers, telephone and telegraph operators, electricians, and primary school teachers in the capital to strike or to conduct work stoppages during the first half of 1958. The army had been forced to occupy the IPN in June 1958, when students demonstrated against higher bus fares. Those actions added fuel to the railroad workers' movement.<sup>98</sup>

The railroad workers' union created a commission to negotiate salary increases for its members in early 1958. A young firebrand from the southern state of Oaxaca,

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<sup>97</sup>Space does not allow for a detailed description of the background of the railroad workers' movement. However, that information can be found in sufficient detail in Pellicer de Brody and Reyna : 157-172.

<sup>98</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 220; Boils : 82-83; Pellicer de Brody and Reyna : 173-176 and Scott : 165-167.



Demetrio Vallejo, had been selected as a member of that commission, and he would soon take over the leadership of the movement. In an effort to make their demands heard, the railroad workers had orchestrated a number of work stoppages during 26-30 June. To demonstrate their solidarity, the workers congregated in the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza, to seek an audience with President Ruiz Cortines. The army forcibly broke up the demonstration, although the press made no mention of the incident. A short time later, Valentín Campa, a veteran communist leader who had been purged from the union in the 1940s, rejoined the movement at Vallejo's request. The work stoppages continued intermittently and eventually compelled the army to take charge of the country's railroad installations on 2 August 1958. High-ranking officials of *Ferrocarriles Nacionales* advised the striking workers that they were acting illegally and could be subject to arrest. They promised military and police protection to those workers who returned to their jobs. The government-controlled press condemned the strikers and expressed approval of the army's intervention to restore order to what had become a chaotic situation. Conditions began to normalize by 5 August, and army leaders withdrew the troops from the occupied facilities they had occupied. Vallejo announced new elections for later in the month and then declared his candidacy. He subsequently won the secretary generalship of the union by a resounding vote of 59,759 to 9. This new leadership proved short-lived. Some sources have suggested that Ruiz Cortines accepted the victory of Vallejo because he did not want to engage in large scale repression a few months before he was

due to leave office. He may have also felt that the resolution of the problem should be left to the new president, Adolfo López Mateos.<sup>99</sup>

President López Mateos did not disappoint his mentor. He acted resolutely and authoritatively and remained in full control of the situation. The railroad workers' union had set an example for other labor unions whose membership had become disenchanted with ineffective leadership. At the beginning of 1959, these unions began voicing their displeasure with their government-coopted leaders. Vallejo and Campa called a strike on 25 February, and the government responded with a 16.6 percent salary increase for the railroad workers. The raise did not appease Vallejo, who called another strike on 25 March. The strike did not find a great deal of sympathy because it occurred during Holy Week and affected many vacationers. Perhaps fearing similar responses from other unions, the president chose to act decisively. The head of the national railroad company fired more than 13,000 striking workers. The union responded by declaring a full strike on 28 March. The army and the police arrested Vallejo, Campa, and other union leaders that same day along with thousands of railroad workers in different parts of the republic. Army troops took custody of the railway installations and promised protection to all workers who returned to their jobs. Beginning on 29 March, all trains carried a twenty-man military escort. The army helped to reestablish order by 4 April, but army forces continued to provide security at numerous railroad facilities. The government charged

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<sup>99</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 220; Pellicer de Brody and Reyna : 179-200 and Rodríguez Prats : 142-143. Pellicer de Brody and Reyna (121-130) provide useful background on Valentín Campa's links with the Mexican Communist Party and the railroad movement. Campa's participation in the movement would later serve as practical justification for the government's decision to purge the movement of its "subversive" elements.

Vallejo and the other leaders with a number of crimes, ranging from mutiny to destruction of public property, and replaced them with more pliant leaders. The government proceeded to cleanse the union of uncooperative workers, and by August 1959, things had returned to normal on the nation's railways.<sup>100</sup> Once again the army had demonstrated its institutional loyalty. The realization that he could depend on the army for support gave López Mateos the freedom to act swiftly and decisively against the railroad workers.

The army proudly defended its role in restoring order in the aftermath of the railroad strikes. The army's official magazine described the military's actions as fulfilling a constitutionally mandated duty of safeguarding the nation's interests, in this case Mexico's railway system. Army members took pride in knowing that they had fulfilled their duties without provoking hostilities. The army had had another opportunity to display its rigid discipline by diligently carrying out the orders given by Mexico's civilian leaders. The army leadership expressed satisfaction with the overall outcome, and more specifically, with the way in which the army completed its mission.<sup>101</sup>

The problems López Mateos confronted during the remainder of his term proved inconsequential when compared with the strike by the railroad workers. His administration's main problems after crushing the railroad workers' movement centered

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<sup>100</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 220-221; Bautista Rosas : 100; Boils : 82-83; Pellicer de Brody and Reyna : 201-215 and Scott : 167-168. Scott wrote that the Mexican government had accused Vallejo of having links with the Soviet Embassy and subsequently demanded the recall of two Soviet diplomats who government officials declared guilty of duplicity in the railroad strikes. Cockcroft (223) wrote that David Siqueiros, the famous artist, had been imprisoned for four years as a result of his participation in the movement and that both Campa and Vallejo remained in prison for more than a decade as a result of their alleged crimes.

<sup>101</sup>Revista del Ejército, August 1958 : 1-2.

on land invasions by landless peasants, known in Mexico as *paracaidistas* (parachutists). Landless peasants invaded a number of privately owned farms in the states of Baja California, Colima, Sinaloa, and Sonora in the early months of 1958, perhaps hoping to capitalize on the presidential transition period. The largest of those invasions occurred in Colima, but the arrival of army forces sufficed to convince the *campesinos* to leave the premises. A short month after he had taken office, López Mateos ordered the use of army troops to remove squatters from private farm lands near Ciudad Obregón, Sonora. In May 1962, troops had to be called in to break up *campesino* meetings in the cities of Jalapa and Veracruz, which had been planning land takeovers in the state of Veracruz.<sup>102</sup> Available documentation in the López Mateos archives reveals that he directed the Interior Ministry to take action on the vast majority of the country's domestic security problems and involved the army in only a few of these conflicts. López Mateos had started a trend of isolating the military from domestic crises, and his successors would attempt to follow that policy, although they did not experience his degree of success. The transition from López Mateos to Díaz Ordaz occurred in an extremely smooth manner.

## 1968

Gustavo Díaz Ordaz continued to follow the policy of his predecessors, which dictated firm and often harsh action against the workers and other opposition groups. The worldwide student unrest began to plague many non-communist nations by 1967, and

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<sup>102</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 544.2/8; Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order Since 1940" : 292-293 and Scott : 237 and 304.

Mexico was no exception. When political leaders lost control of the situation in 1968, President Díaz Ordaz found himself left with no other alternative but to call on the army for support. What followed became permanently embedded in the minds of all Mexicans.

To the vast majority of Mexicans, President Díaz Ordaz and his administration (1964-1970) are associated with one event--the crushing of the student movement in 1968. That fateful year signified unprecedented violence directed against university students and their supporters by government forces. The sporadic violence that had characterized the student strikes, which had commenced in the latter part of July 1968, culminated in dramatic fashion on 2 October 1968. Approximately 10,000 police and army forces surrounded an ostensibly peaceful rally of about 6,000 students and their supporters in the Plaza of Three Cultures at the Tlatelolco housing project near downtown Mexico City. When unidentified snipers fired on the government forces, those forces responded by returning fire at suspected sniper locations and also by firing into the overflowing crowd of demonstrators gathered in the plaza. When the smoke cleared, the death toll ranged anywhere from 25 to 500 people, depending on the source.<sup>103</sup> Octavio Paz, Mexico's Pulitzer prize winning author, remarked poignantly,

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<sup>103</sup>James D. Cockcroft, Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983) : 240-241; Judith Alder Hellman, Mexico in Crisis (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978) : 139-145; Kenneth F. Johnson, Mexican Democracy: A Critical View, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978) : 1-9; Yoram Shapira, "Mexico: The Impact of the 1968 Student Protest on Echeverría's Reformism," Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 19 (November 1977) : 557-564; Evelyn P. Stevens, Protest and Response in Mexico (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1974) : 185-240; Sergio Zermeno, Mexico: Una Democracia Utópica, 5th ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1985) : xvi-23; "Muertos y Heridos en Grave Choque con el Ejército en Tlatelolco," El Día, 3 October 1968 : 1; "Parte Oficial de la Secretaría de la Defensa Sobre lo Ocurrido," El Nacional, 4 October 1968 : 1; Hansen : 201-203 and Riding : 59-60. Tlatelolco awaits its first good historical analysis as Mexican historians remain wary of examining the incident in detail.

"(a)t the very moment in which the Mexican government was receiving international recognition for forty years of political stability and economic progress, a swash of blood dispelled the official optimism and caused every student to doubt the meaning of that progress."<sup>104</sup>

This was indeed a major crisis in Mexico, and the size of the opposition determined the seriousness of the situation. Students, professors, and normal everyday citizens poured out into the streets during the months of June, July, and August to demonstrate against government policies. Díaz Ordaz's response to a letter written by Daniel Cosío Villegas, the famous Mexican historian, condemning the repression against the students, demonstrated the gravity with which the president viewed the situation. He cited French Prime Minister De Gaulle's decision to use the army to quell student disturbances earlier that year as a precedent for his own actions in Mexico. Díaz Ordaz replied to Cosío Villegas that Mexico, like France, was on the brink of civil war.<sup>105</sup>

Civilian police forces had failed to adequately control the student unrest active since the end of July. Government leaders subsequently made the decision to call in army forces to help bring the situation under control. The violence at the Plaza of the Three Cultures on 2 October 1968 quickly became the modern Mexican army's darkest moment. One Mexican journalist referred to the events of 2 October as the *la mancha que no se borra* or the irremovable stain.<sup>106</sup> That proved to be an apt description from

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<sup>104</sup>"Tlatelolco Massacre Still Leaves Scars After Ten Years," San Jose Mercury, 28 September 1978.

<sup>105</sup>"Para Actual No Esperamos a Estar al Borde de la Guerra Civil," Proceso, 6 November 1978 : 9-11.

<sup>106</sup>Fuentes: 297.

the Mexican army's point of view. The army had never been embroiled in such a difficult situation, and many army leaders resented being used irresponsibly. They felt that the government had lost control of the situation by not taking proper precautions. Government leaders then expected the army to restore order with minimum effort. In short, army leaders felt a trap had been set with the army's reputation as bait.<sup>107</sup> The performance of the army forces during the disturbances tarnished the army's paternalistic image and ultimately had long-range effects on the army's organization and its future role in political crises. Therein lies the true military significance of Tlatelolco.

The student movement in Mexico City in 1968 had its origins in earlier movements, which occurred in the states of Puebla in 1964, Morelia in 1966, and Sonora and Tabasco in 1967. A strike had also taken place at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the country's largest and most important university, located in Mexico City, in 1966. The spark that set off the fireworks in 1968 involved some fighting between two rival high schools, one private and the other public, in downtown Mexico City on 22-23 July. Local authorities called in the riot police (*granaderos*) to break up the melee, and the police allegedly used excessive force in restoring order. The students reacted by organizing a large demonstration on 26 July to protest the police actions and simultaneously celebrate the anniversary of Fidel Castro's 26 July 1953 attack on Moncada Barracks, which symbolized the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. The Interior Ministry asked for the army's support in removing the students from the various

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<sup>107</sup>Manuel Urrutia Castro, *Trampa en Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: By the author, 1970) : 24-25 and 203-205. Urrutia Castro, a lieutenant colonel in the Mexican army who worked in the Central Military Hospital, and his book was probably sponsored in part by the National Defense Secretariat since it presents an official army interpretation of what happened at Tlatelolco.

school buildings they had occupied and barricaded. The Secretary of Defense, General Marcelino García Barragán, ordered General Crisóforo Mazón Pineda and his infantry battalion to assist the local police in removing students from the San Ildefonso Preparatory School on 26 July. Local police forces had failed to bring the student demonstrations under control, so the army was called in to help restore order. The next day army troops dislodged students from occupied buildings at the UNAM and the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN).<sup>108</sup> Once the government used the army to help dismantle the student protests, the army became committed to seeing the process through until its ignominious conclusion. Political leaders had pulled the army into a delicate predicament that army leaders had hoped to avoid. This was the first time since the 1920s that the army had engaged in large-scale repression against the Mexican people. This tactic contradicted the army's popular origins, with soldiers forced to use violence on Mexicans from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

General García Barragán declared that he had given his forces strict instructions that limited them to fulfilling the mission of maintaining internal order as outlined in Paragraph 6, Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution. General Mazón proclaimed that he had taken extreme precautions to prevent any spilling of blood. He added that he and his soldiers followed their orders to the letter, and that they never lost control in removing students from the buildings they had illegally held. The crisis did not abate in spite of the army's actions. To the contrary, the movement gained more momentum. These confrontations provoked a general paralysis of schools and public transportation

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<sup>108</sup>Elena Poniatowska, *La Noche de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1971) : 15-28; Bautista Rosas : 85-86; Cockcroft : 240-241; Urrutia Castro: 17-18 and 203-204 and Zermeño : 11-14.



on 29 July 1968 as the students demanded the resignations of the Chiefs of Police and Riot Police in the federal district. A large student assembly formed the National Strike Council (CNH) on 9 August to provide leadership for the student movement. The new council organized enormous protest marches and demonstrations at the Zócalo, the city's central plaza in front of the Presidential Palace, on 13 and 27 August. The confrontations between students and the government forces continued throughout August and into September.<sup>109</sup> When addressing the nation during his 1 September Presidential Informe, President Díaz Ordaz stated that when the army intervened to restore order it would be respectful; it should also be respected. From all the evidence available, the army did attempt to restore order without exceeding its constitutional responsibilities.<sup>110</sup>

When students rejected the advice of President Díaz Ordaz, the Interior Ministry declared that the federal government had the obligation to maintain order in the nation's universities. Political leaders then sent the army to recapture the occupied buildings at the UNAM on 18 September. That action prompted the rector of the university to resign in protest over the army's presence on 23 September. Army forces stayed at UNAM, however, until they were ordered to leave on 1 October, one day before the tragedy at Tlatelolco. Army leaders contended that army forces did not attempt to harm anyone

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<sup>109</sup>Gerardo Medina Valdés, Operación 10 de Junio (Mexico City: Ediciones Universo, 1972) : 21-25; Poniatowska : 28-69. This book was published and circulated clandestinely. The author belonged to the major conservative opposition party, the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN). Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, GUSTAVO DIAZ ORDAZ (Mexico City: By author, 12 March 1986) : 37-38; Urrutia Castro : 203-205 and Zermeño : 11-20.

<sup>110</sup>Boils : 85 and Informes V, September 1978 : 83.

during their occupation of the university, and they asserted that the military respected the university's property and prevented further pillaging by radical groups, whose members, according to army sources, were intoxicated with drugs.<sup>111</sup>

Many interpretations attempting to explain the causes of the turmoil of July, August, and September 1968 have appeared in the aftermath of Tlatelolco, but the real truth will probably never be known. There has long existed a culture of secrecy in Mexico with regard to political cleavages within the Revolutionary family, and the Mexican political *modus operandi* discourages public disclosures. Key political figures do not write autobiographies, and it has been customary for ex-presidents not to have their memoirs published until after their deaths. The important facts related to such a salient incident as 2 October 1968 will remain closely guarded state secrets for years to come. The army's approach to sensitive issues has been, if anything, even more secretive.

When the army did offer an official explanation of the disturbances a few months after Tlatelolco, army leaders attributed the cause of the problems to professional agitators who were enemies of Mexico. The army explanation included intellectuals and politicians, both foreign and domestic, in this group. These instigators were said to have duped students and professors into supporting their ultimate goal of imposing a socialist government on Mexico. General García Barragán believed that university professors had an obligation to teach their students the principles of the Mexican Revolution and not to

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<sup>111</sup>Ramón Ramírez, El Movimiento Estudiantil de México. Julio-Diciembre 1968 (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969) : 298-299; "Los Muchachos Enloquecidos con Drogas Heróicas," Proceso, 30 October 1978 : 11-14; Cockcroft : 240-242; Gutiérrez Oropeza : 45-46; Poniatowska : 70-75 and Urrutia Castro : 22-23 and 203-205.

indoctrinate them with foreign and subversive ideologies.<sup>112</sup> Even to contemporaries, this military assessment lacked plausibility, based as it was on very broad nationalistic sentiments, and an obvious overestimation of the leftist threat in Mexico.

Other interpretations fixed the blame on selfish political leaders maneuvering for an opportunity to become the next president of Mexico. More specifically, those analyses ascribed presidential aspirations to the Interior Minister, Luis Echeverría Alvarez, and to the mayor of the federal district, General Alfonso Corona del Rosal. Another explanation maintained that the liberal wing of the PRI had been attempting to discredit Echeverría and Corona del Rosal to open the way for a more liberal presidential candidate from the official party. Although some political leaders might have attempted to manipulate the student movement to suit their personal interests, those same leaders did not have the power to orchestrate the entire student movement, which was also inspired by the worldwide student rebellions that year. In fact, they could only react, because they lacked the capability to direct a movement that they too did not fully understand. Other writers accused the Central Intelligence Agency of creating a situation that would justify a crackdown on Communists in Mexico.<sup>113</sup> These interpretations had one common flaw; they depicted Díaz Ordaz as a weak leader who was unaware of the ruses being played within his own cabinet. Himself a former Minister of the Interior,

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<sup>112</sup>Bruno Galindo Trejo, "El Ejército y los Disturbios del 2 de Octubre," *Revista del Ejército*, January 1969 : 3-5 and Urrutia Castro : 19-22 and 208. Gutiérrez Oropeza : 49-50 offers the popular interpretation of most military leaders which branded those who agitated against the government as disloyal and treasonous.

<sup>113</sup>Jesús Silva Herzog, *Una Historia de la Universidad de México* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1974) : 157-158; Hansen : 201-203; Medina Valdés : 23-25 and Zermeño : 20-23.

Díaz Ordaz had governed with a firm hand, and that description did not fit his character.<sup>114</sup> A scenario of that kind seemed even more unlikely on the eve of the all important Olympics in Mexico City. It is fanciful that Díaz Ordaz would solicit outside assistance, especially from the United States, at that point in time.

A few historians have suggested, simply, that what the students wanted was more democracy. Far from advocating the overthrow of the government, they instead hoped to make the government more responsive to their needs.<sup>115</sup> Many students expressed their commitment to these goals and values through a large-scale mobilization that baffled the city's security forces, catching them unprepared.

The CNH leaders had been planning a large demonstration at the Plaza of the Three Cultures for 2 October, and with government leaders expecting a sizeable turnout, the Interior Ministry requested assistance from the army. The student plan was to hold a rally in the plaza first and then march to the Casco de Santo Tomás adjacent to the IPN campus. Army leaders were careful to direct their troop commanders not to allow the situation to disintegrate into a violent confrontation between students and government

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<sup>114</sup>A little known anecdote helps to refute the characterization of Díaz Ordaz as a weak leader. After the army had occupied UNAM in September 1968, Lázaro Cárdenas, who had become a principal leader of leftist opposition in Mexico, asked for an audience with the President. Cárdenas told Díaz Ordaz he was violating the Constitution. The President answered Cárdenas by saying that he was a lawyer, and his government adhered to one article of the Constitution. When Cárdenas asked for the specific article, Díaz Ordaz said it was the same article that Cárdenas used as justification for removing General Calles from the country. Díaz Ordaz referred to the article as Mexico and reminded General Cárdenas to aid and harbor subversives was a violation of the Constitution. See Gutiérrez Oropeza : 46-48 for the complete details of the meeting.

<sup>115</sup>Herbert Braun, "The 1968 Student Movement in Mexico: A Revolt Against Modernity in a 'City Without Citizenship'," *A Progress Report*, June 1988 : 38-49 and Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 222. Bautista Rosas writes that some political maneuvering by potential presidential candidates did occur in July-October 1968, but he generally agrees with the explanation given by Braun, Aguilar Camín and Meyer. Bautista Rosas was serving in the army at the time, so he had a close-up view of the events as they unraveled. (See Bautista Rosas : 88-90).

forces. Yet the army had also been ordered not to allow the march from Tlatelolco to the Casco de Santo Tomás, so it might have been better prepared to use force if the opportunity arose. On 2 October, army troops blocked the exits from the plaza, which was surrounded by a large church and several tall apartment buildings. Unidentified snipers opened fire on the government's forces at approximately 6 P.M.<sup>116</sup> Commanders directed their soldiers to return fire at suspected sniper locations on the rooftops and balconies of some of the apartment buildings. When a sniper's bullet wounded and felled General José Hernández Toledo, commander of an airborne battalion and the army forces on the scene, the army panicked, and some soldiers began to fire randomly into the crowd and at other soldiers. The exchange of fire lasted about 90 minutes, during and after which the plaza was a scene of sheer chaos. Medical personnel came to remove the dead and wounded, and the army detained about 2000 people. Another fire fight broke out about 11 P.M. and lasted about 45 minutes. General tranquility prevailed after the last fusillade.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>The true identity of the snipers was never determined. The two most popular accounts identified the snipers as either government agents assigned to the Interior Ministry or as provocateurs working for the leaders of the CNH.

<sup>117</sup>Cockcroft : 241-242; Interview, February 1991; Interview, July 1991; Poniatowska : 166-171; Ramírez : 426-431; Urrutia Castro : 23-24 and 205-210 and Zermeño : 178-209. An army officer familiar with the events of 2 October told me that confusion existed among army forces because of a failure in coordination. A number of plainclothes security and military personnel had been present at the local confines of Tlatelolco. They had been instructed to wear white gloves on their left hands as a means of identification. According to this army officer, members of the Olympic Battalion, a special army unit formed to assist in security and logistical support for the Olympics, were also on the scene dressed in plainclothes, but they had not received word about the white gloves. Consequently, a number of these individuals were fired upon by other army members who thought they were snipers (Interview, September 1989). The story about the white glove as a means of identification eventually leaked out to the public. See Poniatowska : 166-172.

The events of 2 October 1968 shocked the nation, and the aftermath had some profound effects on the Mexican army. Most Mexicans felt ashamed and expressed great remorse over what had been allowed to happen at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. General García Barragán said that 2 October mutilated the hearts of all good Mexicans and left an indelible mark of pain on their souls. Yet the general added that he believed the incident would serve as a valuable lesson for the future: he hoped responsible Mexicans would not allow the youth of the country to be so easily corrupted by traitors in the future.<sup>118</sup> The SECDEF labeled the instigators of the Tlatelolco tragedy as traitors who had set a trap for the army. They had as one of their objectives to tarnish the favorable image the Mexican army held among the Mexican people. Thus the general described the assault on the army's reputation as calumny. These traitors were the true assassins at Tlatelolco. General Hernández Toledo, who was wounded while commanding the army forces at Tlatelolco, concurred with General García Barragán. He said his troops did not even have their weapons loaded. The army forces arrived at Tlatelolco intent on avoiding problems and preventing injuries. A government official familiar with the events at Tlatelolco related that the soldiers had not been given instructions as to what action should be taken if they were fired upon. Army leaders had simply not anticipated that their soldiers would be confronted by hostile gunfire.<sup>119</sup> In some respects, what happened at Tlatelolco was analogous to the shooting of students at Kent State University by Ohio National Guardsmen a few years later. The student

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<sup>118</sup>Urrutia Castro : 24.

<sup>119</sup>"El Crimen de 1968 Fue de la Antipatria no del Ejército," Proceso, 30 October 1978: 6-9; Interview, May 1991 and Urrutia Castro : 205-210.

movement had been mobilizing worldwide, and its magnitude caught many governments by surprise and at a loss for an appropriate response. Mexico had suffered from the same symptoms.

The actions taken by the army on 2 October 1968 have been documented, but most accounts have tended to sensationalize what occurred. Most reports attached the blame for the violence to the unidentified snipers. The gravity of the incident fueled a number of unsubstantiated rumors, some of which accused the army of illegally detaining students at *Campo Militar No. 1* and of incinerating corpses in large furnaces on the army base.<sup>120</sup> This negative publicity prompted a formal justification of its actions by the army.

As army leaders tried to explain why the army responded the way it did at Tlatelolco, in the months following the tragedy, an army lieutenant colonel wrote a short article in a popular periodical in November 1968 justifying the army's actions on 2 October. He explained that subversives influenced by foreign ideologies had tried to besmirch the reputation of the army as a form of revenge after the army had thwarted their treacherous plans. The army had a commitment to be loyal to the nation's history and its institutions, and it proudly fulfilled its mission in a strictly apolitical fashion.<sup>121</sup> An article in the army magazine supported earlier army arguments that placed the blame on professional agitators, whom it identified by name as the leaders of the CNH, and

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<sup>120</sup>Medina Valdés : 33-40; Poniatowska : 118-129 and 164-166; "La Tropa fue Recibida a Balazos por Francotiradores," *El Día*, 3 October 1968 : 1 and Hector Almazán, "Criminal Provocación en el Mitin de Tlatelolco Causó Sangriento Zafarrancho," *El Nacional*, 3 October 1968 : 1.

<sup>121</sup>Manuel Urrutia Castro, "El Ejército Ha Cumplido con Sus Deberes," *Impacto*, No. 976, 13 November 1968 : 59.

attacked their Trotskyite philosophy of terrorism. Citing the army's constitutional justification for preserving internal order under Article 89 of the Constitution as the base from which the army's organic law had been derived, the article reminded its readers that Article 9 of the Constitution prohibits armed uprisings. The army had no alternative but to defend the national institutions and restore order.<sup>122</sup> A number of editorials in the army magazine followed this formal defense of the army's role at Tlatelolco, and they noted how the president had praised the army for its patriotism and institutional conviction during the crisis, and how the true assassins of Tlatelolco were the leaders of the CNH.<sup>123</sup> The official history of the Mexican army reiterated the arguments put forth in the editorials and defended the army's actions for posterity. It stated that the 1968 student disturbances "threatened to create chaos and anarchy, principally in the capital; it was for that reason that the armed forces had to act to preclude the violence spread by irresponsible elements from preventing Mexicans from living freely and peacefully."<sup>124</sup> Army leaders obviously felt dismayed about the outcome of the 2 October confrontation, but they also believed the action taken by the army was fully justified even though it was the least desired course of action.

In all likelihood, the army was not a major player in the strategic planning to quell the student disturbances. Prior actions by the government ultimately mandated a violent

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<sup>122</sup>Bruno Galindo Trejo, "El Ejército y Los Disturbios del 2 de Octubre," Revista del Ejército, January 1969 : 3-12.

<sup>123</sup>Revista del Ejército, September 1969 : 1-3 and June 1970 : 1-4.

<sup>124</sup>Toral : 526. ...amenazaron con crear el caos y la anarquía principalmente en esta capital; fue por ello que las Fuerzas Armadas tuvieron que actuar a fin de impedir que la violencia desatada por elementos irresponsables, impidiera que los mexicanos pudieran vivir en libertad y en paz.



response to the student mobilizations, leaving army leaders with no alternative but to act as they did. Political leaders decided on the specific course of action and involved the army in the "dirty work" when their plan failed to restore order. Some accounts of the 2 October episode speculated that General García Barragán played a major role in deciding on the repressive action against the students, but this is unlikely.<sup>125</sup> If the SECDEF had intended to provoke a tumultuous outcome, he would not have ordered the shooting of his commander (General Hernández Toledo) on the scene. Neither the army nor the government wanted the responsibility for a massacre, especially on the eve of the Olympic games. The army had worked on cultivating a favorable image among the Mexican people since the 1930s. Army leaders attached great importance to that image through the years, and those same leaders felt the army had earned the respect and admiration of the Mexican people through its zealous *labor social*. Army leaders would never have willingly disparaged that reputation by deliberately planning a brutal repression against innocent students.

One individual, whose father had been privy to high-level army meetings during the events leading up to Tlatelolco, spoke of a meeting at which top army leaders discussed the student situation. The army leaders present did not voice unanimity over how to handle the student problem at the tactical level, i.e. on the streets. The SECDEF endorsed a law-and-order hard-line strategy in dealing with dissident students. His specific policy however did not condone or foster violent tactics. Some army leaders

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<sup>125</sup>Michael J. Dziedzic, Mexican Defense Policy (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Papers No. 242, 1989) : 36-39 and Martin Needler, Politics and Society in Mexico (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1971) : 71.

preferred a milder approach, but not surprisingly, the SECDEF and his supporters carried the debate.<sup>126</sup> To its credit, the army always presented a unified position in public. The army's disciplinary code discouraged sharing dissatisfaction outside army circles. Some indications of discontent by army members over what happened on 2 October did leak out. Some soldiers privately expressed dismay over what had occurred. One soldier said he felt compelled to follow orders. A fellow soldier agreed there existed no alternative but to follow orders, but he added that he planned to try and leave the service as soon as possible.<sup>127</sup> Despite some minor undercurrents of displeasure within the ranks, the army as a collective unit remained united throughout the crisis.

General García Barragán's performance during the crisis ultimately proved to be a source of pride for all servicemen. Rumors abounded after the debacle at Tlatelolco. Many political leaders acknowledged privately that the army could have wrested control from the civilian leaders during the latter stages of the imbroglio. García Barragán chose not to seize that opportunity because he had been trained for more than 40 years on the value of loyalty and discipline, and it would have been out of character for him to have acted other than the way he did. He personified an exemplar of institutional loyalty, setting a perfect example for future generations of Mexican army officers to follow. An army general remarked that the ground was fertile for a military takeover, but García Barragán was steadfastly loyal to the institutions.<sup>128</sup> Another general, who served on

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<sup>126</sup>Interview, July 1991.

<sup>127</sup>Poniatowska : 242.

<sup>128</sup>Interview, September 1989.

the Presidential Staff in 1968, proclaimed that the army had been born with the idea to serve its country and not to take power. He asserted that no general could count on the support of the army in a *golpe de estado* "because he would be perceived as doing it for his own personal interests."<sup>129</sup> An official serving in the government in 1968 proffered a more enlightened theory. He argued that Victoriano Huerta had been classified as the most vile military leader of the twentieth century because, with foreign complicity, he overthrew a legitimate government. Huerta had been branded a contemptible traitor by subsequent generations of army officers. Huerta's iniquity had been integrated into the army's ideology as the antithesis of patriotism. The Mexican army would never tolerate another Huerta. The army traditions of patriotism and apoliticism had become too institutionalized to allow a reversion to militarism.<sup>130</sup> A boundary had been created between the military and the political sector over the years, and army officers remained unwilling to cross over that line. Such a deviation would violate every tenet of the army's ideology, which had been deeply implanted in each officer since his first day at the Military College.

Even though the army won some popular support for its support of *civilismo* during the initial student disturbances, the brutal outcome at Tlatelolco had an adverse effect on it, and many Mexicans grew fearful of the army in the wake of violence on 2 October.

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<sup>129</sup>Interview, July 1991. Medina Valdés' book reported on the incidents surrounding the 1968 student movement, and he argued emphatically that General García Barragán was opposed to any attempt by the military to take control of the government. He attributed the general's opposition to his fierce loyalty to President Díaz Ordaz (255). Medina Valdés made this point despite the fact that his book was extremely prejudiced against the action taken by the government and the army during Tlatelolco.

<sup>130</sup>Interview, May 1991.

Few Mexicans had believed that the army would ever use deadly force against the people. A government official told a story about how students playfully touched the tips of the bayonets of the soldiers who provided security at the Zócalo during the large demonstrations in July and August.<sup>131</sup> Actions of that kind had illustrated the respect and confidence the local populace had in the army. The army shattered that trust on 2 October and had to start anew to regain that lost confidence. The crisis had definitely been the most significant the army had faced since the Revolution. The prestige army leaders had worked so hard to achieve had been jeopardized, and the Mexican people had begun to question the character and compassion of the Mexican army.

The year 1968 symbolized a break with the past for the army and the rest of society. The military had endeavored to be above politics prior to 1968. The army had often responded to requests for support from the government, but it had never encountered the kind of predicament it had in October 1968. The army found itself thrust into a political battle that it could not sidestep and had to act out its role as the system's force of last resort. Some analysts suggested that the army had once again become a major political actor as a result of Tlatelolco, but ex-president Miguel Alemán had it right when he stated that the army's role did not change drastically after 1968.<sup>132</sup> General Hernández Toledo reaffirmed that assessment ten years after the tragedy. In an interview with the press in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Tlatelolco, he said, as a soldier, he

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<sup>131</sup>Interview, May 1991. A Mexican businessman who had had numerous business dealings with the army spoke of the new fear the Mexican people had of the army in the wake of Tlatelolco. During an interview in June 1991, the businessman stated that a number of general officer acquaintances had readily recognized that fear but had reached an impasse over how to counter it.

<sup>132</sup>Alemán Valdés : 40.

could not discuss political issues in response to a question about 1968. When asked if the military felt qualified to govern, he exclaimed "we cannot be anything more than soldiers." He shunned the notion that a soldier could have presidential aspirations by saying that soldiers are educated to serve the people and not to get involved in politics.<sup>133</sup> Since 1968 army leaders have acted more judiciously in furnishing the government with the kind of support that had the potential for discrediting its reputation. The army begged off of police functions, causing the government to enlarge state and local police forces. The army did not relieve itself completely from police tasks but participated on a much reduced scale.<sup>134</sup>

The army learned from its mistakes in 1968. The government had traditionally employed a policy of "two carrots, then a stick" in dealing with the opposition. The government preferred cooptation to repression.<sup>135</sup> Cooptation did not work on the students and so the army became the stick. Army leaders did not relish that role, but their staunch institutional loyalty and discipline left them no other alternative but to support the legitimate government. With the damage having passed, the army set out to recapture its popular image and the respect of the Mexican people. It sought to achieve that goal by taking all possible measures to avoid confrontations that resulted in the army physically repressing an opposition group. As an institution, the army turned inward

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<sup>133</sup>Jorge Reyes Estrada, "Mis manos son campesinas, morenas, fuertes...", UnoMásUno, 25 September 1978 : 2.

<sup>134</sup>Boils : 88-92 and 115-120. A retired army general related that the army leadership exhibited considerable reluctance to have the army perform police functions after 1968, and that same apprehension was felt throughout the army as a result of the fallout from October 1968 (Interview, September 1989).

<sup>135</sup>Smith : 57.

after 1968. It became more closed and restrictive about the kinds of institutional information it released to the public.

The aftermath of 1968 generated some profound operational and structural changes within the army. For example, José Luis Piñeyro reported changes in 97 high and middle-range commanders as contrasted with a previous annual average of 10-15. He also noted that the Army's Inspector General's office had investigated five infantry battalions for problems related to troop dissatisfaction with commanders during that same period.<sup>136</sup> The army witnessed a substantial increase in size in the years immediately following 1968. A new leadership emerged in the upper echelons of the army by the early 1970s. The more professional HCM and ESG-trained officers assumed the top leadership positions in the army, and those few remaining officers who had fought in the Revolution were pushed into retirement.<sup>137</sup> The Mexican army had developed since the 1940s without facing even a modest threat to its authority. In 1968, all that changed, and the army hierarchy quickly recognized the institution's need for a general overhaul.

### The Mexican Army and Crisis Management After 1968

When Luis Echeverría Alvarez became President of Mexico on 1 December 1970, he promised to implement a democratic opening or *apertura democrática*, in an effort to bring disenchanted student groups back into the mainstream of Mexican society. The

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<sup>136</sup>Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 86-87.

<sup>137</sup>José Reveles, "De sostén de la Constitución a puntal del sistema," *Proceso*, 18 December 1978 : 18-21 and Bautista Rosas : 146-161.

new president hoped to reestablish a populist image, and he planned to avoid using the army for internal control as part of this new scheme.<sup>138</sup>

The president's new reform suffered a temporary setback in June 1971 as a result of the Corpus Christi Day Massacre, better known in Mexico as the *Halconazo*, named for the paramilitary group involved. While the specific details of that particular episode did not hold any special significance for the Mexican army, it did illustrate some of the effects Tlatelolco had on the subsequent role of the army with regard to student disturbances. The *Halconazo* embarrassed the government and implicated the army as an actor in the affair. The army's ancillary involvement in the *Halconazo* materialized in a fashion very distinct from that of Tlatelolco, demonstrating the army's new philosophy of avoiding direct association with problems involving university students.

Students from a number of universities in Mexico City had planned a march of solidarity for 10 June 1971, Corpus Christi Day, on behalf of their counterparts in Monterrey, Nuevo León, and to demonstrate for basic political rights and for the release of political prisoners. The government had defused the principal motive for the march by forcing the resignation of the governor of Nuevo León and thereby paving the way for student-backed university reforms. Protest leaders decided to carry out the planned demonstration from the Casco de Santo Tomás, near the IPN campus, to the Monument to the Revolution in downtown Mexico City despite the concession made by the government. A paramilitary group, sponsored by the Department of the Federal District and Interior Ministry, called the *Halcones* (Hawks) and ranging in size from 500 to 1500

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<sup>138</sup>Boils : 90-91.

depending on the source, attacked the students as they began their march. Estimates of the toll ranged from a low of four dead and twenty-four injured to a high of 50 dead and more than 200 wounded.<sup>139</sup>

Government officials tried to exculpate themselves, but too many witnesses had seen the *Halcones* emerge from grey buses owned by the city. Members of the paramilitary group had fired into the assembled marchers, stopping them in their tracks, while the local police and army forces stood by and watched the *Halcones* disperse the students and other protesters. Partisans of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the major opposition party, intercepted some of the police radio transmissions, which implicated members of both the police and the army. That same evening the mayor of Mexico City, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, held a press conference and declared that the disturbances had resulted from disagreements between rival student groups. He categorically denied the existence of any paramilitary group sponsored by the government. Stories soon circulated from the press, whose members had been treated rudely by the *Halcones*, verifying the existence of such a group during the latter stages of the Díaz Ordaz administration. The assembled evidence refuted the proclamations of the city officials,

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<sup>139</sup>De Mauleón, Héctor, "EL HALCONAZO DE 1971," *Contenido*, June 1991 : 46-49; Martin C. Needler, *Mexican Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982) : 35-36; Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 247-249; Cockcroft : 273; Johnson, *Mexican Democracy* : 90-91; Hellman : 161-163 and Medina Valdés : 70-104. It should be noted that a researcher encounters problems verifying the actual facts of an incident such as the *Halconazo* because the official press is controlled by the government and tends to overlook unfavorable or unpleasant details. Government-owned companies have traditionally been the only suppliers of newsprint. Consequently, for a newspaper to continue to publish, it must comply with government standards concerning the release of information. The government influence on the press was clearly evident during the railroad workers' movement discussed above. Government restrictions on the press grew even more after 1968. As a result, the researcher encounters a dilemma of having to rely on official government sources and the underground or unofficial press for general information about a specific incident. Both these sources can at times be unreliable and the latter tends to exaggerate the adverse data, and at times, depends on unsubstantiated rumors.



and by 15 June 1971, the public outcry had forced the resignations of the mayor and the chief of police, General Rogelio Flores Curiel. The Attorney General, Julio Sánchez Vargas, tendered his resignation two months later after conducting a feeble investigation of the incident.<sup>140</sup>

Additional facts reached the public in the aftermath of the *Halconazo*, implicating the army at least indirectly, despite declarations by the SECDEF, General Cuenca Díaz, that the *Halcones* did not belong to the army. It soon became common knowledge that the former mayor of Mexico City, General Alfonso Corona del Rosal, had organized a paramilitary force in 1968 to help control the student movement. General Corona del Rosal placed an army colonel, Manuel Díaz Escobar, who had been serving as Deputy Director of General Services of the Federal District, in charge of training the paramilitary group. Colonel Díaz acknowledged the existence of such a group but stated that it had been decommissioned before the inauguration of Luis Echeverría. The army later reassigned Colonel Díaz to Chile for his indiscretions. Parts of the story have remained incomplete. For example, it has not been clearly established whether or not the *Halcones* were ever disbanded, and if they were, when were they reorganized. Although it has been determined that this paramilitary group did not belong to the Mexican army, it does seem likely that junior army officers and sergeants trained the

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<sup>140</sup>Bautista Rosas : 123-125; De Mauleón : 49-54; Johnson, Mexican Democracy : 91-105 and Medina Valdés : 117-132 and 199-201. It should be noted that a few U.S. sources depict the *Halconazo* as an attack directed against the President by extreme right-wing elements in Mexico. This does not appear to be a correct interpretation of the events. Evidence points to Echeverría's direct involvement in the incident. The De Mauleón article cites comments by both government and opposition officials that place the blame unequivocally on the President (58-60). For the assessment by U.S. sources, see Martin C. Needler, "A Critical Time for Mexico," Current History 62 (February 1972) : 81-85; Needler, Mexican Politics : 35-36 and 77; Cockcroft and Hellman : 161-163.

*Halcones*. Even though the army helped train the group, army members did not participate directly in its operations.<sup>141</sup>

The army's role in the *Halconazo* appeared to be the initial implementation of a new policy for dealing with students. Since its image had been tainted by the unfortunate violence at Tlatelolco, army leaders seemed intent on avoiding, at all costs, the recurrence of a similar incident. The army did not shirk its duties on 10 June 1971; its forces surrounded the national palace to protect the president and his offices. Because army leaders did not want to move directly against the students, army forces simply remained in the background as the force of last resort to react against any attack that local police could not handle. Army leaders were stung by the events at Tlatelolco, but vowed to use indirect force if called upon again. The incident on 10 June 1971 proved to be the first stern test of this new army policy of non-intervention in the universities. Army leaders had placed university facilities off limits to their troops. These leaders did not digress from this policy, and the army maintained a safe distance from the universities after 1971. In fact, SECDEFs capitalized on opportunities to publicize this policy at least twice a year. General Cuenca Díaz restated the policy to the press in March 1971, and the following December declared that "the armed forces will never confront the people or the students."<sup>142</sup> Potential student problems in Monterrey and Puebla put this policy to another test in January 1973, but Cuenca Díaz reaffirmed the

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<sup>141</sup>Bautista Rosas : 124-125; De Mauleón : 53-55; Johnson, Mexican Democracy : 103-104 and Medina Valdés : 201-224.

<sup>142</sup>"Las Guerrillas' Labor Policía," Excélsior, 18 March 1971 : 3 and Miguel Moreno, "No Entrará el Ejército Nunca a la Universidad," La Prensa, 8 December 1972 : 3. The SECDEF's exact words were *jamás las fuerzas armadas se enfrentarán al pueblo ni a los estudiantes*.

army's non-intervention to the Mexican people through the press.<sup>143</sup> The SECDEF continued to make similar declarations until he left office in December 1976.<sup>144</sup> The army maintained a safe distance from the universities throughout the Echeverría sexenio, even though scattered student disturbances did arise on some campuses. The army simply deferred to police forces in those cases, and there were always the *Halcones* and the *Brigada Blanca* that could be called upon if needed.<sup>145</sup>

General Galván López, who succeeded Cuenca Díaz as SECDEF, adhered to this same general policy, despite having weathered some harsh tests at the outset of his term. The army did have to assist local police in evicting around 3,000 students from various locations on the campus of the National Autonomous University of Oaxaca in December 1976, but the eviction occurred without incident or repression on the part of the government forces.<sup>146</sup> General Galván López later announced that army forces did not participate in the actual eviction of the students at the university in Oaxaca. The Interior Minister backed up the SECDEF's account and reported that state judicial police forces physically removed the students. The army did remain on the scene, at the request of the governor, to enact preventive measures, such as patrolling the university facilities.

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<sup>143</sup>S. Parades Quintana, "El Ejército Mexicano Jamás se Enfrentará al Pueblo: Cuenca Díaz," El Sol, 27 January 1973 : 2.

<sup>144</sup>See for example Jesús M. Lozano, "El Ejército, Nunca Contra Estudiantes o Campesinos: Cuenca," Excélsior, 14 March 1975 : 1.

<sup>145</sup>Michael J. Dziedzic, Mexico: Converging Challenges : 55. Dziedzic writes of the existence in the late 1970s of a counter-subversive unit made up of military and police forces called the *Brigada Blanca*. José Reveles refers to this entity as a type of political police that engaged in political interrogations and infiltrating subversive groups, among other things (Reveles : 21).

<sup>146</sup>Aníbal Vargas, "La Farsa de la 'Democracia' Mexicana," Perspectiva Mundial, 13 February 1978 : 53-54.

The governor of Oaxaca asked the army to remove the patrols in January 1979, by which time total calm had been restored to the university.<sup>147</sup>

Army leaders placed their forces in Mexico City on alert in July 1977 in preparation for a hostile response to the removal of students by local police forces from the national university. The SECDEF stated at the time that the army had no mission to remove students from the universities. That mission belonged to the local police forces. General Galván López, perhaps sensing potential problems, had asserted a few days before the incident that the army would only enter the university if ordered to do so directly by the president. He added that only the judicial police should intervene in the university if conditions dictated such action.<sup>148</sup> It should be added that neither of these episodes in Oaxaca and Mexico City came even close to approximating a crisis situation, but the army remained prepared for all possible contingencies. The SECDEF made subsequent declarations that the army did not engage in activities directed against university groups, and that it did not have any members employed in clandestine operations within the universities.<sup>149</sup> The army continued to restore its image among the Mexican people by staying clear of student conflicts and other repressive confrontations for the remainder of the López Portillo administration.

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<sup>147</sup>Carlos Ravelo, "La Tropa no Participó en el Desalojo: Galván," Excélsior, 26 February 1977 : 1; Antonio Andrade, "Tropas de Tres Zonas Militares Intervinieron en Oaxaca Para Reestablecer la Tranquilidad," El Universal, 4 March 1977 : 1 and Armando Pérez M., "El Ejército ya no Patrullará en Oaxaca," El Universal, 13 January 1979 : 17.

<sup>148</sup>Renato Trejo Cordova, "El Ejército Sólo Entraría a CU si lo Ordenará el Presidente," El Herald, 30 June 1977 : 5 and "El Ejército Está Acuartelado Para Evitar Toda Alteración del Orden," El Día, 8 July 1977 : 2.

<sup>149</sup>"El ejército está fuera de las universidades: Félix Galván," UnoMásUno, 4 March 1979 : 4 and Jorge Reyes Estrada, "No hay subversión en universidades: Galván," UnoMásUno, 9 October 1980 : 1.

As alluded to above, the Echeverría government tried to exercise a policy of rapprochement with alienated groups, especially the students who still harbored resentment over the Tlatelolco affair. When certain groups refused to accept the government's olive branch, the president was not adverse to adopting a direct hard-line approach against that opposition. Most of the guerrilla movements that sprung up in the late 1960s and early 1970s were related, either directly or indirectly, to the crushing of the student movement.<sup>150</sup> Ronfeldt noted that the army had smashed a few minor attempts by radical intellectuals and students to organize guerrilla *focos* in the northern state of Chihuahua and in the southern state of Guerrero in the late 1960s.<sup>151</sup> The Mexican army became directly involved in hunting down the members of various revolutionary groups with names such as the *Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria* (MAR), *Frente Urbano Zapatista* (FUZ), and the *Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre* by the early 1970s. None of these groups proved to have a lasting impact in Mexico, but the robberies, kidnapping, and other actions they engaged in proved nettlesome to the government and weakened its credibility somewhat in the eyes of its constituents. The army coordinated with civilian law-enforcement agencies and gathered intelligence to break the urban guerrilla groups. The army was better trained to combat the rural guerrilla movement, which ultimately proved to be the more intense of the two types. The major rural guerrilla movement operated relatively unobstructed in the mountains of Guerrero. Two ex-primary schoolteachers, Genaro Vázquez Rojas and Lucio Cabañas,

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<sup>150</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 222.

<sup>151</sup>Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order Since 1940," : 293.

led this rural insurgency. The former founded the movement in the late 1960s, and the latter replaced him when he died in early 1972.<sup>152</sup>

The army did not become extensively involved in the fight against the guerrillas in Guerrero until early 1972. An interesting psychological aspect of the army's campaign against rural insurgency concerned General Cuenca Díaz's persistence in denying the existence of guerrillas in Mexico. He preferred instead to refer to the armed rebels hiding in the mountains of Guerrero simply as bandits. His pronouncements came in spite of references to these agitators as guerrillas in the press and by some public officials. If the SECDEF had acknowledged the presence of guerrillas, he would be insinuating that the Mexican system had endemic problems. One might suppose that Cuenca Díaz believed that to admit to the active presence of guerrillas would impugn the very system to which the army owed its allegiance. For whatever reason, the SECDEF proclaimed on numerous occasions that Mexico had no guerrillas on her soil.<sup>153</sup> By no mere coincidence, the army had directed the major part of its civic action effort within the state of Guerrero since the late 1960s. These programs did not eliminate the hardcore opposition in the state, and the army soon became heavily involved in eliminating these guerrillas who Cuenca Díaz persisted in calling bandits. The movement formed by Genaro Vázquez in 1968 after his escape from prison remained active after

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<sup>152</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 222; Boils : 119-122; Cockcroft : 203 and 243; Eckstein : 35; Gobierno Mexicano, No. 42, May 1968 : 91 and Johnson, Mexican Democracy : 156-158.

<sup>153</sup>See for example "Exclusivo de la Policía Considera Cuenca Díaz el Caso de Genaro Vázquez Rojas," Excélsior, 14 January 1972 : 23; "Posible Amnistía a Lucio Cabañas," La Prensa, 18 March 1972 : 3; S. Paredes Quintana, "El Ejército Jamás se Enfrentará al Pueblo: Cuenca Díaz," El Sol, 27 January 1973 : 2 and Miguel Moreno, "Aquí no Existe Guerrilla," La Prensa, 20 February 1974 : 3. Cuenca Díaz chose to refer to the guerrillas as common criminals who committed ordinary crimes.

his death. Vázquez became the object of an intense army campaign in early 1972. The guerrilla leader met his death on 2 February 1972, by what has been described as both a car crash and an army ambush. Family members alleged that he had been tortured and shot by the army, and Vázquez attained somewhat of a martyr status in the mountains of Guerrero. The leadership of the movement passed to Lucio Cabañas, who eventually organized the political arm of the movement, the *Partido de los Pobres*. This new party's philosophy advocated the destruction of bourgeois society by violent means, the abolishment of capitalism, the nationalization of all land, and the socialization of medicine and communications. Army operations in the region dwindled after the death of Vázquez, but by 1974, they would increase dramatically in response to new tactics adopted by the guerrillas.<sup>154</sup>

When the Guerrero guerrillas stepped up their political kidnapping, President Echeverría increased the army's counter-guerrilla operations there. These developments caused General Cuenca Díaz to retract, at least privately, a statement made in January 1973, claiming that Lucio Cabañas did not constitute a problem for the government. When government forces killed peasant villagers as retribution for a wealthy landowner Cabañas had executed, the guerrilla leader responded by kidnapping Senator Rubén Figueroa, who also happened to be the PRI candidate for governor of the state. The culprits demanded a large ransom, the publication of guerrilla manifestos, and the release of political prisoners. The government refused to comply with any of the demands. Instead, the kidnapping of that high-ranking political official unleashed the largest

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<sup>154</sup>Boils : 121-122; Johnson, Mexican Democracy : 159-160 and Piñeyro, Ejército : 89-90.

military operation in decades. Newspaper reports indicated that more than 18,000 troops were operating in the area where Cabañas was believed to be holding Senator Figueroa. Cuenca Díaz personally directed the military operation known as *Plan Morelos* from an army base near the town of Atoyac de Alvarez. The army controlled all access into and out of the area. The operation failed to rescue Figueroa, and approximately 3,500 soldiers continued the search through July and August. The guerrillas embarrassed President Echeverría by kidnapping his father-in-law on 25 August 1974, and subsequently released him on 8 September after he issued a public statement declaring he admired Lucio Cabañas. Army troops from the nearby 27th Military Zone finally rescued Figueroa on 8 September after a skirmish with Cabañas' forces. Reports surrounding the death of Cabañas, which came on 2 December 1974, left it up to one's imagination as to what really happened. Some claimed the army killed him in an ambush while others asserted that he committed suicide because of a terminal illness.<sup>155</sup> With the death of Cabañas, the rural guerrilla movement virtually collapsed, but the SECDEF announced that military vigilance would continue in Guerrero, even though in his mind there were no guerrillas nor had there ever been any guerrillas in Guerrero.<sup>156</sup> The urban guerrilla movement had also dissolved by 1975, even though the army did not play

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<sup>155</sup>Boils : 121-122; Cockcroft : 243-244; Hellman : 173-174; Johnson, *Mexican Democracy* : 159-164; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 89-90; Riding : 101-104; Weil : 358; Arturo González, "Todas las Vías de Acceso a la Sierra, Bajo Control Militar," *El Herald*, 28 June 1974 : 1; Federico Ortiz, "La Orden de ir Tras de Lucio, Tarde: Rangel Medina," *Excelsior*, 29 June 1974 : 1; José Reveles, "La Búsqueda de Figueroa, Infructuosa, Dice el Ejército, Pero la Familia Aún Espera Una Llamada de Cabañas," *Excelsior*, 6 July 1974 : 4; Enrique Díaz Clavel, "Ocho Batallones Buscan a Lucio Cabañas en la Sierra de Atoyac," *Excelsior*, 14 August 1974 : 16 and "El Senador Figueroa Rescatado por el Ejército Tras Un Encuentro a Tiros con los Gavilleros," *El Universal*, 9 September 1974 : 1.

<sup>156</sup>"Ejército y Armada Presentaron a LE sus Saludos de Año Nuevo," *El Herald*, 5 January 1975 : 1.



a significant role in combating urban terrorism. It mainly coordinated intelligence activities with the civilian police forces, whose principal mission was to destroy the urban *focos*. Viewing the situation in retrospect, the army achieved its mission of guaranteeing the nation's internal security, even though it had not accomplished its mission as effectively as it would have liked. The fact remains that it once again provided loyal support to the government, and thus helped it to weather another crisis.

While nobody can deny that the events at Tlatelolco on 2 October 1968 comprised the single most serious crisis in post-1940 Mexico, the Echeverría presidency that followed the event proved to be the most crisis-filled administration of this period. The Mexican army provided more critical support to the government than during any previous administration since 1940. The army played a critical role in helping President Echeverría overcome the crises his administration confronted, and it faced one final test of loyalty in his last year. One U.S. analyst speculated that President Echeverría had been continuously preoccupied by the threat of a military coup throughout his term as president.<sup>157</sup> President Echeverría relived some of those fears during the last months of his sexenio. Soledad Loaeza, a noted Mexican political scientist, cited rumors as the principal cause for the unrest during the latter part of 1976. Rumors of an imminent *golpe de estado* emanated from both the left and the right. One rumor placed the date of the coup as 15 September 1976. When no coup occurred on that date, a new rumor

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<sup>157</sup>Hellman : 166. A story recounted by an U.S. army officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy in the early 1980s gave some credibility to that speculation. A Mexican officer who served as a top aide for General García Barragán in 1968 told the U.S. officer that the SECDEF had a major falling out with Echeverría, the Interior Minister at the time, over the handling of the student movement in 1968. After that confrontation, Echeverría continued to feel uneasy about the army, and as president, he made a concerted effort to reward the military and win back its loyalty.

rescheduled the overthrow for 20 November (the anniversary of the Mexican Revolution). Two versions of the purported coup surfaced. One had the military wresting control of the government from the president, and the other version had Echeverría utilizing the armed forces to remain in power an additional two years. It finally took General Cuenca Díaz, who emerged amidst rumors that he had been assassinated, to reaffirm the military's loyalty to the Constitution and the legitimate government and put an end to all the unfounded rumors. Both the SECDEF and the Presidential Chief of Staff, the nation's two most powerful military leaders, publicly declared that a military coup could never take place in Mexico.<sup>158</sup> These pronouncements seemed to have restored calm to the political scene, and the army once again demonstrated its respect for the Revolutionary heritage, its loyalty to the institutions, and its open willingness to remain apolitical.

The inauguration of José López Portillo on 1 December 1976 brought Mexico the new president's promised *reforma política* or political reform.<sup>159</sup> The new reform produced a relative degree of political stability, in contrast to the chaotic political atmosphere that had characterized his predecessor's administration. Many viewed the new presidential term as a long desired "return to normalcy," coming on the heels of a

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<sup>158</sup>Richard R. Fagen, "The Realities of U.S.-Mexican Relations," *Foreign Affairs* 55 (July 1977) : 694; Soledad Loaeza, "La Política del Rumor: México, Noviembre-Diciembre de 1976," *Foro Internacional* 17 (April-June 1977) : 575-584; Isabel Morales, "En México, ni Remóticamente Puede Darse un Golpe de Estado Militar," *El Día*, 17 September 1976 : 3; Hugo Gómez Bulnes, "Férrea Lealtad del Ejército a la Investidura Presidencial," *El Día*, 24 November 1976 : 1; José Luis Camacho, "Por Encima de Todos los Intereses se Encuentra los de la Patria," *El Día*, 29 November 1976 : 7; Cockcroft : 245-246; Johnson, *Mexican Democracy* : 51 and Smith : 292-296.

<sup>159</sup>For background information on the reforma política, see Manilo Fabio Murillo Soberanis, *La reforma política mexicana* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, S.A., 1979) and Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, *La reforma política y los partidos en México* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, S.A., 1979).

decade of wrenching political, economic, and social turmoil. Reconciliation and cooptation once again became the accepted motifs for conducting business.<sup>160</sup> President López Portillo enjoyed the steadfast support of the army just as his predecessors had before him. But unlike the man he succeeded, López Portillo did not encounter the kinds of crises that dictated the active employment of the army. His problems tended to be of a more political and economic nature, which were resolved in closed-door meetings and not with military force.

The overall situation under López Portillo did not confine the military exclusively to the barracks. Situations arose which required military support or intervention, but none of these circumstances ever approached a major crisis similar to those experienced during the previous administration. Consequently, the army occupied itself as it had done in previous years by removing squatters and establishing a visible presence during elections by distributing ballots, by supervising the polling places, and by delivering the ballots cast to the Federal Electoral Commission. Rumbblings surfaced in 1980 about a major confrontation with Guatemala along the southern border, but such a scenario never materialized. Tensions mounted over the growing number of Guatemalan refugees crossing into Mexico, but the pressure eased when the Mexican government moved the refugees farther away from the border where they could no longer offer succor to Guatemalan guerrilla groups. The closest the president came to a crisis was when he

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<sup>160</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 222; Needler, Mexican Politics : 35-38 and Smith : 298-300.

nationalized the banks on 1 September 1982, three months before he left office.<sup>161</sup> Throughout his administration, López Portillo had demonstrated he had a solid relationship with both the SECDEF and the army. Nothing had occurred in the aftermath of the bank nationalization to alter that perception. Consequently, the opposition had no alternative but to accept the president's decision; no opposition group could hope to succeed in overturning a presidential decision without the backing of the armed forces.

### A Final Note

Military and political leaders seemed to have determined the future role of the Mexican army as far back as the 1940s. World War II provided the army with its last opportunity to perform its primary role of defending the nation against a foreign hostile

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<sup>161</sup>For specific incidents regarding the removal of peasant squatters see Sanderson : 194 and Smith : 295-296. See also "Intervención Militar Contra los Agitadores," Excélsior, 23 June 1973 : 9 and "Los soldados retiran a campesinos sin violencia," UnoMásUno, 21 February 1979 : 2. General background on the army's duties during election periods can be found in "Asegura Cuenca Díaz que las Elecciones se Desarrollarán en Ambiente Tranquilo," Excélsior, 29 June 1973 : 4; Jorge Reyes Estrada, "El ejército dará suficientes garantías para evitar desórdenes en las próximas elecciones, dice Galván," UnoMásUno, 25 April 1979; "Todo el Ejército Acuartelado Para los comicios del día 1," Excélsior, 21 June 1979 : 15; "Garantizará el Ejército las Elecciones del día 2," El Día, 30 November 1979 : 18; "Prepara el Ejército el operativo de resguardo del orden electoral," El Día, 20 June 1982 : 3 and Isabel Zamorano, "Garantizará el Ejército la Seguridad y el Orden," Excélsior, 3 July 1982 : 1. For information concerning activity along the southern border see Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, "Mexico and the Guatemalan Crisis," in The Future of Central America: Policy Choices for the U.S. and Mexico, eds. Richard R. Fagen and Olga Pellicer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983) : 162-184 and Caesar Sereseres, "The Mexican Military Looks South," in The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment, ed. David Ronfeldt (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1984) : 201-213. For a more recent work that details the army's actions along the southern border in the 1980s see Michael J. Dziedzic and Stephen J. Wager, "Mexico's Uncertain Quest for a Strategy to Secure its Southern Border," Journal of Borderlands Studies, VII, No. 1 (Spring 1992) : 19-48. The SECDEF's assessment of the situation can be found in Ernesto Ochoa Céspedes, "México no Está Permitiendo el Paso de Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos: Galván," Novedades, 9 October 1980 : 14; Rogelio Sánchez, "El Ejército, Listo Para Defender la Soberanía," El Heraldo, 15 September 1981 : 3 and Juan Manuel Oliva, "Listo el plan de seguridad del Ejército contra todo atentado a la soberanía: Galván López," El Universal, 3 October 1982 : 1.

threat. The possibility of an attack on Mexico by a foreign power virtually disappeared after 1945. Having come to that realization, Mexico's leaders decided to involve the army intimately with the country's economic and social modernization. An editorial in the *Revista del Ejército* summed up the army's new role rather eloquently. The editorial commented that despite preparation for war being its primary mission, the army has moved beyond that "accommodating in peacetime, its bravery to the general eagerness of the people...the army participates actively in innumerable job that stretch its margin of competence, obeying a profound patriotic sentiment that impels it to create and to build."<sup>162</sup> The army's extensive civic-action programs had given the army an opportunity not only to help build a new and modern Mexico, but also to serve the Mexican people. Civic action has provided the forum where the army can best exhibit its Revolutionary heritage, its loyalty to the institutions, its patriotic spirit, and its nationalist fervor. Civic action enabled the army to help attain the Revolution's goals of social justice and economic advancement; it allowed the army to reinforce the government's social policies; and it served the Mexican people directly. Furthermore, the army's civic-action programs remained free of foreign influences.<sup>163</sup> Since the 1940s, the army has performed its civic-action role successfully, and in that regard, it has made an often overlooked but significant contribution to the development of Mexico. If army leaders had their way, they would confine their institution's efforts to civic action

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<sup>162</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, January 1949 : 3. The actual translation is *coordinando en la paz, su denuedo al afán general del pueblo...el Ejército participa activamente en innumerables trabajos que rebasan el margen de su competencia, obedeciendo un profundo sentido patriótico que lo impulsa a crear y a construir.*

<sup>163</sup>Boils : 135 and 164.

programs in the absence of a threat of war. Unfortunately, the Mexican system could not afford the army that luxury.

The system the Revolution bequeathed to Mexico could not adequately satisfy all existing interest groups, nor could it constantly maintain an acceptable level of social consensus. Conflicts arose that could not always be resolved in a peaceful manner. Political leaders had to call upon the army, itself an integral part of the system, to crush the opposition when these leaders perceived a particular situation had reached crisis proportions. The army had become a major institutional pillar of the governing system since the 1940s and had accepted the role, although at times reluctantly, as the force of last resort. Army leaders preferred a show of force rather than the actual use of force, and that preference became even more explicit after the army's involvement in repressing the student movement of 1968. The army suffered major damage to its image on account of the Tlatelolco incident, and subsequently expressed a strong desire to remain publicly detached from politically motivated conflicts, while cooperating with other quasi-security forces such as the *Halcones* and the *Brigada Blanca*.<sup>164</sup>

The army did not always accomplish that objective. The student movement in 1968 and the rural insurgency in Guerrero a few years later forced the army to respond violently against certain sectors of the population. Crises such as these challenged the army's institutional loyalty, but army leaders always met the challenge. Realistically, the army has always been placed in a vulnerable position with regard to conflict

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<sup>164</sup>Alan Riding contends that political leaders also prefer not to use military force to resolve an internal conflict because of the political cost involved. He cites the rumors of a coup in the aftermath of Tlatelolco and during the Echeverría administration as examples of these costs (Riding : 92).

resolution. Since the 1940s, the army has been subordinate to the political decisionmakers, having lost years before the political capacity to determine if and when it should intervene in a particular situation. The Mexican Constitution granted the President of the Republic the authority to decide when the army should be used in a civil conflict. In other words, the political system has obliged the army to intervene in crisis situations.<sup>165</sup> Army leaders have not acted of their own volition. While these circumstances do not exonerate the army completely from the repressive acts it had been called upon to perform, they do lessen the amount of blame that can be placed directly on the military. On the credit side of the ledger, the army has continued to fulfill its mission as defined by the Constitution and the army's organic law. A book sponsored by the National Education Secretariat has described the Mexican army's contribution to Mexico in an even more favorable light by stating "we can affirm that the army contributes to the maintenance, reaffirmation and strengthening of the independence, integrity and sovereignty of our nation."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup>Bautista Rosas : 146; Boils : 101 and 113 and Lozoya : 125-126.

<sup>166</sup>Simón G. Trejo Santos, "El Ejército Mexicano," in Mexico, Hacia El Siglo XXI, (eds.) Juan Francisco Escobedo Delgado et. al. (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) : 89.

## Chapter Seven

### The Leadership of the Mexican Army

Two men run the army in Mexico, the President and the Secretary of National Defense (SECDEF). As noted in Chapter Two, Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution has clearly established the President as the Commander-in-Chief of the nation's armed forces. The SECDEF oversees the daily operations of the army and the air force as the president's personally designated representative. The hierarchical and personalized style that prospers in both the army and society in general has characterized this formal partnership through the years. A military analogy appropriately describes this relationship. The SECDEF traditionally serves as the field commander and is concerned principally with tactical tasks and fighting the battle at the forward edge of the battlefield. The president is seen as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff whose primary concerns involve the overall strategic role of the army as well as the long range plans of the armed forces. He may in fact receive some advice and some gentle prodding from the SECDEF in dealing with the latter responsibility, but the final decision rests with him alone.

On a more elementary level, the president represents a unit commander, and the SECDEF serves as his executive officer. In that capacity, the president makes the major



decisions, and the SECDEF ensures his commander's orders are carried out properly. The SECDEF, as executive officer, has the leeway to initiate policies that can facilitate the implementation of the commander's directives and help to standardize the commander's basic philosophy. In theoretical terms, the interaction between these two leaders conforms most closely to the traditional patron-client model, common to many Latin American countries, in which the exchanges between the two actors are described as being informal, unspoken, and implicit.<sup>1</sup> These analogies illustrate that nothing happens within the army without one or both of these two individuals having directed it.

The interaction between the president and the SECDEF has occurred principally on a political level. A high-level official serving in the Echeverría administration (1970-1976) has stated that, to truly understand the Mexican army and its role in society, the army has to be recognized and examined as one of a number of ministries within the government. This politician used the expression that "the army is the ministry and the ministry is the army." In other words, the army functions first and foremost as part of the burgeoning bureaucratic system that has purported to promote the interests Mexican Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Since the late 1940s, the evolution of the Mexican army has been debated in the political arena, where individual presidents have exerted the most influence. The

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<sup>1</sup>Dziedzic, *The Defense Policies* : 557-559. Michael J. Dziedzic, a political scientist at the U.S. Air Force Academy, examines this model thoroughly in "The Essence of Decision in a Hegemonic Regime: The Case of Mexico's Acquisition of a Supersonic Fighter," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1986). He uses an actual case study (the acquisition of the F-5E fighter squadron from the U.S.) to illustrate how the model functioned between Mexican President López Portillo and his SECDEF General Galván López.

<sup>2</sup>Interview, May 1991.

SECDEFs who have served during this period have lobbied hard for the interests of their institutions, and in turn, have received effusive public praise for the army's contributions to Mexican society along with modest but continuous economic benefits. This political bargaining is covered in greater detail below.

The element of reciprocity plays a major role in this relationship. The SECDEF has guaranteed the unwavering loyalty of the army to both the office of the presidency and the overall political system, and the president has reciprocated with a wide range of benefits for the military institution and its membership. Image has also constituted a critical ingredient in this partnership. Both partners have enhanced their individual power by demonstrating that they have the unquestioned support of each other's institution. By their nature, army programs are very different from the political programs enacted during a particular administration. Despite these differences, army programs have generally adhered to the overall philosophy of a specific president. For example, the López Mateos *sexenio* (1958-1964) identified the need for increased social security benefits for the Mexican people, and during that administration, the Secretariat of National Defense (SDN) followed suit by championing the first Law of Social Security for the Armed Forces. When the Echeverría administration (1970-1976) adopted the policy of *apertura democrática* (democratic opening) and many reactionary Revolutionary generals were eased into retirement, opening the way for younger and more qualified officers to take their place.

A retired Mexican army general, who had served in the army as far back as the 1940s, declared that the army has evolved in *sexenios* since World War II, and that the

relationship existing between a president and his SECDEF has proven to be the decisive factor in the development of the army during a specific administration.<sup>3</sup> The comments made by this perceptive veteran imply that the boundaries or zones of action of the army are reestablished or modified every six years in accordance with the alliance that is formed between the president and his SECDEF. Based on the importance of that relationship, the most practical way of examining the evolution of the Mexican army during the second half of the twentieth century is to explore each of those six-year affiliations. Before surveying each administration, the general characteristics and role of each member in the partnership must be reviewed to gain a clearer understanding of how the interaction between these leaders has contributed to the gradual evolution and modernization of the Mexican army.

#### The Secretary of National Defense

The military side of the partnership has been the most difficult to examine because these elite army leaders follow a "culture of secrecy." None of the SECDEFs has written an autobiography, nor has anyone written a biography about any of these generals. Information about their backgrounds can only be gleaned from official military publications, newspapers, and selected works on Mexican politics. The SECDEFs who have served since 1952 have exhibited distinguishing characteristics and personalities that provide grist for subsequent sections in the chapter. Additionally, the limited available

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<sup>3</sup>Interview, September 1989.

data on these major military leaders also reveal some common traits that provide a useful point of departure for studying their role in the evolution of the Mexican army.

The Mexican Revolution became the *raison d'être* of the Constitutionalist Army in 1913. But after the Revolution, the new and inexperienced government had to confront the pressing problem of doing away with the liberators. The solution to the problem entailed the elimination of most of the *caudillos* who had become influential in the army as a result of their bold exploits during the Revolution. During and immediately after the Revolution, many of these military chieftains vied for control of the army, and as a result, there existed no single spokesman for what had become the National Army. During the 1920s, the new political system engendered by the Revolution enabled the President of the Republic to emerge gradually as the lone *caudillo*. Prior to 1946, the president often spoke on behalf of the army since he himself was an ex-general, and as a sign of respect and discipline, army leaders deferred to the presidency on most military issues. By the end of World War II, the SECDEF had become the individual who singularly expressed the army's point of view on those issues and activities that required a public explanation. With the emergence of the civilian presidents, the SECDEF became the army's solitary *caudillo*. As the president's handpicked representative, the SECDEF exerted an influence within the army comparable to that exercised by the president within the political system. A SECDEF does not have to compete to secure his power, the system bequeaths that authority to him automatically, although some SECDEFs have chosen to wield their power more aggressively than others belonging to that elite group.

All SECDEFs have relied on the army's ideology to justify the roles and actions performed by the army during their tenure. This ideology has often served as the principal catalyst for any endeavor undertaken by the army. Since the 1940s, the SECDEF became the self-appointed custodian of that ideology as well as the principal reinforcer of the values that constitute that creed. Because this ideology has become so ingrained in the military culture, no single individual, even one as influential as the SECDEF, can unilaterally change that ideology. The SECDEF's role is to reaffirm the key components of the army's ideology in public when responding to questions about the army's missions and activities. Internally, the SECDEF ensures that his top leaders do not deviate from the established military creed.

The SECDEF has a unique role because he, almost exclusive of other factors or individuals, sets the army's tempo for a particular *sexenio* in accordance with the overall philosophy and policies of the president. He tries to gain notoriety and added respect for the army by sponsoring a wide range of projects that directly benefit the Mexican people. As noted in the previous chapter, the role of the army became fairly standardized after World War II, leaving the SECDEF little room to make his imprint in that area. However, a SECDEF does have the latitude to establish his legacy by championing his own special projects during his term, consistent with presidential wishes. For example, General Cuenca Díaz (1970-1976) left his mark by rejuvenating the upper echelons of command, while his successor, General Galván López, oversaw the modernization of army weapons and equipment.

As for the SECDEF's formal responsibilities, the organization manual of the National Defense Secretariat lists twenty such functions. All these duties relate directly to responsibilities of a purely military nature. It is mildly surprising that none of these functions assigns explicit political tasks to the SECDEF or the army. Some of the SECDEF's more prominent responsibilities include determining the objectives, goals, policies, and financial strategies of the defense sector, setting priorities for accomplishing the army's threefold mission, and establishing policies for allocating the human, material and financial resources provided for in the military budget. Six of the SECDEF's official functions clearly reflect his subordination to the president. The SECDEF has to submit all proposed military legislation and senior-officer promotions to the executive branch for approval. He must keep the president continuously informed as to the state of affairs in the defense sector and bring to his attention those issues that require his immediate attention. Finally, the SECDEF must obtain the president's approval for all officers assigned to the army's highest posts, such as the military zone commanders, the Chief of Staff, and the directors of individual branches (infantry, cavalry, engineer etc.).<sup>4</sup> While these responsibilities definitely establish the SECDEF as the domineering leader of the Mexican army and air force, they also delineate quite clearly his subordination to the civil authorities.

Mexico's political climate, her economic reality, and the values promoted by the army's ideology have set severe limits on actions that can be internally generated by the army. Although the political system has virtually maintained the *status quo* since the end

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<sup>4</sup>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Manual de Organización (Mexico City, 1982).

of the Cárdenas presidency, political leaders have alluded to profound transformations that have been implemented in Mexican society as a means of providing legitimacy for the Mexican government after 1940.<sup>5</sup> The army has evolved in much the same way since the 1940s. The army's annual reports, in the first years of a new administration always, mentioned the reorganization of the SDN or the restructuring of military education. More often than not, these changes led to minimal improvement within the army and tended instead to be circular in nature. For example, the Alemán administration introduced the military region system that the succeeding army hierarchy chose not to utilize, relying instead on the traditional military zone system. Congress passed the Law of Social Security for the Armed Forces in 1962, and in 1976, established the Institute of Social Security for the Armed Forces which basically consolidated the functions instituted by the earlier law, even though both the army and political leaders promoted the new institute as a novel innovation. The underlying implication, then, is that most of these reforms are made to seem more important than they really are. In short, SECDEFs have frequently used slight, or cosmetic changes as a means of reinforcing the legitimacy of the army and providing justification for their leadership.

In searching for other common traits among SECDEFs who have served since 1952, political experience readily comes to mind. The SECDEFs who held office under Presidents Ruiz Cortines through Echeverría (1952-1976) had experience as state governors, senators or presidents of the PRI. This political seasoning obviously

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<sup>5</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 189.

demonstrated that these generals had been well integrated into the system before assuming the nation's highest military post. A high ranking bureaucrat under Díaz Ordaz believed that there was a specific purpose for selecting officers with political experience to serve as SECDEF. He stated that their military and political careers were linked closely together. The political experience these officers had obtained obviously convinced key political leaders of their loyalty to the institutions and identified them as individuals who could be trusted to follow both the rules of the system and the orders given to them by the president.<sup>6</sup> These officers had a clear understanding of how the system could compensate the army, as well as how the army was expected to reciprocate the state. On a personal plane, understanding the more secretive intricacies and the planned direction of the overall system probably caused some of the more ambitious SECDEFs to modify their own political aspirations. They all seemed content to accept the position of SECDEF as the ultimate compensation for their many years of loyal service. These generals expressed their gratitude to the system by exhibiting a strong desire to support their presidents and the policies of each.

Age was also a key variable in the SECDEF equation. These officers assumed their post as SECDEF at an advanced age, and that helped to curb their political aspirations. More specifically, Generals Ramos Santos, Olachea Avilés, García Barragán, Cuenca Díaz and Galván López took office at the age of 61, 68, 69, 68 and 63 years

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<sup>6</sup>Interview, May 1991.



respectively.<sup>7</sup> When they took the SECDEF post, they all had more than 40 years of service and a thorough education in institutional loyalty. After serving six years of grueling service as SECDEF, being permanently on-call for the president, it is hard to imagine that any of these officers entertained serious political aspirations such as the presidency upon their retirement as SECDEF.

The Presidents' selections of SECDEFs up through Cuenca Díaz seems to have been based heavily on the personal relations between the two individuals. A Mexican official with considerable political experience wrote that the connection between a president and each of his ministers is personal and of strict confidence. A president establishes his own nomination criteria for each of his ministers.<sup>8</sup> Despite the changes in presidents over the years, the SECDEF selection process has not deviated significantly from this norm since the end of World War II, although many of the intricacies concerning the choice of a SECDEF remain secret, known only to those who have participated in the process.

A number of high ranking army officers and politicians have mentioned the existence of a quasi-formal selection process that entailed the incumbent SECDEF sending the files of the top ten *divisionarios* (three-star generals) to the president-elect who in turn reviewed and evaluated those records.<sup>9</sup> The incumbent normally forwarded the files of

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<sup>7</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 556.1/105 contains a roster of all the general officers on the rolls during the Ruiz Cortines term. Judging from the birth dates on that roster, Generals Ramos Santos, Olachea Avilés and García Barragán were among the most senior generals when they were selected as SECDEF. General Cuenca Díaz was headed for retirement before President Echeverría extended his military career.

<sup>8</sup>González Cosío : 209.

<sup>9</sup>Three-star general or *divisionario* had long been the highest rank in the Mexican army. Fuentes (p. 222) writes that an officer being promoted at the regular intervals could expect to be promoted to the rank of *divisionario* between 54 and 58 years of age. That means that a general with the experience and the time in that grade needed to be a viable SECDEF candidate would be at least in his late fifties.

the more senior *divisionarios* whom he had looked favorably upon as possible successors. The president-elect had the option of requesting a file that was not in the original batch. For example, one might speculate that General Cuenca Díaz's file was not in the first group of files sent to president-elect Echeverría since he had spent the entire *sexenio* as senator for Baja California. In that position, he had been outside the army mainstream, and thus, not perceived as a viable SECDEF candidate. However, Echeverría had known Cuenca Díaz for many years and had probably been inclined from the beginning to select him as his SECDEF. SECDEFs have not always been the best generals militarily because generals who had not served in a political post had more military service and experience.<sup>10</sup> But that military experience most often took a second seat to loyalty, the criteria judged most crucial by a new president. A high level official in the Díaz Ordaz administration recounted that the President did not know General García Barragán too well before selecting him as SECDEF, but he based his choice principally on García Barragán's reputation as a very loyal officer.<sup>11</sup>

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During the López Portillo administration, the President awarded a fourth star to his SECDEF, Galván López, and since that time only the SECDEF wears four stars. The events surrounding that innovation have an amusing character. It seems President López Portillo awarded the federal district police chief and boyhood pal, Arturo Durazo Moreno, three stars. Galván López became offended that he was considered on a par with the local police chief. The President promptly awarded him a fourth star to assuage his feelings. (Interview, January 1991). See José González González, *Lo negro del negro Durazo* (Mexico City: Editorial Posada, 1983) : 54-58 for Durazo Moreno's interpretation of the incident.

<sup>10</sup>The information about the SECDEF selection process was obtained from a series of informal interviews conducted during 1986-1991. The information about the friendship between President Echeverría and Cuenca Díaz was related to me personally by President Echeverría during an interview in June 1991.

<sup>11</sup>Interview, January 1991.

Other considerations in the selection process concerned age and date of rank. A new president had to take precautions not to select a general too junior in age or grade in order to avoid causing undue turbulence at the highest echelons of the army command. Prior to 1976, incoming presidents seemed to have given less weight to the system of evaluating military records, relying more on personal relations. A relative of General Galván López reported that the general did not have a close relationship with López Portillo prior to his appointment as SECDEF. The general had had virtually no contact with the president-elect before his selection having only formally met him in September 1976, a little more than two months before the inauguration. The general had been walking with a cane as a result of a car accident, and the incoming president told him to get well because he might be needing him. López Portillo had studied Galván López's curriculum and interviewed him in November. According to the general's relative, López Portillo asked him to be the new SECDEF on 29 November 1976, two days before the presidential inauguration. The incumbent SECDEF had not actively supported Galván López as his successor, but the new president had obviously been impressed by his military qualifications.<sup>12</sup> In short, the choice of Galván López seemed to be based primarily on military experience and seniority. Other factors such as the growing technocratic evolution of the government since 1970 may have also affected the Galván López nomination. One outcome of that change was reduced contact between high-ranking bureaucrats and the army. In addition, the 1960s witnessed fewer high-ranking officers occupying key political positions such as governor and party president that

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<sup>12</sup>Interview, October 1990.

traditionally had allowed for considerable communication between army officers and high ranking government officials.

Since the Ruiz Cortines presidency, there has existed a deliberate pattern of choosing a SECDEF who had not shown close ties to the previous military administration. For example, General Ramos Santos had long been identified as a *Callista* and was not on especially good terms with the Alemán team. He credited a strong recommendation from ex-President Abelardo Rodríguez, who still wielded considerable influence in his home state of Sonora, as a major reason for his appointment. General Olachea Avilés, whose allegiance rested with the system rather than any specific individual, followed Ramos Santos. He had served as governor of the territory of Baja California Sur and president of the official party during the Ruiz Cortines presidency, and had not been closely allied with the defense establishment while serving in those positions. General García Barragán, who succeeded Olachea Avilés, had been cashiered from the army in 1952 because of his support for General Henríquez Guzmán. He had not been permitted to re-enter the army until 1958, and he still remained somewhat ostracized under Olachea Avilés. As noted above, General Cuenca Díaz had been serving as senator of Baja California Norte when he was told of his appointment to SECDEF. And finally, General Galván López had spent his first year under Cuenca Díaz in a "frozen" status, without a job. The rationale behind the SECDEF selection process centered on loyalty to the presidency. Each president wanted a SECDEF who could easily sever ties with the previous administration, thereby ensuring complete loyalty to the president and not to his predecessor.

Each president established an additional means of guaranteeing the SECDEF's loyalty by personally appointing the Deputy SECDEF (*Subsecretario*) to his post as second in command of the army and the air force. The *Subsecretario* subtly serves as a mild counterpoise to the SECDEF because he did not belong to the SECDEF's coterie, most often having lost out in the competition for SECDEF to his new commander. In one sense, the Deputy SECDEF's loyalty was directly to the president as payment for such an important assignment, and because most SECDEFs have opted to rely more heavily on their handpicked and unquestionably loyal Chiefs of Staff. Although no SECDEF has ever shown disloyalty toward the president, the *Subsecretario* has provided some insurance for the civilian leadership.<sup>13</sup>

After the SECDEF, the officer most important to the President is the Presidential Chief of Staff or *Jefe del Estado Mayor Presidencial* (JEMP) who has overall responsibility for attending to the President's administrative, logistical and security concerns. During the presidential campaign of López Mateos, the army openly supported the official party's candidate for the first time. Members of the president's general staff and selected officers from the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (ESG) planned the candidate's campaign tours and organized breakfasts and receptions at army installations along the route.<sup>14</sup> The army support became more organized in subsequent presidential campaigns, and the president's general staff customarily handled the electoral campaign

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<sup>13</sup>This information was obtained during several informal interviews with Mexican army officers.

<sup>14</sup>Bautista Rosas : 98.

of the succeeding president.<sup>15</sup> The JEMP normally designated one of the senior officers on the president's general staff to accompany the candidate throughout the campaign period and to manage the required assistance. That officer eventually became the new JEMP, provided he handled his responsibilities well during the campaign.

Because of the nature of his position, the JEMP normally formed a close relationship with the new president. At times, the closeness with the president caused more than one JEMP to try and circumvent the SECDEF's control over certain military matters, a situation that created friction between the two high ranking army officials. Both Presidents Echeverría and López Portillo had to counsel their JEMPs not to interfere with the SECDEF and reassert the subordination of the JEMP to the SECDEF where military responsibilities were involved.<sup>16</sup> A retired army general remarked that the JEMP under Díaz Ordaz, General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, coordinated and worked well with General García Barragán because he readily accepted the SECDEF's seniority and never challenged it.<sup>17</sup> And a JEMP knew that he could never challenge the SECDEF for the army's top leadership position.

In one sense, the JEMP has never been considered an integral part of the mainstream army. He has served the majority of his military career in the Presidential Guards or on the presidential staff. Because the Presidential Guards tend specifically to the needs of the President, the members of that elite unit have been viewed as being separate from the

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<sup>15</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 232.

<sup>16</sup>Interviews, January 1991 and May 1991.

<sup>17</sup>Interview, July 1991.

"real army." Officers not belonging to the Presidential Guards derisively refer to that unit as the "imperial army." The JEMP commands only the equivalent of a brigade, while the SECDEF oversees all forces. Only the SECDEF can negotiate with the President on behalf of the army, and that special privilege places him on a plateau above all other army officers. The modernization that has taken place in the armed forces in the post-1970s era, has not changed the army's policy of highly centralized power, with the SECDEF making all the important decisions himself.<sup>18</sup>

This confidential and singular association between the President and his SECDEF helps to explain why army officers holding political positions exercise negligible political influence. The SECDEF personally recommends each officer who is nominated for an official-party congressional or senatorial position. Although military candidates obtain a leave of absence from active duty when they serve in a political position, their future livelihood still depends on the army, and as a result, their loyalty lies first and foremost with the SECDEF. Even though they are formally part of the political system and abide by the rules of that system, they still coordinate directly with the SECDEF for guidance on what military-related benefits they should be lobbying for. These officers simply guide proposed military legislation through the legislative process, and they have no direct access to the president. If any of these officers attempted to gain an audience with the president, without first obtaining permission from the SECDEF, he would be guilty of circumventing the chain of command and subject to a reprimand from the army

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<sup>18</sup>Sánchez Gutierrez, "El Estado y Los Militares" : 36.

hierarchy. In sum, direct access to the president on behalf of the army and the air force is limited to the SECDEF.<sup>19</sup>

In Mexico, the army has been divorced from formal politics since the 1940s. As one wily Mexican politician observed, the military officer holding a political position is actually a civilian, so his participation in the political process cannot be viewed as a direct form of military involvement in politics.<sup>20</sup> The army's input to decisions at the national level has been limited exclusively to national security issues and has only been provided when it has been formally solicited. Given the strong neutralist bent of Mexico's foreign policy, threats to Mexico's national security from external forces have been virtually non-existent. As a result, the army's participation in the formal political process has been very restricted, and confined to the SECDEF-President relationship.<sup>21</sup>

### The President of the Republic

As one might expect, the civilian side of the President-SECDEF relationship revolves almost exclusively around the president. Although the president has controlled the SECDEF selection, the army has played virtually no role in nominating a president since 1946 when the invariable pattern of selecting civilian presidents was first established.

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<sup>19</sup>This information was obtained from interviews with army officers who had each served a term in the Chamber of Deputies. The interviews took place in May and July 1988. See also Aguilar Zinser : 222-223.

<sup>20</sup>Interview, January 1991.

<sup>21</sup>The ideas presented in this paragraph have been gleaned primarily from a number of interviews with present and former Mexican politicians conducted in September 1989, January 1991 and May 1991.



Despite the army's absence from the presidential selection process, a civilian bureaucratic-insider with extensive government experience has suggested that the army has had a moderating effect on the overall selection process by precluding the choice of an extremist candidate either from the left or the right. According to this political veteran, high-level army leaders have voiced an interest in assuring that the political ship maintains an even keel. The army has tolerated minor shifts in the political pendulum, but it would not likely condone a sharp deviation from the traditional political *modus operandi*.<sup>22</sup> A U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), an interdepartmental report prepared by the national intelligence community, addressing the general outlook for Mexico in 1957 concurred in this assessment. The NIE stated "PRI leadership, aware of the latent power of the army, probably would not select a presidential candidate not acceptable to the military."<sup>23</sup>

The centrality of the presidency has been a well-documented characteristic of the Mexican political system. Mexican presidents, with their virtual viceregal powers, have exercised an almost inordinate amount of power. The Mexican government has long revolved on an axis around the President of the Republic. Once an individual becomes president he obtains that vast influence automatically. A weak president could simply not sustain the Mexican political system. The president is clearly the head of the ruling elite. A leading official from the Alemán *sexenio* once remarked that "the power of a

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<sup>22</sup>Interview, May 1991.

<sup>23</sup>U.S. Foreign Relations, Vol. VI, 1955-1957 : 756.

President of Mexico has no limit but the limit of time, his six years in office..."<sup>24</sup> On this subject of presidential power, a U.S. journalist wrote "the Mexican president has often been described privately as an absolute monarch popularly endowed with Pope-like infallibility for the six years he serves."<sup>25</sup> The acceptance of this imposing presidential power has been deeply ingrained in the Mexican political mentality.<sup>26</sup>

The President has also asserted a corresponding influence in military affairs. In addition to the authority the Constitution has granted him over the army, only the president can activate any of the three major *Defensa Nacional* plans.<sup>27</sup> While the president approves promotions to the rank of colonel and above as authorized by the Constitution, he also has the final approval on the assigning of military zone commanders. Because of his influence and his role as Supreme Commander of the armed forces, the army places singular importance on its interaction with the president. In subordinating itself to a system of civilian government in the years following the Mexican Revolution, the army initially showed its allegiance to the president more than it did to the government. In the eyes of the army and Mexican society in general, the president has historically been perceived as the guarantor of the values and promises of

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<sup>24</sup>Scott : 252.

<sup>25</sup>Henry Giniger, "Mexican Dissident Foresees Rise in Rural Tension," New York Times, 29 December 1967 : 3.

<sup>26</sup>The information dealing with the centrality and power of the Mexican presidency has been synthesized from Bernardo Ponce : 217-218; Brandenburg : 3-6; Córdova, Formación : 45-61; Cosío Villegas, El sistema político mexicano : 22-35 and Scott : 248-261.

<sup>27</sup>Piñeyro, "Presencia política militar" : 70-75. The three major *Defensa Nacional* (DN) plans are DN-I, DN-II, and DN-III. DN-I is a national war plan to counteract an attack from a foreign aggressor. DN-II is a plan of defense against an internal threat, and DN-III is the disaster relief plan, which was discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

the Mexican Revolution. Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, a Mexican political scientist, skillfully captured the essence of this concept when he wrote:

"that the armed forces are loyal to the president reflects the legal rule, the practice, and the ideological principle that consolidates the respect of the military for the civil government. Subordination to the civil authorities by the military means that the military must abide by the laws, and the highest legal principle is the authority of the president."<sup>28</sup>

The president has continued to retain the respect and reverence of the army by following a well designed protocol in dealing with that institution.

Each president has readily acknowledged and praised the support of the army. This overt recognition of the army has always been visible to the public. Soldiers constantly surround the president. They provide security for his person, his family, his home, and his office. Mexican presidents have frequently showered the army with accolades, especially in the annual State of the Union Address. Presidents has customarily been the guests of honor at various military functions held on an annual basis, such as Army Day, the Loyalty March, the post-State of the Union breakfast, and the Independence celebration, to name the more prominent ones.<sup>29</sup> Mexican presidents have acted to make the army feel like an integral part of the system. The president can accomplish that feat because he is the nation's foremost political actor.

The relationship between the president and the army is unique when compared with that existing in other Latin American countries. Many army officers view the president as directly responsible for their well-being, and the personal benefits they receive for

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<sup>28</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 223.

<sup>29</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 223 and Margiotta : 218-221.

their service. Franklin Margiotta, a U.S. Air Force officer, interviewed various officers who had served in the López Mateos, Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría administrations, and he found them to be quite satisfied with the political system as well as optimistic that it would continue to reward them. The same can be said for army officers who had served under López Portillo.<sup>30</sup> One foreign diplomat alluded to this phenomenon when he wrote the "monarchical character of the regime is such that the officers believe that, if not their promotions, at least their marginal personal benefits are the result of the concern of the president."<sup>31</sup>

The perceptions discussed above has led many officers to display a special respect for the president. Margiotta has described these exceptional feelings for the President as bordering on reverence.<sup>32</sup> This view is reinforced in the Gutiérrez Oropeza book cited earlier. General Gutiérrez Oropeza served as Díaz Ordaz's JEMP and wrote a book commemorating the 75th anniversary of the late president. The general intended for the book to pay homage to his ex-leader, and the book's content illustrated how some officers venerated the president. General Gutiérrez Oropeza paid for the work's publication with personal funds and delivered copies to friends of the late president and

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<sup>30</sup>Margiotta : 220-221. During 1980-1981, I had substantial contact with a number of junior army officers, and they left the distinct impression that they appreciated the benefits they had obtained on a fairly regular basis. In fact, they seemed to have grown accustomed to the army system of compensation, which ultimately had been fostered by the SECDEF and supported by the President.

<sup>31</sup>Alain Rouquié, The Military and the State in Latin America, trans. by Paul E. Sigmund (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) : 206.

<sup>32</sup>Margiotta : 221.

to high-level politicians, in hope that Díaz Ordaz's political career would provide a model for those serving in government.<sup>33</sup>

A president must work hard to maintain this aura of admiration. As Martin Needler, a veteran Mexicanist, has written, "presidents appreciate that military support for them can never be taken entirely for granted."<sup>34</sup> A president can best accomplish that task by continuing to dispense benefits. Some have suggested that the armed forces have been integrated into the systems by means of cooptation. Promotions have traditionally provided a means of reinforcing the President's authority. Promotions within the Mexican army have depended to a large extent on the adulation of superiors and the outward manifestation of loyalty.<sup>35</sup> During the Mexican Revolution, most promotions were made on the battlefield. Mexicans called these promotions *de dedo* or *dedazo* because the field general normally pointed to a soldier who had performed bravely and promoted him to the next rank. One Mexican who has researched the military extensively stated that the *dedazo* has been institutionalized by the president through the SECDEF who has been the principal determinant of promotions to the rank of colonel and above.<sup>36</sup> The SECDEF makes the decisions, and the president gives his stamp of approval. Because of the SECDEF's relationship with the president, loyalty to the president most often takes precedence over military skills and qualifications. In sum,

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<sup>33</sup>Interview, July 1991.

<sup>34</sup>Needler, Mexican Politics : 77.

<sup>35</sup>Boils : 114 and Dziedzic, Mexico: Converging Challenges : 62-63.

<sup>36</sup>Interview, January 1991.

to reach "the top of the military hierarchy, the officer must display both ability and political reliability."<sup>37</sup>

Since the Revolution, the army has endured as a privileged institution despite having lost most of its political influence. The perquisites army members have enjoyed through the years have been attained primarily through the special relationship the army has had with the presidency.<sup>38</sup> Although the army has been stripped of its formal vestiges of political power since the 1940s, it has still retained a modicum of informal political clout, simply because it remains the only group that could successfully combat a major internal threat to the system. For that reason alone, the army's support of the political system has remained crucial. Political leaders, especially the president, have learned that the continued subordination of the army to the civil authorities has depended on "a subtle game of differentiated selective compensation."<sup>39</sup> The chief players in that game have been the president and the SECDEF. The rules of the game call for the SECDEF to petition the president for certain favors on behalf of the army. When the president grants those benefits or services, the SECDEF ensures that news of the president's concern for the army filters all the way down to the lowest ranking soldier.

### The Military and Corruption

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<sup>37</sup>Dziedzic, Mexico: Converging Challenges : 63.

<sup>38</sup>Eckstein : 35 and Needler, Mexican Politics : 77.

<sup>39</sup>Rouquié : 206.

Any substantive work dealing with Mexican politics or society has at least indirectly addressed the subject of corruption in one of its many forms, be it electoral fraud or venality on the part of public officials. Corruption, a most despicable legacy from Mexico's Spanish forefathers, permeates all strata of Mexican society. Mexican folklore has sustained itself with fabled stories of how humble bureaucrats become multi-millionaires in a period of six years. Corruption has historically been tolerated as a loathsome reality of daily life. One observer has even suggested that it is the glue that holds the system together.<sup>40</sup> Despite the high levels of discipline and patriotism within the Mexican army, it would be naive to believe that the military has been immune from corrupt practices, given the prevalence of this malady in the other sectors of society. Therefore, no detailed study of the Mexican army would be truly complete without at least a cursory examination of military corruption, a subject considered taboo in Mexico.

While the issue of corruption has been treated with great sensitivity in political circles, it has been addressed with even greater restraint when it relates to the military. A Mexican journalist commented that he could never write about corruption in politics without exposing himself to some personal risk and warned that the subject of corruption in the military is avoided at all costs.<sup>41</sup> Public acknowledgement of corruption in the army would seriously impugn the military's image because corruption and patriotism, a

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<sup>40</sup>Riding : 114. Although a little dated, Hansen : 124-131 offers a useful analysis of systemic corruption in Mexico. Riding : 113-133, who worked as a journalist in Mexico for about 15 years, offers one of the best and most up-to-date analyses of corruption in Mexico. Stephen D. Morris', Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1991) examines the subject of corruption from a more theoretical approach, focusing on its causes and consequences.

<sup>41</sup>Interview, May 1991.

bedrock of the army's ideology, are contradictory terms. Accusations of the army's involvement in corrupt activities would create deep psychological conflicts for many officers who have been weaned on the importance of patriotism since their days at the HCM. This may account for why more than one observer has suggested that the military expects the government to protect its prestige from media criticism over accusations about corruption.<sup>42</sup> And the president is the one individual who can guarantee the army protection against calumny.

Despite the many obstacles to examining corruption in the military, some individuals have made an effort to penetrate that conspiracy of secrecy. Alan Riding, a veteran New York Times reporter in Mexico for many years, has written that the government has fostered corruption within the army as a means of coopting its leaders.<sup>43</sup> Franklin Margiotta has described the somewhat questionable methods some officers have used to supplement their military income.<sup>44</sup> Letters sent to certain military zone commanders by former SECDEF General Ramos Santos admonished his commanders to eliminate usury and the illicit selling of military equipment.<sup>45</sup> That kind of correspondence is an informal acknowledgement that army officers have indeed engaged in corrupt practices. Two social scientists have recently postulated that the army's escalating involvement in the antidrug campaign has made its soldiers vulnerable to bribes from narcotics

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<sup>42</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 230 and Riding : 91.

<sup>43</sup>Riding : 91.

<sup>44</sup>Margiotta : 227-228.

<sup>45</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 707/38.



traffickers.<sup>46</sup> One could easily conjecture that the temptations from drug dealers have existed since the late 1960s when the army began to intensify its effort in the war on drugs.

A former army officer offers the most accurate description of corruption within the army; he describes that phenomenon as being self-contained. Corrupt practices have always been condoned as a means of furnishing unit commanders with added income to compensate for the low pensions they would be receiving upon retirement. Army leaders allegedly exploit their troops by withholding a portion of their salaries and rations, reselling the latter for cash. In one sense, this corruption is not as damaging as that which occurs in other sectors because it is confined exclusively to the army, and can be viewed as a reallocation of budgetary expenditures in favor of those holding top level positions. This former officer sees corruption as presenting a peculiar dilemma for the military. As long as corruption exists within the army, it makes it difficult for army leaders to assume a moralistic role and question comparable practices employed by government officials.<sup>47</sup> This analysis appears quite valid, although increasing participation in the national antidrug campaign would seem to expose the army to external sources of corruption, thereby enlarging the potential for future corruption-related problems.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 230 and Morris : 60-62.

<sup>47</sup>Bautista Rosas : 162-164.

<sup>48</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 230 discusses that prospect.

For the most part, the issue of corruption in the armed forces is not discussed in public. An exception to that rule occurred in November 1980 when Juan Rulfo, a noted Mexican literary figure, announced before the press corps in West Germany, where he was receiving a literary award, that Mexican soldiers were corrupt and were kept from aspiring for political power by means of the bribe. President López Portillo immediately defended the military by publicly denouncing those accusations, and declaring that "no soldier of the Republic is corrupt; all are loyal servants of the institutions..."<sup>49</sup> His declaration and those of other high level officials quickly muzzled any further discussion of the issue.<sup>50</sup> One interesting aside is that Rulfo waited until he was in West Germany to make his allegations which might indicate that he believed his comments would not have been reported if they had been made in Mexico. In bidding farewell to General Galván López two years later, López Portillo called the general an "honest soldier of the Republic, full of valor, imagination, intelligence and discipline..."<sup>51</sup> The Spanish word *limpio* literally means clean, but it can also be defined as honest, which was the connotation used by the president in an obvious allusion to Rulfo's earlier attack on the integrity of the army.

In fairness to the Mexican army, the concept of corruption has been interpreted differently in Western nations than in Mexico, and Alan Riding does a good job in

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<sup>49</sup>Cuadernos : 10. *Ningún soldado de la república es corrupto; todos son leales servidores de las instituciones...*

<sup>50</sup>Jesús Lozano, "Calumnias Contra el Ejército," Excélsior, 21 November 1980 : 1; "No hay corrupción dentro del Ejército: Miguel Angel Godínez," El Universal, 21 November 1980 : 17; Fuentes : 302-303 and Rouquié : 206.

<sup>51</sup>Leopoldo Cano, "Elogia al Ejército: cumplió con creces su compromiso," El Universal, 29 November 1982 : 1.

clarifying these differences.<sup>52</sup> In Mexico, the traditional *mordida* or bribe, frowned upon in Western nations, is seen as a perquisite commensurate with one's position in government. In the army, officers have been inculcated with the importance of loyalty and discipline. The former demands strict allegiance to one's immediate superior, and the latter calls for compliance with the orders given by that leader. The typical leader reciprocates obedience from his key subordinates with a share of the profits or benefits garnered from daily routines that may involve some questionable activities. This type of superior-subordinate or patron-client relationship has become second nature for most officers, and this behavior has been folded into the military culture in much the same way it has for society in general.

Another aspect of this problem centers around economics. According to some reports, the army's pension system can be classified as insufficient to allow most retirees to maintain a minimal acceptable standard of living. Through the years, military pensioners have petitioned Mexican presidents to raise their pensions so they are more in line with the salaries of active duty personnel. After thirty years of service, an army officer can retire at full pay. However, as Margiotta illustrates, an officer's base pay comprises less than thirty percent of the total compensation package he receives. More specifically, an officer's pay is adjusted upwards depending on the location of his assignment, his actual position, and whether or not he is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College (ESG). These supplements can obviously account for as much as

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<sup>52</sup>Riding : 113-116.

seventy percent of an officer's total salary.<sup>53</sup> This means that most officers experience a seventy percent pay reduction when they retire. Because of their age, generals who retire after they have reached sixty years of age, as most do, have virtually no prospects for subsequent employment. Moreover, military pensions have generally remained static, and the significant depreciation of the *peso* since the 1940s has made military pensions virtually worthless. A former general complained that retired officers often had to accept demeaning jobs in order to augment their meager pensions and suggested that the pension system was where army leaders needed to focus immediate attention.<sup>54</sup> Another retired veteran with 36 years of service has written that he is required to wear his uniform when he picks up his pension, yet he could not buy a uniform with the paltry sum he receives. He cites an article from the Social Security Institute of the Armed Forces Law that stipulates a retired officer should earn a salary equivalent to that of an officer on active duty, and then he asserts that the SDN has not been complying with the law. In the long run, the retired general suggests that these kinds of policies are what lead officers to stray from the path of honesty and dignity.<sup>55</sup> Despite these constant complaints, political leaders have opted to extend almost all benefits to those on active duty, realizing the importance of keeping those forces satisfied. This point is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>53</sup>Margiotta : 225-228. Walker : 65-70 also describes the various forms of monetary compensation for army officers.

<sup>54</sup>Alejandro Caballero, "Ingresó al PRD el general en retiro Alberto Quintanar," La Jornada, 21 September 1990 : 1.

<sup>55</sup>Raúl Monje, "UN GENERAL EN RETIRO, CON PENSION MENOR QUE EL SUELDO DE UN SOLDADO RASO," Proceso, 4 June 1984 : 25.

As part of a larger picture, army officers witness firsthand political officials assuring financial security for the rest of their lives during the course of one six-year administration. When army officers begin to think about their futures, many obviously worry about the financial security of their families after retirement, and such a preoccupation can easily steer officers toward corrupt practices. Politicians often have six years to make their fortunes, whereas army officers may have only one chance to command a unit, and great pressure exists to capitalize on that lone opportunity to build a nest egg for the future.<sup>56</sup> That which befalls the army is only one small part of a much larger problem in the rest of society, demonstrating that corruption cannot be effectively redressed in the military until it has first been amended in society in general, where it has thrived on a much greater scale. Finally, it could be argued that most of the values that comprise the army's ideology formally reject corruption, and consequently, that creed could be viewed as a measure that has helped to curb, to a yet unidentified degree, corruption within the army.

### A Final Note

The control of the Mexican army has been clearly delineated in the Constitution and the army's organic law. That authority rests with the president and his SECDEF. After the Mexican Revolution, a formal partnership was established between those two leaders,

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<sup>56</sup>A Mexican aphorism which captures the phenomenon of corruption in society reads *este es el año de Hidalgo, buey es él que deja algo*. That translates as "this is the year of Hidalgo, he who leaves anything is an ox. The year of Hidalgo is the last year of a *sexenio*. The Mexican patriot Father Hidalgo appeared on the old silver *peso* coins and thus represents money. An ox is one of the dumbest animals, as is anyone who leaves anything in the coffers for their successors. This philosophy also gives some insight into what had become standard behavior in official circles.

and that relationship has continued uninterrupted to the present day. The SECDEF has remained clearly subordinate to the President who serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the country's armed forces. Traditionally, the president has entrusted the operational control and management of the army and air force to his SECDEF. Since 1946, all SECDEFs have served their full term in office, and none has violated the president's trust.

Each President chooses his SECDEF based on his own personal selection criteria, which has remained confidential through the years, although loyalty has probably been the first requirement on each president's list. According to the Constitution, the president can select any officer for the SECDEF post. However, since 1952, all presidents have respected army traditions by picking the SECDEF from a pool of the most senior army officers, i.e. from the top 10-15 three-star generals (*divisionarios*). The qualified candidates have similar qualifications and belong to a particular generation of graduates from the HCM. By selecting the SECDEF from this group, a president avoids creating excessive personnel turbulence in the upper echelons of the army's command structure. In the past, political experience was a prerequisite for the office of SECDEF, but that no longer appears to be the case. In fact, the opportunities for army officers to gain political experience have been drastically reduced since the 1940s. The officer that is finally selected to lead the army for six years is also expected to be the principal custodian of its traditions and ideology.

While the army's modernization program that began in the late 1960s has slowly improved the professional quality of the army since that time, the highly centralized

decision-making process remains in effect. Although it is difficult to predict the long range effects of this authoritarian practice, in the short run, it may restrain the pace of the army's progress because of the protracted response time that process entails. Consequently, one should not expect any revolutionary changes within the Mexican army in the immediate future.

## Chapter Eight

### The Evolution of the Mexican Army Under Civilian Control: 1952-1982

The post-1952 era in Mexico revealed two distinct patterns of leadership within the Mexican army--a patently Revolutionary leadership followed by a more technically professional style of leadership. From the end of the Mexican Revolution up through the 1960s, most of the senior officers in the Mexican army carried the label of "Revolutionary generals," officers who had fought in the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution. They had ruled the army since the days of the Revolution, and many had actually stayed on active duty well beyond a reasonable retirement age. For the Mexican army, fighting in the Revolution counted for everything, and it remained the lone criterion that younger generations of army officers could not replicate. The vast majority of Revolutionary officers had not chosen the military as a career initially, but they were forced into the army as a result of the Revolution. With no formal military education, most had received their commissions while serving as enlisted men, and they earned their promotions by the *dedazo* system. By the late 1940s, the "Revolutionary" classification had come to include those officers without formal military education, who had seen action in the revolts of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bautista Rosas : 156-159 and McAlister et al. : 223.



Generals Matías Ramos Santos and Agustín Olachea Avilés, SECDEFs from 1952-1964, were both Revolutionary generals, and some Mexican analysts have included General Marcelino García Barragán in that group.<sup>2</sup> Although General García Barragán fought in the Revolution as an enlisted man, he attended the Military College after the Revolution and graduated with a commission in 1923. His professional military education set him apart from his predecessors. Instead of characterizing him as belonging exclusively to the *generación revolucionaria*, he could be more accurately classified as belonging to a small group of officers who represented a transition between the Revolutionary generals and the fully trained generation of senior officers who attended the Military College and the Command and General Staff College (ESG). The two officers who succeeded García Barragán, Generals Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz and Félix Galván López, fell into that latter category.

The Mexican army followed a distinct development pattern under the tutelage of the Revolutionary generals. Generals Ramos Santos and Olachea Avilés pursued a development plan akin to that initiated by General Limón under President Alemán. These generals concentrated on enhancing the benefits for members of the armed forces and relegated equipment and matériel improvements to a lower priority. Margiotta observed that the Mexican government consistently spent a smaller proportion of its budget on defense than any other Latin American country during 1938-1965.<sup>3</sup> Revolutionary generals were at the helm in those years, and frugal budget allocations

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<sup>2</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 308 and Bautista Rosas : 156-159.

<sup>3</sup>Margiotta : 223.

contributed to a lack of major equipment purchases. Sizable outlays of cash for new equipment were not readily available to the army at that time. However, imbued with their patriotic spirit, army leaders opted to observe the stringent economic policies followed by the other sectors in society.

As SECDEFs, the Revolutionary generals seemed more preoccupied with enlarging the infrastructure of benefits started by President Alemán and General Limón than with improving the collective institution. The benefits Generals Ramos Santos and Olachea Avilés lobbied for improved the quality of life for many of the service members, but the quality of the institution's matériel gradually deteriorated. In retrospect, their decisions seemed quite reasonable. The Mexican army's role and standing in the overall Revolutionary system had been firmly established during the 1940s, leaving the army with purely defensive responsibilities and obviating the need for advanced and expensive military equipment. Army leaders willingly accepted this arrangement set by the nation's civilian leaders, but they did expect compensation in return for these concessions. Steady salary increases coupled with sundry subsidies proved satisfactory to both sides, and this arrangement conformed nicely to the army's ideological values. The army had retained its traditional role of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, further enriching its Revolutionary heritage. The army's willing subordination to the civilian authorities represented its staunch institutional loyalty, and its willingness to forego expensive equipment acquisitions, in order to free financial resources for resolving more pressing societal problems, exemplified its patriotism. The following case studies clarify more

substantively the differences between the SECDEFs with Revolutionary backgrounds and their modern and more professional successors.

#### Revolutionary Leadership Maintains the *Status Quo*: 1952-1964

When President Ruiz Cortines took office on 1 December 1952, he chose the respected Revolutionary General Ramos Santos as his SECDEF. No official reasons had been given for his choice of Ramos Santos, but the new president had been familiar with the general as far back as the Revolution, where he himself had fought with the Constitutionalist army, rising to the rank of major in the process.<sup>4</sup> General Ramos Santos believed he owed his post partly to ex-President and General Abelardo Rodríguez who recommended Ramos Santos to the incoming President.

Ramos Santos, born in San Salvador, Zacatecas on 24 Feb 91, joined the Revolution as an enlisted man in 1911. He distinguished himself on the battlefield fighting against General Huerta's forces in 1913-1914 and against Pancho Villa's army in 1916. He fought on the side of the government forces against the De la Huerta and Escobar rebellions in the 1920s. He served as Secretary of War and Navy for a short period in 1929-1930.<sup>5</sup> Edwin Lieuwen, in his seminal work on the Revolutionary army, wrote that when Calles ruled the country through three puppet presidents from 1928 to 1934,

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<sup>4</sup>Margiotta : 233.

<sup>5</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 556.1/105; Camp, Political Biographies : 247-248 and McAlister et al. : 223-224.

he shared his power with the likes of Almazán, Amaro, Cárdenas and Cedillo. Lieuwen included Ramos Santos in a secondary foursome right behind that first group.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to his military qualifications, Ramos Santos had some political experience. He was a federal deputy for the state of Zacatecas from 1918-1920 and later served as governor of the state from 1932-1934 and 1935-1936. During the interim period, he became president of the official party (PNR), a position he lost after only six months when Cárdenas purged his cabinet and other key political posts of *Callistas* in June 1935. He remained somewhat ostracized on account of his ties to Calles for the remainder of the Cárdenas term, but slowly reincorporated himself into the mainstream army by serving as zone commander in the states of Toluca, San Luis Potosí and Nuevo León during the Avila Camacho and Alemán administrations. When Ruiz Cortines chose him to be SECDEF, he had been serving as the 7th Military Zone commander in Monterrey, Nuevo León, an important position from a military perspective. A few months earlier, he had been made one of the new Military Region commanders, another indication of his importance and seniority.<sup>7</sup>

Virtually nothing has been written about the personal side of Ramos Santos. One former officer related that, although he had very little formal education, the general exhibited finely honed political instincts. Some rare correspondence illustrated this political savvy. Immediately after the inauguration of Avila Camacho, Ramos Santos

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<sup>6</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 104.

<sup>7</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 606.3/91; Camp, Political Biographies : 247-248; Interview, March 1991; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 115-116; McAlister et al. : 223-224 and Revista del Ejército, April-May 1951 : 121.

wrote the new President a letter saying that many of the residents in his zonal area of responsibility, who had initially supported Almazán, were now backing the government. Ramos Santos most likely wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to Avila Camacho and also dispel some of the fears over his past sympathies for Calles. Relying on his political instincts, he sent a letter to President Alemán in 1948 describing an incident concerning a Padilla supporter who had been detained by U.S. authorities while attempting to make contact with Padilla to advise him of the support waiting for him in Mexico. In that initial letter, he promised to keep the President apprised of any new developments. A former cadet who attended the Military College in the early 1950s had recollections of the SECDEF as gruff and rough around the edges, but also as someone who demanded respect and instilled fear up the chain of command, from the lowest private to the most senior officer. One journalist, who characterized Ramos Santos as hard-line, recalled an incident that might have captured the essence of this Revolutionary general. When a colonel refused reassignment outside of Mexico City, he was eventually sent to the SECDEF's office where General Ramos Santos advised the officer he had been reassigned. When the colonel told him he found the new assignment unacceptable, the SECDEF drew his pistol and chased the surprised colonel out of his office and out of the capital.<sup>8</sup>

As one might surmise from that incident, General Ramos Santos carried out his duties as SECDEF in a resolute fashion and was not adverse to enforcing discipline personally, if the situation dictated such action. He was also not reluctant to utilize his

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<sup>8</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 559.1/4; AGN, Alemán Valdés, 544.1/33-2 and Interviews, February, March and June 1991.

coarse but effective political skills whenever the opportunity presented itself. Some letters he sent to two of his Military Region commanders offer some insight into how the general performed his job. In May 1953, he wrote a terse letter to the commander of the VII Military Region in Mazatlán, Sinaloa directing him to stop the usury practices that officers used to take advantage of their troops. The SECDEF also declared unacceptable the customs of selling military equipment for profit and of soldiers holding second jobs outside of the army. In a letter to the commander of the III Military Region in Merida, Yucatan in June 1954, he reminded the region commander of the economic and social problems facing Mexico and the world in general, and admonished him that the solution to these problems required the cooperation of all army members. The SECDEF ordered the commander to ensure that his personnel exuded pride in their mission, and that they maintained impeccable personal appearance standards. He also directed that special care be taken to preserve existing armament and equipment. The SECDEF gave similar instructions to other military zone commanders.<sup>9</sup>

The SECDEF managed his relations with the president in a politically adroit manner. He made the president the guest of honor at the major functions such as Army Day, graduation ceremonies at the HCM and ESG, and the traditional breakfast after the annual presidential *informe*. The editorial staff of the *Revista del Ejército* regularly praised the work of the President and reiterated that the army stood united behind him. General Ramos Santos sent numerous letters to the President congratulating him for such things as a successful year in office, his most recent *informe*, and the interest he had

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<sup>9</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 707/38.

shown in improving conditions within the army. The *Revista del Ejército* generally printed these letters to make its readers aware of the President's favorable disposition towards the army.<sup>10</sup>

While the SECDEF can set the tone for the internal operations of the army during a given administration, the President of the Republic has more to do with the formulation of the army's overall goals for that period. In that regard, President Ruiz Cortines made his plans for the army known in his inaugural address when he said "the glorious Mexican Army as well as the glorious National Navy, honor the country with the loyalty that is characteristic of them and that is the invariable norm of its life. We should solve, then, the problems that concern them of the moral, cultural and economic order..."<sup>11</sup> Those words established the guidepost for the army, and the SECDEF and the president restated that promise on numerous occasions throughout the *sexenio*. The preamble of the annual SDN *Memorias* (1953-1958) contained that excerpt from the inaugural speech and a brief summary of the advances made morally, culturally, and economically by the army during the year in question.<sup>12</sup> Whatever changes were made in the army during 1952-1958 followed the general scheme outlined by the president.

When Ruiz Cortines took office, his first order of business involved opening the doors to the "misguided" Revolutionary officers who had sided with General Henríquez.

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<sup>10</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 606.3/135 and *Revista del Ejército*, January 1953 : 1; November 1954 : 1; September 1957 : 1-2; December 1957 : 1; May 1958 : 38 and September 1958 : 4 and 9.

<sup>11</sup>Informes IV, December 1952 : 521. The President's exact words were *El glorioso Ejército Mexicano al igual que las gloriosa Marina Nacional, honran a la patria con la lealtad que les es característica y que es norma invariable de su vida. Debemos solucionar, pues, los problemas que les atañe, de orden moral, cultural y económico...*

<sup>12</sup>See for example SDN *Memorias*, 1953-54 : 11-12.

He made an effort to bring as many officers as possible back into the fold and met privately with General Henríquez and gave assurances that his followers would no longer be harassed by government forces.<sup>13</sup> Over one-third of his appointments in his first two months in office were with generals and colonels.<sup>14</sup> He obviously had a set plan for securing the support of high-ranking army officers at the outset of his term. A biographer of Ruiz Cortines wrote that the President had de-emphasized the Military Region system that had been set up under Alemán, while simultaneously strengthening the presidential guards which he controlled directly.<sup>15</sup> Once he felt confident of the army's support, he worked with General Ramos Santos to secure benefits for the armed forces.

Service members did quite well financially under Ruiz Cortines. He granted a ten percent pay raise his first five years in office, despite a major devaluation of the *peso* in May 1954. His last year he gave the troops a twenty-percent raise and officers a fifteen-percent raise.<sup>16</sup> With those salary increases, he won immediate approval from the rank and file of the armed forces. After every *informe*, he was besieged with letters and messages of thanks from soldiers of all ranks, although retirees expressed dissatisfaction because their pensions did not see comparable increases, and they continued to petition

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<sup>13</sup>Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 74-75 and Suárez : 201-202.

<sup>14</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 111/4.

<sup>15</sup>Rodríguez Prats : 144. See also *Informes* IV, September 1955 : 573.

<sup>16</sup>Margiotta : 225 and Rodríguez Prats : 145. See also *Informes* IV, September 1953 through September 1958.



the president for additional benefits throughout his term.<sup>17</sup> The question of retiree benefits remained a thorny issue because presidents chose to neglect the problem since the end of World War II, most likely because this group no longer wielded any influence. As a result, military pensions barely left retired soldiers enough to survive.

The team of Ruiz Cortines and Ramos Santos secured a reasonable number of benefits for the members of the armed forces. In their first year in office, they doubled the daily rations allowance, established a special living allowance for high-cost areas, and initiated a uniform distribution program providing free uniforms to both officers and enlisted men. The army also underwent an administrative reorganization of which no details were provided.<sup>18</sup> The most notable gains in Ruiz Cortines' second year were increases of 53 and 50 percent in the values of insurance policies for troops and officers respectively. The president received many letters from active and retired service members and their families expressing appreciation for this initiative which he had highlighted in his annual *informe*.<sup>19</sup> The uniform allocations continued, and the investment in military housing began in earnest. The army also started a military stores program which provided basic goods at reduced prices for military personnel and their dependents. The Army and Navy Bank provided the funding for these stores, and the national export-import company (CEIMSA) stocked the stores. Administratively, the SDN reintroduced the system of the General Directorates of Arms and Services which

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<sup>17</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 550/2.

<sup>18</sup>Informes IV, September 1953 : 525.

<sup>19</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 545.3/261; Evolución : 111 and Informes IV, September 1954 : 545.

had been abandoned during the Alemán *sexenio*.<sup>20</sup> The president remained cognizant of his overall commitment to the army and proclaimed one month after his *informe* that "Mexico offered to improve the Army's moral, cultural and material condition. We are doing it."<sup>21</sup>

In 1955, the president announced a special early promotion for the graduates of the HCM. He also implemented the *aguinaldo* or year-end bonus which awarded a half of one month's salary to all military personnel. The latter innovation proved especially popular and continues to the present day. He later authorized an additional month's salary for those members affected by the floods in the states of Veracruz and Guerrero and mentioned an ongoing effort to create a separate office for military pensions to aid the growing ranks of Revolutionary veterans. Finally, the air force acquired fifteen new planes from the U.S., and the Department of Military Industry (DIM) produced and distributed a new model rifle to the major units around the capital.<sup>22</sup>

The benefits continued to pour forth in 1956. Congress approved two new laws--Retirements and Pensions and Promotions and Compensations. The former law fulfilled a promise made a year earlier when it created a Directorate of Military Pensions, and both laws contained significant modifications from the ones passed during the previous

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<sup>20</sup>Bautista Rosas : 96; Informes IV, September 1954 : 545; Interview, September 1989; Margiotta : 229 and Piñeyro, Ejército : 81.

<sup>21</sup>Antonio Ortiz Mena, México ayer, hoy mañana: Textos de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (Mexico, 1957) : 114. *La colectividad mexicana ofreció al Ejército mejorar su condición moral, cultural y material. Lo estamos haciendo.*

<sup>22</sup>Bautista Rosas : 96; Informes IV, September 1955 : 573 and Piñeyro, Ejército : 81.

administration.<sup>23</sup> Army leaders had attached great importance to the two laws. For example, General Marcelino Inurreta, a senator from the state of Tabasco who had been performing the functions of Vice-President of the Senate, gave a speech to close the parliamentary session on 30 December 1955 in which he mentioned the submission of these two new initiatives. General Inurreta appealed directly to the President, as a friend interested in guaranteeing a sound future for soldiers and their families, and implored him to support the proposed legislation, reminding him of the military's total commitment to "the cause of the *Patria*." Inurreta's speech received favorable press coverage in Mexico City and most likely influenced Ruiz Cortines' decision to pass the laws.<sup>24</sup>

After the laws were passed, Ruiz Cortines formally announced that the Treasury Ministry had been funding an average of 7,500 pensions and had increased the amount of those pensions by ten percent. Thus, the army had the added advantage of not having to fund the pensions with its annual budget. That same year the president also approved an increase in the government's contribution to the troops' savings fund, which tripled the amount of money they received upon separation from the service, while the Army and Navy Bank joined forces with the National Mortgage Bank to establish low-interest

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<sup>23</sup>Evolución : 112; Informes IV, September 1956 : 603 and Rodríguez Prats : 140.

<sup>24</sup>Marcelino Inurreta, "El Señor Presidente D. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines y el Ejército Nacional," Speech made prior to the congressional recess for the purpose of ratifying military promotions, in Mexico City on 30 December 1955 : 17-19 and 23-27.

home loans for military retirees. And finally, the President escalated the year-end bonus to a full month's pay.<sup>25</sup>

In his 1957 *informe*, President Ruiz Cortines again mentioned the measures his government enacted to improve the army morally, professionally, and economically over the past year. These included the continuation of previously established programs such as the *aguinaldo*, free uniforms, the annual pay raise, and the special allowance for high cost areas. The payment of a death benefit to the families of the rural defense force members who died in the line of duty was added to that existing list. The president alluded to new military stores that had been built in Veracruz, Acapulco, Guadalajara and other localities, and the reduced interest rates on military home loans offered by the Army and Navy Bank. He proudly announced that the army had created five equestrian teams to represent Mexico in international competition, including the Olympics and then concluded his section on the army by lauding the army's patriotism and institutional loyalty and by declaring that the army progresses like the rest of the Mexican people.<sup>26</sup>

In his final State of the Union Address, President Ruiz Cortines addressed the army's contributions to the nation by simply summarizing the initiatives that had been taken throughout his administration. No significant innovations were made in the final year of his *sexenio*, but the president did thank the army for serving as an exemplar of discipline, honor and loyalty throughout his term.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Informe IV, September 1956 : 602-603.

<sup>26</sup>Informe IV, September 1957 : 635-636.

<sup>27</sup>Informe IV, September 1958 : 667.

It became clear by 1958 how the president and his SECDEF had contributed to the general development of the Mexican army. This team had focused primarily on raising the standard of living for all military personnel. Within the army itself, little substantive change occurred. More specifically, the administrative reforms undertaken within the SDN had a superficial quality, and the military did not grow in size during this period.<sup>28</sup> There was little change in military education, although the ESG reorganized some of its courses, and the military college started a program which enrolled sergeants with officer potential in a special officer-producing course. The principal innovation in military education was the creation of an advanced course for junior cavalry officers. This course provided inexperienced officers with additional training after graduation from the military college and prior to entering the ESG.<sup>29</sup> Ideologically, the administration helped to reinforce the army's nationalist orientation by rejecting offers of military equipment from the United States and by adopting such policies as equal treatment and mutual respect in dealing with the United States.<sup>30</sup> Official U.S. sources had picked up on the overriding nationalism when they concluded in 1957 that, while she supported the concept of hemispheric defense, Mexico would never condone U.S. forces using her territory unless her national security was seriously threatened.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>For example, an editorial in the January 1956 edition of the Revista del Ejército listed 23 initiatives or directives that had been accomplished under the auspices of General Ramos Santos. Of those, only the Laws of Retirements and Pensions and Promotions and Compensations had any special significance.

<sup>29</sup>Bautista Rosas : 96 and Informes IV, September 1957 : 635.

<sup>30</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 79-81 and Revista del Ejército, March 1956 : 1-3.

<sup>31</sup>U.S. Foreign Relations, Vol. VI, 1955-1957 : 752-753.

As the *sexenio* evolved, it offered added insight into the real substance of the President-SECDEF relationship. There existed a close working relationship between the two, with the SECDEF always deferring to the president. The SECDEF gave special emphasis was paid to the president's policies, and several editions of the army magazine explained and applauded these policies. Editorials in the magazine dissected presidential *informes* and published letters from the president about foreign relations issues and national problems. The SECDEF kept the president informed as to his whereabouts at all times, and the president reciprocated in part by keeping the SECDEF abreast of certain problems and initiatives and by frequently praising the army in public.<sup>32</sup> This kind of relationship between the president and the SECDEF had become *pro forma* for the civilian presidents and their SECDEFs, and subsequent administrations would follow a similar pattern.

General Agustín Olachea Avilés, another ex-president of the official party, replaced Ramos Santos on 1 December 1958 when Adolfo López Mateos became President. General Olachea Avilés, born on 3 September 1890 in San Venancio, territory of Baja California Sur, worked as a miner before joining the Revolution as an enlisted man in 1913. In 1926, he fought against the Yaqui indians in the northern state of Sonora, and some of his assignments included commander of the 13th and 15th Military Zones in the states of Nayarit and Jalisco. Like Ramos Santos, General Olachea Avilés came to office with ample political experience and with a career that showed more of a political than military orientation. He served in a position equivalent to governor of the territory of

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<sup>32</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 565.32/4-8 and 707/38.

Baja California Sur from 1929-1931 and in the territory of Baja California Norte from 1931-1935. After a ten-year interval, he returned to the same position in Baja California Sur for almost two complete terms from 1946-1956 and performed quite effectively in the eyes of his constituents. While running for office in 1946, territorial residents, worker groups and social organizations showered the president's office with telegrams avidly supporting the general's nomination. At the national level, he was recognized as the leading expert on the Baja California territory. When General Gabriel Leyva Velazquez relinquished his post as President of the PRI to become the PRI candidate for the governorship of Sinaloa, General Olachea Avilés surfaced as the logical replacement. He took over as President of the PRI on 17 April 1956 and remained in that post until he became SECDEF on 1 December 1958.<sup>33</sup>

The general's experience in Baja California brought him added influence in Mexican politics. For example, Frank Brandenburg had included him as a member of the inner circle of the Revolutionary family during 1946-1958.<sup>34</sup> As President of the PRI, Olachea Avilés played an important role in López Mateos' presidential campaign, and his zealous support of the party's candidate throughout the campaign convinced the incoming President of Olachea Avilés' loyalty, making him an ideal candidate for the position of SECDEF.

Insights into General Olachea Avilés' personality have been provided by those who knew him in a political capacity. One source characterized him as being as sly as a fox

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<sup>33</sup>AGN, Avila Camacho, 606.3/91; AGN, Alemán Valdés, 544.2/2; AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 544.2/37; Camp, *Political Biographies* : 219; McAlister et al. : 224 and Rodríguez Prats : 204.

<sup>34</sup>Brandenburg : 102.

and very crafty but somewhat ignorant on the broad subject of politics. To his credit, however, he proved extremely competent in carrying out the president's directives for the party. He held the same conservative orientation as that of his predecessor and was not inclined toward reforming or changing the party.<sup>35</sup> Another acquaintance described him as a robust and cordial old man who spoke poorly, but who had the stamp of a Revolutionary. He displayed absolute loyalty to the system and attacked anyone who did not follow suit. Although he supported Cárdenas for the presidency in 1934 and served as a close advisor during the negotiations with the United States for radar stations in 1942, he later cursed Cárdenas as a traitor, for having met with the maverick railroad workers' leader, Demetrio Vallejo. Olachea Avilés allegedly remarked that, if the president authorized it, he would send Cárdenas into exile like the latter had done to Calles. He then said he would have no qualms about shooting the traitor. The general even offered a well-placed source a large sum of money to plant disparaging remarks about Cárdenas in the Mexico City newspapers.<sup>36</sup> Accounts such as these left no doubt as to Olachea Avilés' allegiance to the system, and the incoming president believed that he would maintain this posture as SECDEF.

General Olachea Avilés carried out his duties as SECDEF with a political flair. He made public proclamations at regular intervals to allay any fears political leaders might have had about the military's interest in politics. The SECDEF declared that the army's fundamental function was "(t)o serve Mexico, maintain its institutions and make them

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<sup>35</sup>Rodríguez Prats : 162-163 and 204-205.

<sup>36</sup>Alamillo Flores, Memorias : 597-606; Camp, Political Biographies : 219 and Guerra Leal : 123-139.



respect and grant guarantees to all Mexicans." He added that the members of the military were not militarists, but rather guardians of the national sovereignty and the people's institutions.<sup>37</sup> On another occasion, an editorial in the *Revista del Ejército* noted with profound satisfaction that Mexico had moved beyond the coup stage that neighboring countries were experiencing, and that the army did not use force to impose its will on a particular group.<sup>38</sup> The army's magazine also published the SECDEF's views on the political rights of soldiers. General Olachea Avilés emphasized that, while the army was not a political party or group, each soldier was a responsible citizen with the right to vote, and he exhorted army members to exercise that privilege as long as they did not make their political preferences public.<sup>39</sup> Declarations like these helped to put Mexican politicians at ease and encouraged them to view the army as a partner fully integrated into the system and not as a group that intended to compete with the ruling elite for power.

General Olachea Avilés' close relationship with President López Mateos was comparable to that which General Ramos Santos had enjoyed with President Ruiz Cortines. The army hosted the president for the traditional post-*informe* breakfast or luncheon, and the president joined the SECDEF at the army's major ceremonies and traditional celebrations. López Mateos called on the SECDEF with some frequency to

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<sup>37</sup>"NUESTRO EJERCITO. COMENTARIOS DE LA PRENSA," *Revista del Ejército*, April 1962 : 4-5. *Servir a México, mantener sus instituciones y hacerlas respetar y otorgar garantías a todos los mexicanos.*

<sup>38</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, July 1962 : 1-2.

<sup>39</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, July 1963 : 17.

represent him at public functions or ceremonies, perhaps because of the general's previous political experience and familiarity with those kinds of events. For example, he represented the President at the celebration of Independence hero General José María Morelos y Pavón's 194th birthday in Morelia, Michoacán. Another time he took the President's place at a Flag Day ceremony in Iguala, Guerrero.<sup>40</sup> Both individuals seemed to share a mutual confidence as the following anecdote illustrates. When CEIMSA notified the National Defense Secretariat (SDN) that it would be lifting the subsidy on flour purchased by the SDN, General Olachea Avilés asked the president to continue the subsidy to avoid reducing the amount of food available to the troops. The president responded to the SECDEF's request by ordering the director general of CEIMSA not to eliminate the flour subsidy for the SDN.<sup>41</sup> At the beginning of his term, the president had requested monthly activity reports from the SDN, but by 1961, he had enough confidence in the SECDEF and the army to change the requirement to quarterly reports.<sup>42</sup>

Upon receiving the PRI's nomination for the presidency, Adolfo López Mateos took an immediate interest in the nation's armed forces. In his acceptance speech, he praised the military:

"Mexico may well take pride in its armed services: the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. They are exemplary organizations, devoted completely to the maintenance of our institutional life, the assurance of domestic

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<sup>40</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 135.2/179, 135.2/248 and 135.21/5 and Revista del Ejército, September 1958 : 9 and October 1962 : 7.

<sup>41</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 521.8/84.

<sup>42</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 606.3/122.

tranquility and the defense of our nation's sovereignty. If elected by the people, I will continue to work for the moral, professional, and economic advancement of the armed services."<sup>43</sup>

The new president reaffirmed his promise to the military in his inauguration speech when he promised the nation's armed forces would receive the "encouragement and attention they require; not only will we be interested in the moral, professional and economic improvement of its members, but also in the constant renovation of equipment, and above all, in its organization that should be adequate to meet its needs..."<sup>44</sup>

These statements revealed that the new president's policies would deviate only slightly from those of his predecessor, the principal difference being more emphasis on improving military equipment. The term "improving" did not necessarily acquiring new equipment, but rather renovating that equipment already in the inventory. President López Mateos was also more effusive in his praise of the army than Ruiz Cortines, and in public speeches like the annual *informes*, he often highlighted the army's revolutionary heritage, institutional loyalty and patriotism, virtues that had become readily recognizable parts of the army's ideology. In the wake of the disturbances created by the railroad workers and other public employees, maybe López Mateos felt compelled to single out the army for its support of the institutions. Whatever the reasons for these accolades, the army hierarchy savored them and gave them broad exposure in the army's magazine.

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<sup>43</sup>Adolfo López Mateos, "My Program: The Social, Economic and Political Platform of Adolfo López Mateos." A speech delivered on 17 November 1957 in Mexico City accepting the nomination of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* for the presidency.

<sup>44</sup>*Informes* IV, December 1958 : 686. The actual text is *el estímulo y la atención que requieren; no sólo nos interesaremos en el mejoramiento moral, profesional y económico de sus integrantes, sino también en la superación constante de cada equipo y, sobre todo en su adecuada organización que debe corresponder...*

The magazine's editorials proudly disseminated the President's messages to the army commemorating such events as Army Day and Independence Day.<sup>45</sup> The army's leaders reciprocated by promoting and supporting presidential policies and by giving broad coverage to his activities especially those involving high level foreign visits.<sup>46</sup>

Nor was President López Mateos shy about participating in military functions. For example, he attended the opening of classes at the *Escuela Médico Militar* and personally inaugurated the new military engineering school. He visited new military housing areas and various army installations as a means of affirming that the army budget had been used efficaciously.<sup>47</sup> President López Mateos believed in showing courtesies to individual officers. In 1961, he directed his JEMP to prepare a thank you note for a brigadier general who had sent a message of appreciation for the recent pay raise. On Army Day and other important military celebrations, he often dispatched individual notes of congratulations to the military zone commanders.<sup>48</sup> This style persuaded many officers to be favorably disposed toward the president. The phenomenon of respect bordering on reverence that Margiotta alluded to was evident under López Mateos. Officers believed that the president could correct the injustices that affected them. López Mateos' archives contained an anonymous letter from officers in the quartermaster corps complaining about improper assignment policies for quartermaster officers. The letter

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<sup>45</sup>Revista del Ejército, September 1960 : 1-4; March 1962 : 3-6 and March 1963 : 1-2.

<sup>46</sup>Revista del Ejército, July 1962 : 3-13 and April 1963 : 1-2.

<sup>47</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1959 : 35; July 1962 : 18 and October 1962 : 7.

<sup>48</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 135.21/131 and 706.1/276.

made specific references to the army's organic law and asked the president to ensure the law was applied properly.<sup>49</sup> This case illustrates the confidence army officers had in their president and implies that, because of the loyalty they had placed in the institution of the presidency, they believed the President would come to their aid.

In fact, President López Mateos rewarded the army for its fidelity by continuing the steady flow of benefits from the two previous administrations. He raised military salaries ten percent each year he was in office, which had the cumulative effect of doubling military pay during his tenure. He also retained the *aguinaldo* of one-month's pay which eventually became a standard practice in the army.<sup>50</sup> In September 1959, the president announced that the value of officers' life insurance policies would double while those of the troops would increase fivefold. He disclosed that the government had invested over 100 million *pesos* to raise the military standard of living, especially for the troops. Another 9.5 million had been allocated for military housing, and a military housing construction plan that would resolve military housing problems during the course of the *sexenio* had been finalized. The fiscal allocation for military homes would eventually reach 100 million *pesos* in 1962.<sup>51</sup>

The government's promise to improve the army's equipment began to show results in 1960. The army acquired 16.8 million *pesos* in communications and other war materials, while its own military industry produced another 34 million *pesos* in

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<sup>49</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 545.2/100. The archive did not contain any correspondence that indicated how President López Mateos responded to the officers' request.

<sup>50</sup>Bautista Rosas : 99; Informes IV, September 1964 : 845 and Margiotta : 225.

<sup>51</sup>Informes IV, September 1959 : 691-692.

equipment. Other programs such as free uniforms and special promotions for junior officers continued, and the president authorized a 5.4 million *peso* increase in SDN program money in July of that year. In addition to the new equipment, another change from the previous administration involved officer promotions, which increased twofold from the most recent years and continued at this new rate for the next two years.<sup>52</sup> The army's role in quelling the railroad and other labor disturbances most likely earned its officers these added promotions.

The new emphasis on equipment also remained for the remainder of the *sexenio*. In 1961, the army purchased fifteen T-33 U.S.-made aircraft and fifteen of a comparable Canadian model for the air force. The government allocated 16 million *pesos* to begin construction on a new arms factory in Mexico City. The cost of acquiring vehicles, machinery, and topographical equipment the following year reached 106 million *pesos*. With those funds, the army replaced 2,673 vehicles and obtained new construction equipment for its engineers. The President inaugurated the new arms factory and a factory that produced explosive charges in 1963. These modest improvements caused the army's 1964 budget to be almost double that of 1958.<sup>53</sup>

Although the equipment modernization was notable in light of past policies, the team of López Mateos and Olachea Avilés will be remembered most for its introduction of the Law of Social Security for the Armed Forces. In his 1961 presidential address, President López Mateos spoke of a study investigating how to set up a social security system for

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<sup>52</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 609/373 and Informes IV, September 1960 :718.

<sup>53</sup>AGN, López Mateos, 609/373; Evolución : 94 and Informes IV, September 1960 : 718; September 1961 : 746; September 1962 : 778-779; September 1963 : 811 and September 1964 : 844-845.

the armed forces. Congress passed the Law of Social Security for the Armed Forces a few months later on 30 December 1961. This law gave members of the armed forces benefits on par with those of other federal and state employees. López Mateos had set the guarantee of a social security program for all Mexicans as a goal of his administration, and he never intended to overlook the military in the pursuit of that goal. The social security law for the armed forces defined more clearly benefits already being extended to service members in addition to providing new concessions. The latter included complete medical coverage, new savings funds for officers and enlisted personnel, a special death benefit payment, the creation and financing of fishing cooperatives, improvements in military recreational facilities, housing for retirees, and reserved positions in public schools for military dependents. The law initially required an annual contribution of 170 million *pesos* from the government. In February 1962, the SDN created the Directorate of Military Social Security to administer the program within the army and air force.<sup>54</sup> A key advantage for the military was that it had to expend only a small amount of its budget on this program. The Treasury Ministry financed almost the entire program. The president offered some insight as to the magnitude of this new social security program when he proudly disclosed in his final presidential *informe* that his government had spent a total of 664 million *pesos* on military installations, arms and equipment and an additional 645 million *pesos* on military social

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<sup>54</sup>Bautista Rosas : 99; *Evolución* : 112-113; *Informes* IV, September 1961 : 746 and September 1962 : 778 and 794; Adolfo López Mateos, *MEJORAMIENTO EFECTIVO DE LOS INTEGRANTES DE LAS FUERZAS ARMADAS DE LA PATRIA* (Mexico: Editorial La Justicia, January 1962); Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 84 and *Revista del Ejército*, June 1962 : 1-2.

security services.<sup>55</sup> These figures reaffirmed the continuing emphasis being placed on the human element of the army at the expense of the institutional component.

The government continued to compensate military leaders for their support with a growing list of benefits. Those perquisites provided ample incentives for the army to maintain its relatively isolationist stance with regard to other militaries. Military leaders concurred, at least publicly, with the decisions of civilian leaders to reject military pacts with the United States. Reluctant to cut all military ties with the United States and Latin American counterparts, Mexico agreed to send observers to the *Interamerican Defense College* in Washington, D.C., even though army leaders refused to participate in joint maneuvers.<sup>56</sup> Nationalism had become a more concrete part of the army's ideology, and consequently, the army willingly moved farther down the nationalist path, with the backing of the country's political leaders and the Mexican people.

The rule of the true Revolutionary SECDEFs ended in December 1964 when General Marcelino García Barragán took over as SECDEF. The legacy of that Revolutionary leadership could not be classified as dynamic, and no one event or incident accentuated their tenure. Their era was characterized more by a steady stream of benefits that improved the military standard of living and brought soldiers to a level comparable to that of workers in other sectors. The army's size remained virtually unchanged during this twelve-year period and that eased in part the cost of the added benefits made available to army personnel. Administrative and structural reforms undertaken by the

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<sup>55</sup>Informes IV, September 1964 : 844-845.

<sup>56</sup>Bautista Rosas : 100.



SDN were generally superficial and not necessarily innovative. These military leaders adhered to the philosophy of their esteemed former mentor, General Joaquín Amaro, who placed the utmost importance on the human as opposed to material resources of the military institution.

#### A Crisis Highlights the End of an Era: 1964-1970

Like his President Díaz Ordaz, General Marcelino Barragán's tenure as SECDEF has been closely identified with one event, the crushing of the student movement in 1968. The army's actions against the students, especially at Tlatelolco in October 1968, precipitated major structural changes in a military institution that had remained virtually static and professionally lethargic since the late 1940s. One can only speculate whether or not these changes in the Mexican army would have come about if the turmoil of 1968 had never occurred, although it seems highly probable that some of the changes would have taken place regardless of 1968. When General García Barragán assumed his post as SECDEF on 1 December 1964, the army embraced a new style of leadership. General García Barragán became the first professionally trained officer to hold the position of SECDEF since the end of the Mexican Revolution, and he had a vision for the modern Mexican army quite different from that of his Revolutionary predecessors.

From the outset, he began to slowly reform the army, and these changes accelerated in the aftermath of Tlatelolco. Unlike his predecessors, the new SECDEF stressed the collective institution more than individual benefits. His experience at the Military College led him to emphasize military education as the focal point of the

professionalization process within the army. In one sense, General García Barragán led the transition from the poorly educated Revolutionary leaders to the professionally educated leadership that characterized the Mexican army after 1970. His military and political experience convinced him that politics were not compatible with a military career, and consequently, under his leadership the army moved to a point where political positions could no longer enhance an officer's military credentials. In the eyes of General García Barragán, discipline and institutional loyalty became the two indispensable traits for upwardly mobile army officers.

General García Barragán, born in Cuauhtitlan, Jalisco on 2 June 1895, fought in the Mexican Revolution as an enlisted man beginning in 1913. In fact, he was the last SECDEF who had fought in the violent phase of the Revolution, although not as a general. He entered the Military College in 1920 and graduated in 1923. Edwin Lieuwen wrote that he "established a reputation as a bright young professional officer..." after graduating from the military academy.<sup>57</sup> He later served as the Adjutant General of the Military College from 1926-1929 and as its director during 1941-1942, and that experience probably accounted for the fondness he displayed for the HCM. His other military experience included command of the military zones in the states of Mexico (Toluca), Zacatecas and Querétaro. He was forced to leave active service during the Ruiz Cortines *sexenio* because of his political affiliation with General Henríquez Guzmán, the opposition candidate in 1952. He reincorporated himself into the active army during

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<sup>57</sup>Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 147.

the López Mateos administration, although he remained somewhat isolated from the army's top leaders, a lingering stigma of his friendship with Henríquez Guzmán.<sup>58</sup>

In one respect, General García Barragán was similar to his predecessors; he brought considerable political experience to the office of SECDEF. His political background made him somewhat of a maverick. He served as governor of his home state of Jalisco from 1943-1947 but was forced out of office in early 1947 for refusing to implement the constitutionally mandated six-year term.<sup>59</sup> The general fell further into disfavor with the ruling elite when he assumed control of the *Henriquista* movement in the Pacific and Northern regions of the country in the early 1950s. He later became president of the Federation of the People's Parties of Mexico (FPPM) during the height of the 1952 presidential campaign. As late as April 1954, his activities continued to be monitored by federal police agents, and one of his followers told a government informant that the general could easily muster 5,000 men to fight against the government, if he chose that course of action. Still the informant believed that General García Barragán was too mature to adopt a posture advocating violence. General Ramos Santos invited him to rejoin the army during the early stages of the Ruiz Cortines administration, but the general agreed to do so only if the government revoked its policy of forcing Henríquez supporters out of the army and allowed those ostracized officers to resume their active

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<sup>58</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 112-113; Lieuwen, Mexican Militarism : 147 and McAlister et al. : 224.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

service.<sup>60</sup> These bitter political experiences taught General García Barragán a lesson in loyalty and in the incompatibility of politics and a military career.

General García Barragán became the most recognized SECDEF in the post-Revolution period. While his actions during the student disturbances in 1968 contributed significantly to his reputation, the general also had some personal features that identified him as a true soldier. One admirer wrote that the general epitomized the ideal soldier. His demeanor, his voice, his gait, and the way he gave orders were distinctively military.<sup>61</sup> Many spoke of his fierce loyalty to President Díaz Ordaz and the institutions.<sup>62</sup> One ex-army officer called him mature, valiant and open-minded. According to this officer, the general liked to engage in an open dialogue with his opponents. He related the story of some junior officers with leftist sympathies who had been summoned to the SECDEF's office because of their indiscretions. The general had the most outspoken officer assigned to his office, where he encouraged an open debate of each other's views on more than one occasion.<sup>63</sup> These exchanges took place despite the general's fervent anti-Communist sentiments.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>AGN, Ruiz Cortines, 559.1/3; Guerra Leal : 23-25 and Medina Valdés : 255.

<sup>61</sup>Guerra Leal : 23.

<sup>62</sup>Guerra Leal : 26 and Interviews, September 1989, January 1991, March 1991, and May 1991. As an example of this loyalty, Guerra Leal described an exchange of views between General García Barragán and his wife. The general's wife casually stated that the President was ugly, which was probably very close to the truth. The general grew furious and told his wife that simply was not true. (See Guerra Leal : 108).

<sup>63</sup>Interview, March 1991.

<sup>64</sup>Piñeyro, Ejército : 137.

General García Barragán had developed a close relationship with the president. Díaz Ordaz had chosen the general for his reputation of individual loyalty shown to his superiors, and García Barragán did not disappoint him. The general must have been eternally grateful to the president for having resurrected his military career that had been all but terminated a few years earlier, on account of the residual suspicion from his days as a leader of the *Henriquista* movement. General García Barragán openly displayed his loyalty by publicly acknowledging his subordination to the Supreme Commander. For example, the SECDEF frequently announced that the president had authorized selected officers to visit the United States as part of an exchange program. Each year he declared that the president had permitted the cadet exchange program with the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to continue.<sup>65</sup> Even though it was probably a mere formality, the departure of any officer from Mexico, even for the purpose of official military business, had to be approved by the president's office. This policy represented another explicit example of the army's subservience to the duly elected civilian government, and García Barragán showed no reluctance to acknowledge that subordination in public.

As was customary, he made the president the guest of honor at the important army ceremonies such as Army Day, the commemoration of the Battle of Puebla, the Independence Day festivities, and the opening and closing of classes at the military schools. The SECDEF and his high level commanders always went to the presidential

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<sup>65</sup>See for example Gobierno Mexicano, No. 43, June 1968 : 139-140 and Revista del Ejército, July 1968 : 57, April 1970 : 59 and July 1970 : 47.

residence at the beginning of each year to extend the traditional New Year's greeting.<sup>66</sup> In comparison with the two preceding administrations, the *Revista del Ejército* published more of the president's speeches and publicized his policies more extensively under García Barragán's leadership. In short, General García Barragán exhibited a high degree of personal loyalty to President Díaz Ordaz, and because of the overwhelming influence of the SECDEF, the rest of the army followed suit.

Díaz Ordaz, like the official party presidential-candidates before him, actively lobbied for the army's support by applauding its past performance and by promising improvements in the future. While on the campaign trail, the president-elect asserted that "it would be a constant preoccupation of my government to improve its economic, social and technical conditions."<sup>67</sup> He also made a statement he would repeat several times while in office. He said "I express publicly and solemnly the plenitude of my confidence that the soldiers of Mexico will continue knowing how to do honor to the sacred mission that the *Patria* has entrusted to them."<sup>68</sup> Initially, he proved true to his word by granting the army what Margiotta labeled "a very nice raise," in one of his first acts as president.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>See for example, *Revista del Ejército*, February 1966 : 41-45; January 1967 : 44; September 1967 : 50; January 1968 : 48; February 1968 : 44-45; October 1968 : 33; January 1969 : 58-61; February 1969 : 38-57 and September 1970 : 8-13.

<sup>67</sup>Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, *Doctrina y Programa de Acción del Nuevo Gobierno* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Centro de Estudios Nacionales, 1964) : 43.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Margiotta : 225.

Yet, the president followed up that initial salary increase with only modest improvements, paying only scant attention to the military in his inaugural speech and in his first State of the Union Address. The president changed his approach in his second *informe*, maybe because of the growing turmoil within the country. Díaz Ordaz paid homage to the armed forces in the third paragraph of the address, a distinct departure from presidential *informes* dating back to 1940, which devoted space to the military in the middle or latter-part of the annual report. He commented on some of the army's professional advancements such as the first joint maneuvers in the country's history and a new command rotation policy aimed at giving younger officers a chance at command. He mentioned a new disaster relief plan the army had implemented as well as the 33 million *pesos* spent on improving the Central Military Hospital and the 26 million *pesos* used for other military construction. For the individual officer, the army obtained approval from the president to procure a higher quality material for its uniforms, and subsequently, made new uniforms from this material.<sup>70</sup>

Over the next few years, the president's program for "improving the army's economic, social and technical conditions" crystallized. The command rotation program took shape with 156 command changes during 1967. Army schools developed new programs of instruction that incorporated practical exercises for the first time. An advanced course for junior infantry, artillery, engineering and administrative officers was organized to enhance professional military education. In 1968, annual maneuvers gave the army another opportunity to interact with the rural population and to provide

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<sup>70</sup>Informes IV, September 1965 : 875 and September 1966 : 902; Margiotta : 219-220 and SDN Memorias, 1965-66 : 34.

economic and medical assistance. The government equipped the new annex of the Central Military Hospital and spent 18 million *pesos* on construction in two of the Military Industry's factories in addition to investing 111 million *pesos* to acquire machinery and equipment for two other factories--gun powder and explosives and arms and munitions. These programs of command rotation, improved tactical maneuvers, and investment in military construction and the Military Industry continued for the remainder of the *sexenio*.<sup>71</sup> The main focus of these policies aimed at improving the collective institution, relegating individual benefits to a lower priority. Both the president and his SECDEF intended to enhance the reputation of the army by improving and modernizing certain facets of the overall institution. Due to the existing budgetary restrictions, this was often accomplished at the expense of the individual soldier's benefits.

The Díaz Ordaz administration proved to be somewhat of an aberration from the preceding administrations because some latent social problems had begun to reach a crisis level, and as a result, the government had to deal with those problems in a confrontational and often violent manner. The president's 1967 *informe* gave the first indication that the government might be relying heavily on the army for help in restoring tranquility. The president made specific reference to illegal demonstrations, deploring those tactics, and he declared that the government would not be intimidated by the opposition's actions. In his subsequent *informe*, one month before the showdown at Tlatelolco, Díaz Ordaz, in the wake of the student disturbances during the summer,

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<sup>71</sup>*Informes* V, September 1967 : 2; September 1968 : 40; September 1969 : 89-90 and September 1970 : 132.



stated that the army had continued to perform its Constitutional mission of conserving internal peace and order. He then recognized the army's performance of that mission in a later section of his address and reiterated that the army intervenes only to maintain order and never to oppress the people.<sup>72</sup> The perception that the government had begun to pay more attention to the army also arose from the direct mention of the army's contributions at the very beginning of the presidential *informes*. In the past, specific reference made to the army was generally reserved for the middle or later sections of the annual report. Since 1967, President Díaz Ordaz had referred to the army in two separate sections. He usually reserved the latter space for special praise of the military.

In his 1969 address, the president expressed a debt of gratitude on the part of the Mexican people for the army's "irrevocable loyalty, strict discipline and stainless patriotism."<sup>73</sup> Although he did not mention a specific incident, it was evident that the president was thanking the army for its support during the student demonstrations that culminated at Tlatelolco. The president also exonerated the army from any of the blame at Tlatelolco, assuming full responsibility for his personal decisions. In his final address to the nation, Díaz Ordaz restated his appreciation for the performance of the armed forces during the past six years, emphasizing once again their discipline and loyalty.<sup>74</sup> Although he did not say so directly, the president's underlying implication was that his successor would also need the continuing support of the armed forces. If the army did

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<sup>72</sup>*Informes* V, September 1967 : 36 and September 1968 : 82-83.

<sup>73</sup>*Informes* V, September 1969 : 126-127.

<sup>74</sup>*Informes* V, September 1970 : 170.

gain some concessions from the president for doing the so-called dirty work in 1968, it came in the form of a pay raise for members of the armed forces and increased promotions for high-ranking army officers. The traditional promotion day for the Mexican army has been 20 November in honor of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. On that day in 1968, a little more than a month after Tlatelolco, officer promotions in the general and colonel ranks more than doubled those of the previous three years.<sup>75</sup> The fact that they returned to the normal level the following year seemed to indicate that the expanded promotions in 1968 served as a governmental reward to the army hierarchy.

The events of October 1968 precipitated other reforms within the army. The army leadership, with governmental approval, initiated some significant structural changes for the first time since the late 1940s. These immediate changes formed part of a major qualitative and quantitative restructuring of the Mexican army that would carry over into subsequent administrations. Quantitatively, the army added one military zone, three infantry battalions, one airborne battalion, and one military police battalion to the active forces and one combat engineer company to the Presidential Guards in 1969.<sup>76</sup> While General García Barragán's successor, General Cuenca Díaz, received the credit for transforming the army's upper echelon of command, the process actually began under the tutelage of García Barragán. For example, a review of the promotion list for November 1969 revealed that, at the highest ranks, promotions were dominated by more

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<sup>75</sup>SDN Memorias, 1969-70 : 18-20.

<sup>76</sup>Bautista Rosas : 146.

professionally trained officers who had graduated from the ESG, and were better known as *Diplomados del Estado Mayor* (DEMs).<sup>77</sup>

The SECDEF had his own agenda for the SDN to complement some of the reforms co-sponsored by the government. When the social confrontations began to multiply in 1967, the SECDEF set out to establish favorable relations with the press. By means of SDN bulletins, the army kept the national press abreast of its activities. Army leaders allowed journalists access to selected military facilities for the first time and furnished useful information so they could write special-interest stories about army programs or installations. This policy of keeping the public informed continued for the remainder of the *sexenio*.<sup>78</sup> Because of his educational background at the Military College, General García Barragán endeavored to improve the quality of military education. In that regard, he initiated a series of conferences on the philosophy of the Mexican Revolution at the HCM and invited noted academicians and high-level politicians in an attempt to raise the cultural level of the army's future leaders.<sup>79</sup> Under his leadership, the army placed added emphasis on professional military education and guaranteed upward mobility for the professionally trained and qualified officer.

In what seemed like his farewell speech to the army, General García Barragán indicated that Mexico still lacked a defined doctrine of war, and then mentioned the

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<sup>77</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, November 1969 : 46-49. *Diplomado del Estado Mayor* meant that an officer had successfully completed the Command and General Staff Course, at that time the highest level of military education.

<sup>78</sup>SDN *Memorias*, 1967-68 : 38-39 and 1969-70 : 33-34.

<sup>79</sup>*Revista del Ejército*, May 1966 : 1-2 and SDN *Memorias*, 1966-67 : 141.

elements needed by the Mexican army to formulate such a doctrine. Those key components included brigade and divisional-size units, an increase in troop combat power, adequate training for all forces, especially on unconventional warfare, adequate services to sustain the forces, and the organization and training of the command structure of the brigade and divisional-size units. The SECDEF estimated that the first four objectives had been achieved during his term, leaving only the fifth element for his successor.<sup>80</sup> Realistically, the general had contributed to only the partial fulfillment of the first four prerequisites, but his contribution proved to be an organizational move forward for the Mexican army. These measures aimed at placing the Mexican army on a comparable professional level with some of the more developed militaries in Latin America. Reforms such as these helped to distinguish the army's development from that of the previous two administrations, and at the same time, suggested in what direction the army should move in the future.

Throughout the crises that plagued his term, President Díaz Ordaz retained the respect of the army because he never violated its integrity. According to his JEMP, Díaz Ordaz had an assertive style and a brand of patriotism that the military admired. His philosophy on decisionmaking reflected those virtues. Díaz Ordaz believed that the Mexican people would forgive him for an imprudent decision that came from the heart; but the people would never forgive him for not having the gumption to make a decision. Many army leaders viewed the president as someone who fought against the anti-Mexico

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<sup>80</sup>Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 126-127.

interests, always placing the welfare of the nation first.<sup>81</sup> The mutual respect between the army and the president manifested itself in the latter's frequent association with the army apart from the customary celebrations that traditionally had required his presence. For example, he joined the SECDEF in the ceremony commemorating the 51st anniversary of the death of General José María Morelos y Pavón in December 1966. He inaugurated new facilities at the 13th Military Zone in Tepic in April 1967. On 13 March 1968, he had breakfast with the SECDEF and the officers of the 10th Military Zone in Durango. Later that year, the President visited the new installations at the 15th Military Zone in Guadalajara, where the zone commander acknowledged Díaz Ordaz's firm commitment to the army.<sup>82</sup> This closeness with the army validated the sincerity of the gratitude the president expressed to the armed forces on behalf of the Mexican people in his final *informe*. After his departure, Díaz Ordaz had confided in a close associate that the country owed its peace and stability to General García Barragán who had demonstrated unwavering loyalty and support to the government throughout his term as SECDEF.<sup>83</sup>

In hindsight, the Díaz Ordaz presidency represented another watershed in the evolution of the Mexican army. The problems that surfaced during that period mandated new changes for the army as an institution. For the first time since the 1940s, the army's size and leadership experienced some major changes as part of a modernization

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<sup>81</sup>Gutiérrez Oropeza : 30, 52, 69 and 95-99.

<sup>82</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 40, March 1968 : 25 and No. 45, August 1968 : 9; Margiotta : 221 and Revista del Ejército, December 1966 : 42.

<sup>83</sup>Interview, January 1991.

program that progressed gradually over the next two sexenios. Father time and the crisis of 1968 provided the impetus for the removal of the outmoded and progressively ineffective Revolutionary leadership that had predominated in the army since the 1920s. Although personal relations still counted heavily for promotion, professional qualifications assumed greater importance under García Barragán. And despite the turbulence brought about by exogenous factors during 1964-1970, traditional military values such as a Revolutionary heritage, institutional loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism, and apoliticism attained even greater significance within the army. As President Díaz Ordaz remarked on many occasions in assessing the army's contribution to the Mexican people, the Mexican army distinguished itself through the steadfast loyalty, strict discipline, and fervent patriotism and never deviated from those principles. In that sense, General García Barragán's management of the army remained very much akin to that of his more recent predecessors.

#### Modernizing the Mexican Army: 1970-1982

The exemplar of army leadership, as envisioned by the country's political leaders, arrived on the scene in the personage of General Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz. His selection as SECDEF in December 1970 represented the first time a graduate of the ESG, better known as a Diplomado del Estado Mayor (DEM), had held the highest military post in Mexico. The DEM personified the professionally trained and qualified Mexican army officer. During the past decade, DEMs had gradually begun to fill some of the army's top leadership positions, and now with one of their own as the SECDEF,

they would gain those choice assignments at an accelerated pace. When Cuenca Díaz finished his term in November 1976, General Galván López succeeded him and became the first SECDEF since 1952 with no prior political experience. That selection set a precedent for future SECDEFs and sent a clear signal to aspiring generals that experience in politics hindered more than helped their ascent to the army's highest levels of command.<sup>84</sup>

The social convulsions experienced by Mexico in the late 1960s engendered change in the country as a whole, and in the army in particular. The Mexican army had not undergone any significant structural changes since the late 1940s. Since that time, Mexico and her population had grown exponentially, while the army's size remained generally static. As a result, the army's development had lagged behind that of the nation as a whole, and was sorely in need of reform. A desultory modernization program began in the waning years of the Díaz Ordaz administration and would continue in subsequent *sexenios*. Both Cuenca Díaz and Galván López chose to focus on the army's modernization during their terms as SECDEF. General Cuenca Díaz was more preoccupied with rejuvenating the army's officer corps, while General Galván López's concerns centered more on improving the army's equipment. The forced retirement of nearly 400 army generals and the construction of a luxurious new military academy best characterized the legacy of General Cuenca Díaz, and the state-of-the-art squadron of F-5E intercept aircraft purchased from the United States became the symbol of General Galván López's tenure. Both these SECDEFs continued to pay homage to the army's

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<sup>84</sup>Neither of the officers who succeeded General Galván López, Generals Juan Arévalo Gardoqui and Antonio Riviello Bazán, had served in a political post prior to becoming SECDEF.

traditional ideological values and principles and considered those factors to be integral components of the ongoing professionalization process within both the officer corps and the army in general.

General Cuenca Díaz emerged from moderate obscurity to become SECDEF in December 1970. In addition to having strong military credentials, the general had served as senator of Baja California for the six years prior to his selection as SECDEF. He had been along in years and was probably looking at retirement before his friend, Luis Echeverría Álvarez, was nominated as the official party's presidential candidate. Much like Díaz Ordaz had done for García Barragán, Echeverría lengthened the military career of Cuenca Díaz. In return for this favor, the new SECDEF displayed an ardent loyalty to the presidency and demanded the same loyalty from his subordinates. In making his position clear, he once declared "(w)e do not accept a reasoned loyalty, because loyalty is singular, without scrutiny..."<sup>85</sup>

Born on 13 April 1902 in Puruandiro, Michoacán, Cuenca Díaz attended the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) and later graduated from the Military College, receiving his school crest from President Obregón in February 1922. He formed part of the group of cadets that accompanied President Carranza in his escape to Veracruz in 1920 and remained a staunch *Carranzista* throughout his career. He participated in various government campaigns against armed opposition from 1923-1938 and was twice wounded

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<sup>85</sup>Revelés : 20. His exact words were *(n)o aceptamos una lealtad razonada, pues la lealtad es la única, sin análisis...* One might speculate that Cuenca Díaz's removal from the army mainstream during the Díaz Ordaz administration was influenced somewhat by the fact that he had been serving as army Chief of Staff at the height of the Henriquista movement. In that capacity, he most likely had some unpleasant confrontations with General García Barragán who had been a leading supporter of Henríquez.



in action. In 1942, he graduated from the ESG, and subsequently, held a number of important positions. Those assignments included liaison officer between the Gulf of Mexico Military Region and the Third US Army at Fort Sam Houston, Texas and head of a special intelligence service on the Presidential staff during 1942-1946. He served as Chief of Staff of the SDN from 1951-1952 and commanded military zones in the states of Tlaxcala and Baja California. He also authored several military books and monographs.<sup>86</sup>

A few words need to be written about the choice of Cuenca Díaz as SECDEF, because this case reveals more about the overall SECDEF selection process than any other. According to a political insider from the Echeverría administration, the president had known Cuenca Díaz since the 1950s. Echeverría had been working for General Sánchez Taboada, the Secretary of the Navy and a native of Baja California, who had been very interested in developing that region. Sánchez Taboada introduced Echeverría to Cuenca Díaz, another native of Baja California, and the two became friends and maintained contact through the years.<sup>87</sup> When Echeverría became the PRI's presidential candidate, he naturally sought someone he could trust for the SECDEF post. The president himself stated candidly in an interview that he had been good friends with Cuenca Díaz for many years and had considered him to be well qualified both militarily and politically. Echeverría gave the impression that he had complete confidence in the

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<sup>86</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 76; Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, December 1970 : 28; Guerra Leal : 50-54; SDN, HISTORIA DEL HEROICO COLEGIO MILITAR, Vol. I : 5-6 and Smith : 225.

<sup>87</sup>Interview, May 1991.

general.<sup>88</sup> He had to be especially careful to select a SECDEF whose loyalty was unquestioned because many groups had resented Echeverría whom, as Interior Minister, they believed to have masterminded the government repression against the students in 1968. Rumors circulated alleging that elements within the army were displeased with Echeverría's nomination because they held him responsible for the army's maligned image in the wake of Tlatelolco. Because of his relative military isolation as a senator under Díaz Ordaz, Cuenca Díaz's nomination would represent a break with some of the army leaders who were disgruntled with Echeverría. Under these circumstances, Echeverría's selection of Cuenca Díaz made the most sense, despite his being ten years older than any other member in the President's cabinet.<sup>89</sup>

One former army officer described General Cuenca Díaz as a bold and aggressive officer who did not tolerate opposing opinions. The new SECDEF avidly supported the PRI and took a very conservative approach to politics and military administration. He considered any dissension within the army to have been communist-inspired, and he banished dissident elements to meaningless assignments into the more desolate parts of the country. Unlike his predecessors, Cuenca Díaz had political aspirations, although he camouflaged them very well. For example, when his term as SECDEF drew to a close, he stated, on more than one occasion, that as a military man he could not give his opinion on political issues. While he never publicly lobbied for a political position, he

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<sup>88</sup>Interview, 4 June 1991.

<sup>89</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, December 1970 : 28. With regard to Echeverría's unpopularity within the army, one army general wrote that Echeverría had been a traitor to the *Patria*, the institutions and the Mexican people as well as a major cause of the country's problems (Gutiérrez Oropeza : 69).

did show an interest in becoming the governor of Baja California Norte, but he made it clear that he would follow the required procedure and ask for *licencia* before ever becoming actively involved in politics. A civilian who worked for Cuenca Díaz when he was SECDEF confirmed his superior's interest in politics and indicated that Cuenca Díaz possessed a special penchant for politics.<sup>90</sup> When discussing Cuenca Díaz's political ambitions, it is essential to understand that he always acted from within the system and never opposed or challenged the system. He also followed the rules of the system and did not promote his political ambitions while serving as SECDEF. Instead, he used the prominence of the SECDEF post as a stepping stone to his much-desired goal of governorship of his home state, where he could continue to serve the country and the Revolution after he retired from army. As he and other generals before him cleverly stated, they were simply exercising their rights as citizens. The general eventually received his wish and was chosen as the PRI candidate for governor of Baja California Norte, but his untimely death on 17 May 1977 prevented him from being elected to that office.<sup>91</sup>

The information available on Cuenca Díaz suggests that he had the leverage to sell the president on various programs he personally had designed for the army. Many observers believed that President Echeverría initiated the program to purge the Revolutionary generals from the army's upper command levels. When asked about his

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<sup>90</sup>Jesus M. Lozano, "La Sria. del Deporte, Casi un Hecho; Aspiro a Gobernar BC," Excélsior, 14 October 1975 : 1; "Ejército y Armada Presentaron a LE sus Saludos de Año Nuevo," El Herald, 5 January 1975 : 1; Interviews, January 1991 and March 1991 and Reveles : 20.

<sup>91</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 76; Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, December 1976 : 90 and "De un Infarto Cardíaco Murió Ayer el General Cuenca Díaz," El Día, 18 May 1977 : 1.

reasons for reforming the military hierarchy, Echeverría candidly credited his SECDEF with that innovation. The former president stated that General Cuenca Díaz had told him that the army had to promote upper mobility among the younger officers, and then presented a plan that proposed strict conformity to the prevailing retirement law. Echeverría promptly approved the initiative, which suggested that other SECDEFs might have exerted more influence over defense-related policies and programs than originally presumed.<sup>92</sup>

As a professionally educated and trained army officer, Cuenca Díaz seemed intent on bringing more of his own kind into the army's top positions. Frank Brandenburg wrote about this problem in the 1960s. He noted that the old Revolutionary generals had refused to retire, thereby blocking the ascension of younger and more qualified officers. Brandenburg also believed that discontent among the younger officers would jeopardize the political elite's ability to rule effectively in the future.<sup>93</sup> After Cuenca Díaz became SECDEF, a magazine affiliated with the opposition PAN party reported that younger officers had complained privately about the refusal of older officers to step down. The magazine article claimed that 204 of the 399 generals in the Mexican army were over the statutory age limit, and that 28 of the 35 military zone commanders were between the ages of 67 and 78. A few weeks after the magazine's publication, the SDN published a list of those general officers who would be retired because they had exceeded the legal

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<sup>92</sup>Interview, 4 June 1991 with Luis Echeverría Alvarez. Throughout the interview, the ex-President gave the impression that he had had a great deal of confidence in the judgment of General Cuenca Díaz as well as considerable respect for his SECDEF.

<sup>93</sup>Brandenburg : 159.

age limit.<sup>94</sup> Then on 30 May 1972, General Cuenca Díaz announced that all generals over the age of 65 would be retired immediately. However, he did exempt the true Revolutionary generals from this decree. He said those officers were in a special category, and they would be allowed to remain on active duty even though they did not have specific assignments.<sup>95</sup>

The unique status given to the Revolutionary generals confirmed a point made earlier about no one individual having the power to change the army's ideology. Revolutionary generals had to be treated very carefully since they had attained a unique status. Mexico's national ideology recognized these leaders as national heroes, and their collective effort contributed to making the army a permanent factor in the Revolutionary equation. For their contributions, they would continue to be honored with active duty status until their death.

One month after his initial announcement, the SECDEF declared that the retirement of all officers over the age limit would be realized during the remainder of the *sexenio*, while reiterating the special category for Revolutionary generals. In light of this reform, he soon proclaimed that HCM graduates held all of the army's major command positions.<sup>96</sup> By June 1973, 161 army generals had been retired since the beginning of

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<sup>94</sup>Gabriel Parra, "Inconformidad en el Ejército con el Sistema de Ascensos," *Ovaciones*, 19 June 1972 : 1.

<sup>95</sup>Jesús M. Lozano, "Retiro de los Generales que Pasen de 65 Años Este Sexenio: Cuenca D.," *Excélsior*, 31 May 1972 : 22.

<sup>96</sup>"Todos los Militares que Rebasen la Edad Límite Serán Retirados, Anuncia Cuenca," *Novedades*, 29 June 1972 : 9. The designated retirement age for *divisionarios* was 65 years, 63 years for two-star generals (*de brigada*) and 61 years for one-star generals (*brigadier*).

Echeverría's term, and by March 1976, that number had grown to 354.<sup>97</sup> These figures implied a major transformation of the army's command structure during Cuenca Díaz's term as SECDEF because younger and more professionally trained officers steadily replaced the retired generals. For example, the SDN announced 11 general officer changes in June 1972, and all the new assignments went to graduates of the ESG (DEMs).<sup>98</sup>

General Cuenca Díaz sought to leave his mark on the army by constructing a new *Heroico Colegio Militar*. This he accomplished in splendid fashion in September 1976, less than three months before he left office. At the beginning of his term, the new SECDEF declared that educational reforms would continue within the army. The new military academy would become the jewel in the crown of that educational reform. Mexico's first *Colegio Militar* had been founded in 1823, and in October 1973, the Mexican army celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Military College. The SECDEF added to the celebration by disclosing that a new military academy would be built during the present *sexenio*. President Echeverría initiated construction on what would become a very impressive and modern complex on 17 November 1974. The new facility would occupy over 400 hectáreas in a suburb south of Mexico City, and its completion was anticipated within eighteen months.<sup>99</sup> An unnamed government official viewed the new

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<sup>97</sup>Bautista Rosas : 160-161 and Gobierno Mexicano, No. 31, June 1973 : 138 and No. 60, November 1975 : 98.

<sup>98</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 19, June 1972 : 166.

<sup>99</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 10, September 1971 : 153 and No. 48, November 1974 : 41 and Revista del Ejército, October 1973 : 20-109. See also Revista del Ejército, July-August 1976 for details on the 150th anniversary celebration and the plans for the new *Colegio Militar*. This edition was devoted entirely to the military academy, an indication of the importance attributed to that school by Cuenca Díaz.

military academy as compensation for the army's efforts in eradicating the guerrilla movement in Mexico. He allegedly commented that "it is better to give them concrete than guns."<sup>100</sup> President Echeverría spared no cost in constructing the new school, adding to an already growing government deficit. This project, in addition to some others, eventually caused his Finance Minister to resign in protest of what he considered to be excessive and irresponsible spending.<sup>101</sup>

In November 1975, as the president and his SECDEF ate breakfast at the site of the new Military College, the president said that 3,400 workers were working 24 hours a day to complete the new buildings on time. And that time came on 18 August 1976 when President Echeverría officially closed the HCM located in the Mexico City neighborhood of Popotla. On 13 September 1976, the President officially inaugurated the new HCM complex and the army's new medical school (*Escuela Médico Militar*).<sup>102</sup> The new HCM was a thoroughly modern and truly imposing complex which gave the army added prestige and paved the way for a gradual increase in the size of the officer corps (see Table 2-1) by almost tripling the capacity of the old HCM.<sup>103</sup> Both the SECDEF and

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<sup>100</sup>Riding : 92.

<sup>101</sup>Interview, January 1991.

<sup>102</sup>Gobierno Mexicano, No. 62, January 1976 : 96-97 and No. 70, September 1976 : 241-243 and Revista del Ejército, July-August 1976 : 112-120.

<sup>103</sup>Interview, September 1989. The army officer interviewed said that the actual attendance at the new HCM did not actually triple, but he estimated that it about doubled after 1976. Data available from a few SDN *Memorias* published after 1976 showed that the number of cadets increased by about 30 percent. Obviously, greater increases in the number of cadets would have to be accompanied by a commensurate growth in the size of the army in order to accommodate these new officers. However, political leaders were only willing to approve a 30 percent increase in the corps of cadets in the late 1970s. Plans to almost double the size of the armed forces in the early 1980s were eventually scratched because of the country's fiscal problems, and the number of cadets at the HCM eventually remained at the level established in the late 1970s.

the president left their indelible marks on the army with the construction of this new military academy.

As noted earlier, Luis Echeverría came into office not exactly on ideal terms with some of the army's leaders, even though he held a special fondness for the military. This affection emanated primarily from his experience in working under General Sánchez Taboada when the general served as president of the PRI and Secretary of the Navy. Echeverría personally recounted that he had learned discipline and a social consciousness from the general, and he respected those values which he found to be pervasive in the armed forces.<sup>104</sup> Thus, Echeverría assumed the presidency relatively familiar with the army, and he was prepared to promote some of his own programs for the army. An army officer who had worked directly for Echeverría said that the president was very interested in getting the army closer to the population. For that reason, he supported a number of civic action programs that could accomplish that goal.<sup>105</sup>

The new President started to work immediately on improving his image among the armed forces. His first presidential *informe* dedicated more space to the military than any of his recent predecessors, and in his subsequent addresses, he also praised the army more extensively than previous presidents.<sup>106</sup> He employed a special technique for projecting a favorable image of the army by describing its members in terms of the

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<sup>104</sup>Fuentes : 298-299; Interview, 4 June 1991 and SDN, HISTORIA DEL HEROICO COLEGIO MILITAR, Vol. I : 1-3. Echeverría's father had worked for the Finance Ministry as a pay agent for the army, so his son had some familiarity with the army way of life.

<sup>105</sup>Interview, March 1991.

<sup>106</sup>Luis Echeverría A., Seis Informes de Gobierno (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Presidencia, 1976) : 9-10 (Hereafter cited as Echeverría, Informes) and Margiotta : 220.



values they revered. Phrases such as "patriotism and exemplary loyalty," "firm sustenance of the democratic institutions," and "unbreakable fidelity to their popular and constitutional origins" were used regularly to characterize the military.<sup>107</sup> These lofty accolades characterized Echeverría's treatment of the army. He attended the traditional military ceremonies, and was not adverse to participating in other events not normally reserved for presidents. These latter activities ranged from inaugurating a new army physical education course to attending the funeral of a Revolutionary general.<sup>108</sup>

In an attempt to move the army closer to the people, Echeverría approved the army's new organic law (1971), which formally established disaster and emergency relief as a principal mission of the army. Bautista Rosas, a former army officer, offers some interesting observations concerning the addition of this new mission. He notes that the new disaster relief mission replaced the mission of "maintaining the dominion of the Constitution" that had been in effect since 1926 and contends that the elimination of the latter mission theoretically removed what could have been perceived as the legal justification for a military *coup d'état* by an enlightened and more professional army hierarchy. Because of the increasingly professional leadership within the army, that possibility could very well have been more than just a passing concern of the ruling elite.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Echeverría, Informes : 9, 37, 63, 91, 125 and 168.

<sup>108</sup>The various editions of the Revista del Ejército from 1971-1976 highlight President Echeverría's presence at the important army functions such as Army Day, the opening and closing of military classes, the post-*informe* breakfasts, the Independence Day celebrations and the inauguration of important army facilities.

<sup>109</sup>Bautista Rosas : 171-181 and Diario Oficial, 15 April 1971 : 2-16.

Other accomplishments during his first year in office included the creation of the *Medalla de la Lealtad*, a new medal for deserving members of the army, instituted in honor of the cadets who participated in the Loyalty March in 1913. The president also directed the reorganization of the National Military Service (SMN) that sought to develop a civic spirit among the participants, to enhance personal work skills, and to increase sports activities. He promoted a new interest in physical education and sports nationwide, and the army organized various programs among the populace in all parts of the country to comply with these presidential directives.<sup>110</sup> Both the president and army leaders would continue to emphasize sports programs throughout the *sexenio*.

In 1972, Echeverría established a military housing fund that provided low-cost financing for the building or purchasing of private homes by military personnel. The SDN purchased its first computer, an IBM model with 32K memory, to facilitate personnel and resource administration. There were also improvements made in the area of internal security. The president and the SECDEF promised an intensification of the anti-narcotics campaign, especially in the troublesome states of Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, and Sinaloa, and Congress passed the Federal Law of Firearms and Explosives. This new law gave the army principal responsibility for regulating the ownership, transporting and use of firearms and explosives within Mexico. The SDN created a new department to administer to these new responsibilities.<sup>111</sup> The army

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<sup>110</sup>Echeverría, *Informes* : 9-10; Margiotta : 230 and *Revista del Ejército*, January 1971 : 48 and April 1971 : 21.

<sup>111</sup>Echeverría, *Informes* : 37; *Evolución* : 113; "A Fin de Año Estarán Listas las Primeras 7 mil Casas Para Miembros de las Fuerzas Armadas," *El Nacional*, 17 June 1973 : 1; "Exclusivo de la Policía Considera Cuenca Díaz el Caso de Jenaro Vázquez Rojas," *Excélsior*, 14 January 1972 : 23; *Gobierno*

managed this new program independent of supervision from the Interior Ministry, although certain officers did maintain liaison with that ministry on sensitive issues or problems dealing with illegal arms and munitions. According to Echeverría, Cuenca Díaz had pushed for these internal security initiatives.<sup>112</sup> The SECDEF most likely viewed these measures as a means of defusing the guerrilla movement within the country, especially in the southern state of Guerrero where the guerrilla *focos* were the strongest and most active. Cuenca Díaz believed that when small arms were unaccounted for they eventually found their way into the hands of guerrillas, and the new arms-control law aimed to put a major dent in the illegal arms trade.

The following year, in the wake of his promise to build a new HCM deserving of the loyal guardians of the nation's institutions, the president directed that the names of the *Heroico Colegio Militar* and the *Heroica Escuela Naval Militar* be inscribed in gold letters in the National Congress in recognition of the patriotic service the graduates of these institutions have rendered to the nation. At the height of the guerrilla insurgency, army members received a handsome fifteen percent pay raise, and General Cuenca Díaz thanked the president personally on behalf of all members of the army and air force at the post-*informe* breakfast he hosted for the president on 3 September. That same year Echeverría introduced the *Tiendas Sedena* which were basically an expansion of the military stores program created during the Ruiz Cortines era. The main difference was that these new stores would be administered exclusively by the army and would not rely

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Mexicano, No. 19, June 1972 : 165; Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos, 25 January 1972; Piñeyro, Ejército : 119-125 and SDN Memorias, 1971-72 : 50.

<sup>112</sup>Interview, 4 June 1971.

on CEIMSA (the national export-import monopoly) for support and supplies, and their presence throughout the country would be more prolific. A few years later, the president expanded that program and established military farms and cattle ranches with an aim of making the army self-sufficient in food supplies. He also created the *Patronato Nacional de Tiendas y Granjas Agropecuarias Sedena, del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos* (National Association of Sedena Stores and Farms of the Mexican Army and Air Force) to direct and coordinate the activities of the army's burgeoning economic enterprise.<sup>113</sup>

From a benefits standpoint, Echeverría's greatest contribution to the army was the *Instituto de Seguridad Social para las Fuerzas Armadas Mexicanas* (the Social Security Institute for the Mexican Armed Forces), which a federal law created on 29 June 1976. This new law abrogated the Armed Forces Social Security Law of December 1961 and placed all the offices and agencies that handled social benefits for the army and air force under a centralized control. For example, the Directorate of Military Pensions and the office that managed the Military Housing Fund were subsumed into this new institute. The institute administered all economic and social benefits. Savings funds, literacy centers, military stores, life insurance, child care centers and home loans all fell under the purview of this new institute whose new headquarters building the president

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<sup>113</sup>Bautista Rosas : 154; Diario Oficial, 6 October 1976 : 2-4; Echeverría, *Informes* : 91 and 97; *Gobierno Mexicano*, No. 30, May 1973 : 9 and No. 71, October 1976 : 20; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 125; *Revista del Ejército*, September 1973 : 42-43; May 1975 : 22-26 and July-August 1976 : 58-59 and Toral : 528-532. The word Sedena or SEDENA is an acronym for *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*.

inaugurated on 11 September 1976.<sup>114</sup> Both Cuenca Díaz and Echeverría had expressed an interest in augmenting the economic and social benefits of the military during their terms in office so that members of the military would reach a level comparable to those attained by other federal workers.<sup>115</sup> The Social Security Institute for the Mexican Armed Forces contributed significantly to the fulfillment of their goal, exceeding it in some respects, and the institute's modern headquarters building would serve as a visible reminder of their contribution for years to come.

In a personal interview, President Echeverría mentioned that he had sought the collaboration of army wives in some of the social projects he promoted. He expressed great satisfaction with one of those projects he personally sponsored, the *Patronato de Asistencia Social Pro-Hijos del Soldado* (Association of Social Assistance for Soldiers' Children). The program gave officers' wives the opportunity to help improve the lot of the common soldier and his family. The president had an activist wife who helped to manage the program in coordination with the wives of top army leaders. The military wives organized *patronatos* in all the military zones, and these generous women donated their time to visit the pediatric wards in military hospitals and distribute toys, candy and clothing to the sick children in addition to collect contributions to improve the facilities at those hospitals. These associations also provided educational scholarships to deserving

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<sup>114</sup>Bautista Rosas : 154; Diario Oficial, 29 June 1976 : 8-29; Echeverría, *Informes* : 168; *Evolución* : 113-116 and *Gobierno Mexicano*, No. 67, June 1976 : 263-264 and No. 70, September 1976 : 170-174.

<sup>115</sup>Interviews, January 1991 and 4 June 1991.

dependents. The president broadly praised the efforts of these generous women in his final *informe*, openly acknowledging their contributions before the nation.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to improving the quality of military life, the Echeverría administration witnessed some key structural changes within the army. During this period, the emphasis fell mainly on modernizing the army's human resources principally through improvements in military education, which received an unprecedented impetus under Echeverría. Army leaders devised the Military Educational Reform Plan in early 1971 to improve professionalization, especially in the middle and lower-range commands. The curricula at most military schools were changed to become more attuned to current innovations in military science. While the addition of a new military academy gave sufficient credibility to these changes, the linchpin of the educational reform was the founding of the *Universidad del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea* (the Army and Air Force University) in December 1975. Army leaders intended for this new university to serve as the central directorate of middle and high level army and air force schools, to train instructors, and to conduct research related to military science.<sup>117</sup>

Although the SECDEF claimed he had been attentive to the need for renovating some military equipment, he did not foresee the necessity for large scale acquisitions of equipment. However, both he and the president recognized the requirement for enlarging the size of the active forces. This need arose in the aftermath of the student disturbances

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<sup>116</sup>Echeverría, *Informes* : 184-185; "Seis Años de Labor" : 228-234 and SDN *Memorias*, 1971-72 : 46-47.

<sup>117</sup>AGN, de la Madrid, SDN 07.30.00.00, C.5, Exp. 6; Echeverría, *Informes* : 164 and 184-188; Piñeyro, *Ejército* : 110-118 and Sánchez Gutierrez, "El Estado y Los Militares" : 16.

in 1968, when Echeverría, who was serving as Interior Minister at the time, saw the government come close to losing control of the situation. The army needed to beef up its active forces and be prepared to respond to a variety of internal conflicts. As a result, the expansion of the active forces that had begun after Tlatelolco continued under Echeverría. The end result was that, between the end of 1968 and the beginning of 1976, the army had added one military zone, fifteen infantry battalions (to the existing fifty-four), two airborne battalions, one military police battalion, three cavalry regiments, two 81mm mortar groups and one heavy transport regiment to its active inventory.<sup>118</sup> Political leaders had realized that the growth in the nation's population had substantively outdistanced the size of the armed forces, and the country's political and social situation dictated a sizeable increase in the active forces which was ultimately accomplished during 1970-1976.

The most pivotal change in the army's structure was undoubtedly the displacement of the Revolutionary leadership by the younger and more professional DEMs. Bautista Rosas describes this phenomenon quite well. Prior to 1970, the Revolutionary generals held the predominant number of top commands. For example, in mid-1970 DEMs commanded just 4 of 21 major directorates and only 12 of 35 military zones. Six months after Echeverría took office those figures changed in favor of the DEMs to 12 of 21 directorates and 24 of 35 zone commands.<sup>119</sup> The Mexican army's Revolutionary leadership had become obsolete during the Echeverría presidency. The emphasis was

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<sup>118</sup>Bautista Rosas : 152-154 and Sánchez Gutierrez, "El Estado y Los Militares" : 20-24.

<sup>119</sup>Bautista Rosas : 152-160.

clearly on youth, and the president sought to give greater access to anxious and qualified younger officers and to bring these officers into the public mainstream. In May 1974, he organized a luncheon where he addressed young officers and government bureaucrats and spoke of the importance of civil service and the commitment to change. In an obvious allusion to the recent military coup in Chile, he encouraged the young military officers to serve as defenders of the Revolution. The president also appealed to those in attendance for unity within the government. A government official present at the luncheon stated that Echeverría had attached a great deal of importance to the gathering. In the weeks after the meeting, this official noted a greater willingness on the part of high-level political officials to explain their individual roles to groups of officers, as a means of ensuring the army's continued loyalty to their cause.<sup>120</sup> The structural changes were not limited to the officer corps. The country's changing demography portended variations in the composition of the troops whose ranks had traditionally consisted of members of the peasants classes, but by the 1970s, offspring from the marginal urban classes were joining up.<sup>121</sup> This recent development gave the army a more urban bias. Over one-third of the officer corps had come from the federal district, and the rank and file were also beginning to approach that figure. Fewer and fewer officers and troops had previous experience in a rural environment where in years past the army had done its most effective work. It appears that the army was developing a

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<sup>120</sup>"Mexico: Future Hopes and Present Politics," *Latin America*, May 24, 1974; Interviews, September 1989 and March 1991, and Reveles : 20.

<sup>121</sup>Bautista Rosas : 161.



strong regional bias in favor of the capital area, which, in the long run, might affect how and where the army's resources are employed.

This new army leadership proved its loyalty to the government. In that way, these leaders differed little ideologically from the *Revolucionarios* who preceded them. As early as April 1975, Cuenca Díaz declared publicly that there did not exist the slightest possibility of a military coup in Mexico, and he assured the Mexican people that the armed forces would not intervene in the presidential succession process.<sup>122</sup> In the midst of the unsettling rumors about President Echeverría not being allowed to finish his term, the January 1976 edition of the *Revista del Ejército* published a letter from the president to the army and the air force emphasizing the concepts of loyalty and the support of constitutional order. The military heeded this advice and provided its normal support during the presidential election later that year. Franklin Margiotta hints that much of Echeverría's treatment of the army was aimed at securing its political loyalty. The handsome 23 percent pay raise the armed forces received in September 1976 suggests that Margiotta's supposition might not be too far off the mark.<sup>123</sup>

General Félix Galván López assumed the post of SECDEF on 1 December 1976, becoming the first SECDEF since the 1950s to hold the office without some formal political experience. One analyst suggests that the selection of Galván López evolved naturally as a result of the gradual depletion of political positions available to army

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<sup>122</sup>Julio Pomar, "Los Golpes de Estado en México son Cosa de la Historia: Cuenca," *El Día*, 2 April 1975 : 3.

<sup>123</sup>"Aumento del 21 y 23 por Ciento Para la Burocracia y las Fuerzas Armadas," *El Día*, 29 September 1976 : 1; Margiotta : 245 and *Revista del Ejército*, January 1976 : 1 and July 1976 : 69.

officers and on account of the growing professionalism within the army, which prompted officers to focus exclusively on military interests.<sup>124</sup> Those two factors did indeed offer a valid explanation of President José López Portillo's choice of SECDEF. That argument can be further reinforced by examining the situation from the political side. Since the early 1970s, the backgrounds of Mexico's leading politicians had experienced some significant changes. The ascension of Echeverría marked a tendency to rely more on the technocrat rather than the traditional populist brand of politician. Mexico's new political leaders had been appointed, not elected to public office. This meant that this new breed of politician, the president himself a member of that group, had little experience in mingling with the populace, unlike the populist politician who had served as governor or senator. As a result, these technocrats had few formal ties and little contact with military leaders, and they relied more heavily than their predecessors on a potential SECDEF's military record as a criterion for selection.

Although he had had no formal ties with President López Portillo, General Galván López certainly had a distinguished military career. Born in Villa de Santiago, Guanajuato on 20 January 1913, Galván López entered the Military College in 1930 and graduated with distinction in 1934. As a young lieutenant, he fought against Cedillo and his rebel forces and later attended the ESG from 1941-1944. He served on the Presidential General Staff during the Alemán administration and later moved to Washington, D.C. as an assistant army attaché in January 1952, the only SECDEF to serve in the United States. He was General García Barragán's private secretary from

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<sup>124</sup>Walker : 47-48.

August 1965 to January 1969 and served out the rest of García Barragán's term as his Chief of Staff. After passing the first year of Cuenca Díaz's term without a job, he proceeded to serve as the military zone commander in Saltillo, Coahuila (6th), Irapuato, Guanajuato (16th), and Chihuahua, Chihuahua (5th).<sup>125</sup>

Galván López had the reputation of being a stern disciplinarian, although some officers referred to him as a tyrant. Whatever the case, he left no doubts about who was in charge. Shortly after taking office, he announced that he would be responsible directly to the president for accomplishing the missions entrusted to the army by the Constitution and the organic law, and that those missions would take precedence over any other activity. He outlined a command rotation plan that would allow a maximum of three years in a command position. He illustrated his no-nonsense approach by stating that the strictest discipline would be maintained in all units, and that commanders of battalion and larger-size units would not leave their place of duty without providing instructions on how they could be reached immediately. The new SECDEF directed that unit training areas would encompass the units' sectors of responsibility so the unit personnel could familiarize themselves totally with the area, and he wanted assigned duties performed with the same promptness and careful attention that would be used in confronting a real enemy. In the few short visits he had made since becoming SECDEF, he noticed that staff members were not fully cognizant of what the political, agrarian and student situations were in their regions. He also observed some negligence with regard to

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<sup>125</sup>Camp, Political Biographies : 109; Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, December 1976 : 36-37 and Interview, October 1990. The lack of any previous relationship between López Portillo and General Galván López was confirmed in an interview with a close relative of the general in October 1990.

maintenance at installations and appearance standards of soldiers. The SECDEF vowed that these shortcomings would no longer be tolerated.<sup>126</sup>

These actions provide some insight into the personality of Galván López and portray an individual with a professional military background but lacking in the diplomatic skills of a politician. Army officers who had served under Galván López recalled his authoritarian nature and said that anyone who did not follow his orders suffered dire consequences.<sup>127</sup> General Galván López's comportment was more rigid and militarily grounded than that of his recent predecessors who had preferred the more diplomatic approach to command. One former army general related that Galván López did not like army officers to be involved in politics. As a result, he forced the small group of officers serving in the Congress to retire after they completed their political assignment rather than allow them to revert to active duty status.<sup>128</sup> Galván López's military training had taught him the importance of loyalty, and his relationship with President López Portillo provided an exemplar of loyalty. He steadfastly pledged both his and the army's loyalty to the president. As early as January 1977, an editorial in the army's magazine stated that the army high command backed the president and would maintain strict loyalty to the nation's institutions. After the president's first year in office, the SECDEF sent him a letter, that was later published in the army's magazine,

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<sup>126</sup>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, DIRECTIVA DEL ALTO MANDO, Speech made by C.Gral.Div. D.E.M. Félix Galván López Secretary of the National Defense on 4 January 1977 before the Military Zone Commanders and Gobierno Mexicano, No. 1, September 1976 : 125.

<sup>127</sup>Interviews, September 1989 and September 1990.

<sup>128</sup>Interview, September 1989.

congratulating him on a successful first year in office and reaffirming the army's unwavering loyalty. Less than a year later, Galván López proclaimed that the army remained under the president's direct jurisdiction, continuing to respect the law and the institutions, and in his own words, the "Army is and will be the last foxhole of the Mexican Revolution." He confirmed the army's loyalty to the presidency frequently throughout the *sexenio*.<sup>129</sup> In discussing more sensitive issues such as the army's role in politics, Galván López clung to the army's traditional ideological principles. He denied that the army had a formal role in the nation's political process, and instead, he described the army as apolitical, reiterating that the army would never act outside the law. On several occasions, he declined to discuss politics saying that as a soldier he was prohibited from doing so in public.<sup>130</sup>

When General Galván López took office, he had his mind set on continuing the modernization program initiated in the previous *sexenio*. He began immediately by motorizing the army's cavalry regiments. A few years later, he disclosed that horse-mounted cavalry was an anachronism, and that the cavalry needed to recapture its distinguishing features of speed and mobility. By the end of his term, Galván López had achieved his goal of motorizing over 20 cavalry regiments.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Revista del Ejército, January 1977 : 5; November 1977 : 3; December 1977 : 63; September 1978 : 3; September 1979 : 45 and June 1980 : 45 and Isabel Zamorano and Jesús M. Lozano, "No nos Obnubilan ni Derrumban los Problemas: Galván L.," Excélsior, 5 August 1982 : 1.

<sup>130</sup>Francisco Rodríguez G., "Los Militares nos Preparamos Para Servir al País no Para Gobernar," El Herald, 6 October 1978; "El ejército nunca actuará fuera de la ley, afirmó Félix Galván," El Día, 2 May 1979 : 2 and "Presidente Civil o Militar?, que el Pueblo Decida: Galván," El Sol, 17 October 1980 : 1.

<sup>131</sup>Fuentes : 255; Riding : 93; SDN, DIRECTIVA DEL ALTO MANDO; Vizcaíno : 7 and Wager : 102-104.

As Mexico began to benefit from the windfall in oil profits, the SECDEF worked diligently to improve what one analyst referred to as "what may be the smallest and worst-equipped armed forces of any nation of its size."<sup>132</sup> In a press interview which another analyst described as "the watershed event that marked the beginning of the trend toward greater public assertiveness and a higher public profile for the armed forces," General Galván López justified the army's modernization by stating that the President had directed that the army modernize at a pace commensurate with that of the rest of the nation.<sup>133</sup> He added that the growing population mandated more protection and additional security to vital installations. Improvement in the quality of the armed forces could better guarantee the nation's sovereignty and integrity. He then spoke of the introduction of technology acquired from West Germany to produce the G-3 automatic rifle. Like a true soldier, he concluded by saying "the strong are respected more than the weak."<sup>134</sup> In actuality, the country's economic boom paved the way for the army's modernization. It offered the ideal justification for such a program. In the past, army leaders would have been branded as anti-patriotic if they had sought a substantial boost in the military budget when the nation was suffering through an economic downturn. Now the SECDEF could promote the program as part of Mexico's overall modernization program.

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<sup>132</sup>Alan Riding, "Mexican Army Shows New Sense of Pride to the Consternation of Some Politicians," New York Times, 5 October 1980 : A3.

<sup>133</sup>Vizcaíno : 7 and Walker : 85.

<sup>134</sup>Enrique Aranda, "Obliga el crecimiento del país a la modernización del Ejército," El Universal, 8 October 1980 : 1; Vizcaíno : 7-8 and Wager : 102-104.

The acquisition of ten F-5E supersonic fighters and two F-5F fighter trainers from the United States was the most widely publicized and most expensive military purchase. After a series of well-publicized military buying trips to France, Israel and the United States in early 1981, General Galván López decided that the U.S. aircraft and the accompanying training package would be the most advantageous for Mexico. This acquisition symbolized the modernization of the Mexican army and air force and provided a concrete sign of the government's overall commitment to that program, since the funds to purchase the aircraft came from special presidential discretionary funds.<sup>135</sup>

Some other programs that the SECDEF promoted with the president's backing included the introduction of computer systems, albeit elementary ones, in all military zones and attaché offices for the purpose of transmitting data to Defense Headquarters. By the end of his term, he had devised the Military Center of Automated Evaluation to test military personnel for promotions and in general military skills. A strong advocate of traditional military values, he introduced a special course at the HCM for incoming cadets at all the military schools. This new familiarization course taught the new students about loyalty and discipline and attempted to establish a modicum of *esprit*

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<sup>135</sup>Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change, 2nd rev. ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987) : 53; Susan Kaufman Purcell, "The Mexico-U.S. Relationship," Foreign Affairs, Winter 1981-82 : 390-391; Edward J. Williams, "Mexico's Central American Policy, Apologies, Motivations and Principles," Strategic Issues Research Memorandum, U.S. Army War College, 15 March 1981 : 21-23 Jorge Reyes Estrada, "El dinero al ejército para fortalecerlo y garantizar la defensa del país: Galván López al salir a Israel," UnoMásUno, 10 January 1981 : 3; Jesús M. Lozano, "El Ejército no Puede Quedar a la Zaga del Adelanto: Galván," Excélsior, 26 May 1981 : 1; Riding : 93 and Walker : 53. The most comprehensive analysis of the decision to purchase the F-5E aircraft is contained in Dzedzic's "The Essence of Decision in a Hegemonic Regime: The Case of Mexico's Acquisition of a Supersonic Fighter."

*d'corps* before their formal military education commenced. He also established the highest echelon of military education, the *Colegio de Defensa Nacional* discussed above, in September 1981 to provide special training on the formulation of national defense strategy as well as to offer some background on subjects such as force development, international affairs, economics, and political science to a select group of colonels and relatively young generals with potential to reach the highest positions of command. Finally, he instituted the *FAVE SEDENA*, which was the army's clothing and equipment factory, in November 1982. Previously the army was dependent upon a number of state-run factories for uniforms and basic military equipment, but General Galván López centralized these diverse operations under exclusive army control. By early 1982, the SECDEF estimated that once the matériel purchased in 1981 was operational, the army and the air force modernization program would be complete, and it was in the area of military equipment that Galván López would leave his most profound mark on the army.<sup>136</sup>

Like his predecessor, José López Portillo assumed the presidency with some understanding of the Mexican military. The new president came from a family with a modest military tradition since his father had graduated from the *Colegio Militar* and had been a member of the cadet escort that accompanied President Madero from Chapultepec Castle to the National Palace in 1913. He also displayed his grasp of military history

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<sup>136</sup>George W. Grayson, "No Presidential Sashes--yet--on Mexico's Military Men," The Christian Science Monitor, 17 September 1982 : 23; "Cumple con el Plan Global de Desarrollo el Grado de Modernización de Ejército y FAM," El Nacional, 9 January 1982 : 1; "Implantó el Ejército su sistema de computación," UnoMásUno, 22 September 1982 : 4; Fuentes 253-255; Gobierno Mexicano, No. 72, November 1982 : 150; Revista del Ejército, April 1977 : 3; SDN, DIRECTIVA DEL ALTO MANDO and Williams, "Mexico's Central American Policy" : 25.



when he declared early in his campaign, that the military uprisings during the 1920s had showed the army that the best path for the future was that of loyalty and duty to the nation. In that regard, when he took office he asked the army for the courage and loyalty needed to safeguard the integrity of the nation.<sup>137</sup>

José López Portillo projected an image quite different from that of past presidents. He perceived of himself as a Renaissance man. The new president had written a few books on Mexican history and fashioned himself as an intellectual. His active participation in sports helped to project an image of a strong and robust leader. His personality contributed to the special relationship he had with both the SECDEF and the army. López Portillo enjoyed participating in non-sedentary military activities and often exploited the photo opportunities that accompanied those ventures. For example, he went horseback riding with the SECDEF on a regular basis at *Campo Militar No. 1*, and on one occasion, after visiting an army unit, he took target practice, in clear view of the assembled press corps, with a new shotgun the SECDEF had given him. His willingness to partake in physically strenuous activities won him instant approval and respect from the rank and file within the army, and the SECDEF persisted in extending invitations to him for a host of army competitions and field exercises.<sup>138</sup> As was standard practice, President López Portillo attended the traditional military ceremonies such as the Loyalty March, Army Day, the ESG anniversary celebrations, the commemoration of

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<sup>137</sup>Fuentes : 309-310 and Revista del Ejército, December 1976 : 2 and February 1979 : 7-9.

<sup>138</sup>Interview, October 1970 and Revista del Ejército, April 1977 : 60-61.

General Obregón's death, the post-*informe* breakfasts and Independence Day celebrations.<sup>139</sup>

President López Portillo set precedents with his willingness to participate in some military activities that other Presidents had eschewed. He seemed to enjoy shaping a unique relationship with the army, and General Galván López welcomed those opportunities when the Supreme Commander could rub shoulders with his troops. In June 1977, he became the first president to give a presentation at the ESG where he lectured students, staff and faculty on the subject of political philosophy. At a ceremony following his lecture, General Galván López presented the President with the ESG insignia that students are awarded upon graduation, identifying them as DEMs. A few months later, the President joined 20,000 members of the army and the air force on maneuvers in the southern state of Oaxaca. In March 1978, he accompanied the SECDEF to El Ciprés, Baja California to inspect damage from the floods and witness first hand the implementation of the of army's disaster relief *Plan DN-III-E*. The President also spent two days at the V Regional Meeting of Military Zone Commanders in September 1979 where he said he learned the meaning of *esprit d'corps* and later proclaimed his pride and satisfaction with and pride with the Mexican army. In July 1980, the President tested the new armored personnel carrier that the Department of Military Industry had begun manufacturing nationally. Although attendance at the ceremony commemorating the founding of the ESG could not be considered

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<sup>139</sup>Revista del Ejército, May 1977 : 64-65; September 1977 : 64-71; January 1978 : 3; July 1978 : 63-64; September 1979 : 45-46; February 1980 : 60-61; June 1980 : 45 and July 1980 : 41-43.

unprecedented, the president, accompanied by his entire cabinet, did unveil the first commemorative stamp celebrating the school's fiftieth anniversary in April 1982.<sup>140</sup>

López Portillo's management style did not allot the military either much space or a priority position in the annual presidential *informes*. He preferred to keep military business out of the public eye and to maintain relative confidentiality about military transactions and perquisites. In light of the economic crisis the country experienced during the previous *sexenio*, López Portillo might have adopted this strategy to prevent a generally anti-military population from demonstrating its animosity toward the army over what might have been perceived as an exorbitant military budget.<sup>141</sup> Information about new army benefits were normally confined to official publications. For example, the President did not announce salary increases for the armed forces in his State of the Union Addresses, but word of the pay raises did appear in the army magazine.<sup>142</sup>

López Portillo was an eloquent speaker, and he reserved the military's limited space in the annual *informes* to praise the army's contributions to the nation and to embellish the army's ideological roots. Instead of elaborating on the benefits the government secured for the army, the President chose to applaud the army for its contributions in civic action and in the national antidrug campaign. He also spoke respectfully of the

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<sup>140</sup> Enrique Aranda, "El Ejército Seguirá Siendo Leal a las Instituciones: Galván," *El Herald*, 28 July 1977 : 1; Angel Gómez Granados, "Ocho Lesionados Durante un Salto de Paracaidistas," *El Universal*, 11 December 1977 : 1; Jesús Saldaña H., "La Situación es Delicada: Félix Galván," *El Herald*, 22 February 1980 : 2; Ernesto Ochoa Cespedes, "Está Garantizada en México la Paz Social," *Novedades*, 25 July 1980 : 1; *Revista del Ejército*, June 1977 : 3; December 1977 : 3; March 1978 : 63-64; September 1979 : 3 and August 1982 : I-VII.

<sup>141</sup> Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 249-261 offer a comprehensive account of the economic problems that faced Mexico during the López Portillo administration.

<sup>142</sup> *Revista del Ejército*, November 1977 : 3 and September 1979 : 45.

army's traditional values, reminding the Mexican people of the army's constitutional origins, the popular roots of its members, its staunch institutional loyalty, and its exemplary discipline. These values took the form of recurring themes to varying degrees in all of López Portillo's *informes*.<sup>143</sup>

All this does not suggest that the President did not have army programs he favored and promoted. To the contrary, he championed extensive army participation in the national antidrug campaign and in disaster relief programs, and he encouraged the army's modernization. He cited the army's extraordinary efforts in the antidrug campaign explicitly in five of his six *informes* stating that the army had received international recognition for its program and had served as an unparalleled example to the rest of the world. The SECDEF, aware of the presidential interest in this campaign, began publishing drug eradication statistics and the antidrug activities of the military zones most affected by the problem in the monthly editions of the *Revista del Ejército y la Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos* beginning in April 1978 and continuing through the remainder of the *sexenio*.

Based on the comments made during his State of the Union Addresses, López Portillo believed that the army made its principal contributions to the *Patria* in the areas of civic action and disaster relief. Those contributions received at least a passing mention in each of his *informes*. The President probably felt that these activities projected the most favorable image of the army among the Mexican people. Civic action

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<sup>143</sup>José López Portillo, *Cuadernos de Filosofía Política*, No. 42 (Mexico City: Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto, December 1980) is replete with quotations from López Portillo on the importance and dedication of the army. Hereafter cited as *Cuadernos*.

also contributed greatly to the maintenance of internal order by reducing socioeconomic tensions in the countryside. And it had the added advantage of allowing the president to keep the more unpleasant residual political functions out of the public eye. In his 1981 speech, he mentioned that the army provided support in 75 separate cases of disaster or other emergencies during the past year. The following year he cited the army's invaluable support and personal sacrifices to help those affected by the eruption of the Chichonal volcano in the southern state of Chiapas and commended the armed forces for their heroism and their contribution to the nation's overall progress during his administration.<sup>144</sup>

A Mexican sociologist wrote that Echeverría created his formula of *apertura democrática* to maintain an acceptable level of social consensus, and López Portillo followed with his strategy of *reforma política* for the same purpose.<sup>145</sup> As a result of the intensifying economic crises in the waning years of the Echeverría *sexenio*, the army's modernization program had begun to grind to a halt. The newly discovered oil wealth in the early part of López Portillo's term led to a different kind of reform within the army, one that sought to keep the army on par with the rest of the country whose modernization had started to move at an accelerated pace. In his 1979 *informe*, the President stated that "to respond to a Mexico that is reforming herself politically, economically and socially and to give her harmonic viability, her military must also

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<sup>144</sup>Informes V, 1981 : 685 and 1982 : 724.

<sup>145</sup>Guillermo Boils M., "Los Militares en México (1965-1985)," Revista Mexicana de Sociología, Año XLVII/Num. 1, January-March 1985 : 171-172. Hereafter cited as Boils, Revista Mexicana.

transform itself."<sup>146</sup> This somewhat cryptic message gave General Galván López the signal he needed to expedite a sluggish modernization program for the army. In keeping with his philosophy of a reduced philosophy for the army, the President did not widely espouse the army's modernization program in public. He designated the SECDEF to carry the modernization banner, while assuring him in private that the army could count on the government's support.<sup>147</sup> On more than one occasion, the SECDEF made it clear that he had the backing of the president in his efforts to modernize the army and the air force, and that he was simply carrying out the president's orders in that regard.<sup>148</sup>

López Portillo will be remembered for other reforms he introduced, especially the turning over of the Department of Military Industry (DIM) to the SDN and the founding of the *Colegio de Defensa Nacional* (CDN). Since its inception in April 1947, the DIM had been a directorate of the Office of the Presidency, despite having been staffed principally with army personnel. In September 1977, President López Portillo decided to relinquish its control to the SDN. That reform gave the army added prestige, and by giving complete control of the military industry to the SDN, this new policy implied a considerable amount of trust and confidence in the army on the part of the president. López Portillo also gained some notoriety within military circles by authorizing the establishment of the highest tier of military education, the CDN, a major contribution to

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<sup>146</sup>Informes V, September 1979 : 609.

<sup>147</sup>Dziedzic, The Defense Policies : 559.

<sup>148</sup>Francisco Ramirez, "El Ejército Mexicano Dió Otra Muestra de Disciplina, Destreza y Eficiencia," El Nacional, 7 December 1981 : 6 and Revista del Ejército, January 1982 : 3.

the collective institution of the military. This new school ostensibly placed the Mexican army on the same level as the more developed militaries in South America, at least from an educational standpoint. The president said that army leaders wanted to broaden their knowledge about their country and its shortcomings as well as to gain a better understanding of how they can better serve Mexico. He believed the training offered at the new war college would directly benefit these leaders because their duties required them to serve in diverse regions of the country.<sup>149</sup>

The new and more professional non-Revolutionary leadership of the modern Mexican army left an indelible mark on that institution. These new and informed leaders recognized the army's state of unpreparedness and its inferior armament in the face of mounting threats from rural and urban guerrillas and from narcotics traffickers. As a result of these growing dangers, General Cuenca Díaz initiated an all-encompassing modernization program when he became SECDEF in December 1970. The program gained additional momentum during the next administration and left the army better qualified to deal with both internal and external threats.<sup>150</sup> Because the modernization process covered two separate administrations, the overall scheme was somewhat haphazard and incomplete in some areas. That shortcoming derived in part from the army's restrictive budgetary process and the army's general lack of experience in modernizing its forces. The military's budgetary data have seldom been made accessible

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<sup>149</sup>Diario Oficial #11, 15 September 1977; "El Departamento de la Industria Militar Pasa a Depender de la SDN," *Excélsior*, 22 September 1977 and Fuentes : 310.

<sup>150</sup>Aguilar Camín and Meyer : 308; Aguilar Zinser : 227 and Sánchez Gutierrez, "El Estado y Los Militares" : 13-14.

to the public, and when some figures have been released, they often give rise to conflicting assessments. Despite the discrepancies, different accounts shed at least a modicum of light on the fiscal interpretation of the army's modernization program. According to one set of data, the military budget as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) remained a constant 0.7 percent since the late 1960s. In 1981, the budget allocation for the SDN grew by 54 percent from the previous year, boosting its percentage of the GDP to 1.6 percent.<sup>151</sup> Later figures (Table 8-1) paint a slightly different picture, showing a gradual decline in the percentage of the SDN budget as part of the total government spending since the Echeverría *sexenio*. Nevertheless, military spending grew in absolute terms since the start of the modernization program. The discrepancy over the 1981 figures might be explained by the fact that the F-5E squadron was paid for with special presidential funds in 1981, although the former set of figures may have included the purchase price of the aircraft as part of the official military budget.

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<sup>151</sup>Wager : 102-103.



TABLE 8-1

Planned SDN Expenditures, 1973-1983  
(In Millions of pesos)

YEAR	AMOUNT	% OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING
1973	2,674	1.6
1974	3,121	1.4
1975	4,229	1.2
1976	5,877	1.4
1977	8,261	1.3
1978	9,514	1.1
1979	11,815	1.1
1980	13,912	1.0
1981	25,856	1.1
1982	32,764	1.0
1983	37,874	0.6

SOURCE: Walker : 60-61.

Regarding human resources, a report surfaced in the summer of 1981 that stated the size of Mexico's armed forces would almost double to 220,000 over the next few years. The country's serious economic problems toward the end of the López Portillo's term made that supposition highly improbable.<sup>152</sup> In actuality, the size of the Mexican armed forces in 1982 was roughly 120,000, and by 1990, that figure had only grown to

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<sup>152</sup>Wager : 103-104.

about 130,000 with the army accounting for about seventy-five percent of that number.<sup>153</sup>

Although army leaders did not achieve all their modernization goals during 1970-1982, the die was cast. The Mexican army had entered into a new phase of development in which it was led by a more dynamic, professional, and less political leadership than it had been accustomed to since the end of the Mexican Revolution. But as one observer cautioned, this modernization program brought changes to the military institution but not to its weight and place within the overall system. Nor did it transform the army's principal mission which remained the maintenance of internal order.<sup>154</sup> During this transition, the army ideology, still firmly anchored in the Revolutionary mystique, continued as the one steady factor in the army's evolution. The ideological values exalted by army members in the 1940s were still held in the highest esteem in 1982, and as 1982 drew to a close, in the eyes of the country's political leaders, institutional loyalty was the army's most conspicuous virtue.

#### A Final Note

Two distinct leadership styles unfolded within the Mexican army during the second half of the twentieth century. The philosophy of the Revolutionary generals, who commanded the army in the 1950s and 1960s, aimed at enhancing the benefits

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<sup>153</sup>Rogelio Sánchez N., "El Ejército Listo Para Defender la Soberanía," El Herald, 15 September 1981; Aguilar Zinser : 227; Dziedzic, The Defense Policies : 567-568; Riding : 93 and Sánchez Gutierrez, "El Estado" : 14.

<sup>154</sup>Boils, Revista Mexicana : 183.

infrastructure that was started during the Alemán administration. Due to Mexico's neutralist stance on the international scene and the growing emphasis on nationalism within the army, these Revolutionary leaders saw no immediate need for advanced military equipment. Instead, they wanted to guarantee the loyalty of the rank and file and decided upon a broad range of benefits as the means of accomplishing their goal. By the mid-1960s, the army had moved from a very personal style of leadership to a more professional one.

The new army leadership grew more concerned with technical competence and with improving the institution's image and reputation throughout Latin America. The accent on professionalism began with General García Barragán's new leadership philosophy. In the wake of the Tlatelolco incident, he recognized that changes within the army were inevitable, and he immediately began to look at ways to make the army more professional. He initiated training and doctrinal reforms to which his successor, General Cuenca Díaz, was able to devote more time and resources, especially after the army had arrested a small rural insurgency movement in the southwestern state of Guerrero. President Echeverría (1970-1976) emphasized the need to improve public education nationwide, and General Cuenca Díaz followed his President's lead by building the modern and enlarged military college and by establishing the University of the Army and Air Force (UDEFA). For both these leaders, the goal was to give more opportunities to younger politicians and military officers. That policy resulted in a purge of the army's officers ranks, forcing out the feeble, ineffective Revolutionary generals who had been blocking the advancement of the more professional and conscientious younger officers.

The acquisition of the F-5E fighter squadron from the United States gave the Mexican military the guise of a modern military force and helped to assuage the egos of many top army leaders. Nonetheless, there remained considerable room for improvement. Personal ties, although still important, had been losing their influence since the demise of the Revolutionary generals. General Galván López continued to reform military education as a means of imparting professional values on the officer corps. His reforms culminated with the founding of the National Defense College (CDN), which replaced the ESG as the highest echelon of military education. With regard to promoting military programs in a given *sexenio*, based on the earlier comments of former President Echeverría, it appears that SECDEFs had more influence in independently promoting those programs than most Mexicanists had given them credit for.

The period of 1952-1982 was one of gradual change for the Mexican army, which tended to follow, rather than lead the rest of society along the modernization path. However, the army did make substantial progress during that period, and all the changes that took place within the institution did so in consonance with its military creed. The basic principles of that ideology had been well instituted by the 1940s. While the army slowly changed, its ideology remained the one constant that provided the army with direction and that served to link the past with the present.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

The highest compliment that can be paid to the modern Mexican army is that it has guaranteed uninterrupted peace and relative stability in Mexico since the 1930s. While the army's performance in the post-1940 era has been far from flawless, the army has consistently performed in a way that has benefitted the nation's overall economic, political, and social development. At times, the mere presence of the army has preempted nettlesome problems that might have drained precious government resources away from programs that have provided vital support to the Mexican people. After the chaotic decade of the 1920s, the army gradually yielded its political power to a civilian elite that refined a rare political system, originally formed by Mexico's top military leaders. The system has survived without major modifications to the present day, and outsiders continually marvel at how the new ruling class retained its commanding political influence while keeping the military politically at bay. Two such individuals are Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, who wrote that the "taming of the military has been startling by comparison not only with Mexican history, but also with almost all of contemporary Latin America."<sup>1</sup> They added that this "does not mean that Mexico's

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<sup>1</sup>Levy and Székely : 39.

military lacks functions. It means that these functions mostly *serve rather than threaten* the civilian system. The military watches for potential threats to stability."<sup>2</sup> Few experts would disagree with Alain Rouquié, France's ambassador to Mexico, when he writes that "(f)ew armies in the continent appear to be less politically involved. The small numbers in the armed forces and the low level of budgetary allocations are good indications that the Mexican armed forces as an institution are relatively weak. Considering the importance of the country...there is reason to be surprised at that limitation of the military."<sup>3</sup>

The Mexican army has definitely behaved atypically, when compared with its counterparts in Latin America, during the period in question. In the 1970s, the effects of professionalism on the armed forces of Latin America were debated passionately. In attempting to explain those effects as they existed in Mexico, Edwin Lieuwen used a thesis he had borrowed from two acclaimed civil-military experts, Alfred Vagts and Samuel Huntington. Using Mexico as his case study, Lieuwen described the correlation between military professionalism and political activity by the military. He postulated that growing professionalism within the military corresponded to a reduction of political involvement by the armed forces.<sup>4</sup> His thesis, as far as it went, did indeed prove valid for Mexico. Since 1940, the Mexican army had become clearly more professional, while experiencing an increasingly diminished role in politics.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Rouquié : 204.

<sup>4</sup>Lieuwen, "Depoliticization" : 53.

Alfred Stepan, Samuel Finer, Guillermo O'Donnell, and José Nun, among others, challenged Lieuwen's thesis and countered with one of their own. Stepan, a leading spokesman of this group, unveiled what he called the "new professionalism of internal warfare." He argued the opposite of Lieuwen, with one important qualifier. Stepan believed that increased levels of military professionalism led to greater political activity when the military's principal role was the preservation of internal order. However, in those countries where the military's primary function was one of external defense, Lieuwen's thesis held true.<sup>5</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, Stepan's theory had considerable validity as evidenced by the many military governments in power. Mexico, where the military's primary function was also the maintenance of internal order, proved the major exception to Stepan's thesis.

Mexico differed from her neighbors because the Mexican army had become institutionalized, and there existed a military culture and a Revolutionary creed that generated confidence in the ability of the civilian government to rule the country effectively. Although most Mexicanists have recognized the Mexican military as exceptional, they have chosen to overlook the military culture and ideology as reasons for that unique status, relying instead on the political system to explain the military's pattern of development since 1940. They have argued, for example, that it is the

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<sup>5</sup>Alfred Stepan, "The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion," in Authoritarian Brazil, ed. Alfred Stepan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) : 47-51. Hereafter cited as Stepan, "The New Professionalism."

political system that is truly unique, and that the civilian rulers have long determined the military's role in Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

Mexico's singular political system, begotten by the Mexican Revolution, has certainly influenced the army's evolution since the 1920s. But the efficacy of the political system alone does not adequately explain the army's development since 1940. The centrality of the presidency and the monolithic ruling party fall short of providing a thorough explanation of why powerful army generals chose to relinquish their power to unarmed civilians and never again as an institution sought to recapture that lost influence. One of the strengths of this dissertation is that it focuses primarily on the internal variables of the Mexican army as opposed to the external factors on which the limited number of available studies on the Mexican army have chosen to concentrate on. This shift in emphasis to the internal facets of the military institution offers a more reasoned approach to studying the Mexican army and to finding the answers to some of the imponderable questions about the general absence of military influence in politics.

During the Miguel Alemán presidency (1946-1952), the tremendous growth in the state apparatus squeezed the army further out of the political picture. And despite what might have been perceived as an unfavorable situation by some military leaders, the National Defense Secretariat had never officially criticized a president or the ruling party since that time.<sup>7</sup> Ostensibly, army leaders accepted that new order because they believed

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<sup>6</sup>Levy and Székely : 39.

<sup>7</sup>Piñeyro, "Modernization" : 126.



it was the mandate of the Revolution, and as loyal and disciplined servants of the institutions, they upheld those changes.

In his important article on civil-military relations in Mexico, Franklin Margiotta proffered some penetrating insights for the success of the civilian leadership's control over the military. In summarizing what have become the widely accepted reasons for the civilian preeminence, he cited the existence of a well-organized political party that had showed a willingness to coopt the military elite and to offer the army a stake in the country's future by making it a partner in the system. Since the 1940s, political leaders have also demonstrated a reasonable concern for the material well-being of the nation's soldiers and have showered those loyal patriots with lavish public praise.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Dzedzic advanced a similar assessment of how civilian leaders exerted their control over the military. Like Margiotta, he emphasized the constant cooptation of the armed forces, but he differed on one count when he alluded to a quasi-psychological factor whereby army leaders, as direct descendants of the Mexican Revolution, perceived of the civilian ruling elite as one and the same with the state.<sup>9</sup>

Although these explanations based on the efficacy of the political system do shed light on the evolution of the army, they do not really explain how the army achieved a consensus to relinquish political power. Dzedzic comes closest to the mark when he discusses the psychological effects of the Revolution on the leaders of the armed forces. The ethos of the Revolution definitely influenced the army's behavioral pattern from the

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<sup>8</sup>Margiotta : 246.

<sup>9</sup>Dzedzic, Mexico: Converging Challenges : 60-63.

late 1920s to the present. The army's contributions and sacrifices during the Revolution have assured it of a permanent position in the system that evolved from that momentous and all-defining movement. The military does not have to intervene in politics to gain a share in the system; it has already been fully integrated into the system. On account of the inextricable link between the army and the Revolution, the Revolutionary creed and its accompanying virtues of equality, political freedom, and social justice formed a critical part of a nascent army ideology in the 1920s. In fact, Mexico's soldiers became the true guardians of the Revolutionary mystique, assiduously working to keep the Revolutionary traditions alive and vibrant. This new ideology also preached institutional loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism and abstention from politics. To their credit, the nation's civilian political leaders wisely continued to give the armed forces their fair share of benefits and public praise, constantly reminding the army of its status as a cornerstone of the Revolutionary system.

Since 1940, the army, as an institution, has never challenged the hegemony of the civilian rulers.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it has distinguished itself through its unwavering institutional loyalty. The army has chosen to remain on the periphery of national politics, leaving that responsibility to professional civilian politicians. The concatenation of values that make up the army's creed have advocated restraint in politics and have influenced the army to maintain a relatively apolitical posture. As Chapter Seven pointed out, the army's involvement in politics is mainly confined to the interaction between the Secretary of National Defense (SECDEF) and the president. And armed with new information on

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<sup>10</sup>Boils, Revista Mexicana : 170.

the relationship that exists between these two leaders and on the SECDEF-selection process, the degree of control that the president, as the leader of the legally constituted government, exerts over the army has become clearer and less of a state secret. One Mexican social scientist contends that the army remains totally subordinate to civilian authorities even in the area of national security which is normally a principal domain of the armed forces.<sup>11</sup> Because the Revolutionary army led Mexico out of the anachronistic *Porfiriato* and delivered the country from the Revolution, the army's legitimacy will be recognized for as long as the Constitution of 1917 endures. The army has gained a great deal of its esteem on account of its revolutionary origins and has maintained that respect by rendering invaluable support to the nation through the fulfillment of its missions outlined in the Constitution and the organic law. This dissertation has dissected the role of the Mexican army more thoroughly than any previous study. The aim of this analysis has been to demonstrate the extent of the army's contribution to the overall development of Mexico. One role in particular, civic action, has made a major contribution to the economic well-being of some of the more popular sectors in society. For one thing, the army, through civic action programs, has labored hard and successfully to root itself in the civic culture. In addressing the future role of the Mexican military, a Mexican officer asserted the following:

"The Armed Forces will continue to be a major institution of social change as it spreads new skills, machines, and concepts into the hinterland. Citizens that lead the Armed Forces, enlisted as well as

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<sup>11</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 226.

officers, will increasingly become the driving forces for technical and social innovation in the rural areas."<sup>12</sup>

Civic action has demonstrated its importance in terms of the budget and public relations, but it does not explain the more essential mission of the army, namely, crisis management. The army's significance in that role ensures that it is never taken for granted by political leaders. Despite this last point, civic action has blended well with the Revolutionary ethos, and the daily practice of that role has helped with the consolidation of the army's ideology in the post-1940 period.

As an institution, the army has not changed significantly since the 1940s. It continues to be characterized by very modest budgets, a low political profile, little technical sophistication and a primary mission geared toward preserving internal order. The Alemán administration, although favorably disposed towards the United States, ironically put an end to any possibility of a military alliance with the United States. That policy eased the army down a strictly nationalist path from which its rigid discipline allowed no detours. For example, the army has relied heavily on its own military industry in order to avoid foreign influences in the resolution of the nation's security problems. Although the military industry has experienced its share of technological difficulties in the process, the operation of equipping the army has progressed in a distinctly Mexican design. Some structural modifications and a formal reordering of its missions occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, but the army as an integral unit did not really change. One constant has remained with the institution throughout: that invariable

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<sup>12</sup>Pérez Mendoza : 19.

element has been its ideology. The military values revered in 1940 were no less cherished in the 1980s.

All this suggests some internal dynamic, notably more influential than the political system, has been the driving force behind the army's evolution in the post-Revolution period. Alfred Vagts, a pioneer in the study of civil military relations, has written that tradition predetermines a soldier's behavior and mindset, regardless of rank. Military actions and responses have been mostly decided upon *a priori* as a result of the body of military regulations that must be strictly followed. In most cases, Vagts added, soldiers were generally eager to conform to the established rules.<sup>13</sup> In that regard, a former Mexican army general, who had competed at one time for the position of SECDEF, commented that the Mexican army did not tolerate nonconformity of any kind. There has always existed a unity of purpose and institutional loyalty in the army.<sup>14</sup> His comments had added significance because he made them publicly after he had joined an opposition political party upon retiring from the army.

This dissertation has contributed to the existing literature on the Mexican army by identifying the existence of a Mexican army ideology and by defining that creed in concrete terms. More importantly, this work has begun to give this ideology the attention it deserves by illustrating how that ideology has been the internal dynamic that best explains the army's evolution since 1940.

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<sup>13</sup>Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism, rev. ed. (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959) : 29-32.

<sup>14</sup>Alejandro Caballero, "Ingresó al PRD el general en retiro Alberto Quintanar," La Jornada, 21 September 1990 : 1.

With respect to tradition, the army's ideology abounds with it, and this military heritage has contributed extensively to the conservation and reinforcement of that same military creed. In other words, the army's ideology has nurtured itself and set guidelines as to how the army and its members could act. For example, if army leaders ever decided to move against the government, they would find themselves in an ideological quandary because such action would be classified as counter-revolutionary and a direct contradiction of their ideology. That is not to say it could never happen, but only that it would take a set of extraordinary circumstances to force such an act.

The army's ideology, as this dissertation has shown, has grown stronger with time. In the opinion of one Mexican social scientist who has studied the Mexican military, there has not been even the slightest indication that any individual or group of a different ideological persuasion could influence the army to change its loyal and nationalist stance.<sup>15</sup> The high level of centralized control that accompanies the SECDEF post has been established since the 1940s. Any officer that rises to that position has been inculcated with values such as a revolutionary heritage, institutional loyalty, discipline, patriotism, nationalism and apoliticism. During his long military career, a SECDEF has become especially well versed in the components of the army's ideology, and as the army's official spokesman, he has used most of those virtues to explain and to justify army activities. And to be sure, he serves at the discretion of the powerful civilian president. As SECDEF, he insures that all his subordinates respect and follow the values inherent to that ideology. The SECDEF sets the example and the entire institution lines

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<sup>15</sup>Boils, Revista Mexicana : 182.

up behind him. General Marcelino García Barragán (1964-1970) was the apotheosis of institutional loyalty. His actions during the student turmoil in 1968 left no doubt about the army's commitment to the system engendered by the Mexican Revolution. Nevertheless, this ideology has become so firmly established that not even the SECDEF can change or modify it unilaterally. As a result, the behavior and actions of the SECDEF vary negligibly in terms of ideology from one administration to the next.

Although the effect of the political system on the evolution of the army was qualified earlier--an important finding of this dissertation--it has aided the army's development in a number of ways. Because the system has experienced considerable success since its inception, it has not really had to face a true legitimacy crisis. The student movement in 1968 came very close, but the government never lost control of the situation. In fact, it was the support of the army that salvaged the situation. Even though the army overreacted and was poorly prepared for what took place, its actions did ensure that the country's political power remained in the hands of the ruling civilian elite. Mexico's legacy of relative political stability since the 1930s has helped to nourish the army's ideology. As an integral part of the system, the army has also been immune to legitimacy crises and has not been exposed to the strain of warding off constant criticism of its activities, as have some of its counterparts in Latin America. When the army has performed functions characterized as quasi-political or residual political roles, such as dismantling large anti-government demonstrations or removing peasant squatters from private farm lands, it has not normally undertaken those tasks of its own volition. The government directs the army to engage in such activity under the purview of what the

government considers its constitutionally assigned mission of preserving internal order. However, these politically motivated actions do not equate in any way to political decisionmaking, and so the army retains its relatively apolitical posture. In short, the *status quo* in Mexico has in no way interfered with the perpetuation of the army ideology. In fact, the opposite has been true. The political situation in Mexico actually encouraged the army to continue pursuing the development pattern that had been established for it during the 1940s.

Since 1940, the strength of the armed forces in proportion to the size of the population has declined steadily, with the exception of a brief period in the 1970s (see Table 2-1), and the rationale for this development has been the corresponding decrease in external and internal threats.<sup>16</sup> This dissertation has explained the evolution of the Mexican army through the personalities and contributions of the SECDEFs and presidents who have served since 1940. Along the way, this study has shown how these leaders have employed a singular military ideology to justify army actions and its continued development to the Mexican people. More importantly, it has illustrated how this ideology, which has been identified and defined as a result of a thorough review of army publications, public speeches and interviews with political and military officials, has been a driving force in the overall evolution of the Mexican army since 1940.

This study ends with the completion of the José López Portillo administration in November 1982. Since so much of Mexico's history is governed by the six-year presidential term (*sexenio*), 1982 left enough time to evaluate adequately how the army

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<sup>16</sup>Evolución : 169.



had developed prior to that date. Moreover, the Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado administration (1982-1988) portended some changes within the army that a historian would need more time to evaluate. Among those changes that require additional study are the army's structural reorganization and the pitfalls resulting from greater involvement in the drug war, some of which were discussed briefly in Chapters Six and Seven. The literature on the Mexican army still has relatively little concerning the interaction and competition between the National Defense Secretariat and the Interior Ministry, which has responsibility for public security. In that regard, this work has provided some leads for future research. Another issue that has not been adequately discussed centers on the question of whether or not the army is becoming a caste. The evidence to date is inconclusive, despite certain innuendos suggesting the army is headed in that direction. Both these topics beg for additional research.

Although the 1980s would bring a structural reorganization and a greater involvement in drug eradication and its accompanying pitfalls, the military's modernization has not brought with it a more active political role for the Mexican army. Nor have there been any sociopolitical conflicts on the domestic front that have necessitated a military response.<sup>17</sup> This is not to imply that the army no longer has any political weight. It is just that its political influence tends to be of the latent variety, a point not lost on journalist Alan Riding. He wrote that many politicians remain nervously suspicious of the Mexican army and recognize that the army could become more assertive at any

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<sup>17</sup>Aguilar Zinser : 229-232.

time.<sup>18</sup> The coup scare of 1976 (see Chapter Six) is a good example. In hindsight, the rumors of possible political involvement by the military proved highly inflated, even though they were taken seriously by many high-ranking officials for a few short weeks.

Despite this wariness toward latent political power, there is no real cause for alarm. There exists no evidence to suggest that the army will deviate from the path it has dutifully followed since the 1940s. To the contrary, since the Revolution, the army has steadfastly supported the noble tenet of "the country comes first," and the army's ideology will guarantee that the institution's future is guided by the same norm.

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<sup>18</sup>Riding : 93.

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