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National Security and Public Safety Challenges for 2000

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A CHANGING COUNTRY

In the last 10 years, Mexico has undergone a series of reforms that have changed the foundations of its postrevolutionary political-economic model. The opening up of the economy and democratization have been accompanied by fresh ideas that have formed a new mesh of national interests, leading in turn to a new conception of national security. This conception, how-

ever, is still hazy and includes a series of points that must be clarified.

A renewed conception of Mexican national security must place more emphasis on the novel elements that today threaten the country's ability to produce itself. The new century and the administration that comes out of the July 2000 elections are a propitious context within which to answer three major questions: Regardless of political differences, what parts of the national project are vital for our survival as a national community now and in the future? What role does Mexico want to play on the world stage,

taking into account geographical determinism and our own room for manoeuvre? What factors could disturb or present difficulties or obstacles to achieving national goals?

Obviously, there is no single or easy answer to these three questions. What is needed in the new century is to arrive at consensus that strengthen the nation, making sure it is not rudderless at a time in which the redefinition of issues as delicate as the relative obsolescence of the nation-state and limited sovereignty are on the agenda. The idea of national security in the most general sense is related

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to a process of achieving shared objectives, called the national project, by the community as a whole.

A NATIONAL PROJECT FOR 2000

Redefining the outlines of the Mexican national project is the precondition for broadening out the content of Mexican national security. The national project could be changed in four ways: through a revolution that would found a new national pact; the collapse of a form of national organization; a change in the international situation; or a succession of reforms decided by political pact that would make qualitative changes in national goals. In Mexico, the change of the postrevolutionary national project is due mainly to a change in the international situation with sharpened globalization. But it has also been determined by the exhaustion of existing economic, political and social forms of organization, which has led to a series of reforms. The direction of national politics, then, stems much more from the need to adapt internally and externally than from a deliberate project and strategy. It is now necessary to introduce the idea of national will into this process of change in order to establish new national objectives with a broad consensus and in this way visualize the conditions needed for this project to become a lasting reality. The recognition of these national objectives must be generalized and explicit, as must the geo-strategic priorities and the values that sustain them. If different sectors have discrepancies about the content of the national project, the project's potential for rallying public support around it will be weakened.

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INTEGRATION OR SOVEREIGNTY THE ETERNAL DILEMMA

One of Mexico's vital interests is to create consensus around the kind of integration it seeks with the rest of the hemisphere, today, when the issue does not seem to be taken with seriousness and depth it deserves. As Anthony Giddens recently said, "The strong state used to be well equipped for war. Today, it should mean something different: a profoundly secure state must accept the new limits of sovereignty."¹ Mexico, for example, has accepted the agenda that came out of the 1998 Summit of the Americas in Chile, but has not yet defined clear limits for its integration. Neither has there been a significant effort to develop the institutional framework to deal with issues that little by little are being taken over abroad, like the fight against drugs, to mention just one example. The redefinition of the concept of national security must inevitably include a reformulation of what sovereignty means in a globalized world. Without an agreement on this level, the national community could tear itself apart in a debate between integrationists and sovereignty conservationists that would only lead us into a blind alley.

From a global point of view, the creation of supranational spaces and institutions is a trend that cannot be ignored and about which awareness must be created



in a first phase. In a second phase, a political pact must be arrived at that simultaneously establishes limits, timetables and safeguards for the process of ceding sovereign decisions. In this scenario of a trend toward integration, of the redefinition of sovereignty and therefore of the very content of national security, Mexico is forced to open an unprejudiced debate about the extent of the process of integration and everything it implies to define its position in the new world context.

THE LACK OF PUBLIC SAFETY A DIRECT THREAT

Clearly, reaching consensus about national goals, national interests and their priorities is not sufficient for defining a nation's strategy. The adverse factors that keep a country from achieving its objectives must also be demarcated in order to find the means to reduce, contain or eliminate them.



The evolution of the risks to Mexican national security is marked mainly by the increasing lack of public safety, which directly threatens national life and harmony. The information about this is horrifying. Suffice it to say that kidnapping has become a cancer that threatens all sectors of society. Auto theft has also reached alarming figures. In the first 10 months of 1999, almost one million crimes were reported, an important percentage of which included the use of violence. Matters have become so serious that President Ernesto Zedillo himself has recognized it in presenting a rather bleak diagnosis of the situation in his last annual address to the nation.

It is with great regret that I recognize that the state has not dealt with this demand [public safety] of the Mexican people. And I am speaking of the state in its broadest sense, since in matters of public safety, clearly the three branches and levels (federal, state and municipal) of government share the respon-

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sibility. More than 90 percent of all crimes committed come under the jurisdiction of the states. We have had to deal tenaciously with problems like inadequate legislation; obsolete institutions also tainted with criminal activities and corruption; and the lack of resources and good programs. Faced with these grave problems, the federal government has by no means been passive.²

President Zedillo has dealt with this grave threat with intensive organizational efforts. His listing of the government's legal, budgetary and organizational efforts is eloquent:

In the past five years there have been five reforms of existing legislation and eleven new laws have been passed dealing with public safety and the justice system. This year, the federal and state governments are investing 9 billion pesos in public safety. This is more than twice in real terms what was invested last year and almost triple the 1997 figure. In addition almost 70 percent of these resources are being administered by the state and municipal governments on the condition that they apply precise programs to clean up their district attorneys offices and police departments, to train their agents and to modernize their equipment. Simultaneously, the federal government is also strengthening its security forces. The Federal Preventive Police force has been created with new mechanisms for hiring, training

and control to detect and avoid the infiltration of negative elements. But we will begin to win the battle against crime very soon. Very soon we will begin to reverse the trend toward criminality and insecurity that we have experienced in recent years.³

The administration that will end in 2000 has been characterized, then, by its design of new structures, laws and police forces and by exponentially increasing the resources put into the fight against crime. These efforts may not bear spectacular fruit in the short term because many of the institutions —particularly the Federal Preventive Police— will have a maturation curve. Time, however, will undoubtedly be a factor that will up the pressure. The Zedillo administration started out proposing a body of municipal, state and federal governments to coordinate efforts in these matters, the Public Safety Council, and it is concluding by launching operations of the Federal Preventive Police. These efforts should show some first results soon, particularly with regard to cleansing government law enforcement agencies of corruption and in the fight against organized crime. Otherwise, the phantom of violence would become the main threat to national stability. If during 2000, people's perception of safety does not increase, public insecurity will become the worst threat to the stability of Mexico's young democracy and, therefore, the main driving force behind political involution. **VM**

NOTES

¹ Anthony Giddens, *La tercera vía* (Madrid: Taurus, 1999), p. 154.

² Ernesto Zedillo, "Mensaje a la nación," *V Informe de Gobierno* (Mexico City: September 1, 1999).

³ *Ibid.*