

# Reviews

## **La seguridad nacional en México y la relación con Estados Unidos**

(National Security in Mexico and Relations with the United States)

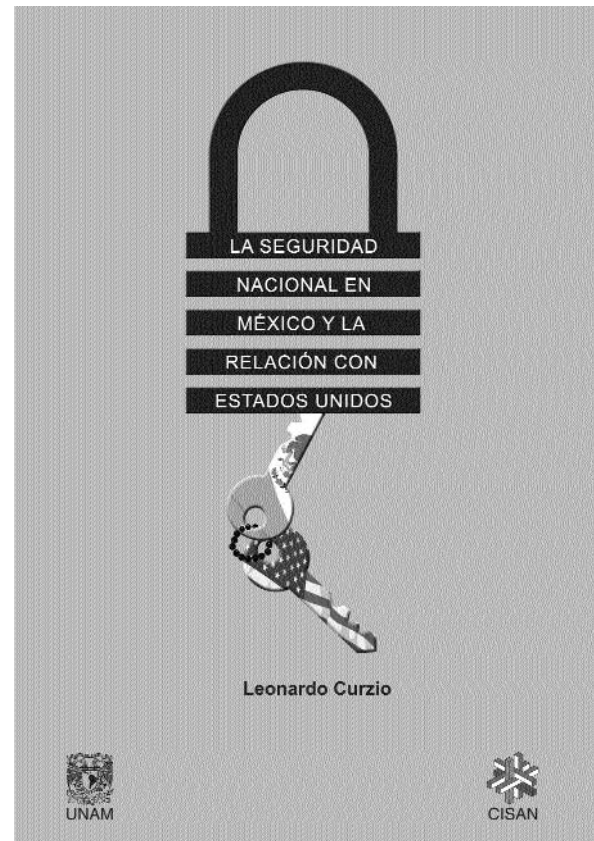
*Leonardo Curzio Gutiérrez*

CISAN-UNAM

Mexico City, 2006, 182 pp.

One of the most frequently mentioned themes in political and academic literature is national security. This is not mere chance if we think about the interest the topic creates: when someone mentions that this matter or the other is a question of national security, it gets the attention of the listener almost immediately. So, for the interested reader, it has become a challenge to find trustworthy, professional sources contributing valid elements for analysis that do not get lost in a sea of meaningless points.

Fortunately, we can say there is a new trustworthy source: *La seguridad nacional en México y la relación con Estados Unidos* (National Security in Mexico and Relations with the United States), by Dr. Leonardo Curzio, published recently by the UNAM's Center for Research on North America (CISAN). It is destined to become an obligatory reference book for scholars of



the topic since it combines simplicity and complexity very well while presenting us with a panorama of Mexico's national security.

In its six chapters, the book goes from the explanation of the basic concepts to the most complex ideas about the present and future of the Mexican case, covering along the way the most outstanding authors on this issue in our country and abroad.

It is precisely the book's methodology that makes it attractive: little by little it accumulates the analytical tools needed to clarify the issues it takes up until, at the end, the reader realizes he/she has before him/her a solid, clear panorama of Mexico's national security and its role in our relationship with the United States.

Starting with the introduction, the author says that the most important thing for our country in this regard

is the clarity the governmental sphere must bring to its relationship with organized groups and the general population, given that the non-transparency of the idea and practice of national security has made the topic alien and even frightening for some sectors of society. It is only recently that the systematic and even excessive mention of security has begun to diminish the distancing from something that is actually very pertinent to the population at large. This is because the state must guarantee citizens' lives, property, the territory they live in, food, etc.; in other words, national security is something that cannot be taken away from the members of the nation.

In the first chapter, "Las opciones de México" (Mexico's Options), the author analyzes the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first. He examines in detail the factors that led our country to go from a nationalist, autarchic, quasi-xenophobic model to a cosmopolitan nation with open borders and without tariffs. All of that has not only changed the material conditions of Mexicans and the country's political structures, but has also forced us to reformulate the way we relate to each other and —what is even more important— to reconsider the model of the nation we are, what we are and what we want to be.

With this as background, in the second chapter, "Estado, soberanía y seguridad nacional" (State, Sovereignty and National Security), the author takes the reader through the analysis of the concepts usually utilized to study national security. He clarifies a panorama that might otherwise be unintelligible and contributes the information needed to understand the role played by the state, the nation, sovereignty and security itself. Thus, at the end of this analysis, we can conclude that Mexico needs to reformulate its national project to be able to firmly define its national security.

Thus, with historic and conceptual foundations firmly established, Leonardo Curzio begins the inductive analysis that goes from "Seguridad nacional de México" (Mexico's National Security), chapter three, to "Los tres planos de la seguridad: el nacional, el bilateral y el hemisférico" (The Three Levels of Security: National, Bilateral and Hemispheric), chapter four. Along the way, he examines things like what prerequisites the concept of national security must fulfill in order to be assimilated and supported by the nation as

a whole, like being: 1) socially acceptable; 2) politically correct; and 3) culturally unifying. He also points out that the quest for security must be carried out around national objectives that must be both clearly established and organized into three categories: 1) vital; 2) political organization and the state; and 3) social. These objectives must be lined up around the satisfaction of national interests, which are classified as 1) vital; 2) critical; and 3) serious.

The result of applying this conceptual apparatus to our country is a diagnostic analysis of the vulnerabilities that make Mexico suffer from severe deficiencies and face security challenges. This study is one of the things the reader will appreciate in this book.

"Security is something that is valued when it is lost," writes the author when analyzing current relations in security matters among Mexico, the United States and countries of the Western Hemisphere in general. He clarifies why Mexico and all the nations of the hemi-

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sphere lack common security reference points and how this fosters the preponderance of unilateral policies, which has made all attempts at coming to an agreement fail, especially since September 11, 2001.

For all these reasons, the Mexico-U.S. security agenda, dealt with in chapter five, seems to be forgotten, since domestic political issues in the United States and its war against terrorism have more weight than the need to broaden and deepen cooperation with its neighbors and trade partners.

Finally, chapter six explains why there is an "Elogio de las diferencias" (In Praise of Differences) in North America, and brings us face to face with the fact that, even though we have everything we need to be more than just trade partners and to advance in building a unified region, even in matters of security, Mexico, the United States and Canada have instead become bogged

down in the false security-prosperity dilemma. This means that the challenge is to understand security not as an individual and national matter, but as an opportunity to create a region whose members can overcome their deficiencies and successfully take on the challenges. So, for our country, the task is to find the arguments and carry out the policies needed to convince the United States that we are indispensable in the North American regional security equation.

This book has what it takes to have an important impact in its target area of studies: simple but at the same time profound language; a tight-knit but broad historic vision; a sophisticated but pedagogic analysis; and something no less important, which is that its ideas

are clear and certain at the same time that they border on the polemical. The content and references are so learned that the schools where future national security analysts are being educated would do well in using it as a textbook. **MM**

*César Villalba Hidalgo*

**Professor at the UNAM School of Political  
And Social Sciences Center for  
International Relations**

### **Writing Toward Hope. The Literature of Human Rights in Latin America**

*Marjorie Agosín, ed.*

Yale University Press

New Haven and London, 2007, 639 pp.

September 11, 2001, very much alive in the world's memory today as a dramatic date is, in fact, historically speaking, the "other" September 11. In its death-marked tragic nature it was preceded, in 1973, by "the day the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende was toppled by Chilean military forces, backed by the intervention of the CIA." This date also marked the beginning of a period in Latin America to which the present book bears witness by compiling a wide range of different writings, poignant testimonials of (un)known moments of anger, fear, truth, justice, peace and, of course, hope.

A book such as this one constitutes an assertion of the intrinsic need, more so than ever in these, our post-September 11, 2001 times, to activate the politics of memory in unprecedented directions. One of the core messages of *Writing Toward Hope* is, indeed, the urgent need to address selective historical amnesia.

As editor Agosín states with great clarity of purpose in the introduction, "This anthology presents an impor-

tant group of literary voices specific to Latin American culture. The voices are varied and from many countries, but they have much in common. All respond to an understanding that collective history is an experience that affects all citizens dominated by authoritarianism and fear. All share an ethical and artistic vision born of the peculiarities of political violence and social injustice. The clear understanding that the personal is political and historical is one of the principal components of this literature which denounces through realistic and direct rhetoric or through ambiguous and subtle poetry."

It seems *à propos* that in these times, riddled with overt and subtle new forms of sustained and reiterative fear, at present no longer circumscribed solely to Latin America, having reached, on September 11, 2001, further north into the American hemisphere, that these writings are now being made available to the reader, lured by a single yet highly charismatic concept: "hope."

It seems relevant as well as significant today to have access to a compilation that aims to bring together a wide range of texts that are, in one way or another, centered on human rights issues (implemented, in case we have forgotten, "by a group of Western nations in response to the moral crimes that occurred during World War II") through literary and testimonial prisms. For at