

Fifth Report of the Observatory on the National Guard and Militarization in Mexico

As president-elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador retracted his anti-militarist discourse and stipulated in the National Peace and Security Plan 2018-2024 that, due to the lack of professional police institutions capable of facing the challenge of insecurity, it was necessary to continue using military institutions in the fight against crime. With this premise, López Obrador has promoted a militarization such as the country has never known in its modern history, creating a military National Guard (NG) and involving the Armed Forces in various civilian tasks. The government has provided contradictory and incomplete information on this accelerated militarization process. It was for this reason that the Observatory of the National Guard and Militarization in Mexico was created, composed of a group of academics, journalists and experts, as well as civil society organizations.

The following is a summary of the information gathered five years after the NG began operating, through official sources (bulletins, reports and communiqués), local and national media, and requests for access to information from different federal security agencies.

1. Integration

- The increases in the force strength of the NG correspond, for the most part, to “transfers” of military elements from the Secretariat of National Defense (SND) and the Secretary of the Navy (SN), to the Secretary of Security and Citizen Protection. Until 2022, we knew that of the total number of active elements of the NG, 71% came from the Armed Forces. However, by 2023, the information could not be updated.

Armed Forces personnel assigned to the NG from 2019 to 2022				
Year	Elements from SND	Elements from SN	Total NG elements	Percentage of military elements in the NG
2019	48,771	9,410	74,473	78%
2020	59,843	13,528	98,282	75%
2021	62,135	16,792	99,946	79%
2022	76,400	14,541	128,233	71%

Source: based on the requests for information with folio number: 330026423000108 and 330026623000859.

- When asked through transparency requests, the NG responded that, by 2023: “there is zero record of NG elements that were transferred by SND and SN”.
- In addition to this type of inconsistent answers, by 2024 the NG has not fulfilled its obligation to issue its annual work report.

2. Training and certification

- If the military in guard duties are to perform police functions, they must be subject to the definitions of the Professionalization Guiding Program and accredit subjects such as: first responder, police ethics, human rights, detention and driving of persons, attention to victims and police mediation.
- The government has presented inconsistent information on the number of NG elements supposedly graduated from the initial training courses.

Graduates from initial training courses	
Year	Number
2020	24,560
2021	25,620
2022	23,511
2023	34,602
Total	108,293

Source: based on the requests for information with folio number: 332259823000745 and 332259824000758.

- On the other hand, the Unified Police Certificate (UPC) is a document that should certify that police officers are apt to enter or remain in public security institutions, and that they have the knowledge, profile and skills necessary to perform their duties.
- The latest available data indicates that the UPC had been granted to 96,732 members of the NG, without any way or instance to verify it. If this figure is true, it means that five years after the beginning of operations, 74% of the NG members have the UPC. In any case, according to an agreement of the National Public Security Council, by May of this year the total number of NG elements should have been certified.

3. Deployment

The operational deployment of the NG should correspond to the incidence of crime in the entities. However, at the end of 2023, the largest number of NG elements was concentrated in Mexico City (5,253). Among the states with high levels of incidence that have a similar or lower number than Mexico City are: Guanajuato, Baja California, Michoacán, Zacatecas and Tamaulipas.

4. Resources

- The budget allocated to the Armed Forces has reached historic highs, while federal support for police development has seen minimal increases or stagnated, in addition to the fact that the bulk of the federal public administration has suffered severe budget cuts.
- For 2024, 67 billion 526 million pesos were approved for the NG (14 times what was allocated in 2020), 247 billion 551 million for SND (121% more than in 2023), and SN received 68 billion 596 million (64% more than in 2023).
- Overall, the Armed Forces' budgets reached 383,673 billion pesos in 2024, making it the third largest budget, only behind the Secretary of Welfare and the Secretary of Public Education.
- At the same time that its budget has increased, the income of the Armed Forces has increased its resources through other means; for example, through the transfer of the budgets of at least 267 civil attributions and agreements with federal and local institutions; through trusts without organic structure; controlling at least 30 companies of majority state participation created during this six-year term; or through the administration of the Mayan Train, the control of several ports and airports, or the operation of an airline.
- There is no positive relationship between increased resources and greater effectiveness. In the last National Census of Federal Public Security of INEGI it was reported that, during 2022, the NG made only 2,814 people available for the alleged commission of crimes.

5. Military elements in the civilian sphere

- As of today, 15 state public security secretariats are headed by military commanders: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Colima, Guerrero, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz and Zacatecas.
- In addition to holding the post of Undersecretary of Security and Citizen Protection and the National Intelligence Center, 1,237 members of the Armed Forces hold positions as secretaries, directors and administrators in local corporations.
- In addition to public security and the management of ports, airports, customs and the Mayan Train, they also hold positions in various offices of the National Migration Institute, the Biological and Reactive Laboratories of Mexico (Birmex), and various offices of the ISSSTE.

6. Alleged human rights violations

- From January 2019 to May 2024, SDN, SN and the NG accumulated 4,800 complaints for alleged human rights violations: torture, forced disappearances, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and arbitrary detentions allegedly committed by their elements.
- According to NG reports, from 2020 to 2023, none of its members were criminally sanctioned.

- There are allegations of espionage by the Armed Forces against activists, human rights defenders and journalists. Ratifying its subordination to the Executive, the National Human Rights Commission pointed out, in a communiqué, that there was no evidence that the federal government or any entity of the same carried out this type of activities.

7. Effects of militarization

- The NG has not produced results that have had a significant impact on the situation of chronic violence and impunity in the country.
- The danger of a greater number of human rights violations increases.
- The growth in functions and budgets of the Armed Forces occurs to the detriment of the local police.
- Given the opacity of the Armed Forces, the risk of corruption increases.
- Military protagonism is not compatible with a democratic system defined by the preeminence of civilian institutions. Particularly worrisome are the partisan expressions of high-ranking military commanders and threats by military officials to judges and judicial officials.

8. Proposals to reverse militarization

- To design and build a fully civilian federal police force.
- To restore and increase federal and local budgets for police development.
- To limit and redirect the budget of the Armed Forces towards the fulfillment of their primary tasks of modernization and national defense.
- In those cases in which their support in security is indispensable, the sentence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights should be complied with, in the sense that such participation should be extraordinary, regulated, supervised, subordinate and complementary.
- To design with the Armed Forces a plan of withdrawal to the functions of an armed force in a democracy. Carry out a critical review of the organic laws of the Armed Forces in order to specify and limit the scope of their responsibilities in times of peace, including:
 - Internal security functions.
 - Disseminate detailed information on its budget and development processes in a transparent and accessible manner.
 - Formalization of mechanisms for interaction with civil society and human rights organizations through public consultations, roundtables and openness to receive complaints from citizens.
- To strengthen the role of Congress to oversee and even investigate the work of the agencies involved in public security, internal security and national security.
- To reestablish the autonomy of the National Human Rights Commission.