

Contributor Profile: Mexico

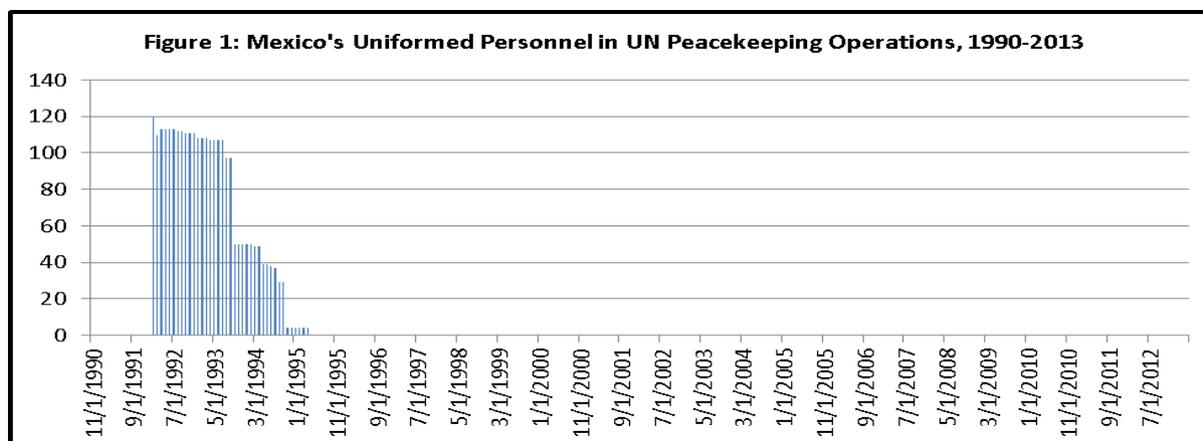
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Active armed forces ¹	Helicopters*	Defense Budget	Uniformed Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
270,250	Multi-Role: 60	2011: \$62.8bn (0.53% of GDP)	None	None	None
World Ranking (size): 19	Intelligence, surveillance & reconnaissance (ISR): 14	2012: \$68.9bn (0.52 % of GDP)			
Army 200,000	Search & rescue: 4				
Navy 58,500	Transport: 197 heavy; 45 medium; 99 light				
Air Force 11,750	*Combined equipment for all services (army, navy and air force)				
Paramilitary 9,500					
Defense Spending / Troop: ² US\$19,000 (compared to global average of approximately US\$68,000)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

The UN has always played an important role in Mexican foreign policy. Mexico was a founding member and actively participated in the San Francisco conference that led to its creation. Mexico was fully committed to the Allies' effort during World War II (having deployed forces to Asia) and its contribution was rewarded in 1946 when Mexico was elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Since 1946, Mexico has participated in all major UN bodies and has been among the world's major contributors to the UN regular budget. In fact, it is Latin America's largest provider of assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping operations (0.47% of the total assessment for the 2013-15 period).³ Yet, not one single military Mexican peacekeeper has been deployed abroad under a UN mandate since 1950. Instead, Mexico has only deployed a small number of civilian police officers between 1992 and 1995 (see figure 1).



Aside from deploying two military observers to Kashmir during the 1950s, Mexico's diplomacy has long been characterized by caution and distaste for anything that violates the principle of non-intervention. During the Cold War, Mexico tended to be a passive player, rarely involved in high politics and often abstaining from sending troops abroad. This is not to say that Mexico was indifferent to the main issues of international security, as it played a relevant role in promoting nuclear disarmament (for which Mexican Ambassador to the UN Alfonso García Robles shared a Nobel peace prize in 1982 with Sweden's Ava Myrdal) and pacifying Central America in the 1980s. However, during the Cold War, Mexico was extremely selective in its international security policy, often discriminating against the UN peacekeeping system. In other words, it did not perceive or view UN peacekeeping as an ideal forum to express its interest or show commitment; this often translated into a passive, mostly defensive, and at times legalist multilateral policy.

In the 1990s, Mexico served as host and third-party mediator in the peace and reconciliation efforts in El Salvador and Guatemala. Indeed, the peace agreement that ended the civil war in El Salvador was signed in Mexico City in 1992. The so-called Chapultepec Palace Peace Accords (for the Mexican landmark building in which the agreement was eventually signed) led to the establishment of the UN Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). UN observers were tasked with monitoring a ceasefire agreement between representatives of the Salvadoran government and the rebel Farabundo Martí Liberation Movement (FMLN). However, when El Salvador requested Mexican peacekeepers to support its peacebuilding process, Mexico refrained from deploying soldiers and instead sent members of the judicial police to instruct the newly formed Salvadoran national police on the "finer points of corruption."⁴ This was the first and last time that Mexico supported UN operations with uniformed personnel in the post-Cold War era.

The election of Vicente Fox as president in 2000 brought significant changes to Mexico's foreign policy. To signal the arrival of a new democratic era, after almost 75 years of authoritarian rule under the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), Fox eagerly approved Mexico's non-permanent candidacy for the UN Security Council in 2002-2003. This was a radical change from previous administrations, which until then had refrained from participating in the Council; serving on the Security Council only twice, in 1946 and again in 1980-1981. The Fox administration navigated through the UN system with relative success; hosting the 2002 UN International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, presiding the Security Council over one of its most critical periods (the 2003 Iraq war), and opposing US efforts to use force against Saddam Hussein's regime. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Mexico approved the establishment of several UN operations and authorized the expansion of many others. In spite of Mexico's diplomatic activity at the UN, Fox did not commit Mexican troops for UN peace operations.

When President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006 he followed the legacy of his predecessor (like Fox, Calderón was a member of the conservative National Action Party). In 2009-2010 Mexico served, once again, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Yet again there was substantial diplomatic activity in UN fora: Mexico presided over the Council in mid-2010, during the Iraq-Turkey flotilla crisis in Gaza,⁵ and hosted the 2010 UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún. Moreover, Mexico pledged \$10.5 million in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake and provided humanitarian and logistical support to the UN (mostly by shipping aid and refueling flights and cargo ships en route to Port-au-Prince).⁶ But troop deployments for UN peace operations remained elusive. The Calderón administration relied heavily on its armed forces for multiple law enforcement and

anti-drug trafficking operations in Mexico and did not commit one soldier to UN peacekeeping.

Enrique Peña Nieto was sworn in as president of Mexico in December of 2012, amidst growing criticisms about his party's electoral tactics, which include clientelism and pork barrel politics. Peña Nieto's election brought the PRI back to power after a twelve-year hiatus. In recent months, the new administration has shown a zealous desire to change gear in Mexico. Unlike Calderón, whose trademark policy was to deploy thousands of soldiers in Mexico's streets to combat drug traffickers, Peña Nieto has put an emphasis on economic reform and free trade. It appears the new government is attempting to modify the conventional wisdom in the United States that Mexico is a failing state by using its "new" status as an emerging economy to induce change (Mexico is the 12th largest economy in the world, the United States' second largest trading partner, and Latin America's top exporter, 11th in the global ranking, surpassed only by China and South Korea in the developing world). Hence, the new official rhetoric is that Mexico is no longer the "new democracy in town," but rather the "new emerging power." This might translate into a new phase of foreign policy activism, but it is still uncertain if this will involve troop commitments for UN peacekeeping. Peña Nieto may decide to withdraw troops from Mexico's streets and reconsider UN deployments as a means to improve his country's external image. This measure, however, will require a Constitutional amendment to allow troops to be sent overseas for missions other than war. On the other hand, Nieto's administration might return to the old isolationist model that characterized the PRI regime, which often quartered soldiers and rejected UN invitations to participate in peace operations.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

Mexico has a presidential system with the executive branch vested with the power to conduct foreign and defense policy, and with a career Foreign Service, complemented by an intermediate number of political appointments. In Mexican politics, there is a tacitly agreed division of labor between soldiers and diplomats. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (also known as the *Cancillería*) abstains from interfering in national defense debates as long as the military refrains from meddling in diplomatic affairs. This division of labor was so explicit and institutionally embedded that Mexico did not even appoint military attachés to its UN mission in New York until late in the Calderón administration. Until 2010, Mexico did not have military representatives negotiating at the UN DPKO, where peacekeeping issues are often discussed among colonels and diplomats.

In dealing with UN peacekeeping topics, the will and policy preference of the *Cancillería* are largely irrelevant. The decision on whether Mexico will join a UN peace mission relies on the executive branch and two strong, federal, and autonomous ministries: the Army, also known as the Ministry of Defense or Sedena, and the Navy, also known as Marina. The most senior army general heads Sedena, while the most senior navy admiral leads the Marina. The complete absence of a civilian-led Ministry of Defense means that the military reports directly to only one civilian institution: the President. The Mexican armed forces have thus sufficient institutional autonomy to craft their own missions. Since the military was not in power during the PRI era, the democratization of Mexican politics in 2000 did not modify defense policy itself; it simply altered party politics, but not civil-military relations. The Air Force and especially the Army continued to focus on their domestic missions, consisting essentially of maintaining order, providing public services in rural communities, containing revolutionary movements (such as the Zapatista movement in Chiapas and elsewhere), and halting trans-national organized crime (mostly anti-drug trafficking). In the past years Mexico

has witnessed an emerging debate regarding the advantages of participating in peace operations. Diplomats in the *Cancillería*, not surprisingly, have led the debate. However, the armed forces (especially the Army) remain vehemently opposed to any form of peacekeeping participation (see below). Ultimately, Army generals have the last word if they do not want to commit troops to the UN.

Committing troops abroad requires approval from Mexico's National Security Council as well as from the Senate, neither of which is automatic. Approval from the National Security Council has not taken place, among other reasons, because the head of Sedena is part of it and decisions within the Council are made by consensus. Sedena representatives thus hold veto powers and oppose any sort of UN engagement, even if it does not entail Army soldiers. Likewise, Sedena can effectively lobby Congress through its retired officers, many of which now serve as legislators and chair the Senate's Armed Forces and Defense Committee. Hence, the Army has effectively blocked policy debates regarding peacekeeping participation.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political rationales: Political rationales could potentially incentivize Mexico to contribute UN troops in the future. First, there is an increasing desire to improve Mexico's image overseas, after six years of a bloody war against organized crime. The incentive to modify the country's external image could translate into concrete peacekeeping commitments, in which Mexican officials might attempt to use the UN as a forum to reshape the country's identity and match its economic power with its military might. Second, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs perceives Brazil's rise with increased skepticism and Mexican diplomats dispute Brazilian aspirations of becoming a permanent member of the Security Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs thus endorses peacekeeping commitments as a means to counterbalance Brazil's influence at the UN. In other words, regional competition for influence and prestige in Latin America could prompt Mexico to provide peacekeepers. Finally, public opinion in Mexico is slowly shifting. According to a recent survey conducted in Mexico, 48% think their country should participate in UN peace missions (with 36% against), 63% think the UN should engage to restore democracy, 60% believe strengthening the UN should be a foreign policy goal, and 94% believe Mexico should be actively engaged in world affairs.⁷

Security rationales: Mexico does not have security interests beyond the North American region (focused mostly U.S. and Canada) and Central America; as a result security motivations are not strong determinants of participation.

Normative rationales: Mexican foreign policy does not emphasize normative issues beyond non-interference.

Economic rationales: Because military operational costs are much higher than UN reimbursement there are no economic benefits to participation.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Financial costs: Currently, economic factors do not provide strong incentives for Mexico to participate in UN peace operations. Quite the opposite, there is increasing concern that future deployments overseas for peacekeeping might increase operational costs and represent a budgetary burden for the armed forces. Sedena, in particular, has raised questions about budgets and peacekeeping associated costs, such as vaccines, uniforms, and equipment for the mission, some of which are not subsidized by the UN. Peacekeeping provides few

economic enticements for the military, since their operational costs and salaries are much higher than the current UN monthly rate of pay (until recently, approximately \$1,028 per soldier).

The Army is in a less stringent condition, since its budget increased by almost 25% during the last four years of the Calderón administration when it was used to perform anti-drug trafficking and law enforcement tasks. From 2007-2010, Mexico received US\$1.6 billion from the United States (via the [Merida Initiative](#)) to purchase military technology and equipment to improve its fight against drug cartels. Given this relatively generous budgetary environment, the Army has had virtually no monetary or salary incentives to participate in UN peace operations.

Constitutional and legal obstacles: One factor frequently invoked to justify Mexico's reticent policy towards UN peacekeeping is that the Constitution prevents the country from sending troops abroad. There is no constitutional clause allowing units to participate in operations other than war. Furthermore, according to the Mexican Constitution, the executive branch has to conduct foreign policy by observing the following normative principles: non-intervention in domestic affairs, self-determination of nations, the peaceful resolution of controversies, the non-use of force in international relations, the legal equality of states, international cooperation for development, and the struggle for peace and international security.⁸

Although these norms have been widely lauded by Mexican jurists for their altruist nature, they have been criticized for being predominantly legalistic and defensive. Dominant interpretations of these principles have pushed Mexico to abstain from actively intervening in world affairs. That is because it is believed that actions to pacify, stabilize, restore democracy, or prevent conflicts from emerging would undoubtedly lead the country to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states and thus violate the principles of self-determination and non-intervention. According to principle-based explanations, Mexico should place international laws and norms of sovereignty above any other possible objective or consideration. Mexico thus maintains that when designing the mandate for an operation, the principles of the sovereignty and internal jurisdiction of the states concerned must be taken into account.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which often provides public support for UN peacekeeping, does not publicly advocate for extreme adherence to these principles. For instance, in May of 2004, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Luis Ernesto Dérbez declared that: "If we are already financing peacekeeping, then the question that arises is whether Mexico is not being a hypocrite for pouring in money, but not personnel."⁹ A year later, in June of 2005, Patricia Olamendi, the then deputy foreign secretary for multilateral affairs and human rights, publically stated that Mexico might someday contribute personnel to peacekeeping missions.¹⁰

Ironically, it is the Ministry of Defense, backed by Congress, which often uses (and abuses) this normative interpretation of non-intervention in order not to deploy troops overseas. Service commanders and some legislators consider that constitutional provisions prevent Mexico from committing troops. From their perspective, future deployments would require a constitutional amendment. This claim, however, is questionable. Mexico's participation in the UN mission in Kashmir in the 1950s (2 peace observers) did not require congressional approval, since observers participated as individuals (not as units or troops), who were lent to the organization through a simple request for a leave of absence. Only the deployment of

troops (not individuals) requires Senate approval, but as of today, no legislation has been introduced in the Congress to allow military units to serve in UN peacekeeping.

Resistance in the military: The crux of the problem lies in the military. However, the armed forces do not have a unified voice on the matter. The Navy, with more international exposure than the Army, but with fewer personnel, seems to be supportive of Mexico's involvement in peace operations. Many reasons are cited by Army generals for not providing UN peacekeepers. First, it is argued that Mexican soldiers do not fulfill UN foreign language requirements for observational posts, since English courses have never been part of the mandatory military curricula. Second, there are serious concerns about over-stretching missions when the military is already engaged in multiple operations at home, including anti-drug trafficking campaigns and policing major urban locations, such as Monterrey, Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. Third, the Army has shown anxiety about Washington's increased involvement in Mexico's anti-narcotics policies. From the Army's perspective, peacekeeping is yet another attempt to de-nationalize Mexico's defense strategy, in which international actors (such as the UN) would have a stake in Mexican defense policy. Finally, and most importantly, the Army is feeling edgy due to widespread accusations of human rights violations committed by its own forces during the implementation of the Calderón anti-drug strategy. Indeed, the relationship between the armed forces and international NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch, has been testy.¹¹ In this context, the Army is naturally hesitant to participate in peacekeeping operations because it fears that such an engagement will expose it to increased international criticism and even allow for future civilian intervention, beginning with diplomats and NGOs meddling in doctrinal and organizational affairs via UN peace operations.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

The new government faces considerable domestic challenges to alter the system of incentives regarding peacekeeping commitments. First, the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto must be able to convince the armed forces that conducting peacekeeping should be part of their mission. This involves modifying the military's cultural predisposition and mission orientation. Externally, the Army has never had the appetite to project power abroad, in part because since World War II, Mexican soldiers have not dealt with any external military enemies. Mexico is too small to fight a war against the United States and too big to battle its small and weak southern neighbors. The Army would then need to internalize peacekeeping as a new externally oriented mission.

Second, domestically the administration has a difficult balancing act to sustain with a divided government. Troop deployments overseas require Congressional approval and Peña Nieto's party (PRI) does not have a legislative majority. A political coalition involving opposition parties is indispensable to overcome current constitutional restraints. President Peña Nieto has been able to push some sweeping economic reforms in Congress by reaching out to opposition parties, but he has yet to introduce military and security reforms. Peacekeeping might not be on top of his political agenda, at least not in the short-run.

Finally, if Mexico were to overcome all these domestic obstacles, where should Mexican troops deploy? The UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is slowly coming to an end and Mexico has no concrete strategic interests in Africa. In view of the cultural and linguistic limitations of Mexican soldiers, deployment options would likely be limited to token contributions of observer posts, and perhaps restricted to a handful of Navy officers.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has publicly advocated for an increased role in UN peacekeeping. Diplomats clearly understand that Mexico's role in world affairs is at stake. However, the opposition led by the Ministry of Defense, which is predominantly staffed by Army personnel, weighs against such diplomatic initiative. The Navy is open and perhaps even prepared to perform peace operations, provided the executive and legislative branches approve such deployments. Congress is equally divided on the matter, with the leftist and nationalist parties (involving members of the Revolutionary Democratic Party and the PRI) advocating against any external intervention, including peacekeeping participation. Likewise, there is limited engagement by NGOs and civil society, which for the most part are focused on domestic violence and human rights within the country.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

Mexico's military does have capabilities to assist mostly humanitarian operations. The Navy has already performed international deployments in support of humanitarian and disaster relief missions in Indonesia, Central America and the US. Navy troops were sent overseas in early 2005 to aid the victims from the tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia. This was then followed by the deployment to Mississippi to aid in relief operations in the wake of hurricane Katrina. More recently, the Navy participated in a humanitarian relief operation in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

The Army too has substantial experience with relief operations and has occasionally assisted other countries. Its most recent international deployment took place during September 2005, when nearly 200 troops (mainly medical personnel and engineers) were deployed to San Antonio, Texas, and set up a mobile hospital and kitchen facilities to assist hurricane Katrina victims (a deployment that did not require Congressional approval). The armed forces have not only the capabilities, but also the know-how to support humanitarian relief missions. They may, however, lack the skills or training to observe truces and ceasefire agreements. Moreover, their policing techniques have been subject to criticism for an over-reliance on an "iron-fist" approach, which emphasizes the use of force first and investigations later.

Part 8: Further Reading

Roberto Dondisch (ed.), *México en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU* (Mexico City: Editorial Debate, 2012).

Arturo C. Sotomayor, "Why Some States Participate in UN Peace Missions While Others Do Not?" An Analysis of Civil-Military Relations and Its Effects on Latin America's Contributions to Peacekeeping Operations," *Security Studies*, 19:1(2010): 160-95.

Arturo C. Sotomayor, "Latin America's Middle Powers in the United Nations: Brazil and Mexico in Comparative Perspective," *International Peacekeeping*, 16:3(2009): 364-78.

Arturo C. Sotomayor, "México y la ONU en momentos de transición: entre activismo internacional, parálisis interna y crisis internacional," *Foro Internacional*, 191-192 (2008): 238-67.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "[Mexico's Candidacy for the UN Security Council](#)" (New York: United Nations).

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from the IISS, *The Military Balance 2013* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2013).

² Defense Spending/Troop is the total defense budget (in USD) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Uses latest figures available from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013*.

³ Mexico's 0.47% contribution is the largest of all Latin American states, surpassing Brazil's 0.322%. See UNDPKO, "[Financing peacekeeping](#)" and for assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in 2013-2015 see [UN General Assembly resolution A/67/224](#).

⁴ See David McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: Reconstructing Police and Military Institutions" in M.W. Doyle, I. Jonhstone and R. Orr (eds.), *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operation in Cambodia and El Salvador* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.282-311.

⁵ See "[Press Conference by Mexico upon Conclusion of Security Council Tenure](#)," (UN Department of Public Information).

⁶ A full list of countries and amounts pledged to Haiti see "Haiti earthquake pledged by country" *The Guardian*, 14 January 2010, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/jan/14/haiti-quake-aid-pledges-country-donations>

⁷ See "[Mexico and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy](#)," (CIDE, Mexico City).

⁸ See paragraph IX of article 89 of the Mexican Constitution.

⁹ See Ana Anabitarte, "Posible hipocresía de México en apoyo a misiones de paz: Derbez," *El Universal*, 12 May 2004: p.1.

¹⁰ Clara Ramírez and Andrea Merlos, "Chocan Los Pinos y SRE," *Reforma*, 30 July 2005: International Section: 2; José Luis Ruiz, "Descarta Fox enviar tropas en misiones de paz," *El Universal*. 13 May 2005:1.

¹¹ See Human Rights Watch, "[Uniform Impunity](#)" (Washington, DC, April 2009).