MERIDA INITIATIVE AND US-MEXICO MILITARY COOPERATION:

ARMED FORCES AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING: THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES BETWEEN NATIONAL SECURITY AND PUBLIC SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The use of the armed forces to struggle drug trafficking has a long history in Mexico. However, the participation of the military in these tasks has been transformed from marginal and restricted activities, in support of the civil authorities (such as drug crops eradication and drug interdiction) to take a central role in the strategy to combat criminal organizations.

Since the Declaration of the "war on drugs" of former President Felipe Calderón, to the present day, the armed forces have participated in missions that blurred the boundaries between national security and public security. On the one hand, the military have been responsible for important captures or deaths of top leaders of criminal organizations, as for example, the death of Arturo Beltran Leyva in 2009 or the recent capture of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, leader of the Sinaloa cartel. On the other hand, the armed forces have been deployed to respond to the citizen’s demands for public security, performance activities in this field, which includes street patrols and permanent presence. The argument that justifies this intervention is that the military are collaborating with civil and police authorities in the preservation of internal order and comply with its constitutional duties of protecting the internal security of the nation.

This paper examines how the progressive participation of the military in combating drug trafficking in Mexico, has blurred the boundaries between national security and public security. Not only because the tasks of the military have been extended, but specially because their presence on the ground of public security is becoming more recurrent due to the inability of the police and civil institutions for guarantee it.