

Vecinos De La Cholla

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Civil Association

The Newborn Mexican National Guard

Any American who travels in Mexico is well aware of the presence of the Mexican military. Unlike in the U. S., the Mexican government uses its army in a variety of security operations within their country. The soldiers man check points on highways throughout Mexico. Some of the check points are permanent facilities one can expect to stop at each trip through their territory. Other check points are mobile units that setup in random sites for a defined time period. There is no permanent check point on Mexican highway 8 between the northern border and Puerto Peñasco; however, temporary check points are set up occasionally on our highway access to Cholla Bay. The soldiers speak very little English, but generally are courteous and polite. The mission of these check points is to seize illegal drugs and firearms. Many of the permanent check points have a "wall of dishonor" where they post pictures of the travelers they have arrested with their illegal cargo. These check points have existed for many years in the entire Republic of Mexico.

In the last few months, you may have noticed the presence of a new branch of Mexican law enforcement and public security, the National Guard (Guardia Nacional). The National Guard was the idea of Mexican President Lopez Obrador and was formalized in May of 2019. The President's idea was a response to the rising influence of criminal drug trafficking organizations. When Lopez Obrador assumed office in 2018, Mexico was victimized by violence not seen since the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century. Former President Felipe Calerón embarked on a disastrous war on drugs in coordination with the American government in 2006. Since then, drug trafficking has proliferated, they have acquired army-type arsenals, have challenged ill-equipped state and local police forces, and have killed and kidnapped thousands of innocent civilians.

The concept of creating the National Guard was to have a national peace keeping force ready to deploy under state and local authority. Due to years of widespread abuse and corruption in local and state police departments, Mexicans trust soldiers far more than police officers. National polls have found that 66% of Mexicans trust soldiers, but only 18% trust police officers. The Lopez Obrador security cabinet was convinced that a National Guard with civilian-military officers and military discipline would be more trusted by citizens. With the creation of the National Guard, the Policia Federal was dismantled, and its personnel was reassigned to the new National Guard. Many army soldiers and navy sailors were transferred as well. By 2024, the National Guard is projected to employ 200,000 soldiers, mainly through new civilian recruits. This number, 200,000, is more than 5 times the number of officers in the former Federal Police force. The training of national guardsmen emphasizes the proportional use of force. They are trained on the use of firearms and non-lethal disabling devices. However, they are outfitted and trained to confront the heavily armed drug cartels. Mexico needed a force with the firepower and capability to take on these criminal groups, but also needed law enforcement trained not to infringe on the common citizen's civil rights. The national guard is under civilian control but does coordinate with the Mexican military.

President Lopez Obrador was convinced the Federal Police Department could not be reformed. There was substantial evidence the department was corrupt and controlled by the drug trafficking cartels. Further, serious allegations of corruption involving Genaro García Luna, the Secretary of Public Security (2006-2012), surfaced early in the Calderón Administration. In 2013, García Luna was listed on the world's 10 most corrupt public officials published in Forbes magazine. But, it wasn't until 2019 that the collusion scheme was revealed. In December 2019, the US Department of Justice arrested García Luna in Dallas. It is the first time that a Mexican government cabinet member (current or former) was charged with a crime. García Luna is still in American custody, accused of taking millions of dollars in bribes to protect notorious Sinaloa drug boss, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán.

The mission of the Mexican National Guard was drastically changed in response to the American threat to impose tariffs on Mexican exports in the summer of 2019. President Lopez Obrador deployed 15,000 guardsmen on the northern and southern borders. The move was welcomed by the American government to curb illegal immigration, but was heavily criticized in Mexico. Soldiers complained they enlisted to protect Mexican citizens from drug cartel violence, not do American dirty work. There have been reports of abuse by guardsmen on both borders, but they remain there rather than confronting the deadly drug violence plaguing Mexican society.

President Lopez Obrador remains committed to the Guardia Nacional. He plans to propose a constitutional amendment to make the National Guard a permanent part of the Defense Department to ensure it would not be eliminated by future administrations. This removes the pretense of a civilian-controlled force that was used to gain approval for its creation two years ago.

The guardsmen on the streets of Puerto Peñasco are not enforcing immigration laws. They are under the command of State and City authorities to enhance the public safety in our city and can act in the same capacity as our local police officers to enforce community laws and regulations.