

The background of the cover is a photograph of a large group of soldiers in green camouflage uniforms and helmets, standing in formation. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark, muted color palette.

**BUILDING
BETTER
GENDARMERIES
IN
MEXICO
AND THE
NORTHERN TRIANGLE**

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Foreword

By Dr. Karen Finkenbinder

Michael Burgoyne has made a valuable contribution to stabilization. The 21st century requires a new way of thinking. U.S. experts such as David Bayley, Robert Perito, and Michael Dziedzic have discussed a security gap in post-conflict and failed states, and promoted ways to close it. The U.S. model of decentralized policing is not it. Rather, as Burgoyne notes, we must look to our partners that have Gendarmerie Type Forces (GTF) – Stability Police Forces.

Though others may be able to do stability policing in the short-term, Stability Police made up of GTF are the best approach. They have extensive expertise and experience policing civilian communities (the latter lacking in military forces), often in high-crime and insecure environments. As Burgoyne rightly observes, “the military lacks expertise in policing and law enforcement which can create a counterproductive outcome when training foreign police forces. Even military police lack the community policing knowledge resident in European SPFs.”

Rather than enable minimally qualified U.S. contractors or use military personnel, the United States should continue to partner with the Center of Excellence for Stability Policing Units (CoESPU) in Vicenza, Italy, an organization that includes GTF officers from many countries and develops international stability police. Similarly, the United States should support the development of the NATO Stability Police Concept that envisions military forces quickly transitioning to stability police who either replace or reinforce indigenous forces. And, the United States should support efforts by the European Gendarmerie Forces (EUROGENDFOR) to enable their deployment in support of European partners.

Security cooperation is a complicated and expensive business and the Department of Defense is trying to do it better. A big leap will be to stick to our knitting and truly partner with those that know what they are doing. Burgoyne has reminded us that we need not do it all ourselves, we have partners that can better support U.S. objectives to prevent security vacuums.

Building Better Gendarmeries in Mexico and the Northern Triangle

By Michael L. Burgoyne

Abstract

Mexico and Central America are facing a serious security crisis caused by powerful criminal gangs and transnational criminal organizations. With little hope for an immediate resolution to the problems of militarized criminal violence, some countries are turning to hybrid organizations, mixing police and military capabilities. Mexico's new government has taken the initiative to form a National Guard that is still not operational but promises to be a unique security force combining both military and civilian security forces. Nascent experiences in Mexico and Central America have much to learn from European models of Stability Police Forces (SPF). The French Gendarmerie, Spanish Guardia Civil, and the Italian Carabinieri offer examples of highly capable SPF that can provide a useful context and learning for Mexico and Central America. These European forces share many common characteristics including: a powerful historical narrative, community policing experience, military capabilities, organic investigative powers, and a symbiotic relationship with prosecutors. Their combination of military capabilities with community policing provides a potential response to militarized criminal threats and was successful during the historical beginnings of European gendarmerie forces. While not all of the characteristics of European gendarmeries are applicable in Mexico and the Northern Triangle, they provide insights into a culture of mentorship and professionalism that can help guide SPF development. Furthermore, a lack of U.S. expertise in SPFs speaks to a necessity to partner with European allies to achieve security cooperation goals with countries developing these types of forces.

Building Better Gendarmeries in Mexico and the Northern Triangle

Security forces in Mexico and Central America are struggling to deliver security in the face of powerful criminal gangs and transnational criminal organizations. Despite more than ten years of security sector reforms and initiatives, Mexico suffered a record 33,341 homicides in 2018 which equates to 25.8 murders per 100,000 people.¹ Likewise, in the Northern Triangle of Central America, composed of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, homicide rates are an astronomical 37.8 per 100,000 citizens.² By comparison, there are 5.3 murders per 100,000 people in the United States.³ The preferred tool for engaging criminal threats is a capable police force. However, Mexico's powerful transnational criminal organizations and Central America's 3rd Generation Gangs, armed with military weapons, have effectively challenged police forces.⁴

Faced with criminal threats that not only endangered public security, but the national security of their countries, governments turned to military forces. Military forces have the firepower and training to defeat criminal groups in combat, but lack many of the skills that make police effective in maintaining the peace. With little hope for an immediate resolution of militarized criminal violence, some countries are turning to hybrid organizations, mixing police and military capabilities.

Bridging the gap between the military and police, Stability Police Forces (SPF) are able to operate in non-permissive environments, such as those found in Mexico and Central America.⁵ SPFs represent a category of forces that includes gendarmeries, carabinieri, and national guards. Although there are concerns that SPFs represent a militarization of the police, they provide an answer to internal threats that defy responses from standard police forces. SPFs are by their nature shaped by the specific conditions present in their countries. However, this study argues that there are common characteristics of highly capable SPFs that should inform policymakers creating SPFs and U.S. security cooperation professionals supporting their development. These characteristics include: a powerful historical narrative, community policing experience that provides unique military capabilities, organic investigative powers, and a symbiotic relationship with prosecutors. In addition, this study recommends that the United States leverage its allies with SPFs to fill a critical gap in its security cooperation efforts.

This study uses a comparative case study approach.⁶ The French Gendarmerie, Spanish Guardia Civil, and the Italian Carabinieri are the most frequently examined SPFs by law enforcement and security scholars and are considered the gold standard of SPFs.⁷ As such, this study examines each of these three organizations using a DOTMLPF-P lens with additional aspects focused on legal authorities and the role of U.S. security cooperation. DOTMLPF-P is a U.S. military acronym designed to examine institutional capabilities. It includes: doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy.⁸ This study provides additional definitional clarity into the composition of functional stability police forces, and extrapolates characteristics that can inform governments developing SPFs and improve the effectiveness of U.S. intervention in the form of security cooperation.⁹

Stability Police Forces

The academic literature has wrestled mightily to define and categorize SPFs. SPFs have been labeled paramilitary forces, militarized police, high-end police, gendarmerie, and constabulary forces. Often SPFs are characterized in contrast with community policing which the U.S. Department of Justice defines as “A philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques between the police and the community.”¹⁰ The terminology used can help shape arguments and perceptions of the forces being discussed. Labeling is part of an ongoing debate about the effectiveness and use of SPFs.¹¹

Benjamin Beede believes that “all police organizations are ‘paramilitary’” which he defines as forces that “resemble both police and military organizations and may supplement or even supplant them.” He further sub-classifies them into “civil, army, military, militarized, and paramilitary” organizations.¹² Beede’s definition is entirely reasonable; however, police scholar Roberto Perito rightly points out that the term originally was coined by British journalists to describe Nazi Brown Shirts and has also been used to describe groups like the Irish Republican Army and other violent organizations.¹³ Painting organizations like the French Gendarmerie with the same brush as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) is inappropriate. The term “militarized police” also provides a strong negative connotation, implying that lightly armed community police have been exchanged for heavily armed troops.

“High-end police” provides a more helpful typology, defined as police that “...fill a critical gap between military forces and civilian police.”¹⁴ The term stability police force emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War where security scholars envisioned the need to police a “new world disorder” where force would be used to restore “public security in war-torn or chaotic societies.”¹⁵ In these situations, deployable police forces gained favor for their suitability in stability operations. Given the level of internal violence present in Mexico and in Central America, stability is an apt mission for security forces operating there. This study accepts a definition proposed by RAND: “An SPF is a high-end police force that engages in a range of tasks such as crowd and riot control, special weapons and tactics (SWAT), and investigations of organized criminal groups.”¹⁶

Often manifest in the use of certain terminology, there is a robust debate on the appropriateness of SPFs in general. For some opponents, SPFs represent a tool of state oppression through the militarization of the police at the expense of community policing and democratic norms.¹⁷ Political scientists Stephen Hill and Randall Beger warn of the dangers of a “paramilitary policing juggernaut” that is a danger to “democratic policing” which focuses on citizen protection and human rights.¹⁸

Proponents of SPFs argue that they are a valuable tool in the current security environment marked by intrastate violence driven by insurgency, civil wars, terrorism, and powerful criminal organizations.¹⁹ SPFs offer the ability to “police the gap” between regular police and the military. They “combine the knowledge of the police and the military, and have an intimate knowledge of crisis management.”²⁰ Transnational organized crime scholar John

Sullivan contends that SPFs “have flexible, expeditionary capabilities and can effectively bridge the demands of community policing, complex investigations, and military (light infantry) operations.”²¹ Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this investigation, SPFs have been effective tools in state formation in Europe where they secured roads, maintained interior security, conducted law enforcement tasks, and allowed weak states to expand their territorial control.²²

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the validity of these arguments in depth. While acknowledging the potential pitfalls inherent in the development and use of SPFs, this study accepts arguments that SPFs do effectively fill a critical security need for situations that exceed regular police capability but are incongruent with military skills and authorities. Although SPFs can operate as a deployable stability force, this study is focused on their ability to operate within their own countries and does not examine their expeditionary capability. Despite the limitations of the study, the examination of these three highly developed SPFs can provide useful data points for further investigation into the control of militarized police forces and capabilities that make them more effective at expeditionary operations. The focus here will be on identifying characteristics that can inform the potential organic development of SPFs in Mexico and Central America, where criminal violence is challenging governments with an “enforcement gap” their security forces struggle to fill.²³

Challenges in Mexico and Central America

On 6 April 2015, a group of 80 armed criminals set up a deliberate ambush position on a local two-lane highway between Puerta Vallarta and Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco. When their target, a convoy of ten state police vehicles, entered their kill zone, they engaged with machine guns, 40mm grenades, armor piercing rounds, and explosives. As a result, 15 police officers were killed.²⁴ This incident, far from an anomaly, is indicative of common military style engagements police face in Mexico.

Mexican police have struggled to respond to the threat posed by transnational criminal organizations and to professionalize as part of the transition to multiparty democracy. The Mexican population has low confidence in their police and the majority believe that they are corrupt.²⁵ Mexico’s “cifra negra,” the estimated percentage of crimes that go unreported or never enter into an initial investigation, is an astounding 93.6 percent.²⁶ Facing increasingly powerful transnational criminal organizations and weak police institutions, Mexican President Felipe Calderón greatly expanded the internal security role of the military in a war on organized crime.²⁷ His successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, also leaned heavily on the Mexican military to fulfill an internal security role. Current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has announced a policy to maintain the military in the streets because “there is not another option.”²⁸

Since the 1990s, Mexican governments have made efforts to reform the police and justice system. However, as one Mexico watcher succinctly put it, there have been “many reforms, little progress.”²⁹ At the municipal and state level, most governments have been unable to professionalize and strengthen their security forces while combating corruption and violence generated by criminal organizations fueled by massive profits from illicit drug

trafficking. Federal efforts included the creation of the Federal Police and a largely unsuccessful effort by the Peña Nieto administration to create a gendarmerie.³⁰ In addition, the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense also increased the number of military police units available for internal security missions.³¹

López Obrador, like his predecessors, is pursuing the development of a new federal police force, this time a “National Guard.”³² The National Guard cleared its initial hurdle in March 2019, when the Mexican legislature approved constitutional modifications enabling its creation. The National Guard will be a civilian institution at least initially formed by the military police, naval police, and Federal Police. It will not be placed under the Secretariat of National Defense, but rather the civilian Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection.³³ Additional laws will be necessary to fully implement the concept including a National Guard law, a use of force law, and a law governing detention powers. However, given López Obrador’s significant political capital, the National Guard is likely to follow the outlines of his security strategy. That points to the Mexican military as the training and force development institution for the National Guard. In addition, the National Guard would be distributed throughout Mexico and play a key role in the coordination of public security at the local and state level.³⁴ It remains to be seen if the National Guard will be another security policy misfire or the future of policing in Mexico.

In the Northern Triangle of Central America criminal violence is rampant and driving disruptive migration to the United States. El Salvador leads the region in homicides with 51 per 100,000 citizens, which is nearly twice the rate in Mexico’s 25.8 per 100,000.³⁵ During a bloody civil war in the 1980s, many Salvadorans fled to the United States, primarily Los Angeles, where young men formed gangs to protect themselves, including the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). When authorities cracked down on the gangs, large numbers of the gang members were deported back to El Salvador. Still recovering from its devastating civil war and reconstructing its institutions, Salvadoran law enforcement was completely unprepared for this new criminal threat.³⁶

El Salvador has attempted several policies to control violence including a truce between gangs and *mano duro* (hard line) enforcement efforts. Security issues are exacerbated by prison overpopulation and high levels of corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary. Like Mexico, El Salvador has turned to its military to provide security and it is estimated that nearly half of Salvadoran military personnel are involved in public security.³⁷ In addition, the government created the El Salvador Special Reaction Force composed of 600 army special troops and 400 national police from specialized police units.³⁸

Honduras, like El Salvador, emerged from the Cold War only to find itself facing large numbers of deported gang members.³⁹ In addition, Honduras occupies a transit zone for illicit drugs that is contested by transnational criminal organizations.⁴⁰ Efforts to combat police corruption resulted in the dismissal of 5,000 police employees and the arrest of the National Police Commissioner.⁴¹

Confronted with limited police capabilities, the Honduran government deployed its military onto the streets and formed the Public Order Military Police (PMOP, *Policía Militar del Orden*

Público) in 2015.⁴² Created by the Honduran Congress, the PMOP has national jurisdiction and is charged with “the defense of citizen security, executing operations oriented at combating organized crime and common crime.”⁴³ Despite these efforts, 25 percent of Hondurans indicated that they or a family member had been a victim of a crime in 2017 and the homicide rate was 40 murders per 100,000 citizens.⁴⁴

Guatemala has a lower homicide rate than its Northern Triangle neighbors at 22.4 murders per 100,000 citizens.⁴⁵ However, as a transit country for cocaine and a heroin producing country, Guatemala faces endemic corruption and drug violence.⁴⁶ Mexican criminal organizations including los Zetas have been active in Guatemala.⁴⁷ Police corruption was so severe that Guatemala invited the United Nations to help by granting investigative powers to the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG).⁴⁸ In 2015, Guatemalan President, Otto Perez Molina, resigned and was tried for corruption.

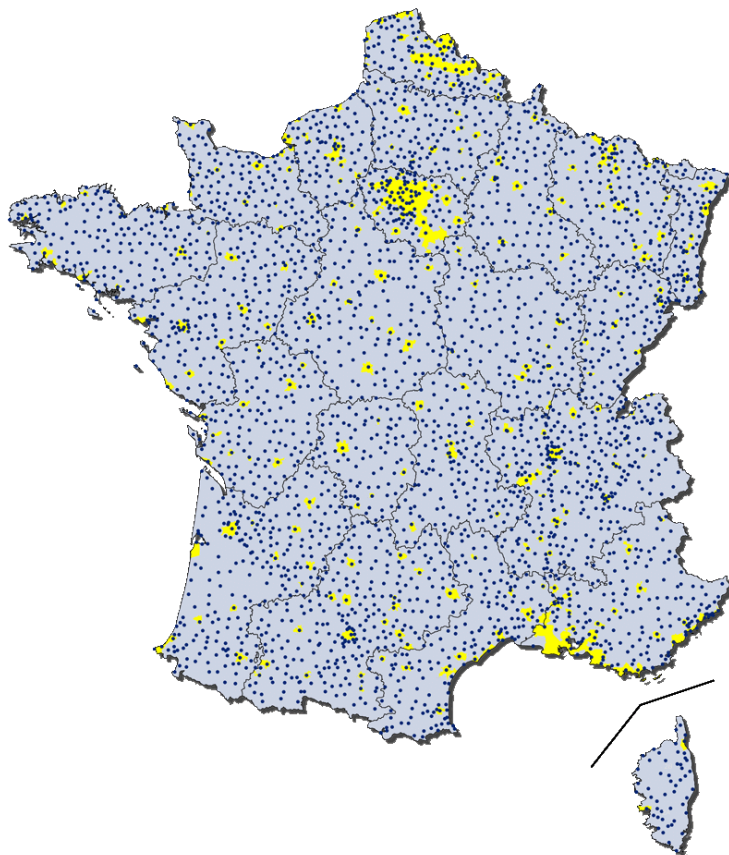
Guatemala has a long history of using the military in an internal policing role. In April of 2018, the government withdrew the military from its 18-year mission in Guatemalan cities supporting the police in law enforcement functions.⁴⁹ However, the military is still active outside of cities in a counterdrug and border security role.⁵⁰

French Gendarmerie Nationale

The French National Gendarmerie is a descendent of the Royal Maréchaussée formed during the 100 Years War (1337-1457). Initially designed to control military troops and bandits, the force would later expand its mandate to policing civilians as well. In 1791, the National Gendarmerie was officially formed by law.⁵¹ During its early history, the Gendarmerie and its predecessor, the Maréchaussée, played a crucial role in state formation and the consolidation of power by the French government over its territory.

The National Gendarmerie’s organization within France is based on its earliest missions securing territory and roadways. The Gendarmerie continues to maintain a hierarchical military structure. There are nearly 3,800 Gendarmerie barracks distributed throughout France. Gendarmerie stations, typically manned by between six and 50 personnel, report to departmental companies which in turn report to departmental groups then to regional headquarters, and finally to the Gendarmerie General Directorate. There are also 109 Mobile Gendarmerie Squadrons available to address civil unrest and reinforce territorial units. In addition, the Gendarmerie maintains special units including the National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN), a highly trained special response unit for high risk and terrorist situations.⁵²

Figure 1. The French Gendarmerie are Distributed throughout Country in Nearly 4,000 Installations⁵³



The National Gendarmerie was originally a component of the French Armed Forces under the French Ministry of Defense. However, in 2009 it was repositioned under the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior manages the Gendarmerie's budget and provides its administrative and operational guidance. Gendarmes, however, do operate under the control of the Ministry of Defense when tasked with providing military police type functions on installations or when deployed for military actions.⁵⁴

The French National Police represent one of two major national police forces in France. These two police corps are operationally controlled through geographic separation. The National Police operates in urban areas and the Gendarmerie operates in suburban and rural areas. This provides a jurisdictional separation of forces that can also be affected by judicial prosecutors that can designate one of the forces to conduct a particular investigation as necessary.⁵⁵

All Gendarmes are judicial police officers and can conduct investigations. In addition, the Gendarmerie maintains specialized investigative sections and brigades, as well as a national-level Institute of Criminal Investigation. These specialized elements provide the

Gendarmerie with state-of-the-art forensic capabilities and scientific tools to process evidence.⁵⁶

The Gendarmerie maintain a hybrid recruitment and training program for its 100,700 strong force.⁵⁷ Enlisted recruits attend eight months of initial training and after four years are eligible to advance to become a non-commissioned officer. Most officers hold a master degree prior to joining the Gendarmerie and then attend two years at the National Gendarmerie Officers School.⁵⁸ Obtaining a position in the Gendarmerie is highly sought after and the Gendarmerie only selects 14 percent of its annual applicants.⁵⁹ Gendarmes can potentially have a long career in the force with retirement set at 58 years old.⁶⁰

The Gendarmerie is primarily a community policing force with its daily focus set on law enforcement and citizen security. Typical gendarmes operate in unarmored vehicles, wearing police uniforms, and carrying small caliber pistols.⁶¹ However, all gendarmes can carry military weapons based on situational requirements. Mobile Gendarmerie Squadrons, with their crowd control mission, are equipped with armored vehicles. Likewise, the GIGN is armed and equipped with military grade weapons and tactical gear.⁶²

Spanish Guardia Civil

Like the French Gendarmerie, the Guardia Civil has a long history of service. The organization was founded in 1844 by royal decree following the Spanish insurgency against the French and the implementation of land reform initiatives that increased the need for rural security. This force would provide protection from banditry and secure the population throughout Spain. The Guardia Civil provided a stabilizing force that allowed a central Spanish government to consolidate its territorial control.⁶³

The largest police force in Spain, more than 80,000 Guardia Civil personnel operate throughout the country and Spanish territorial waters. The Guardia Civil has a military hierarchy consisting of zones, provincial commands, companies, and stations. "Apart from the constant adaptation and modernization, the Guardia Civil has progressively assumed new responsibilities, namely; road traffic control, protection of coasts, borders, territorial waters, seaports and airports, environmental protection, control over weapons and explosives, mountain rescue or counterterrorism."⁶⁴ The force also boasts robust specialized units like the Rapid Action Unit, a maritime element, and aerial units. It is also tasked with the security of the Royal Family and senior government officials.

Since 1986, the Guardia Civil has been under the administrative and operational control of the Ministry of the Interior. Like the Gendarmerie, the members of the Guardia Civil can operate under the Ministry of Defense when performing military police duties or when deployed in support of military operations.

In addition to local police forces, Spain maintains a National Police and the Guardia Civil. Unlike in France, the Guardia Civil operates along side the National Police in rural areas and major urban centers. The two forces have notionally separated responsibilities, however in

practice there is significant overlap. Prosecutors play a key role in deconflicting jurisdiction and prioritizing efforts.⁶⁵

Members of the Guardia Civil are judicial police and can conduct investigations. One of the Guardia Civil's four main divisions is the "intelligence, criminal investigation, and cybercrime division." This element is able to provide forensics and scientific analysis capabilities.⁶⁶

Guardia Civil personnel are developed through a military formation process. Enlisted personnel attend a one-year Guardia Civil course to achieve the basic rank of "Guardia Civil" and after three years can apply to a follow-on course to become a corporal. After two years, corporals can apply for a one-year course to become warrant officers. Officers attend the Spanish army's military academy for two years and then complete three additional years at the Guardia Civil academy. Careers in the Guardia Civil can last until retirement at 65 years of age.⁶⁷

Similar to the Gendarmerie, the Guardia Civil are primarily focused on community policing activities. As such, they patrol in unarmored vehicles with pistols and do not typically operate in tactical uniforms and equipment. The Guardia Civil does not maintain heavily armed mobile units like those found in the Gendarmerie. It does maintain robust air and maritime units. Its Rapid Action Unit saw extensive service in counter terrorism and stability operations during Spanish internal security efforts against the ETA Basque separatist movement. Although only numbering around 500 personnel, the Rapid Action Unit has military grade equipment and armored vehicles. It also serves as the priority unit for military deployment under the Ministry of Defense.⁶⁸

Italian Carabinieri

The Italian Carabinieri was also formed based on the influence of the French. Like Spain, Italy had been occupied by Napoleon's forces. Officially formed in 1814 by the King of Sardinia, the Carabinieri was given a national defense and police role from its inception. Throughout the 1800s, mirroring the French and Spanish experiences, the Carabinieri would play a critical role in the formation of a unified Italian state from a fractured group of kingdoms.⁶⁹

The largest of the three forces examined here, the Carabinieri boast over 100,000 personnel, and like the Gendarmerie and the Guardia Civil, maintain a nationwide presence in order to provide government control over the expanse of the Italian state. Today the Carabinieri occupy nearly 5,000 stations throughout the country reporting to 550 companies, which in turn report to provincial and then regional commands.

Unlike its French and Spanish counterparts, the Carabinieri remain under the Ministry of Defense as a distinct and equal branch of service along side the Army and the Navy. However, the Carabinieri conduct their internal day-to-day operations under the guidance of the Ministry of the Interior. Funding is also split between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense.⁷⁰

The Carabinieri share their internal policing function with a national police force. The Carabinieri operate in rural and urban areas, where the police are primarily focused in the

cities. In addition, city and provincial police forces add to the mix of police operating in the same spaces.

Carabinieri are judicial police and conduct investigations and report to prosecutors who shape the investigative response to crimes. Prosecutors in Italy enjoy a high level of authority and are able to designate which police force is best suited to conduct a particular investigation. Similarly, prefects in Italy provide further guidance to the national level police forces. Prefects act as representatives of the national government and coordinators of police forces throughout Italy. They manage law enforcement activities in their areas of responsibility.

The Carabinieri are unique among the three forces examined in this study in their robust military capabilities. In addition to their widespread community policing presence, the Carabinieri maintains a mobile brigade consisting of seven regiments and five battalions. These units provide an internal policing capability to react to large scale public disorder or emergencies. In addition, a second mobile brigade provides units that can deploy internationally in support of military missions. The “Tuscania” Parachute Regiment is a highly capable Carabinieri unit, equipped and trained exactly like a military parachute infantry regiment, but with personnel trained in police tasks. Italy utilizes this unit in overseas missions and also for patrolling in high risk or austere environments within Italy. An example of this type of mission was the deployment of the unit to Sicily during the Sicilian mafia’s terror campaign against the state in the early 1990s. The Carabinieri also has a Special Intervention Group which provides its counter-terror and high-risk special operations capability.⁷¹

Carabinieri training and recruitment mirrors the Gendarmerie and Guardia Civil. Individuals can enter the Carabinieri as either enlisted personnel, Non-Commissioned Officers (perhaps better translated as warrant officers), or officers. Enlisted personnel attend a six-month course, NCOs attend a three-year course, officers spend two years at the Italian Military Academy and then three years at the Carabinieri Officers’ School to obtain a law degree.⁷²

The Carabinieri point to three characteristics as foundational strengths of their organization: the station sergeant, the Carabinieri role in Italian society, and the diversity of experiences in assignments. Station sergeants command the 5,000 stations located throughout the country and lead small and large organizations in their community-policing role. These senior warrant officers, often with decades of experience, mentor junior carabinieri and are the point of contact for the population with law enforcement. Station sergeants often serve for over ten years in the same station and develop unmatched local knowledge of the people in their areas of responsibility.⁷³

The Carabinieri’s long history in Italy and their tight bond with the communities they serve has been institutionalized in public ceremonies and parades in which the town mayor, priest, and Carabinieri are represented. Under this system, the Carabinieri are an integral part of the daily lives of their communities.⁷⁴

The diversity of carabinieri assignments offers another advantage to their personnel. Carabinieri can move between the more military focused mobile units, organized crime investigations, community policing stations, and stability policing overseas missions. This blend of assignments over a 35 year career provides a varied array of experiences personnel can call upon when facing diverse challenges in Italy or abroad.⁷⁵

SPF Comparisons and Development Recommendations

Each of the three units evaluated in this study have long and storied histories within their countries. These forces are embedded in the culture of their populations and enjoy a strong perception of legitimacy. Obviously, these unique historical experiences are not easily replicated. However, the historical value is derived from the current narrative that describes the unit. If Mexico or its Central American neighbors want to create a functioning SPF, it will require the development of a positive unit culture. Management expert Edgar Schein describes culture as “the accumulated shared learning of a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave related to those problems.”⁷⁶

Organizational change models like the John Kotter’s eight step “leading change” system offer potential strategies to change police organizations. Regarding cultural change, Kotter notes “...the challenge is to graft the new practices into the old roots while killing off the inconsistent pieces.”⁷⁷ One of the most effective tools to achieve cultural change is the use of an “organizational narrative” that explains “who the organization is, has been, and expects to be in the future.”⁷⁸ Although lacking an ongoing history of service, countries can select a unit from their past and overlay its narrative onto the new force. For example in Mexico, the National Guard lacks the historical significance of an organization like the Rurales. However, it can trace its roots back to the 1917 Constitution, which can be exploited to enhance organizational change and generate an organizational identity. A new acronym-based unit, like the Honduran PMOP or the Mexican PFP (Federal Preventative Police), can become fodder for the next political change, while historical names and heraldry are less vulnerable.

Like historical service, military formation is a commonality among the three institutions. Members of these units strongly believe that the initial period of military instruction instills military values that shape SPF personnel. Militaries greatly value their histories and demand selfless service and duty from their members. This creates a strong and reinforced values base for personnel joining SPFs. In Mexico and the Northern Triangle, militaries could perform the same function. This is especially true because police units often lack a strong institutional education and formation system. Often political shifts can greatly alter the nature of police forces in ways that the military is able to resist. This could be especially useful in countries like Mexico where police corruption is rampant and popular perceptions of law enforcement are highly negative. Military training could provide an SPF with valuable legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The analysis in this study indicates that developing the Mexican National Guard through military institutions will help create a professional culture in the new organization.

Military training is closely tied to the dependency of the institution within their government. The Gendarmerie and Guardia Civil are both under the control of their Ministries of the Interior. The Carabinieri are under the Ministry of Defense. All three forces were initially under their respective armies. Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries will need to decide where to form their SPFs based on the unique political circumstances of the country. Corruption and the effectiveness of civilian leaders within the Ministry of the Interior must be considered. Likewise, the potential to provide too much power to the Ministry of Defense could be a concern in countries like Guatemala with a history of military rule. Dependency relationships will naturally be a combination of budgetary and operational responsibilities among ministries, developing the proper combination is critical. However, European case studies show that the dependency relationship can change as the internal security situation and government ministries change.

Table 1. Comparison of European SPF Units⁷⁹

	French Gendarmerie	Spanish Guardia Civil	Italian Carabinieri
Doctrine/Missions	Full spectrum: Community policing to military deployment	Full spectrum: Community policing to military deployment	Full spectrum: Community policing to military deployment
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationwide distributed stations (with jurisdictional boundaries with National Police). • Mobile squadrons • Special reaction forces • Air and maritime units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationwide distributed stations • Limited mobile forces • Special reaction forces • Air and maritime units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationwide distributed stations • Mobile brigades • Airborne regiment • Special reaction forces • Air units
Dependency	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of the Interior	Ministry of Defense
Training/Education	Primarily Gendarmerie	Mix of Guardia Civil and military	Mix of Carabinieri and military
Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Policing equipment • Moderate military equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community policing equipment • Limited military equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community policing equipment • Extensive military equipment
Personnel	100,000+	80,000+	100,000+
Facilities	Primarily MoI	Primarily MoI	Primarily MoI
Career Longevity	High	High	High
Investigative Authority	All personnel	All personnel	All personnel (-) (General Officers do not have judicial powers)

Community policing and national presence represented another common characteristic of the Gendarmerie, Guardia Civil, and Carabinieri. In many ways, this commonality is a historical aberration caused by similar circumstances requiring highly capable police forces to help consolidate state power. The Mexican federalized system does not preclude the creation of a 100,000 strong National Guard. In actuality, that type of force would displace the internal security role of the Mexican army, which has maintained a nationwide federal

presence since Porfirio Diaz. Smaller Central American states face fewer obstacles to the development of national police forces due to their size. However, the generation of an additional community policing force on top of their existing national police forces could be redundant. It is important to note, however, that all three European nations examined in this study have duplicative national law enforcement agencies. This perhaps inefficient system provides a check on corruption and creates healthy competition between police forces.

Although often vilified as militarized police, the Gendarmerie, Guardia Civil, and Carabinieri spend the majority of their efforts in traditional community policing roles where they work with the community to "...address the causes of crime and to reduce fear of social disorder through problem-solving strategies and police - community partnerships."⁸⁰ This experience is seen as vital when they are required to operate in more dangerous environments with more robust military equipment. In fact, service in units like the Carabinieri mobile brigades, the GIGN, or the Rapid Action Unit require initial service in a community-policing role. SPF's do maintain a robust military capability, but the community policing experiences of an SPF's personnel are just as vital as its equipment. This dynamic is misunderstood as politicians and security policy makers seek out powerful police units to take on militarized criminal threats. When searching for answers to these threats, it can become easy to latch onto the military capabilities of SPFs without realizing the importance of community policing experiences to their effectiveness.

Closely linked to community policing, all three SPFs instill judicial investigatory power in their personnel. This is possible due to the robust training plan and competitive recruitment process each force maintains. Without this capability, police become proximity police, no better than soldiers, only able to react when a crime is occurring immediately in front of them. Investigatory authority empowers officers and enables more effective policing.

With investigatory power comes a requirement to work closely with effective prosecutors. The prosecutor is a critical link between the judicial system and the SPF. Without functioning and capable prosecutors, SPF forces will not be able to achieve lasting public security results. The combination of investigatory powers and effective prosecutors allows SPFs to target organized crime elements and root out the most dangerous criminal elements.

Another common characteristic among the forces was a focus on mentorship. SPF personnel have long career timelines and mentoring subordinates is an honored tradition. Carabinieri Lieutenant Colonel Diego D'Elia cautions, "You cannot create a Carabinieri by sending someone through a school. A Carabinieri is the combination of instruction, mentorship, and experience."⁸¹ Mentorship of this caliber can be difficult to manage in Mexico and Northern Triangle countries where police units are frequently disbanded and formed, and where often toxic mentorship poisons junior members with corrupt standards.

International cooperation offers a valuable solution to mentorship challenges. The European Gendarmerie Force (EUROGENDFOR), founded in 2004, is an "operational, pre-organized, robust, and rapidly deployable" force comprised of SPFs from seven countries. EUROGENDFOR has participated in police training missions throughout the globe including in Afghanistan, Mali, and Ukraine.⁸² In addition, European SPFs have independently provided valuable security cooperation efforts with other nations. As an example, the Chilean

Carabinieri was in part formed through a close partnership between Italy and Chile. Consistent and long-term efforts between a developing SPF and an existing SPF can develop a culture of mentorship based on honest and effective police work. In addition, opportunities for long-term exchanges at the junior level could provide opportunities for personnel in developing SPFs.

Finally, military capacity varied among the forces with the Carabinieri maintaining the most robust capabilities. However, the historical formation of these units tells a different story. In the beginning, these units maintained a significant military capability to take on bandits and insurgents. The current criminal situation in Mexico and the Northern Triangle is comparable to the early experiences of European SPFs. Like European SPFs, new SPFs may require a more robust military capability until state consolidation occurs. SPF deployments to war zones indicate that the ability to operate in contested environments is critical if conditions are to be set for lightly armed community policing. Countering militarized criminal threats requires military training and equipment that standard police do not possess. Military capability is a distinct advantage and critical characteristic of an effective SPF.

Impact on U.S. Security Cooperation

The United States plays a key role in supporting police development and reform throughout the world including in Mexico and the Northern Triangle. Unfortunately, U.S. security cooperation with foreign police forces is significantly constrained by the lack of a U.S. externally-focused and deployable police training force. Following the end of the Cold War, during an intense focus on peacekeeping operations, many policymakers and academics called for the creation of a U.S. SPF that could be used in expeditionary law enforcement and security cooperation.⁸³ This force never materialized and the gap in U.S. capability remains.

Without an SPF, the United States attempts to work in this space through several organizations. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) "...helps countries deliver justice and fairness by strengthening their police, courts, and corrections systems."⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the management of INL projects falls on foreign service officers (FSO) who often have little or no experience in policing. INL also frequently lacks operational police units with which they can execute training. To fill these gaps, INL relies on contractors and direct hire government officials. While there are certainly highly effective FSOs and contractors, overall, INL has shown inconsistent results.⁸⁵

Other programs operated by law enforcement agencies have shown promise. The Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) "works with foreign governments to develop professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transnational crime and terrorism."⁸⁶ However, ICITAP suffers from manning and budget limitations. Most importantly, U.S. law enforcement agencies do not conduct stability policing overseas and are generally not designed or motivated to conduct large-scale security cooperation with foreign law enforcement partners. Brookings scholar, Jason Fritz

laments “There is no incentive to create [police training] expertise or capacity because there are no standing missions to substantiate such efforts.”⁸⁷

In addition to bureaucratic and resource limitations, U.S. police officials, police serving as contractors, or police serving as government civilians have an inherent bias against SPF type forces because they come from a very different law enforcement tradition — the Robert Peel system prevalent in the United Kingdom and the United States. This bias can taint U.S. security cooperation planning when partner nations consider the development of an SPF type force.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has an outward focus and it maintains an extremely robust security cooperation and stability capacity. However, the military lacks expertise in civilian policing and law enforcement which can create a counterproductive outcome when training foreign police forces. Even military police lack the community policing experience resident in European SPFs. Although military personnel have been employed to train police forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, 22 U.S. Code also specifically restricts DoD law enforcement assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸⁸ DoD is authorized to train national forces engaged in specific missions including counterterrorism and counter-narcotics.⁸⁹

Conclusions

This study offers several recommendations to inform U.S. security cooperation with countries considering or actively developing SPF forces. The first insight is that military capability and community-policing skills are two sides of the same coin. Successful SPFs develop their personnel so they understand both skill sets. As such, U.S. security cooperation, whether DoD, State, or law enforcement agency led, should ensure both concepts are integrated into security cooperation strategies.

A second insight is that mentorship and experience are critical components of SPF personnel development. The United States simply does not have this tradition or experience in its police agencies. Providing mentorship and experience opportunities will require the integration of NATO and European partners. Fortunately, EUROGENDFOR provides an existing and functional system for analyzing, tailoring, and deploying European SPF personnel in support of foreign partners. Effective coordination with EUROGENDFOR can fill a significant gap in the U.S. security cooperation playbook. In addition, the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence (NSPCOE) and the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU), which is supported in part by U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative funding, offer extensive training opportunities for SPF units and personnel. Before turning to contractor-based solutions, the United States should make every effort to generate a long-term strategy with our partners to maximize strengths in a multinational effort. The United States can provide funding and unmatched logistical support and the EUROGENDFOR, NSPCOE, and CoESPU can provide their unique institutional knowledge.

Finally, investigative and judicial system development is a critical consideration. While U.S. expertise in SPFs is limited, the U.S. can make significant contributions to judicial system

development and prosecutor training. A great example of a judicial development program is the U.S. effort assisting the Mexican government in the transition to the accusatorial system from the inquisitional system. U.S. security cooperation under the umbrella of the Merida Initiative has trained “9,000 prosecutors, investigators, and forensics experts” as well as 200 federal judges. In addition, a \$87 million program for judicial transformation is working in support of federal authorities and all 31 Mexican states.⁹⁰ Simultaneously developing a functioning judiciary system is imperative for an effective SPF.

Mexico and the Northern Triangle face serious criminal threats and are all pursuing variations of SPF type forces to respond to these threats. The French Gendarmerie, Spanish Guardia Civil, and the Italian Carabinieri offer examples of highly capable SPFs. Their combination of military capabilities with community policing provides a potential response to militarized criminal threats and was successful during the historical beginnings of European gendarmerie forces. While not all of the characteristics of European gendarmeries are applicable in Mexico and the Northern Triangle, they provide insights into a culture of mentorship and professionalism that can help guide SPF development. Furthermore, a lack of U.S. expertise in SPFs speaks to a necessity to partner with European allies to achieve security cooperation goals with U.S. partner nations developing SPFs.

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