



HIGH DRAMA OVER MEXICO'S NEXT DEFENSE SECRETARY

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Political intrigue has turned Mexico City into a rumor mill, a ring for below-the-belt punches, a trumpet for charges of ties to narco-traffickers, and a locale for clashes over the veracity of shadowy protected witnesses. This environment arises not only from opponents of Enrique Peña Nieto, candidate of the once-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), who are denouncing as illegitimate his 6.6 point victory margin in the July 1 presidential contest. Rather another battle royal has erupted among the brass over the secretary of defense (SECDEF) to succeed incumbent Gen. Guillermo Galván on December 1.

This essay 1) highlights several contenders among the 24 division generals—similar to U.S. Army major generals—and eligible to lead the 200,000-member force; (2) describes the traditional selection procedure; and (3) considers several factors that have tuned this process from sharp-elbowed lobbying into a free-for-all within the Ministry of Defense (SEDENA).

Top Contenders for Mexico's Secretary of Defense (SECDEF)

Name	Date and Place of Birth	Key Posts in Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA)	PROs	CONs
Gen. (div.) Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda	June 14, 1948; Mexico City	Chief Administrator (<i>Official Mayor</i>); commanded Military Regions I (Mexico City/DF and Mexico State); IX (Guerrero); and V (Jalisco); Military Zone 15/a (Jalisco)	Reputation as a hard-liner; forged productive ties to Enrique Peña Nieto when commanding Military Region 1, which embraces the DF and Mexico State; most senior general at age 65.	Beltrán Leyva [drug] Organization (BLO), a cartel adept at suborning high officials, made headway in Guerrero when he headed the 9 th Military Region (Guerrero); close to SECDEF Galván; yet, a SEDENA saying holds that: "The king doesn't name the king."

Gen. (div.) Augusto Moisés García Ochoa	April 6, 1951, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.	Director of Administration (since Nov. 20, 2010); created the CIAN anti-drug information center; personal secretary to former SECDEF Gen. Gerardo Clemente Vega (Dec. 2000-to 30 Nov. 06); commander of Military Zone 24/a (Cuernavaca); interacts well with civilians; and has written a book, <i>La participación de las Fuerzas Armadas en el entorno actual de la Seguridad Pública</i> (DF: Ala de Avispa: 2009).	Close to SECDEF Guillermo Galván; the BLO gained a strong presence in Cuernavaca when he headed the local Military Zone (24/a).	Grew in shadow of Gen. Tomás Ángeles Dauahare, ex-number two in SEDENA and an intelligence expert, who has been incarcerated for alleged ties to the BLO.
Gen. (div.) Carlos Demetrio Gaytán Ochoa	Dec. 22, 1949: Mexico City	Undersecretary; 2006-10: served as head of General Staff	Close to Galván; studied together in the Superior War College (ESG)	Never commanded troops as head of a military region or a military zone; worked in Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Health (FEADS) in the Attorney General's Office, and few if any SECDEFs have served in civilian agencies; linked to intermediary between BLO and generals jailed for cooperating with narcos
Gen. (div.) Luis Arturo Oliver Cen	Oct. 23, 1948; Progreso, Yucatán	Chief of Staff (since Sept. 16, 2010); Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations; commanded 8 th Military Region (Oaxaca) and Military Zones 9/a (Sinaloa) and 32/a (Yucatán)	When Deputy Chief of Operations, the Army captured Vicente Zambada, Niebla, son of the Sinaloa Cartel's second most powerful leader	Worked in FEADS and few, if any, SECDEFs have served in civilian agencies
Gen. (div) Virgilio Daniel Méndez Bazán	1949, Cansachcas, Yucatán	Commander of the 10 th Military Region (Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana, Roo); rector de la University of the Army and Air Force; director general of military education; commander of 22 nd Military Zone (Mexico State)	Promoted more contacts between Army and civil society; encouraged recruitment and training of women; fought local drug consumption	Although held tough commands, he has focused more on training and social issues
Gen. (div. ret.) Roberto Miranda Sánchez*	Jan. 5, 1947; Mexico City	Chief Administrator (Official Mayor) until his retirement on Jan. 16, 2012; Commander of XI Military Region (Torreón, Coahuila); former head of intelligence (S-2)	Chief of Presidential General Staff (EMP) under President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000)	Retired; SECDEF typically an active duty officer; spiked his chances by campaigning for the post and indicating how he would "renovate" SEDENA

* Miranda Sánchez should not be confused with Gen. (brig.) Roberto Francisco Miranda Moreno, who is heading the president-elect's security detail.

TRADITIONAL SELECTION PROCESS

In past decades, consultations among senior generals gave rise to a short-list of potential Secretaries of Defense from active duty division generals, equivalent to a U.S. Army lieutenant general, whose names were presented to the president-elect. Chief executives of the PRI, which held the presidency from 1929-2000 typically selected the three-star with the most years of service. Such orthodoxy is much less relevant in light of the rapidly-changing drug war, the growing emphasis on technology, and the imperative to work with the United States and other allies. President Vicente Fox Quesada, a member of the center-right National Action Party (PAN), broke this tradition in 2000 when he selected Gen. Clemente Vega García, a recently promoted division general. Crucial to this deviation was overt self-aggrandizement—a violation of the unwritten rules of the game—by the swashbuckling Gen. Delfino Palmerín Cordero, who used the Internet to loft his star. Consequently, Fox's National Security Adviser Adolfo Aguilar Zinser¹ opted for Vega García.

Similarly, Gen. Roberto Miranda's campaigning for SECDEF has eliminated his chances for selection this year.

SEVERAL COMPLICATING FACTORS

First, both the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and non-governmental organizations have severely criticized the Army and, to a far lesser extent, the Navy. For instance, Ambassador Carlos Pascual in a "secret" diplomatic cable dated January 1, 2010, and subsequently published by the *WikiLeaks* website, excoriated the Mexican military as "slow and risk averse." He accentuated the difficulty in convincing the generals "that modernization and not withdrawal are the way forward, and that transparency and accountability are fundamental to modernization." Especially vexing to the Mexicans was Pascual's pointing out the rivalry and lack of coordination between the Army and the Navy.² An outraged Calderón forced the envoy to resign. Meanwhile, the zealous Mexican Human Rights Commission has publicized a surging number of complaints against the military: 367 in 2007, 1,230 in 2008, 1,800 in 2009, 1,415 in 2010, 1,626 in 2011, and 479 in mid-2012.³

Second, the Army's hierarchy resents the accolades heaped on the Navy, whose 50,000 cadres include the 18,000 members of the Marine Corps, for its relative success in combatting drug syndicates. The Navy's take-downs include: Mauricio "El Amarillo" Guizar Cárdenas (July 26, 2012), Raul "El Lucky" Hernández Lechuga (Dec. 12, 2011), Julián "El Piolín"/"Tweety Bird" (Feb. 23, 2011), Arturo "El Barbas" Beltrán Leyva (Dec. 16, 2010), Gulf Cartel co-leader Ezequiel "Tony Tormenta" Cárdenas Guillén, BLO top lieutenant Sergio Enrique "El Grande" Villarreal Barragán (Sept. 12, 2010). Secretary of Defense Galván has maintained a professional, even cordial, public relationship with Navy Secretary Adm. Mariano Francisco Saynez. While the Army has had its share of successes, the Navy has captured or killed more kingpins.

One of Ambassador Pascual's complaints was the Army's vacillation when informed of the whereabouts of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, head of the notorious Beltrán Leyva Organization. As a result, the Navy dispatched Marines from Mexico City to storm the drug lord's luxurious heavily-guarded compound, which lay only a few blocks from the 24th Military Zone headquarters in Cuernavaca. Officials of U.S. law-enforcement agencies invariably report much better cooperation with the Navy than the Army.

Indeed, on February 4, 2009, the Navy and the Pentagon secretly agreed to keep confidential all national security information exchanged between the two entities.⁴

Third, the Defense Ministry (SEDENA) is upset over Peña Nieto's decision, made late in the campaign, to appoint Gen. (ret.) Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, as his adviser on security affairs. Not only is Naranjo a foreigner and highly esteemed in the Pentagon, but he is a general retired from the Colombian National Policy (PNC), not the

¹ . Zinser, who had served as Mexico's permanent representative to the UN died in a car crash on June 5, 2005.

² . The Spanish daily *El País* ran a replica of the message, "Cable sobre la descoordinación entre el Ejército y la Marina," February 2, 2010.

³ . Catherine Daly *et al.*, Transborder Institute, "Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico," Transborder Institute, July 30, 2012.

⁴ . Anabel Hernández, "Actuá EU en México aliando con la Marina," *Reforma*, August 29, 2012.

Colombian Army.

Fourth, Army bigwigs may see their key role in the drug war limited, as well as their budget, by the formation of a 40,000-cadre “Gendarmerie,” endorsed by Peña Nieto. This concept resembles a PRI gambit to create the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) as a paramilitary force under the Interior Ministry (Gobernación) composed of the Third Military Police Brigade, the Federal Immigration Police, the Federal Highway Police, and several smaller units. In the late 1990s, Jesús Murillo Karam, a tough-as-nails current Peña Nieto ally, was public security subsecretary of Interior (Gobernación); former Interior Secretary Francisco Labastida Ochoa appeared destined to win the presidency; and the goal was to form a structure modeled on Spain’s *Guardia Civil* or Chile’s *Carabineros*. The PAN’s Fox won the election in 2000, and the organization never materialized as planned.

Fifth, five generals and several lower-ranking officers await trial at the Altiplano high-security prison in Mexico State on charges of working with the Beltrán Leyvas.⁵ The most controversial of the accused is Gen. Tomás Ángeles Dauahare a contender for Secretary of Defense when Calderón selected Galván, with the advice of confidant Juan Carlos Mouriño.⁶ As the Number Two at the Defense Ministry, Ángeles incurred the defense secretary’s wrath in 2007 when he told a radio reporter that Galván suffered poor health. Detractors also accused Ángeles of spreading rumors alleging that Public Security Minister Genaro Luna García, Calderón’s super cop, had links to the underworld. On May 9, 2012, the three-star general again raised eye-brows by participating in a PRI-sponsored forum at which he castigated the conduct of the drug war and the “lack of an exit strategy.”⁷

Various groups have rallied behind Ángeles. The imprisoned general presented documents showing he was in Germany at the time a protected witness asserted he was meeting with Mafiosi. Javier Ibarrola, a military specialist for the *Milenio* newspaper, has written favorably of the beleaguered general, and the chairman of the National Defense Committee in Congress has called for a hearing on his incarceration. A substantial group from the Center of Analysis and Opinion of Retired Army and Navy Members has also weighed in on Ángeles’ behalf. They insist that he is the target of “revenge,” presumably by Galván.⁸ SEDENA-watchers also interpret the move against Ángeles as an effort to sully the reputation of García Ochoa, a formidable contender to take the reins from Galván.

Proceso, a muckraking magazine, reported that Lt. Col. Silvio Isidro Hernández, who is also behind bars for supposedly being the interlocutor between individual generals and the BLO, enjoyed protection and promotions thanks to Gen. Gaytán Ochoa, another aspirant to succeed Galván.⁹

Sixth, questions swirl around billions of pesos in contracts let by SEDENA during Calderón’s six-year term. The greatest controversy focuses on 18 major contracts for sophisticated equipment and technology to enhance the Army’s intelligence capability. For example, in mid-2012 *El Universal* reported that the ministry signed a contract for the equivalent of \$379 million to purchase state-of-the-art communication interception equipment from Security Tracking Devices, a Jalisco-based firm. The agreement raised questions because of its secrecy, the potential for the Army to eavesdrop on innocent civilians, and the inability of journalists to find the American contractor’s alleged office in Mexico City.¹⁰ Of course, the brouhaha over the expenditures may be yet another means to give a black eye to García Ochoa, who participated in many of the acquisitions.

Seventh, on August 9, 2012, the Mexican Supreme Court (SCJN) made a historic ruling that armed forces’ personnel charged with human rights violations against civilians should be tried in civil tribunals. This finding rankled the

⁵ . The prisoners are Gen. Ricardo Escorcía Vargas, ex-commander of 24th Military Zone in Morelos; (2) Div. Gen. (ret.) Ricardo Escorcía Vargas; (4) Div. Gen. (ret.) and former No. 2 in Sedena Tomas Ángeles Dauahare; (5) Brig. Gen. Roberto Dawe González; commanded an elite unit assigned to the 20th Military Zone headquartered in Colima; (5) Brig. Gen. Rubén Pérez Ramírez Aviña, ex-commander of garrison in Ojinaga, Chihuahua, on the Texas border; (6) Lt. Col Silvio Isidro de Jesús Hernández Soto, and (7) Major Iván Reyna Muñoz, who is in custody in Querétaro.

⁶ . Mouriño, then interior secretary, died in a plane crash on November 4, 2008.

⁷ . Juan Arévalo, “Tomás Ángeles y la incuestionable guerra de Calderón,” *SDPnoticias.com*, May 22, 2012.

⁸ . Javier Ibarrola, “Solidaridad con Dauahare,” *Milenio*, July 25, 2012.

⁹ . Miguel Dimayuga, “Narcoescándalo en la Sedena salpica al subsecretario,” *Proceso*, July 31, 2012.

¹⁰ . “Paga Sedena 5 mmdp por equipo para espiar” (“Sedena spends 5 billion pesos on spying equipment”), *El Universal*, July 16, 2012.

military and transfers to civil courts jurisdiction over alleged crimes traditionally adjudicated in “*fueros*.” The prerogative, which allowed the armed forces to pass judgment on its own personnel, dates to the Middle Ages and is enshrined in Mexico’s Code of Military Justice. The SCJN must decide four cases in the same way to establish a precedent.

Eighth, Army leaders, who have become increasingly outspoken in recent years, are eager for Congress to clarify the Constitution (Article 129) in order to give legitimacy to the military’s participation the drug war. Some legal scholars argue that only civilian law-enforcement agencies can pursue criminals. In late November 2011, Netzai Sandoval, a Mexican human rights lawyer, has already filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, urging an investigation of the deaths of hundreds of civilians by the military and drug traffickers. The petition, signed by 23,000 citizens, named Calderón, Sinaloa Cartel boss Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera, Public Security Minister García Luna, and the commanders of the Army and Navy.¹¹

WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

The Secretary of Defense’s selection process—with all its intrigue—prompted Gen. Galván to meet with the 24 qualified candidates on August 6, 2012 to “serenade” them. In fact, he warned them against lack of discipline, leaks about the budget, and other unprofessional conduct. He stressed that it would not be Calderón who appointed the next defense minister, but the incoming president.¹²

Just as Fox depended on Aguilar Zinser and Calderón relied on Camilo Mouriño to recommend a SECDEF nominee, Peña Nieto will entrust this task to former Deputy Luis Videgaray Caso, a tough-minded economist brimming with political savvy. The brainy, hard-charging Videgaray is likely to emerge as chief of staff in the next government. He and Peña Nieto want the most competent defense minister possible, regardless of years of service. This goal augurs well for García Ochoa, whom Galván has placed in charge of the September 16, 2012 Independence Day parade, but there is always the possibility of that a dark horse will appear.

¹¹ . “Activists accuse Mexican president of war crimes in drug crackdown,” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2011.

¹² . Miguel Badillo, “Se reúnen Calderón y Galván/Exigen lealtad a 24 generales/Expendientes militares a Peña,” *Contralínea*, August 13, 2012.