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INTRODUCTION

This book is a collection of the presentations of 12 women members of the armed forces in Mexico, Canada, and the United States at the international seminar “The Role of Women as Actors in the Armed Forces of North America.” The seminar was held at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in May 2014. It had three objectives:

1. To create a space for military and naval women from the United States, Canada, and Mexico for unprecedented interaction in the region and share their important role, responsibilities, and experiences in a sphere traditionally perceived as masculine;
2. To make them visible to different audiences in Mexico, particularly young students and academics; and
3. To set a precedent to continue this important dialogue on a regional level.

This seminar was organized not only due to the importance of the subject, but because it has not received sufficient attention at the regional level. While in Canada and the United States gender issues in the military have been addressed in the media and civil society for a long time, in Mexico, little has been said about women in the armed forces. In addition, although women have participated in the armed forces for many decades in all three countries, so far we have found no evidence of systematic institutional interaction among Mexican, Canadian, and US military and naval women. We have found no records of meetings between female representatives of the three armed forces where issues like cooperation and interactions were discussed from a gender perspective, or where they shared their experiences as military women in the three countries.

However, significant changes in North American inter-military relations and in the Mexican Armed Forces beginning in the first decade of the twenty-first century underline the importance of reflecting on the subject of this book. While US and Canadian armed forces have historically had a close, strategic relationship, military-to-military relations between all three countries had been limited. This began to change between Mexico and the US when they started fighting transnational organized crime jointly in the framework of the Merida Initiative in 2008. This US in-kind security assistance program for Mexico fueled greater bilateral

cooperation between their armed forces in areas such as education, training, equipment, intelligence, joint military exercises, and others. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of US-Mexico cooperation under this initiative has been an unprecedented level of interaction between the Mexican and US Armed Forces. This bilateral development coincided with internal changes in the Mexican Armed Forces beginning in 2007, which opened up more career and promotion opportunities to women.¹

Furthermore, since the early 1990s, relations between the three countries began to increase thanks to new political, economic, and trade exchanges. This has resulted in increasing interdependence in those areas, as well as in the social and cultural spheres. Nevertheless, closing the gap on important asymmetries that affect them —particularly Mexico— is still pending. In this context, a reflection about gender equity is relevant, since, despite advances, the full incorporation of women in all spheres and levels has not yet been achieved in the three nations.

The United Nations Gender Inequality Index (2016) illustrates this point. While Canada is rated as highly equitable, in 18th place; the United States (43rd place)

¹ “Mexico Opens Military Opportunities to Women,” *USA Today*, September 28, 2007, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-09-28-mexico-military_N.htm, accessed October 25, 2016.

and Mexico (73rd place) are rated as less equitable.² North America is a universe of 483 million people,³ who come together in a democratic institutional framework. Without this framework, it would be unthinkable to develop inclusive policies to guarantee greater incorporation of women as professionals in traditionally male areas like the armed forces. Nevertheless, the new dynamics of trilateral cooperation has not included the promotion of gender equality in the armed forces, particularly concerning women's participation.

Historically, women have participated in different ways in the armed forces in the three countries of North America. For example, Mexican women participated as *soldaderas* or *Adelitas* and colonels at least since Mexico's Revolution in the early twentieth century.⁴ Women in the US participated in the struggle for independence since 1775, while Canadian

² United Nations Development Programme, "Gender Inequality Index," *Human Development Report 2016*, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf, p. 214, accessed May 1, 2017. It should be noted that the United States has moved up on this scale. In 2014, it was ranked in fifty-fifth place. See http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf, p. 224, accessed June 2, 2017.

³ The World Bank, "Population, Total (Canada, United States and Mexico) 2015," <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>, accessed October 24, 2016.

⁴ See Gabriela Cano, "Soldaderas and Coronelas," in *Encyclopedia of Mexico*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), pp. 1357-1360; and Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 290.

women have served in the armed forces for more than a century.⁵

At first, the participation of women in military activities in the three countries was informal and generally limited to traditional roles. They were mainly nurses, cooks, and laundresses. However, there were also some female spies, combatants, and commanders, but often they had to disguise themselves as men. However, starting in the second decade of the twentieth century, they began to formally join the armed forces. For example, in the United States they were admitted during World War I, while in Mexico in 1934.⁶ Undoubtedly, incorporating women into the armed forces in the region has been a slow and gradual, but continual and dynamic process of constant learning and adjustment.

Today, the three countries, each with their own particularities, enjoy a substantial and growing participation of women. For example, in early 2014, almost 15 percent of the Canadian Armed Forces were women.⁷ In the United States, 15 percent of all active

⁵ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, “Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Backgrounder,” March 6, 2014, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/hie8w7rm>, accessed June 6, 2017.

⁶ Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Sedena), “Reseña histórica de la inclusión de las mujeres,” August 20, 2015, <http://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/las-mujeres-en-el-ejercito-y-fuerza-aerea-mexicanos>, accessed June 7, 2017.

⁷ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, op. cit.

military personnel were women by 2015.⁸ In the Mexican Army, 7 percent of active personnel were women by 2014, according to Brigadier General Irene Espinoza Reyes, who participated in the seminar that led to this book.⁹ At the same time, women in the Mexican Navy represented 16 percent of its personnel, as Rear Admiral Irma de los Santos Ayala told seminar participants.

It is important to make a parenthesis here to clarify that, while the United States and Canada each have one department or ministry of defense, Mexico has two. There is a Secretariat of the Navy or Mexican Navy (*SEMAR* in Spanish stands for *Secretaría de Marina-Armada de México*), and a Secretariat of National Defense (*SEDENA* in Spanish), which includes the Mexican Army and the Air Force.

Today's generations of women in the armed forces in North America have many more career and promotion opportunities than before. They are dentists and doctors in the military health care sector, but they are also pilots, oceanographers, engineers, man-

⁸ U.S Department of Defense, *Women in the Military*, 2016, http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2016/0316_womens-history/images/Infographic-Ig4.jpg, accessed October 24, 2016.

⁹ See also Sedena, "Preguntas frecuentes del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos," <http://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/preguntas-frecuentes-del-observatorio-para-la-igualdad-entre-mujeres-y-hombres-en-el-ejercito-y-fuerza-aerea-mexicanos>, accessed June 6, 2017.

agers, paratroopers, and mechanics, among other professions that only a short while ago were still considered exclusive to men. For example, in 2014, Mexican women were allowed for the first time to train to join the Special Forces of the Army and Air Force. In 2011, the Mexican Navy's Special Forces admitted a woman for the first time.¹⁰ In Canada, between 1989 and 2000, women began to participate alongside men in all professional military activities, including serving aboard submarines and as commanders in combat, as Vice-admiral Jennifer Bennett of the Royal Canadian Navy pointed out at the seminar. Therefore, women in the region now serve not only as non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and privates, but also as officers in the navy, air force, and in combat arms, among others, depending on each country. Likewise, they hold all sorts of ranks, such as lieutenant, captain, major, colonel, admiral, and general.

Undoubtedly, to advance in gender equality, each of the region's armed forces has had to adopt and implement new norms, commitments, programs, and initiatives. One instance of this is the National Action

¹⁰ Sedena, *Las mujeres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*, August 20, 2015, <http://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/las-mujeres-en-el-ejercito-y-fuerza-aerea-mexicanos>, accessed June 6, 2017; and Televisa, "Armada mexicana tiene primer mujer en fuerzas especiales," *Noticieros Televisa*, December 10, 2011, <http://noticierostelevisa.esmas.com/nacional/377989/armada-mexicana-tiene-primer-mujer-fuerzas-especiales>, accessed June 7, 2017.

Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP) that the US Department of Defense adopted in 2012 for the armed forces.¹¹ Another example is the 2011 Training and Awareness Program on Gender Perspectives for Military Personnel adopted by Mexico's SEDENA to institutionalize the gender perspective in the Army and Air Force.¹² As part of this program, SEDENA created the Observatory for Equality among Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force.¹³

Such measures must be viewed in the broader context of the three countries' national, bilateral, and trilateral efforts to promote gender equality in general—not specific to the military sphere—in the region. In 2012, for instance, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and US President Barack Obama signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the North American Leaders' Summit. In 2016, they

¹¹ In April 2012, then-US Secretary of Defense Leo Panetta signed a policy memorandum directing implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) in the US armed forces. President Barack Obama had issued Executive Order 13595 on December 19, 2011 to enact the plan itself.

¹² The name of this program in Spanish is "Programa de Capacitación y Sensibilización para Efectivos en Perspectiva de Género 2011".

¹³ Sedena, "Antecedentes del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos" [Background on the Observatory for Equality between Men and Women of the Mexican Army and Air Force], August 18, 2015, <http://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/antecedentes-del-observatorio-para-la-igualdad-entre-mujeres-y-hombres-en-el-ejercito-y-fuerza-aerea-mexicanos>, accessed June 7, 2017.

signed on a trilateral level with Canada. Yet, these MOUs do not focus specifically on gender equality in the military. The following illustrates the nature of the 2012 and 2016 agreements:

[In 2012,] Mexico and the United States signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Promotion of Gender Equality, the Empowerment of Women and Women's Human Rights. . . . This is a framework agreement that will allow both governments to identify future concrete cooperation initiatives, which will be implemented in coordination with the corresponding agencies and bodies.¹⁴

[After the 2016 North American Leaders' Summit,] Mexico, the United States and Canada signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship and the Growth of Women-Owned Enterprises in North America. In the framework of this memorandum, activities are carried out to facilitate women's access to world value chains and their participation in international trade, promote partnerships, strengthen entrepreneurial mentoring relations, and facilitate the creation of networks and information exchanges.¹⁵

¹⁴ SRE, *México y Estados Unidos*, 2012, <http://mex-eua.sre.gob.mx/index.php/trabajando-juntos>, accessed October 25, 2016.

¹⁵ Presidencia de la República, "Iniciativas concretas para promover la paz, la seguridad y el desarrollo; proteger el clima y el medio ambiente; mejorar nuestra competitividad en la economía global; y ampliar las oportunidades para los ciudadanos"

In fact, Ana Luisa Fajer Flores, then Director General for North America at Mexico's Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE in Spanish) and guest of honor at the inauguration of the seminar, said that the recommendations that have come out of this effort will be an important contribution to the gender-perspective working group in the framework of relations between Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

It is important to address the subject, especially in Mexico, because little is known about the role of women in the armed forces in general and, specifically, regarding the Canadian and US cases. Conversely, the Mexican case is relatively unknown in the US and Canada. Differences in the participation of women in the militaries of each of the three countries can be discerned, but we do not know how similar they are or how much they may differ from that of their male counterparts. In any case, it is clear, for example, that men still predominate in positions of command and the upper ranks.

The central idea of this seminar of gathering military and naval women from the three countries ended up turning the event into an unprecedented space for dialogue and reflection. It was the first time that

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[Concrete Initiatives to Promote Peace, Security, and Development: Protect Climate and the Environment; Improve Our Competitiveness in the Global Economy; and Broaden the Opportunities for Citizens"], <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/documentos/clan2016-temas-regionales>, accessed October 25, 2016.

they were brought together to express themselves in a civilian and academic environment and before an audience full of young students.

Twelve military and naval women participated in the seminar and now contribute to this book. They represent different countries, generations, ranks, and branches or services of the armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force). In this manner, we achieved a representative and diverse group. All were officers in their respective countries, including some of the highest ranks. Among them was Mexican Brigadier General Irene Espinosa Reyes, who pointed out at the seminar that she was one of two women generals in active service in Mexico's Army. By 2016, however, Mexico had five women generals.¹⁶ Another participant, Mexican Rear Admiral Irma de los Santos Ayala, was the highest-ranking woman in the Mexican Navy at the time of the seminar. Representing Canada, Vice-admiral Jennifer Bennett was the first woman to be promoted to that rank in her country.¹⁷ Moreover, US Major Gen-

¹⁶ Sedena, "Preguntas frecuentes del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos [Frequent Questions about the Observatory for Equality among Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force]," <http://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/preguntas-frecuentes-del-observatorio-para-la-igualdad-entre-mujeres-y-hombres-en-el-ejercito-y-fuerza-aerea-mexicanos>, accessed June 6, 2017.

¹⁷ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Canadian Forces Welcome First Female Admiral as Chief Reserves and Cadets," May 30, 2011, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/>

eral Gwendolyn Bingham said at the seminar that she was one of seven women with that rank out of a total of 25 female generals in the US Army.¹⁸ In 2013, of the total number of generals and admirals in the US Armed Forces, 69 were women and 976 men, according to [CNN.com](http://www.cnn.com).¹⁹ All told, two rear admirals, one major general, one brigadier general, two navy commanders, two lieutenant colonels, three majors, and one lieutenant participated at the seminar and in this book. Moreover, each presenter participated in one of the panels with officers of similar ranks from the three countries. The ranks of the participants listed in this book are the ones they held at the time of the seminar.

This book contains their testimonies as they presented them orally at the seminar. They are written here in the language of the participants. In addition, Her Excellency Sara Hradecky then-Canadian ambassador to Mexico, delivered a speech underlining the aims of the seminar. Her speech in Spanish is included in this book following the testimonies.

article.page?doc=canadian-forces-welcome-first-female-admiral-as-chief-reserves-and-cadets/hnps1vef, accessed, June 7, 2017.

¹⁸ Buffalo Soldiers of Virginia, December 4, 2013, <http://www.buffalosoldiersofvirginia.com/news/wsmr-commander-gwen-bingham-promoted-major-general/>, accessed June 7, 2017.

¹⁹ [CNN.com](http://www.cnn.com). "By the Numbers: Women in the US Military," January 24, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/24/us/military-women-glance/index.html>, accessed June 6, 2017.

The testimonies presented after this Introduction are divided in three sections. Each section corresponds to one of the three panels of the seminar, as indicated below. The three panels, their topics, and participants are the following:

1. “Women’s Responsibilities and Experiences as Actors in the Armed Forces in North America.” In this panel participants reflected on the number of women in each country’s armed forces; the kind of responsibilities they had; and the differences or similarities between their experiences and those of their brothers-in-arms.

Participants:

- Rear-admiral Jennifer Bennett, Royal Canadian Navy
 - Major General Gwendolyn Bingham, US Army, Northern Command
 - Brigadier General Irene Espinosa Reyes, Mexican Army
 - Rear Admiral Irma de los Santos Ayala, Mexican Navy
2. “Institutional Programs to Promote Gender Equality in the Armed Forces in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.” This panel dealt with the gender equality objectives of their institutions; norms, programs, and other initiatives to promote

those objectives; and recommendations for innovating legislation and institutional programs.

Participants:

- Commander Amy Alcorn, US Army, Northern Command
- Lieutenant Colonel Rosa Elena Torres Dávila, Mexican Army
- Major Nancy Perron, Royal Canadian Air Force
- Lieutenant Sandra Navarrete Ramos, Mexican Navy

- 3.** “Women in the Armed Forces in North America: Perspectives, Achievements, and Challenges.” This panel centered on the way women contribute as agents of change within the armed forces; societal perceptions —among women and men— of the activities of women in the military; and future challenges.

Participants:

- Commander Patricia Camacho Reyes, Mexican Navy
- Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Russ, US Air Force, Northern Command
- Major Judith Irina González Herrera, Mexican Army

- Major Krista Dunlop, Royal Regiment of Artillery, Canadian Army

In short, this academic seminar was an opportunity to inform and stimulate the public about the subject, as well as to generate ideas to continue the dialogue as a joint effort in the region.

This book is a collection of the participants' contributions to a unique meeting in the contemporary history of North America. It represents a collective effort that will hopefully contribute to future similar initiatives, especially given the need to raise public awareness in the region about the participation of women in the armed forces in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

We invite everyone to read and take note of the diversity and rich content of the testimonies of these extraordinary military and naval women. Through them, they will directly communicate to the reader their visions, experiences, and aspirations. We want to express to all the women of the armed forces who participated in this seminar and book our most profound admiration and recognition.

We also want to thank the following institutions for their decisive support and trust: the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Center for Research on North America (CISAN-UNAM), the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (WJPC), the Embassy of the United States in Mexico, the Em-

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