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U.S.-MEXICAN SECURITY COOPERATION: THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Keynote:

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Panel:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. JONES: Good afternoon. I see we have standing room only. I think that's appropriate for the importance of the occasion.

My name is Bruce Jones. I'm the Vice President of the Foreign Policy Program here at Brookings. And it's my pleasure to welcome you today to this important event on *U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, which is one part of a wider Brookings' initiative on analyzing the opportunities and challenges in the U.S.-Mexico relationship, at a critical time, I think, in both countries' history and in the relationship between them.

And I do stress both the challenges and opportunities, the two countries, continue to negotiate the details of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the trade agreement that would follow up with NAFTA, TMX as our friends in Mexico, I have learned, call it.

From my own vantage point I believe that the passage of USMCA, as the Trump administration calls it, I can't remember what the Canadians call it -- it has three names -- I believe it's vital for Mexico and it's essential for the United States that we pass the revised agreement.

I think there's much too little recognition in the United States of how important it is for our economy and our security to have a prosperous Mexico on our southern border, and I think there's a lot that we can do to grow together, including in new areas like energy, where we have a real potential to collaborate.

But there are serious challenges as well. And despite unprecedented levels of security cooperation between the two countries over the past decade, Mexico has not really succeeded in suppressing rising levels of criminal violence, weapons flows in the United States add to the difficulty. At the same time the opioid crisis in the United States has partly fueled by supply from and through Mexico, migration issues continue to loom large in the bilateral agenda.

And I think there's a political challenge we need to think squarely about,

which is that President Trump and President López Obrador have outlined different security priorities.

AMLO has declared an end to the war on drugs, and seeks to focus on violent crimes in Mexico, understandable, but meanwhile President Trump remains very concerned about drug flows and migrant flows across the U.S.-Mexico border, quite apart from the broader discussions about the wall.

So, I think that there's an agenda of tackling tough challenges, but also an agenda of building on and sustaining cooperation and a partnership between the two countries, and at Brookings we hope to contribute to all this by offering ideas, honest critique, and opportunities for convening among experts and colleagues. And that's the context for today.

I want -- before introducing our Guest Speaker -- to pay tribute to Vanda Felbab-Brown who is the sort of activist in our ranks on this issue, and a superb scholar of Mexico, among many other things, and I think is making a very important contribution to American understanding, of a wider understanding of Mexico, and of the U.S.-Mexico relationship through her prolific writings on the topic.

So, I want to turn now to introducing our distinguished guest, Ambassador Bárcena, who is the New Mexican, new-ish, Mexican Ambassador to the United States, and who will deliver a Keynote Address on President Obrador's security policy.

So, welcome to Brookings, and welcome to the United States.

Ambassador Bárcena is a Career Diplomat and served most recently as the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations Agencies in Rome. It's a very nice job, by the way. She also serves as Ambassador to Denmark and Turkey, and in key positions in the Foreign Ministry, including as Head of the Department of Migrant Workers and Border Cooperation in the General Directorate of North America; so, extremely well prepared for the challenges that she confronts as Ambassador to the United States.

Following that we'll have a discussion led by our own Vanda Felbab-Brown.

And then we will welcome on stage, after that, Professor Rafael Fernández de Castro, Director of the Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies at UC San Diego. And Ambassador Tony Wayne, a Career Ambassador and Former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico and Argentina, and Assistant Secretary of State now at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and a long-time friend of Brookings.

They will present findings and recommendations from the new task force white paper on U.S.-Mexico security dynamics in which they and Vanda participated.

But for now, it's my pleasure and my honor to invite Ambassador Bárcena to the podium. Thank you for joining us. (Applause)

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. It's an honor to be here at Brookings Institution; such a world-renown think tank, and so respected in Mexico, and with my friend, Rafael; with my colleague and friend, Anthony Wayne, Vanda, and colleague.

So, I'm newly arrived, as you see, and I've been talking particularly on USMCA ratification on issues of migration, discussing both privately and public these matters. But it's the first time that I will address the New Security Strategy of President López Obrador, and how this is related also to the other areas of the bilateral relationship.

So, I would start for recognizing and underlining that cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. regarding security is fundamental for the stability and prosperity of both countries and the whole North American region.

We have both been affected by the challenges posed by illegal trafficking of drugs, people, money and guns, which is why we will continue to work based on the principle of core responsibility, of shared responsibility.

The New Security Policy of the Mexican Government represents a fundamental shift in the way Mexico has dealt with security in the past decades, in the previous years, Mexico fought organized crime with an almost exclusive reliance on punitive and traditional approaches that privileged the criminalization of drugs, and the use of military

might to take out drug kingpins.

These resulted in the fragmentation of cartels and the rise of drug-related crimes, like theft, kidnappings, extortion and violence, while a decisive action from the Mexican Government was long overdue and so that's why we had to take these measures, the strategy that was put into place achieved important results in some areas but face unintended consequences for human lives, and the environment, the general environment of citizenship security in Mexico.

In response, President López Obrador decided to articulate a new security vision that represents a turning point in the way Mexico has understood security and peace for the past two decades.

The main plan was a strategy on security, public security. One of the main elements was to separate again the ministry -- the labors of security, or the tasks of security and governance were in only one ministry, that was Secretaría de Gobernación. President López Obrador decided to split them again having la Secretaría de Gobernación for governance issues, human rights, and migratory issues and the issues of public security.

And with this, this is a structural change on the way we organize our answer to the challenges of public security. And then the public strategy has eight pillars that are totally interrelated among them.

The first is anti-corruption, the second is economic inclusion, the third is human rights protection, the fourth pillar is regeneration of ethics in society, the fifth a new approach on the fight against drugs; six, peace building; seven, prison reform; and eight, a new perspective on public security and national security including the creation of the National Guard.

These pillars put forward a new vision that is human-centered and considers that both enforcement actions of the military and the newly-created National Guard must operate hand-in-hand with a comprehensive approach to prevent the repeat -- the recurrence of violence by addressing its root causes through institutional consolidation,

reconciliation and a social political and economic transformation.

It also seeks to revamp previous mechanisms that proved successfully in specific areas including bilateral mechanisms with the U.S. that have relied on trust building and fluent communications between enforcement agencies.

In this sense, we recognize that Iniciativa Mérida has been a fundamental component of our bilateral efforts on security, but it needs to be reviewed strategically in order to ensure its effectiveness and make sure its main goals adapt to the current priorities of both countries.

So, we have started an evaluation of Iniciativa Mérida in Mexico. We have started conversations with the U.S. on the need to evaluate Iniciativa Mérida, identify where are the successes, and where Iniciativa Mérida has not worked as was expected, and how to go forward in this bilateral cooperation.

The greatest value the Mérida Initiative would recognize, is having contributed to the construction of mutual trust and cooperation between Mexico and the United States. The initiative helped to develop a collaboration scheme with the United States that allows complementing Mexican efforts to fight organized crime and strengthen our institutional capacities.

Eleven years after its implementation and with the start of the administration of President López Obrador, it is important that both the U.S. and Mexico review their modalities and objectives of cooperation in security matters on their Mérida privilege and institutionally strengthening and development, training and exchange of state-of-the-art technology.

On this topic, I want to make clear and underline that our security cooperation with the U.S. is, and will remain, one of the top priorities of our relationship with the U.S. There should be no doubt about it.

One fundamental element is to maintain our continued military cooperation also, which has become stronger and has developed on various coordination levels from a

strategic to tactic. This has allowed us to establish common priorities and reinforce our educational and training programs.

We are also cooperating closely to prevent human smuggling and arms and ammunition trafficking, through information sharing, training, coordinated patrolling along the border, and with the use of technology at ports of entry.

A new strategy for customs has just been launched in Mexico that will increase the common procedures for checking the cargo, and also sharing information in real-time. In addition, we maintain a continuous dialogue to prevent trafficking in persons that allows both countries to identify where do we have to strengthen our exchange of information and collaboration.

Now, for the sake of time I will address some of the main pillars of the security strategy in no particular order, and try to explain how they overlap and integrate for this new vision of President López Obrador.

One of the main pillars of the security strategy, and it would be surprising for some but not for Mexicans, is the fight against corruption. According to the OECD, the cost of corruption in Mexico is estimated to be between 5 and 10 percent of Mexico gross domestic product. And corruption and organized crime have shown to have a symbiotic relation to one another.

Therefore, a successful approach to organized crime is inseparable from a wider effort to eradicate corruption from public life in the country. A notable example already in place is the fight against fuel theft in which the government has invested more than $200 million, but it was estimated that only in 2018 the cost of fuel theft was up USD3 billion.

Furthermore, new wide-ranging constitutional reforms have been passed to strengthen crime proceeds recovery from corrupt practices, and to expand the number of crimes requiring preventive prison without bail to include corruption, fuel theft and electoral fraud, amongst others.

The other fundamental pillar that I want to address is the new perspective

on public security and national security that includes the creation of the National Guard. One major component of this pillar is implementation of a citizen security approach, the premise of this approach is that the successful public security frameworks are the ones that guarantee the rights of citizens.

The legitimacy of policing derives from their integrity in exercising those powers and their accountability for doing so.

The other component is the creation of the National Guard which was approved, unanimously, by the Mexican Senate, and with the majority of votes, only one vote against, in the Chamber of Deputies.

The National Guard will be responsible for public order and security, at the same time military forces that have been de facto in control of public security will enter a five-years phase-out period, afterwards they will return to their national security duties, but without the help of the Military, without the training of the National Guard based on Military discipline. This cannot happen.

The National Guard will be under civilian control in a few years, but will operate with the assistance of the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Navy. The National Guard will be integrated by the Military Police, the Naval Police, and the Federal Police.

The military forces will be in charge of developing infrastructure, discipline, (inaudible) and training. It will have clear accountability mechanisms, members that commit a crime will be judged by civilian authorities, only violations to military discipline will be addressed by military authorities.

Furthermore, all criminals apprehended will be taken to civilian courts. The National Guard will be deployed in 266 regional sites within the 32 states, and it is expected to reach 50,000 members with a gradual approach.

In the first stage elements from the Army Police, the Naval Police and the Federal Police will be recruited, as I said so, to join the guard. Later, the recruitment will be

open to all civilian population. All of its members will act in accordance with a protocol on the legitimate use of force that we consider necessity, proportional means, and adherence to law.

I would like to underline that yesterday I was listening to Senator Vanessa Rubio from one of the opposition parties explaining then how the Senate reached almost -- not almost -- a unanimous agreement. It was a negotiation among all the political forces in Mexico. So, that means that all political forces are committed to the National Guard, and are supporting it and so will be supporting the job in public security.

Another third fundamental pillar is the new approach on the fight against drugs. On this issue Mexico has devoted unprecedented efforts to eradicate crops, confiscate drug shipments, destroy clandestine labs, and disarticulate drug trafficking organizations.

However, the emphasis on the punitive and prohibitionists approach has contributed to generate a spiral of violence. What is worse, drug consumption, both in the U.S. and in Mexico has continued to rise.

This is why Mexico seeks to promote a more effective collaboration with the U.S., but also internationally, based not only on a criminal justice approach, but also focusing on addressing social grievances, reinforcing prevention strategies, as well as strengthening public health and care for victims and vulnerable groups.

The rise of the use of fentanyl and its destructive effects on ordinary Americans, for example, present new challenges that will require a closer cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico.

I come just from a lunch with the Head of Customs in Mexico. They were telling me that what is arriving in Mexico is chemical precursors from China, and that most of fentanyl that arrives to the U.S. comes from China. So, what we have is that with chemical precursors arriving in Mexico some groups are starting to manufacture fentanyl in Mexico.

And the fentanyl that's arriving to the U.S. is coming basically from China

through mail, and a good part of it, or some part of it through Mexican borders. But we are not yet big manufacturers of fentanyl, we are manufacturers of methamphetamines, and what we are seeing at the border is a drop of almost 80 percent of the seizures of marijuana, there's almost no traffic now on marijuana.

Also the traffic of cocaine has been going down considerably, the traffic of fentanyl has been going up more than 100 percent, the traffic of chemical precursors have been going up more than 100 percent, and the traffic of heroine is up around 50 percent.

So, that means also that the whole system of drug trafficking and drug trade is changing, and that what is going on under drug trafficking is related also to the human trafficking, and to the arms trafficking.

If the people or the elements of Mexican security forces and the U.S. security forces are concentrated in fighting illegal traffic of people, then other parts of the border are not well taken care, and then drugs cross more easily.

By the way, drugs cross the borders basically through ports of entry, and that it's a characteristic that we need to have in mind, always, for any cooperation.

So, that is why Mexico, we are ready then to contribute, to explore new ways to deal with this urgent challenge of fentanyl, and while there is not a silver bullet that will solve the problem overnight, we want to generate an honest and respectful discussion based on five main ideas.

A more human enforcement, recognize a problem as a health public issue, the issue of drugs, distinction in the regulation of substances, address the root causes of violence and the propagation of crimes through a sustainable development strategy, and make international cooperation more coherent and efficient.

We have submitted some of these ideas already to the Committee on Drugs of United Nations in Vienna, only 10 days ago.

Lastly, the peace-building approach is worth an individual mention because it is closely related with the rest of the pillars, notably, human rights protection, economic

inclusion, and the regeneration of ethics in society. Mexico believes that a sustainable peace cannot be achieved without a series of interrelated processes in order to address justice, accountability, and reintegration into society.

The government will explore the implementation of a transitional justice approach in order to promote possibilities for reconciliation. Amnesty and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration will also be evaluated under the clear conditions, full collaboration with justice institutions, unequivocal manifestation of repent and damaged reputation.

This is when President López Obrador said in one of his early-morning conferences that what we were going to do was a peacekeeping operation inside Mexico, he was referring to this. You know, the basis of a peacekeeping operation is three pillars.

Is first, guarantee basic security presence of armed forces and police to stabilize the situation. Second, deal with this demobilization, reintegration disarmament; third is guarantee access to justice and prison reform.

And what he was saying is we will do this with our own resources. So, we will take the conceptual basis of what a peacekeeping operation and a peace-building operation is, and we will do it with our own Forces.

And now, fortunately, for the last years both the Mexican Police, and above all, the Mexican Army and the Mexican Navy have been participating in peacekeeping operations so they know all these concepts, they know the ideas that sustain this effort.

I will close saying that we expect that this strategy will change the paradigm through which security and peace are understood in Mexico. It's a bold move but an urgent one after 12 years of increasing violence.

And by the way, we cannot expect that results will come very fast. It will take at least six months to start to see the first results of the new strategy.

But a close collaboration with the U.S. on all these topics will be fundamental, which is why we are determined to carry on a spirit of cooperation that

promotes broader and deeper understanding of our common challenges, of our way ahead, of our common future.

So, I hope that the debates like today in Brookings Institution can help to enlighten this new era of cooperation, can bring new ideas to consider, and can underline that without the cooperation, and not only at our common border, but also with Canada and in our southern border, there is no way ahead.

The only way to really advance is having this cooperation and understanding the needs and the approaches of the other side. We need empathy, and we need to know what are the priorities of each other. Thank you very much. (Applause)

(Off-the-record discussion)

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: (Crosstalk)

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Oh. Yes. I have to go there. Sorry, I wanted to skip the questions. (Laughter) It didn't work.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Ambassador, thank you so much for the absolutely enlightening presentation.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: This might have been your first speech on security issues and the New Security Strategy, but it's an absolutely stellar speech that gave us tremendous food for thought. Thank you so much for sharing it.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Perhaps I can start my first question. I'll ask a few questions and then open up for the audience, with the amnesty leniency pillar component of the security strategy. No doubt this is the most innovative and perhaps one can even say, most controversial element of the strategy.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: It is.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Certainly transitional justice has been applied many times, but in the context of military conflict. It has not been applied in the way the

administration is conceiving of it in the context of criminality. Could you tell us a little bit about who might be eligible for the amnesty? I understand that this is an issue that's evolving --

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: It is evolving.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: There is back and forth. What is the current state of thinking about that? And perhaps also if you could share with us, some about the process of conceiving the amnesty leniency law, the consultations that are taking place with civil society, and society broadly in Mexico?

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: I think that you're right. This is an evolving issue in which it has been a lot of discussion in Mexico. And I would say that there isn't yet a consensus on this issue, and that is why consultations with the civil society is going on, and it is true that some people think that the transitional justice concept cannot be applied to criminality in Mexico but has been applied, as you said, in the context of civil wars and peace processes.

I think basically what, particularly what Secretaría de Gobernación has been saying and, you know, she was a Judge for the Supreme Court in Mexico. It's that we have a lot of people in jail relating to criminality, basically to drug trafficking there are not the big drug traffickers. Are some young people, some poor people that were either caught with a small amount of drugs or they were used as the carriers of the drugs.

So, we need to see if those are really criminality, or were just extremely poor or young people that were used, or even knowing what they were doing, they have little option of taking another decision. So, as far as we are following there is -- not yet submitted any legal or law to the Congress to approach this.

So, I think that discussion is going on, but the idea is that we need really to undermine or to deal with the causes of the criminality, and the insecurity and keeping young people, let's say, 18 years old, 19 years old, 20 years old, young men or young women in jail because they were having a certain amount of marijuana with them, it will not help to really

diminish the criminality.

So, that is the idea. If the concept of transitional justice could be applied to other big criminals, let's say, and not in the context of a peace process, I think there is something to be discussed. I don't think we can discard it in principle. I think if you go even to the Colombian experience and with the negotiations on that, you know, some of the guerrilla leaders were also accused of criminality and drug trafficking.

So it is something that we need to explore, I would not discard it, I will not say that it's just a good idea in principle, it's something to be discussed.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Yes. And transitional justice processes are often a vital part of a peace deal --

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: The peace process.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: They're also enormously controversial, and indeed your example from Colombia is very apropos in the changes that the Duque administration is seeking through the transitional justice element with potentially vast negative consequences for the peace deal, never an easy situation.

I would highlight and compliment the effort of the López Obrador administration in having some societal consultation on transitional justice, whether it is applicable, in what form, what are the eligibility standards. That doesn't always happen, yet it is a vital part of building political legitimacy for the process.

Not less controversial issue, if I may, is the fundamental change of strategy away from drug trafficking groups. I understand that both President López Obrador and Minister Durazo have at various points, explicitly, disavowed going after cartels.

The President said the war on drugs has ended. Yet you have highlighted both the issue of homicides in Mexico that are certainly also perpetrated by drug trafficking groups, and the issue of fentanyl, and the tremendous death that it's causing in the United States, and the need for cooperation between Mexico and the United States.

What are the contours and outlines of combining these two elements? The

need to cooperate on fentanyl, the need to suppress homicides, and yet going away from focus on drug trafficking groups?

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Let's say, homicides are not all related to drug trafficking.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: And what we have seen in the organized crime is, as I said, is that organized crime has their diversified. They not only deal with drug trafficking, they deal with kidnapping, they deal with extortion, they deal with illegal traffic of people, they deal with illegal traffic of arms. And maybe those other activities of organized crime have more direct consequences on citizens, because if you are a citizens that is not directly involved with drug trafficking, but you receive telephone calls on extortion. Or if you are assaulted in highways, or if you cannot guarantee the private sector safety in your highways, and that is not related necessarily to drug trafficking, that means that you will give priority to solve those issues.

Would that mean that you will not pay attention anymore to drug trafficking, or to fight drug trafficking? No. It gives that you will have to prioritize, because what people need in Mexico is to feel safe. The common citizen needs to feel safe, so that's why we are -- they will also be working in jails from -- most of the extortion was coming out.

Are we going to stop our cooperation in drug trafficking? No. Are we going to totally stop fighting drug trafficking? No. It's just that the main mantra will not be the war on drugs. The main mantra would be citizens' security, a peaceful environment, but that doesn't mean we will stop cooperating.

It is of our interest. It is in the national interest, the national security of Mexico to continue to cooperate and to fight drug trafficking, but it is not the only priority, or the main priority as it was in some of the past years. Maybe because the citizens' insecurity was not as high as it was just in the last few years.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I think that your administration is absolutely right in

focusing on citizen safety. Homicides are the essential issue that any country needs to focus on. If there is violence, whether it's through criminality or through conflict that has tremendously negative effects on all kinds of aspects of citizens' lives and societal functioning.

And, in your words, will also be a great relief to many in Washington that it's not a matter of stopping focus on drug trafficking --

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: No.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: -- but changing prioritization.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Yes. It's just to give more emphasis on citizen security, and also to link citizen security with the new policy of the government of Mexico and human rights. So, the new government of Mexico has recognized that we have more than 40,000 disappearances. We have recognized that there are more of 200,000 people internally displaced. That was not recognized.

We have reestablished this committee to look for the missing persons. We have reestablished these, or established the Truth Commission for Ayotzinapa to review again what happened.

So, I think this has to be understood that the priority for President's López Obrador and for President López Obrador as Government is human-centered. It's the person, and of course we will fight all the different aspects of crime that impinges on the human -- on the citizen security. But we will work more on the concept of human security, let's say, that on the concept of a strictly national security.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And my last question for you before I take a few questions from the audience. In announcing the National Guard, President López Obrador, and Secretary Durazo, and other officials emphasize there's still a very poor state of police forces in Mexico both the President and the Secretary, in fact, also highlighted that the Federal Police that has received, by far, most attention in terms of police reform including U.S. assistance, still faces lack of capacity and corruption.

Can you tell us a little bit about the agenda of the López Obrador administration in terms of police reform, and also in terms of justice reform, and continuing with the very vital and important implementation of the prosecutorial system?

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Well I think we will continue with implementation of the prosecutorial system, and I think that it's the area that sometimes is not so well known, that it's one of the bilateral cooperation areas, that it's included in the Iniciativa Mérida.

Particularly, the U.S. has been financing through IDLO, which is the International Development Law Organization which is based in Rome, the training of the State Police and Municipal Police to do some criminal investigations. And also they have been doing the training for the new procedural justice. And I think that one of the areas in which the Secretaría de Gobernación will give a big priority also is in the follow-up of this reform.

And having a Former Minister of the Supreme Court at the head of the governance system in Mexico will be very important. What we are now in this evaluation of the Mérida Initiative that may have, maybe, another name in the future, so that we really reflect what we are going to do in the future; one of the main areas will be the justice reform, still, or considered as one of the areas in which we can cooperate more.

On the other hand, the National Guard is based basically on models that exist in other countries, and as Carabinieri, basically. We have been working a lot on the Carabinieri model of Italy, and the la Guerra Civil Española, but if you go through the Carabinieri model and the problems that Italy has confronted, and Mexico has confronted, they are very similar, and so we have a lot of to learn from them.

So we will be working with Italians on the training also of the Guarda Nacional, but at the same time that we deployed and operate the Guardia Nacional, we will be training the Municipal and State Police Forces.

What it is important to say, that it's, even in the maximum -- I think the

Federal Police, but please correct me, we never reach 100,000 elements. Did we?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Roughly 50,000.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: And in and in Colombia they have a Police Force of a-half-a-million police similar to Guarda Nacional. And Colombia is less than half of the Mexican population, so that means that the police forces in Mexico have always been smaller in comparison to the challenges that we have.

Even now for Guarda Nacional 50,000 it's not enough, we will need to beef up the Guarda Nacional, and we will need to train and recruit people. But at the same time that we are recruiting for Guarda Nacional, we are recruiting for an army for the National Institute of Migration.

We are recruiting for customs, and we are asking more and more school education, more strict on the recruitment terms. So it is, even with a huge population that Mexico is not easy to do it, it's not easy to beef up the Guardia Nacional at the same time that you beef up an army, at the same time that you do customs, at the same time even in other sectors.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: The U.S. Embassy in Mexico has 1,500 employees now, more and less, or even more. The Mexican Foreign Service is 1,300 employees all over the world. That gives you just the size of the challenges that we have in all areas. So can we reach our goals in the number of people of the National Guard on what they will be doing?

If we make a huge leap in these six years of President López Obrador will be a great triumph. Will we be able to fulfill old expectations? Probably not. But if we go into the right way and we advance, and we continue cooperation, I would consider that a triumph.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. I'll take three questions. Please wait for the microphone, introduce yourself, and ask a brief question. This gentleman right here?

QUESTIONER: Ambassador, congratulations on your recent appointment, and delighted to hear your remarks today.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Could you speak just briefly about how you will try to implement the incentives to fight corruption? My own personal view is that corruption in Mexico underlies many of the other issues you talked about, and incentives for dealing with it will perhaps be very tough to implement, but need that done, especially in the middle levels. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I'll take more two questions. Two more questions. Diana?

MS. NEGROPONTE: Thank you. Diana Negroponte from Woodrow Wilson. Madam Ambassador, thank you for what you have shared this afternoon. My concern is the use of preventive detention, and the number of crimes which are now eligible for preventive detention. What measures exists there to ensure that the rule of law will be complied with, and that this will not be used for political purposes?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. And one more; the gentleman over there on the other side of the room.

QUESTIONER: Mexico either has been unable to or has chosen not to stop hundreds of thousands of Central Americans from crossing its territories. Is there a solution to that problem? Is it a problem? And if a Democratic administration here were to lessen border security, not build any more fencing, what kind of equilibrium do you think would be achieved in the coming years, if there were much less attention paid to the southern border?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. Ambassador?

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Well, first corruption. I would say that for President López Obrador, if we could synthesize the main objectives of his government in three, it would be: one, the fight against corruption and impunity. So, so we cannot fight

corruption if we don't fight impunity. So, there will be more strict measures, where you'll have a more active Secretaría de la Función Pública fighting corruption, increasing competition in the case of tendering or direct calls for adjudication for different contracts.

The other big objective is fight against inequality and poverty, and the third is the fight against insecurity and violence. So, I addressed today basically the third, and part of the third is also fight against corruption.

But I think the main objective, and I am convinced that President López Obrador won the election because he fought the campaign based on the fight against corruption. So, there are measures now that are being taken, and that is why some of the reforms on preventive detention was really related to some crimes that are related to corruption.

But what you said, Diana, is true. The Congressmen and Senators that oppose that reform, they oppose it on the base that it could be used for political reasons, and violating human rights. I think the option of not doing it was that the state would not have the tools to fight those really -- those crimes.

And it is very clear in the case huachicol or the fuel theft. When the government launched its campaign against huachicol, or the fuel theft, the question that was asked by most of the journalists, and they were totally right, is: why haven't you detained any person, any people responsible for this?

The problem is that fuel theft was not considered a major crime. So if you could not -- caught them in fraganti, you could not persecute them, so you could not process them, and you could not put them into jail. So, it had also to be considered like a major crime not subject to bail and preventive detention.

So it will be like -- also like a deterrent. How is it going to work? I can't tell you. I would like to assume that with the reform of the judicial system in Mexico it will work well, and that with the new National Guard it will work well, that we will be able to really bring to justice the people that are committing these crimes.

But we have to knowledge at the same time that the challenges of the justice system in Mexico are huge. According to some UNDP reports only 2 percent of the crimes that are committed in Mexico have a result, not prosecuted but have a final verdict. And these we have to be to be aware of.

And on the issue of the migration, I think we are having constant conversations with the U.S. administration on migration. To be totally honest, we have a different perception of migration. For Mexico migration is basically an economic and social phenomena that is related to demographic profiles, labor markets complementarity, economic forces, and that it should be approached from a human rights point of view.

Having said that, we are totally aware that migration has some challenges related to security and to national security, but we don't see migration as a national security threat. We see it really as I said, it's an economic and social phenomena.

I think the migration policy of the U.S. right now has a different approach. So what we have been trying is to keep a very open and frank dialogue on how we address the challenges of security related to migration.

And our perception is that of course we need to fight the illegal trafficking of people, and without any doubt, there is organized crime involved in the illegal trafficking of Central Americans through Mexico to the U.S. and we have to tackle that.

And we are, all the time, trying to work with the U.S. Government identifying the areas in which we can strengthen collaboration, like exchange of information, better state-of-the-art technology to do this. But at the same time if we do not address the root causes of migration because a humanitarian crisis is in Central America.

If we do not address the root causes of migration, which is violence, the lack of economic opportunities, climate change and its derivatives like drought in Central America, that is why we call in the northern triangle, the Dry Corridor of Central America.

Sixty percent of the Central Americans migrating through Mexico to the U.S. comes from the rule areas, because of the plagues, because of the droughts, because of all

the problems.

And of course another aspect which is family reunification. When we have the crisis of minor children, unaccompanied minor children, and there were some interviews in Mexico to the children, and then we identified their families in Honduras and Guatemala.

And asking to the grandmothers -- and this was the story that Senator Rubio was saying yesterday -- to the grandmother: why did you send your grandchildren five and six years' old alone through Mexico? Oh, because their parents are in Florida, and I want them to be with their parents. As simple as that.

So, that migration has also a human dimension that if you only see it as a national security threat you forget about the most important thing, which is the human dimension.

So are we cooperating? Are we in dialogue with the U.S. authorities on the huge challenge of the Central America migration? Yes, we are. Do we agree on everything? No, we don't. But that doesn't mean that we are not cooperating.

We are cooperating, we are collaborating, and we look forward to find a solution, and to find not a final solution, but to find the means and the ways so that people in Central America stay in their places of origin, and that people in the south and southeast of Mexico stay in their places of origin.

Because as President López Obrador has repeated once, and again, and it's the same thing that Head -- the American, the U.S. Head of the World Food Program, David Beasley, the Leader of FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, José Graziano da Silva; Gilbert Houngbo, the International Fund for Agricultural Development; and my President, the four of them say: migration should be an option and not a necessity. And we need to work with that aim in mind.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Ambassador, thank you so much for the very enlightening comments.

Please join me in thanking the Ambassador, and welcoming -- (Applause)

AMBASSADOR BÁRCENA COQUI: Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you so much. And welcoming on the stage, Ambassador Tony Wayne. Please join me in welcoming on the stage Ambassador Tony Wayne, and Dr. Rafael Fernández de Castro. (Applause)

Bruce Jones already introduced our very distinguished panelists in his remarks, because of time and wanting to make sure that the audience has enough chance to ask questions, I will not repeat at the introductions of our two stars, who are very prominent in fostering U.S.-Mexican security cooperation, and much broader, U.S.-Mexican cooperation over many decades.

I only want to reiterate what Bruce had said in his opening remarks, namely, that Rafael chaired a task force that produced the white paper on how security cooperation could, should proceed in the era of the Trump administration, and the López Obrador administration.

It was a bilateral task force that included distinguished experts and high government officials from Mexico and the United States, and among the distinguished stars was Ambassador Wayne. And the paper was available when you entered, and I would be very delighted if you could share with us some of the key findings and recommendations. Rafael?

MR. DE CASTRO: Thank you, Vanda. Let me stand. I prefer to speak from the podium.

And even thought the Ambassador has left, I just wanted to make sure that, I mean, we recognize that she accepted our invitation. She's an academic, she's a diplomat very close to academics. She was, at a point in her life, a wonderful Professor of International Relations, and I can tell that she continues to be close to academics, to policy ideas. So, I want to thank her for being here.

First of all, Vanda, I also want to recognize you. You're a wonderful team player, you're so efficient -- I mean you're wonderful in organizing this event. You know, I

will nominate you to become part of the El Tri. That is the Mexican soccer team. We badly need people like you, Vanda. We definitely need people like you.

And I want to recognize some people from the task force who are here. First of all, Cecilia Farfán-Méndez, she's a Post Doc Fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UCSD. Thank You, Cecilia. I mean, mission accomplished, we are here. I mean, she was the academy coordinator. Thank you, Cecilia.

Gema Santamaría is here. Gema and Cecilia, I will say they're one of those New Mexican young scholars who are doing, I will say, literally wonderful research on violent issues, and your work is so necessary for Mexico and for Latin America to overcome the crisis. Thank you for being here.

And Eric Olsen is also here as well, as well as Enrique Bravo, my former student; and Lori Molinski. Thank you for being here. If I'm forgetting someone from the task force, I'm sorry, but those are the ones who I have recognized.

I want to thank my Dean, my boss Peter Cowhey, for being here. This is important for us, the School of Global Policy and Strategy, we are celebrating our 30th Anniversary. I see this event as part of our celebration, what we're doing at GPS is basically trying to come up with innovative solutions to world problems.

I see security, in Mexico security, in Latin America security, across the border more problem, and I'm very grateful for my colleagues at GPS to help us put together this paper and this task force.

Let me make four points to summarize the report. First of all, I will say it's, yes, Mexico and the U.S., we live in critical times. Mexico is undergoing a violent crisis, and the U.S., and I'm sure my colleague, Tony Wayne will be talking about the opioid crisis in the U.S.

And it's very telling, Martha was just telling, and thanking you, but I was saying that you're a diplomat who has who has always been very close to academics, that you were a wonderful Professor International Relations, and I wanted to let you know, at the

outset, of your staying in Washington, I mean, we can tell you're doing wonderful, you're world-round diplomat.

But eventually after six years here remember that there is a Center -- the Center of U.S.-Mexican Studies; that you can always come to write your book there. That is my message to you really at the outset of your ambassadorship here in Washington. You've been there already so you know that you're welcome there.

So, let me go back. My first point is, yes, we live in a crisis and this crisis in Mexico and the U.S. has already compromised the expectancy of living in both countries. So this could give you a sense of the magnitude of the crisis. So, we are undergoing this tremendous crisis both in Mexico and in the U.S.

Yes, last year has been the most violent year ever in Mexico 33,000 homicides. But what I want to say, and Ambassador Bárcena already said something about it; it is, I mean violence in Mexico and in Latin America is beyond homicides. What is really affecting not most Latin Americans is street crime. And there's a lot of robberies in Mexico, so we really have to tackle these problems and it's -- so will live in chronic violence that that goes beyond homicides.

Let me make two points about violence in Mexico. First of all Mexico is not alone, what we live in is a regional crisis, Latin America has become the single-most violent region on earth. We, Latin Americans, represent about 8 percent of the world's population, and we're concentrated about 33 percent of world homicide. This is too much. We must do something about this, and we must understand that this is, again, an original crisis.

Second, violence is multi-dimensional, and usually politico's, policymakers they tend to emphasize the role of drugs, of drug trafficking. Yes, this is very important, but I would like to emphasize something that is common in Latin American, and it's the lack of state capacities.

This is very keen. Without state capacities, without better police, without better prosecutors, without better judges, and without better prisons we would not be able to

reduce impunity, which is something that is badly needed in our countries, in our societies.

Let me go to my second point. We all know the President Trump and President López Obrador, they embody change. I mean they, they are here basically to challenge the status quo.

Well, the members of the task force we believe very strongly that we must take into consideration there'll be improvements of U.S.-Mexico security cooperation of the last two decades.

We shouldn't invent the wheel. It's not about that. We should, I mean, Ambassador Martha Bárcena already talked about the Mérida Initiative, you're right, I believe it's about strengthening the Mérida Initiative, not about destroying it.

The Mérida initiative now is only a fraction of what it was 12 years ago when it started. But I believe that Mérida is very important, because already has -- it has institutionalized some processes within the U.S. Congress, and it has really helped tremendously the dialogue and the communication between the two Federal Governments.

Not only that, lately the Mérida Initiative was very good to come up with very innovative programs, to state and local governments in Mexico, so, that's key we must, I would say strengthen that.

My third point will be: try to align the goals between Mexico and the U.S. security wise. In the U.S., traditionally has been too much about drug interdiction, and too much about drug kingpin strategy.

I believe, and Martha Bárcena said so, in Mexico it must be about citizen security, it's about our children walking to school. I mean when I'm in San Diego, because now I live in San Diego, believe me, every day when I see these kids walking to school I feel like, wow, I wish that could be happening in my city, in Mexico City.

And so that sounds like it's about citizen security, it's about reducing the levels of impunity, and we must save that. And I'm glad that finally Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the President, and of course our top diplomat in Washington, they have this clarity

of mind and they understand that is about the safety of Mexicans. About being able to play in the street as we used to play in the street, my children were able to play in the street, but not lately -- not anymore -- I will put it that way.

So, it is very important. In the paper we have nine very concrete recommendations. Let me share with you two of them. First of all, we believe that it will be very important to have once again, or to create a high-level group on security matters -- a bilateral group on security affairs.

Let me share with you. Working for President Calderón in 2009, Janet Napolitano, newly-Homeland Security Secretary came to Mexico February 2009; and the late Carlos Rico a wonderful policymaker, Martha knew him very well, he came with an idea of creating a working group on immigration issues.

Janet Napolitano said yes, then Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State said yes, and then Barack Obama or his White House said no, because they thought it was too political.

I'll tell you something. I believe if we had -- if we would have created that, the National Group on Immigration, I will say we would not be living in the crisis, we are living in the U.S.-Mexico border, especially the humanitarian crisis we live in there. The suffering of the immigrant community, particularly Mexicans and Central Americans, has been devastating for the last 12 to 15 years. This is too much. And what we need is to strengthen the dialogue.

I believe that in this U.S.-Mexico Working Group, the role of the Ambassador, she's going to be key.

Finally, we are going to have a U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, he was finally nominated after nine months without an Ambassador. So he's welcome I hope. The Center will shortly confirm here, but this is important.

And I believe that the participation of the Foreign Ministry will be key, because we are talking about a regional crisis. So that's why the Foreign Ministry should be

present in that discussion.

My other point about this working group, I believe that even though Mexico is in the midst of a crisis I believe that the López Obrador Team should come soon with a roadmap but for the next six years in terms of cooperating with the U.S.

I believe that the former administration of Peña Nieto, they were never able to come up with a full strategy on how to cooperate with the U.S. And this is important.

Let me go to my closing point, and this is about, I will say, we have to have a sense of urgency in creating this developing plan for Central America. I know this is a top priority for President López Obrador, but I will add to that a good security component.

We could not have development in Central America without security, so security and development will go hand-in-hand. This will be very, very important. So it's, I believe, that López Obrador, and I believe that the Trump White House they should be very ambitious of this, we should be talking about a sort of a Marshall Plan for Central America.

And I believe that the NGO community, and also I will say the Diasporas here, the Central Americans living here, the wealthy Mexican Americans, we should invite them to participate in this. They will be very key about helping their homelands to be more secure, and to be, I will say, more developed. I will stop here. Thank you, Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. (Applause)

AMBASSADOR WAYNE: Well, getting to follow up two excellent presentations. Let me just focus a little bit on the recommendations at the end. And I do strongly recommend you take a look at the report, and there's a lot of combined wisdom from both sides of the border in this report.

So, first I agree fully that the first recommendation is key. It's very important that we have strategic alignment.

As the Ambassador said, we have different priorities; that's okay, but within those priorities there's overlap. And we need to forge that agenda and agree on it, and then have a way to follow up progress in getting all the agencies together to work on this agenda.

One of the good reasons to have such a big group, is that we do have so many agencies on both sides of the border working on this. They do not have the same agendas. That's just a fact; it's a fact of bureaucracy.

You need to be able to bring them together, they have to regularly be held accountable to report, what have they been doing here and there, and how does this fit the overall agenda. So, this whole process of having a group -- first aligning the strategies to having a group to monitor that, periodically getting together to see how everybody's working together, is really important.

Historically, in my experience, we never fully had that in the years that I saw. We got closer. We established a group in 2013/2014 that brought everybody together for the first time, ever. We hadn't done that before. But there's more we can do. So, this is an opportunity to do that.

Secondly, clearly the National Guard is the innovation going on now, and it's not only establishing the National Guard, it is recruiting members, it is training them, it is properly providing the capacity and equipment they need, there's a lot that can be done bilaterally that has traditionally fallen in the area of the Mérida Program, whatever we end up calling it. That can be a very important part of collaboration between the two countries as this goes forward.

Secondly, in that in the second point we get to, we talk about sub-national governments. One of the very sad legacies of all our efforts to cooperate, is we have not focused enough on sub-national law enforcement authorities. There were several areas, a couple of states in Mexico where we did work closely with them under the Mérida Program, and that produced good results.

But there are other places that are now suffering from a lot of violence where we just never did work. There are a lot of reasons for that, but it is very important that our dialogue include talking about, as the Ambassador said, as they go ahead trying to re-establish security, they're going to start looking at state and local police forces. I think

there's a lot of area that we can help each other in that collaboration.

Mexico needs to get better at prevention as the Ambassador said, it also needs to get a lot better at investigation and prosecution, and she also did say.

And so addressing all of these is going to be very important for restoring that sense of security. And there's a lot that we can do together in that area, but there's a lot that we haven't been able to do because of the shortcomings in the investigative capacities, and the prosecution capacities.

In a number of cases it was largely the United States that did most of the investigation, and then prosecution in a certain category of crimes. We want a partnership where that's not the case, where we are each taking many cases forward to bring justice to them.

And so this does have to be an important area, I think, of work together in justice reform, and improving that capacity the in the Mexican system. And I'm a strong believer in having joint investigations for processes that touch across the border, that that actually forces people to work together. Hopefully we would create a trusted environment to do that, that's one of the important recommendations also, is to have vetting for people.

But that's actually a way to learn together and to help bring people to justice, and I think we need to do more of that as we move forward. Another of the recommendations is to focus on fentanyl, and other synthetic opioids.

The reason for that, as the Ambassador alluded to this, great growth in the trafficking of this, they're very lethal and there are areas of gigantic profit for the drug cartels.

It does not cost much to produce them, much cheaper to produce fentanyl and put it in pills, than to raise poppies and turn it into heroin, and a lot easier to get across the border, or to mail into the United States, or to get across the Canadian border.

And so I think one of the things we have to do is coordinate between the three countries of North America, and deal with China together because most of this right now is coming from China, eventually it might come from India or other places, so you do

need to go after the organized trafficking groups in order to prevent that. But there's a lot we can do both bilaterally, trilaterally, and quadrilaterally to deal with this problem.

Similarly, the demand side as was mentioned, is really important, we do have to have a dialogue about that. Another recommendation is look at community policing.

This is an area' John Feely is here in the office, and I still remember when I first got to Mexico he was the Deputy Chief of Mission and had been Charge d'Affaires, and he said, Tony we'll know that we've had success with the Mérida Program when a 12-year-old girl gets lost in the crowd and runs up to a policeman and asked for help. She would not do that right now. Now, you're going to do that if you have community policing, and people trust the police in their communities.

So, you see John, I did listen to things you were telling me. (Laughter)

Corruption, corruption is, it's a big deal in bilateral cooperation. A lot of work that we do takes place only between people that we can trust, and that means there is very limited areas for actually joint work together. So the vetting again is very important in order to have that trust, and this is true between Mexican agencies as well, not just U.S., Mexico, is going to be really important.

Having more transparent and automated processes so that targeting of potential criminal operations does not filter through officials that might be tainted, and might redirect that targeting other places using bigger databases, search of those databases with automated processes, a lot that can be done in that area to improve transparency and limit corruption.

Finally, money laundering. The estimates from DEA are $18-20 billion a year made by drug groups from Mexico selling drugs in the United States. That's a lot of money. We find in a good year maybe a billion dollars worth of that. It's out there somewhere, we've got to get better at cutting off that money that supplies the drug groups that buys arms in the United States that buys officials, that buys all -- you know, all sorts of other things. And we didn't do that. We haven't done that yet.

We can take this to a whole different level, I think, of cooperation. I am a big fan, again, of having joint investigative efforts that focus on cross-border money-laundering operations, and even going through third countries, because there's a lot that does go through third countries.

Let me stop there. And we can hear from all of you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much Tony and Rafael for the excellent review of the report. (Applause)

MR. DE CASTRO: You're welcome.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I am mindful of time and Brookings' strictness in sticking to the timeline. So, I will have to bite my tongue, and not ask you each a ton of questions that I have in mind, but let me start by asking one question of each of you, and then opening it again to all of you.

Tony you have an enormously distinguished U.S. diplomatic career that very much focused and continues to focus on economic issues. In the early days of the Trump administration many Mexican officials, who, when they came to town highlighted the interconnection between security and trade issues, with perhaps somewhat of a subtext that security cooperation, would also be a function of what happens with the negotiations of NAFTA, and the U.S. Mexican economic relationship more broadly.

Are we still in that state? What is the interconnectedness today? And how is the security cooperation dependent on what happens with the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement?

AMBASSADOR WAYNE: Well, there are several different layers to responding to that question. So first, on the border itself the two questions are intimately integrated. You're facilitating good things crossing the border, and you're stopping bad things from crossing the border. So, you need a holistic approach to looking at trade facilitation, and all the illicit smuggling that's going in both directions.

And you need to get all the people working on the border or near the border

to be thinking in those different ways, because you want to do both things at the same time.

Secondly, when you're having a lot of really negative rhetoric at the political level between the two countries it makes it harder to do sensitive cooperation especially that might be criticized at home.

So there was that period of time when, let's say, a lot of negative things were being said from this side of the border about Mexico, it made it hard for or my former colleagues in the law enforcement area in Mexico to really push ahead in cooperation with the United States. Now, we're not there now so that's good, and we don't want to return to that in that area.

And then over the long run it -- having a vibrant trade and investment relationship encourages, and often requires, good law enforcement and justice relationship in order for it to function. And I sincerely believe that the establishment of NAFTA had a big effect -- had many big effects in Mexico, but one of them was it opened the door for much wider cooperation than would have been the case in the early 1990s, or certainly in the 1980s.

We just started collaborating in many more areas for the mutual benefit of both countries, so the whole economic partnership and the security partnership go along together I think.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you. Rafael, you spoke about San Diego and kids on the street, going to school. Of course San Diego is across Tijuana, wonderful city, amazing city, really suffering from criminal violence. Last year was the Mexican city with the highest murder rate, (inaudible) other issues such as extortion.

And it's also the key focus of the López Obrador administration in the 17 areas, arguably it's number one area and it has enjoyed having the first National Guard deployment of 1,800 personnel to be helping to reduce violence.

Can you give us your reflections, observations, on Tijuana violence there? And also of course Tijuana is one of the emblematic cities or locations of migrants from

Central America, staying in Tijuana waiting for their Asylum cases to be heard.

MR. DE CASTRO: Yes, Vanda. And not an easy question; a complex answer, but just let me say something about NAFTA. I believe NAFTA had a lot of spillovers and truly helped us, Mexican and Americans, to try to better cooperate on security first, and I believe we have done fairly well on security, we're still not yet.

But on immigration issues, we are really not yet, we really have been -- unilateralism continues to be the order of the day in migration issues. To me that is a mistake.

I understand that the soul of the U.S. has been discussed when you're talking about immigration reform, but still, I mean, we should have this trendy dialogue because we badly need it.

Let me go back to -- I will say you're not talking about the migrant caravan, the migrant caravan was seen as a movement of people. I'm talking before the midterm election that could have devastating consequences for the U.S.-Mexico border.

Ambassador Bárcena came to San Diego and Tijuana, we were together and your husband, Agustín, Ambassador Agustín Gutiérrez-Canet. And basically, I mean, we saw the bilateral relationship impending on Tijuana and San Diego.

Do you know something? Tijuana and San Diego act as a buffer zone. The caravan eventually was diluted into Tijuana and into San Diego. I will say about one third of the caravan people they came into the U.S. and some of them are waiting for asylum, some of them are going to be deported back, but one-third is in San Diego.

And I will say, San Diego has this very active civil society, these wonderful NGOs, basically helping and pushing the local government to serve migrants. On the other side of the border I have never seen such a vibrant NGOs' organizations like in Tijuana.

Ambassador was there, and we were talking with this activist, a professional activist, wonderful people, so I will say about another third of the caravan, they stay in Tijuana, mostly, I would say, young Central Americans, they are you already working in the

construction industry. There's a boom in Tijuana in the construction industry. And I would say about one-third have been going back to Central America.

So, I mean it was diluted, it was -- some of the caravan has been integrated into Tijuana and into San Diego. The same happened, by the way, three years ago with the Haitians. We have about 70,000, mostly Hondurans, coming last fall into Tijuana and San Diego, but Haitians, we have 20,000 Haitians, and they've been absorbed and they were buffered by this -- Tijuana and San Diego.

But I'm worried about the coming up of increasing levels of violence in Tijuana. Yes, it's way too much. There's a big debate between the -- I would say, business community in Tijuana, because indeed the new violence in Tijuana, it is not the same as the one we had there in 2008/2009.

Then violence was the main -- was in (inaudible) -- it was in Avenida Revolución in Zona Rio. It was affecting, I would say important businesses, it was affecting tourism in Tijuana. Now, it's in the isolated neighborhoods but still there's a lot of violence.

So, it seems to me, and I'm seeing from the Central Government that they're trying to come with this comprehensive approach because, yes, we have to combat corruption, we have to go to the root of the problem, and some of the root of the problem it is poverty, it's the terrible, I would say, distribution of wealth we have in Tijuana, we have in the entire Mexico. And I would say, and it's about putting together the local, the state and the federal government.

We're having elections in Baja, California, and Tijuana this coming June. It's going to be key. And I will say the number one issue for the election is security, and I hope the new -- the incoming governments will address it.

We're going to have a conference at our Center very soon on that, about violence in Tijuana, about the issues of the election, because I do believe this coming election is paramount for the well-being of the region, and for the well-being of the entire border, because Tijuana and San Diego, let's face it, they are setting the example for the

rest of the world. Let me stop here, Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. I'll take three questions and turn it over to the panel. So, to this lady right here, please wait for the microphone, introduce yourself, and ask a brief question.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I'm the Congressional Correspondent for the *Hispanic Outlook*. It seems like that there isn't much incentive for Mexico to keep caravans and such in Mexico, that they are a fairly good idea that they would encourage them to come to the United States. So, what kind of incentive can be given to Mexico to, you know, support border security on the southern border? And in that phase also, what is being done with it UNHCR establishing refugee camps on the southern border of Mexico?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR WAYNE: Do you want take all the questions first?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Yeah. I'll take all. The gentleman in the blue shirt in the back.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. Whenever I go to Mexico and talk with friends and family about the dual problem of crime and corruption, one point that comes up frequently is, at a local level, the collusion between politicians, police and organized crime. Now, most of what I heard this afternoon seems to suggest measures that from the top down, and I would like to ask what are the initiatives to break this unholy alliance between crime, politicians and drug trafficking, and impunity at the local level in Mexico?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. And the last question, the gentleman right behind.

QUESTIONER: The Ambassador first talked about adding thousands of new people into the National Guard and Police. Mr. Fernández de Castro talked about lack of administrative capacity. Doesn't this seem to provide a great opportunity for the criminal elements, the gangs and the cartels to totally infiltrate these new law enforcement entities?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. Tony and Rafael, whichever order, or

whichever questions you would like to take?

MR. DE CASTRO: You tell us.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Why don't you start?

AMBASSADOR WAYNE: All right. Let me start at the end. Yes. There has to be a very careful election -- selection process for bringing people into the National Guard. One of the big challenges over recent years in Mexico has been precisely imperfect methods for screening people coming in at various levels at the federal -- for federal institutions, for state institutions and even, much worse, at the municipal level.

So, that does have to be a very important part of this whole process. Because you are right, for example one of the things that used to be the case was somebody could be kicked out of one Police Force, one State Force, and just go to another state and get hired again because they had the skills, and you didn't -- that state did not know that they've been kicked out for corruption or ties to a criminal gang.

So, that's one of the values of having a national system and a database for actually selecting the people that they come in. At the local level you're exactly right, it does need to be tackled there, but I think you need to ask the -- and Rafael, unless you have some idea -- you have to ask the Government of Mexico how they're going to start tackling that.

You know, we have to be, we do have to be understanding. The Government of Mexico inherited a horrible situation when they came to power. If you just look at the numbers of homicides you'll see that from 2014 on they've shot up, they've set historic records 2017, historic records in 2018, and the first two months of 2019 had been historic records for January and February, since they started collecting this data in 1997.

So, this is a really difficult situation. All sorts of things need to be fixed. They're not going to be able to fix everything right away, but you are certainly right, you've got to break this partnership at every level you can you break it.

MR. DE CASTRO: I would say that like caravans, well there's caravans

because of -- there's way too many abuses against migrants in transit in Mexico. We've neglected the migrants in transit for the last 10 or 20 years, or so. So, they have to come in big numbers to protect themselves.

But they are they are also politically motivated. I mean some of the movements are politically motivated. In South America and Honduras for example the Honduras Caravan was motivated as a criticism to the President of Honduras, who had a dubious election.

What I will say the response from Mexico should be to prioritize, I mean the protection of migrants in transit. We haven't been able to do that, and that seems to me that now, at least from the Interior Ministry, we've seen a more humanitarian approach. Everybody's talking about that and I'm glad.

Now it seems -- I'm sorry to say this -- but now the Foreign Ministry is becoming like the hawk, okay, because they're worried about having so many migrants coming into the northern border, meaning it could create us problems there. But I will say this is -- I mean the only solution is to go to the root of the problem. So, therefore, the idea of having this development plan for Central American and Southern Mexico is key.

I could find -- I mean I'd -- this is a top priority for López Obrador, and I hope he will deliver. Because this is not easy to do, it's very complicated and it will need a lot of political will from him, and a lot of his capital, political capital, and believe me he has a lot.

So, I believe he can deliver if he decided to do this, it would really have to become his number one foreign policy priority for this to happen.

AMBASSADOR WAYNE: Just to add. I agree fully that the medium- and long-term solution is in Southern Mexico in Northern Central America, but we don't live in the medium and long term. That's why the Foreign Ministry of Mexico correctly is worried about what's going to happen at the northern border.

And they don't have all the solutions, I understand that, but you cannot -- you have a very dangerous situation with these thousands of people coming up, and this is

the situation that we live in, and so the Ambassador, all her colleagues, they're going to have to deal with this.

You need to find short-term solutions to be able to get to that medium and long term, which is going to take a lot of work. That is correct. But it's the short term that's very important to manage well to avoid the bad outcomes that are possible.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Rafael, here is an opportunity for another excellent region of work on another task force and white paper.

MR. DE CASTRO: Be our guest, Vanda, we need people, and we need team leaders and, yes, we should really be talking about that. Yes.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Ambassador Wayne, Dr. Fernández de Castro, thank you very much for joining us today for your remarks.

Ambassador Bárcena, we are very grateful for your coming here today and enlightening us. And thank you, all, for participating and asking questions.

(Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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